



Reading Room:
A Journal of Art and Culture

THE SPACE OF READING
ISSUE /05 2012

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*Edited by Christina Barton,
Natasha Conland and Wystan Curnow*

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Foreword

Catherine Hammond

Marylyn Mayo as
a child with her
mother Mavis Mason

Dr John Mayo established the Marylyn Mayo Foundation to benefit a number of causes, including the advancement and wider appreciation of the visual arts. The Foundation's support has enabled the Auckland Art Gallery to establish two major initiatives: the Marylyn Mayo Internships and *Reading Room*; and in 2011 the Marylyn and John Mayo Members Lounge and Marylyn Mayo and Mavis Mason Painting Conservation was opened. The journal is also in memory of both Marylyn Mayo and her mother, Mavis Mason, in recognition of their shared interest in the visual arts.

Born and raised in New Zealand, Marylyn Eve Mayo had a lifelong interest in education, law and the visual arts. Her academic career established her as a legal pioneer in Australasia. Marylyn was one of fewer than two dozen women law graduates when she completed her degree at the University of Auckland in 1960. Her legacy is honoured at its Law School with the Marylyn Eve Mayo Endowment Scholarship and the Marylyn Mayo Rare Book Room. Marylyn's parents, Mavis and Sydney Mason, moved with her to Auckland when she began her university studies. Mavis Mason was an artist and the move to Auckland enabled her to develop this talent: in the 1960s she studied painting with one of New Zealand's most celebrated artists, Colin McCahon. Mavis's love of art was imparted to Marylyn who was a regular visitor to the Auckland Art Gallery and, from the time she was a recent graduate, collected works by contemporary New Zealand artists including Colin McCahon, Don Binney and Richard Killeen.

In 1969, Marylyn moved to Australia to teach law at the University of Queensland's campus in Townsville, soon to be known as James Cook University. It was here that she met and married John Mayo. In 1974, Mavis left New Zealand and joined her daughter and John in Townsville, and remained in Australia for the rest of her life. Marylyn's vision to establish a separate Faculty of Law at James Cook University was realised in 1989 when she became the Foundation Head of its newly established Law School. She retired in 1996 but her links with the University remained with the establishment of the Marylyn Mayo Medal and the Law Students' Society's annual Mayo Lecture.

Introduction

Wystan Curnow, for the editors

The space of reading. Is it a place or a state of mind; a necessary release or another form of engagement; an adjunct to the work we do as artists, writers and curators, or our most crucial *modus operandi*; something familiar or uncharted territory? For this issue of *Reading Room* we variously addressed such questions, including asking 23 artists, writers and curators about their current reading habits. We asked: Given that we live in a world that appears to be “speeding up,” and that our work is increasingly mediated by social interactions (electronic and otherwise), what space is there for the contemplative and reflective, for the intense and quiet activity of reading? To what extent do we still engage in this activity? Have opportunities for reading been enhanced by the online environment; is it an adequate replacement for or complement to the page? Has the nature of our engagement with text changed because of it? The questionnaire captures reading, or rather readers negotiating moments of transition, which of course is one reason for our interest.

Another is that it seems to us that the space of reading is wide, varied and perhaps because of that, strangely overlooked. Is it really too backroom, too taken for granted, too locked into its designated roles to be dragged out into the open and made a subject of public discussion? Since reading is a process so obviously required by our common enterprise, can we really afford the apathy that is the outcome of such reticence? What has emerged in this issue is an awareness of how pervasive, how encompassing the space of reading and its processes actually are. Processes which variously permeate the making of art, the making and understanding of exhibitions, the conception and the design of books; processes which produce writing, which shape analogically the interpretation and the re-interpretation of works and oeuvres. Wherever distinctions between media and genres, roles and categories shift or blur, reading tends to register or renew its presence.

Although intricately interwoven into our practices, reading possesses powers of its own derived from the appetites it cultivates and satisfies. Reading’s intensities and intimacies are exemplified as well as examined here. We are reminded of reading’s agency in the construction of meaning.

Days Of Reading: Letters between Wystan Curnow and Allan Smith

Early in May last year I suggested to Allan Smith that we get together and have a talk about reading. Allan's email reply included a rundown on what he had been reading recently and why, but ended: "I really don't think I'll have much to offer your thinking about the next R.[eading] R.[oom] issue, but I'll enjoy talking with you, Wystan." I was however so intrigued by Allan's rundown that I disregarded his conclusion. In any case, even before we met for lunch further email exchanges established points of coincidence among our current interests, notably and unexpectedly the works of John Ruskin, and seemed to persuade us both a joint writing venture would be worth our while.

We've borrowed our title from a selection of Marcel Proust's writing partly because of the long essay on Ruskin it contains but mainly because it describes the way reading is represented in our exchange: as, that is, the core vocational (not vacational) activity of two art critics, whose avid reading shapes their writing and vice versa. Reading is less a subject here – we've read about and reflected on it for sure – than a compelling preoccupation whose specific necessities these letters serve, we hope, to demonstrate more than define.

Our exchange evolved rather rapidly into something more like a traditional literary exchange of letters than an email correspondence/discussion. While we have written to each other here, mostly we have written as companions, alongside one another, each producing his own journal of a year in the life of a reader/writer to the accompaniment of the other. Large quantities of material have been cut as we have gone along—readers may pick up the odd loose thread that relates to missing content; dates have been retained, and although there's been some rewriting the narrative of the exchange remains largely intact. We met at regular intervals to discuss our progress but left the exchange largely to its own devices trusting that as we pursued our current reading interests the complementarities of the letters would be enriched and the shape of the whole propose an end point.

LETTERS TO WYSTAN

Sunday, 5 June 2011

Wystan, last week my sister Anna sent me a quote from an Anthony Burgess essay about books:

"A novel is a visual experience — black marks on a white page, many of these bound into a thickish book with a stiff cloth cover and an illustrative dust jacket. Its paperback version is a poor but necessary thing, a concession to the pocket, the sickly child of the original. When we think of 'War and Peace' or 'David Copperfield' we see a fat spine with gold lettering, the guardian of a great potentiality (signs turned into sense), proudly upright on a shelf. BOOK can be taken as an acronym standing for a Box of Organized Knowledge. The book called a novel is a box from which characters and events are waiting to emerge at the raising of the lid. It is a solidity; a paperback is a ghost." I like the notion of books as boxes of variously organised knowledge; I don't sympathise with Burgess' connoisseurship of the tooled leather, embossed and polished hardback as glass case artifact; I've always mostly preferred paperbacks, or second-hand, simply designed hardbacks of an early to mid-twentieth century period. The old hardbacks I like are veteran books; definitely not vintage. I recently heard a radio interview with someone who said that the rise of e-reading was going to make us want more "special" and crafted books, especially art books, to compensate for the loss of materiality that the Kindle or iPad entail. Not I. But we will all unavoidably re-adjust our perception of the materiality of books and printed matter. Artists have been alert to the intensely paradoxical materiality of the book long before digital devices raised the stakes on the forms and formats of reading.

Then Jon Bywater sent me a link to a photograph taken by Babette Mangolte of Annette Michelson's bookshelves on the Upper West Side in 1976. Jon probably suspected this might interest me given my preoccupation with stacks of things, storage systems and taxonomies generally; it confirmed how much my experience of books and reading, or thinking about reading, is inseparable from my mental and physical rehearsals of the formal and informal organisations of book-objects. That is, I'm often thinking about the geology of books and how they stacked and displaced in irregular groupings; how they pack together upright with serrated profiles and angular gaps — and how we pick our way across their real and virtual terrain. How they are relativised and augmented as informational compression through their relations with all other pieces, folders, and foldings of inscribed paper nearby. Solidities, yes, but transitive, containing multitudes and congregating.

This morning, Debbie, a postgrad student, sent me a link to the Adam Art Gallery exhibition *Behind Closed Doors*. The publicity image was a photograph by Neil Pardington of some shelves in a Wellington collector's storage room (Col. pl. 1). I can only assume that Neil was drawn to the vertiginous art-historical

humour of the collector's grouping of a pile of books whose spines said: Blind; The Practitioner; Man Masterpiece; and NZ(P? — as part of a library reference number) — next to a Ronnie van Hout 1/35th scale figurine of McCahon in the studio. This ponderous and nutty, pseudo-contextualising of the object by the books and the awkward sharing of shelf-life between books, artwork and file boxes, dramatised the chaotic and ramifying energies in play between the materialities and meaning effects of writing — which books intensify while delimiting — as words and things, inscriptions and meanings both enable and resist each other.

"For the indefinite future, then, there will be printed books, just as surely as there will be wooden shelves and coffee-tables to put them on."

— Geoffrey Nunberg, "Farewell to the Information Age"

Monday, 6 June 2011

Morning Wistan,

I want to say a bit about what Michael Fried has talked about already in his 2002 book *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin*. I've noted on the flyleaf that I bought my copy with the gift of farewell money from the Auckland Art Gallery in early 2002 — it must have got to Parsons still warm from the ovens of Yale University Press. At the time I was struck by how close it was to some of my abiding interests and retrospectively it is interesting for me to see now how favoured motifs of mine, such as stacks, bricks, shelves, collated objects and their handling, wrapping and sorting were charted by Fried's book. Fried opens with a discussion of two bookcases; a drawing by Adolph Menzel and one by Degas. He even steps into the drawings by means of Ruskin's challenge to draughtsmen to observe the bewitching play between proximity and obscurity which divide the loyalties of attentive students of intelligent vision; thinking about our discussion of books and reading I was planning to cite this passage from Ruskin myself, having conveniently forgotten that Fried was there first. Fried closes his book with a quotation from another favourite writer, W G Sebald about the post-WWII brick sorting that the Trümmerfrauen did for months on end in bombed-out German cities. This move from the constructional to scenes of trauma and work amidst ruins is also one which I follow in my thinking about bricks and books. I can't recall now when I first came across Per Kirkeby's quasi-architectural brick sculptures in Lars Morell's *Per Kirkeby: The Art of Building* in the Elam Library, but it must have been not too far into my Elam teaching after leaving the Gallery. I'd been very taken with an interview with Kirkeby in *Arts Magazine* or *Artscribe* back in the 1980s and his setting of his practice in the methods and metaphors of geology; I hadn't liked his middle-period paintings too much but was instantly converted to his primarily outdoor brick projects.

Bricks and books are related. In 2002 or 2003 a postgrad student gave me a copy of a John Szarkowski introduction to his book on modern photography where I fastened on his observation that "The world now contains more photographs than bricks." Not only did Szarkowski's claim implicitly acknowledge the intense relationship photography has had with materiality, as those uncanny wafers of information, shed skins of things, ghost prints of the real — have functioned as records of the insistent, melancholic desire to be imprinted by the texture of the world — it also, most presciently, put the digital and the physical in the ring together; matched up images and things; bodiless information on the move and the densely persistent stoicism of the things we lift, position, rap our knuckles on and kick against as proof of their reality. Bricks against pictures, tableaux against tables. Blocks on books, and tomes as tomb slabs. As a boy, Sartre saw the heavy books in his grandfather's library as a cross between a quarry and a building site: "I began my life as I shall no doubt end it: among books. In my grandfather's study, they were everywhere; it was forbidden to dust them except once a year, before the October term. Even before I could read, I already revered those raised stones; upright or leaning, wedged together like bricks on the library shelves or nobly spaced like avenues of dolmens..." Kelvin Soh's bulky, stratified rocks, glittering with silica, which sat heavily on thin hardback books in his recent MFA exhibition, put me in mind of Sartre's oppressive convergence between the weights of minerals and knowledge.

Some of van Gogh's paintings of loosely heaped novels on tables may also be seen as examples of Ruskin's set exercise of trying to "draw... books accurately, with the titles on the backs, and patterns on the bindings, as you see them... simply as they appear, giving the perfect look of neat lettering; which, nevertheless, must be (as you find it on most of the books) absolutely illegible." Taking Ruskin's lesson to heart we will be forced to admit that we live under "a universal law of obscurity," and that "nothing can be right, till it is unintelligible." Collating some of these paintings online I found someone saying how some of the titles on van Gogh's novels could be deciphered. I'm sure that is the case, though they always remain fused in and subject to the meshwork of brushy strokes... and dot-dot-dash of drawn paint. In contrast to van Gogh's Morse code of pigment or Degas' schematic all-over impression of loose hatchings and fluid, brush drawing, Fried reads Menzel's *Dr Puhlmann's Bookcase* as the outcome of sustained, accumulated concentration, and prehensile purchase on the density of the objects of attention. What I want most from books and from their physical, visual and verbal ways of modelling the world, and therefore what I want from bookshelves is what Fried says of Puhlmann's bookcase: it is a "highly complex, internally differentiated" phenomenon.

Bookshelves provide constant stepping-up, constant ascent and descent of profiles, edges, corners, projections, with various thicknesses or thinness; with

gaps, wadding, cascades, and tilings of differentiated materials; with organisational geometries and their erosion. And because they do this conceptually and informationally in terms of what they contain under their covers — or box lids, as Burgess might say — they are quasi-Monads à la Leibniz: each book is a monad, a compression, “a mirror of the universe,” “each created Monad represents the whole universe, [and]... represents more distinctly the body which specially pertains to it.” Books, using Leibniz’s description, operate as does each portion, or particle, of infinitely divisible matter, within which are “a world of creatures, living beings, animals, entelechies, souls. Each portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fishes. But each branch of every plant, each member of every animal, each drop of its liquid parts is also some such garden or pond... Thus there is nothing fallow, nothing sterile, nothing dead in the universe, no chaos, no confusion save in appearance, somewhat as it might appear to be in a pond at a distance, in which one would see a confused movement and, as it were, a swarming of fish in the pond, without separately distinguishing the fish themselves.” And this is very much like the vertiginous archaeology of seeing, the “absolute infinity of things,” which prompted Ruskin to observe that no matter how close we get to things, even aided by a microscope, which he generally foreswore, the obscurity of the world reveals itself at every approach, “into a fifth, sixth, hundredth, or thousandth place, according to the power we use.”

Monday, 6 June 2011

Evening Wistan,

I’m thinking of the way reading scripts is an embodied choreography of informational uptake; of stop start, drop scan, open shut, skip turn, return, forward, stall, and slow. The velocity of an instrumental reading leaves these differentiations in its wake. William Gass talks about working against the grain of writing that is written for readers whose “fast mind speeds over the text like those noisy bastards in motorboats.”

Alberto Manguel enlists 18 pictures of people reading as he begins his *A History of Reading*. In a painting of the ill-fated Paolo and Francesca, Manguel notes that Francesca “is holding the book open, marking with two fingers a page that will never be reached.” The scene of a reader stalled mid-read, cooperating with the moment of a painted depiction as the ungraspable time of the text is grasped as a series of moments; of stops and starts; of structured intervals, is beautifully explored in Harry Rand’s book on Manet’s *The Railway*, also known as *The Gare Saint-Lazare* (Col. pl. 2). Rand describes the Mother, who reads while her child looks through the railings at a cloud of steam and smoke, as having paused with her fingers and thumb marking three separate sections of her book; and how this implies

the splayed temporality of comparative reading, of taking the time to move between the different pages which her hands freeze as she gazes at us while still half in the cloud of thoughts her reading has produced; the large plume of steam is like a scallop-edged thought balloon. The different modes of awareness and distraction that pertain between the girl, the mother and the lapdog all support a consideration of differentiated consciousness; of thinking both inside and displaced from its bodies. And we read all this across the painting, like reading the distribution of information across a chess-board or a grid — of the sort that T E Hulme says we launch as provisional rafts of coherence atop the drifting chaos of the world of cinders which underlies all our sketches or constructed edifices of culture. Railway lines too, T E Hulme said, represent our drawing of significant patterns across the cinders that our cultures bed down in.

The staccato grid of Manet's dark railings, metonym for railway ties, (a new take on "reading between the lines?") punctuates this phenomenology of sustained reflection as a series of sharp taps; a slide of percussive raps on the metal of the screen which separates the private monads of dog, daughter and Mother from the industrialised regularity of the railway system. For recent viewers there is a synapse between Manet's railings and the alliterative ripple of Francis Alÿs' stick along London railings (Col. pl. 3); or Patrick White's Miss Hare from *Riders in the Chariot*, who would punctuate a shapeless afternoon by knocking on objects as she walked: "With the back of her hand she hit a fence-post, to hear her father's bloodstone ring... All along the road — or track" — in each case, interface between the world-field and subjectivities is happening through increments, snapped-off moments, accumulated incidents. In the Manet, the mother's manual operating/performing of the book, as book and woman together become a typical reading-machine, chimes with those now dated, gilded or coloured thumb-indexes on the fore edge of fat books, or the now more ubiquitous tabs and fluoro sticky-notes. In a series of augmented books, Richard Wentworth has pursued this treatment of a book as a form of obsessional need to accent, save, and physicalise the written text and its contents (Col. pl. 4). They start from the convenient, ready-to-hand book-mark — the chocolate wrapper, the toothpick or the playing card — and play exponentially on this functional solution until it attains a formal, material delirium. The book resembles a gargantuan Dagwood sandwich; it is stuffed with leaves, plastic ties, gloves, twists of ducting tape, drinking straws, a wooden ruler, cords, strings and wires and fabric to the point of maniacal profusion; this is bookmarking as a clinical condition. The book is eating its markers — while its thumb-indexes run across the splayed fore edge like frivolous arpeggios to the rank plenitude of its thickly wadded inserts — the schizophrenic tome chews on its foreign interleaves — it reminds me of the monster of ecclesiastical Error in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* forced to spew out half-chewed "lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw," whose vomit "full of books and papers was, /With loathly frogs and toades."

Friday, 15 June 2011

Hi Wystan,

"When I was four, I liked to build castles with my Father's pocket-sized, twenty-two-volume set of Trollope. My brother and I had a set of wooden blocks as well, but the Trollopes were superior: midnight blue, proportioned to fit a child's hand, and, because they were so much thinner than they were tall, perfect, as cards are, for constructing gates and drawbridges... I can think of few better ways to introduce a child to books than to let her stack them, upend them, rearrange them, and get her fingerprints all over them."

— Anne Fadiman, *Ex-Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader*

"It's a wonder," Fadiman goes on, "that the young Diana Trilling, who had to wash her hands before she extracted a volume of Twain or Balzac from her parents' glass-fronted bookcase, grew up to be a booklover. Our parents' model was the playground; her parent's model was the operating room." Capable of feeling distress when corners of books especially are mashed or grated by apparent disregard for the book as an object with edges — I'd have to admit to favouring something of both the "operating room" as well as the "playground" model here.

When Georges Perec took up the challenge of sorting out his bookshelves he always felt he fell between the desire to classify, systematise and regulate on one hand, and his constant capture by chains of interconnection and possible alternative ways to organise the books; "we oscillate between the illusion of perfection and the vertigo of the unattainable." And, given the dizzying prospects opened up by any collection of books as they simultaneously figure running chains of potential connection, and the play of "pure chance" that shadows the speculative intricacies of any necessarily provisional organisational code, Perec suspects his aspirations to regulate his library is something of a decoy, "a trompe l'oeil intended to disguise the erosion of both books and systems." And, such metaphysical light-headedness prompts him to find the tangible, domestic proximity of shelves and books an acceptable antidote to the immateriality of organisational hubris: "It is no bad thing in any case that...our bookshelves should serve from time to time as joggers of the memory, cat rests, and as lumber-rooms." Finding our ways among and between shelved or stacked books may in fact resemble looking for material in a disorderly lumber room — a space to pick one's way through in the dark, as per the close-pressed jumble of maritime paraphernalia and provisions in which Poe's stow-away narrator secures his below-decks cubby; that hide for the watchful self at risk in *The Voyage of Arthur Gordon Pym*. (You told me to read Pym for the ice dramas; I found something else.)

Books as cat-rests or stacks of lumber are books as physical things temporarily shorn of their textual content; they are books become mute slabs and blocks of

frozen information; they are like numerable signs that gain in psychological tension and compression as they present as opaque to all but their material specifications; their signifying capacity is concentrated as it is flatly denied. They acquire a sense of compression, of strangely voiceless animation, because treating them as blocks or stackable units is a form of aggressive control over their enormous ideational power. This is a classic case of formal transvaluation; of one type of form (organisational style) trumping another type of form — called content, when separated out as the second party of a difference.

One of the most elegant demonstrations of this trumping of books' speculative and ideational content through formal maneuver is performed by Annelore Schneider and Claude Piguet of *collectif_fact*, in the photographs they have taken of art critics' bookshelves in which every single book and magazine has been turned with its spine to the wall so all titles and authors names are erased and the differentiation is down to thickness, height, paper colour and age and what can be seen of a binding. The artists comment, "By reversing the books, the relationship between image and information is inverted; the books being dispossessed of their informational values. This project ultimately abstracts libraries, thus leaving the viewer free to speculate about the worlds of their owners." The last half of that last line is that banal claim to interpretive agency which we often hear. Closer to the work's strange energy is the resulting conflict between the suppressed and differentiated complexity of the individual works and the owner's organisational code. I have just found a wonderful precedent for Schneider and Piguet's reversal while re-reading Elias Canetti's *Auto da Fé*. As a manical ruse to stop his wife from inventorying his library for pecuniary gain, Peter Klein spends hours turning every one of its thousands of volumes around, spines to the wall: "it distressed him thus to reduce them to the namelessness of an army ready for war. In earlier years nothing could have persuaded him to such harshness." The four tall, fully-shelved rooms thus re-arranged are much more than an abstract conceit for Klein, they are a "many-headed multitude" on whom he has to impose this new form of silence against their voluble and passionately articulated resistance.

Sunday, 17 July 2011

Some of the postcards on my bookshelves include images of cable cars, funicular railways, trams with pantographs clipped to catenaries, foot-bridges, cubist cliff-faces and quarries with ladders, signal towers, surveillance towers, dockyard cranes, model train layouts, shop windows, and more bookshelves and stacks of folded fabric or bricks — all of these underline the bookshelf as a habitable store; what Heidegger called a "standing reserve;" a miniaturised obstacle course and a cache of densely faceted readable inventories; a larder, a magazine, a cellared plenitude of partially ordered materials and equipment, date-stamped, labelled and cross-referenced. From here I can easily

take the lift down to Georges Perec's exorbitantly stocked and excessively appointed basement rooms in his *Life: A User's Manual* — that elaborately designed virtual pop-up book with interlocking spaces, in which the apartment block is viewed as a cut-away architectural diagram; an asymmetrical shelving unit whose levels we read one by one; or a cross-section of an industrial machine — imagine a structure for producing private, familial, amorous, and absurdist speculative ensembles with moving figures and furniture. In the apartment-book's basement there are monsters and cyclopean grubs as well as massive lift machinery in Piranesian stadium spaces, whose distant vaults are festooned with pulleys, chains, winches, twisting pipes, trailing cables and hubristic scaffolds of steel and wood. Further down, after the "cold-storage rooms; ripening rooms; mail-sorting offices; shunting stations with their switching posts; steam locomotives pulling railway trucks, flat wagons, sealed cars, container cars, tank cars: platforms stacked high with goods," past the piles of gravel, mountains of slag and ash heaps, and beyond the "whole inexplicable geography of stalls, backyards, porches, pavements, blind alleys, and arcades, a whole subterranean city organised vertically into neighbourhoods, districts, zones," there are bureaucrats checking records, performance profiles and departmental policy documents; managers calculating hours, mile-long telephone exchanges and banks of printers printing paysheets, stock lists, invoices, financial spreadsheets, along with "paper-shredders and incinerators endlessly devouring quantities of out-of-date forms, brown folders stuffed with press clippings, account books bound in black linen with pages covered in delicate violet handwriting."

Fadiman confesses to never being able to resist "books about books;" the pictorial and physical clutter which silts up around my books demonstrate that same motivation to hypothesise shelf-size *mise en abyme* self-mirroring matches of gathered things to rowed books; scale-jumps between different forms of adjacency; proximate object confusions and restive data quick to migrate from thing to picture; model to object; image to reading machine. A diagram of relations between book, world, and writer/reader could be pantographic; the book recording in small the larger profiles of the world, and the reader expanding the network of the book's miniature print trays — letters lined up for service — like Leigh Davis' "writing, on small, coded, printed rails" — into 1:1 scale mental projections of the world providing incredible detail and major directional information at the same time as modelling the world in sequence after sequence, page after page, of over-lapping maps in handheld proportions. Alternatively, with a hypothetical library as proposed by Victorian statesman W E Gladstone, the reader could make frequent crossings between the tramways of rolling shelf units housing 25,500 items in a room 28 feet by 10: "Twenty-four pairs of trams run across the room. On them are placed 56 bookcases, divided by the passage, reaching to the ceiling, each 3 foot broad, 12 inches deep, and separated from its neighbours by an interval of 2 inches, and set on small wheels, pulleys or rollers, to work along the trams. Strong

handles on the inner side of each bookcase to draw it out into the passage." More commonly, a reader will mimic the absorption of Menzel's newspaper readers, or the attentiveness of Daumier's print collectors and connoisseur's, who tilt their heads and crane their necks to see a picture or page correctly; the kinaesthesia of that small stretch — that looks like a listening — is a message alert, denoting acknowledgement of the object in view.

Tuesday, 13 December 2011

Sartre said he'd rather read crime fiction than Wittgenstein; Wittgenstein said he'd rather read detective fiction than Aristotle.

Reading in the car

"We read a lot when travelling," notes Georges Perec, and although passenger ships have become less common since the advent of air travel, "From the reading point of view . . . a ship is nothing more than a chaise longue." In *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, a selection from what the author calls his "collage-books," Julio Cortázar has an illustration from pataphysician Juan Esteban Fassio, of a special furniture ensemble that joins a foldaway chaise longue to a sequentially keyed filing cabinet, and a small cupboard containing food, drink and cooking apparatus — all to facilitate the reading of Cortázar's combinatorial novel *Hopscotch*. Perhaps reading in bed with condiments close by, is the only way to ensure maximum psychic insulation for reader and text; Perec asks what happens to the text as it gets read intermittently, in different times and different places; what happens to the text in transit and what control over it do we lose through the "chopping-up" effected by "our own bodies, by other people, by the time, by the din of the crowd?" The task of filtering or checking the noise of the world is an on-going issue in the maintenance of any private, or singular interior space; especially, perhaps those of the reader and writer. Some general noisiness of surrounding sound serves to blanket unwelcome interruptions by sounds that distract or irritate — buses, trains and planes, all have their cocooning ambience; their white noise of indifferent sibilance and chatter which can be ignored, even without headphones; Perec's ventriloquised Minister of Culture declaims: "The true library of the people is the Métro!"

In his collection of essays about inhabiting and categorising spaces, Perec immediately precedes his section on Antonella da Messina's depiction of St Jerome reading in his book-lined compartment-as-furniture, his fingers between pages and passages he might refer back to, with an extract from *La Revue du Touring Club de France*. The extract describes Raymond Roussel's extraordinary mobile home fabricated in 1924–25 for the reader/writer who appreciates having all the comforts of home close to hand when on the road, while remaining insulated from the unpredictabilities of the world they are

moving through. Whereas the narrator of Huysman's *Au Rebourg* could mentally travel without leaving town, with the blinds down in his hermetic chamber of cross-country thinking, Roussel was able to stay at home writing while touring the countryside. "Thanks to the ingenuity of its arrangement," Roussel's *maison roulante*, "contains: a sitting-room, a bedroom, a studio, a bathroom, and even a small dormitory for a staff consisting of three men (two chauffeurs and a man-servant)." It also contains "an excellent wireless set" which "enables it to pick up all the European stations;" and its smooth and safe passage on steep hills or tight mountain corners is assured by the reliable engineering of a Saurer chassis and the steering system's admirable turning lock. A self-confessed adulant of Jules Verne, it is highly likely that Roussel was particularly inspired by the steam elephant of Verne's novel, *The Steam House*. Full of ingenuity, commodiousness, provisions, and accommodations to all possible requirements of body and mind that its fortunate passengers may experience, Verne's "prodigious locomotive," "steam behemoth," "gigantic elephant-engine," is superlatively adjusted to cushion its occupants from any jolts and bumps of travel across India when in search of tigers, or rebels at large, on the run since the Sepoy Rebellion. The Elephant omnibus and its trailer contains kitchen, pantries, bedrooms, cabins, gunroom, box-room, ice-house, cellar, dining room and a drawing room with a bookcase; and its overall design excellence insures "the perfect poise of the apparatus, which is so well balanced that not even the severest jolting could disturb it."

It was from all the jolts and abrasive frictions of travel that Ruskin and his parents sought to isolate themselves in the specially fitted coach they hired for their European tours. The sequestered and fluidly mobile travel, which their coach enabled, kept at bay all "the snares and disturbances of the outer world." In memory, Ruskin extols the travelling carriage's "easy rolling — steady and safe poise of persons and luggage... the cunning design and distribution of store-cellars under the seats, secret drawers under front windows, invisible pockets under padded lining, safe from dust, and accessible only by insidious slits, or necromantic valves like Aladdin's trapdoor; the fitting of cushions where they would not slip, the rounding of corners for more delicate repose; the... springs of blinds; the perfect fitting of windows... and the adaption of all these concentrated luxuries to the probabilities of who would sit where, in the little apartment which was to be virtually one's home for five or six months — all this was an imaginary journey in itself, with every pleasure, and none of the discomfort, of practical travelling." All fitments facilitating the young Ruskin's comfortable viewing of the passing landscape, his drawing, reading and writing; though Ruskin does mention that he often could only make hasty drawings on the road which were worked up later in the day due to the swift pace through the countryside.

In his earlier account of family travel around the English counties, Ruskin describes his position of comfortable elevation in a smaller but fondly

remembered carriage; his precocious security as passenger in this carriage with “admirably fitting and sliding windows, admitting no drop of rain when they were up, and never sticking as they were let down,” seems to depend on making portable and mobile the cosy niche of his boyhood writing station in a well-lighted recess beside the fireplace at home, “out of all inconvenient heat, or hurtful draught,” where a “good writing-table shut me well in, and carried my plate and cup, or books in service.” The above-mentioned smoothly sliding windows provided “one large moving oriel, out of which one saw the country round, to the full half of the horizon.” This elevated opticality was further insured by it being well-sprung, and “hung high, so we could see well over stone dykes and average hedges.” Also important to the boy were the carriage’s folding steps, “with a lovely padded cushion fitting into the recess of the door” that Ruskin loved to see being folded up and down, like a deftly adjusting mechanism from a Jules Verne story. Such kinaesthetic pleasures of material organisation were equally guaranteed by the military-style precisions and pre-planning brought by Nurse Ann to the packing of the family luggage. The “perfectly smooth mail roads” then available to local English travellers completed this idyll of almost frictionless mobility. As with Verne’s *Steam House*, the young Ruskin’s fantasy of locomotion is a fantasy of regulation; of infinitely regulated passage through the world; of the supple adequation to all necessary adjustments required by varying pressures and resistances, and to the synchronising of interior and exterior spaces at any scale. The constant adjustment between traveller and landscape; travelling and difference, are analogous to the constant regulation that reading requires and enables. We read to regulate our participation in the world.

As Ruskin’s diaries of his later travels in Italy reveal, it became increasingly difficult for him to immure himself against the din and disturbance of everything going on outside the window, or to avoid the rough jolts, jostling, and discord inflicted on the reader/writer/traveller by raucous crowds, pot-holed roads, or more internal disturbances to consciousness by physiological and psychological noise. In his own way, Ruskin was always seeking his version of the necessary working pleasures Gertrude Stein referred to as “distribution and equilibration.” “There must be distribution and equilibration, there must be time that is distributive and equilibrated.”

Such equilibration is often under threat for Ruskin. The following are a very small sampling from his diaries: May 1874, “Today up refreshed, but (7 o’clock), but perpetual crying, hammering, and chipping under window, will spoil my work.” August 1874, “Slept well after finding the sacred places of Fiesole still safe, though gambling boys shrieking, howling, swearing, in the sweet field of the cloister, and beside the cypress of Turner’s view — so that deafness would now be a mercy to me in Italy.” September 1874, “Hellishest of carts for full half an hour last night... furious, senseless, as if there were nothing but driving in the world. Strange what expression may go into the

sound of wheels." "Cats and carts, and unclean damnable railroad whistling as usual." January 1875, "Just before dinner, zigzag frameworks of iridescent light fluttered in my eyes, and I could not see even to read large print by candlelight, this, at 1/2 past five." September 1875, "blackier, wilder, horribler day than Thursday... [wind] tearing the branches off the Virginian creeper at my window into skeleton ruin, and howling like a hyena, and I can't see to read or write." March 1876, "Crashing rain with wild roaring wind and the whole air like the thickest of a steamer's of Manchester chimney's discharge... I really cannot read or work this morning, in mere horror at the gloom and diabolical rage of the sky. And the book of Numbers is woeful reading..."

In Canetti's *Auto da Fé*, Peter Klein's protracted fall from the beatitude of silent study — "He panted for silence as others do for air" — from the "punctilious, practical subdivision of his hours" — ends in the apocalyptic conflagration which destroys Klein's library along with himself. When all is well with the sealed world of the library and the world outside is unable to impose its objects and changing temporalities upon him, Klein experiences the reading and writing life as a blissfully suspended form of locomotion which goes nowhere: "Through the glass above him he could see the condition of the heavens, more tranquil, more attenuated than the reality... He was aware of them at a distance, they did not touch him... It was as if he had barricaded himself against the world: against all material relations, against all terrestrial needs, had builded himself a hermitage, a vast hermitage, so vast it would hold those few things on earth that are more than this earth itself, more than the dust to which our life at last returns; as if he had closely sealed it and filled it with those things alone. His journey through the unknown was like no journey. Enough for him to watch through the windows of his observation car the continued validity of certain natural laws... the capricious incessant working of the climate, the flow of time — and the journey was as nothing." The tragi-comic wheels of narrative which roll through the book take not only Klein but also all the other picaresque characters in the novel through excessive and polyphonic rehearsals of role and rhetoric to exhilaratingly absurd ends. The novel's theatrical relativising of all codes and customs immolates literature and learning along with all their deeply loved trappings in a burning affirmation of their elaborately contrived and insufferably conventional nature.

Ruskin's and Klein's fraught relations with human, mechanical, and landscape noises are pertinent to Lisa Crowley's recent Vyborg Library project, and the essay Anna Sanderson wrote to accompany Lisa's *The Reading Hall* video installation at Te Tuhi this year. Lisa talks of how she had to go to the other side of the world, to Alvar Aalto's 1930s modernist building built in a part of pre-war Finland, which is now part of Russia, to find a library which functioned entirely independently of digital technology; even though she filmed it in digital video. Lisa also says that to get the imagery of the library quietly minding its own readerly and archival business, she had to discard hours of

footage which was cluttered up with the noisy footfalls of librarians walking back and forth across the linoleum floors in hard-heeled shoes. It's interesting to think of the repressed, incessant movement of Lisa's librarians as enacting the constant movement that reading depends on and calls up. I'm thinking here of the way Proust, in his "On Reading" preface to Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, which you referred to, spoke about the way his vigorous pacing was a necessary physical accompaniment or response to, "Shakespeare... Sophocles, Euripides, Silvio Pellico whom I had read during an unusually cold March, pacing back and forth, stamping my feet, and running along the paths every time I shut the book in the exultation of having just finished reading, of the energy stored up during my immobility, and of the bracing wind blowing down the village streets." And the line you quoted about reading taking us to thresholds, is followed by Proust's filling out of the idea that reading's "repeated excitations" serve to roll us out of various inertias of the psyche through the jolts that "come to [the reader] from without." Proust is fascinated by the way objects in many of the places in which he spent memorable reading time, confronted him as "obstacles;" of the way he was often taken up with a white lace cloth, "whose frayed edges were always getting caught in the cracks of the drawers;" and the heavy curtains, which were "ultimately very annoying in their awkward, stubborn insistence on playing around the parallel wooden curtain rods and getting tangled up with each other and caught in the window whenever I wanted to open or close it."

Anna Sanderson calls her text on Lisa's project "a quiet place to read and think." What pervades Anna's text most surely is the sense of reading as a process that is pursued with care and attentiveness amidst constant fluctuations of visual, sonic and social noise, all working to mottle the crystalline purity of any sacred reading silence. Through the muffled precisions of Anna's text, despite Aalto's commitment to "eliminate all disturbing elements," a quiet place to read and think only exists as a luminous idea; a light-filled diagram, a utopian texture only discoverable within the grain of an inconstant and voluble world.

Thursday, 2 February 2012

In "Cinders," T E Hulme refers to a type of partially isolated, marooned space which has a "strange quality," and is necessary in some unspecified way for philosophy to do its work: "a shade of feeling, one gets (a few people alone in a position a little separated from the world); a ship's cabin, the last bus." In Sven Birkerts' lament for the passing of the age of the book and the dawning of the age of a digital space, he describes reading as constantly transforming black markings on a page into "an environment, an inward depth populated with characters... a world inside the world, secret and concealable... a book was a vast play structure riddled with openings and crevices that I could get

inside. This notion of hiding, secreting myself in a text was important to me — it underlies to this day my sense of a book as a refuge." In *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, Birkerts says, "Vertigo is not a comfortable sensation, but I keep seeking it out, taking it as an inoculation against what a Latin poet called *lacrimae rerum*, 'the tears of things.'" "I knew even then, in my early teen years, that what I did in my privacy was in some way a betrayal of the dominant order of things, an excitement slightly suspect at its core." "I was pleased by the fact that from a distance, even from nearby but disinterested vantage, every page looked more or less the same... I understood that this was something almost completely beyond legislation." "To be a writer — that is, to live that particular relation of self to the world — that was what mattered." "[T]o be a writer was not just to produce words — books — as other professionals produce car designs or legal agreements. Rather it was to position oneself independently, at an angle to the society..." The spaces of writing and reading at their most productive and resourceful depend on some angle of incidence formed in relation to the social. The swerve or deviation may be minor but it is enabling and can serve to generate a profusion; an exponentially accruing abundance. There are plenty of such spaces modeled in juvenile fiction, fantasy fiction and in more serious philosophical texts: consider Foucault's insistence that doing philosophy, which entails "an 'ascesis,' *askésis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought," propels the writer into spaces that are unorthodox; deviated; and very much like escape routes from the given. Foucault talks of preparing "a labyrinth into which I can venture, into which I can move my discourse... in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again." As writing is about losing oneself through the process; becoming *someone* different to who one started out as, we need to construct spaces that are *somewhere* different. This may mean "preparing the way out that will enable you in your next book to spring up somewhere else and declare as you're now doing: no, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you." Another sidelong, ancillary space, in which we can occupy the necessary angle of incidence, is the café. The café in the city is like the desk's or carrel's relation to the library.

Friday, 10 February 2012

Ruskin & noise

In his *Gutenberg Elegies*, Sven Birkerts finds a synchrony between the interdependence of reading and writing, and the mesmeric sounds of train travel, as the rhythm of the phrase "'the reader and the writer'... set up its recursive beat in my head" in metrical rapport with the pulse of the train's steady momentum. The semantics of the phrase soon receded under its own relentless, alliterative momentum: "Before long... the packaging of sense fell away, leaving me with just the two thudding trochees: reader... writer..."

And these I repeated no less compulsively, aware as I did so that their beat fell in synch with the more extended dactyls of the train. And then, without warning, a string of sentences arrived and I hurried to record them in my notebook." In the same book, Birkerts finds the process of starting to read a book one of adjustment and readjustment between different time-scales; of accustoming oneself "to the rhythm and voice of the work . . . of making [oneself] susceptible to the sounds and rhythms and their endless modulations," as perceptions of the physical space of reading, of the location of the cat, the comfort of the furniture, gradually get displaced by the textual real, to the point at which, for a period of time, it seems as if, "the chain has settled over the sprockets; there is the feel of meshing, then the formal glide. When I look up again, the cat has vanished."

Here's adventurer and diplomat Fitzroy Maclean getting started on his autobiographical *Eastern Approaches*: "Slowly gathering speed, the long train pulled out of the Gare du Nord. The friends who had come to see me off waved and started to turn away; the coaches jolted as they passed over the points, and the bottles of mineral water by the window clinked gently one against the other. Soon we had left the dingy suburbs of Paris behind us and were running smoothly through the rainswept landscape of Northern France. Night was falling and my compartment was nearly dark. I did not switch on the light at once, but sat looking out at the muddy fields and dripping woods.

"I was on my way to Moscow, and, from Moscow, I was going, if it was humanly possible, to the Caucasus and Central Asia, to Tashkent, Bokhara and Samarkand. Already, as I watched that drab, sodden countryside rushing past the window, I saw in my imagination the jagged mountains of Georgia, the golden deserts, the green oases and the sunlit domes and minarets of Turkestan. Suddenly, as I sat there in the half-light, I felt immensely excited."

A perfect way to start a book; to entrain the reader — alert to the pick-up time as the reader adjusts to the tempo and time-scale of the writing; seated in the train — relinquishing some control; adapting to the gathering momentum of both text and locomotive; in a carriage, being conveyed, carried, bundled along like an intelligent/sentient package (so not solely a reduction to the status of transported commodity, which Goethe and Ruskin both feared). Becoming a transported object is part of the pleasure, of being taken away; of being partially, temporarily, rewritten. Watching, with a degree of listlessness — Ruskin mentions the listlessness and lassitude associated with "continual book occupation" — one drifts, is distracted, as internal and external scenery fold through one another as the imagined, exotic regions to be travelled displace the blur of suburbs and woods; easing the passage of oriental reverie through the monotone of a Northern European landscape. The percussive crossing of the points; the rhythmic accenting of the movement; the calibration of the travel which fuses the vertiginous tilts and lilt of

subjectivity, and the documentary observations of the travelogue as we follow them both. Being tipped into a liquid state; as the train sways along the rails; in synch with the bottles of water knocking on the deep window-sill, and rain sluices the dimming world outside. There is a semi-autonomy in the compartment — like Ruskin's little table in the corner by the fire with his cup, plate and book — except this one is in motion. This requires what Lefèbvre called, after Bachelard, "rhythmanalysis." That's where reading chimes with skateboarding, parkour, walking, climbing, running, and all other forms of accented locomotion; all other forms of synchronising ourselves with the world. It's where reading chimes with writing. Any writing will have a tendency to either activate its accents, its jointure and organisational textures, or, alternatively to regulate all accenting to a state of minimal pulse or textual flex so imperceptible that the text appears an immaculate conception conveying its information in an almost bodiless, indifferently efficient way. Accented writing which entrains the reader into a corporeal as well as a semiotic rapport, puts me in mind of that silly joke about the man who told his doctor that he got a stabbing pain in his eye whenever he drank tea; the doctor said he should take the spoon out of his cup before drinking.

Reading as mutual adjustment between reader and read, between subjective and material temporalities, is also figured in the picture of Silas Marner, George Eliot's short-sighted weaver who turns to his loom for consolation in the midst of private trauma, and the loom which imposes on him something of the repeating routines of its mechanical operations: "The livelong day he sat in his loom, his ear filled with its monotony, his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in its brownish web, his muscles moving with such even repetition that their pause seemed almost as much a constraint as the holding of his breath." "His loom as he wrought in it without ceasing, had in its turn wrought on him, and conformed more and more the monotonous craving for its monotonous presence."

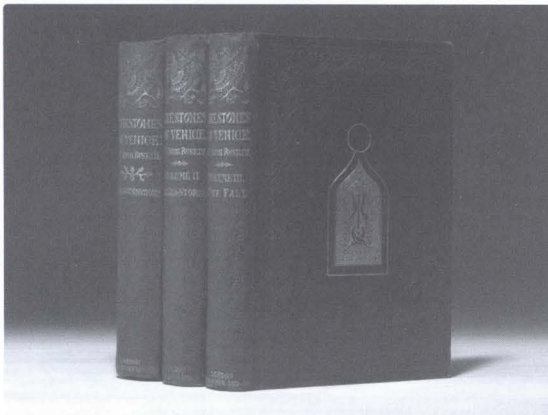
There is something of Silas Marner's myopic adjustment to the soothingly recursive formations of the details in front of him, which reminds me of Nick Austin's snail crossing the pages of an open book at its own speed along the ledge the book rests on (Col. pl. 5). Just as Nick's title *Reading and Driving* implies a miraculous synchronisation of two incompatible activities, so the slow directional pace of the snail on its gluey foot seems both at odds and strangely resonant with the metric of a reader turning page after page while only travelling virtually. And Nick's ironic mollusk reminds me of André Kertész's photograph *New York (Bug and Book)*, which shows an armoured beetle moving between what Sven Birkerts would call "the tiny weights of ink" on a page of Voltaire. The beetle and page, the snail and the book, in their way are as richly evocative of intricately differentiated behaviours, scales, and temporalities, as are the mutually adjusted actions and affects that ripple across the surface of Manet's railway painting.

Thursday, 23 and Tuesday, 28 February 2012

I've just read another of those self-fulfilling metaphors of the reading process this morning, in another James P Blaylock novel (I quoted from his *The Digging Leviathan* in my "Running on Pebbles" text) *Lord Kelvin's Machine*: in the second chapter which loops back to an earlier beginning to the story begun in chapter one, the main protagonist, Langdon St. Ives, feels himself falling into his precipitous narration: "He lowered the glass and gazed into the sea . . . He was overcome suddenly with the uncanny certainty that the jetty was moving, that he stood on the bow of a sailing vessel plying the waters of a phantom sea. The rushing tide below him bent and swirled around the edges of thrusting rocks, and for a perilous second he felt himself falling forward." I'm sure the passage would remind many of Melville's more renowned descriptions of mastheads on land and sea and his cautionary observation that sleepy "sailors sometimes go aloft in a transition state" and so may fall to their deaths. "The tranced ship indolently rolls; the drowsy trade winds blow; everything resolves you into languor." The masthead is the place from which the world becomes excessively visible at the price of a displacing vertigo: its elevated overview offers depth, prescience, cadenced totalities and transformative virtualities. Yet, even here on these tall stick constructions, the author bemoans that a thick coat against the cold can provide only a type of lining for the body rather than furniture for more protracted dreaming: "a mere envelope, or additional skin encasing you. You cannot put a shelf or chest of drawers in your body, and no more can you make a convenient closet of your watch-coat." Ishmael craves a well-appointed eyrie, a cubby with provisions — though the ship below the watcher has the three years of meals stored-up; the masthead is "sadly destitute of anything approaching to a cosy inhabitiveness, or adapted to breed a comfortable localness of feeling, such as pertains to a bed, a hammock, a hearse, a sentry box, a pulpit, a coach, or any other of those small and snug contrivances in which men temporarily isolate themselves." Warming to his theme here, Melville seems to anticipate that provisioned reading station of Fassio the pataphysician, and Perec's assertion that "From the reading point of view . . . a ship is nothing more than a chaise longue."

When Melville calls the "fire-side narrative" of Captain Sleet to his cause, he lovingly describes the appointments of the viewing station that the so-called Sleet crow's-nest provided and chides Sleet for almost forgetting how all the physical aspects of his spell on lookout duty are crucial for sustaining the cerebral enterprise of ascertaining their correct global positioning. In Sleet's *A Voyage among the Icebergs, in quest of the Greenland Whale, and incidentally for the re-discovery of the Lost Icelandic Colonies of Old Greenland*, "In shape, the Sleet's crow's-nest is something like a large tierce or pipe; it is open above, however, where it is furnished with a movable side-screen to keep to windward of your head in a hard gale. Being fixed on

the summit of the mast, you ascend into it through a little trap-hatch in the bottom. On the after side, or side next the stern of the ship, is a comfortable seat, with a locker underneath for umbrellas, comforters, and coats. In front is a leather rack, in which to keep your speaking trumpet, pipe, telescope, and other nautical conveniences." Melville insists that Sleet's "well replenished little case-bottle, so nicely tucked in on one side of his crow's nest, within easy reach of his hand," also be fully acknowledged, as regular nips from said bottle keep body and soul together while mittened, he carries out his mathematical calculations in the frost bright air. Melville's point is that all the small behaviours and dependencies that enable and accompany the aerial sentry's lofty cognitive work, should be fully noted. This brings me back to the way Proust's attempt to talk about the act of reading kept diverting to places of reading, and Perec's physiologies and anthropologies of reading in his "Reading: A Socio-physiological Outline," led him to images of the reader pecking the ground like a pigeon after breadcrumbs; of reading while eating, bathing, or on the toilet; of reading squatting, walking, standing, or lying down; of the reader specified by "different organisations of our posture, sequential decisions, temporal choices, a whole set of strategies inserted into the continuum of social life which mean that we don't read simply anyhow, any when, and anywhere, even if we may read anything." Melville's attention rhymes with the places, positions and proprieties of reading in a city, which Kertész impressionistically gathered in his small book *On Reading*, published in New York in 1975, one year before the Perec essay published in Paris; and with the image of the half-blind, young Jacques Lusseyran sitting reading in the fork of an apple tree, then putting his book down to climb even higher. And all of these ways of understanding the act of reading as a situated contrivance, which gathers behaviours and necessary props around it, gather around the "stage-sets" and "scenes" of reading that interest you in Byars, Artschwager and Barber and take us back to all those depicted reading scenes in Manet, da Messina, Chardin and medieval manuscripts which Manguel enumerates. All reading is located reading.



John Ruskin
The Stones of Venice
First edition (3 volumes)
London: Smith, Elder,
1851-53

LETTERS TO ALLAN

Thursday, 26 May 2011

I have been reading Tony Tanner's book, *Venice Desired*, his Ruskin chapter, as I plan to take *The Stones of Venice* with me to read on the plane on my way there. Before I could get a copy of that from the library, I'd picked up Proust's *Days of Reading* (in the Penguin Great Ideas series) because it included his introduction to the translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, to which Tanner keeps referring. Proust begins with recollections of his childhood reading and continues: "No doubt the length and nature of the preceding exposition proves only too well what I had first of all claimed for it: that what it [childhood reading] chiefly leaves behind in us is the image of the places and the times when we did it. I have not escaped from its spell; I wanted to speak of my reading but I have spoken of everything except books because it was not of them that my reading spoke to me. But perhaps the memories it has given me back one after another, will have themselves have awakened in my reader and led him gradually, as he dwelt among these flowery, circuitous paths, to recreate in his own mind the original psychological act known as READING, sufficiently strongly for him to be able now to follow, as if within himself, the few recollections it remains to me to proffer." What Proust has to say about childhood memories of reading and how he uses it here, is characteristic of his view of reading, as he elsewhere writes, and as Tanner quotes: "Reading is at the threshold of spiritual life; it can introduce us to it, it does not constitute it." (236) Reading provides us with "incitements" not "conclusions." "[A]s long as reading is for us the instigator whose magic keys have opened the door to those dwelling-places deep within us that we would not have known how to enter, its role in our lives is salutary. It becomes dangerous on the other hand, when, instead of awakening us to the personal life of the mind, reading tends to take its place, when truth no longer appears to us as an ideal which we can realize only by the intimate progress of own thought and the efforts of our own heart, but as something material, deposited between the leaves of books like a honey fully prepared by others and which we need only take the trouble to reach down from the shelves of libraries and then sample passively in a perfect repose of mind and body." "Reading, then, as a liminal *act*, performed on 'the threshold of spiritual life.'" The active reader's mixing desk always busy, its work a register of the "personal life of the mind."

Instigations do tend to get rationalised, or just left out of accounts of what we have read. Yet to ignore the images that present themselves, the lines of thought that would keep company with, or intrude upon, our mimed monologue of the book before us would be to give in to the passivity Proust finds fault with. His recollections may provoke by association memories of our own childhood reading, and considerations of whether the place or the substance of the reading is what we retain. Then, half way into one of his lovely complex sentences, or at the top of a new page we may find we have not taken in anything we've just read, but have boarded trains of thought all of our own that seem to have nothing to

do with what he had written. I have frequently been distracted in this fashion at concerts, been surprised by efforts of the heart, intellectual leaps, that have taken place whilst lost in thought during this or that second movement. Staring at the orchestra, proprioceptively registering its movements, but hearing not a note. Not bored, not tired – stimulated and excited is more like – I find myself more wrapped in my own thoughts and feelings than in Proust’s or Mozart’s!?

Luxuriating in what my old teacher, Morse Peckham called the psychic insulation of it all.

Perversely, the heightened sense of occasion invites rather than forbids such excursions. So what *was* the instigator, and when precisely did it occur? And what did I learn? As the very waking from a dream seems sufficient to suppress the memory of it faster than consciousness can say no, so awakening to one’s distraction seems to cover the psychic tracks that led to it. I imagine distraction’s onset taking place with equal economy and speed. As well as an incitement to day dreaming, active reading is unavoidably an incitement to writing. This would account for the habit of some poets writing during poetry readings. You might imagine it bad manners, yet the last time I was at St Mark’s – that is St Mark’s in the Bowery, New York’s premiere poetry venue – I recognised three established poets in different parts of the audience writing while listening to their fellow poets read. It is that well entrenched, as a practice. Frank O’Hara’s 1957 title, *Meditations in an Emergency* (on *Mad Men* a while back, do you watch it? Don Draper got himself a copy), a riff on Donne’s “Meditations on Emergent Occasions,” is another helpful way finder. Am I here making the case against “silent reading,” or setting out some of active reading’s scenes of improvisation? At a small café table in a populous city.

Monday, 6 June 2011

Afternoon Allan. As you know I was planning to leave for Venice last Wednesday but this didn’t happen. Sue has just come home from an unexpected and most unpleasant sojourn at North Shore Hospital brought about by an acute attack of atrial fibrillation. Hopefully this will settle down now. So I’ve postponed my travels until later in the year and in the meantime will look after her and as best I can keep you company writing about reading and reading about writing.

I had myself read Ruskin’s passage about the obscurity of the world revealing itself at every approach, from whatever distance according to the power we use to perceive it, and I marked its cosmic complacency, its assurance that the world and its human inhabitants are thus finely adjusted to one another – by natural law.

Adjustment being the watchword of the Enlightenment, as of for example, Jane Austen’s fiction. Providentialism. But did I get the wrong end of his schtick?

This was Vol. 1, so is his mind changing during the writing of *Stones*? I'll save that for later. For the present let me say I'm with you, on the soft vs hardback book. My own reading and book buying addiction began with my teens, in the mid-1950s that is, *with* in fact the arrival en masse of the paperback, especially Penguin books designed first by Edward Young then Bauhaus typographer Jan Tschichold. The books I own are mostly paperback, and part of me considers any hardback up itself (I don't frequent second-hand book stores and have mixed feelings about fine press books). The colour-coded genre series appealed particularly to my adolescent mind – moving on from childhood philately and anticipating adult tastes in taxonomy? I'm shocked to see there are at least 30 Penguin book titles published in that decade on our shelves. Some bought by Sue, one from the Auckland Teachers' Training College library (sorry), some migrated at some stage from my father's shelves, the source also of eight numbers of *Penguin New Writing* (including contributions from Frank Sargeson, and my father) and nine of the *Penguin Parade* from the late 1930s and the 1940s, which brings the number of pre-1960 Penguin publications on our shelves to 50! I've vague memories, but no record of, Penguins bought, read, then lent, lost, or tossed, over the years but there'd be lots.

Anyway, **Orange and white** was for general fiction. I remember Arnold Bennett titles, (*Riceyman Steps*, about a miserly second-hand bookstore owner, is gone. Can't find *Hilda Lessways*, but the other two in the trilogy, *Anna of the Five Towns* and *Clayhanger*, they remain), D H Lawrence, P G Wodehouse (*Uncle Fred in Springtime* is still in residence), Gabriel Chevalier's naughty *Clochemerle* also took off. *Swann's Way* stayed. **Green and white** was for crime fiction. None of these remain, but there was a time when Georges Simenon (ah, rusted tramp steamers, dark rainy Marseilles nights...) and Raymond Chandler ("she chews bottles and spits bricks...") loomed large. **Red and white** for drama, George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan's* all that's left. As for the rest: **Purple and white** was for essays and belles lettres. This where these letters of ours belong, Allan? **Grey and white** for world affairs, **Cerise and white** for travel and adventure, **Dark blue and white** was for biographies, **Yellow and white** for miscellaneous; whatever interest these genres held for me they didn't result in purchases. The **Cerulean blue and white Pelican** series was quite another matter. Heaven knows what became of my *Psychology of Sex*. I remember well and retain and learned to dismiss Herbert Read's, *The Meaning of Art*. The Penguin Classics series, itself coloured-coded, looms equally large on my shelves: Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, etc. But why are all my old Zolas the more trashy-looking American imprints?

The nearest American equivalent to Penguin was Pocketbooks, now a division of Simon & Schuster. A kangaroo named Getrude with a book for a Joey, was its logo. If, as seemed likely at one time, all paperbacks would be called pocket books, their portability, their function as literary iPods, would have been recognised as their main point of difference. Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City

Lights imprint had a Pocket Poets series, which was made famous by that *Howl* you got yourself a copy of the other day. Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* (1964) was one of them. As you know, O'Hara was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art and he, truth to tell, did write them in his lunch hour. "A Step Away from Them," which is an elegy for three friends, Bunny Lang, John Latouche and Jackson Pollock, ends:

A glass of papaya juice
and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

In, suggests Brad Gooch, the breast pocket of his "trademark seersucker Brooks Brothers jacket". O'Hara likes to keep his reader hanging on (at) the end of his lines; "My heart is in my/mouth." No: "pocket." With the paperback we may now wear our hearts in our pockets, as well as on our sleeves?! What would that mean? And who is this Pierre Reverdy? What with the recent rush of Chanel bios, his name is perhaps now a little better known than in O'Hara's day. We assume that there was a book of that title, but wrongly. That doesn't make Reverdy's poems any less close to O'Hara's heart, on the contrary, it suggests that they were in some sense published *there, in his pocket*. For a time, he said later (letter to Mortimer Guiney, February 19, 1962), he was "taken over by that lovely quality of walking-along-the-street-conscious-of-moment-by-moment, in some of Reverdy's poems." "A Step Away from Them," has just this lovely quality, a walking/reading of the rich busy life of the city, of the poem of it, the italics are mine:

It's my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk, among the hum-colored
cabs. *First*, down the ...
... *Then*, onto the
avenue ...
On
To Times Square, where the sign
blows smoke over my head, ...

Until, we come to the end of another line:

... *First*
Bunny died, *then* John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
And one has eaten and one walks,
...

This recollection and the question it prompts both arrive as if they were just one more moment, or one step like any other, which in one sense they were; but

that line: “earth as full as life was full, of them?” which opens the poem up to “them,” who’d been up to this point *but* a step away, in a different direction though, is so slow to spell out, to appreciate, that it is clearly a moment like no other. Ironically it’s the vibrant busyness of New York city life that seems to trigger O’Hara’s memory, instigating his rhetorical question. Life goes on regardless, *regardless* of the losses. O’Hara goes on, still in love with a life in which what he misses ends up in a poem, a poem which he must hope will end up close to some other reader’s heart.

Saturday, 24 September 2011

Allan, this is what I saw out my hotel window the morning of September the 24th and emailed to Sue the following day accompanied by these three remarkable sentences from Proust:

“And my admiration for Ruskin lent to the things which he had brought me to love so great an importance that they seemed to me charged with a value higher than that of life itself. This was literally so on an occasion I believed that my days were numbered; I set off for Venice in order, before I died, to approach, to touch, to see embodied, in palaces that were decayed yet still upright, still pink, Ruskin’s ideas of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages. What importance, what reality can a town so special, so localised in time, and so particularized in space as Venice have in the eyes of someone about to take leave of the earth, and how could the theories of domestic architecture that I might study



there and verify from living examples, be amongst those ‘truths which dominate death, which keep us from fearing it and cause us almost to love it’ (Renan?)”. Which is Proust at his most remarkable. What you come to this place for is to apprehend an afterlife that exists no where else.

The coffin is being delivered to the Chiesa di Gesuati, not far from here on the Zattere. Upper right a lone accordionist plays along. Already my letters are preoccupied with memory and death. The occasions on which I have been painfully reminded of and forcibly obliged to give credence to the fact that my own days, and those of my nearest and dearest, are numbered, have been on the increase lately. I don’t imagine this is going to stop any time soon.

Monday, 30 January 2012

Such is the hiatus in our exchange Allan, and such the scope, density and, not the least, the excitement of your more recent installments, I hardly know how or where to resume my part. I won’t start from where you left off but go back a ways to: “I will need bookshelves.” Loopings back and movings on on multiple fronts already figure in the current sequence of our exchange and, I’m pleased to see, seem at once cause an effect of convergences of subject and process generated by it. So this should be just a further incorporation.

Anyway, back on June 5 you wrote “how much an experience of books and of reading or thinking about reading, is inseparable from my mental and physical rehearsals of the formal and informal organisations of book objects. That is, I’m often thinking about the geology of books and how they are stacked and displaced . . . Solidities, yes, but transitive, containing multitudes and congregating.” Books en masse as geological structures – that trope aims to reassert or re-assay the materiality of the book, its object status, by identifying it with matter more dense, much heavier, durable, and more natural. Turning to it at a time when the production and distribution structures of the book object are in fact collapsing around us seems an effort to hold off a future whose readable language is all but weightless, without substance you might say? This year friends got Kindles for Christmas (how about you?), downtown Auckland lost half its bookshops, and Parsons, doubtless the best art book shop in Australasia, where you bought your Michael Fried, is in the midst of its closing down sale. Which brings me back to Ruskin and *The Stones of Venice*. It was published (1851–53) in three volumes. The Dover reprint of the 1889 4th edition runs to almost 1300 pages. That’s a heavy number. To write a book that long, and to read it (unabridged) seems in itself an endorsement of the materiality of the book. However, out of copyright, it now appears to be largely downloadable. Vol. 1 is already available on your Kindle for 99c but I can’t imagine (yet) trying to read a work of that length on screen and, having not managed to read it before I left for Venice and having weighed the Dover (9kg!) I decided after all not to take Ruskin with me.

It was never a good idea; I could only be there for six days, I'd a Biennale to see and there was barely time enough for that let alone for the city let alone to read much. *The Stones of Venice* was too heavy to bring, and from the Biennale bookshop, the one book that I did want to buy and since have, R H Quaytman's *Spine*, was too heavy to take away. (Ruskin had so much more time and more luggage I think, feeling ridiculous even putting myself in his place. Yet that's literally where I was – he stayed at the same pensione: La Calcina from the 13th of February, my birthday coincidentally, to May 23, 1877. Well after he'd written the *The Stones*. Note the name, by the way: La Calcina, the lime store; 90% of Venice's stone is in fact limestone. His diary notes the location, on the Zattere: "commanding sunrise and sunset both... I look along the water instead of down on it, and get perfectly picturesque views of boats instead of masthead ones, and I think I shall be comfy.")

So Tony Tanner's *Venice Desired*, my active reader's digest, came instead. Think of the combined weight of the all works he discusses, as against the lightness of his book, think of how heavy the nineteenth century especially was with print. But I knew I couldn't go to Venice just for the Biennale, and feared, even before I found myself face to face with them, the thousands of stuffed pigeons Maurizio Cattelan had perched throughout the galleries of Padiglione Centrale and named Turisti, after me. Equally I knew if one travelled for knowledge (as one must), it's best to take some of it with you, to permit Tanner to remind me that "as spectacle – the beautiful city par excellence, the city of art – and as spectacular example, as the greatest and richest and most splendid republic in the history of the world, now declined and fallen, Venice became an important, I would say the central site (a topos, a topic) for the European imagination." And with his brilliant help be reminded of those traveller-authors: Byron, Ruskin, Proust, James, Hofmannsthal, and Pound who wrote (up or down) that Venice. Tanner is especially enlightening on their readings of their predecessors, Ruskin of Byron, Proust of Ruskin, et cetera. It's really their Venice, a tourists' Venice, we all go there to see – the Venetians produced no comparable literature of their own, even in their glory days.

Proust quotes this from *The Stones*: "Not in the wantonness of wealth, not in vain ministry to the desire of the eye or the pride of life, were those marbles hewn into transparent strength, and those arches arrayed in the colours of the iris. There was a message written in the dyes of them, that once was written in blood; and a sound in the echoes of their vaults, that one day shall fill the vault of heaven... Never had a city a more glorious Bible. Among the nations of the North, a rude and shadowy sculpture filled their temples with confused and hardly legible imagery; but, for her, the skill and treasures of the East had gilded every letter, and illumined every page, till the Book-Temple shone from afar off like a star of the Magi." A passage he remembers having read "for the first time in St Mark's itself, during an hour of storm and darkness when the mosaics shone with their own material light alone, with an inner, earthly and ancient gold to which the Venetian sun, which sets even the angels of the campaniles on fire, no longer

added anything of itself; the emotion which I felt on reading this passage amidst these angels bright against the surrounding gloom, was very strong and yet not perhaps very pure. Just as my joy grew at seeing these beautiful and mysterious figures, yet was tainted by the pleasures of erudition as it were, which I felt as I took in the texts appearing in Byzantine script beside their haloed brows, so the beauty of Ruskin's images was quickened and corrupted by the presumption of his allusions to the sacred texts." Tanner sums this up: "This is the 'mixed joy' of a modern, reading – translating? – an earlier writer who was in turn reading an earlier past. It is, surely, an exemplary example of how we – we moderns – *re*-possess our past," and adds: "Proust notes that there is a kind of pleasure and pride – and beauty – in the way in which Ruskin refers to, and deploys, his erudition, reference, images... Rather like, says Proust, the mixed feelings and pleasures he gets from St Mark's itself – the sombre gloom and the serious biblical message; but then the glow of the precious materials and the radiance of the artistic skill. Mixed, mixed. The mosaics of the page are like the mosaics of the cathedral. Thus Proust effectively equates, merges, identifies, Ruskin's book with the Venetian 'Book-Temple' – both move and engage him by their style which dazzles in darkness. Ruskin textualizes Venice; Proust now retextualizes Ruskin by, as it were, reabsorbing or subsuming his writing into the very place he wrote about... The implication is that they are inseparable, even indistinguishable. Ruskin's dark moralizing becomes another tone, a colour value and aesthetic increment, to the stones of Venice themselves." That sounds like an incitement to me.

Thursday, 23 February 2012

Pleased to make it to your show the other night, Allan, I'm looking forward to having a closer look and a chat about it. [Allan Smith curated *Running on Pebbles: Through-Lines with Incidents and Increments* at The Snakepit in Auckland's High Street.] Meantime I still have Venice, leastways twentieth-century Venice, on my mind. Thomas McEvilly writes about a James Lee Byars' installation, *The Book of a Hundred Perfects* (1985, Col. pl. 8) "two darkened rooms were painted entirely in gold. In the first, four black velvet library sofas, or reading couches with gilded legs, were arranged around a cubical black book with no text inside. It was a reading room from some Other world, its black and gold, the stuff of death and transformation. Slumberous presences seemed to float about." This reading room installation is contemporaneous with a significant number of "books" by Byars, such as *The Book of Thank-you*, *The Book of Question*, *The Spherical Book*, *The Moon Books*, *The Cube Book*. Besides textless stacks of paper, there are books of stone, immaculately finished geometrical-shaped marble objects exhibited in vitrines and sometimes split in two as though they might be "opened" for reading. As with the stacks, their silence endows the *idea* of the book with history, substance, and value.

As distinct as each of these book-objects remains, they can only be fully comprehended as furnishing a "set" or "scene" – as in "stage set" or "scene" of reading.

Col. pl. 1
Neil Pardington
Ronnie van Hout, Muriwai
c1972, 1998, 2011
From the series "Behind
Closed Doors", 2011
Black and white
photograph
Courtesy the artist

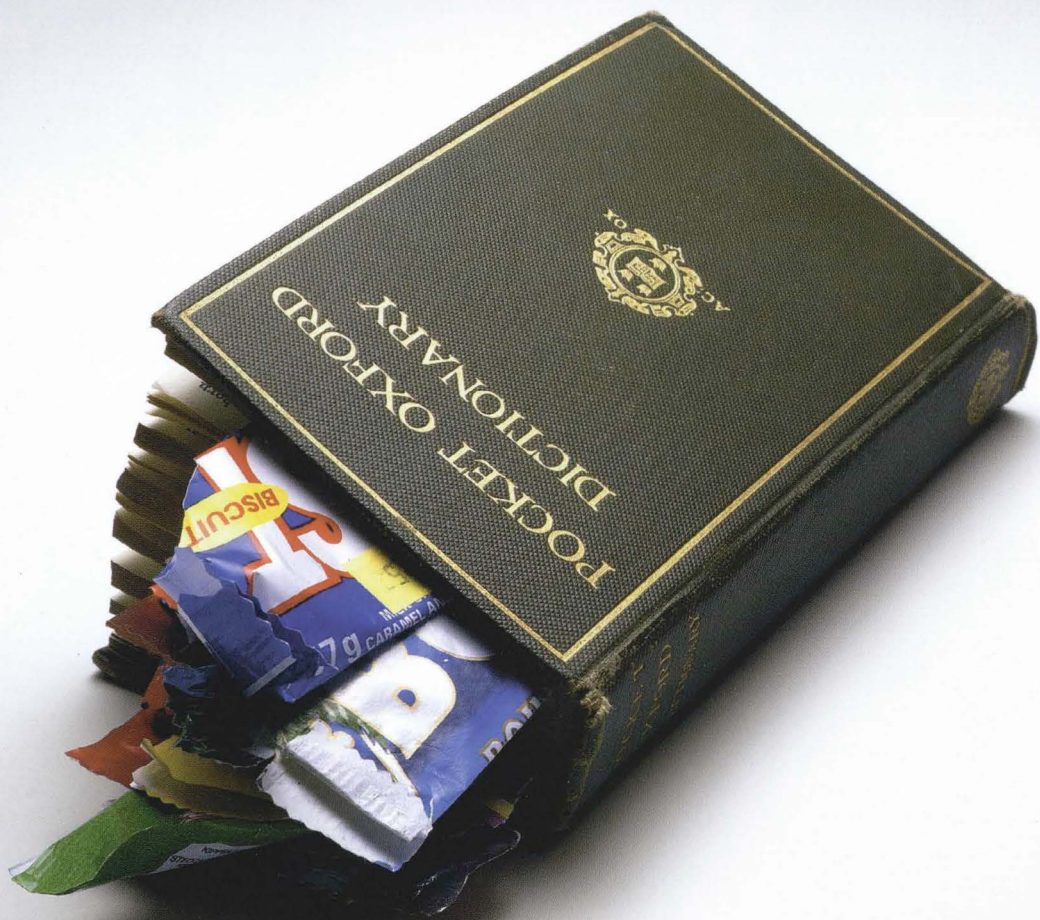


Col. pl. 2
Eduard Manet
The Railway, 1873
oil on canvas
93,3 x 111,5 cm
Gift of Horace Havemeyer
in memory of his mother,
Louisine W. Havemeyer
National Gallery of Art,
Washington



Col. pl. 3
Francis Alÿs
Railings
London 2004
In collaboration with
Rafael Ortega and Artangel
Video documentation of
an action
6 minutes 57 seconds
Courtesy David Zwirner,
New York



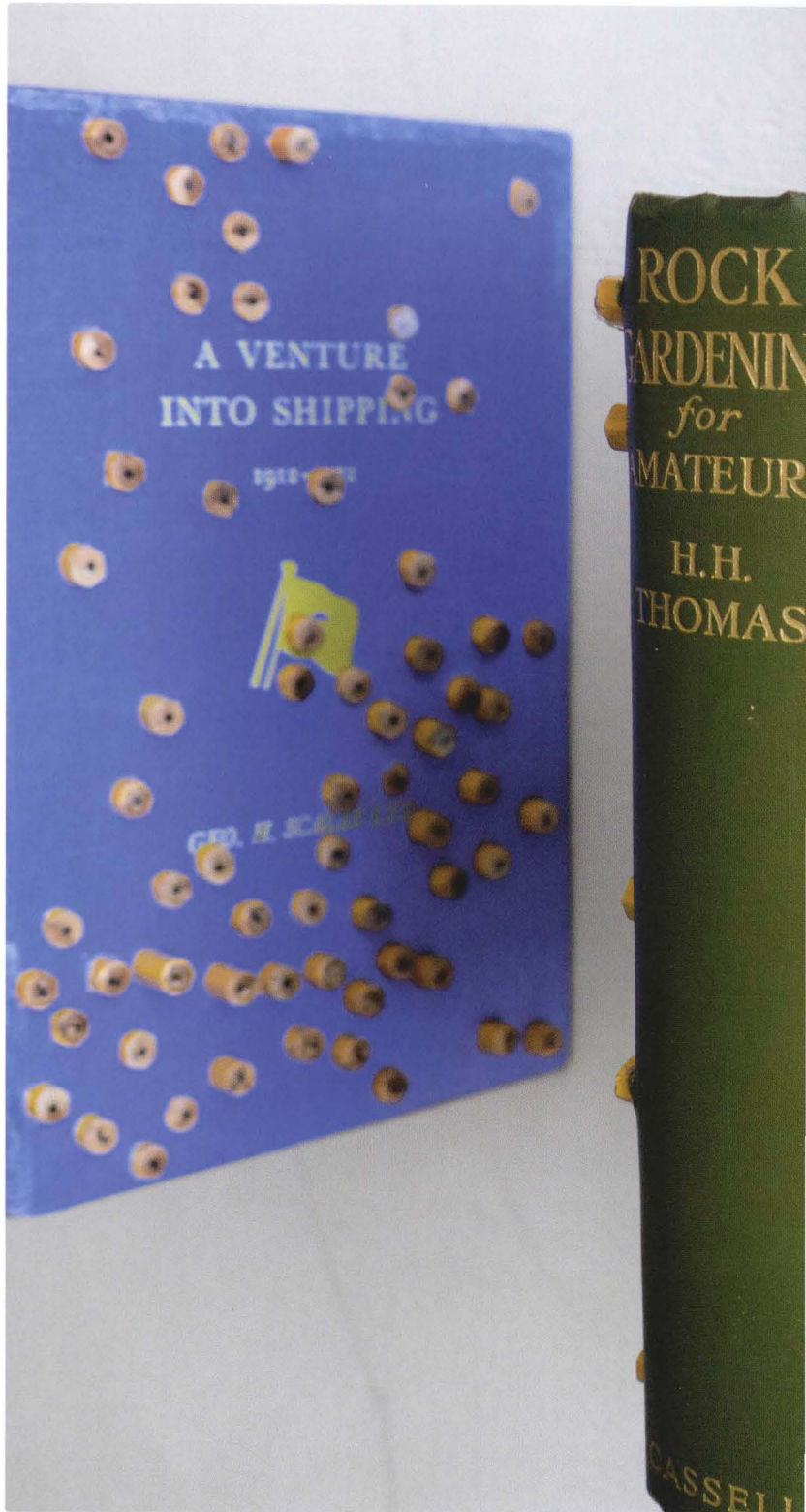


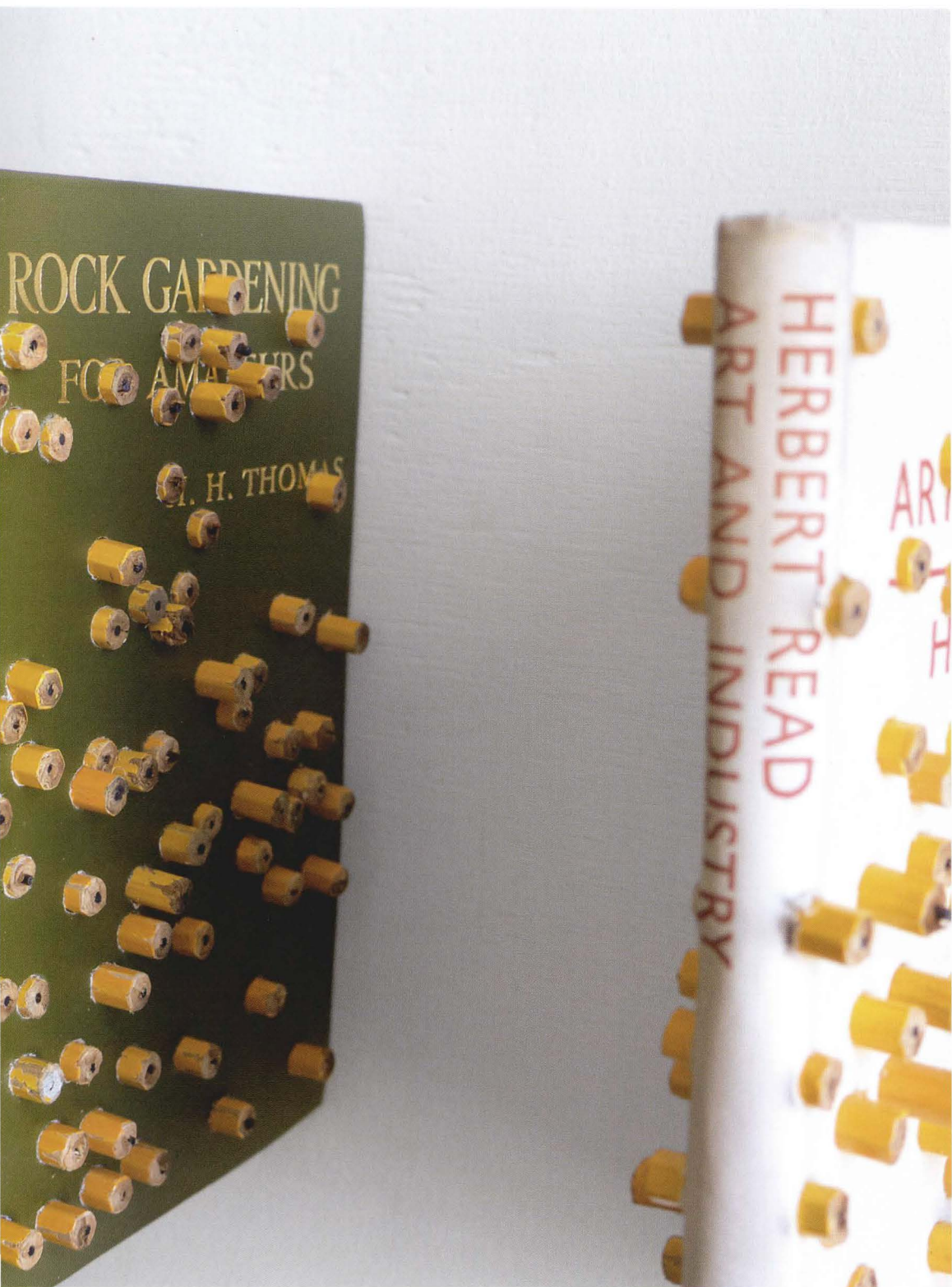


Col. pl. 4
Richard Wentworth
*Tract (from Boost to
Wham)* 1993
Courtesy the artist and
Peter Freeman Inc.,
New York.

Col. pl. 5
Nick Austin
Reading and Driving
2010 (detail)
Acrylic on denim and wood
Six elements, each
285 x 350mm approx.
Courtesy the artist and
Hopkinson Cundy, Auckland
Photo: Jennifer French

Col. pl. 6
Paul Cullen
*Models, Methods, and
Assumptions 2007*
Courtesy the artist







Understood, for instance, as keeping company with the two seventeenth-century Venetian objets trouvés, the *Venetian Reading Stand* (1985) and *The Chair of Transformation* (1989) which place “the play” firmly in the past and in Venice, or with the black nineteenth-century chaises longues of *The Book of a Hundred Perfects*, and the Louis Quinze *The Golden Divan* (1990). We mustn’t be fooled by the alluring self-sufficiency of Byars’ “perfect” cubes, and spheres, of his golds and blacks, their autonomy and their purity are compromised indeed transformed by the theatre of the Other World; they’re really only props for a performance, furnishings for a room, garb and décor for city life in This World. *The Book of a Hundred Perfects* is wordless and yet it speaks, as we say, volumes. The installation is without readers, and yet for all its creature comforts it’s a public reading room and its book is for sharing. The gold legs support us readers, they exalt and transform the parts we play in our engagement with The Book. The couches and the book may turn to gold, in fact, Byars named an empty 1000-page book *Gold Dust is my Ex-Libris* (1983). What a great title that is!

Col. pl. 7
On Kawara
Reading of *One Million Years* at Trafalgar Square, London, in 2004.
Courtesy David Zwirner, New York

Col. pl. 8
James Lee Byars
The Book of a Hundred Perfects 1985
31 1/2" by 78 1/2" by 31"
(each: 4 chairs)
14" by 14" by 14" (book)
velvet/gilded wood,
velvet/paper
Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York

I want to think of this scene of reading as an installation genre that connects hard to classify artists or artists otherwise taken as separate, and connects the medium of installation to that of performance: Richard Artschwager, whose sculptures include lecterns and furnish numerous kinds of “scenes,” On Kawara, especially the public readings of *One Million Years* (Col. pl. 7), Bruce Barber’s series of “reading rooms,” and Joseph Kosuth’s didactic wallpapers, among them. Even Lawrence Weiner, whose oeuvre consists of performance instructions the default presentation of which is usually a scene of reading. I take this genre to be an extrapolation of the book itself, a static object incorporating a temporal programme. Then I want to consider it as a 1980s work, as contemporaneous that is with the digitisation of print, print which brings Venice, the Silicon Valley of mechanical print technology in the late fifteenth century, back into the picture.

Byars is usually considered a cosmopolite, a nomadic dandy but I prefer to consider him a Venetian here, one who, at least in his later years, extends, plays out the line of Tanner’s visitors whose constructions of the city extends and elaborates its afterlife as a central topos/topic in the European imagination, et cetera. Venice as that kind of scene. Whilst Byars was championed in Europe and chastised in his native USA as a belatedly romantic modernist, the former don’t quite get such titles as *James Lee Byars Does the Holy Ghost* (not Mashed Potato), the title of his first Venice work, a performance in St Mark’s Square for the 1975 Biennale, and the latter assume that “exiles” have somehow missed the boat, he was establishing his base in Venice – maintained a residence there from 1982 until his death in 1997. When I met Byars in November 1992, he was living on the Campo San Maurizio; he spoke American with an Italian accent and said that when he died he wanted to be buried on the cemetery island of San Michele. There he’d keep company with that other Yankee provincial turned cosmopolite supreme, Ezra Pound. Byars offered to show me the house Pound had shared with Olga Rudge, in the Calle Querini, five minutes walk from

La Calcina, and took my picture standing by the door. Byars always dressed “up,” but even his performance costume – gold lame suit, top hat etc – too ad hoc, *commedia dell’Arte* rather than Beau Brummel, to be the full dandy – was less exceptional in Venice than elsewhere. Peter Ackroyd discusses in *Venice: Pure City* (2009) the historical theatricalisation of public life in Venice, the heritage of Goldoni, Opera and Carnival, and observes that, “there is still something odd, theatrical about the dress of contemporary Venetians.”

I met with Byars each day of my visit, at his insistence, to discuss his possible participation in *The World Over* exhibition [Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam/City Gallery, Wellington, 1996]. I became aware of how important a base Venice was to him for finding craftsmen and sourcing stone when I broached the idea of a large greenstone sphere for the show. What reminded me of our meeting, were Peter Ackroyd’s comments on green marble: “There is also green, so much wished for in a city of stone. Bellini luxuriated in deep green. The Venetian builders loved green marble. It was an intimation of the natural world, so that we can speak of forests of marble springing up in the city. It was a reminder of the sap and the leaf of the miracle of rebirth. Ruskin noted that one of the favourite chords of Venetian colour ‘was the sweet and solemn harmony of purple with various greens.’” And now I’m recalling your earlier allusions to the forest of F Ponge, the pine woods, the technology of trees, of reading and writing...

Wednesday, 29 February 2012

Your letter recalled to mind the third-to-last chapter of Melville’s *White-Jacket* in which the narrator falls 100ft from the topmost shroud into the sea. Also the forest eyrie in the “Coverdale’s Heritage” chapter of Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), “Long since, in this part of our circumspect wood, I had found out for myself a little hermitage. It was a kind of leafy cave, high upward in the air, among the midmost branches of a white pine tree. A wild grape-vine, of unusual size and luxuriance, had twined and twisted itself up into the tree, and, after wreathing the entanglement of its tendrils around almost every bough, had caught hold of three or four neighbouring trees, and married the whole clump with a perfectly inextricable knot of polygamy. Once, while sheltering myself from a summer shower, the fancy had taken me to clamber up into this seemingly impervious mass of foliage. The branches yielded me a passage, and closed again, beneath... A hollow chamber, of rare seclusion, had been formed by the decay of some of the pine-branches, which the vine had lovingly strangled with its embrace, burying them from the light of day in an aerial sepulchre of its own leaves. It cost me but little ingenuity to enlarge the interior and open loop-holes through its verdant walls. Had it ever been my fortune to spend a honey-moon, I should have thought seriously of inviting me bride up thither, where our next neighbors would have been two orioles in another part of the clump.” A strangely psycho-sexual tree hut this, especially

for a character named Miles Coverdale, the same as that of the first translator-publisher of the Bible in English.

It was, he continues “an admirable place to make verses, tuning the rhythm to the breezy symphony that so often stirred among the vine leaves; or to meditate an essay for the *Dial*, in which the many tongues of Nature whispered mysteries, and seemed to ask only a little stronger puff of wind, to speak out the solution of its riddle. Being so pervious to air-currents it was just the nook, too, for the enjoyment of a cigar. This hermitage was my one exclusive possession, while I counted myself a brother of the socialists. It symbolized my individuality, and aided me in keeping it inviolate. None ever found me out it, except, once, a squirrel... So there I used to sit, owl-like, yet not without liberal and hospitable thoughts, I counted the innumerable clusters of my vine, and fore reckoned the abundance of my vintage.” No books, or reading, but these mid-nineteenth-century eyries might as well be reading rooms, nooks, because they are metaphors for the space of perception and consciousness. Like heads on masts/trees; the outlook, and eyesight is primary, but what about Hawthorne’s other body images?

Thursday, 1 March 2012

Took a while, but I now know that Venice’s main claim to a place in this discussion rests on its contribution to the history of printing and publishing, to the industrialisation of the word and the commodification of the book. Of course, reading precedes and follows this history, but it’s through its agency that the space of reading became silent, privatised, increasingly democratic and specialised. By the end of the fifteenth century, Venice had become the major publishing centre in the world, with almost 200 printing shops publishing about 20 per cent of all books. Just two decades after Gutenberg invented movable type, Venice began to license printers. It established the first copyright laws. As Peter Ackroyd observes: “All the conditions for what would now be called mass production and mass marketing, were in place; indeed printing was the first form of mass production technology, creating identical objects at identical cost... Venice excelled in printing, rather than creating literature. Its most famous printer, Aldus Manutius, was a wandering scholar from Bassano near Rome. He came to Venice as a lecturer, and despite his great learning he was soon imbued with the commercial spirit of the city. He became aware that knowledge of the classics could be wrapped up in packages like bales of raisins, he could turn learning into a commodity. So in 1492 he formed a workshop for the production of Greek texts. In this pursuit he was aided by the Greek scholars who had fled from ruined Byzantium with the words of the past in their heads. They brought with them, too, manuscripts and commentaries. Almost by accident Venice found itself at the forefront of the revival of learning. Its commercial spirit had consequences in the sphere of the intellect.” The so-called Aldine series of classical texts appeared every two months for five

years in unusually large editions (1000 as against 100, or 250) and in an unusually compact (octavo, as against folio) size – good for tucking in sleeves, and so sometimes said to be the forerunner of the modern “pocket book” – and achieved European-wide distribution.

Since Venetian printers established the Roman font as the standard face of Western printing, and Aldus’s type designer, Francesco Griffo invented italic, which he derived from a cursive hand called “cancelleresco” used in Venetian government offices, our reading to this day registers the effects of their type-punches. Movable metal type may have gone to the tip during my lifetime – I’m told the New Zealand Government Printers’ inventory joined the infill on which Te Papa is built – and the days of analogue printing may be numbered, but typefaces based on the designs of Griffo and his Venetian predecessor Nicolas Jenson, such as Centaur, Adobe Jenson, Antiqua and Bembo remain in use. As we come to terms with the full ramifications of digital publishing perhaps we will, for the first time, be able to judge the extent to which reading as we have known it has been function of the printed word.

Unsurprisingly, the Renaissance recovery, study and diffusion of pagan texts, humanism, as it is called, didn’t go unchallenged. The commercial interests and technological innovations that made it possible presented the Church with threats as well as opportunities. In Michelle Lovric’s novel, *The Floating Book* (2003), a real historical figure, Murano-based Dominican friar, Filippo de Strata, gets to rant in the following manner: “Venetians, I tell you, go to the printers and destroy them! Destroy those muses of the printers: the whores and editors! Mark you how the work of the Devil, printing, has coincided with the destruction of the Venetian empire! When did this Gutenberg commence his vile trade! 1453 – need I remind you! – the year we lost Constantinople to the Turk! When did the barbarian von Speyers start printing in Venice! 1470! The year we lost Negroponte! And now we’ve the heathen invading our very churches... that so-called architect Codussi is building a baptistery on the island of San Michele which looks as ungodly as a harem of the infidel!... Even our own painter, Giovanni Bellini is stooping to disgusting allegories, using foreign women as his models, polluting his studios with visitations from his friends who are, of course, printers.” I note, incidentally, that Lovric’s novel is set in Jenson.

The Church, with its pulpit, choirs, frescos and painted altarpieces, its stained glass windows, its ceremonies, clerical dress ups, incense, processions, bells, and so forth commanded a formidable ideological apparatus, architectonically integrated and crucially organised around the projection and control of performed word. The written word, and the hand-made book played its part – as script(ure) – in this system, whereas the printed word, because of the exploding publishing industry, expanding book market, the spread of writing and reading endowed the word with new power, and new forms, creating new communities knowledge, all of which were developing independently of the

apparatus of Church and threatening its hegemony. In these terms the Reformation has to be seen a major outcome of the new technology, also Rome's centuries' long and ultimately unsuccessful campaign (its index, Inquisition, et cetera) to suppress unwelcome publications.

Henri-Jean Martin, in *The History and Power of Writing* cites Victor Hugo: "Three centuries later Claude Frollo, the archdeacon of the cathedral in ... [his] novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*, (in English *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, 1831) is paging through a copy of Peter Lombard's *Sentences* printed in Nuremberg when he pronounces the enigmatic phrase, 'le livre tuera l'edifice,' (the book will destroy the building). Hugo proclaims prophetically that printing would destroy the church and that 'human thought, in changing its outward form, was about to change its outward mode of expression; that the dominant idea of each generations would, in future, be embodied in new material, a new fashion; that the book of stone, so solid and enduring, was to give way to the book of paper, more solid and enduring still.' The book, which has spread everywhere thanks to printing had become indestructible." Until now, we might add.

Not many years after Hugo wrote, Ruskin referred, as mentioned in a previous letter, in *The Stones of Venice* to St Mark's as a "Book-Temple," "Never had a city a more glorious Bible," and elaborated his figure of a "book of stone" in these terms: "the whole edifice is to be regarded less as a temple wherein to pray, than as itself a Book of Common Prayer, a vast illuminated missal, bound with alabaster instead of parchment, studded with porphyry pillars instead of jewels, and written within and without in letters of enamel and gold." St Mark's was a building to be read as a book, more particularly *The Book*, but a pre-print version. Chronologically and ideologically fitting as it may be, the terms of Ruskin's metaphor when considered not only in the context of his own book, but in the fictional contexts of Hugo and Lovric, begin to come unstuck, and their capacity to "exalt and transform" thrown into doubt.

Wednesday, 14 March 2012

Three takes on the end of the book.

1.

"I am fatally attracted to obsolescence, whether I like it or not. It's just the way things are." – Tacita Dean

In *The Guardian*, for February 22, last year Dean wrote: "On Tuesday last week, the staff at Soho Film Laboratory were told by their new owners, Deluxe, that they were stopping the printing of 16mm film, effective immediately. Len Thornton, who looks after 16mm, was told he could take no new orders. That was it: medium eviction without notice. This news will devastate my working life and that of many others, and means that I will have to take the production of my work for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall commission out of Britain."

This work, *Film*, which closed at the Tate a few days ago, was conceived as homage to but functioned inevitably as requiem for its medium. 35mm film printing is also becoming uneconomic, and I gather that by next year all US cinemas will have converted to digital screens, projectors and cameras are going out of production... The end of film is nigh. The CD too; the major labels will discontinue production next year some say.

The arts are no strangers to technological change, least of all recorded music; however the tsunami of obsolescence that is undoubtedly upon us, won't affect them all equally. It's 40 years since Lucy Lippard's *The Dematerialisation of the Art Object* was published; since that time the art object has become much more ontologically hybrid (film, for instance, wasn't yet an established museum art form) but it's hardly gone up in digital smoke. Indeed, the visual, like the performing arts have relatively little to fear from digitisation, because economically speaking they are not piggybacked onto mass entertainment media, particularly those that during the twentieth century successfully challenged the dominance of print. The bottom may be falling out of print publishing as we know it, but the failure of an overly corporatised industry is bound to have its upsides. The collapse of production and distribution costs offers opportunities for new niche businesses that promise to sustain or renew the book and continue the rapid diversification of the spaces of reading. Reading, viewing and listening are all undergoing changes of incalculable significance, with more in the offing. That the causes are interconnected is self-evident, but the interrelatedness of the effects is largely unknown but crucial to an understanding of where reading is going. That it presages, in Jacques Rancière's words, a comprehensive redistribution of the sensible, seems without question.

2.

Mallarmé wrote, "everything in the world exists to end up as a book." The Book. But when, following its obsolescence, the book is no longer, what then? Where will everything go, what on earth will it do with itself? Since with obsolescence what was impossible for the book no longer matters, maybe what succeeds it will now make it the Book possible. If Mallarmé's *The Book* originally signified the end of the book, its limit case, perhaps its replacement signifies its beginning.

I found this in my inbox the other day, courtesy of e-flux, from Printed Matter, the renowned New York artist's book store: "In *Mallarmé, The Book* Scherubel acts as both editor and preserver of Mallarmé's forgotten masterpiece. In a gesture that highlights *The Book's* contradictory status as both impossible to realize (as a book) and fully realized (as a conceptual work), Scherubel produced a 'cover' for *The Book* in the dimensions specified by Mallarmé more than 100 years ago. *Mallarmé, The Book* bears all the hallmarks of an ordinary dust jacket, including an ISBN and a back cover text. This dust jacket wraps around a block of white styrofoam to form the 'bookstore version,' which will be presented at Printed Matter alongside the sculptural blow-up 'promotional version.'" Sam Slote in

a paper exploring affinities between Mallarmé and Joyce observes that: “The notes Mallarmé left behind deal very little with the content of the planned *Livre*, and instead concentrate a great deal on the *form and format* the *Livre* was to take, . . . Unlike a regular book, Mallarmé planned to have the pages unbound, and so the order in which the *Livre* would be read would be subject to permutation. Each reading of the *Livre* would be a performance or *séance* in which it would adapt itself to its circumstance. For example, the number of pages in each volume of the *Livre* would vary according to the number of operators and auditors present at each *séance*. Verso and recto are to be interchangeable in the multiple possibilities of this volume’s binding; and so the *Livre* would not impose a single direction or vector of reading. Indeed, the notes seem to be experimental jottings concerning this variable ordination of pagination. In a sense, one could consider Mallarmé’s plan as an attempt to enact a manual or non-digital hypertext: a hypertext that does not depend on the latest HTML ordinance from Bill Gates or the WWW Consortium.”

3.

I have to confess I’ve not finished reading *The Stones of Venice*, although I have read much more in it than when last I wrote of it to you, and I appreciate much more why the problem of reading Ruskin has so much to do with the fascination his writing holds. Amazingly, *The Stones* is incomplete in itself. It becomes necessary to read or, in my case read again after almost 50 years, *Modern Painters*, another multi-volume masterpiece, ostensibly concerned with the paintings of Turner, which Ruskin stopped writing and publishing, so that he could start writing *The Stones*. He was compelled to do this by the shock of discovering the arrival of the railway and gas lighting in Venice. Then he returned to *Modern Painters*. After that his habit of having more than one book on the go at the time, of being driven on by a fury of distraction, only grew worse. From the perspective of our century, the nineteenth seems to have perpetually gorged itself on writing and the printed word, to the point where in cases like Ruskin, where such industrial excesses are coupled with personal compulsions, the book itself began to self-destruct. Ruskin’s implosive logocentric fanaticisms are tailor-made for close Derridean reading.

So here’s a clip from the man himself. He writes in *Of Grammatology*, before, that is, the advent of the digital, before it could be said to be implicated in the end of the book: “The end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book, even if, even today, it is within the form of a book that new writings – literary or theoretical – allow themselves to be, for better or for worse, encased. It is less a question of confiding new writings to the envelope of a book than of finally reading what wrote itself between the lines in the volumes. That is why, beginning to write without the line, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space. If today the problem of reading occupies the forefront of science, it is because of this suspense between two ages of writing. Because we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently.”

THE GREATEST TRAGEDY OF PRESIDENT CLINTON'S ADMINISTRATION

HAS BEEN HIS INABILITY (OR REFUSAL) TO ENACT THE HEALTH CARE REFORM THAT HE PROMISED AS PART OF HIS CAMPAIGN PLATFORM. OBVIOUSLY, THE WELL BEING OF THE NATION'S POPULACE SHOULD BE GOVERNMENT'S PRIMARY CONCERN. THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PEOPLE'S HEALTH IS OF FAR GREATER IMPORTANCE THAN THE CARE OF PUBLIC PROPERTY BECAUSE THE NATION'S POPULACE ITSELF IS ITS GREATEST NATIONAL RESOURCE. IT IS UNFORGIVABLE THAT ANY PERSON IN AMERICA SHOULD DIE BECAUSE OF HIS OR HER INABILITY TO PAY FOR HEALTH INSURANCE. HEALTH CARE MUST BE PROVIDED, ABSOLUTELY FREE OF CHARGE, TO ALL RESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES, AND THIS COVERAGE SHOULD, OF COURSE, INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH CARE. PART OF THIS EXPANDED NOTION OF NATIONAL HEALTH WOULD BE A HEIGHTENED CONCERN FOR SEXUAL WELL-BEING.

IT'S TIME WE, AS A PEOPLE, TOSSED ASIDE OUR NATION'S PURITAN HERITAGE. AMERICA HAS TO BE REALISTIC AND ACCEPT THE FACT THAT WE ARE A SEXUAL PEOPLE. WE MUST ALSO RECOGNIZE THE SAD CONNECTION BETWEEN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DYSFUNCTION, AND EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL FRUSTRATION. BEING A HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY CAN ONLY BE POSSIBLE IF ONE IS A SATISFIED, SEXUALLY FUNCTIONING, MEMBER OF SOCIETY. THUS, PROSTITUTION SHOULD NOT ONLY BE DECRIMINALIZED, IT SHOULD BE SOCIALIZED AND MADE AVAILABLE, AT NO COST, TO EVERY MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE DAMAGE HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE. WE ARE A POPULATION SO SEX-STARVED, WE HAVE CREATED FOR OURSELVES A POPULAR CULTURE INDUSTRY THAT BOMBARDS US CONTINUALLY WITH A PANTHEON OF FANTASY FIGURES OF DESIRE. THIS ELITE, COMPRISED OF MOVIE AND TELEVISION ACTORS, PORN STARS, POP SINGERS, ROCK MUSICIANS, ATHLETES, SUPER MODELS AND THE PAMPERED CHILDREN OF THE WEALTHY, IS THE OBJECT OF OUR COLLECTIVE MASTURBATORY DREAMS. THESE FIGURES ARE PAID ENORMOUS SUMS OF MONEY AND LIVE IN A MAGICAL WORLD YOU AND I ARE DENIED ACCESS TO. THEY ARE FREE FROM THE RULES AND OBLIGATIONS THAT APPLY TO EVERYDAY PEOPLE. THEY ARE GRANTED ALL THAT SOCIETY HAS TO OFFER, YET GIVE BACK NOTHING TANGIBLE IN RETURN. IN THE END, THESE "SUPER HEROES" PROVIDE ONLY FRUSTRATION. THE TIME HAS COME TO ERADICATE THE REMOVED CULTURAL ZONE THESE PERSONS OCCUPY. IT'S TIME THESE "STARS"

BECOME CITIZENS AND PROVIDE A REAL SOCIAL SERVICE, THE SAME ONE THEY ONLY HINT AT PRESENTLY. IT'S TIME THEY ACTUALLY PLEASURE THE POPULATION THEY CONTINUOUSLY TITILLATE.

I PROPOSE THAT THESE RITUALIZED PUBLIC FIGURES BE REQUIRED BY LAW TO PUT IN TIME AT GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED SEX CLINICS, WHERE THEY WILL BE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL. OBVIOUSLY, IT IS NOT PHYSICALLY POSSIBLE FOR THIS SMALL NUMBER OF CELEBRITIES TO ENTERTAIN, IN PERSON, EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO THEM THROUGH THE MASS MEDIA. THE SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM IS TO MAKE



AVAILABLE, TO ANYONE WHO WANTS IT, FREE PLASTIC SURGERY ENABLING HIM OR HER TO BECOME THE "DOUBLE" OF ANY CELEBRITY THEY WISH. THE ONLY PRICE FOR THIS OPERATION WOULD BE SERVICE IN THE PUBLIC SEXUAL-SATISFACTION WORK FORCE. THIS MOBILIZATION OF POPULAR ENTERTAINERS AND THEIR FANS, INTO A SEXUAL WORK FORCE IS ONLY MEANT TO BE TEMPORARY, FOR ONCE THE GENERAL POPULATION FINDS SEXUAL SATISFACTION THERE WILL NO LONGER BE THE NEED FOR A MASS CULTURE INDUSTRY. ONCE EVERYONE FINDS WITHIN THEIR GRASP THE MEANS TO PLEASURE ON A DAILY BASIS, A RITUALIZED ARENA OF SPECTACULAR FANTASY FIGURES WILL SERVE NO CULTURAL PURPOSE. PEOPLE WILL CONSTRUCT THEIR OWN DESIRE FREE FROM THE EFFECT OF ANY PREFABRICATED STANDARD. WITHIN

A GENERATION, SEXUAL REPRESSION WILL CEASE TO BE A MAJOR FACTOR AS A CAUSE FOR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ILLNESS. AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN, IT WILL BECOME AS INCONSEQUENTIAL AS THE COMMON COLD.

IN THE MEAN TIME, BEFORE THESE SOCIAL PROGRAMS ARE PUT INTO EFFECT, I OFFER UP SOME HAND MADE CELEBRITY SURROGATES AS A STOPGAP MEASURE. THE PEOPLE ARE DAMAGED AND SHY; THEY ARE UNWILLING TO TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD FREEING THEMSELVES OF SEXUAL REPRESSION AND THEIR RELIANCE ON FANTASY SEX OBJECTS. KNOWING THEIR LIMITATIONS, I HAVE PROVIDED THEM WITH SIMPLE, SQUARE ONE, TACTILE PLEASURES, HOPING THAT THEY MAY USE THESE AS SPRINGBOARDS TO MOVE ON TO MORE COMPLEX EROTIC ONES.

SPEND A LITTLE TIME WITH THESE INANIMATE FRIENDS, LISTENING TO THE MUSIC, EXPLORING YOUR FEELINGS. TAKE A FEW BABY STEPS. BUILD UP THE COURAGE TO LEAVE ART, AND THE FETISH, BEHIND. MOVE FORWARD INTO REALITY, THEN MOVE ON TO ECSTASY.

MIKE KELLEY

Stopgap Measures: Reading Mike Kelley's Writings

John C. Welchman

This essay and the research on which it is based was largely finalised at the time of Mike Kelley's tragic death. I dedicate it to his memory with a renewed sense of gratitude, appreciation and respect for the extraordinary generosity, intellectual acumen and sheer imaginative and stylistic vitality he left to us in his writings.

The range of genres and styles, as well as subjects and debates, taken on (or invented) by Mike Kelley in his writings during the last three decades is both remarkable and unique.¹ His idioms have included creative and critical essays for art and alternative journals; essays for exhibition catalogues; artist statements; scripts for sound sculptures; libretti; dialogues (real and imagined); performance scripts; manifestos; numerous interviews (as both interviewer and interviewee); polemics; panel presentations; screening introductions; radio broadcasts; public lectures; CD liner notes; invented case histories; and poster texts. The variety of topics about which he has written, noted and talked is equally broad, ranging from commentaries on and additions to his own work and that of teachers, friends, colleagues and heroes, to meditations on contemporary music, psychoanalytic and popular cultural concepts and science fiction. He has produced important reflections on the nature of caricature and contemporary dialogues with it; on ideas and effects of the uncanny; and on UFOs, gender-bending, pop psychology, adolescence, Repressed Memory Syndrome and architecture. Among other issues, his interviews discuss the Detroit underground in the mid-1970s, Conceptual art, feminism, sexuality, rock music, formalism, the relation between New York and Los Angeles, politics and the pathetic. And writing itself. Within this profusion of vehicles and themes, Kelley's written texts were almost always informed by the signature play and irony that abound in his work, whether written, performed, videoed, drawn or installed.

Not even the three volumes of his writings published to date have accommodated all of Kelley's writings, for they omit his signature essays, liner notes and

Fig. 1
Mike Kelley
A Stopgap Measure 1999
36 x 24 inches
Courtesy Kelley Studio
and the Mike Kelley
Foundation for the Arts
Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

panel discussions of contemporary music; an exciting body of interviews, recorded conversations and broadcasts, for which Kelley and his work were the focus; the scripts used for the performances that launched his career in the mid- and later 1970s; and a range of writings achieved in the last half decade or so of his life. While not really known as a writer by many in the art world (in large part because of the multiple geographic and media locations of this work), considering quantity alone, Kelley takes his place alongside the theory-oriented abstractionists of the historical avant-garde (Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Kasimir Malevich) as one of the most productive artist-writers of the twentieth century – ironic company, perhaps, for an artist whose engagement in projects funded by the conceptual vernacular led him to stand “staunchly against the whole idea of nonrepresentational art.”²

Before 2000 I was an avid reader of Kelley’s writings, but beginning in that year I worked very closely with him for much of the ensuing decade as his editor and anthologist. This was no easy task. For a start, Mike had launched a crusade against the very notion of “standardization,” so it was something of a struggle to bring his usages, stylistic habits, footnote references and occasional repetitions into some measure of mutual alignment. At the beginning we would sometimes spend a day going through a page or two; but we soon reached an accord without a formula – so that by the time we collaborated with our friend Jim Shaw on a book-length discussion (*On the Beyond*, 2011), we were able to spirit through the entire manuscript in little more than a long afternoon. Having had the experience of being stuck in Mike’s first-person texts like a fly in jam, of tilling them lightly, and prompting them in conversation, I have come to understand something of the profound imbrication for which they stand as signal adjudications between his thought, his speech and his artwork.

For while essential to understanding his visual production, the writings Mike produced “about” a certain project are never the key to it, even when the fluency and conviction of his “statements” are almost overwhelming, and even if the artist himself sometimes suggested that he was supplying the deficit of a proper understanding never quite negotiated by outside critics. Instead, the writings illuminate and italicise, exaggerate and drift – rubbing up against the work to which they refer like voices that haunt its world of possibilities. In some instances the writing merges with the project itself and can’t be pulled out of, or pushed through, it. This is the case for the word imperfect spoof analyses of *We Communicate Only through Our Shared Dismissal of the Pre-linguistic* (1995) or the satirical poster text, “A Stopgap Measure” (1999, Fig. 1). In other situations Mike gives us something – whether a position or a personification – that we could never imagine the work might possess, and goes on to make its apposition virtually inevitable. This is the plot or the ruse behind Mike’s writings – egging us on to weave our own critical fantasies through the network of salient orientations he conductively lays down.

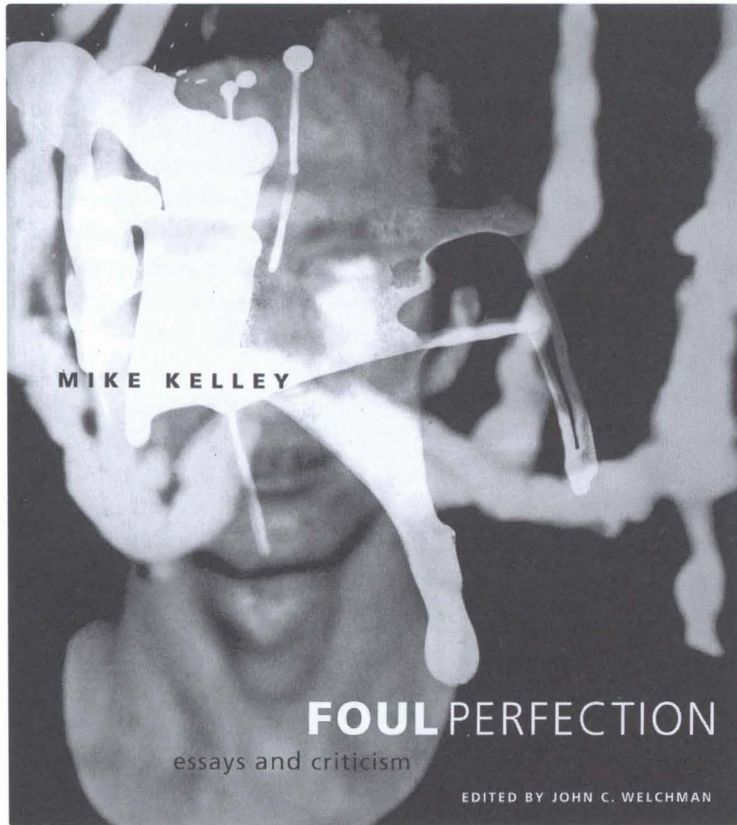


Fig. 2
Mike Kelley
*Foul Perfection:
Essays and Criticism*
ed. John C. Welchman
MIT Press, 2003
Cover

“Urban Gothic” (1985), the first essay in Kelley’s collection of critical essays, *Foul Perfection* (2003, Fig. 2), was written just a couple of years before Kelley virtually abandoned live performance. With its distinct aural qualities (“spoken word rather than written text”),³ and persona-driven incantations, the piece bears explicit traces of the styles and forms Kelley used to develop his performative work, reminding us that from the beginning his writing took on experimental folds and complexities that matched the material and thematic overlays of the performances, drawings and installations. After 1985, however, the style and form of Kelley’s critical writing modulated into a combination of first-person critical opinion, contextual observation and historical and thematic revisionism. What he once termed the “library work”⁴ that underwrites almost all of his projects in different media remained a constant resource from this point (“It’s just like doing a research paper”).⁵ Kelley’s commitment to research, compilation and citation – what we can term his archival impulse – and its reassemblage, dismantling or explosion therefore emerges as a “center” for his

intergeneric activities; the notion of “poetic” concentration, or “condensation” being the key figure of this continuity in “idea generation.”⁶

While never abrupt, the shift from speaking, singing, chanting or ranting, first improvised then based on a performance script, to writing texts for publication demanded new forms of attention, continuity and reference, as well as a turn in Kelley’s orientation to research. He was conscious, in particular, of a move in the mid- and later 1980s – due partly to teaching duties in the graduate Fine Arts programme at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena⁷ – from what had been a habitual involvement with historical and avant-garde literature to reading in art history and criticism and cultural theory. “I never read literature anymore,” he said in conversation with Heinz-Norbert Jocks in 1999, “I read almost only critical theory and history books.”⁸ The result was a self-conscious attempt to write “straight text[s]” in a manner that was neither “subjective [n]or artsy.”⁹

Kelley’s formative influences in literature included the Beats, especially William Burroughs, early twentieth-century avant-gardists like Tristan Tzara, Raymond Roussel, Alfred Jarry, Gertrude Stein, Raoul Hausmann, and the Futurists Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Luigi Russolo. He read Novalis and Lautréamont, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, William Beckford and Matthew Lewis, Vladimir Nabokov, Günter Grass, Jean Genet, Witold Gombrowicz and Thomas Bernard, as well as practitioners of the new novel and their associates, such as Thomas Pynchon and Samuel Beckett. Among his own generation, Kelley was a supporter of the literary circle that grew up around *Beyond Baroque* in Venice, California, where Dennis Cooper, Bob Flanagan, Benjamin Weissman, Amy Gerstler, Tim Martin and others made regular appearances. Early on his reading also included the psychological studies of R D Laing and Wilhelm Reich; and, in politics and social criticism, the Yippie manifestos of Abbie Hoffman and John Sinclair. He was also interested in fossilised systems of thought, like the theology of Thomas Aquinas, and pseudo- or out-of-date scientific constructions, including Jarry’s pataphysics or the writings of Lucretius.¹⁰ With the exception of the “eccentrics” of the genre – H P Lovecraft, Philip K Dick, J G Ballard – he generally disliked science-fiction, however, because its exoticist aspirations were so often at odds with its “normative intentions.”¹¹ Kelley learned many lessons from these genres – appropriation, collage-composition, humour and irreverence, anti-institutionality, the diagnosis of repression, system construction (and parody) – all of which passed by one means or another into his art practice and the composition of his writings.

With all this reading behind him, and a confessedly “bookish” side to his early development, it is hardly surprising that one of Kelley’s dreams as a youth was to become a novelist, something he admitted was frustrated by a self-professed lack of literary talent: I “couldn’t write,” he said in an interview in 2000.¹² As a student at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California from 1976

to 1978, he later confessed that an important motivation for the move to writing was provided by his alienation from – and ignorance of – prevailing theoretical discourses in the Conceptualist milieu that dominated the school at this time. “I really developed my writing skills strictly to fight the fact that I was always depicted as stupid. I didn’t want to. I’m not a natural writer. I did it on purpose and it was not a pleasant task.”¹³

A key aspect of Kelley’s early thought about the theory and practice of writing can be found in his negotiation with the modernist notion of collage, and, in particular, with the aesthetics of fracture and structure associated with the new novel and postwar experimental fiction (Pynchon, Burroughs, Genet, among others) as well as with postmodern media practice. Kelley was careful to separate the writing techniques he developed for performance from either Joycean stream of consciousness, or pure montage and “cut-up.” “It’s actually not cut-up,” he commented, “it’s very much organized . . . like improvisational music . . . I always had a more compositional approach to writing.”¹⁴ Aware of the limitations of fracturing strategies, Kelley pointed out that the aesthetic of disassembling “ultimately fails as a strategy of resistance because it emulates the sped up and ecstatic effects of the media itself.”¹⁵ Kelley’s views on “disruption” exemplify the complex adjudication he sought, for while he admitted to the use of “disruption . . . in a Brechtian sense,” which promotes “a return back to the real,” he opposed the solicitation of more radical forms (as in the work of Burroughs), desiring instead to arrange transitions between “a string of associations.” By simulating “natural flow” Kelley would thereby produce an “almost ambient feel.”¹⁶

In a panel discussion on the occasion of *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp. O.S.O.*, his collaborative exhibition with Paul McCarthy at the Vienna Secession in 1998, Kelley offered the notion of fracture and collage, perhaps its sustained consideration, focusing on the idea of appropriated or oppositional criticism. The artists’ selection of texts by Georges Bataille, Wilhelm Reich and Clement Greenberg “in lieu of a catalogue,” can be considered as one of the many “layers of reference” Kelley identified in the installation itself. Like that work, these texts can be read historically, formally, poetically, or in any combination. The act of assembling them, and the particular intensities with which they might be consumed (or ignored) by viewers, read with or against each other, and with or against the work and its own contexts and references, reinforces Kelley’s own sense of “postmodern” relativity, his refusal to think about texts or objects in terms of their “content or their truth value,” but rather as complex entities with their own structures and histories, blind spots and illuminations, relevance and detours. Working across and against “fashion” and revivalism, using these texts “for their poetic value” but also as “a rationale” for the materials in the exhibition, Kelley noted both his distrust of the truth-giving or denotative function of writing, and that he became more interested in his later career in the “historicist” situation of texts, which, he suggested, came to “supersede my interest in the formal aspects of . . . writing.” With the provocative notion of “socialized visual communication,” Kelley’s later

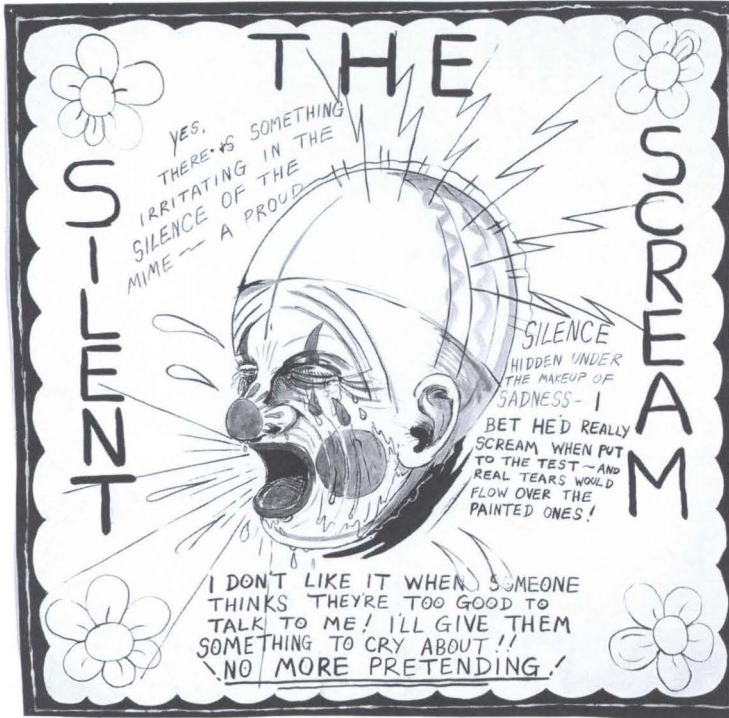


Fig. 3
 Mike Kelley
The Silent Scream 1984
 Acrylic on paper
 37.375 x 37.375 inches
 Courtesy Kelley Studio
 and the Mike Kelley
 Foundation for the Arts

writings attempted to draw the work, its forms, audiences, conceptual and historical references and the writings it occasions, designates or appropriates into a multi-layered compositional totality based on an open logic of association, consumption and repressive return.¹⁷

Another step in the move from performance/script to essay or statement was Kelley's development of his signature, black-and-white, word-image combo pieces (always referred to by the artist as "paintings") which originated around 1978 as a part of his performance apparatus, but emerged a few years later as independent works (Fig. 3). They pair uninflected outline figures painted in black acrylic, with box or sidebar text in a profuse range of calligraphic styles that stand out against the relative homogeneity of other postmodern mergers of image and text, in the work, say, of Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger or Joseph Kosuth.¹⁸ In these works language acts as a destabilising agent that intervenes in the production of what Kelley described as "culturally standard" images, complicating their "legibility."¹⁹ The image-text combinations themselves are "illustrations" – flow-charts of meaning clusters – that establish their

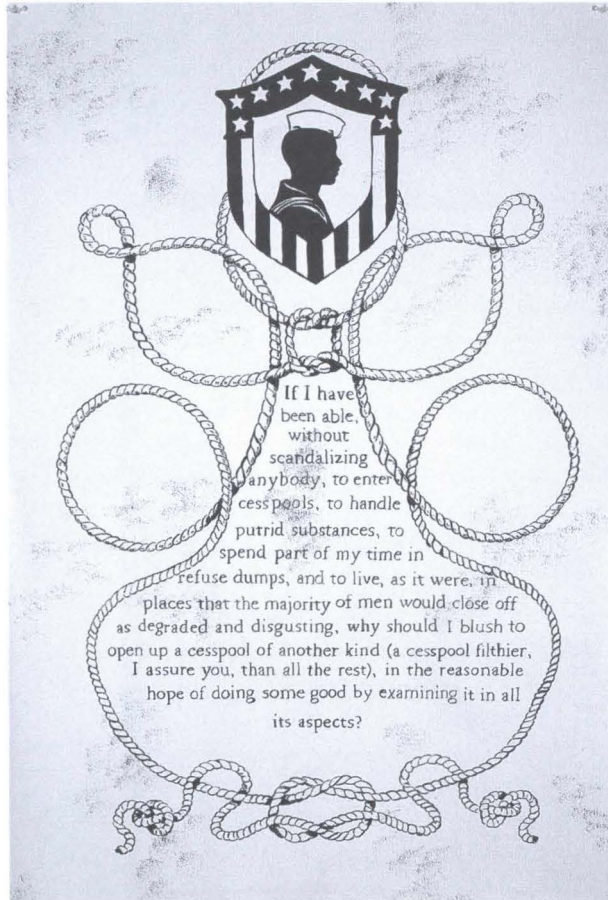


Fig. 4
 Mike Kelley
Disembodied Militarism,
Preface 1988
 Acrylic on paper
 53.75 x 35.875 inches
 Courtesy Kelley Studio
 and the Mike Kelley
 Foundation for the Arts
 Photo: Douglas M. Parker
 Studio

prominence in the artist's work following the diminishment of the object and a new interest in manners of speaking and address. As, most notably, with the photo-texts of Kruger, important relations are staged between the captions, slogans, clichés, put-downs and jokes Kelley inscribed on his illustrational paintings and the thematic concerns of his longer writings.²⁰ Kelley's turn to statements and essays and the delivery of sonic components to his art works (in the *Dialogue* series, for example), may have been a kind of "compensation" for the "de-scripting" of his images, apparent in the late 1980s as he turned to more consolidated presentational structures and the ironic tactility of craft materials.²¹

As with other elements of Kelley's work, there are several origination narratives that underwrite his decision more than three decades ago to write his own accounts of his art and ideas. "I was so unhappy when I was younger with what critics wrote about my work," he noted in one of these, that "I was forced into a position of writing about it myself."²² A primary motive in Kelley's shift to criticism was to defeat what he viewed as the Chinese whisper of falsely imputed intentions, passed as assumptions and misrepresentations from

review to review at the outset of his career. In a real sense, Kelley's battle against pseudo-"reportage" and vicarious intentionalism anticipated more general conditions of criticism achieved only in the 1990s: "Only recently," he suggested in 1998, "has criticism been seen as itself like art, or fictive in some sense, or constructed, representing the writer's point of view."²³

Seldom organised as "objective" analyses, Kelley's writings have a signature profusion that while often driven by fast-paced rhythms are also based on condensation. The artist points, for example, to his compilation of "a lot of notes very fast – you know, ba-ba-bum-bum-bum-bum."²⁴ Many of his texts start out with strings of concepts and quotations speedily assembled and rhythmically compressed. Often departing from these concentrated clusters, the spectrum of Kelley's styles ranges from an "expository" mode ("trying to explain to people what I'm up to in a very clear way") mostly reserved for catalogue essay commissions, through to the explicit corruption of this clarity using parodic forms of "pseudo-exposition" and "high flights of fancy,"²⁵ to the penning of "wild manifestos,"²⁶ like "Goin' Home, Goin' Home" (in *Minor Histories*, 2004). Thus, each mark on this gradient of types is set against the notion of a "standard," introduced above: exposition is normally organised against standard interpretation – critical consensus or received opinion; pseudo-exposition utilises, but then derails, the standard formats established for critical and artistic writing; while wilder moments of Kelley's writing (more evident in *Minor Histories*) merge document and fiction, common sense and reverie in fusillades of ironic moralism or parodic social zeal. Several commentators on Kelley's writings have been perplexed by the range and overlaps between these textual types. One designated the more experimental texts "great perverse objects" because of the difficulty they purportedly create for "art critics or theoreticians:" "On the one hand," notes Jean-Phillippe Antoine, "you take the place of the critics, and forbid them to do their job, you become your own critical theorist. But on the other hand, if one reads the texts, one perceives something else going on."²⁷

In all its idioms, even the most straightforward, Kelley's writing is laced with humour and irony, which arises from the many gaps and dissonances he builds into his willfully faulty structures. In the image-text combos, for example, with their in-image titles and commentaries, the text might mimic the work, or operate "as another figure in a visual proposition" (Isabelle Graw) offering another layer of meanings that mediate, often unstably, between "jokes," "red herrings" and real "issues" (Kelley).²⁸ The compounding of textuality with, or as a supplement to, the visual image is a part of Kelley's plea for "scrutiny," the kind of close but "open reading" that punctures the "social veneer" and probes underneath his rearrangements of mass culture.²⁹ There was, then, both a literal and a figurative side to Kelley's central ironic/comedic strategy of playing with "figures of speech."³⁰ Humour in Kelley's work was a function of his wider view of art as "a byproduct of repression." "Part of the humor in my work," he noted, "is about making that obvious."³¹ In his writings, repression was identified with

histories and reputations passed-over or suppressed by the critical status quo; and Kelley's revisionism often crackled with irony as he re-engaged with various omissions or misinterpretations in the historical record. Humour and irony are, finally, caught up in another conceptual focus of Kelley's work and aesthetic as a whole, his proposition that art is crucially connected to ritual, and that one measure of its power and success is founded on what he terms "a kind of structural analysis of the poetics of ritual."³²

While Kelley often expressed his resistance to forms of art that trade too overtly with the biographies of their makers, aspects of his personal history and development clearly played an important part in all phases of his career:

From the late '80s on there was a general tendency for critics to psychologize my work, and that was something that surprised me... As a response... I felt I had to bring myself into [the work] or make myself part of the subject of the work, in order to problematize that psychological reading. I had to make it difficult... by giving a lot of false information...³³

The dichotomy between structure and information and personal history is as vigorously present in the progression of Kelley's writing as it is in his art. While seldom lacking in opinion, colour and personal style, the essays and comment pieces anthologised in part one of *Foul Perfection*, for example, address themes and issues within which Kelley's presence is largely remaindered as composition or critique. With the exception of the shortest piece of all, on Marcel Broodthaers, the piece on Paul Thek and the discussion of Survival Research Laboratories, the essays in the second section, on the other hand, discuss a selection of male artists who are (or were) friends or mentors of Kelley (Miller, Askevold, Huebler), and who shared aspects of his personal and professional history. Even the essay on Falhström, whom Kelley met only once, in his student days in Michigan, closes with an epilogue recalling the awkward circumstances of their encounter. Such proximity to his subject matter, supplied as it was with an intensity of seeing, sharing, reading and exchange, offers one of the more compelling aspects of his writing – though at the same time, of course, presents an obstacle for the more critically "objective" Kelley (and his readers) to negotiate. The strands of personal and professional knowledge woven through the catalogue essays join with another dimension of subjective investment visible across the volume: the intermittently irascible, cavalier, or cranky voice that drives these writings forward. Kelley was always candid about the disadvantages, repressions and dissatisfactions of his youth, even suggesting – half seriously – that his recourse to art was simply a "more productive way than just being a drug-addict or a criminal or a juvenile delinquent or all the other ways that you can vent your dissatisfaction." Emerging from a personality that was once "naturally miserable... mean-spirited and angry,"³⁴ Kelley's style and opinions are characteristically frayed by occasional misanthropy or art world cynicism, the boldness of which makes for a convincingly strident and partisan

criticism all but absent through the 1990s except in the unappetising vestiges of Right vs. Left polemic caught up in the Culture Wars.

While success in the art world obviously complicated his outsider ethos, and blunted some of his more rebarbative remarks, it cannot be denied that Kelley defended his positions on aesthetics, popular culture, contemporary music and the art world at large with conviction and rhetorical tenacity. Many of his essays, for example, propose a thoroughgoing critical revisionism predicated on a set of principles and arguments that recur in subtly different formulations. Kelley was concerned with figures or themes that don't quite fit, or trespasses across paradigms deemed separate or sacred by sanctioned critical interests. His revisionism could be thematic, as in the essays on caricature and the uncanny; or monographic, as in the essays that questioned the ageist assumptions underwriting the partial omission of Huebler's confounding exercises in "planned futility," from the Conceptualist avant-garde; Falhström's relative neglect by the partisans of Pop; Thek's anomalous location between Minimalism and critical figuration; or what Kelley viewed as an undue lack of engagement with Miller's art and writing in the precincts of New York postmodernism.³⁵

Joining with his disavowal of traditional writerly excellence, and his intermittently cantankerous style, Kelley's refusal to accept canonical histories of contemporary art was one of several measures of his "badness" as a writer. But being bad was not simply a concession Kelley ironically granted himself, it was – as Yvonne Rainer noted in another context – a symptom of the difference between normative conventions and assumptions and the *artistic* inflection of a discourse, whether film-making, writing or whatever. Kelley's flirtation, then, with what he described as "*allowed* bad writing"³⁶ reached for the strategic permissibility of a "bad style," the relative dysfunction and opacity of which challenged the operating systems that occasioned it – whether criticism, commentary or theory.

As a prophet in the wilderness of his own national culture, it is hardly surprising that Kelley's views on the US critical establishment were often sceptical, even polemic. He remarked in the mid-1990s that:

Art magazines are special interest magazines like any other ... they are trade magazines. Increasingly there has been no attempt to hide that. Whereas art criticism ... used to adopt a tone of criticality ... putting things in some kind of historical perspective ... [using] social critique ... it's increasingly obvious that it's some kind of fluff or advertising for artists or trends or movements or galleries.³⁷

Kelley was especially disappointed by the kind of criticism that does nothing more than describe, acting, in effect, as a kind of bookmark for prospective buyers.

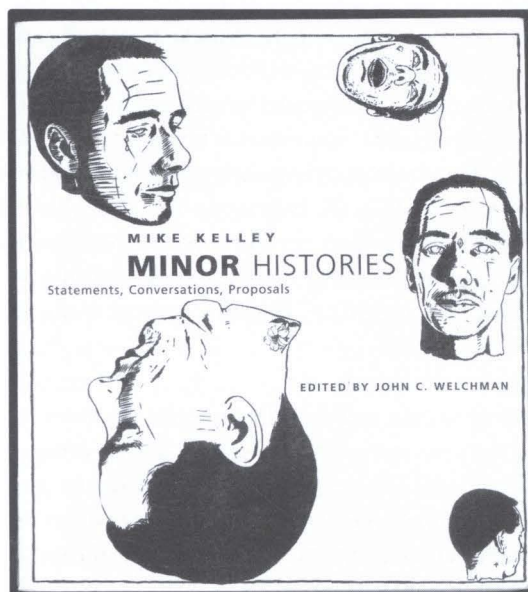
While Kelley was never a conventional critic or apologist for his own work, his writing can be considered as a kind of super-medium (sound, talk, slogan, inscription, metaphor, critique, script, poetry, assemblage, history, polemic) binding the forms and genres of his practice together. "I can raise my voice in protest," Kelley once remarked, "but I'm not the one who writes the history."³⁸ Paul McCarthy underlined in 1998 that for Kelley writing was just another among many possible media (drawing, performance, video, photography etc.), when he noted: "I think Mike and I view all mediums as equal – we use whatever medium that is appropriate to the idea."³⁹ Kelley himself made a similar point when he remarked during a radio interview in 1994 that art has a "syntax . . . [that's] like a written piece of language."⁴⁰ Thus, while Kelley was attracted to the literary conditions, writerliness, or "poetics" of writing, these apparently medium-specific qualities are also associated with other artistic attributes – in a kind of transversal exemplification of the metaphoricity that defines them. In the case of Freud – "I like Freud's writing simply as literature, because it is so metaphorical" – Kelley likens this aspect to "a sculptural way of talking about the construction of the personality which could be connected to Freud's own interest in antiquities – those things which are dug up out of the earth as evidence of the past."⁴¹ This suggestive formula offers another of the striking conjunctions between form, trope, material and historical meaning that characterise the most convincing of Kelley's works.

There are other filaments of consistency in Kelley's inter-media practice that connect his writings to his visual art. The most immediate arises from his long-standing interest in the relation between an artwork and that primary field of texted intervention provided by the title. "I've always," Kelley noted, "been very careful about titles." Typically, Kelley's titles offer a deliberated field of reference for the image or installation, sometimes seeming to counteract the tendency to "psychologize" a work, as with *Zen Garden* (1990), whose "peaceful, contemplative title" was intended to divert the viewer's projective reading of "the animals hiding under the blanket."⁴² Kelley rarely refused to designate his works, or call them "Untitled," except in those instances when he wanted "to point to [the] fiction of material self-reference."⁴³ Another inter-media consistency can be found in his commitment to implied narratives and associational flows that arise from the spaces between compressed images and texts. While a third emerges in his repeated "conflation of various genres to produce . . . absurd or surprising effects," which he likened to the genre confusions of Burroughs and the idiosyncrasies of Lovecraft.⁴⁴ And all relate to an overriding suggestion by the artist: that media and materials are subordinate to "ideas:" "I use various media because they seem appropriate to the idea that I want to work with. And I don't have a real investment in any kind of particular materials. I've never really loved materials [or] had [a] . . . super-fetishistic relationship" to them.⁴⁵ For Kelley, the artistic process "almost always" originated with ideas, and the activity of "thinking first" was decisive.⁴⁶

The 20 “statements” produced by Kelley between 1984 and 2002 (and collected in *Minor Histories*, 2004, Fig. 5) are strikingly varied in length, address and genre. Their idioms include more experimental writings, couched in variants of the declarative and persona-driven language which characterise Kelley’s earlier performance work (e.g. “Goin’ Home, Goin’ Home,” 1995 and the brief “Statement for Prospect 89”), to more straightforward, or expository, accounts of the structures and research-driven thematic concerns of particular exhibitions or installations. Transposed from reflections on general issues in art and visual culture or on the work of other artists, to meditations on the organisation and effects of Kelley’s own projects, this mode resembles the writing styles of most of the essays in *Foul Perfection*. It commenced with the statement on “Three Projects: *Half a Man, From My Institution to Yours, Pay for Your Pleasure*” (1988), and continued in writings such as the exhibition statements *Blackout* (2001) and *Memory Ware* (2000–01).

Other texts manifest a combination of these styles, or take the form of letters (*Radical Scavengers*, 1993) or responses to questions, such as “On Folk Art” (2001) and “On Some Figurative Artists of the Late 1960s: Responses to Questions for *Eye Infection*” (2001–02). The introduction to *Reconstructed History* (1990), for example, is meant to read as pompous and belaboured, reflecting the rhetorical mannerisms of a priggish persona (and is in this sense “performative”). But within the writerly logic thus established, the text offers a consistent exegesis of the mildly depraved “historical” images that follow it. “Some Aesthetic

Fig. 5
Mike Kelley
Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals
ed. John C. Welchman
MIT Press, 2004
Cover



High Points" (1991) and *Missing Time: Works on Paper 1974–1976, Reconsidered* (1995) are Kelley's most overtly biographical texts – though sections of several others, including *Alma Pater (Wolverine Den)* (1991), "Land O'Lakes/Land O'Snakes" (1996), *The Poetry of Form* (1996) and *Sublevel: Dim Recollection Illuminated by Multicolored Swamp Gas* (1998) all contain extended reflections on Kelley's childhood, university experience or early artwork. Memory, biography, personal recollection, and Kelley's aesthetic – and sentimental – education thus constitute one of the leading thematic clusters in *Minor Histories*.

"Some Aesthetic Highpoints" was written as a reaction against the standard artistic bios printed by rote in exhibition catalogues and press releases. Kelley isolates six episodes from his formative experience ranging from a poster competition at his junior high school in 1968 or 1969 to concerts he attended in 1973 by Sun Ra and Iggy Pop and the Stooges, to a stint as a volunteer for Hermann Nitsch's Orgies Mysteries Theater when it came to Los Angeles in 1978 (the year of Kelley's graduation from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia). Each recollected experience offered some form of socio-artistic revelation – about role-playing, the nature of performance, group dynamics, grass roots organisation – which Kelley casts in the form of mock aesthetic juvenilia.

The statement for *Missing Time* is a more expository account of Kelley's return to a series of works made while he was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan between 1972 and 1976. In it Kelley discusses the ways that memory, repressed memories and social or institutional formation and "abuse" may have influenced the production of his student paintings. The statement has three main agendas: to counteract the general critical tendency to "psychoanalyze" Kelley's work, inferring from it that Kelley must have "suffered some sort of childhood abuse;" to use the self-referential scene of his early work to open up larger questions about the generation and circulation of Repressed and False Memory Syndromes (which are developed in other parts of the *Missing Time* project and the statements associated with them); and to outline and annotate the artistic and pedagogic assumptions he encountered in the art department at the University of Michigan and their relation to conflicting currents in the American art world in the later 1970s – the formalism of Hans Hofmann; gestural painting; Rauschenberg and Pop; and installation and performance art. It ends with the somewhat "ironic" fact that Kelley was admitted as a Master of Fine Arts student at California Institute of the Arts, "then the premier 'conceptual art school.'"

First published in 1984, and thus the earliest text in *Minor Histories*, the style and address of "Ajax" are somewhat different from the other statements. The piece developed from Kelley's decision to subtract nine passages from the script for his performance, *The Sublime* (1984) that made reference to the subject of "Ajax," and offer commentaries on and interpretations of them. "Ajax" plays out a move, then, from what Kelley refers to as the "purposeful ambiguity" of the

associational method of composition used for his performances to the more settled structure of a published text. The result is a negotiation between script and text, viewer and reader, governed by Kelley's "playful" interrogation of possible audience responses to multiple levels of reading and reaction that converge on both subjective and generic understandings of "narrative, history, or drama." While clearly not intended as a serious or sustained inquiry, the concerns of "Ajax" are emblematic of several wider issues to which Kelley returned consistently in his artwork and writing over the next decade.

Attending briefly to the thematic development of "Ajax" will give us a useful sense of the grain and the veneer of Kelley's textual method as he layers historical research and conceptual problematisation with references to the crossing and bifurcation of high and low cultures. "Ajax" begins with a meditation on character development, suggesting that texts, like other inanimate objects, are subject to a process of projective personification. Even if a text is disjointed, plotless and lacking in narrative sequence, Kelley suggests that readers will invest characterological significance in its proper names, and some form of narrative development will be read (or misread) from its patterns, timeframes and other gestures of continuity. Characters, subject-positions and different forms of reading are revealed here as provisional, "floating" and constantly renegotiated in the space between performance, text, and the vast matrix of associational coordinates that readers deliver to the scenes of their textual encounters. Ajax emerges as a complexly layered, quasi-allegorical figure incorporating a range of qualities from the "silence, brutishness and pride" attributed to him in several (quite different) interpretations of his role in the Trojan War (in Homer's *Odyssey* and Sophocles' play, *Ajax*) to the impersonation of cleanliness later foisted upon him by the Colgate-Palmolive Company.

However, the primary reading of Ajax that concerns Kelley, is neither Greek nor contemporary. It arises from the premium placed on Ajax's silence and its association with the sublime in Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime*. The equation between sublimity and silence is followed through in the series of associative conjectures about its psychological origins that follow the nine excerpts from the script of *The Sublime*. In the first, Ajax becomes a "blue-collar drummer" and a "sympathetic... underdog;" then, in the course of the ensuing reveries, he's constructed as a "spoiled, boastful brat," a man frightened of speech, a "true friend," a dullard, an addict, a cleanser and a warrior. A coda connects the rationale for the selection of Ajax as an icon of vigorous cleanliness to another transposed figurehead of American commercial culture, the Pillsbury Doughboy. Propelled by a system of switches and circuit breakers relaying thematically between historical and popular cultures, psychologically between subjective overdetermination and group consciousness, and stylistically between script, fiction and criticism, "Ajax" is an early repository of issues and techniques that Kelley will take up in more sustained and focused forms in the writings that followed.

Perhaps Kelley's most energetic sequence of texts are his "wild manifestos:" "Goin' Home, Goin' Home" (1995); the second part of "Land O'Lakes/Land O'Snakes" (1996); and sections of *Sublevel: Dim Recollection Illuminated by Multicolored Swamp Gas* (1998). His "Image-Texts" – written to be incorporated either in particular photographic works and editions, as integral components in an installation, or, in the case of "Meet John Doe," as a polemic printed on a double-sided poster that was exhibited at the Patrick Painter gallery in Los Angeles in 1999, and also served as a mailer/announcement – are also couched in variants of the exuberant, allusive language characteristic of the style Kelley first developed in his performance writings of the late 1970s and 1980s. The concatenations of puns, metaphors, and elisions that make up this most fictive and expressive register of Kelley's writing have few precedents in the avant-garde art world. Their closest relations might be the nonsense broadsides and "lampisteries" of the Dada artists, notably Tristan Tzara.⁴⁷ But although they have their anarchic moments, Kelley's texts don't produce force fields of senselessness and nihilism;⁴⁸ they offer instead a relentless stream of psycho-semantically altered pop cultural clichés, governed by free associations trawled from the TV, brand names, high art tropes and other components of the Kelleyean everyday, arbitrated by the artist's enormous capacity for vernacular digestion and his prodigious memory.

These writings, and the seepage of their style and effects into Kelley's other textual productions, create a distinctive postmodern retort to the experimental language of the manifesto associated with the historical avant-garde. Several other artists of roughly Kelley's generation, among them Kruger, Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, also produced writings that equivocate between fiction and commentary, though theirs tend to be more restrained, abstract or narrative-driven.⁴⁹ One reaction to the distinctiveness of Kelley's language places it alongside the work to which it relates as a kind of textual extrapolation. Thus, Graw described the structure and effect of "Goin' Home, Goin' Home" as "opposed" to the logic of a "catalogue essay" suggesting instead that the "text was intended to mirror the aesthetics of the installation."⁵⁰ The instinct to subordinate text and work to a governing aesthetic of association catches something important in Kelley's ramifying inter-media methodology. It's also the case, I would argue, that Kelley's more experimental writings come closest to the layering of association, memory and form in his paintings and installations, a conjunction that Kelley, like his friend and sometime collaborator, Tony Oursler, made most apparent in his use of dialogues and tape loops as integral sonic components in such projects as the *Dialogue* series (1991).

Kelley himself traced the move in his work from the early "text-driven" performances through a period in the late 1980s when he began to produce more research-based "art critical texts," "designed for the general art world reader," to the development of a more compressed relation to his "notes," brief "statements" and "lists," which, though sometimes presented in "essay-like form," as with the experimental writings here, might, in the future, be deployed as

“lyrics.” He envisaged, then, a destiny for his more condensed, poetic writings as the lyrical supplement to his career-long interest in “pairing sound and text.” In the “wild manifestos” the lyrical valence is still implicit, but something of the concentration, rhythm and lilt of the song-like mode – though as often with Kelley, darkly keyed – rings out in these vagrant, sonorous texts.⁵¹

The Video Statements bring together brief, liner-note-like introductions to seven video pieces made by Kelley (beginning with the very early *The Futurist Ballet*, 1973); eight made in collaboration with friends and colleagues, mostly based in Los Angeles (Bruce and Norman Yonemoto, Paul McCarthy, Raymond Pettibon, Tony Oursler, Anita Pace, Erika Beckman, and Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose); and a further four solo pieces by Tony Conrad, Oursler, Pettibon and McCarthy. As Kelley makes clear in the head-text to this section, the video writings are slight and occasional. Written for the most part before these figures had achieved wide recognition, they do not presume to summarise or annotate the general contribution of the artists to whose work they refer. They are valuable, instead, for the informal analyses of the specific video works discussed, and in offering a sketch of the media milieu in which Kelley worked at the end of the twentieth century.

Composed in 1979, *The Poltergeist* is a composite text, partially pieced together from phrases, allusions and citations taken from the numerous books and articles on poltergeists and spirituality consulted by Kelley during the research phase of his collaborative project with David Askevold, which were collided with ideas about “spontaneous human combustion” and imagery from the adolescent “weirdo” cartoon style of hot rod/surf culture artists such as Ed “Big Daddy” Roth and Stanley Miller. The fact that the poltergeist phenomenon is most often associated with young women entering puberty is used metaphorically to address art production as “adolescent creative transgression.”

The four texts for *Timeless/Authorless* (1995) were apportioned across a series of 15 black-and-white photo-text works first shown in Kelley’s exhibition *Toward a Utopian Arts Complex*, at Metro Pictures, New York in 1995. Written from the point of view of putatively fictive victims of probably delusional abuse, their disquieting themes include gang rape, torture, abduction, incarceration and incest. Depending for their effect on subtle moments of believability, and clearly drawing on the style of Kelley’s scripts and monologues (though eschewing much of the fragmentation and allusive compounding of the early work), these pieces are among the most fantastic, provocative and disturbing of all Kelley’s writings. They also reveal his dependence on the written word for the delivery, sustenance and plausibility of imaginative extremism. For it would be almost impossible to deploy the contradictory impulses that play through these narratives – which are horrific, perverse and almost comical, all at once – in any conventional visual media. Of course, all of this is rendered even more shocking – and more effective – when one realises that the four texts here derive from a bout of auto-analysis as Kelley “used self-help books to determine what [his]

'pathological' psychology is." As he put it in an interview: "I just plugged my own background details into the standardized dysfunctional schema."⁵²

We Communicate Only through Our Shared Dismissal of the Pre-linguistic (1995) is delivered in yet another manner of textual address. Its series of 15 approximately page-long texts is presented in two modes: on the gallery walls next to colour photographs of paintings made under Kelley's tutelage by kindergarten students while he was an undergraduate art student at the University of Michigan in the early 1970s; and from the hard drive of a nearby computer terminal, accessible (interactively) to exhibition visitors. Each text offered a detailed interpretation of the image with which it was paired, summoning up colourful renditions of the "insights" and technical language of child art analysis and art therapy. As with most of Kelley's "projective" writings, these pieces have the uncanny effect of layering the rhetoric of zealously professionalised diction with hermeneutic overdetermination so that the reader is constantly shuttled between plausibility and denial. Contradiction, reading-in, and the blurring of subject positions between analyst, parent, child and reader/viewer, accelerated by the interactive component of the display, are brought together here in a consummate effort of ironic commentary.

"A Stopgap Measure" (Fig. 1) was printed on one side of a highly charged "protest poster" for Kelley's exhibition at the Patrick Painter gallery, Los Angeles, in early 1999; while a series of paragraphs and sentences drawn from national and international newspapers describing or commenting upon the Steven Spielberg stalking case appeared on the other side, under the title "Meet John Doe," along with an article from the London newspaper, the *Sunday Telegraph*. This signature essay in social satire is an informative example of the composite writing methodology Kelley developed in the late 1990s. Composed, as Kelley noted, "after so many years of writing fiction" and in the teeth of a crisis in his "belief system," the piece takes as its point of departure an issue about which he "cared" "passionately," the provision of healthcare in America. Kelley offered an extended commentary on the nature of the "slippage" in tone and cadence he negotiated as this "everyday" concern becomes laced with parody and the nonsensical. The process, he suggested, is similar to the irrational passages navigated through "libidinal urges" or his "attraction to popular culture." But Kelley went on to offer a more extended and revealing comparison between what he attempted in "A Stopgap Measure" and evangelical oratory:

I must say that my influence in this is preaching. Because preachers do the same things. Preachers start up by talking about very workaday problems, and then they become more abstract (I'm talking more about Pentecostal preachers). So it starts with daily problems, like not having enough money, it goes into more abstract things like world conditions that promote such problems, and then it goes into speaking in tongues. So it starts with the sensical, and through shifts in syntax and cadence, goes completely abstract.

And this abstract status is associated with emotion, and what interests me very much (it's always interested me very much) is how this level of our feeling has to be approached a sensical way; you can't just jump into it, you have to do it through a system of disorientation, that seems rooted at first, and this is something that I was very much going for in this text.⁵³

Two subjects were of special importance to Kelley through the 1990s: questions of architecture and social space, on the one hand; and studies, reports and images of UFO sightings, which Kelley convened under the term "Ufology," on the other. *Proposal for the Decoration of an Island of Conference Rooms (with Copy Room) for an Advertising Agency Designed by Frank Gehry*, was written by Kelley in 1990 to Aleks Istanbulu in the Frank Gehry office. While Kelley's intervention in the then new Chiat/Day office building in Venice (1985–91), was never realised in situ (it was created for the exhibition *Helter Skelter* at MoCA, Los Angeles in 1992), Kelley's ironic and disruptive address to built space emerges here with playful clarity. Co-authored with Paul McCarthy, *An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard Powers and Francis Picabia* (1997), paired separate statements by Kelley and McCarthy on experiences of pictorial and architectural space, relating to their project combining work by the sci-fi illustrator, Richard M Powers and the Cuban-born avant-garde artist Francis Picabia.

"Architectural Non-Memory Replaced with Psychic Reality" (1996) is an expository statement organised as an extended commentary on the context, making and implications of *Educational Complex*, the large architectural model Kelley built as the centerpiece for his exhibition, *Toward a Utopian Arts Complex*, at Metro Pictures, New York in 1995 (the *Timeless/Authorless* and *We Communicate* photo-texts – among other pieces – were also exhibited in this show). In addition to its outline of the construction of *Educational Complex* according to Kelley's partial and imperfect memory of the interior spaces of the seven or so schools he had attended, from kindergarten to grad school, the text meditates on the relation of his "complex" to traditions of utopian architecture, including Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical architecture and Paolo Soleri's Arcosanti. But Kelley crossed these concerns with another instalment of his abiding interest in Repressed Memory Syndrome, and the fixation on childhood abuse in the US in the early 1990s. He also alluded to his own implication in these pop psychologies: "it seemed natural to look to my own aesthetic training as the root of my secret indoctrination in perversity, and possibly as the site of my own abuse."

Ufology was a subject close to Kelley's heart for several reasons. First, the literature on UFOs subtends an aesthetic that Kelley found fascinating and contradictory: in it, he remarked, "there is often this conflation of the cold, the hard and the metallic with the runny and sticky, and with luminous coloration."⁵⁴ Such structural contrasts became another element in the analogical matrix that Kelley connected to the sexuality of space, the pink and flesh tones of pornography and crystalology, and the colour-chart formalism of

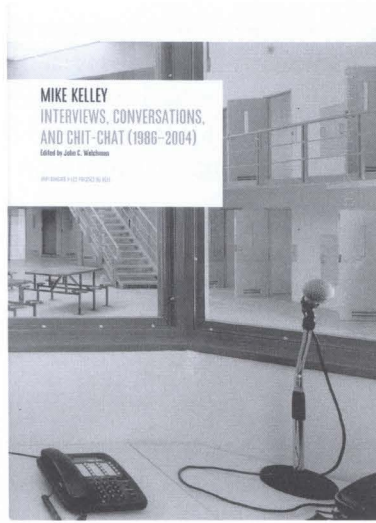


Fig. 6
 Mike Kelley
Mike Kelley: Interviews, Conversations, and Chit-Chat, 1986–2004
 ed. John C. Welchman
 JRP/Ringier, 2005
 Cover

Hans Hofmann. Second, as the opening paragraph of “The Aesthetics of Ufology” (1997/2002) makes clear, Kelley was compelled by the meeting in Ufology of “hi-tech fetishism and symbolic body-loathing,” “the abject and the technological.” A third interest relates Ufology to Georges Bataille’s “aesthetics of heterogeneity,” Jean-Paul Sartre’s analysis of the “slimy,” the anthropologist, Mary Douglas’ discussion of filthiness and abject bodily materials, and pornographic imagery – which Kelley discussed in relation to sci-fi films from the 1950s to the 1990s, and the illustrations of Richard Powers. “Weaned on *Conspiracy: A Dialogue Between Chris Wilder and Mike Kelley*” (1998) combined further insights on Ufology by Kelley with Wilder’s reflections on the “endless roll of [similar] images” collected in *Project Blue Book*, the investigative agency formed by the United States Air Force in 1952.

Scattered as they are in various kinds of publications across three continents and seldom well-distributed, it is hardly remarkable that there are few cogent assessments of Kelley’s work as a writer. Though the task is far from over, the three volumes in print, along with plans for further anthologies, will lay a foundation for discussion of the work of this prolific artist/writer.

In Kelley one discovers the first practitioner-polemicist-historian of the broad counter-current to mainstream American modernism . . . Rather than bait the “art experts,” he has beaten them at their own game. More precisely he has hijacked the basic premises and methodologies of postmodernism – complete with postmodernism’s preoccupation with class, gender, and the intricacies of false consciousness and cultural denial – and redeployed them with rough and ready energy that radically alters our perspective on their past and future application.⁵⁵

Kelley's work as a writer was founded on a dense web of issues and allusions – biography, memory, architecture, aliens-among-us, folk art, the American vernacular, moving images, historical revisionism, theories of character, repression, socialised constructions of gender, performance, art world formalism, and more – which overlap, argue and reverberate in a blazing network of focused conflations approached only, I would contend, by the more willfully paranoid musings of Salvador Dalí. Dalí's meditations on the psycho-cultural implications of smoothness, manifested in a delirious spectrum of "objects" – ranging from a "cottonless reel" and the uninflected physiognomy of silent-era comedian, Harry Langdon, to the eggs and rounded surfaces in his own paintings⁵⁶ – are matched, for example, by Kelley's imaginatively hectic conjugation of "blob"-like forms in several of his later writings. In the first story proposed for *Zoo TV*, "The Purple Glob" (1996), Kelley actually designates his misrecollection of the narrative of the falling purple glob he heard as a child to a kind of "paranoid" "projection," which becomes the imagistic basis for a confabulation of gelatinous materials, authoritarian violence, alien intrusion and cross-gendered mistaken identity (all of which Kelley decodes as screen memories). Kelley twice returns to the implications of the purple glob: in "Weaned on Conspiracy: A Dialogue Between Chris Wilder and Mike Kelley," where it becomes an allegory of the embrace by Ufology of "both the abject and metaphysical;" and in "The Aesthetics of Ufology" (1997/2002), which features an extended reflection on gooey and slimy conditions and on blob monsters and aliens – which, among other references, looks to Jung's "symbolic interpretation of the egg-like form of the UFO."

Kelley's writings are, by turns, frenetic, expletive, coolly analytic and ironically obsessional. Veined with surprising references to art and pop cultural history, they are intensely personal and sometimes morbidly critical. Considered as a whole, they are almost unique among the writings of any modern artist, for they combine both the most significant body of interpretation and commentary on Kelley's career for the last decade and half, with the creative co-production of a new discursive energy – part fictional, part choric, part subjective – that courses through and effectively revises the works themselves.

1. This discussion of Mike Kelley's work as a writer draws on several sources, including the introductions to two volumes of the artist's collected writings, and a further anthology collecting his interviews with other artists, writers and film-makers. *Foul Perfection* (MIT Press, 2003) surveys two of the leading aspects of Kelley's writing, collecting his major critical texts on art, cinema and the wider culture; and his essays, mostly commissioned for exhibition catalogues, on the artists (or art groups) David Askevold, Öyvind Fahlström, Doug Huebler, John Miller, Survival Research Laboratories and Paul Thek. *Minor Histories* (MIT Press, 2004) concentrates on pieces that were integral to Kelley's own art practices from the mid-1970s to 2002, including his most influential "statements" and work-related texts; sound pieces and dialogues scripted for audio tape in various installational contexts in the later 1980s and 1990s; texts from

photo-editions and posters; and a sequence of humorous pseudo-psychological interpretations and quasi-fictions. While *Interviews, Conversations, and Chit-Chat* (JRP/Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2005) brings together a dozen zestful interviews and conversations conducted by Kelley with some of the leading voices in contemporary culture over the last couple of decades. They range from extended discussions with his artist-friends Jim Shaw and Tony Oursler, to probing dialogues with performer Mike Smith, A A Bronson of General Idea, German painter/writer Jutta Koether, photographer Larry Clark, Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth, and with noted film-makers John Waters and Harmony Korine. The book begins with a conversation with me about the stakes of the interview and the nature of talking; and ends with a discussion between Kelley and Jeffrey Sconce about the notable exhibitions curated by the

- artist on *The Uncanny* (1993 and 2004). Future volumes will collect, edit and annotate a selection of scripts for the celebrated series of performances Kelley wrote, directed and performed or co-performed in the concentrated burst of activity between 1976 and the mid-1980s that established his reputation as one of the most innovative contemporary artists working on the West Coast; interviews focusing on Kelley's work; and texts written during the last decade of his life.
2. Mark Breitenberg, "Freak Culture: An Interview with Mike Kelley," *Art + Text* 68 (February–April 2000): 61.
 3. Mike Kelley, interview by Robert Sentinery, "Mike Kelley: Form and Disfunction," *Zone* 1, no. 2 (1994): 15.
 4. Kelley, interview by Robert Sentinery, 15.
 5. Mike Kelley, interview by Gerry Fialka, "Genesis of a Music," KPFK Pacifica, May 19, 1994 [aired June 1994], transcript, 3.
 6. Mike Kelley, interview by Heinz-Norbert Jocks, part 1, transcript, 1. Kelley was interviewed several times by Jocks. Earlier discussions were published in German in *Kunstforum International* in May–July 1995 and December 1997–March 1998, but the most recent interviews, cited here from the artist's transcript, were conducted in August and September 1999 and published in Heinz-Norbert Jocks, *Mike Kelley im Gespräch mit Heinz-Norbert Jocks [Dialog: Kunst, Literatur]* (Cologne: DuMont, 2001).
 7. Kelley, interview by Fialka, 3.
 8. Kelley, interview by Jocks, part 1, 1.
 9. Kelley, interview by Jean-Philippe Antoine, *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art moderne* 73 (Fall 2000): 110.
 10. Kelley, interview by Jocks, part 1, 2–3.
 11. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 117.
 12. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 110.
 13. Robert Storr, "An Interview with Mike Kelley," *Art in America* (June 1994): 90.
 14. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 107.
 15. Kelley in "An Endless Script: A conversation with Tony Oursler," in *Introjection: Tony Oursler, Mid-Career Survey, 1976–1999*, Deborah Rothschild (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art, 1999), 51; reprinted in *Interviews, Conversations, Chit-Chat*.
 16. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 107.
 17. Mike Kelley, in conversation with Paul McCarthy, Martin Prinzhorn and Diedrich Diedrichsen, on the occasion of *Sod and Sodie Sock Comp. O.S.O.* (an exhibition with McCarthy), Vienna Secession, September 23, 1998, transcript, 2, 6, 7.
 18. "Look/Write/Act: Word/Image," the second section of my survey essay, "The Mike Kelleys," for *Mike Kelley* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 52–56, develops this analysis of Kelley's image-text combos.
 19. Kelley, interview by Sentinery, 15.
 20. For analysis of the imaging of text and its relation to other writing types in Kruger, Holzer and others, see my *Invisible Colors: A Visual History of Titles* (London: Yale, 1997), 339–48.
 21. Welchman, "The Mike Kelleys," 56.
 22. Isabelle Graw, "Isabelle Graw in Conversation with Mike Kelley," in *Mike Kelley*, 8.
 23. Kelley, conversation with the author, February 2001.
 24. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 3.
 25. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 3.
 26. Graw, 8.
 27. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 109.
 28. Graw, 8–9.
 29. Graw, 9.
 30. Kelley, interview by Sentinery, 15.
 31. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 12.
 32. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 119.
 33. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 114.
 34. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 13.
 35. Of Öyvind Fahlström and Peter Saul, for example, Kelley noted that: "my teachers considered [them] to be minor artists — Rauschenberg and Johns were their heroes. Now I think more people would agree that these artists were important artists." Mike Kelley, interview by John Miller (March 21, 1991), in *Mike Kelley*, (New York: Art Resources Transfer, 1992), 36.
 36. Kelley, interview by Miller, 8.
 37. Kelley, interview by Fialka, 9.
 38. Kelley, interview by Jean-François Chévrier, *Galleries Magazine* (Paris), 1991, 55.
 39. Paul McCarthy, conversation with Mike Kelley, Martin Prinzhorn and Diedrich Diedrichsen, 3.
 40. Kelley, interview by Fialka, 3.
 41. Kelley in conversation with Paul McCarthy, Martin Prinzhorn and Diedrich Diedrichsen, 5.
 42. Kelley, interview by Miller, 42–44.
 43. Kelley, in Graw, 41.
 44. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 8.
 45. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 10.
 46. Kelley, interview by Jocks, 11.
 47. See, Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: J. Calder, 1977).
 48. Kelley noted that "I've never wanted my work to be associated with the Dada sensibility — to be perceived as simply negational," in Graw, 25.
 49. For a discussion of some of these writings and related issues, see my *Invisible Colors*, 339–48; and *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (London: Routledge, 2001), 15–17.
 50. Graw, 8.
 51. Graw, 41. Following Kelley's suggestions, Graw notes that "Goin' Home, Goin' Home" is "less discursive" and "a bit like a song."
 52. Graw, 19.
 53. Kelley, interview by Antoine, 118; I have modified the transcription slightly.
 54. Graw, 33.
 55. Robert Storr, "Eye Infection," in the catalogue for *Eye Infection*, curated by Christiaan Braun at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (3 November 2001–20 January 2002), (dist. Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag), 22–23.
 56. Dalí's reference to the cottonless reel can be found in his essay, "Non-Euclidean Psychology of a Photograph"; and to the face of Langdon in "...Always, Above Music, Harry Langdon ...," *L'Amic de les Arts* (Sitges) 31 (1929), trans. Yvonne Shafir in *Oui: The Paranoid-Critical Revolution, Writings 1927–1933*, ed. Robert Dscharnes (Boston: Exact Change, 1998), 80. There are references to other round, smooth forms including eggs and grapes, throughout Dalí's paintings and writings.

“What I am Reading” *Reading Room* Questionnaire

Compiled by Christina Barton
and Natasha Conland

In light of the theme of this issue of Reading Room, we approached a range of artists, writers and curators and asked them: What, why, how and where are you reading at the moment? The aim was to take a global, inter-generational and cross-disciplinary snapshot of our current reading habits, predilections, focuses and frustrations, to garner insights into the role of reading now and its relation to the visual domain in which we work. To contextualise their responses, which we expressly asked to be short and as much as possible off-the-cuff, we set the stage by posing a set of larger questions: Given that we live in a world that appears to be “speeding up,” and that our work is increasingly mediated by social interactions (electronic and otherwise), what space is there for the contemplative and reflective, for the intense and quiet activity of reading? To what extent do we still engage in this activity? Have opportunities for reading been enhanced by the online environment in which we spend so much of our time? Is the screen an adequate replacement for or complement to the page? Has the nature of our engagement with text changed because of it? From an original list of 46 invitees, here are the 23 responses we received.

CB & NC

Nick Austin

I'm a pretty scatterbrained reader and so I lean towards writing's shorter forms. I'll usually spend time at work surfing web pages. Moving through links and keyword searches, this reading process becomes a narrative that fits into a one-hour desk shift. Browsing Samuel Beckett's letters to Ernie Bushmiller, creator of the *Nancy* comic strip, regarding possible collaboration ... Joe Brainard's *Nancy* drawings, which are pretty much pure genius ... Brainard's famous book of prose, *I Remember*, which reminds me of those tweets from Harry Stephen Keeler novels (e.g. “Fook Wong shut his lips so firmly that they made virtually a line as straight as the one between Euclid's famous two points.”) and couldn't *I Remember* become a tweeted edition? ... Roz Chast's

critique of bananas ... the Bookworm podcast on KCRW, where the host's first question of W G Sebald goes something like, "Will you pardon me but I don't know your name."

After work I'll go to my studio and look out the window for ages.

Nick Austin is an artist currently living in Dunedin.

Len Bell

"I should have begun with Baudelaire," wrote Gustave Courbet at the end of his description of his *The Artist's Studio* (1855). Baudelaire, immersed in reading, sits on the extreme right of the painting. A reader of paintings too, he had observed earlier that there were "rich and poetic subjects all around [in contemporary life], but we fail to see them." He was arguing for close, attentive, concentrated looking, for "really seeing," for "reading."

The problem of looking but not seeing is exacerbated and multiplied by habits of reading engendered by digital technologies, the hours spent at the computer, flooded with multitudes of texts and images. Most can only be attended to superficially. Focused attention on any one thing for a sustained length of time is inevitably disrupted. Instantaneity, sensation and surface trump contemplation, reflection and depth. At least that is an increasingly expressed view. Is it necessarily so?

In his *The Invention of New Zealand*, Francis Pound laments the passing of the days, "so blissful in retrospect ... when both students and professors were *paid to read*" (p. xi) [his italics]. Luckily we still can. My recent reading includes David Bezmozgis, *The Free World*, Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot*, Paul Zweig, *Departures* – all read in bed; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, *Gerhard Richter Portraits*, Elizabeth Ellis, *Conrad Martens: Life & Art* – not read in bed. A mix of fiction, memoir and art/history, personal and professional, these books generated unexpected connections and productive cross fertilisations.

Internet "reading" can facilitate those too. Quick access to any number of online journals and publications is invaluable – for instance, *The Art Newspaper*, *New York Times*, articles from *Arts & Letters Daily* and its links, museum, gallery and library websites; could we research and write effectively now without these resources? What I get from them supplements my old-time reading habits.

Will the screen inevitably replace the page? Will Kindle supplant the feel and intimacy of a book in bed? Was the name "Kindle" inspired by a "kindle of kittens?" There is also a "mischief of kittens." The "mischief" of books has saved

many a person. Books enable respite from, *and* guides to, the world, as well as the stillness and time necessary for self-exploration. The online world in contrast offers quick links to just about anything and everything, a lot of noise and busyness, immediate connectedness, whether illusory or actual. Will we control our use of the screen or will it control us? Book reading, or its absence, will be crucial to how the answers play out.

Leonard (Len) Bell lectures in art history at the University of Auckland and researches and writes about art and cultural matters, past and present.

Roger Blackley

Now I know how a jaded pokie-player feels: one more coin, one last fat chance for the big win. My current object of reading desire is a website, but it's not money that I'm winning. Papers Past, the National Library's word-searchable archive of early New Zealand newspapers, offers a revolutionary research tool that is already provoking lively debate regarding its virtues and vices. Whereas earlier generations of historians struggled with cumbersome paper volumes and even more maddening microfilm, online discovery now means that undergraduate students can astonish their lecturers with absolutely fresh data. For the study of a society like nineteenth-century New Zealand, where newspapers constituted the all-important literature, Papers Past has quickly become an indispensable tool.

While searches are targeting particular research goals, it is thrilling to uncover random gems that remind you just how foreign the past can be. The following example from 1876 seems fitting for this current context, revealing an unfettered market in which everyone's image was available and the historical relativity of notions such as "privacy." The timeless element is the power of a persuasive pen to seduce an unsuspecting reader.

A few days since, a young man was observed intently gazing at the portrait of a young Auckland lady, in the shop of a photographer at the top of Shortland-street, until he seemed to be lost to every object around, and only conscious that he was looking at the resemblance of the face of a lady whose pictured charms had been so admirably produced by the photographer. At length he entered the shop, and asked for copies of the picture which had impressed his whole being. He could only get one which he immediately pressed to his lips, and placed it next to his heart. He ordered twelve portraits of the beautiful Hebe, and would have given anything for the address of Miss L— the interesting original, but photographers are like father-confessors, they tell no secrets, especially to anxious enquirers. The young man however, pushed his enquiries until he discovered Miss L—'s residence. He immediately dipped his pen in the magic fluid of love, wrote

one of the tenderest of epistles, which met with a favorable response. The young man's prospects being good, his offer was accepted, the marriage fixed for the second week in the New Year . . . Such is the silent influence of a faithful carte d'visite [sic] on the susceptible mind of a young man.

(*Auckland Star*, 29 December 1876, 2).

Roger Blackley teaches art history at Victoria University of Wellington. In a former century he was curator of historical New Zealand art at the Auckland Art Gallery.

Jan Bryant

Reading runs through my projects as a dispersed and broken enterprise, at once seductive *and* wretched. Nothing is ever finished, just caressed lightly, lovingly, and rarely in the sequence it was written, since the pressure of time has made reading from start to finish an inaccessible desire. There is no time for absorption in the present moment, or for getting lost in a way that makes everyday concerns dissolve into the infinite space of a book. This has disappeared. Books persist as tempting, promising utopias.

I'm distracted. I can't read anymore (maybe I was never able), unless some background noise is there to help me concentrate, a television, a computer screen, music, people talking and moving about. I tend to shift back and forth between things (a parade of dark-hooded, fire-bearing men, marching to drums through an old Spanish town, drags my attention away from my reading and onto the screen. A Google search tells me it's a film by Orson Welles called *Confidential Report*, 1955, cut up now by bland public television advertising. The POV rises so sharply from the ground that I'm swamped by strange, looming, figures, alienated from one another. Cowering music is reduced to a single note, and the urgent, stilted dialogue moves in its own fractured way to an unresolved ending) . . .

After he became blind, Jorge-Luis Borges asked people to read to him. One of his readers, Alberto Manguel, wrote, "I can vouch for the fact that there exists a relationship between this old librarian and his books which the laws of physiology would judge impossible" (*With Borges*, 31). I think of Borges longingly as *the Reader*, as the only reader, since reading was everything to him, even when he could no longer read. Maybe this is why, as a supine reader, I go back again and again to Borges, hoping to receive a semblance of his somatic relation with books, and to sever my own body from its indivisibility from the computer.

Do you remember in the old days when an acute, sideways glance at the computer screen made the rolling, vertical black lines visible? Sustained reading was hard on the eyes and everything had to be printed. Today I can no longer form neat handwritten letters, and everything available online is read directly on screen . . .

Books are stacked all around me, many books. I haven't stopped buying them.

Jan Bryant lectures in contemporary and modernist art practices at Monash University, Australia. She is founder of Art Programme www.artprogramme.org.

Gregory Burke

Writing about reading post the recent passing of Steve Jobs leads me to consider the grey and corporate world of computing we may well have been locked into without his drive to personalise the computer. For me the birth of the PC was profoundly liberating in giving me the dexterity to operate closer to the speed of thought. It transformed my experience of writing. Gone were the days of trying to recover the urgency if not the internal logic of an idea. If I had the brainwave to completely reorder the content of a text I was writing I could try it out with a couple of clicks, without the train of thought being derailed by the mundane necessities of daily life and the often messy process of rewriting the text. The result looked good too. This instantaneity also became part of my process of reading as the Internet developed. The search engine is now intrinsic to my reading behaviour, allowing me to follow up on leads at the moment I am entertained by an idea.

Of course the Internet delivers information, not knowledge; some good, a lot bad. Things need to be checked and while Amazon is great for finding stuff, ordering is hit and miss, without first flipping through the pages. While I don't miss going to a bookstore to find a title I am looking for out of stock with the message of a weeks-long ordering time, I do miss the digressive experience of exploring the well-stocked specialist bookstore and making discoveries. Even those stores that remain are at the mercy of the tightening economics of publishing and distribution. On the other hand new publishing and distribution platforms are appearing thanks to the both the Internet and print on demand technology. This has led in part to an upsurge in vanity publishing, with the onus to be discerning shifting from editor to reader. While there is no doubt that digitisation has transformed the dynamics of reading, leading to losses as well as gains, I'm happy to take the good with the bad.

Gregory Burke is a seasoned museum director and curator. He is currently the Co-Commissioner of the Montreal Biennale in 2013 amongst other projects.

Rex Butler

As an academic, much of the reading you do is like having an affair: promiscuous, easily distracted, open to temptation. You don't know exactly why you are doing what you do. You are probably doing it as much for the sheer pleasure (and vague sense of naughtiness) as anything else. But, once you find

your topic, you start reading as though you were married: dutiful, persistent, faithful and maybe not even enjoying it all that much.

Over the past year or so, I have been having an affair with the work of Boris Groys. I had always had his *The Total Art of Stalinism* on my Modern Art supplementary reading list, although never having read it properly myself it was perhaps too much to expect first-year art history students to do so. But in late 2010 I picked up a copy of *Art Power* from the Dark Horse Bookshop in Adelaide after a conference. I fell in love with Groys' paradoxical turn of mind, his willingness to flout doxa or common sense in a process he called "metanoia." I soon began to read everything by Groys I could lay my hands on, from *The Total Art of Stalinism* (finally) to *The Communist Postscript*, from the collection *Art Power* to his online postings for the journal *e-flux*.

My affair soon turned into something like a marriage. What was originally a careless passion cooled into something quotidian, professional, self-interested. I began to see how I could respond to Groys, how I could have something to say about him. The first public declaration of my commitment was a paper delivered at the Association of Art Historians' Annual Conference in a session entitled "Post-Socialist Prospects and Contemporary Communisms in Art History." The next (and probably final) expression of my love is something I want to write on the Australian abstract artist John Nixon. Many years ago, I once wrote something critical of his work, wondering how he could be modern, for all of his professed admiration for Malevich, if his work refused to innovate. Now, thanks to Groys, I can see I was wrong: it is precisely because of his refusal to innovate, that is, to accommodate himself to contemporary conditions, that Nixon marks himself as a Communist and as a true follower of Malevich. So as a complement to "Boris Groys: Communist Art Historian," I hope one day to write "John Nixon: Communist Artist."

Rex Butler is an art critic, author and Associate Professor in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at The University of Queensland.

Anthony Byrt

I'm currently staying, with my wife and seven-month-old son, at a friend's house on Auckland's west coast. We're off-grid – the power and water come straight from the sky. As a result, our days are determined as much by the weather as our boy's shifting needs. We're not completely cut off though; we have a satellite broadband connection.

Under the house's single, energy-saving lamp is a pile of books that I occasionally dig through once my son is down for the night. Some of them belong to me, but most belong to my friend: the second volume of John Richardson's *Picasso*

biography; Colin McCahon, Elizabeth Peyton and John Currin catalogues; Alpers and Baxandall's book on Tiepolo; Daniel C Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*; Judith Binney's *Encircled Lands*.

No fiction though. This is weird for me, because up until my son's birth, that's almost all I read. But I haven't been able to since. Most parents will probably sympathise with this; it's pretty hard to open a novel at the end of an infant-led day. But for me, there's another factor. My son almost died in a Berlin ICU the morning after he was born. So either it's that fiction seems a little pointless after an experience like that, or it's that the trauma, months later, has started to take on a fictional quality: memories, dreams, and sleepy "what ifs" have become just as untrustworthy as each other. I haven't yet decided which one it is.

In those first weeks, the online world offered me things far more real and more comforting than anything books could. I downloaded PDF reports that gave me cold statistical possibilities. And I found blogs by parents in similar situations. Some had given up. Others celebrated their child's complete recovery. A few were falsely hopeful. It didn't really matter which; the important thing is that they were there, and that I'd found them.

Since leaving Berlin, my online life has become even more important. The day I booked our flights home I joined Twitter, as a way to keep in touch with the people I loved and was leaving behind. But it's grown beyond that. I'm often surprised by the things @AnthonyByrt says, and thrilled by what people say back to him. Their links send me places I wouldn't otherwise go, and their 140-character thoughts, when genuinely thoughtful, twist mine too. It's a community I won't ever find between covers – a group of virtual strangers who shape how I read and survive here, there, wherever.

Anthony Byrt is an art writer based in Auckland. He is currently Director of Research at Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design.

Abby Cunnane

I am reading the latest *Hue & Cry*, two pages at a time and last thing at night with one eye shut; I am reading the small Penguin paperback *Ai Weiwei Speaks: With Hans-Ulrich Obrist*, on the bus from Island Bay, and dangerously, as I walk up the concrete steps home. I am reading a wilted photocopy of T J Clark's LRB review of Gerhard Richter's Tate exhibition, because it doesn't matter that it gets folded ears travelling in my bag; I am re-reading Joan Didion's essay collection, *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live*, on the weekends because it's hardback and too big to carry, and too good to read for less than an hour at a time. Fine lunchtimes at work I am reading Joseph Grigely's Architectural Association lecture, *Some Stories Various Questions*.

Yet none of these are what I am *really* reading. My non-desk reading is determined by location (bed, bus, bath, lunchtime in the Square, library), by season (books which can/not cope with sand down their spines), by the heft and format of the book, and by the exhibition I am working on. At any one time I am probably reading four books, sub-current to the daily skim of blogs, magazines and websites, which I'd characterise as an engaged or purposeful scanning rather than sustained reading. Online territory represents a place to search for, or spontaneously encounter text which may later become reading material, returned to or printed. But it's like being inside the library's mind, too vast and too fast for productive reading. The more time I spend at the screen the more hungrily I return to print, something to hold.

The book you're really reading is what you think of, achingly, during a conversation, and in the evening return to with a kind of furtive pleasure. Which narrows it to two, *Julian Dashper: This is Not Writing* and Peter Schwenger's *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. And here I realise that almost everything I read relates directly to visual things, most often to artworks I have seen or wish to see, or need to know more about. Aside from habit and comfort, I read as a way to be ready for the next time I see something I can't articulate, and for the time before, when the words or responses I knew were insufficient. I read as a kind of *looking further*.

Abby Cunnane works as Assistant Curator at City Gallery Wellington, writing and reviewing for a range of publications in her spare time.

Richard Dale

To keep my various interests as active as possible I have several books and journals going at once. Books I have open at the moment are:

– Adorno's *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*. One of the lecture series Adorno taught from his last decade, this is a prelude to his summary work on critical method, *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno holds the primary place in my reading and education. He conveys a deep understanding of the political and humanist possibilities that philosophy in the German Idealist and Marxist traditions allows, without succumbing to pitfalls that can lead thought into idealism in its various forms. He refuses violence (institutional), distrusts resolution (political and artistic) and doesn't fetishise language. He recognises the limitations to achieving equality and non-violence within capitalist society and within tradition, suggesting instead a seemingly contradictory notion of non-participatory praxis, always on the side of the oppressed. I find familiarity with Adorno's work – especially the underlying epistemology that guides his philosophy, and his appraisals of artworks – has been essential both in sustaining my world view and in developing the tools for thinking, reading and critique.

- Avner Offer’s *The Challenges of Affluence*. Israeli sociologist Offer gathers statistics on the British and American private sphere to point out the significant negative impacts of economic overdevelopment in Western societies on its own citizens.
- Lin Chun’s *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* is an addition to my Chinese studies, which informs my curatorial practice in this area. This is the best sort of historiography: part history, part political theory, with an eye on social justice.
- To help keep me up to date with ideas, events and practice, I subscribe to: *New Left Review*, *Radical Philosophy*, *London Review of Books*, *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* and *Art Asia Pacific*. I prefer *Sight & Sound* for its film reviews, which are a model of succinct criticism.
- Piano practice sees me reading music daily: Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Messiaen and a recent purchase of the Cortot edition of the Chopin *Preludes*. Cortot created a working manual for Chopin players, with annotations of each piece and a breakdown of difficult sections into simple practice suggestions that can run into thousands of permutations.
- A weekly survey of comics helps with my illustration work and I follow two series, *iZombie* and *The Walking Dead*, both smart, well-drawn narratives that capture something of the Zeitgeist.
- Beside my bed is poetry, modern and historical, including *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*. I take Keats, Shelley, Byron and Wordsworth to complement piano studies, mindful of Adorno’s insight in *The Sociology of Music* that the English Romantic poets are the *locum tenentes* of nonexistent great English composers.

Richard Dale is an independent curator and writer who focuses on East Asian contemporary art. His last exhibition was for the Human Rights Commission commemorating the UN Declaration of Human Rights and included six New Zealand artists.

et al

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Tony Green

Daily (almost) coffee reading has been Honoré de Balzac *La Comédie Humaine*, for over a year. I am into volume seven of the 12 volumes of the Gallimard-nrf edition. But varied else besides:

- A friend found me a copy of Richard Taruskin's five-volume *Oxford History of Western Music*. Taruskin has interesting things to say about art-historical methods.
- Gary Taubes' detailed and penetrating exposé of the bad science that lies behind the dietary doctrine of the public health authorities: *Good Calories, Bad Calories*.
- Biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and interviews with musicians, dancers and performing artists. Recently these have included: two biographies of George Balanchine, central to the history of ballet in the USA; Arthur Rubinstein's two volumes of memoirs, full of inside information on many musicians and other artists; Vito Acconci's *Diary of a Body; Objects of Desire*, interviews, film by film, with Luis Bunuel, that demonstrate his resistance to simplistic Freudian and Marxist interpretation; interviews with Philip Guston, revealing his struggle with improvisatory method, encounters with the unknown, and includes an interview with Clark Coolidge, where younger poet and older painter find common ground.
- Various poetry: Lisa Robertson's epic *Debbie*, Carla Harryman and Lyn

Hejinian's fiction *The Wide Road*; Caroline Bergvall's mediaeval parodic style in *Meddle English*; Larry Eigner's *Collected Poems*; Charles Bernstein's collection of essays, *The Attack of the Difficult Poems*; *The Grand Piano*, an experiment in autobiography by 10 San Francisco "language" writers; poems by Lynn Behrend, Geof Huth and Paul Siegel.

- I like marathon reading through the whole work, for example Proust, Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud, Robert Creeley. This is done more quickly with painters and sculptors with a book of reproductions. In a couple of days I caught up on the painter Jean Fautrier, through the catalogue of the big 2002 show, which includes useful contemporary commentary and older (translated) essays by Jean Paulhan and Francis Ponge.
 - Film-watching – catching up on the Nouvelle Vague (and others) – has led to some of my reading. Truffaut, Rohmer, Chabrol, all readers of Balzac, brought me to his novels. Jacques Rivette was a reader of Jean Paulhan, and so I have read *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*, with its interest for problems of criticism and Paulhan's essays on Fautrier, Braque, cubism and *l'art informel*. I am now reading Ponge's poems and his correspondence with Paulhan.
- Reading is a passionate following of trails, for elusive grasp of one work in the light of others.

Tony Green is Emeritus Professor of art history at the University of Auckland. He is currently writing poetry and making painted and collaged language tubes.

Terrence Handscomb

...she walked back to the car and sat in the parking lot, idling the engine and watching a woman in a muumuu walk out of the Carolina Pines Motel and cross the street to a supermarket... As if in a trance Maria watched the woman for it seemed to her that she was watching the dead still center of the world, the quintessential intersection of nothing (66–67).

...she bought a silver vinyl dress, and tried to stop thinking about what she had done with the baby. The tissue. The dead living thing, whatever you called it (115).

– Joan Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, 1970

Anyone who has lived in Los Angeles will understand how something can be read into nothing. Los Angeles is a strange mix of vacuity of meaning and an excess of representations which lie closer to the symptom than they do to any classical reading of truth. This is what I love about Joan Didion's "Los Angeles" and the solipsistic epiphany of Maria Wyeth, the tragic protagonist of *Play It As It Lays*.

Reading an August media release from Creative New Zealand celebrating "New Zealand's success" at the 54th Venice Biennale in which the organisation reports

that “the continued success of Michael Parekowhai’s exhibition in Venice follows it being picked by *The Independent* [June 12, 2011 edition] as one of the winners of this year’s biennale,” I am unnerved by its astonishing correspondence to Didion’s novel, in which a void of meaning so wonderfully centres on the unanalysable power of the symptom. CNZ’s inflated corporate media release makes me anxious because it presents the same strange mix of excess and nothingness which is located in the solipsistic narrative of Maria Wyeth.

I’m not questioning the artistic merit of Parekowhai’s Venice installation, but expressing my disappointment in the way CNZ’s communiqué inflates its representation of New Zealand’s artistic success on a world stage. It seems that CNZ suffers a failure of reading in relation to its context. Their “errancy of excess,” which entails the adoption of the inflated representational narratives of advertising, public relations and advocacy to please corporate and state patrons, effectively instantiates Alain Badiou’s idea that an authentic art event “cannot in itself, be represented or fixed.”

True artistic success is at heart revolutionary, unrepresentable and in my view, symptomatic. The simplicity and power of pure artistic presentation and the truth embodied in its momentary fixing, is that which makes art great. CNZ’s reading of “New Zealand’s international success” effectively kills the art to control the subjective trace of what it abandons to the void: subjective fidelity. This comes across as not only clumsy but strategically dangerous. If New Zealand’s engagement in the very sophisticated world of international arts events is left to such weak cultural gatekeepers, one wonders what will become of New Zealand’s burgeoning cultural identity. By reading too much into too little, New Zealand’s cultural administrators are in danger of becoming too beguiling and our art becoming too literal.

Terrence Handscomb is a New Zealand artist currently living in Los Angeles. He recently completed a PhD under the French philosopher Alain Badiou.

Ron Hanson

When I think about my own reading habits, outside of study or work, they have truly become schizophrenic. I rarely read an entire book and jump from passage to passage, looking for patterns of information as much as anything. Due to the transient and economically marginal nature of my life the past few years, it’s been some time since I’ve had a space of my own in which to truly savour reading. And I often process so much information during a given day that I prefer to wind down by listening to music or going for a walk, whereas in the past I may have done so by reading. I would say that the Internet has greatly enhanced my ability to do research and scan large amounts of information, but I wouldn’t say it has aided the quality of my reading experience. I think it

would be dishonest to suggest that the hyper-mediated environment and rapid escalation of small-scale information transmissions and communications in contemporary life has had no effect on my ability to concentrate and sink into an extended process of reading. And at the same time, I crave a different kind of reading experience than the one I so enjoyed in the past. My mind wants to wander and I don't feel inclined to stop it. I feel bored and dissatisfied with most books I encounter these days and seek a new kind of reading experience, something akin to the productive schizophrenia imagined by Deleuze and Guatarri in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which is one of the most enjoyable and rewarding books I've read in recent times. I've also enjoyed reading the books *Art Power* and *The Total Art of Stalinism* by Boris Groys. He can really turn a phrase, is economical with his prose and has something to say – simple enough qualities but hard to come by, it seems, in this day and age. I miss magazines and newspapers; they no longer seem worth my time. And while there is so much more availability in terms of what to read, the culture of reading seems so fragmented. I don't have the sense that others are reading what I'm reading and vice versa. I feel the absence of a community of readers. But such a malaise can't last forever. Things always change and the future is intriguing.

Ron Hanson is the editor of the art magazine White Fungus and has written for publications including Afterall and Rhizome.

Bilal Khbeiz

To be honest, I can't find a perfect place for reading. I believe modern times, I mean, our current time, has no room for readers anymore. I'm not complaining. There is nothing to achieve by complaining or becoming angry. Sometimes anger can do too much, more than we can imagine. I am not talking about the anger of people, as Hannah Arendt has described it: as "a productive act," which we can observe clearly with the Arab Spring, in Egypt, Libya, Syria and Tunisia. I am talking about the anger of readers, and I mean by readers, people who have opinions, written opinions in general.

Readers can't be blamed for anything today, because, as I see it, they have lost their identity, and maybe forever. There is a huge gap between Leon Trotsky as a reader and myself as one. Trotsky as a reader has the opportunity to change something, because in his era the book itself was much more influential than now. So, in brief, I think we have lost, or we are on our way to losing the power of specialties and specialists. (A few days ago, a medical report put forward that taking vitamins could cause dangerous illness; they suggested this after decades of urging us to use these.)

Anyone today can find their absolute truth and can defend it as well. And every truth is different; sometimes it can be the absolute opposite. In fact we don't read today to comprehend or understand, but we read to blur our view and to

confuse ourselves. Indeed, the now is, somehow, the era of individual stories and truths; the individual believes his pain is huge enough to describe in words. This is the era when any single death has the right to appear as a massacre. And fortunately, that means the world today is more greatly valued and progress can be made to protect human life. But unfortunately, and despite every effort, we are still watching the blood in Syria, Yemen, the Sudan and elsewhere spring as fountains, and we still count the number of murders in Syria daily, wondering how many Syrian people need to die to allow the “rest” to live in peace and freedom.

Bilal Khbeiz is a Lebanon-born artist, poet, essayist, and journalist. Since 2008 he has lived and worked in Los Angeles.

Chris Kraus

I tore through Emily Perkins’ *Novel About My Wife* a few days ago on a plane ride because I’ve always enjoyed reading her work and they had it for sale at the airport.

Before leaving LA, I read Roberta Allen’s *The Dreaming Girl*, very slowly. Originally published in 2000, it’s been re-published by the writer-run small press Ellipsis. I read it because Allen (whom I’ve never met) sent me a copy. The book is extraordinary. It’s a bit like Duras – very short paragraphs; vivid detail; high emotional pitch – but much less histrionic. The story seems to take place during an earlier time, perhaps the 1980s or 1990s. Two travellers meet in Belize and briefly hook up. She’s an American, perhaps in her early 20s; the guy, a bit older, is German. Unaware that she’s in a trance-state (i.e. she lives in her head, like many young people) her only way of understanding the things she sees and that happen is how they correspond, or do not, to her dream. Every sentence of this short book is indelible: that is, at once artful and deadly accurate. Allen writes in short, declarative sentences that force a slow reading because each line is so expansive: like a really good screenplay, each image engenders others, both in and outside of the story. The book is extremely collaborative between writer and reader:

On the bus he is smiling. He can’t help himself. He is thinking about his life three months ago. He was working in a printing plant in Germany. He was longing for adventure.

I fell into this book. A bit like reading Herta Müller’s *The Appointment*, or Roberto Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives*, you want to read it over and over.

I’ve mentioned four books: all read as books, and for pleasure.

Chris Kraus is a writer and art critic based in Los Angeles.

Lee Weng Choy

There was a time when I was a more devoted student of the arts and humanities, and read many books from cover to cover. Now I find I'm reading a lot of articles and essays, but books, not so much. One reason is that, of late, I have been doing more teaching, and most of my reading is for school: the stuff ranges from Miwon Kwon on site specificity for a course on curating, to Tony Bennett on the museum for a class on arts organisations and society. That's all well and good. But what I really should be reading is more novels and fiction. Been meaning to tackle *Moby Dick* again; *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is currently my travelling companion. Some time ago I started supplementing my reading on art by regularly reading about natural history. I was especially fond of Stephen Jay Gould. Recently, I read Philip Hoare's book on whales, *Leviathan*. Such detours from art very often supply me with perspectives that inform the art criticism I write. In the last couple of years, I have been wondering about the different ways that theory and literature encounter the world. My contention is that theory attempts to apprehend – to firmly grasp. Whereas literature merely addresses, that is, it seeks, somewhat modestly, to reach out, to listen and speak to the world. I believe that writing on visual art would benefit greatly from detours into literature.

Lee Weng Choy is an art critic, writer and teacher. From 2000 to 2009, Lee was the Artistic Co-Director of The Substation arts centre in Singapore.

Chus Martínez

The where is very important to me: I read on my sofa, in pyjamas; I wake up early and start the day reading with a black coffee. There is a blanket that is always with me, like a transitional object that helps me to pass through the night into the day on that sofa where I am for one and a half hours every day. I also read in all the waiting times I need to face when I am travelling, but almost never manage to read on a train. For some reason the movement gets me distracted, and I hold the book but I just stare at it. I have also made good friends with the iPad. I read almost only nineteenth-century novels there, and, lately, also *Father Brown* and even *Hercule Poirot*. I do not know why, but it just happened like this.

I am always reading two or three books at a time. I just finished *The Third Reich*, a novel by Roberto Bolaño and I am just tonight starting *Estrella Distante*, another of his books. He is not big on psychology and I love this. Also *Father Brown*, Borges' favourite book. But I am also reading all the essays of Robbe-Grillet. I started a couple of months ago thinking that I would dislike them to the core. But he completely surprised me. Every line is wiser than the previous one. Reading him makes you want to meet him. It is impossible, but I spent a night YouTubing his lectures. Amazing. And also Bachelard. He has the wild idea of "implacement," "envelopment," thinking of art as a way of using the mind

as a place. His writing is completely different from others; his prose is not conventional, something rare in an era where people just want to state the same, over and over again.

Why do I read? I think I have a huge problem with the moving image. There is no single device able to play a movie around me. I love them, in principle, but... And the book is there still, nicely quiet, waiting for me every morning. I am lazy, books too.

Chus Martínez is DOCUMENTA(13) Head of Department and Member of Core Agent Group.

Hans Ulrich Obrist

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

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Hans Ulrich Obrist is the co-director of exhibitions and programmes and director of international projects, Serpentine Gallery, London.

Walid Sadek

The oncologist does it all with dash. He is a skilled reader of a text which is rewriting the life of a patient. The patient is apparently taken by the words of

the oncologist. The cryptic words of the oncologist are on his side and on the other side of what was his body which is now inhabited by a cryptic illness. To his dash, the oncologist adds wit. To the patient he seems more than just an expert. He seems a man of the world. Opinionated, he is capable of shifting from the Latinised particulars of the illness to the demotic irony of everyday politics. The patient listens and smiles. He recognises in the specialist a man with whom he shares the profane concerns of this world. The patient feels powered by this ally who has access to the text of the illness. The patient bears a text for which he now has found a reader. Between the two of them they are many and unequal.

Magnanimously, the oncologist welcomes questions gleaned by family members from the Internet. He does more than answer. He amends, emends and completes the questions. The family slowly reckons that what they read online is a text written by the oncologist, most probably sections edited from the longer minutes of a laborious conversation with illness. He knows what they cannot know and for him would rather know only partially. What they know is simple and so terribly intimate as to seem impedimental if spoken. The oncologist must not be distracted from reading the text. Without a text to read the family waits for summaries, diagnoses and reports delivered of course with the same dash and wit. What the oncologist does not know and the family will probably come to know is that a text cannot be read until written over. If not palimpsestic, living is unreadable.

Walid Sadek is an artist and writer living in Beirut.

Anna Sanderson

I'm not reading much at the moment. The last three months have been full time with children and babies. Part of my own personal arrangement for sanity is that I don't use the Internet much. I read a bit at night. Recently: *Jackson's Track*, an oral history from Victoria, Australia; *In the Early World*, Elwyn Richardson's educational experiment in Oruaiti; *The Cloud of Unknowing*; *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*; *Who Stole My Game?*, Chris Laidlaw's critique of modern rugby, and John Halifax, *Gentleman*, a Victorian novel.

I don't check my email unless I have to, every two or three weeks otherwise. I don't use Facebook, read blogs, newspapers (except the *DomPost* over someone's shoulder), or do any substantial reading on the screen. I've done two or three searches in the last few months. I looked up the bibliography of a writer, and searched "jellyfish video" and "marlin" because I had a dream where a marlin jumped up out of the water on to the rocks to get a female swimmer (me). It leapt with such force and landed so hard that the volcanic rocks underneath bit into its silver muscular body. It was still limited by its form though, in a way

which reminded me of watching "the long jump" and how gravity-laden even the most powerful of us seem.

Googling "marlin," I realised, was just a way to keep passively dwelling on something, (as one might do with a crush). Once you do though, a drift is set in motion in which the original or intensity of the thought is cast off and other, irrelevant information seeps in, loosening the hold. The search has diluted the thought.

I wrote this first with pen and paper. I find the computer screen has a kind of impatience. I prefer to feel I have "gone away" to write (or read). It is part of a feeling that one doesn't write (or read) with one's intellect only, but with the intelligence of the whole body. Writing or reading (i.e. thinking) with the computer can seem a bit like sleeping and eating and working in the same place. It is swimming with endless but limited and competing voices, images with a uniformity of feeling, the energies of imminent and future communication, all in the same bright little box. I can see how one might adapt to this, by developing sophisticated internal blocks and filters, but I wonder what is lost in receptivity by it?

Anna Sanderson is a writer who lives in Wellington.

Marnie Slater

I have three books beside my bed. These books have been beside at least four different beds in at least four different houses: *The Man without Qualities*, *The Making of Americans* and *Swann's Way*. I suspect I inherited my fiction reading habits from my dad, who, from my observations, takes at least a year to read a book. Modernist fiction is perfect for this pace: even if your bookmark falls out of *The Making of Americans*, an approximate guess of where you thought you might have been will suffice. These books are more like objects of language; my reluctance to finish any of them might have something to do with relishing them as strange, sometimes stuttering bedfellows who refuse to go home. The reading I enjoy the most – the deep, inquisitive, surprising and sometimes profound reading – creates a private space of two solitary bodies, a solitary body speaking to another solitary body.

I think online reading works differently. For a recent collaborative work I was part of, I dived into what is being produced by the online queer and feminist communities. It's like a rabbit warren of all the politics, relationships, gossip, intimacies, gender representations and images voiced with the wit and queer-isms that are never really part of mainstream media, operating like zines but with an exploded, expanded community way beyond the geographically local. The "where" in this case is actually travelling through a network of

understanding that is not solitary at all. Now I also love and appreciate the company of effingdykes.blogspot.com, sugarbutch.net and Riese's writing for autostraddle.com, amongst others.

Marnie Slater lives in Brussels, Belgium, where she spends her days being an artist, editor and a badge-carrying member of All the Cunning Stunts.



Bolívar Biblioteca,
University of Panama 2011
Photo: Michael Stevenson

Michael Stevenson

I returned to Panama in August of this year to pursue once more the business of the bodyguard, mathematician, philosopher, poet, playwright, aviator, sergeant in the National Guard. This man, José de Jesús Martínez, aide to General Omar Torrijos, was the chief source for my film of 2008, *Introducción a la Teoría de la Probabilidad*. In Panama he is simply known as Chuchú.

Chuchú authored some 25 books, all published locally in editions of no more than 500. They are very beautiful objects. Today the books are scarcely seen – except at the Bolívar Biblioteca at the University of Panama. It was my ambition then, to go there and read as much of the breadth of this author as I could. And so I sat in Special Collections, with a translator, for several days reading. Although the room was full of published rarities it lacked climate control. The smell of papier mâché overwhelmed; there was also confusion with the card system. Most of the books of interest had three or more entries, the same title, but on separate cards and each with a different signature. The librarian described these as phantoms – really there was just one book – I could choose whichever call number. When the books did eventually appear, they did so from a mysterious source somewhere beyond the walls of the room. Some of the books were actually Chuchú's own copies with additional notations in the margins. Except for the librarian himself, we were the sole visitors to Special Collections. While we read, he would pass time playing cassettes... odd we thought in a room full of signs demanding you "read and think in silence."

Soon we knew his entire – and rather limited – music collection (*Foreigner, Toto* and their ilk). To read these books was intense; I do not know of a comparable experience. The extraordinary texts fused with the soft rock and the tropical humidity. By closing time each day I was exhausted – then there was dinner, and friends, and the evening.

Michael Stevenson is an artist living in Berlin; this year he will make new solo projects for the Museum Tamayo, Mexico City and Portikus, Frankfurt am Main.

Anna Marie White

Someone once described me as “bookish” and I accept this as a pretty good summary of my style. People know to give me books for presents and I spend any spare money on books. For many years I refused to spend money on fiction and developed a good working library at home. But there has been a publishing frenzy in my specialty areas: Māori art and history, museology and cultural theory. My library has lots of holes now and cannot be relied upon. As a busy curator in a regional art gallery, I struggle to access resources, especially when I am researching for exhibitions or writing to deadline. I don’t subscribe to online databases or magazines (nor will my institution do this on my behalf) and generally, I don’t trust or rely on the Internet for much. It is too “lite” for my purposes and I can’t be bothered with the dross.

On the other hand these conditions have changed my reading habits and possibly for the better. I rarely have the opportunity to browse books or magazines *en masse*. Nor can I amass a range of books on a subject at short notice. Instead I am more focused in my research activities, selecting books for interloan (at my expense) or begging postgraduate students in the region to download articles using university databases. Increasingly, I find myself studying classic or seminal works, actually reading reference books like *Art Since 1900* from beginning to end, or the complete works of select authors. I just finished a study of E H Gombrich and have, strangely enough, moved on to Hal Foster. In both cases, I am attracted to their method and style – namely, the clear delivery of complex ideas – and their obvious admiration for artists as knowledge makers (as opposed to the historians in that role). I have the same priorities in my recreational reading, which, for the last two years, has been Ian Rankin’s *Rebus* series (I am on my third reading of the series). In my own work, I aspire to the smoothness of Rankin’s writing style; no chinks or bumps and easily consumed. On reflection, the purpose of my reading has changed as I have published more work. I am looking for writing mentors and models as much as seeking knowledge and entertainment. This may explain my general disinterest in the Internet as it isn’t the primary site of my work.

Anna Marie White is the curator at The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū.

Fig. 1
T. Lux Feininger
[*Bauhaus Band Performing*]
c1928–9
Gelatin silver print
116 x 154 mm
The J. Paul Getty Museum,
Los Angeles
© Estate of T. Lux Feininger



Rereading Julian Dashper's *The Big Bang Theory*

Robert Leonard

Julian Dashper died in 2009, after a battle with cancer – he was 49. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he was one of New Zealand's most visible and most talked-about artists. For me, at that time, his work reframed New Zealand art and set much of my agenda as a curator.¹ *The Big Bang Theory* (1992–93), one of his key bodies of work, is now almost 20 years old; too old to be part of the current conversation, yet not old enough to feel like history. Times change and today's art audience is unlikely to be familiar with the peculiar pressures and possibilities that gave rise to the project and made it crucial; on the other hand, it can now be appreciated in ways that it wasn't at the time. Indeed, aspects of its significance are only now becoming clear.²

To understand Julian Dashper's work, it is necessary to appreciate the shape of the New Zealand art scene that formed him and that he responded to.

Dashper started studying at Elam School of Fine Arts, at the University of Auckland, in 1978. In the 1970s, New Zealand art's mainstream was "New Zealand painting." It included senior figures like Colin McCahon, Toss Woollaston and Rita Angus, as well as younger ones like Pat Hanly, Don Binney, Michael Illingworth and Philip Clairmont, who were also becoming household names. The more-or-less nationalist painting mainstream was challenged on either flank by the internationalisms of modernist abstraction in painting and of post-object art, each of which presumed the artistic-intellectual high ground.

The modernist abstract painters considered the mainstream backward. They fetishised painting's intrinsic formal properties and asserted the "autonomy of the art object" – its independence from the artist's biography and psychology, and from the wider world, politics, etcetera. They liked the aesthetic insulation

of white-walled galleries, where art could be showcased in rarefied isolation. Conversely, the post-object artists, who emerged around Jim Allen's Elam Sculpture Department in the early 1970s, had no truck with the autonomy of the art object, stressing instead the extrinsic or contextual – site-specific, social, political and global factors. They often rejected white-walled galleries, preferring overtly loaded sites, such as volcanic craters, beaches, abandoned factories, radio waves and their own bodies.³

As Dashper completed art school in 1981, everything was changing again. Modernist abstraction and post-object art would both be absorbed into the New Zealand art mainstream. However, their presumptions to being advanced would be hit hard by a new international sea change going under the name of postmodernism. Internationally, it ushered in a “return to painting,” which incorporated both nationalistic neo-expressionisms and a post-formalist take on abstraction.

From the outset, Dashper played the field, working across the idioms of mainstream painting, formal abstraction and post-object art, nationalism and internationalism. Dashper's loyalties were always split; he would claim expressionist Clairmont and expatriate conceptualist Billy Apple – both tutors during his Elam salad days – as his key early influences.⁴ Dashper's first solo show, *Motorway Schools*, at Auckland alternative space 100m² in 1980, was a conceptual-looking “intermedia” installation. However, by the mid-1980s, Dashper was mostly showing neo-expressionist-looking paintings in dealer galleries.⁵

As much as they looked expressionist, Dashper's neo-expressionist paintings were oddly affectless. His *Cass Altarpiece* (1986), for instance, was really a pastiche of expressionism – expressionism with nothing to express. As much as its title framed it as a homage to Rita Angus's iconic 1936 landscape painting, *Cass*, and as religious, Dashper's triptych had nothing to say about the pioneer woman artist, the place or religion. Indeed, the four-and-a-half-metre-wide painterly abstraction could not have been further from Angus's modest, little, hard-edged landscape. Any reference to Angus turned entirely and exclusively on the title, making the painting little more than an alibi for exploring the effects of titling.

In the late 1980s, Dashper began to work in a more overtly detached, conceptual manner. However, his work would continue to expand upon ideas implicit in *Cass Altarpiece*. Dashper kept addressing canonical New Zealand artists, as if seeking to ride on their coat-tails into local art history. However, his homages remained perverse because, despite claiming to celebrate his elders, he always managed to sidestep their achievements, preferring to revel in technicalities and trivia. For instance, for his painting *The Grey in Grey Lynn* (1989), Dashper left on the masking tape as a nod to McCahon's existential dilemma over the stuff. Sometimes Dashper's homages nodded to diametrically opposed figures. For instance, 1989 drawings and paintings

representing the year of his birth, “1960”, seemed to cite Angus’s iconic date painting *AD 1968* (1968). However, in being abstract and probably having been drawn using French curves, they also suggested a debt to modernist Gordon Walters.⁶ Whose side was Dashper on?

Dashper’s interest in art apocrypha would prove to be part of a growing fascination with art’s unacknowledged and overlooked supports. As much as the autonomy of the art object is associated with elite old-school modernist critics like Clement Greenberg, at another level it is simply prevailing common sense. Artworks are generally considered auratic objects, with viewers commonly disregarding the supports and paraphernalia (physical and ideological) that ground and enable them. Dashper, however, drew attention to all and any such devices, in myriad ways conflating, confusing and switching them with the art object proper. He made works out of slides, reproductions, labels, catalogues, invitations, packing materials, hanging devices and art advertising – a banner advertising one show was the show. He made works out of empty frames – suggesting that art is all frame. Observing that artists display their CVs in their shows, he exhibited his own CV as a work – his life’s work. Etcetera.

Dashper’s enquiry was bound up with what Jacques Derrida called “the logic of the supplement.” As Jonathan Culler explains:

A supplement... is “something that completes or makes an addition.” A supplement to a dictionary is an extra section that is added on, but the possibility of adding a supplement indicates that the dictionary is itself incomplete... The supplement is an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but the supplement is added in order to complete it, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.⁷

Supposedly autonomous, the art object rests on all manner of disavowed supplements, without which it would not function. By placing these supplements centre stage, Dashper constantly begged the question: Where does the artwork begin and end – at its edge, at its frame, its title, its label, the gallery, the catalogue, the myth? What is inside the artwork? What is legitimate and germane to discuss as part of it?

* * *

The Big Bang Theory centred on five works, all created in 1992, each involving a drum kit whose kick drum bore the name of a key figure in the 1970s New Zealand art mainstream, as if it were a band name, for a covers or tribute band perhaps.⁸ The kits were first installed in New Zealand cities with which the artists were associated, the four main centres plus New Plymouth: *The Woollastons* (referring to Toss Woollaston) in Wellington, *The Drivers* (Don Driver) in New Plymouth, *The Anguses* (Rita Angus) in Christchurch, *The Hoteres* (Ralph

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DEAR TOSS

'HOW ARE THINGS WITH YOU? We've just received a copy of your catalogue for the show at the NAG. IT WILL BE GREAT TO SEE THE SHOW. I'M GOING TO BE IN WELLINGTON FOR 3½ WEEKS OVER CHRISTMAS SO I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING IT. CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR FIFTEENTH EXHIBITION at Peter's and a wonderful book... I LOVE THE STORY ABOUT GETTING 'ABOVE WELLINGTON' INTO PETER'S, HOW IT HAD TO COME IN ACROSS THE ROOF OF THE FRUIT SHOP AND YOU HAD TO TAKE PART OF THE WALL OUT TO GET IT IN. LAST TIME I WAS DOWN I HAD A LOOK AND I SAW THE WALL THAT HAD TO COME DOWN. IT WAS A DANGEROUS JOB. BUT IT HAD

TO BE **T**OSS, I'VE BEEN STARING AT THE PAINTING OF 'FROM SPOONERS RANGE'. 74

I REMEMBER SEEING IT IN WELLINGTON A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO AND BEING VERY IMPRESSED. THE CRAW TYPE REACHES OF THE MOUNTAIN RANGE IN THE CENTRE IS JUST SO BEAUTIFUL.

IT MAKES ME THINK OF THAT PHOTOGRAPH OF PICASSO'S FINGERS ON THE EDGE OF THE TABLE. EXCEPT THEY WEREN'T FINGERS THEY WERE LOAVES OF BREAD. GUSTON ONCE SAID "YOU KNOW, PAINTING IS LIKE HANDS STUCK IN A MATTRESS" AND HIS DAUGHTER MUSA MAYER IN HER BOOK 'NIGHT STUDIO' SAID HER DAD SAID "PAINTING IS LIKE STUFFING A MATTRESS BY HAND." I THINK THAT OFTEN PAINTING CAN BE LIKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO QUOTES.

GERALD BARNETT provides the perfect description of that 'slippage' your work embodies when he quotes Baudelaire on Delacroix: 'this picture



is so harmonious that it is grey - as grey as nature, as grey as the summer atmosphere when the sun spreads over each object a sort of twilight film of trembling dust.' That TREMBLING DUST in your 'LAS MENINAS (after Velasquez)' or 'A view of Port Nicholson from Tinakori Hill, looking north', with its little Isadoras for wharfs, or the shimmering 'Dead Christ after Bellini (set in Lyttelton Harbour)..... GOOD STUFF.

HEY - THE PHOTOGRAPH ON THE BACK OF THE CATALOGUE IS GREAT. 'ABOVE WELLINGTON' IS ON RAILWAY SLEEPERS, IN YOUR STUDIO, WHILE YOU WORK ON IT. READY TO ROLL.



(after Toss)
Las Meninas sketcher
(after Cezanne)



The Correlation between
 ① Custom's planks of lumber and your breezy engineering in the Las Meninas homage remind me again of the 'spooner's Range' Sphinx-feet and candor of your vision. I SAW LAS MENINAS IN SPAIN IN 1987 AND I REMEMBER SWAYING IN FRONT OF IT WITH THE FORCE FROM IT. I READ HOW YOU WERE WORKED BY IT ALSO, BOTH IN '62 & '87. LIKE HOW YOU WORKED FROM A REPRODUCTION FOR YOURS. I FIND THAT IMPORTANT, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU SEE SO MANY PEOPLE PAINTING IN THE PRADO, IN FRONT OF THE WORKS. I'VE GOT THE LAS MENINAS POSTCARD AND I'VE PUT IT NEXT DOOR TO YOUR WORK IN THE BOOK. IT BELONGS NOT ABOUT COMPARISON BUT ABOUT FALLING IN LOVE and the distances traversed..... PAINTING.... A picture made in this way. POSTCARD: WISH YOU WERE HERE, ON THE BACK. LIKE... CEZANNE. LOOKING AT THE REPRODUCTIONS IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 30'S. THEN YOU WENT OUT AND YOU DID IT YOUR WAY. IT'S LOOKING GREAT TOSS. NOW WHEN THE PLANE TURNS TO LAND ABOVE WELLINGTON WE'RE ENGULFED IN A PANORAMIC Whollaston, like swaying before Las Meninas.

TOSS. In your words, "I feel germinating in me this new landscape..." BEST WISHES FROM JULIAN & JOHN

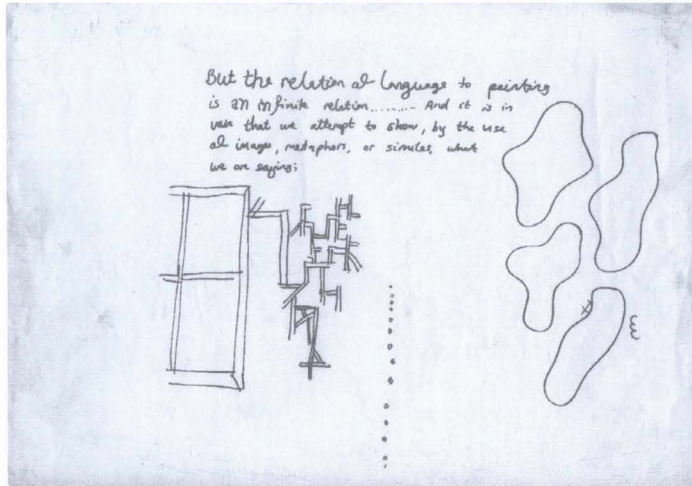
90 000

Hotere) in Dunedin and *The Colin McCahons* (Colin McCahon) in Auckland. However, Dashper didn't start out with an overarching plan. The project was improvised, evolving in response to opportunities as they presented themselves.⁹

It started as a prank. The National Art Gallery, Wellington, invited Dashper and John Reynolds to give a lecture on the work of senior New Zealand painter, Toss Woollaston, on the last day of his 1991–92 show, *Toss Woollaston: A Retrospective*.¹⁰ Dashper and Reynolds had studied together at Elam, and regularly exhibited together and collaborated. Both were represented by Wellington dealer Peter McLeavey, who also showed Woollaston.¹¹ Inviting these two young artists to celebrate the much older artist was a curious move. While it may have been done to argue a lineage, it pointed instead to a generation gap. Woollaston may have been a key figure in the development of New Zealand painting, alongside McCahon and Angus, but his big, brushy, brown landscapes were remote from current art thinking. Indeed, the curator of Woollaston's retrospective, Gerald Barnett, acknowledged this, although he spun it as Woollaston's own disinterest, his active "resistance... to... postmodern discourse."¹²

Anticipating their lecture, Dashper and Reynolds published a pagework in the *Listener* (Fig. 2). "Dear Toss" reproduced a two-page handwritten letter in which the young artists offered fulsome praise for the veteran Woollaston.¹³ Parts were written by Dashper (in his distinctive all-caps style) and parts by Reynolds. Their fan letter was presumptuous, even cloying: "It's looking great Toss." They congratulated Woollaston on his retrospective, waxed lyrical about his 1974 painting *From Spooners Range, Nelson*, and compared him to fashionable American painter Philip Guston. They also mentioned Woollaston's 1988 copy of *Las Meninas*, the 1656 Velázquez painting famously celebrated by Michel Foucault at the beginning of *The Order of Things*. (How did New Zealand's mass-circulation TV guide come to run this art world in-joke? What were they thinking?)

On Sunday 16 February 1992, Dashper and Reynolds presented their "lecture" in the Blue Room, the largest gallery space at the National Art Gallery, where Woollaston's grand late landscapes were hung. The young artists had set up a drum kit in front of *From Spooners Range, Nelson*. The face of the kick drum bore the legend "The Woollastons" in a kitschy typeface. On one side of the drum kit was a corporate-style whiteboard. For the performance, Dashper and Reynolds took turns playing the drums, rather amateurishly (Reynolds playing better than Dashper), suggesting that they themselves were "The Woollastons." The one not playing the drums drew on the whiteboard; Reynolds sketching impressions of *Las Meninas* and reproducing erudite quotes from *The Order of Things*, Dashper making modernist doodles. Occasionally, they handed whiteboard printouts to the audience (Fig. 3). After some time, an alarm clock rang, signaling that it was all over. In truth, the performance – witnessed by a tiny audience¹⁴ – had virtually nothing to do with Woollaston, who was effectively exploited by Dashper and Reynolds as an alibi, as they did their own thing.



PREVIOUS PAGE

Fig. 2

John Reynolds and
Julian Dashper

"Dear Toss"

Listener, December 23,
1991

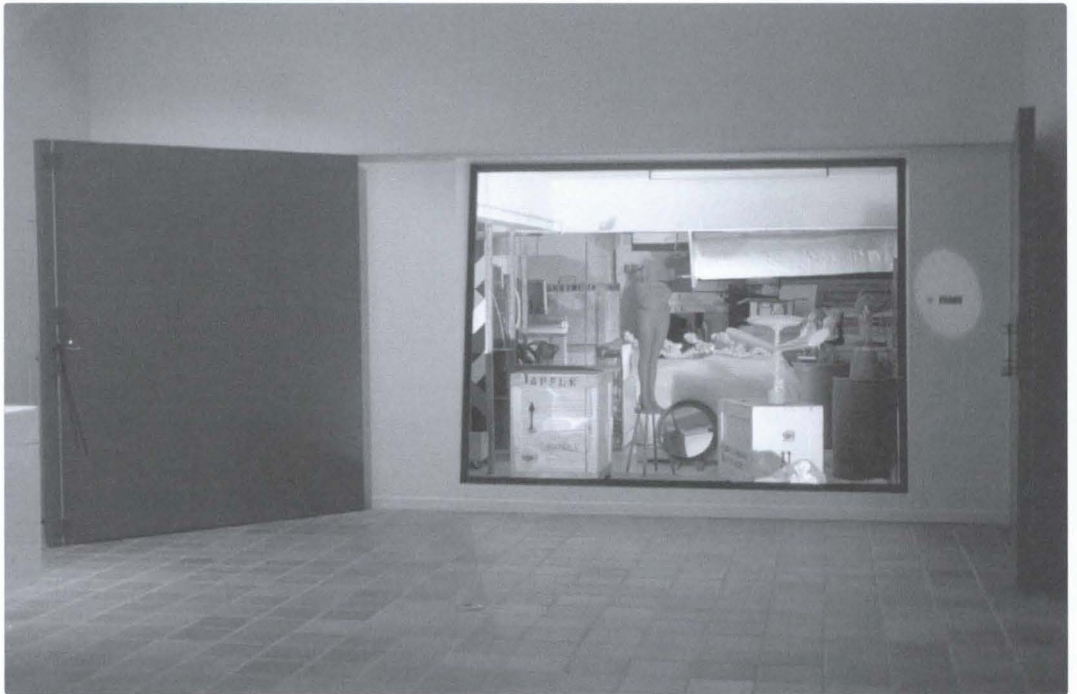
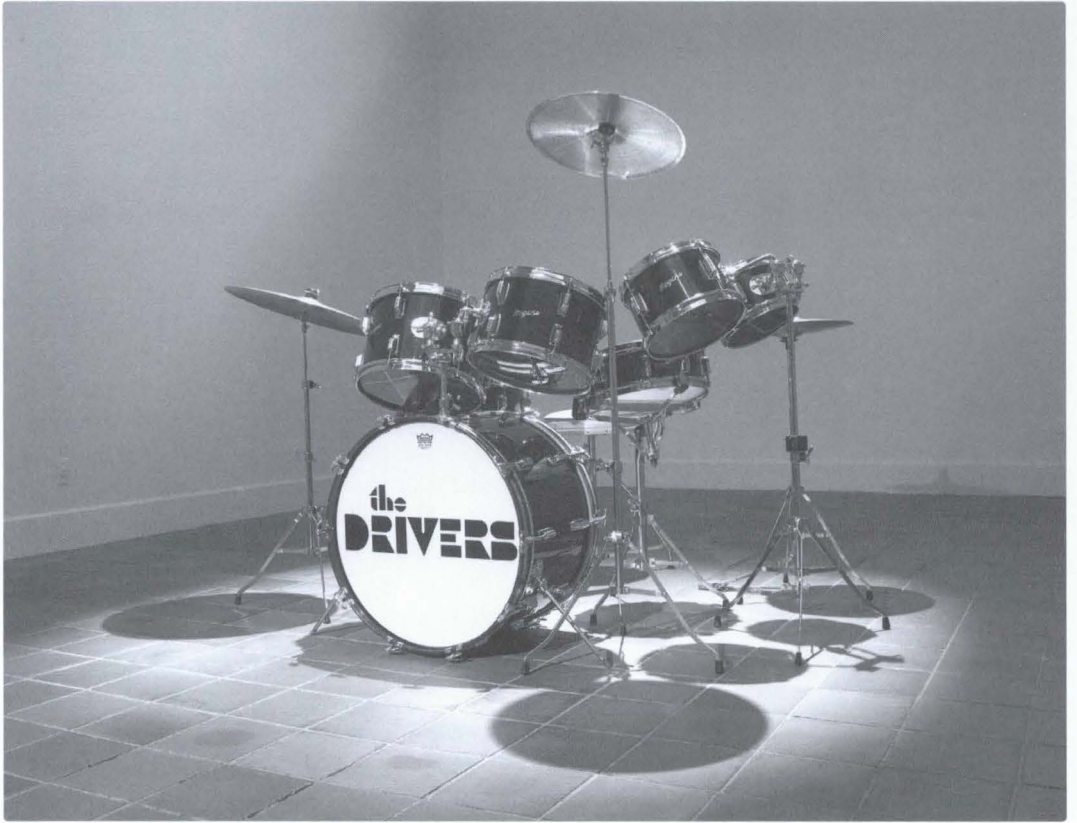
ABOVE

Fig. 3

John Reynolds and
Julian Dashper
Whiteboard printout
from *The Woollastons*
1992

In May 1992, Dashper made *The Drivers* as part of his solo show *Julian Dashper's Greatest Hits* at New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.¹⁵ A major local artist, Don Driver was strongly identified with the Gallery and the city. His work had always been a staple of the Govett-Brewster's programme; he showed there regularly and was well represented in the collection. He had also worked at the Gallery continuously since 1969 in various capacities, including a stint as acting director. However, by 1992, he was employed as a gallery attendant. Dashper installed *The Drivers* in the two ground-floor galleries. In one gallery, he placed the drum kit (Fig. 4). In the other, he inserted a large window into a wall, providing a view into the collection storage area behind it (Fig. 5). That scene – which prominently included two iconic Drivers, *Flyaway* (1966–69) from the Govett-Brewster collection and *Red Lady* (c1968) – was artfully arranged, as if set up for a photographic shoot. Indeed, the scene recalled Marti Friedlander's iconic photographs of Driver in the Govett-Brewster basement (in which *Flyaway* and *Red Lady* also appear) from Jim and Mary Barr's 1980 book *Contemporary New Zealand Painters, Volume One*.¹⁶ For those unfamiliar with the book, Dashper left two copies opened at relevant pages in a display case.

The Drivers was utterly site specific: the Gallery itself and Driver-on-duty-in-it were crucial components. One's experience of the work was informed by knowing that its subject was right there, patrolling the gallery. Dashper's work played on the Gallery's complex relationship with Driver, as simultaneously a lofty artist and a lowly employee. It made an issue of the space between the celebrated name artist, collected by the Gallery and represented as a younger man in Friedlander's photographs, and the older, frailer customer-services officer, there on the gallery floor. (Perhaps these were the multiple "Drivers" of Dashper's title.) With Driver there, one's reading of the work was complicated by having to think about it through his eyes; considering how he felt about the liberties Dashper had taken with him and his work, the way Dashper had



RIGHT

Fig. 4
 Julian Dashper
The Drivers 1992
 Unique gelatin silver print
 510 x 630 mm
 Chartwell Collection,
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki, 2001
 Photo: Bryan James

BELOW RIGHT

Fig. 5
 Julian Dashper
The Drivers in *Julian
 Dashper's Greatest Hits*
 Installation view
 Govett-Brewster Art
 Gallery, New Plymouth,
 1992
 Photo: Bryan James

exhibited him. One also had to think about the ethics of the Gallery (his employer) in allowing his works in its collection and him as an employee to be co-opted by another artist in this manner. Interestingly, while Dashper's show was on, Driver lost his job at the Gallery, having worked there for over 20 years.

I suspect that it was as a result of seeing the iconic installation shot of *The Drivers* drum kit taken by Govett-Brewster photographer Bryan James that Dashper realised that the drum-kit works might become a larger project in which photography could play a pivotal role. From here on, Dashper created his drum-kit installations with the camera in mind, engaging professional photographers to create single "hero" images to represent them.¹⁷ (Fortunately, the Barrs had taken a snap of *The Woollastons* at the National Art Gallery that Dashper could use to represent it. Omitting the performers, it could have been taken before or after the performance. Indeed, it did not suggest the drums had even been played. Shot on colour-slide film, Dashper would print the image in black and white, giving it a period feel.)

In late July 1992, Dashper opened a solo show at Christchurch's Brooke/Gifford Gallery.¹⁸ At the same time, over the road, in Smith's, the famous secondhand bookshop, he presented *The Anguses*, named for Rita Angus, Canterbury's famed pioneer regional realist (Fig. 6). Dashper located the drum kit upstairs in the shop's New Zealand Room, where all the precious New Zealand-specific material (including books, maps and the odd Māori carving) was held, separated off from material from the rest of the world. Of course, this recalled the way "New Zealand art" is habitually imagined to operate in a separate frame from "world art," as its supplement. Dashper played on the location as a paradoxical *mise-en-abyme* – a New Zealand room *within* New Zealand! Peter Bannan's photograph of the set up has the signature melancholy of another Christchurch-associated artist, photographer Laurence Aberhart. It is as though the camera were a time machine, transporting us into a dusty past. Through the window, however, one could see the Brooke/Gifford's modern-looking signage, as if glimpsing the future.¹⁹ *The Anguses* was the last of *The Big Bang Theory* works to be open to the public.

Dashper set up *The Hoteres* at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in October 1992, while he was in town for a solo show at No. 5 Gallery.²⁰ It was installed simply to be photographed; there was no audience. Ralph Hotere was something of a local hero, having lived in Dunedin since receiving the Hodgkins Fellowship in 1969. Peter Hannken's photograph shows the kit installed in a gallery space, but with no art to be seen. Instead, around the kit are a crate (the Gallery was in changeover) and food trays and trestles (leftover from a supplementary function the night before). The scene was bleak, dismal, matter-of-fact – no mood lighting. Apart from the name on the kick drum, there was no reference to Hotere in the photograph, although the stenciling of the Gallery's initials on the crate and the trestles perhaps recalled the stencil-lettering style Hotere had once made his own.

Dashper was determined to do *The Colin McCahons* at Auckland Art Gallery. McCahon's and the Gallery's histories were intertwined. From 1954 to 1964 – a crucial time in the invention of New Zealand art – McCahon worked at the Gallery, first under Eric Westbrook, then Peter Tomory; first as a cleaner, ultimately as a curator. His museum work informed his art practice and his developing art practice informed the emerging canon of New Zealand art that the Gallery promoted. The Gallery showed McCahon's work while he was employed there (something that would be considered unethical – a conflict of interest – in Dashper's day), and, after McCahon left, it presented no fewer than three retrospectives of his work.²¹ Today, in addition to its own substantial McCahon holdings, the Gallery also has works from the McCahon estate on long-term loan and is represented on the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.

McCahon is New Zealand's most celebrated artist. In the 1970s he represented something of an impasse for younger artists. Almost any artistic direction they might care to pursue, he seemed to have always already been there, making younger artists feel like belated followers ("The Colin McCahons" perhaps). Indeed, Dashper's own entrée into the Auckland Art Gallery programme came via McCahon, when he was included in the Gallery's 1989 *After McCahon* exhibition. In that show, Dashper co-opted the glazed box that the Gallery used to protect McCahon's fragile painting-on-paper *Imprisonment and Reprieve* (1978–79) to frame a set of his own miscellaneous sketches, like some art cuckoo taking the master's place. Back in 1989, the Gallery was happy for Dashper to use the box, but, in 1992, when Dashper asked if he could install *The Colin McCahons* drum kit in one of their galleries to photograph, they said no. So, embracing the user-pays spirit, Dashper instead hired the Gallery auditorium – a non-gallery space used for the Gallery's supplementary public programmes (concerts, screenings, lectures, etcetera) and rented to outsiders – and did his installation there. Technically, he could claim he was exhibiting in the Gallery, although not in its galleries.

On 13 November 1992, Dashper installed the drum kit on the auditorium's stage, between a piano (pressed against the wall, so it couldn't be played, at least not conventionally) and a lectern (recalling that *The Woollastons* had been billed as a lecture and that, after leaving the Gallery, McCahon took a lecturing job at Elam) (Fig. 7). It was an ambiguous set up, perhaps suggesting a fluxus performance for drummer, lecturer and acrobatic pianist. Or perhaps the lectern and piano just happened to be there, and were beside the point. Dashper had his installation "witnessed" by Professor Tony Green (a key commentator on both McCahon and post-object art) as it was photographed by Geoffrey Short. In all, *The Colin McCahons* was up for less than two hours.

Dashper completed the project with a supplementary exhibition, which seemed to include all the others but was something else entirely. For *The Big Bang Theory* at

Fig. 6
Julian Dashper
The Anguses 1992
Unique cibachrome print
630 x 510 mm
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2001
Photo: Peter Bannan

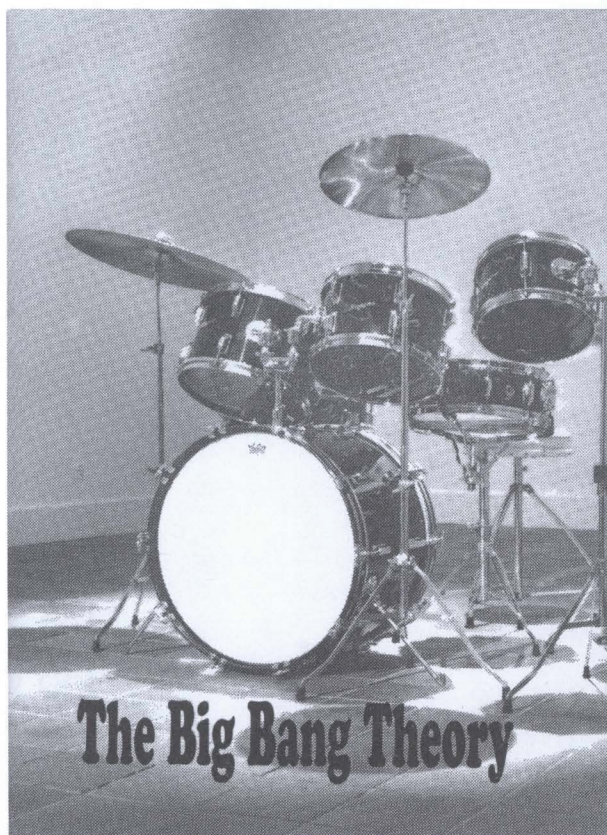
Fig. 7
Julian Dashper
The Colin McCahons 1992
Unique gelatin silver print
490 x 630 mm
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2001
Photo: Geoffrey Short



Auckland's Artspace (16 June–9 July 1993), Dashper mustered the five drum kits, presenting them in a line, showroom style (Fig. 8).²² This seemed a perverse thing to do, because, in the original installations, the kits had been used as a means to coax latent histories out of the contexts in which they had been shown. Brought together, in this relatively neutral space (that none of the artists were specifically associated with), this was lost. As if turning his back on his own site-specific idea, Dashper seemed to fetishise the kits as “autonomous” artworks, as if they might be read as meaningful in themselves, out of context. Or did he?

Alongside the kits, Dashper exhibited the five photographs of the original installations. He also produced a publication featuring six essays, one on the project overall, and one on each of those installations (Fig. 9).²³ The photographs and the publication filled in the site-specific dimension of the original installations. The publication's writers also relayed arcane, beside-the-point, “insider” information, much of it doubtless fed to them by the artist himself. From Lara Strongman and Tony Green, we learnt the names of the fancy typefaces Dashper used to brand the drum kits (Gold Rush for *The Woollastons*





LEFT
Fig. 8
Julian Dashper
The Big Bang Theory 1993
Installation view
Artspace, Auckland, 1993

ABOVE
Fig. 9
Julian Dashper
The Big Bang Theory
Auckland: Julian Dashper,
1993
Publication cover

and Mr Big for *The Colin McCahons*) as though these names were of allegorical import. Green even considered it relevant to tell us that *The Colin McCahons* drum kit featured an unusually large snare with a 22" Ebony Ambassador skin made in Hollywood especially for the New Zealand market. William McAloon made much of the fact that the drum kit for *The Hoteres* had been borrowed from Dunedin band The Verlaines (who, incidentally, in being named after the French symbolist poet, provided a serendipitous precedent). However, another kit was used for *The Hoteres* at Artspace. Stephanie Oberg observed that, at Smith's, *The Anguses* "lacks cymbals but [is] supplemented with symbols," but also noted that, when shown at Artspace, *The Anguses* had cymbals.²⁴ Etcetera. One might wonder if such trainspotter trivia was germane. Were the writers reading too closely or the wrong things? As publisher, was Dashper endorsing their readings, even enfolded them into his project?

Dashper's *The Big Bang Theory* show was like a shell game. It asked: What's the point and what's beside it? What is the actual artwork, as opposed to its supplement? FIRST, the actual work could have been the five original installations.

Except that, for one of these (*The Colin McCahons*), there was only an audience of one, and, for another (*The Hóteres*), no audience at all. These two works were surely intended to be seen as photographs. SECOND, it could have been the drum kits themselves. Except that the installations had all been so site-specific. THIRD, it could have been the five photographs. But, while two were set up only to be photographed, others were documents, and, of those, two fundamentally misrepresented the original works (as documents are wont to). *The Woollastons* photograph didn't show the performance (in fact, it was not even taken during the performance) and *The Drivers* photograph only showed the drum-kit part of the original installation. FOURTH, perhaps it was Dashper's publication. Much of the thinking and information that subsequently animated discussion around the project would be from there, and would have been nearly or totally impossible to deduce directly from the installations, the drum kits and/or the photographs. The project survived as discourse; it lived as legend. Ultimately, Dashper seemed to be saying, "the work" was everywhere and nowhere, dispersed and relayed across and between many supplements. In a way, it was all supplement.

Each iteration of *The Big Bang Theory* was quirky – exceptional. The project was riddled with inconsistencies and anomalies, which may have been incidental or crucial.²⁵ For instance, *The Woollastons* photograph was the only one in which the named artist's work appeared; *The Colin McCahons* was the only work where the artist's Christian name was used; *The Anguses* photograph was portrait format and in colour, while the others were landscape format and black and white. As a half-baked allegory, an elaborate mixed metaphor, *The Big Bang Theory* begged more questions than it answered. For instance, if the drums are a supplementary instrument, making little sense musically on their own, what was missing? While the pluralised band names suggested groups, why were these groups represented by drum kits to be played by individuals? What kind of music would be played on the drums? If there were bands, had the other instruments come and gone or were they yet to show? Were the performances yet to begin or already over? If the band names referred not to the artists named but to followers, who was implied? Did the vacant drum stools suggest absent artists, or that the job of playing the drums belonged to the viewer? A playful master of misdirection, Julian Dashper was forever posing such unanswerable questions.

In refusing to clearly construct its reader, *The Big Bang Theory* forced its readers to guess at Dashper's intentions or risk getting lost in the Duchampian fine print – although, of course, many did both. In being so distinctive, so exceptional, *The Big Bang Theory* prompted its audience to confront the general conditions under which artworks are written and read, and specifically the "logic of the supplement" at play in that. It offered itself as a test case.

In 2001, the Chartwell Trust acquired *The Big Bang Theory*. At least, they acquired some objects: the five drum kits and the five photographs. Along with the rest of its collection, these items are currently on long-term loan to the Auckland Art

Gallery, the institution largely responsible for inventing and promulgating the nationalist New Zealand art canon back in the day. Here, they can be regularly exhibited in the company of actual Woollastons, Drivers, Anguses, Hoteres and McCahons, giving the Gallery's curators and education officers ample opportunity to tell tales of the halcyon days of New Zealand art. But, given that *The Big Bang Theory* project was fundamentally contextual, what exactly did Chartwell acquire in buying the kits and the photographs? Was it documentation, relics or intellectual property – the right to put the art objects (the kits and photographs) into play in new contexts. *The Big Bang Theory* is now a curators' plaything. Since being acquired, the kits and the photographs have been shown on numerous occasions, as a group, as individuals and in various combinations.²⁶ They have been, and will continue to be, put in all manner of new conversations with one another and with other works outside of Dashper's control and authorisation. Which raises the question: to what extent are these subsequent iterations and their quirks part of Dashper's project? Of course, this new question only deepens the problem the work already poses of itself: What am I? Where am I? Where do I begin and end?

* * *

Julian Dashper took the edge off his often dry and arcane art by weaving funny stories around it and his commentators got in on the act.²⁷ Puns and boom-boom jokes abound in the literature. In his essay "Conundrum," Stuart McKenzie said the project was about banding together and drumming out the good news, while William McAloon titled his essay on *The Hoteres* "Hits from the Sticks."²⁸ Such gags go with the territory, but they also distract from what is at stake in the work, which is all about idioms of art-making and the past, present and future shape of New Zealand art and art history.

If *The Big Bang Theory* was intended as a representation of the earlier nationalist canon of New Zealand art, it was certainly a peculiar and inadequate one. Certainly, Woollaston, Angus and McCahon were "the big three," the basis of the nationalist canon originally backed by Auckland Art Gallery Director Peter Tomory and his disciples. If Dashper sought to evoke the old nationalist canon, it was clear why abstract painters Milan Mrkusich and Walters had been overlooked. But why include Hotere and Driver, and not, say, Pat Hanly, to whom Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith had devoted an entire chapter of their 1969 nationalist art bible *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting*? Driver seemed a particularly odd inclusion, having made his name as an abstract painter and as a sculptor and installation artist. He had even featured in *New Art*, the 1976 post-object-art-ish anthology.²⁹ Also, the way Dashper located the artists in cities didn't totally add up. Sure, Woollaston had long shown with Wellington dealer Peter McLeavey – from whom Woollaston's painting *Above Wellington* (1986) had been purchased by Wellington's National Art Gallery (it featured on the cover of the publication for their Woollaston retrospective) – but he was famously a Nelson artist. Rita Angus may have lived in

Christchurch in her early days (so had McCahon), but she lived in Wellington after 1955 and was famous for her paintings of the capital. She would seem to be a better representative for the windy city than Sir Toss.³⁰

Of course, by the early 1990s, the nationalist idea of New Zealand art had been discredited, and Dashper was not trying to endorse it but to parody it. Although its title, *The Big Bang Theory*, suggested an audacious, dramatic, sophisticated, scientific explanation of the origins of New Zealand art, the project provided no such explanation. There was a gulf between the title's grand promise and the rickety metaphor of the five drum kits. The pre-scientific, metaphoric folk cosmology of Dashper's "theory" pointed only to the enduring contingency and quaintness of "New Zealand art." Perhaps Dashper was making light of New Zealand art's desperate need to find a legitimising point of origin, however implausible.

The Big Bang Theory is essentially about the transposition of idioms. It makes an analogy between the idiom of (high) art through that of (popular) music – it treats a silent musical instrument as a sculpture. But, more significantly, it is a perverse homage to key figures in the 1970s New Zealand art mainstream through the then-hostile idiom of post-object art, although this went largely unrecognised at the time.³¹ (In doing this, it engaged a cliché of post-object art, that of site-specific installation mediated through supplementary photographic "documentation."³²) It is as though Dashper deliberately misconstrued the object of his veneration, as in a country-music tribute to heavy metal. As art, *The Big Bang Theory* owed little to the five mainstream artists it ostensibly celebrated. Rather, it was indebted to a key figure in post-object art who wasn't named, Billy Apple, particularly those works he produced on his second New Zealand tour in 1979–80 under the name *The Given as an Art-political Statement*.

Dropping in, "direct from New York," Apple had toured the country, visiting galleries, making exhibitions on the fly. His exhibitions consisted of interventions into gallery spaces; he essentially exhibited the spaces themselves. His shows drew attention to the galleries' quirks and inadequacies, and suggested ways they might be improved. Like an architectural proofreader with a big red pen, Apple prompted gallerists to get their acts together and showed them the way. His provocations raised questions about how much galleries and museums actually did for the artists that showed in them and for their audiences.³³ *The Given* works made explicit back-of-house matters not normally considered part of the public art discussion. They were all about supplements. The project not only addressed exhibition spaces, it foregrounded didactic panels, catalogues, advertisements and magazine write-ups. And it involved and implicated other art-world players, illuminating the industry, the social scene of art.³⁴ All this would be echoed in *The Big Bang Theory*, which was equally contextual, improvised and opportunist, and similarly presented itself as some kind of encompassing "national tour." So, if *The Big Bang Theory* was a homage to anyone, it was a homage to Apple, albeit unacknowledged.



Fig. 10
Ronnie van Hout
Dead Artists 1992
Black and white
photographs

It is a problem that *The Big Bang Theory* is still sometimes simplistically presented as a cheery affirmation of the five artists named and of an out-of-date idea of New Zealand art when it's neither. Indeed, those five forlorn, silent, abandoned drum kits lined up at Artspace suggested a drum-kit graveyard. (Compare Ronnie van Hout's contemporaneous 1992 *Dead Artists* photographs (Fig. 10).³⁵) As much as the title *The Big Bang Theory* proposed a beginning, Dashper's project was more about the end of something. Certainly, its meaning would be transformed by what he did next, which was to largely turn his back on New Zealand art as a topic. While Dashper's work had been keyed to the New Zealand scene, exploiting its peculiar insularity and intimacy, after making *The Big Bang Theory* he increasingly exhibited outside New Zealand, jettisoning local references and themes, producing works that could travel, physically and philosophically.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of New Zealand art had real traction. New Zealand art had largely been an enclosed discourse. It was an art made by New Zealand artists, shown in New Zealand galleries, bought by New Zealand collectors and institutions, and written up in New Zealand journals by New Zealand critics. It was often explicitly about New Zealand. By the 1980s, that idea had lost its lustre, and today it seems irrelevant, at least for current practice. With art-world globalisation – increased mobility and access to information – everything is different. These days, our artists work outside the country as much as in, finding the stakes for their work in other contexts, other conversations. We are operating in a period I like to call “the end of New Zealand art.”

Dashper always aspired to be part of a larger, more international conversation. When he started shifting his work offshore, it was still a hard row to hoe. By contrast, subsequent generations of New Zealand artists have taken

international engagement almost for granted. So *The Big Bang Theory* comes at a point of transition and, because of this, there is a real question of how to place it art historically. It can be seen as preoccupied with old-school New Zealand art (addressed to the past) or as part of a process of shedding it (clearing the way for moving on). We can see Dashper as backward looking, as “the last New Zealand artist” perhaps, or we can see him as the forerunner for a generation of younger New Zealand artists operating internationally.

There are different ways to read *The Big Bang Theory*. One can read it allegorically, as a tongue-in-cheek celebration and critique of the old-school nationalist canon. One can read it idiomatically, as a meditation on the contextual nature of art generally, and on post-object art’s site-specificity specifically (making Billy Apple a crucial reference point). And, in the light of Dashper’s subsequent work, one can read it as a harbinger of our global, post-national, post-medium present. Despite being absorbed into “the museum” – and, in part, because of it – the project’s complexity, slipperiness, and radiance are only increasing. In so many ways, New Zealand art – and our reading of it – might now be seen to pivot on *The Big Bang Theory*.

1. Curated by Bernice Murphy and myself, *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992) not only included Dashper’s work, it was indebted to Dashper for its overall approach. His work gave us precedent and permission to take liberties in rearticulating New Zealand art history.
2. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, in 2010, on the occasion of the exhibition *Play On*, which reflected on the art of the 1990s. *Play On* included the five drum kits from Dashper’s *The Big Bang Theory*.
3. In America, abstraction and post-object art were implicated in a progression. Art evolved from abstract expressionism through minimalism into conceptualism. However, in time-lagged New Zealand in the 1970s, they appeared simultaneously, as equally current options.
4. “Art Historian Tony Green Talks to Julian Dashper,” *Nine Lives: The 2003 Chartwell Exhibition* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery, 2003), 13.
5. By this time, his work owed much to another Julian, American neo-expressionist hero Julian Schnabel. Seeing the then-portly young Dashper pose on the cover of *Art New Zealand* (no. 43, Winter 1987), Lindsey Bridget Shaw wrote, “Julian Dashper, not content with ripping off the ideas of Julian Schnabel ... is actually beginning to look like him.” (“Outside New Zealand Art Looking In,” *Listener*, April 9, 1988, 35).
6. Walters’s *Still Life with French Curves* (1943) was reproduced in Francis Pound’s essay “Walters and the Canon,” in *Gordon Walters: Order and Intuition*, ed. Lawrence Simmons and James Ross (Auckland: Walters Publication, 1989), 52. Pound described the drawing as a “premonition” of the koru to come (55) and argued that Dashper had canonised Walters “from below” (63–4).
7. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 102–3. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida discusses the role of “the supplement” in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writings. Also relevant is Derrida’s discussion of the frame in *The Truth in Painting* (1987). Derrida observes that, when we look at a painting, we take the frame to be part of the wall, yet, when we look at the wall, the frame is taken to be part of the painting. The frame is an ambiguous divide between the work and that which is exterior to it. It is necessarily unclear as to whether the frame is part of the work or part of the outside world.
8. The drum kits recall the eminent tradition of art-school bands.
9. *The Big Bang Theory* was enabled by Dashper’s receiving an inaugural QEII Arts Council Visual Arts Programme Fellowship in 1991, which allowed him to develop an ambitious string of exhibitions throughout the country.
10. 7 December 1991–16 February 1992.
11. Early on, Dashper and Reynolds exhibited together in two-person shows: in 1983 at Durham House, Auckland, and in 1985 and 1986 at Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington.
12. Gerald Barnett, *Toss Woollaston: An Illustrated Biography* (Wellington and Glenfield: National Art Gallery and Random Century, 1991), 89.
13. Julian Dashper and John Reynolds, “Dear Toss,” *Listener*, December 23, 1991, 60–1. Dashper and Reynolds’s letter

- accompanied a one-page preview piece on the Woollaston retrospective (Pam Walker, "A Meteor Eye": 59). On that page, it was explained: "Over the page, in an open letter, post-modernists Julian Dashper and John Reynolds pay tribute to Woollaston's work."
14. I speak from experience. I was one of the few in attendance that day.
 15. 9 May–28 June 1992.
 16. Marti Friedlander, text by Jim and Mary Barr, *Contemporary New Zealand Painters: Volume One* (Martinborough: Alastair Taylor, 1980).
 17. Peter Bannan photographed *The Anguses*, Peter Hannken *The Hoteres* and Geoffrey Short *The Colin McCahons*.
 18. 28 July–14 August 1992.
 19. Peter Vangioni's eyewitness account provides interesting background to Dashper's opportunism and improvisation: "When I first saw the drum kit, my immediate thought was that Ross Humphries, Smith's proprietor, who also happens to be a musician, was using the space as a practice room, maybe for an AC/DC tribute band. A quick chat with Ross informed me that the kit was in fact an art work by Julian Dashper, referencing the New Zealand artist Rita Angus. . . . As a drummer rather than an art historian, my appreciation of *The Anguses* was also assisted with the work being shown in a bookstore and not within the context of an art gallery. There were no labels, didactics or the reverent hush found in many art galleries. The installation was very low key with promotion being made by word of mouth instead of the local arts guide. *The Anguses* was originally proposed as a gallery installation. In April 1992 Dashper had wanted to display the work alongside Rita Angus's oil painting *Cass* at the Art Annex of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery. This proposal was declined in favour of his exhibition *Slideshow*. Similarly, he intended to display *The Anguses* at the Brooke/Gifford Gallery, his Christchurch dealer, but this also failed to reach fruition. In the end Dashper settled on installing the work at Smith's Bookshop." Peter Vangioni, "Four on the Floor: *The Anguses* at Smith's Bookshop," in *To the Unknown New Zealander* (Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery, 2007), 9–10.
 20. *Julian Dashper at No. 5*.
 21. *Colin McCahon: A Survey Exhibition* (1972); *Colin McCahon: Gates and Journeys* (1988); and *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* (2003, which opened at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 2002).
 22. The Artspace show was the first time Dashper used the phrase "The Big Bang Theory" in relation to the project. As you entered the space, the closest kit was *The Hoteres*, then *The Woollastons*, then *The Anguses*, then *The Drivers*, with *The Colin McCahons* furthest away. The kits were carefully ordered to suggest neither the artists' relative positions in art history nor the order in which Dashper had made the original installations. In the Artspace show, Dashper did not use the kits he had used in the original installations, as could easily be ascertained by consulting the five accompanying photographs.
 23. *The Big Bang Theory* (Auckland: Julian Dashper, 1993).
 24. At first, Dashper borrowed drum kits to present *The Big Bang Theory* works. However, when *The Big Bang Theory* was acquired by the Chartwell Trust, kits were purchased.
 25. In addition, references leak out into other Dashper works, previous and subsequent. *The Drivers* harks back to *Building. A Type* (1989), Dashper's wall-painting installation for Artspace's *Occupied Zone* series. Here, Dasher wrote the word "DRIVE" large in Devandra, the same typeface he would later use for *The Drivers*. At the time, however, the Artspace work seemed to have nothing to do with *Driver*, but was read instead as referring to McCahon's being inspired by speech bubbles on a Rinsop packet (Drive being another brand of washing powder), to Dashper's day job as a taxi driver and to Dashper's careerism (his "drive"). Similarly, consider Dashper's bizarre inclusion of *The Anguses* drum head in his 1994 exhibition at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, where it was bound to be (mis)read as a reference to the ANG, the Australian National Gallery (now the NGA, the National Gallery of Australia).
 26. For instance, in *Nine Lives: The 2003 Chartwell Exhibition* (Auckland Art Gallery, 2003), curated by myself, *The Anguses* kit was shown with all five photographs and *Cass Altarpiece*. In *Play On* (Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, 2010), curated by Christina Barton, all five kits were shown, without the photographs, in the company of works by Michael Parekowhai, Slave Pianos, Terry Urbahn and Ava Seymour.
 27. Back in 1992 I reported: "In the lectures he gave as part of the proceedings, Dashper proffered a unique interpretation of *The Drivers*. For instance he noted that drummers also play with brushes and that 40-gallon drums often appear in *Driver*'s work. He noted that the artist lays down a rhythm track for the rest of the culture. He spoke of the portable nature of the drums and of his art, the idea of touring art like touring a band, and the exhibition as a gig. . . . Dashper treated the installation . . . as a prop . . . to weave new mythologies around." "Sleeve Notes: Julian Dashper's Greatest Hits," *Midwest* 1 (1992): 23.
 28. Both from *The Big Bang Theory* (Auckland: Julian Dashper, 1993).
 29. *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-object Art*, ed. Jim Allen and Wytan Curnow (Auckland: Heinemann, 1976).
 30. Similarly, *Hotere* settled in Dunedin in 1969, but was born and bred at the other end of the country, in Mitimiti, Northland.
 31. Only Tony Green made the connection, in his essay in *The Big Bang Theory* publication. In New Zealand in the 1980s and early 1990s, post-object art was off the radar, a "missing chapter" in New Zealand's art history. It was put it back on the agenda with two exhibitions, *Action Replay: Post-Object Art* (Artspace, Auckland, 1998; Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 1998; and Auckland Art Gallery, 1998–99) and *Intervention* (Robert McDougall Contemporary Art Annex, Christchurch, 2000).
 32. For more on the supplementary logic of the photographic document in post-object art and Dashper's prescient relation to it, see Christina Barton, "What was Directly Lived has Moved Away into a Representation," in *Action Replay: Postscript* (Auckland and New Plymouth: Artspace and Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2002), 14–31v.
 33. Apple's project was perverse, in that he was a post-object artist (for whom context was everything) seeking to perfect the kind of "neutral" space favoured by abstract painters (for whom context was nought).
 34. For instance, at Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, Apple was assisted by artists John Bailey, Ian Bergquist, Robert Ellis and others, with photography by Peter Hannken; at the Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch, by artists John Hurrell, Paul Johns and others, with photography by Glenn Jowitz; at Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, by artists Jeffrey Harris, Ralph Hotere, Clive Humphreys and Russell Moses; and at Auckland Art Gallery by artist and staffer Ron Brownson and art historian Tony Green. Wytan Curnow, "Report: The Given as an Art-political Statement," *Art New Zealand* 15 (Autumn 1980): 26, 29, 30 and 32.
 35. Ironically, Dashper was survived by two of the artists named, *Driver* and *Hotere*.

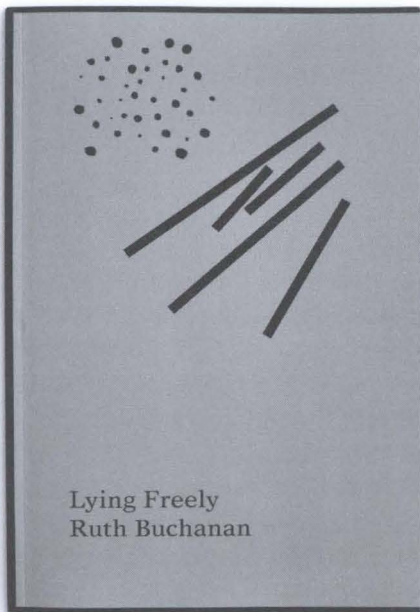
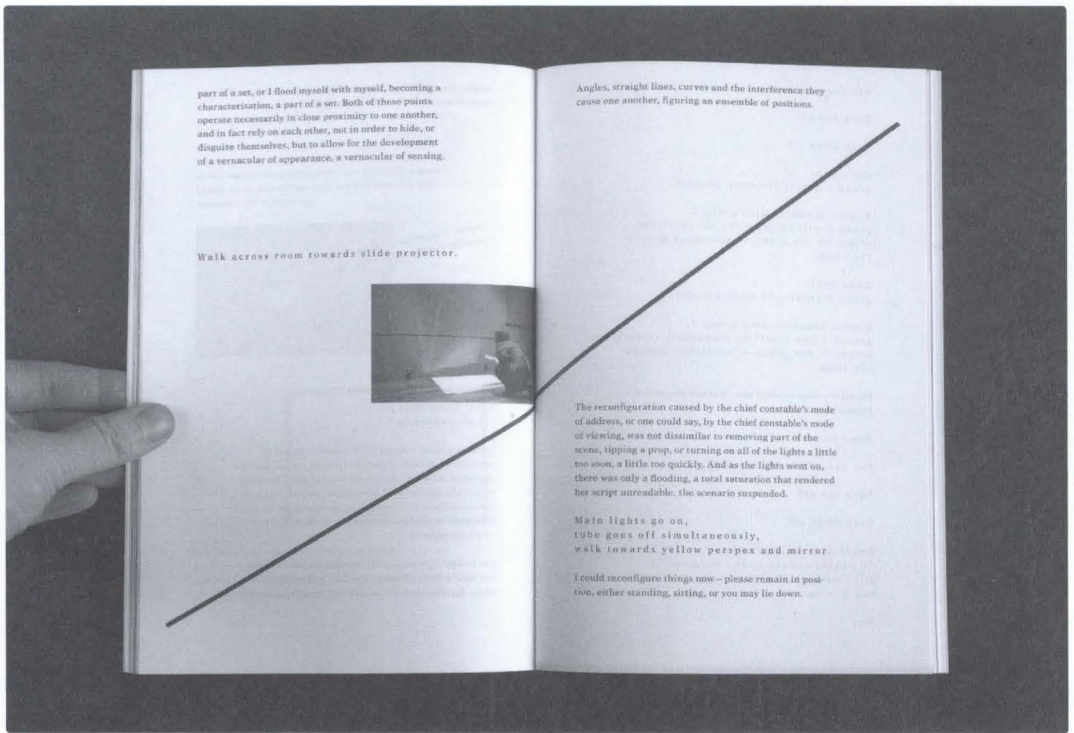


Fig. 1
Ruth Buchanan
Lying Freely 2010
Inside pages
Photo: John McIver

Fig. 2
Ruth Buchanan
Lying Freely 2010
Cover

The Book as Scripted Space: Alterations, Ruth Buchanan and Simon Denny

Laura Preston

A diagonal line extends across the centrefold of a double-page spread in artist Ruth Buchanan's book, *Lying Freely* (2010, Fig. 1).¹ It is the same line that was later reproduced on a hooked woollen rug, a line of black across a distinctively beige background the proportions of which mirrored those of the open book. It is housed in a vitrine. As a response to the book, this object relates to a three-act series of works undertaken in three locations in Europe and it was included in her Auckland exhibition at Hopkinson Cundy, *Furniture, Plan, Rival Brain* (2011), which served to relay Buchanan's recent two-year project to viewers back home.

To the left of the diagonal in the book is a photograph showing the artist revealing a mirror and its effects through lighting the situation. She is crouched down inspecting her image that has fractured into a ricochet of light reflections. Her back is turned. We do not see her face. It is typical that she appears in her work but rarely in full form. Above the line and to one side are the words, "Walk across...". There is ample white space around this instruction. This is no usual record of an exhibition, for it also serves as a script for the production of future objects. The book is an integral part of a project that is open-ended as to both the works and the readers it may implicate. In this reading of the book, I inaugurate another iteration that can only ever be partially recalled; the project propagates the private space of reading.

Like Buchanan's *Lying Freely* (Fig. 2), Simon Denny's *Cruise Line* is a component of an installation. Published in 2011, the book includes 18 maze diagrams scattered through and between two commissioned texts by Norman M. Klein and Mark von Schlegell.² Some of these diagrams of "solved" mazes also appear on seven printed canvases hung behind ship rope handrails at the Neuer Aachen Kunstverein (Fig. 3). PDFs of the essays are projected in the exhibition space. The shading or, in the case of the canvases, the colouring-in, of a section of the maze carved out by the line on its way to the exit, seems beside the point

of solving the maze puzzle and represents an alternative spatial occupation, a visualisation of rule breaking that asks what it may mean to take over a territory. Together, with the book and a video component, the printed canvases offer variations on how to modify the image of the maze and thus refuse its rule-based instructions. Across all components of his work, I read Denny's use of instructions ("image editing software solutions") for how to modify the image of the maze as allegorical: a sideways move towards modelling a post-capital situation.

* * *

I am reading Denny's and Buchanan's exhibited objects from a collection of downloaded digital images. Their books I hold in front of me. For any consumer of art today, this is a familiar scenario, except that in this case both artists' books pre-empt this situation by presenting themselves as reproductions (that is, as publications) and as components of an exhibition. They are savvy promotional instruments in which a critique of the production of knowledge is implicit, extending the exhibition time frame and allowing the project to stretch out and take up a network of readers. These books are typical of a new impetus to publish that is gaining critical traction in contemporary art. What interests this reader is not that they satisfy an increasing nostalgia for the printed form, but that they can be thought of as sculptural. I am interested in tracking the spatial implications of narrative construction and asking questions of the mechanisms of documentation.

The book is a carrier of information based on a structure (reading more generally left to right, top to bottom, page after page) that, all the same, allows for interpretive contingencies. The differences between reading a book and looking at objects presented in a gallery space, or a video or performance work, bears relation to the temporality each embodies. The book occupies a position where all stages in the circuitry of art production – research, construction, exhibition, documentation – can appear simultaneously.

In her book *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, American art writer and curator Lucy Lippard catalogued the increased reflexivity towards the processes of art production. She presented the findings of her database-driven activity as a chronological inventory. She collected all the exhibition press releases, extracts from reviews and introductory texts she encountered over the six-year time frame covered by the book. Lippard's findings were produced before the Internet. Her listings begin in 1966 with exhibitions that describe a series of objects, over time these gradually explore the relationship of objects to spaces, and by 1972, the projects she catalogues focus just on space, describing how artists had shifted to focusing on the exhibition space, thus treating context as form. As Hans Haacke, one of the featured artists, states:

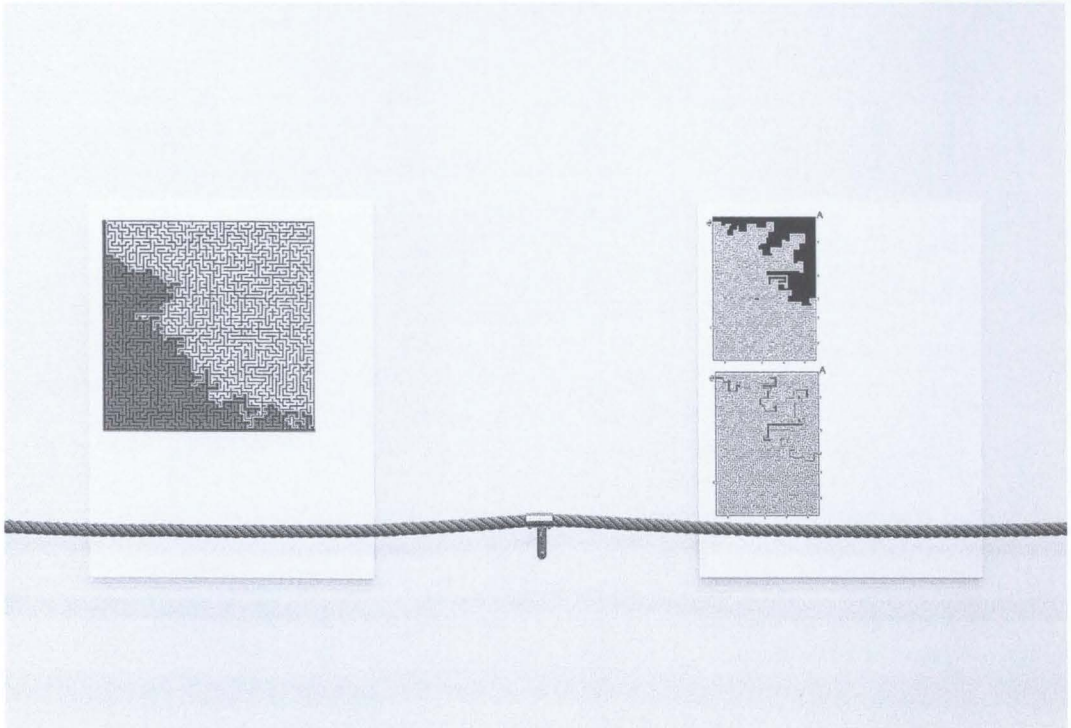


Fig. 3
Simon Denny
Cruise Line 2011
Installation view
Neuer Aachen
Kunstverein, 2011

The working premise is to think in terms of systems; the production of systems, the interference with and the exposure of existing systems. Such an approach is concerned with the operational structure of organizations, in which transfer of information, energy and/or material occurs.³

Lippard tracks the “dematerialisation of art” that occurred over the period of the book’s time line as an archivist and collator rather than as a historian or interpreter. *Six Years* is a repository for information and a container of information as objects. It provides an architectural framework that mirrors wider social changes in communication systems, at the same time as it measures artistic resistance to market forces. This approach need not be confined to her home territory of New York City, nor limited to the six years in which she focuses. It is a structure that can be repeated.

Lippard’s approach was a starting point for *A Reader*, an exhibition produced in 2011 by Alterations, a curatorial agency established in Wellington, New Zealand by myself, Amit Charan and Joel Cocks (Fig. 4). Operating within the economies

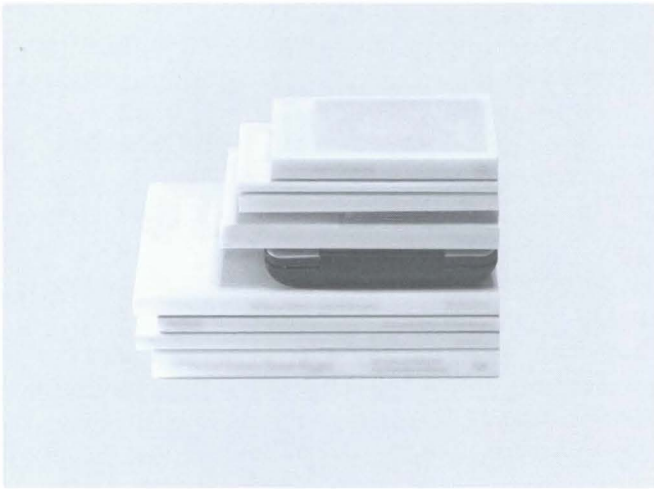


Fig. 4
Alterations
A Reader 2011
Stack of books

of “free time,” *Alterations* aimed to undertake research projects, produce discursive platforms and propose new exhibition formats. In line with these objectives, *A Reader* was an exhibition in book form that was designed to encourage a self-mediated and personal encounter with copied material. It was a way to occupy the intimate space of a reader⁴ within the determinably public realm of the library. As such, it was a tactic and a model for a radically reduced form of production, a non-production, which was also inflected by our local situation. Since distance most often necessitates the reviewing of contemporary art through reproductions, *A Reader* re-presented this mode of distribution by collating a series of copies, while presenting possibilities for reflexively considering the way a copy operates.

The “book-as-exhibition” was deposited in the central public libraries in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand. Although predominantly text based, it also included audio, moving image and photography, featuring work by: Sophie Calle, Marjolijn Dijkman, Liam Gillick, Idris Khan, Abbas Kiarostami, Alec Soth, Susan Sontag, Wolfgang Tillmans, Roman Ondak, Bik van der Pol and Tris Vonna-Michell. In some cases certain pages were bookmarked, in others an entire text was reproduced. The disparate texts were brought together to form an inter-textual meditation on the idea of the copy. Companion texts discovered through the agency’s selection process were presented alongside texts that were self-consciously juxtaposed. Examples included a fashion bracelet cited in Alec Soth’s faux fashion magazine paired with Abbas Kiarostami’s film *Close-up* that told the tale of a doppelgänger. Idris Khan’s referential photograph was followed by Susan Sontag’s renowned book, *On Photography* (1977), which had been used as a source for Khan’s work. Roman Ondak’s drawings taken from photographs of his previous exhibitions were presented alongside the source photographs. And Marjolijn Dijkman’s postcards of oak trees were placed at the beginning and end of the exhibition to create an

alternative to the texts, and to provide them with a moment of rest prior to their dispersal and displacement elsewhere.

Each contribution was covered with frosted paper, blurring the titles of the source material but also unifying all the contributions into one object. The size and shape of the books determined the sequence of works in the exhibition and further gave an impression of the exhibition as one large, extended book. Readers were expected to come to the stack and read the range of assembled sources freely. Reading as an inter-textual act became the major narrative thread running through the exhibition. An anthology of copies, the exhibition questioned whether the original artwork could ever be located and “read,” or if, in effect, the initial work had become re-authenticated through the distribution of the copy. These questions were incorporated into the book’s commentary on the contemporary iteration of the dematerialised object. Although the project did not chart a time frame of production, as Lippard’s had, nor did it determine the artwork as dematerialised, it proved that the reproduction is a prerequisite for collating source material, and endorsed the reproduction as having an equivalent object-hood and readability as the original. Only one copy of the book-as-exhibition was made. This has subsequently been dismantled, its various components returned, many back to the library.

Like *A Reader*, Denny’s and Buchanan’s books are examples of the dematerialised art object re-materialising as scripted reproduction. These book projects articulate the spatio-temporal conditions of narrative construction in relation to contemporary modes of communication and archiving. Constructed via the postmodern tactic of collating references and fragments from the archive, they aim to move this methodology on to interrogate the function of the copy. These books apply a strategy of repetition, by slightly varying repeating forms as content, and, through choice of stock, size and layout, they emphasise portability, to serve reflexively as copied utterances in circulation and, by formal means, to subvert or suspend meaning.

The theoretical frame for this reading is the concept of narrativity developed by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975). He argued that reading has always been an act of inter-textual deciphering, based on the tendencies and tensions of dialogue to stray off tangentially and return to a point at hand. For Bakhtin, the utterance, which he considered to be the communicative act caught in the complexities and inequalities of social life, is both found in and formed by social interactions. He viewed the utterance as a product of the interaction of *langue* (the abstract grammatical form of language) and the historical context in which language is spoken. Bakhtin asserts:

The utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualised embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well, this can be understood as describing the transition

from the system of norms to the non-normative use of that system in the production of an actual utterance; but it can also be understood as describing the participation of every utterance in the dynamics of a language in tension, so that every utterance involves a taking of sides in all the multiple conflicts and negotiations that constitute the politics of language.⁵

Bakhtin claims that the most important feature of the utterance is its dialogical nature. All discourse is in conversation with prior texts as well as with discourses yet to come. This account led Bakhtin to sketch out a view of the apparatus of culture, in which discourses retained as collective memory inform the situation of each uttering subject.⁶ He focuses on the stylistic shifts of narrative prose, predominantly in Europe, to identify the ideological implications of reading. The narrative development that Bakhtin outlines is dominated by the perpetual shifting between a tendency to linearity (impersonal and monumental narrative structure), and the contrary, a personalised disintegration of the spatio-temporal momentum of storytelling.

Books that are reflexive of their stylistic means provide a persuasive source for and archival evidence of the cultural dynamics that inform contemporary narratives. Seen through the lens of Bakhtin's theory of narrativity, Buchanan's and Denny's book projects, with their emphasis on the function of reproduction, adeptly model current modes of knowledge production. The books are both reflexive of and implicated within the contemporary systemised culture of communication – a system that is perpetually hyper-linking, outwards and horizontally. The structure and layout of each book accentuates the dialogical nuances of this present. For instance, there is an emphasis placed on the materiality of word (as object or ideogram) to be read (out loud) from the space of the page. The books are also narrative constructions – lines made through a space – that register time as operating simultaneously and in contradiction to a linear form; giving access to the present-time experience of a now-past exhibition of which they are a part, while at the same time occupying the same point on the time line of art production as the artefact or the document.

Both artists are concerned to address what Norman M. Klein has called “scripted space,” a “walk through or click through environment (a mall, a church, a casino, a theme park or computer game).” Both books were produced in collaboration with New Zealand graphic designer, David Bennewith, whose designs provide an expanded view of the artists' working methods and another register for the notion of “scripted space.”⁷ A reader encounters this spatial enfolding of the object and document firstly in terms of design and typographic form and secondly in terms of shifts in literary genre and stylistic register. For example, in Buchanan's book, texts reference concrete or projective verse in which the physical page becomes integral to the meaning of the words, or, with Denny, text and image read as adaptations of science fiction or refer to an updating of the

picaresque. Both books serve as repositories of parallel texts that function as guides to the ideological stances that inform each artist's project: Denny's political critique of leisure industries, Buchanan's interrogation of the archive.

* * *

Today I will guide you through the city of Utrecht toward the Rietveld Schröder Huis. What was once uncontrolled space has been cut through by a motorway that forms a curve through this previously open-view. And it is exactly this curve, or this angle, or this straight line, this distorting of an apparent open-view that I will speak about today, in that I would like to think about particular working methods or figurations of methods...⁸

Buchanan's broader project investigates the tensions that exist between private need and public appearance, individual agency and collective legacy.⁹ Over the course of the project's two-year time frame, she presented three "acts," each including a reference to a female literary figure, an architectural location and an event format. These three acts she calls "meetings with meetings." Dipping into the archive and drawing out nuances of personality in the literary figures she studied, Buchanan orchestrated "meetings" with Janet Frame, at the modernist museum house; Agatha Christie, at the hotel; and Virginia Woolf at the British Library. The book documents her encounters. Rather than providing details about the writer or the place, Buchanan's narratives are determinably dislocated and deferred; she offers instead a transcript of a guided tour, an abstract mapping of a theatre piece, a typographical tracing of an exhibition installation.

Conversations with Bennewith began with the guided tour (the first "act"), and the book was from the outset conceived as an archival component; the content of which would accumulate at the completion of each act of the "drama."¹⁰ *Lying Freely*, as published however, went beyond documentation and now stands as a four-part investigation into/demonstration of the notion of the archive itself. This book-as-object tests the definitions of what is placed on public display and what, from a confluence of events, can be archived. The book's textuality articulates recollections drawn from an ensemble of fragmentary artefacts and recorded utterances, all of which are open to re-reading.¹¹

Lying Freely invites a reader to rehearse the three events. The book's display of content echoes the performative nature of the work, demonstrating the artist's proposal for archiving the event as a transcript of action points and diagrammatic forms to be repeated. This is most pronounced in the use of the page as a ground upon which the repeating and altering angles of the typography "perform."¹² This play with orientation is also applied to the diagrams, scanned sketches and photographic reproductions. The reader of *Lying Freely* is left to negotiate the gap between reading and the act of reading, by having to turn the page this way and that and by following diagrams that are discernibly

fragmentary.¹³ The book refuses the idea that reading is a linear event. Indeed Buchanan personifies the act as indeterminate and intimate; as the introduction to the third section states, in a large sans serif typeface:

Though the figure of communication might be about invention, it is equally about lighting conditions, proximity and timing. Communication rarely moves in straight lines. Rather, it collects interference on the way: angles, curves, reflections, warps, tilts. As these interferences emerge, they touch.¹⁴

In her essay “Proposing and Disposing” which comprises the fourth and final section of *Lying Freely*, Marina Vishmidt describes Buchanan’s project as a meditation on the appearances of information and a questioning of what makes it into the record. She also asks the reader to question what is concealed beneath methods of repetition and what is revealed by reconfiguration; and how to negotiate the staging of a project across various spaces. Vishmidt construes the experience of the project (of which the book is a part) as a “matter of topology” which “became diffused over the course of the works... whether as the sculptural space of metaphors (‘being a room,’ ‘active surfaces’), the relationship of scripting and space, or the attenuation of distance (geographical/cognitive/existential) into an abstract form.”¹⁵

In negotiating the page so as to read these various traces – often at awkward angles to each other, often with forms repeated so that pages look similar to others and without page numbers to guide the reader – it is anticipated that the reader may be touched by “a state of fugue.” Whilst working on the structure of her project, Buchanan became intrigued by *fugue*’s double meaning: the elaborate musical structure and the mental disorder involving manic disconnected journeying. In being placed somewhat in this state when encountering the book’s pages, I read this as a critique of the motivation to build a collectively known, historically-determined narrative about a subject. As the artist puts it; “*Lying Freely* seeks... to develop a space of such negotiation where the notion of freedom in one’s public and private presence is contested *vis-à-vis* an ‘economy of voice’.”¹⁶ Reading between the lines of *Lying Freely*’s minimal means, one detects a determination for the book to resist resolution and accumulate a more liberated understanding of what may have occurred in the three acts. Occupying the private and unquantifiable space of the reader, the book leaves the event open and conceives a form for a contemporary narrative where “lines” are only ever inscribed by acts of reading. As the postscript concludes:

Perhaps in the hands of the reader this book could be seen as a final point. However it is only a comma within a long conversation, an open-ended exit from a cycle of events that we remain entangled within. Oscillating between these different points, it will now become lost in chains of readers.¹⁷

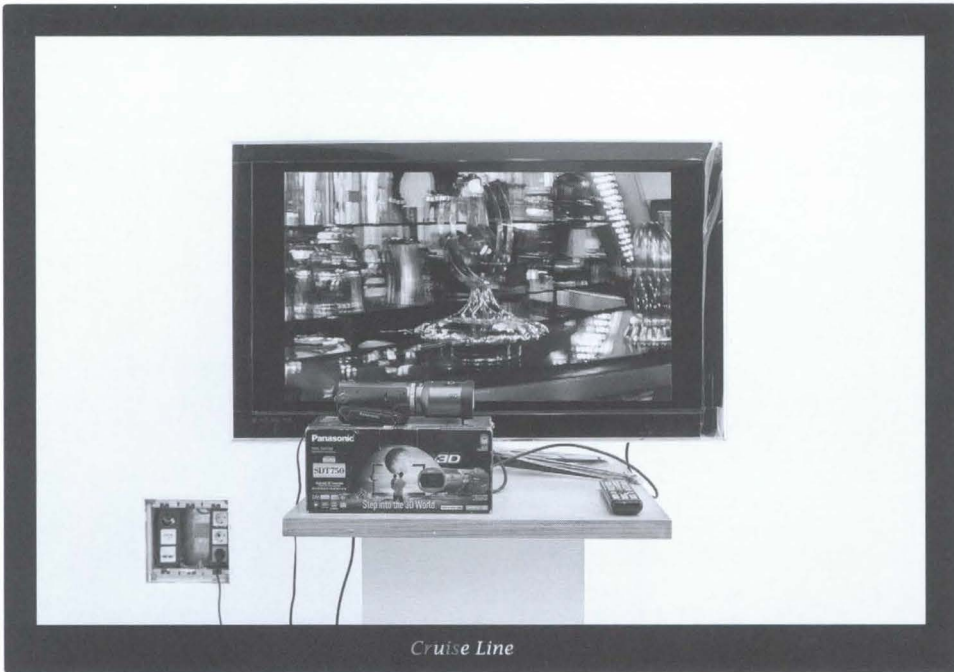
Fig. 5
Simon Denny
Cruise Line 2011
Book cover



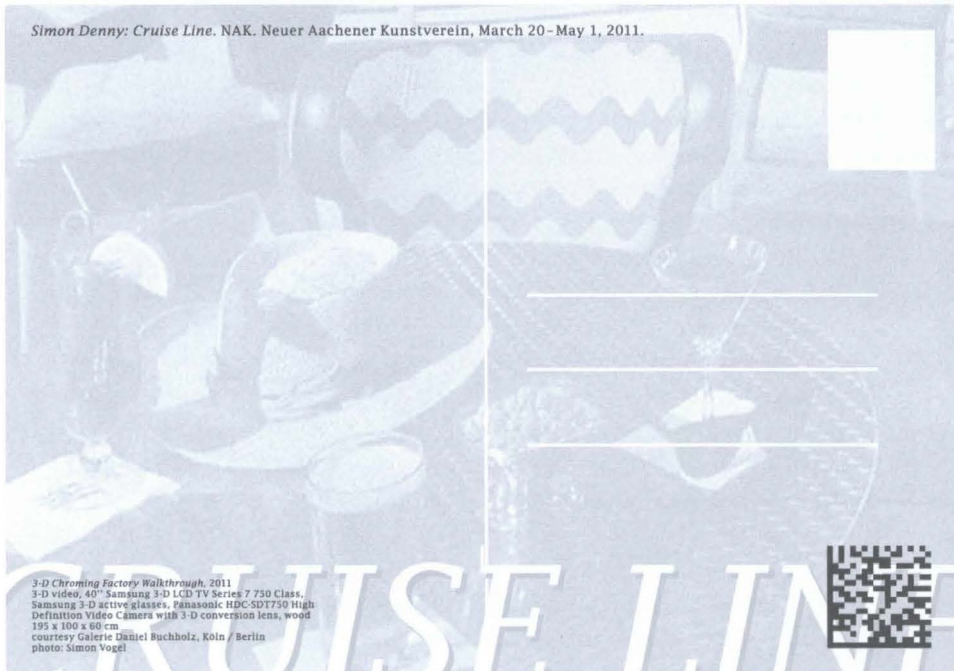
Cruise Line is co-authored by Simon Denny and writers Norman M. Klein and Mark von Schlegell, with design by David Bennewith, whose presence is felt through its visually sparse handling (Fig. 5).¹⁸ The book is soft-covered and just over A4 in size, with lightweight paper stock which gives the object a tabloid feel supported by the inclusion of a set of promotional postcards (Fig. 6). Its form escapes definition and seems like a manual for an unspecific, yet-to-be-discovered purpose.

Denny is already known for his critical commentaries on scripted environments and designed realities as well as for the way his sculptural practice engages with the politics of distribution. He often works with material that references systems of information delivery and retrieval, and more recently he has been attracted to early video and the proliferation of moving image culture through online video broadcasting. Denny creates circuits in which materials give form to the perpetually consumptive economic structures through which knowledge is carried and distributed.

Here Denny draws attention to a particular fleet of cruise ships that have an affiliation with the Disney entertainment conglomerate, a fleet of cartoon cover-up markets in motion. Often working in a site-specific manner, Denny closely reviewed the manufacture of metals used to produce the Disney ships, focusing his research on the Aachen-based chrome-finishing factory that is responsible for fitting out these fantasy cruise liners. For the exhibition, he produced a video of the factory production line, shot on what the Disney marketing department had claimed to be the first-ever 3-D home video camera. With this product, Denny closed the circuit of broadcasting with the industry's latest gimmick.



Simon Denny: *Cruise Line*. NAK. Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, March 20 - May 1, 2011.



3-D Chroming Factory Walkthrough, 2011
 3-D video, 40" Samsung 3-D LCD TV Series 7750 Class,
 Samsung 3-D active glasses, Panasonic HDC-SDT750 High
 Definition Video Camera with 3-D conversion lens, wood
 155 x 100 x 60 cm
 courtesy Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Köln / Berlin
 photo: Simon Vogel

Fig. 6
 Simon Denny
Cruise Line 2011
 Postcard

In Denny's book, plot is transposed onto object. The main protagonist of *Cruise Line* is the passenger liner, a shopping mall at sea. The punctuating mazes throughout the book's pages – interspersed between the endpaper x-rays of weapons in brief cases – read as images for the context through which the ship is negotiating its way; the sea as the colonised space of industrialisation on which capitalism is built. The texts extend the metaphor of the adventurous passenger liner to tell stories which converge headily to offer a socio-political critique of capitalism. In his essay for the publication titled, "Suburbia Ruins: Notes on the Dismantling of the American Psyche," Klein recalls the picaresque as "an old form of storytelling" that nonetheless resonates with our own era. This popular and satiric genre which typically follows the fate of a roguish character as he moves through a corrupt society, with its frequent flashbacks and parallel episodes, seems strangely well-adapted to the current spatio-temporal momentum and politics of storytelling at this time. Perhaps those are his weapons in the border control x-rays that feature as the book's endpapers. The *Cruise Line* project gives an updated, contemporary form for this literary structure.

Set with this, Klein presents a litany of reasons for the economic crisis that caused the American house mortgage market to collapse. He bases his analysis on a proposal that American society has become beholden to the script of "freedom," and gives proof of this claim by presenting merged, anecdotal evidence – everything from Hollywood to the culture of gambling – that he found in the "archive" (presumed to be sourced online as well as off). Weaving in and out of factual references and creative deceits, Klein folds history into the literary, to reinstate the picaresque. His aim is to show up the labyrinthine state of consumerism with its dependency on keeping the masses entertained by obscuring the origins of a consumer's habits, ensuring any motivating forces unrecoverable and in circulation. For example, "Section V, Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (Picaresque Justice)" reads:

As in a picaresque, the jurors take an episodic journey. They must enter without preconditions. The evidence they encounter will be raw. By the end, they uncover justice.

The judge guides their reading, as the narrator. The attorneys serve as authors – to deliver fictions, to explain the spaces between. Obviously, these fictions are meant to read as true. But like all constructions, they are not inevitably true or false. However, once the jury delivers its verdicts, these fictions legally disappear, unless challenged.

In Latin, *fictio* also meant "legal fiction." In other words, fiction was the making of, not the story itself. Evidence was a kind of clay. That clay was authored (sculptured), until it yielded to what actually took place. This reminds us that justice might not be served. Needless to say, the carriage (fiction) of a trial is extremely fragile.

The suggestive, creative journalism of Klein's approach is accompanied by the text compiled by Mark von Schlegell. Recounting the (plausibly fictional) surveillance logs from passengers on board *MAGIC*, one of the Disney cruise liners, von Schlegell presents a cerebral text that links topics such as the immediate housing crisis with allusions to NASA's role in the fall of the Berlin Wall. Each entry insists on the reader letting go of the "truth," giving up on finding the "origin" of the utterance, and being entertained by the ride of tangential implications:

Note: Don't think that you have anything to hide should the urge to think tank come upon you. Truth is fiction aboard our Magic kingdom. In the following interaction with the Deck 6 Block 6500 Maitre D, a guest might have worried that she'd said too much. In the end, of course, she gained back everything she had thought she's lost and more.

To read *Cruise Line* is to play a relentless game of deciphering, leading this reader to allow the multiple, textual registers to be at work simultaneously. There are references to the digital realm, to journalism and to the stylistic conventions of science fiction. Evidencing an adeptness in the use of online communication, the project collapses notions of authorship, fiction and documentation. Never denying the conventions of the book form, it expects the reader to navigate through the work's constructed maze, while guiding them sideways and across the bounds of fixed ideological positions. It celebrates reading as an inter-textual act, as trafficking between the shared maze-forms of image and text. Both book and exhibition engage the context of the hyper-capital but identify no single strategy or trajectory out of this system. I read Denny's book as re-politicising the postmodern strategy of allegory to visualise narrative construction as a carrier that is both implicated in and attempts to locate a passage through the spatially unfixed and infinitely divisible cycle of progress.

The book projects *Lying Freely* and *Cruise Line* along with *A Reader* knowingly act as reproductions, as well as animate the reproduction as the primary source of encounter. In all three, the act of reading becomes an integral part of the books' strategies. The device of repetition and the reconfiguration of texts – visuals included – are employed to mobilise past events and stimulate further reading, departing from a litany of reference points and diagrammatic forms. Devices of hiding and converging information, fictionalising source material, and presenting multiple registers of voice within the same page, draw out the projects' ideological refusal to produce definitive artefacts and objects of experience for the archive to consume. All challenge expectations of exhibition, information retrieval and broadcast.

At this historical point, when the idea of democracy is widely being challenged

as is its embedded capitalistic intentions, Denny, Buchanan and Bennewith give form to a narrative that posits uncertainty as productive and promotion as explicit; advocating self-determined, transparent knowledge-production over cloaked servitude and passive receptivity. Moreover, the artists are reflexively aware of the itinerancy of the book form, and incorporate a critique of the production of history and knowledge-distribution as the book's content. As Bakhtin claimed, the historical process is never finished or completed, and as a result there is no need to imagine or hope for escape from historical processes.¹⁹ That said, *A Reader*, *Lying Freely* and *Cruise Line* propose that the structures that carry knowledge and the terms for "freedom" associated with the leisure and education of information retrieval are being re-thought. Readers navigate these books as scripted propositions for a contemporary narrative structure; one of a special orientation that invites liberated readers to become knowingly implicated in the situatedness of their reading and to decipher meaning within a system of reproduction.

- Ruth Buchanan, "Circular Facts – *Lying Freely* Part II. If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution, Amsterdam," in *Lying Freely*, Ruth Buchanan (The Netherlands: Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht and Casco Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht, 2010).
- Simon Denny, Norman M. Klein and Mark von Schlegell, *Cruise Line* (Köln, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2011), on the occasion of the exhibition, *Cruise Line*, at NAK, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Germany, 2011.
- Hans Haacke in *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Lucy Lippard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 123.
- A Reader* addressed Alterations' immediate audience in the first instance, a community of our peers: fellow artists, curators and writers based in New Zealand predominately, although it also included those we had personally worked with in other capacities and elsewhere.
- Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought* (London: Routledge, 1995), 36.
- Bakhtin acknowledges the Stalinist context of his writing as well as the reigning historical materialism that stressed the social and historical particularity of all actions.
- All three live and work in Europe but maintain a strong association with arts' communities in New Zealand. Simon Denny keeps connected through his representation with Michael Lett, and previously Gambia Castle. Ruth Buchanan had a strong connection with artist-run initiatives such as Rm 103, and more recently public institutional outings such as Kate Montgomery's curated *Prospect*, City Gallery Wellington, 2011. She has also been awarded the McCahon residency in late 2012. Bennewith's work comes home by research subject (notably on the typographer Joseph Churchward); as meme and through printed forms of his activities.
- Buchanan, "Nothing is Closed – *Lying Freely* Part I. Guided Tour of the Rietveld Schroeder Huis, Utrecht," in *Lying Freely*.
- The project began during her research at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht 2008–10, after completing postgraduate study at the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, 2007.
- She drew on various institutions that connect with her time of study in Europe and on New Zealand to fund and realise the project including Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht; the nomadic performance platform *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution*; the project space The Showroom, London; the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht and contribution from Creative New Zealand.
- As noted, the mirror is often a motif used in her installations with light applied to it (often from a handheld torch) to give an image for a projected disorientation extending from one source.
- It is in this aspect of the work that Bennewith's voice is most clearly present. His working method is evident in his works on paper which place typographic forms on the page at various angles. For further details on David Bennewith's practice review, www.colophon.info. An exhibition at the bookshop and project space split/fountain, Auckland in 2011 presented a series of poster works using this technique. This body of work was first sighted by the reader and writer at Hirschfeld, Berlin, a project space run by artist Boris Dornbusch during 2009–10.
- There are points where the textual forms implicate the reader, somewhat comically, in enacting an object from the previous event: the upside down "The Back of Your Head" within an abstracted map of an exhibition space that fills the pages of the third section playfully invites an alignment of one's head to the text, and also, although not dependent on knowing, gives typographical form for the film work shown as part of the exhibition component of the project. It reveals the back of the artist's head as shadowing the research activity of Virginia Woolf at the British Library.
- Buchanan, *Lying Freely*.
- Marina Vishmidt, "Proposing and Disposing," in Buchanan, *Lying Freely*.
- Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht, <http://www.cascoprojects.org/?entryid=169> (accessed November 1, 2011).
- Frederique Bergholtz, Binna Choi and Emily Pethick, "Postscript," in Buchanan, *Lying Freely*.
- It was published on the occasion of the exhibition carrying the same title at NAK, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Germany.
- Dentith, 152.

Lu Hsun

**Wild
Grass**

鲁迅：野草

Walking Backwards, Reading Lu Xun: Shanghai, 2011

Deborah Cain

Fig. 1
Lu Xun
Wild Grass 1927
Cover, English
translation, 1985

Rather than too quickly collapsing Chinese writer Lu Xun's (1881–1936) concepts into art discourses of appropriation or other modernist aesthetic practices, my approach has been to open up space for discussion around his work. It is his idea of the “modern” that is of particular interest, and maybe a more syncretic view that privileges what is happening in particular places of art production in China now. Although Lu Xun himself played with narrative devices and was actively involved in translating and introducing modernist practices, such as woodblock printing, into his cosmopolitan milieu, my project here has been just to start the reading process. And this has allowed, however briefly, a juxtaposition of the 1920–30s period with some snapshots of art and culture taken from a location in Shanghai circa 2010–12.

Sitting in the relative calm of Lu Xun Park, in my neighbourhood of Hongkou, northern Shanghai, I'm thinking about the act of reading and its relation to the Chinese word *yuèdú* (to read/reading). Around me, people are walking backwards as a form of exercise; others are swimming in a man-made lake where signs say “No Swimming!” At the other end of the park is a museum commemorating Lu Xun (the *nom de plume* of Zhou Shuren, one of the leading figures of modern Chinese literature), and a little further on is the residence where this much-loved writer lived his last years.¹ A museum exhibition tells how he supported young writers and artists in the belief that they would contribute to a modern and revolutionary China. Lu Xun's “doctrine of borrowism” is highlighted, and examples of his translations of foreign works displayed (Gogol, Hugo, and so on). A video presentation within the exhibition gives voice to and illustrates his prose poem *Autumn Night*.

In his widely lauded *Wild Grass: Three Portraits of Change in Modern China* (2005), Pulitzer-winning journalist Ian Johnson cites a line from Lu Xun's collection,

Wild Grass (1926–27, Figs 1 and 2), in which *Autumn Night* was originally published. Johnson refers to Lu Xun as one of the progressive seeds of modern China, who in a different time would have been a “shoo-in for the Nobel Prize.”² Meantime, the literary critic and human rights activist Liu Xiaobo, winner of last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, remains in prison, having been sentenced in 2009 to eleven years incarceration for “incitement to the overthrow of state power and the socialist system and the people’s democratic dictatorship.”

His friend Ai Weiwei, likewise, despite being the son of a revolutionary communist poet, the artistic consultant for the National Stadium (*The Bird’s Nest*) built for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and ranked thirteenth in *ArtReview’s* guide to the leading figures in world art, was placed under house arrest by the Shanghai police in November 2010, mainly, it is thought, to silence his influential writing published online.³ Some say it was to prevent him from attending the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to his absent friend, Liu Xiaobo; others that it was because of his memorialising the names of 5000 school children killed in the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake; some that it was to stop him holding a party to commemorate the demolition of his new Shanghai studio by the city authorities. In April 2011 he was formally detained for “economic crimes, tax evasion, bigamy, and spreading indecent images on the internet.” The latter charge seems to refer to his circulation of a picture of himself jumping naked, with only a stuffed toy horse covering his genitals, and a Chinese caption that reads as both “Fuck Your Mother” and “The Communist Party Central Committee.” Others suggest it was because he endorsed an internet debate by overseas Chinese supporting the Arab world’s “Jasmine Revolution.”

Elsewhere, the now officially-sanctioned symbolic representation of modern Shanghai, a sci-fi view of the city skyline, is reproduced by the artist Yang Zhenzhong in a balancing act. The city is projected upside down as if on his fingertips in *Light and Easy* (2003, Fig. 3). It is, coincidentally, filmed from the far side of the Huangpu River, from a vantage point in front of the old colonial-era architecture along the famous Bund.

The purpose of this essay is to juxtapose the diverse agendas and circumstances of Chinese writers and artists today with the radicalism of their predecessors in the interwar generation. From my position here in Shanghai, China’s most modern city, Lu Xun’s idea of “borrowism” is an interesting point to start with. It might be juxtaposed with the idea of learning by rote central to the classical style of Chinese education. Lu Xun recounts in an autobiographical essay, “The Fair of the Five Fierce Gods” (1926, 1928), how he was at seven years of age compelled by his father to recite by heart from a primer, *Rhymed History*, before the household could go to the festival rites associated with a popular village temple fair. The only thing he really remembered from this lesson was the act of recitation itself and the first two lines:

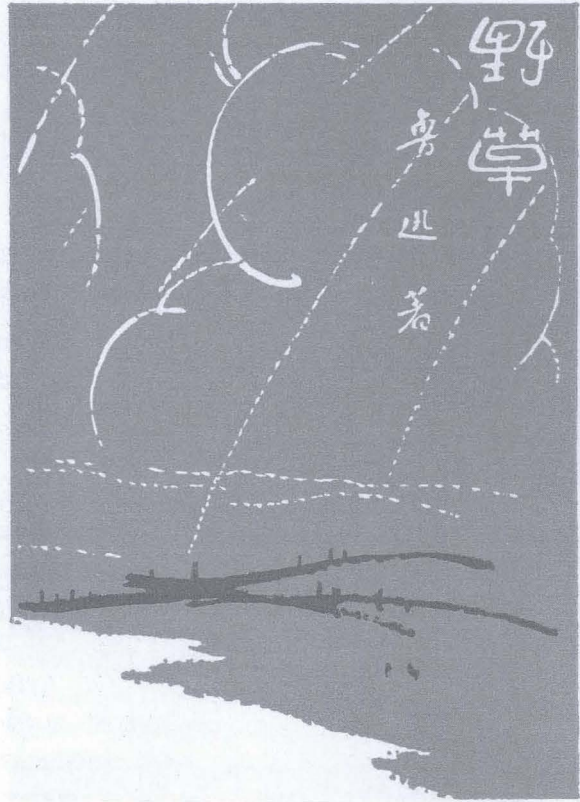


Fig. 2
Lu Xun
Wild Grass 1927
First Chinese cover, 1927

In the beginning was Pan Gu,
Born of primeval void...⁴

Lu Xun went on to advocate an idea of eclectic cultural reform, which has also been described by the word “grabism” (explained as “meaning we should enthusiastically adopt what is good from the cultures of other nations”).⁵ More recently, too, the Chinese–Australian writer Brian Castro – speaking at the 2011 Shanghai International Literary Festival about his own multi-sourced narrative of the 1930s, *Shanghai Dancing* (2003) – went so far as to claim that “the Chinese way of education *is* copying” [my emphasis].⁶ But copying has taken many forms, for example, the unofficial bootlegging used in the Cultural Revolution period by people to circulate reproductions of novels or later, music.⁷

Chinese literary scholar, Qian Liqun, meantime identifies a dichotomous tendency in much Chinese academic research to fixate “on either ancient China or the modern West.”⁸ The result, he claims, is either a popular skepticism or a feeling of apathy towards critical thinking, and overall the game of “telling tall

tales". Qian Liqun includes people in positions of power, as well as school-children, in this tendency to evade critical reflection on aspects of China's twentieth-century history. Encouraged by media and government, popular attention is re-directed more towards material betterment and consumerism, resulting in a "national forgetting."⁹ In this context, Qian Liqun sees Lu Xun as a figure that now is more rhetorically discussed than critically investigated as a central figure in modern Chinese history and thought.¹⁰

As part of my work teaching social and cultural analysis to undergraduate Chinese in preparation for their studying overseas, I took two of my classes to the nearby Shanghai Lu Xun Museum. My particular interest was in how they might talk about this 1920–30s writer. The students at first thought it was a rather boring exercise, as they had all studied Lu Xun in their high school education. Most could recite at least something from his body of works. But the discussion that resulted while preparing oral seminars became heated, with different opinions emerging about whether the writer should now be removed from the curriculum, as has been proposed.¹¹ He was compared especially with the popular Chinese blogger, Han Han,¹² with a division occurring between those who saw Lu Xun as having positively upheld the need for collective modernisation, and those who saw Han Han as an individualist who is more relevant to today's contemporary lifestyles.¹³



The Shanghai Lu Xun Museum's "doctrine of borrowism" becomes "raptism" in the work of Qjan Liqun, which he refines as "the ethic of taking from others, or *nalai zhuyi*," from Lu Xun's essay of the same name.¹⁴ It was a project for cultural production that would shape a new China. But Qjan Liqun sees Lu Xun's idea as reflecting neither a Sinocentric nor a Eurocentric view of China. A critical, complex, and sometimes contradictory attitude towards what a "modern China" might mean is apparently encapsulated in the prose writing of this early twentieth century scholar. Or, in the words of one of my students, reading Lu Xun involves trying to understand a person who had "big dreams for his motherland."

Only a few days later, in late December 2011, the blogger Han Han was again in the mainstream media, after he published a series of essays contradicting his previous critique of the government and education systems.¹⁵ The celebrity writer's posts on "revolution, democracy and freedom," were once more the topic of discussion, including in the Chinese English press.¹⁶ "A revolution needs a leader" but what kind of leader would this be in China, asks Han, described by Raymond Zhou as a Shanghai "wunderkind who established himself as a best-selling author at the tender age of 17."¹⁷ Furthermore, by criticising the Chinese people for remaining quiet or only crying out when they themselves fall victims to some disaster, Han Han is compared to Lu Xun, "who took a scalpel to the Chinese national character."¹⁸ Zhou summarises the various opinions amongst academics paying attention to the now twenty-nine-year-old Han, who days after Valclav Havel's death and public funeral had referred to the "velvet revolution" in a dismissive way because, in China, "if it were allowed, all the speechifying [on social problems] will end up as advertising for throat lozenges."¹⁹ But for Han, social reform is now more important than revolution or democracy. Zhou ends his *China Daily* commentary, "Reformed Revolutionary, or Revolutionized Reformist?," by stating that while Han might not be a radical, he is nevertheless a rare example on the mainland of a non-aligned maverick.²⁰

Fig. 3
Yang Zhenzhong
Light and Easy 2 2003
Video
5 min 20 sec video loop
Courtesy ShanghART
Gallery, Shanghai

Revolution is a subjectively mediated and nostalgic theme in Marc Lafia's work, seen across town at the Minsheng Art Museum in December (part of the Red Town art area of Shanghai). Lafia cross-references through visual montage – mass media images of The Beatles, Chairman Mao, Jean-Luc Godard, 1970s Chinese Cultural Revolution films, and so forth. In *Double Fantasy: On Your Own* and other film segments/film-stills, one sees a ghosting and slippage of misconceptions about past social and individual polemics of global rebellious actions and belief systems between the 1960s and the 1990s. Lafia's work was also exhibited in a group show *dAFT*, shown in September at the Shanghai Gallery of Art, along with other international and homegrown artists such as Paul McCarthy and the MadeIn Company, and was generally focused on satirical interpretations of contemporary society, or specifically the absurd logic of consumerism.

These works recall the 1990s artist Wang Guangyi and his placing of images from the Cultural Revolution together with ubiquitous icons such as Coca Cola

in his *Great Criticism Series* (1993).²¹ But this new version is equally evident in the *Island 6's* Liu Dao art collective's installation for the RAM Christmas Project 2011 (Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai), *Just Call Me Nick*. There a video installation asks visitors to interact with Santa on their cellphones from a number given on the screen, but the dishevelled, costumed, circa-1931 Coca-Cola-Santa-persona is so busy coping with the reality of frantic Christmas/winter shopping that he comes across as a dystopic figure of religion and consumer culture. If you sent him a text message you might get back a response such as: "Have you been naughty or nice this year?," or "Texting is only for naughty children," or, "Let me have a Silent Night for once!"

Upstairs from this foyer display in the Rockbund's main galleries, an exhibition of Zhang Huan's *Q Confucius* continues with a more explicit but open-ended face off between religion and ideology, Christianity and Confucianism, and the government's call for a harmonious society and its actual cultural and social policies. Like the art in the *dAFT* exhibition at Shanghai Gallery of Art, Zhang Huan's work is asking overarching and basic questions about the human condition in a globalised world, as well as the place of Confucian thinking in today's China. Upstairs in a video documentary about the creation of the artwork, Zhang Huan asks "How to realize harmony?" [English subtitles]. Meanwhile, one floor below, a motorised robotic Confucius noisily creates such a disharmony that on the same visual commentary viewed on the fourth floor (via footage from the opening weekend) we see two baby monkeys clinging to each other in fright when confronted by the sounds and actions of the automaton.²²

Also relevant here is the discussion by Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio on the interconnections of globalisation, where they explain that:

Today, contemporary Asian art is both sympathetic to the cultural and historical frameworks within which it is produced but also – clearly – attuned to the global networks and international marketplace in which it is frequently exhibited, bought and sold. To grasp its history we must decode an intense, multifaceted dialogue between cultures not just within Asia, but also in Europe and America and elsewhere.²³

The transformations in the production and market for Asian contemporary art have been a constant media topic in China during 2011. In November the *US-China Forum on the Arts and Culture* in Beijing saw debates on these issues in the media, with much use of the catchphrase "creative industries," and calls for experts to be publicly consulted on what "culture" is. In the meantime, leading international and China-based "personalities" were given prominence – such as curator Melissa Chiu (Chinese–Australian resident in America), novelist Amy Tan (Chinese–American), director Ang Lee (Taiwanese), and artists Cai Guoqiang and Liu Xiaodong – and cited as examples of how to successfully "develop, expand and project" Chinese culture.²⁴

Since then mid-winter shoppers in the city have been enjoying lively yuletide music and buying the festive decorations of a Western Christmas, produced mainly in a factory in Yiwu, Zhejiang province.²⁵ Decorations and Christmas music are still evident long after the Western festive season, and often can be seen in Shanghai all year round, especially over Easter weekend. The colour red also marks the Spring Festival for the Chinese Lunar New Year, which will start 23 January in 2012.

Walking along the Bund waterfront, on Zhongshan Dongyi Road, 31 December 2011, with perhaps a million other people waiting for midnight and the Western calendar to tick over, I watched a light show on the former colonial buildings near the Nanjing Road junction with Zhongshan, at numbers 12 and 13 of the historic financial square. But when, at midnight, the clock in the bell tower of the Shanghai Customs House (a custom's office from the imperial period, rebuilt in 1925 in a European "back to ancient style") struck the hour, the melody that rung out was the Mao-era anthem "The East is Red."²⁶ Then, rather than the generally expected fireworks lighting the night sky along the bend of the Huangpu River, small red lantern balloons were set adrift against the blacked-out commercial hub of the usually-blazing neon skyline of the Pudong area. Known as *kong ming*, these lanterns are customarily made of red oiled rice paper on a bamboo frame. They are sky candles that were historically used as signals in war, but are now associated with various festive events. Here they were for good fortune and sending romantic messages afloat into the winter air.²⁷

It was Lu Xun's use of the vernacular voice and how he wrote critically about Chinese traditions, rituals and social structures that eventually saw him become canonical in the nation's literature, having been strategically coopted by Mao's authoritarian cultural programme.²⁸ In the essay "Ah Chang and the *Book of Hills and Seas*," for example, the writer used his childhood Amah (nanny) as a protagonist for questioning familial conventions, lores and customs. The particular story concerns the New Year, and how she taught him that the first thing he must do on waking on the first day was to say "Good luck, Amah." He writes of the methods she used, telling him horror stories about the "Long Hairs" (troops in the Taiping Revolution) who could carry him off. She had previously told him how, when the household had fled the insurrection and left the family cook behind, and she had asked the rebel troops for food, they had instead thrown her the severed head of the gatekeeper, it being tossed at her by its *queue*, the ponytail being the detested symbol of feudal servitude.²⁹

Basically, his Amah is presented as the "repository of irksome conventions" during his childhood. At the same time, it was his illiterate Amah that he recounts as giving him one of his first illustrated books, for which he had longed, the *Book of Hills and Seas*, which she had mistakenly thought was a *Book of Holy Seas*.³⁰ The book was in the form of vernacular fiction including legends, myths and fables of the past that he had yearned to read but which had been

banned from his formal classroom.³¹ This type of material provided the basis for an expanded Chinese literary heritage, in what has been described as a self-education in an “anti-Confucian spirit,” which Lu Xun and his contemporary, the author Wu Yu (1872–1948), both contributed to.³²

Writing of the numerous appropriations of and accusations directed at Lu Xun, Huang Qiaosheng states that the “edged afterlife of ... [the writer’s] work speaks of China’s fragile intellectualism and complicated literary arenas during times of upheaval.”³³ A museum pictorial biography from 1981 – re-compiled and translated into English, after Huang attended a 2009 Columbia University symposium in New York, aptly titled “Multimedia Lu Xun” – includes a famous image taken by the American journalist and writer, Agnes Smedley (1890–1950).³⁴ The photograph shows Lu Xun in his classical guise, dressed on this occasion in a scholar’s silk gown and seated outdoors in a cane wicker chair, of a cosmopolitan restaurant in the former French Concession (Xuhui/Luwan Districts of central south west Shanghai). This now iconic image has become a tourist artefact, rendered in ceramic multiples, but with the inclusion not evident in the original photographic print of a book in one hand and a cigarette in the other. It thus encodes symbols of both traditional and modern China, kitsch indeed, but somehow appropriate.

Speaking of lessons learned in childhood, Lu Xun mocks the “preferred text” that a “Confucian scholar” might have given him, *The Picture-Book of Twenty-Four Acts of Filial Piety*, for its hypocritical rules and “old fetishes” that were meant to trick him into being the good son.³⁵ In the Preface to his 1927 collection of essays *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, he says he was confused by these early lessons of the past, just as he was also confused in the present and with the “rules for writing.”³⁶ But clearly he also was confused about the changing, violent world around him, as leftist colleagues were imprisoned and executed, and Lu Xun himself was forced repeatedly to change residences in order to protect his life.³⁷

The year 2011 marked the centennial of the overthrow of the imperial Chinese system, and the founding of the Republic of China. Back in September a movie celebrating that event, was released onto the nation’s screens. Co-directed by and starring Jackie Chan, *1911* depicts the roles played by Sun Yat-sen as political leader and Huang Xing as military commander. Posters throughout the country in recent months have portrayed an image of Jackie Chan in his starring role as Huang Xing. The government of the People’s Republic of China sanctioned the production, but so far smaller crowds than desired have paid to attend it, and international reviews have been less than positive.³⁸

In the official Centenary commemorations Sun Yat-sen was uniquely honoured by having his image placed near the Mao Mausoleum in Tiananmen Square, and facing across the road to the great poster-image of Mao that for the past half-century has dominated the gate to the Forbidden Palace. Both figures are

represented wearing what once were called “Sun suits” but more recently have been called “Mao jackets” (Fig. 5). In the movie *1911*, too, these garments are imbued with great symbolism: when Sun Yat-sen (Winston Chao) is shown returning from abroad during the final period of the revolution, he is given such a jacket by Huang Xing as a replacement for his western suit. The *queue*, or ponytail, is similarly given symbolic prominence, especially when Yuan Shikai (Sun Chun) demands a theatrical cutting of his *queue* in his transition from Qing Dynasty military strongman to Republican hero (and his future role as second President of the Republic).

Clothes and hairstyles for the representations of Confucius in a RAM exhibition are also crucial for how the *Zhang Huan: Q Confucius* “memorial” is displayed. The traditional “daily practices and behavior of filial piety and ancestor worship” are vividly juxtaposed with current values.³⁹ In a panel discussion on 15 October in the Shanghai Library, Mathieu Borysevic, Director of the Shanghai Gallery of Art, recounted his early experience of the artist’s work in the 1990s, and how Zhang Huan had since become the poster-boy of “New Chinese Art” for the New York art world.⁴⁰ From the discussions and ensuing dialogue about Zhang Huan’s use of the body in his art, it became evident that rather than seeing the work merely as social criticism it might be better to view it as a performative reaction to the complications of that social reality; an expression of the artist’s looking at everyday things to think through issues of what it means to be human. Previously, the politics of his art have been the main focus of international discussion.

Zhang Huan: Q Confucius brings together diverse visual images of Confucius, including a portrait in cowhide *Q-Confucius No.1* (2011); a large silicone and steel structure of carbon fibre and acrylic *Q-Confucius No.2* (2011, Fig. 4); three ash-on-linen paintings, one depicting Confucius, another Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, supplemented by other support figures of scholars and disciples, and an additional painting of a oceanic void hanging in-between on a third wall. Similarly, *Q-Confucius No.6* (2011) consists of a wire cage, a pneumatic device (of the robotic figure), a steel bed, nine live monkeys (visible only in the documentary), and a Chinese hackberry tree. In an outside installation, *Q-Confucius No.7* (2011), live termites and ants were housed in a steel and concrete shed, residing on a water and net enclosed log. Including his previous work with portraiture and his earlier body-performance art, Zhang Huan’s dialogue with iconic and everyday images of people, things and society, is above all an exploration of human nature.

Beyond the legacy of Confucius and the proper manners for social behaviour are the excesses of Li Mu’s *Happy Birthday* (2006), a six-minute video performance in the *dAFT* exhibition. Dressed for the party, a young girl is set-up on a shallow stage in a cake-throwing scenario that ends with her being completely smothered in the sugary mixture. The demented activity turns a common



birthday practice into an uncomfortable absurdity. A prosaic reality of this festive event is thus exploded. During the SH Contemporary Art Fair in September 2011, Li Mu spoke as part of a RAM Studio panel event.⁴¹ In discussing conceptual practice and art transactions, Li Mu commented on how over the last five years of working as a professional artist he had not been shown in exhibitions or had his work collected. In the present environment in China, which does not have large, well-established contemporary institutional art structures in place, he has no choice but to find ways of surviving in order to continue making his art (September 9, 2011).

That contemporary Chinese artists are now part of the global art market, and that China is a major player in the world economy, are well-established facts. Different points in a cultural, political and economic trajectory also can be schematically outlined: The founding of the Republic of China in 1911 and the “Fourth May 1919” cultural movement (that Lu Xun was involved with in Beijing); the Communist Revolution of 1949 and the “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom” cultural campaign of the late 1950s; the Cultural Revolution from 1966



Fig. 4
Zhang Huan
Q-Confucius No.2 2011
Silicone, steel, carbon
fibre, acrylic
3800 x 9800 x 6600 mm
Image provided by
Zhang Huan Studio
Courtesy Rockbund Art
Museum, Shanghai

Fig. 5
Chinese tunic suit
Zhejiang Textile & Fashion
College, Ningbo City,
East China, Zhejiang
Province
2011
Media photograph
Courtesy of Imaginechina

through to the death of Mao in 1976; the resurgence of a capitalist economy in the decades following, along with the reassertion of the dictatorship of the Communist Party, as represented by the tragedy of 4 June 1989 at Tiananmen Square; and China's ongoing integration into the global economy symbolised by its joining of the World Trade Organisation in 2001.

Such a summary account of modern China's history suggests the difficulties faced by artists and intellectuals through the course of the twentieth century and into the present. Definitely, there has never really been a directly continuous condition of cultural expression in the country, wars, invasions, famines, and political and social upheavals intervening. There have been many divergent paths, and a layering that has divided official and unofficial, mainstream and underground, or mainland and offshore productions. In the present, too, many artists – as is the case overseas as well – cannot easily enter their work into the still-emerging contemporary Mainland Chinese art market. Also, as shown by a recent *Shanghai Daily* article, there is a lack of knowledge about contemporary art in the general public arena here in China.⁴²

Meantime, Cai Guoqiang's major exhibition, in the Arab Museum of Art in the wealthy Gulf city of Doha, opened with a big bang that thematically made connections between China and the Arab world.⁴³ In a totally different production for a show in Shanghai, *Action of Consciousness*, the MadeIn Company with some skepticism explores the drive to "creativity" and the functions of art objects.⁴⁴ The main piece of the latter show is a "performance installation" of mixed media objects that are literally thrown up out of a central white boxed-room (of unspecified dimensions). The viewer sees these things only when people inside the confined space of the box hurl them out into the air above, the "performers" starting this action when they see audience members enter the gallery space on a video monitor. In the catalogue, these art forms appear as blurry action shots in the still images, while the publicity flyer for the exhibition depicts a small vague UFO on a white ground.

Although there is not space here to discuss all the work in detail, the show also included an exercise manual, *Physique of Consciousness* (hand-made Museum manual) and a single channel video enacting a given series of movements, related to a "cultural fitness" programme (of about 200 steps). In an interview, MadeIn's Xu Zhen states:

To us, pluralism forms a rather fake kind of culture because it permits everything even when some things shouldn't be permitted... It's incapable of generating new or valuable cultural content. Many of these works confront this problem.⁴⁵

Xu goes on to liken the experience of viewing the sculptural works in the other part of MadeIn's extended show that seem "African" to how we can only see the objects of *Action of Consciousness* as "glimpsed for a fraction" when they emerge in-motion out of the white box. Because we generally have a limited real knowledge of tribal sculpture, he says, our biased view influences how we perceive things and distorts our perceptions of them.

The final artwork from Shanghai to be mentioned is that of Gao Weigang at the Shanghai Gallery of Art. Standing in the gallery space of a group exhibition, and looking over towards the Bund from the Zhongshan Dongyi Road side of the river, a sound installation by Gao, *Boom! Boom! Boom!* (2011, 3900 mm cannon) rings out an onerous crash of gunfire. It is directed at the "garish Pudong cityscape" across the way.⁴⁶ As the catalogue essay explains, war is being declared on the myth of progress (and perhaps at the project of fast urbanisation). The pretense of the greatness of China's economic situation, and a blind faith in the claims made on its behalf, also are being mocked. In order to connect with the socio-political world of the twenty-first century and rapid changing cityscape, the artist re-engages with notions of realism derived from Courbet (but textually closer to a more neutral photo-realism), rather than the propaganda of the former socialist realism or its criticism in the 1980–90s. The

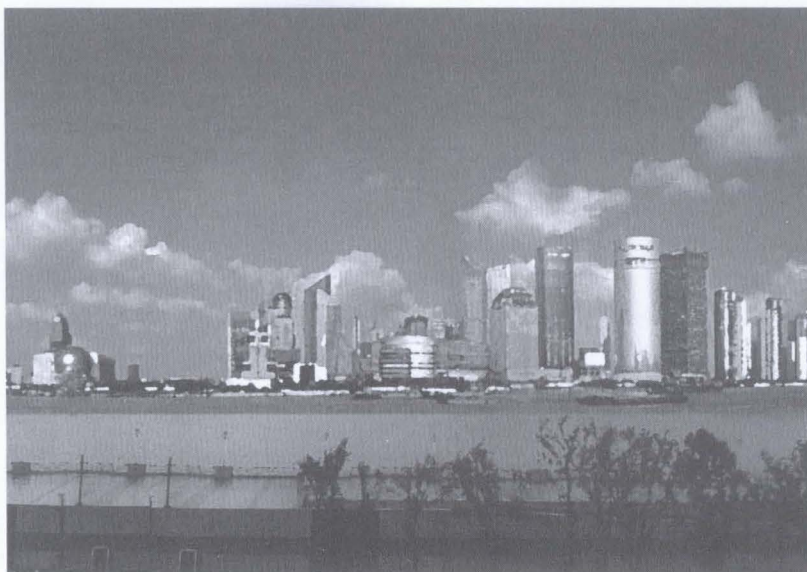
artist's show included two oil-on-canvas paintings, one being of Pudong (Fig. 6) and the other of a pile of rubble, plus a fractured oil-on-mirror of a seacoast. Accompanying these are a flimsy styrofoam simulation of the Parthenon; two free-standing marble pedestals, each featuring objects such as a pile of shit rather than the traditional lions; a wall-mounted stainless steel staircase; a concrete-cast globe positioned on a rusted steel tripod; and an oil-on-car tarpaulin that pays homage to Bob Marley's song, with the inverted words "Everything isn't gonna be alright." Which effectively sums up the installation.

In his 2008 autobiographical return visit to the city he was born in almost 80 years earlier, J. G. Ballard, reminisces:

Shanghai was not a British colony, as most people imagine... [It] was one of the largest cities in the world, as it is now, 90 percent Chinese and 100 percent Americanized. Bizarre advertising displays – the honour guard of fifty Chinese hunchbacks outside the film premiere of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* sticks in my mind – were part of the everyday reality of the city, though I sometimes wonder if everyday reality was the one element missing from the city.⁴⁷

Actuality, certainty, veracity, or simply plain truth, are problematic words related to the understanding of art and culture in China today. But even from a location in Shanghai in 2011, and theoretically looking backwards to the 1930s and Lu Xun's "doctrine of borrowism," it becomes very difficult to forsee how art and the artworld in China might unfold in future years.

Fig. 6
Gao Weigang
Shanghai Shanghai 2011
Oil on canvas
1000 x 1500 mm
Courtesy Shanghai
Gallery of Art, Shanghai



In *Wild Grass*, Lu Xun included a sardonic ode to “My Lost Love,” sub-headed “New doggerel in the classical style,” which starts with the refrain:

My love lives on the mountain-side,
I long to see her, but too high the mountains;
Helpless I hang my head and wet my gown
With tears that flow like fountains.
A scarf she gives me, gay with butterflies,
What shall I give her? Owls.
I know not why, but much to my surprise
She turns away and scowls.
...

And concludes with:

My love lives in a rich man’s house,
I long to call there but I have no car;
Helpless I shake my head, and now my tears
Are scattered near and far.
She gives me roses, and a gift
Of brown snakes I then make her;
Angry, she turns away from me –
Why? May the devil take her!
(October 3, 1924)⁴⁸



Fig. 7
Lu Xun
Ceramic figure
Shanghai Lu Xun Museum
Photo: D Cain

It could be said that “borrowism” is alive and well in China in ordinary everyday spaces, but not quite in the radical way that Lu Xun intended. And, even walking backwards, he still makes a great read. In September 2011 a story from the *Shanghai Daily* newspaper quickly spread around the internet, telling of a new social ritual whereby members of the older generation that survived the Cultural Revolution now meet in a Shanghai IKEA store’s cafeteria. They gather in the Swedish chain’s furniture shop merely to drink a free cup of coffee and congregate in a “match-making corner.” But for IKEA’s management, this has now become a problem.⁴⁹ Unlike the nameless narrator in the American film *Fight Club* (1999, David Fincher), who compulsively buys from IKEA out of boredom, the men and women who get together in the Xuhui store do not buy the goods. They have been going there for over a year for singles’ get-togethers on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Rather than the consumer world that *Fight Club*’s “Jack” wants to see crumble, the heady mix typified by a red lantern, KFC, and the China Pavilion from the Shanghai 2010 World EXPO is here to stay.⁵⁰ In 2012 the Shanghai Biennale will be held in this former EXPO building, to be renamed “The China Art Palace.”⁵¹

After hearing writer Li Er (well-known in China’s literary scene) speak recently about the powerlessness of the magician – and, by implication, the intellectual – I was interested to read the newly published English translation of his work, *The Magician of 1919*. The first of its two stories covers the fourth of May student demonstrations in Peking in 1919, which Li describes as “the dawn of modern China,” while the second deals with contemporary festivities (western Christmas, which Li views as a romantic affair for couples; birthdays; and Chinese New Year celebrations). His second story, *Christmas Eve*, is seen through the life circumstances of a retired schoolteacher, Mr Chin, who acts as a pimp to supplement his limited income selling newspapers.⁵² Born in 1966 on the cusp of the Cultural Revolution, and now resident in Beijing, Li spoke of how another of his characters, the magician, who, like a metaphor for history in China, had intended to pull a pigeon out of his sleeve but produced a rabbit instead.

Most of the artists mentioned above relate only indirectly to Lu Xun’s writing, reflecting his interest in themes like Confucius, festivals, everyday life, and revolution, and his belief that art has an important role in a “modern” China. But Li Er’s work can be more directly linked to Lu Xun, who in fact appears in a story, alongside the magician’s antagonist, Ge Ren, who as “*Individual*, participated in the New Culture Movement, in which Chinese scholars, including Lu Xun, advocated democracy and science as well as promoting social reforms.”⁵³ Li Er weaves surrealistic glimpses – rather than social realist ones – mixing humorous, historically factual, fictitious, fake, real, unreal, visible and invisible scenarios, including the magician Bigshot Cowrie who, like the youthful Mao, becomes a librarian.

Everyday occurrences, and bodily elements – to do with bowel movements or erections (a trick with a hidden queue) – are linked to the ebb and flow of history

and life in Li Er's narratives. His work has been compared to Lu Xun's *The Story of Ah Q* (1921).⁵⁴ But on seeing Zhang Huan's portrait of Lu Xun, titled, *A Madman's Diary*, (2011, incense ash on linen, 2500 x 2000 mm) in the Minsheng Art Museum's *Face* exhibition (March 2012), other connections can be made to the 1930s writer. It references the title of the first story in the classic collection, *Call to Arms* (1922), which written in the vernacular voice, sees a man analogously haunted by cannibalistic propositions. The painting's use of the tiny particles of burnt ash at once bring together the many facets of an iconic photographic rendition and at the same time disperses the material "body" into the blur of the ash painting, which is after all made from the heap of waste left behind after burning.

My thoughts return to the south Shanghai Longhua Temple where festival events for the third day of the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar are being held the March weekend that I complete this article. I remember standing mesmerised, watching the incense burn in this ancient temple's urns, after which the ash was then blown in a swirl by the seasonal winds. The ceramic figure (Fig. 7) produced by the Lu Xun industry has an attachable cigarette that both symbolises the modern young writer and the social gatherings of his era (some of whom subsequently died by firing squad in the political struggles of that time). It also brings to mind the x-rays of his diseased lungs on display in the Lu Xu Museum in Shanghai, and the fragility of life that can be seen in Zhang's ash portrait.

It is Li Er's writing that I have read last. His tales of the fourth of May 1919 and Christmas Eve focus on a variety of events, but from an awry perspective. For instance, Mr Chin is procuring young girls for the nightclub, Garden of Eden, across the road from his newspaper stand. When a young girl arrives on the street in a trishaw, she conversationally comments on the photograph of his daughter hanging on the wall of the newsstand, and in a moment of nostalgia he plays a cassette song of his own lost daughter singing "Happy Birthday." Mr Chin is trying to earn the cash to bring his daughter's ashes back from Japan, where she died after running away with her father's life savings. The young girl from the trishaw, on the advice of a friend, wants the old man to get her work in the brothel so she can pay her way overseas to study. The old man is not unaware of the contradictions: and it is this painful absurdity that Li Er is writing of in a slow and careful manner, which also serves to discourage the reader from jumping to conclusions too quickly. It is a cautionary tale for an outsider like myself to consider when so new to reading, writing, and looking, here in the midst of the drama of modernising China.

1. The Shanghai Lu Xun Museum is now located on Tian-ai Road, off Sichuan Road, in the Hongkou District of Shanghai. This museum was originally opened on 7 January 1951 with Zhou Enlai inscribing its name, then, it was relocated to its present site in 1956, and reconstructed in 1998–99. It is described as a "National Exemplary Base for Patriotism Education," Museum brochure. Lu Xun's final residence is around the corner at 9, Lane 132, Shan-yin Road.

2. Ian Johnson, *Wild Grass: Three Portraits of Change in Modern China* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 125.

3. See Ai Weiwei, "Why I'll Stay Away from the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/07/olympics2008.china>.

4. Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2010), 55–59.

5. Huang Qiaosheng, *A Pictorial Biography of Lu Xun* (Beijing: Henan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2010), 160. In June–September 2011 the Shanghai Lu Xun Museum display was reorganised, and now the English translated word “borrowism” has been replaced with “Take-and-Use.” The revised wall text now reads: “Serving the present and the future of the Chinese nation, Lu Xun advocated the practice of ‘Take-and-Use’ as he went all out to collect and preserve the traditional cultural heritages of China, introduce the more concrete and simplistic foreign arts and promote the new styles of block prints,” January 2, 2012.
6. See Stuart Beaton, “A Journey from Macao Ferry to Kangaroos and Back,” *China Daily*, April 29, 2011, 19.
7. See Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 226. And, Jonathan Campbell, *Red Rock: The Long, Strange March of Chinese Rock and Roll* (Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books), 51.
8. Qian Liqun, “Refusing to Forget,” in *One China, Many Paths*, ed. Chaohua Wang (London, New York: Verso, 2003), 294–95.
9. Qian Liqun, “Refusing to Forget,” 295.
10. There is an international body of new research and academic writing on Lu Xun, for example, on the writer’s slow appearance in the Chinese literary scene of the time, see Eva Shan Chou, “Learning to Read Lu Xun, 1918–23: The Emergence of a Readership,” *The China Quarterly* 172 (December 2002): 1042–64.
11. The “beginnings of a Lu Xun withdrawal from textbooks” is dated to 2007 in Julia Lovell, trans., *Lu Xun: The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China. The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), xxxv.
12. Evan Osnos, Profiles, “The Han Dynasty,” *The New Yorker*, July 4, 2011, 50. Evan Osnos spoke with Jeffrey Wasserstrom about “China on the Move” in Shanghai, September 8, 2011, where he mentioned Han Han and his own writing for a blog. Osnos, December 28, 2011, comment on “Han Han Funny,” *The New Yorker* ¾ *Letter from China*, comment posted June 29, 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/evanosnos/2011/06/han-han-funny.html>.
13. The negative criticism was not directly voiced in class, where Lu Xun has been blamed for the polemically breaking with the past and for being a totalitarian collaborator. See Qian Liqun, “Refusing to Forget,” 296.
14. Qian Liqun, “Refusing to Forget,” 297.
15. Wugang, ed., “Forum: You Say You Don’t Want a Revolution,” *Global Times (China)*, December 28, 2011, 14.
16. Zhang Wen, “Revolution Goes Soft in Information Age,” “Forum,” ed. Wugang, *Global Times (China)*, December 28, 2011, 14.
17. Raymond Zhou, “Reformed Revolutionary, or Revolutionized Reformist?,” *China Daily*, December 30, 2011, 18.
18. Zhou, “Reformed Revolutionary, or Revolutionized Reformist?,” 18.
19. Zhou, “Reformed Revolutionary, or Revolutionized Reformist?,” 18.
20. At this point, both Chen Wai and Chen Xi have now been jailed for nine and ten years respectively for “subverting state power.”
21. Zhang Guangyi, whose art can be seen in the Shanghai Gallery of Art’s foyer cabinet, but who has criticised how his work had been subjected to “misunderstandings,” and that he was not a “public intellectual,” because, “I simply have no attitude.” See Liu Xiaolin, “King of Pop: I Do Not Judge,” *Shanghai Daily*, November 25, 2011, B6.
22. *Zhang Huan: Q Confucius*, curated by Fumio Nanjo, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 15 October 2011–29 January 2012.
23. Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, *Contemporary Asian Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 29.
24. See Liu Lu, “Changing Frames,” *China Daily*, November 21, 2011, 20; Todd Balazovic, “The Cost of Commercialization,” *China Daily*, November 22, 2011, 19; Zhang Letian and Ge Jianxiang, “What Culture Should We Develop?” *Shanghai Daily*, December 14, 2011, A6.
25. Xu Junqian, “Business in Christmas Decorations Booms,” *China Daily*, November 28, 2011, 16.
26. See *Shanghai The Bund Architectures*, Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration.
27. Tony Wang, personal communication, January 1, 2012.
28. For example, see Eva Shan Chou, “Learning to Read Lu Xun,” 1059.
29. Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, 29–31.
30. Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, 25–35.
31. Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, 43–45.
32. Chou, “Learning to Read Lu Xun,” 1051.
33. Huang Qiaosheng, *A Pictorial Biography of Lu Xun* (Beijing Lu Xun Museum and Henan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2010), 3.
34. Huang Qiaosheng, *A Pictorial Biography of Lu Xun*, 102.
35. Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, 49.
36. Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, 3.
37. For example, on February 7, 1931, a young group of five writers sponsored by Lu Xun were secretly executed with other artists and intellectuals by Chiang Kai-Shek’s nationalist Kuomintang. They were members of the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers: Rou Shi, Hu Yepin, Li Weisen, Yin Fu and Feng Keng. See Li Yuying, *Lu Xun: His Life and Final Residence*, trans. Cai Min (Shanghai: Shanghai Lu Xun Museum, nd), 12.
38. “Commemorating China’s 1911 Revolution: From Sun to Mao to Now,” *The Economist*, October 8, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21531524>.
39. Melissa Chiu, “Zhang Huan: Turn to Traditions,” in *Zhang Huan: Q-Confucius*, cur. Fumio Nanjo, (Shanghai: Rockbund Art Museum, 2011), 87.
40. “Zhang Huan: Q Confucius,” (panel discussion, for the Rockbund Art Museum exhibition, Shanghai Library, Shanghai, October 15, 2011).
41. In relation to Tino Sehgal’s *Taking the Stage OVER* exhibition arranged by an independent curator, Biljana Ciric (in a period when the RAM was closed).
42. Wang Jie, “Confusing Art and Beauty,” *Shanghai Daily*, December 4, 2011, <http://www.shanghaidaily.com>.
43. Mu Qian, “Beginning with a Bang!” *China Daily*, December 20, 2011, 19.
44. Chris Moore, “Made up Interview,” *MadeIn Company*, ed., *Action of Consciousness* (Shanghai: MadeIn Company and ShangArt Gallery), 21.
45. Sam Gaskin, “States of Consciousness,” *Time Out Shanghai*, December 2011, 57.
46. Mathieu Borysevic, “Everything Isn’t Gonna Be Alright,” in *Gao Weingang: Everything Isn’t Gonna Be Alright* (Shanghai: Shanghai Gallery of Art, 2011), 4.
47. J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton An Autobiography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 4.
48. Lu Hsun, *Wild Grass*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1985), 12–13.
49. Lu Feiran, “IKEA Becomes Life of the Party,” *Shanghai Daily*, September 2, 2011.
50. Christopher Crouch, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Visual Culture, Tradition, Modernity, and Globalization* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2010), cover page.
51. Wang Jie, “China Art Palace Will Kick Off with 2012 Biennale,” *Shanghai Daily*, December 30, 2011, A4.
52. Li Er, *The Magician of 1919 and Christmas Eve: Two Stories*, trans. Jane Weizhen Pan and Martin Merz (Hong Kong: Make-Do Publishing, 2011), 9–10, 96.
53. Li Er, *The Magician of 1919*, 17.
54. Chitralekha Basu, “Responding to the Loss of Things,” *China Daily*, March 20, 2012, 19.

Round Table

Reading Exhibitions

Coordinated and edited by Natasha Conland

The purpose of this round table was to engage a range of curators, writers, and artists in the journal's focus on reading as it pertains to exhibition making. The question of "reading exhibitions" springs from discussions the editors have had about the relationship between the exhibition as a physical experience of artworks/objects in real space and the other formats in which an exhibition can be experienced, notably, the catalogue, reviews, etc. The role reading plays in creative, curatorial and critical practice is commonly taken for granted wherever it occurs. The direction of the round table asked participants to consider where there are consumers of exhibitions who do not see the exhibition space proper, and what this means for their reception. Can they be experienced from afar, mediated via the catalogue, or reconstructed via the magazine page? Do these formats extend, delimit or transform the exhibition? In the groundless space of a closed blog-site during a concentrated period participants imagined where reading is situated for today's exhibition makers and viewers. The topic of the round table is not about any particular exhibition. Indeed it asked us to reverse our expectations about the primacy of the exhibition over reading about it.

Natasha Conland, Monday, April 2, 2012. Perhaps I will start with the broadest question first – how does reading influence and affect the exhibition experience? With the abundance of written forms in circulation, is it timely to ask what the relationship might be between the exhibition as a physical experience, with one spatiotemporal dimension, and the exhibition as a written account? Given the volume of email news alone containing previews, reviews, exhibition notices, those who consume exhibitions through word and image alone must grossly outweigh those who experience them in their physical form. Therefore, what possibilities lie in the "read" exhibition? Can an exhibition be experienced solely from afar, as a written account may infer, and if so, what is lost or gained in that experience? How does the proliferation of written material around exhibitions change, add or transform the physical life of an exhibition or its viewing? Indeed, can we be "absorbed" in an exhibition through its written account?

David Cross. To begin, there is clearly an impetus brought about by the increasing desire, on the part of the art world generally, for fluid global interchange with a view to making exhibitions or commissions if not readable, then at least graspable, from afar. Through a nuanced combination of writing that builds a layered sense of what it is to viscerally experience the artwork, and carefully selected documentation, we are now attuned to locating ourselves in never to be seen exhibitions. This does not mean we experience the work, our understanding is guided by a framing of the artwork, particular readings and viewpoints, and photographs deemed iconic. This edited version can be highly evocative and precise in capturing a sense of the experiential, often by colouring in seemingly slight or mundane details, but it is still provisional. The care in which publications are constructed, for multiple viewpoints and multiple readings, and the space they create for the reader to engage and build a version of the exhibition through fragments is really the question.

Christina Barton. Yes, that said, rather than reception after or aside from the fact, in the form of the published record, there is also reading's relationship to conception: what is the relation of an exhibition to a prior text or body of knowledge? I pose this because I am currently working with a colleague to develop a show based on their PhD research. The challenge for them, having viewed but never curated a show before, is to shift from the construction of a linear argument, to the presentation of their subject as a fully spatialised experience.

In thinking this through I have been reminded of the freedom an exhibition poses; its looseness in comparison to the logic of the written pre-text or its documentary postscript. I am not proposing a binary in which one is favoured over the other; rather I'm struck by the relationality between the two. An exhibition wraps meaning around works of art in ways that are mobile, multi-dimensional, inchoate, implicit; it relies on actual, material, kinaesthetic, encounter, while a pre-text gives this experience a specific logic, a rationale, a certain significance. While fixed in time and space, an exhibition is contingent both as an event (that takes place) and as an absence (having taken place). It creates for itself, I would argue, a certain independence from its textual accompaniments; even as its *raison d'être* might be a written precedent.

In discussion with my colleague, I've tried to explain how an exhibition might work. I've proposed that an argument can be embedded in the works themselves, that it emerges through their layout and juxtaposition and in relation to an architectural context, that meanings can extend laterally, bounce off things in a real space. I've suggested that less needs to be said, because the viewer has more cues for thinking their way into and through the content. An exhibition is about creating an impression, generating a feeling, its meaning creeps up on you.

I've also warned that however many directional cues a curator inserts (introductory signage, consecutive arrangement of works, labels that spell out

connections, etc) to govern how the show is read, viewers simply won't be led. You only have to watch how people navigate a space: they will perversely start where you hoped they would finish, or they'll simply wander, taking in virtually nothing of the interpretative material. A show just isn't the same as a book.

I've also questioned the place of pleasure; arguing that an exhibition will "succeed" only if it offers a rich visual experience. I've tried to explain that it is not enough to select a work for evidentiary purposes; you can't use art simply to make a point; there is a difference between an artwork and a document, regardless of the fact that the archival fragment can seduce on the grounds of its status as a relic, its aura as artefact. Works of art as material objects have a power that comes into play when they are encountered for real. They can stop an argument in its tracks and take the discussion entirely elsewhere.

Being forced to explain this has led me to see that the exhibition and its texts are very different discursive terrains. Perhaps the relation between the two is less deterministic than one would suppose; perhaps in fact, one encodes a necessary critique of the other.

NC. In reference to David's comments, I'm interested that we have begun with a discussion of reading's adjectival meaning – its "legibility" – where writing is supposed to play a defining role. Then Tina, those oppositional qualities, the loose, lateral, kinaesthetic effects that you speak of are seldom evoked in the primary written documents for an exhibition, its announcement and calling card. Perhaps they could be, but you are right that there might not be a persuasive argument in the wording. On occasion curators have resisted the pressure to release artist names for as long as possible, precisely because they are believed to give an exhibition more legibility, or identity, the most recent example being Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's *DOCUMENTA* (13).

Curators of exhibitions are often asked for the legible measure of their work: the "key messages", the artist's names, and increasingly textual citations. Certainly curators and their galleries, museums and exhibition venues, are often reliant upon pre-written texts to generate interest in an exhibition, yet any attempt to describe the space of the exhibition while it is yet to be fully formed, falls into fairly standard measures in most pre-view material. There are practical and methodological problems for writers of press releases and preview texts to convey what is or might be going on in the space of an exhibition, yet for many people this is the most they will read of an exhibition. Sometimes you will hear the murmur from afar – that X exhibition is sounding interesting, promising as a result. Yes, provisional, but some kind of die has been cast.

How are people inspired to visit exhibitions and become on-site audiences? Are they attracted to the clarity of an idea in written form, does it strike a chord, does it feel contemporaneous with their own thinking, or do they merely feel envious

about the idea of being somewhere, a space in which something could happen – a limited, one-time-only experience of art, and therefore honouring its time-based or performative aspects. In the social space of art's reception “being there” matters for more than reasons of art alone, this we know, yet the expectations for an exhibition to shift spatial and aesthetic terrain are high. I am curious whether visitors, myself included, have ever imagined an exhibition space before it is experienced, or a work of art prior to viewing it. Could we dream of an exhibition that wasn't a composite of exhibitions we've already seen?

The roguish traits of exhibitions we will seldom admit to (publicly) as exhibition makers – wilful alliances, exploding injustices of representation even in size or scale, representation or resource – as they are distracting to its cogency. But these rough edges are part of the desired experience of being there, if only to measure where our expectations fall short. If, as it seems, the exhibition notice (a simple announcement of dates, title, place, contributors) is to be replaced by an ever extending preview of the ideas, intentions, reference points, alliances – what does this also say of our trust in the viewing public, and the implied fear for that space of native instability, where various peoples walk through art on location, at any given time, under any given conditions?

DC. The contextual information that you speak of, Natasha, (press releases, fliers, project launches etc) are certainly key devices in shaping and building expectations, and I agree they activate an assortment of associations, projections and aspirations so that the exhibition begins to form while we stand at the letterbox reading the invitation or skim read e-flux press release in-between student consultations.

Artists and curators are increasingly aware that there are real risks to leaving the marketing to the experts because of the way in which crucial flavours are imbued at the get-go that build very specific expectations. For Rirkrit Tiravanija's project, *Untitled, 2009 (Pay Attention)* for One Day Sculpture, the announcement card “was” the work, and sought to draw our attention to the increasingly narrow spaces between the marketing (announcing) of an exhibition and the artwork itself with. That project in particular spoke to the role supposedly “nebulous profiling” plays with how we come to frame and locate meanings before we even experience the work. By asking the recipient of the invitation card to pay attention to something (in this case to New Zealand's quirky orange pedestrian crossing signs), Tiravanija effectively and amusingly cut out the middleman thereby activating the work at the very moment we are made aware of it.

CB. I like that idea of an exhibition's “roguish traits”; I know well the surprise of seeing something in a space that was not “there” in the list of works or the conceptual schema, a twist or connection that adds to or skews the curatorial agenda. I also know from my own viewing experiences that what one takes from or makes of a show is often wayward, partial, personal. Reading reviews

of shows one has seen is always salutary in this regard. Take the critical coverage of a large-scale Biennale. One can't help but be pleased when one's own estimation of a particular artist or work is confirmed by the reviewer, as if one has got it "right", but more often than not one senses a mismatch between one's own encounter and that of the accredited critic. Did I miss something, or is there an agenda already in play in those reference points to which you point?

Somewhere in this nexus one discerns the inevitable play between ideas, objects and meanings and the powerful forces that set out to control these. Reading in this sense is a layered exercise, a game of matching words to things as they are encountered in specific situations, in order to understand the curatorial point, and a sussing out of what else is at stake: canon formation, gamesmanship, market pressures, and so on. Ironically, it is the press release that often makes this double reading explicit. The catalogue will often present a discursive frame or extrapolating document, and be immensely useful for this, but its acknowledgements and credits also tell another story.

Terry Smith. *Hi Natasha... Sorry for not being able to get into the blog but a combination of factors (end of semester, bombs threats disrupting everything here in Pittsburgh, and the priority of finishing my book on curating) proved too much. As some small compensation I am offering the round table a reflective excerpt culled from my upcoming book Thinking Contemporary Curating, to be published by DAP for Independent Curators International, New York, in October 2012:*

"...To exhibit is... to bring a selection of such existents... or newly created works of art, into a shared space (that may be a room, a site, a publication, a web portal, or an app) with the aim of demonstrating, primarily through the experiential accumulation of visual connections, a particular constellation of meaning that cannot be made known by any other means. To 'read' an exhibition, then, is to follow the lineaments of the proffered constellation until you grasp its meaning. Of course such meaning, once found, may be parsed in terms other than strictly exhibitionary: art critical, art historical; literary, philosophical, cultural; personal or idiosyncratic; ideological or programmatic – the list is long. But exhibitionary meaning (Walter Benjamin named one aspect of it 'exhibition value,' but now it is a larger idea) is quite specific because it is established and experienced in the space of an exhibition, actual or virtual (virtual includes memory).

"It follows that, broadly speaking, contemporary curating should aim to display some aspect of what it is, or was, or might be, to *be* contemporary as a matter of individual and collective experience. Thus there is a spatial, and phenomenological, horizon for contemporaneity within the exhibition: it is a discursive, epistemological, and dramaturgical space in which various kinds of temporality may be produced or shown to coexist. Enabling viewers to experience an understanding of contemporaneity *in an exhibition setting* (taking 'exhibition' in the broad sense just mentioned, and 'setting' to mean any

appropriate situated context) would, on this reading, be the curatorial equivalent of making contemporaneity visible in the case of art, and of capturing it in writing for publication in the case of criticism and history ...”

...“Reading differently. Can we move beyond the idea that curators mainly give exhibitionary form to art historical and art critical ideas, and that it is these for which we should look in reading an exhibition? Is it not the case that curators have – for decades, at least, and perhaps longer (the history is only just beginning to be put in place) – shaped exhibitions around *curatorial* ideas, and that it is these to which we should attend when reading them? If so, what are these ideas, and is ‘idea’ the right word for them?”

“I begin from a bridging example. In her review of Performa 11, entitled ‘So Big, Performa Now Misses the Point,’ *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith chastises director RoseLee Goldberg for not pushing hard enough at programming events that – in contrast to those that blur the boundaries between theatre and the visual arts in some vague or haphazard manner – fully exemplify and at the same time push at the boundaries of ‘visual art performance.’ This is an art critic holding a curator to account, demanding explicitly that her exhibition be a kind of argument about what is and what is not performance art, or, more specifically, what constitutes a particular kind of performance art that is implied by the term ‘visual art performance.’ Is this fair comment on a real shortfall within an enterprise that is essentially shared by both curator and critic, or an example of an art critic missing a curatorial point?”

Blair French. From the responses to date, I suspect that we generally concur in our understanding of “reading” as an act of making connections across and between elements, to convert sequences and patterns of symbols into meaning. Terry writes of “reading” an exhibition as an act of “follow[ing] the lineaments of the proffered constellation [of exhibits or existents].” I am struck by Tina’s description of the gap between (even the overt and wilful clash of) a curatorial direction on how to read the exhibition (supplied both in textual formats but crucially also in spatial and visual design), and each individual “reading” of an exhibition through its direct encounter – those individuals who wander from intended end to beginning, or slope back and forth across the grammatical structure of the exhibition. This effectively reminds us that each act of reading, of interpretation, is from another perspective one of misreading, of misinterpretation.

David alludes to this differently in writing about the structure of the accompanying (or the stand-in?) publication – how it needs to incorporate multiple viewpoints and perspectives in order to enable an act of what I’ll call connective or reconstructive reading in which each reader in effect assembles a version of the exhibition. This seems to me to be a model of a publication as exhibition rather than linear book, and one that is increasingly adopted for publications

accompanying or paralleling many exhibitions today. There is the Biennale guidebook that, like a travel guidebook, one skips back and forth within, less to find a map through the exhibition than to confirm and give substance to an idiosyncratic path already journeyed. Then there is the project “reader” that sets a social-political context for “reading” the exhibition without directing or engaging in that act of reading. All the guidebook-style publications lining my shelves are from exhibitions I have actually viewed, for the most part with the book in hand. They are maps of sorts, but also memory aids. They don’t “read” the work for me, nor can I very effectively in retrospect read the work or exhibition as a whole through them. Indeed, to do so would be to read an entirely other exhibition given that so many of the images are only indicative of artists’ practices, at least in the minds of curators or artists’ agents who have supplied images prior to their creation within the exhibition in question.

The “readers”, however, I collect more generally as an accumulating body of thought around contemporary art within its multitude of social and political specificities. I have many readers for projects I never physically viewed. They can function entirely independent of the occasion of the art project. In collective form then, they are a gathering of contemporary art readings generated by the occasion of exhibitions, but dependent on the work of art for perhaps nothing more than a set of foundational premises: a form to think from, around and only very occasionally at; a provocation to intervene within an already historical moment; and a situation that levers the resources necessary to give public form to this thinking (to produce the book).

However, if the reader provides an alternate – although now conventional – publication model to that of the catalogue, it is nevertheless generally produced within the productive sphere of the artist project/exhibition.

Helena Reckitt. Thinking about your remarks, it strikes me that the experience of learning about art and exhibitions through textual sources is of particular relevance to art audiences living at a distance from mainstream centres of art making and exhibition. This reminds me of how Sherrie Levine talks of discovering the modern masters through reproductions as an artist growing up in the American Midwest. Feeling several removes from the real thing – and experiencing three-dimensional art as a flat reproduction – filtered into her work in interesting ways. We see the mixture of envy, admiration and longing in her approach to mimicry.

Now we are in a very different culture of appropriation to that of Levine – what has been called the post-Internet era. As the artist/activist Artie Vierkant explained in 2010:

“... Post-Internet is defined as a result of the contemporary moment: inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency,

the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials.

“In the Post-Internet climate, it is assumed that the work of art lies equally in the version of the object one would encounter at a gallery or museum, the images and other representations disseminated through the Internet and print publications, bootleg images of the object or its representations, and variations on any of these as edited and recontextualized by any other author . . . For objects after the Internet there can be no ‘original copy’.”

We recognise the attitude described by Vierkant in the work of artists like Seth Price and Ryan Trecartin – how they matter-of-factly embed the Internet’s processes of sampling, circulation, distribution and repetition into their art. Price wrote about such approaches in his oft-quoted 2002 essay “Dispersion.” More recently, in 2009, Hito Steyerl published “In Defence of the Poor Image,” which considers “the copy in motion . . . the ghost of an image . . . the itinerant image . . . copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.”

Steyerl’s emphasis on the degradation of the image central to post-Internet culture is echoed in the wonderfully apocalyptic opening to artist Oliver Laric’s *Vvversions*, which begins with a voiceover (it also exists in written form):

“Degradation followed display. Reified and emptied, the image was treated like the lowliest of things. Images were broken, burned, toppled, beheaded and hanged. They were spat, pissed and shat on, tossed into toilets, sewers, fountains, canals, rivers, rubble heaps, garbage dumps, pigsties and charnel houses, and lewdly handled in brothels and inns. Stone statues were used as cobblestones, keystones and infill, or were modified to represent something new.”

In this context I find Tina’s albeit eloquent and articulate discussion of making and visiting exhibitions somewhat nostalgic. Is there really “a difference between an artwork and a document”, as Tina suggests? Doesn’t that buy into rather old-fashioned ideas of artistic aura? Isn’t the exhibition a format in which things that have not been defined as ‘art’ already can take on art-like qualities?

CB. My comments are partly driven by the fact that my most intense responses to exhibitions are when I am travelling and outside my own context and encountering things “for real”. It is only then that I have the feeling I am gaining some tenuous hold of “what is going on”. I also understand that we can never entirely embrace the “event”, or be there in some unmediated, primary sense. Reading, scanning the internet, only go so far to ameliorating that sense of disconnect.

And I must admit, I enjoy looking in the bookshop after seeing the show almost as much; and my choice of souvenir, which book I buy, becomes a highly

charged decision: how heavy is it, how expensive, to what extent do I want to secure my memories of this moment by owning the accompanying document, does this book interest me in terms of my wider research interests? Such decisions are carefully weighed and add to the total experience. In “The Incunabulum and the Plastic Bag” Maria Fusco calls book buying of this kind the “distinct commercial sublimation of our relationship with the art object in a gallery context” and the “arbiter of meaningful participation” (in *A Manual for the 21st-Century Art Institution* (Whitechapel, 2009)).

HR. Yes, our habits of exhibition viewing are changing. Boris Groys, in “Comrades of Time,” describes how “Contemporary spectators are spectators on the move; primarily, they are travellers. Contemporary *vita contemplativa* coincides with permanent active circulation. The act of contemplation itself functions today as a repetitive gesture that can not and does not lead to any result – to any conclusive and well-founded aesthetic judgement...”

Anja Isabel Schneider, one of my students at Goldsmiths, recently curated *Formes Breves, Austres, 25 / Formas Breves, OTRAS, 25* for the Franc Lorraine and MARCO, Vigo. This group show including text-based art and art that mimicked forms of reading and of writing in order to explore the fragmentary, partial, interrupted and non-linear ways in which we read today. It seems that we read text on a screen very differently from that on a page, our eyes scanning to take in the whole rather than reading line-by-line.

CB. At this point, Kate, as an artist who has actively used both text and publications, I'd really like to know how you negotiate the reading experience? Does your work become a response to certain conditions of reception; to what extent can a work anticipate or undermine a reading implied by a curatorial brief?

Kate Newby. I think a lot how much to say, what is generous, or what is just overstating the fact in the reception of the work. Often I've enjoyed having less said about things, and fewer directives to point things out, because I've been constantly reminded and taught that the viewer is often smarter and more capable than I think they are. In various gallery or public spaces I get excited by the prospect of the viewer encountering and responding to the situations I create in their own way. Perhaps this means that a lot of people may miss things or not see it in its fullest most described form, but from my experience when they do feel engaged this viewer comes up with surprising observations and responses.

Having said that, I do think it's important not be too oblique and to provide a necessary amount of cues for understanding the work. I think I navigate this by using a lot of things I see getting used in the world outside of the gallery in the work itself. An example of this might be seen in the concrete ramp I did recently for the Auckland Art Gallery, *I'm just like a pile of leaves* (2011). It didn't feel

obscure to me to make a concrete floor, with the intention that it be walked over, it's present in our lives every day. But I would often watch people unsure as to whether they could walk on it. Some felt fine and seemed to have an immediate sense of what to do with it and would have no problem walking over the ramp as they would any other floor. Others just walked around it and looked from a distance. I wasn't sad when this happened, I was just interested in creating a situation where the viewer had to make a lot of decisions on their own about the work.

I think publications can be amazing for expanding the work, but I often try to push for a write up of the work that is loose. It is mostly a very different thing for me, the publication and the exhibition. A lot of times the work literally becomes something different in a photograph (sadly, sometimes this is better!). It seems like an interesting time to stretch out and use supporting material to speak to the core factors but often I like to do this through associated material, not direct images and texts.

I've been quite interested in a space here in New York called The Artist's Institute. They have a "season" of one artist at a time that runs for six months but with three changes of the work. At the moment it's Rosemarie Trockel. I've been going to film screenings there that she has chosen as significant for her. Nothing I have seen has spoken to her work in a direct way. This is what I like to happen in the accompanying publication to an exhibition, these are the things that make the work exciting and expansive.

BF. Kate's comment regarding the Rosemarie Trockel selected screenings provides an interesting example of how art institutions are trying to find increasingly dynamic ways of publicly recognising and presenting – almost performing – the complexity of the contexts that artists themselves perceive and build around their work, including through publication. There is of course the simple conveying of artist perspectives and opinions – through interviews with curators, educators and writers who filter these into formal writing, through public talks, or audio and video commentary in gallery spaces and online. But increasingly common are the artist-curated film programs, the artist-selected reading lists and reading groups, the published lists of what artists might be reading, watching or listening to. Some of this slips into personality profiling, a step-away from Sunday magazine supplement or in-flight airline magazine. But at the more sophisticated end of the spectrum, these approaches layer potential readings of and around work in a manner that simply cannot be achieved by a singular textual approach. Rather than using reading as a means to "make sense" of the work, they actually complicate encounters with and understandings of the work.

Of course, there's always the possibility that such contextualisation can appear incredibly obtuse and befuddling – or just too contrived and clever by half.

There is also the possibility that it becomes a stand-in for the research-based, intellectual, interpretative activity that is being squeezed out of writer/curator roles within a corporatised art world. However, it mostly seems to me to rehearse in public the non-linear, improvisational, bowerbird manner by which most artists draw from the world about them. Much like the rest of us. This is a very different way of “reading” the exhibition, or reading with the exhibition, but Kate is reflecting the value of the looseness and potentiality it can produce, at best in addition to, rather than in place of, more traditional writing and reading approaches.

HR. Kate, you mention how The Artist’s Institute – a small space on the Lower East Side run by curator Antony Huberman under the auspices of Hunter College – attempts to create conditions for encounters with art outside written interpretation. As you say, they show a small number of works by one artist for longer than the usual exhibition run – they present just two shows a year – and provide multiple meetings and encounters around those works. In his 2007 polemic “I (Not) Love Information,” Huberman writes: “Now more so than ever: the efficiency, quantity and immediacy of information and information-systems has placed art and the artistic gesture at risk of being identified, categorized, digested, cannibalized and made into information before it has a chance to begin being art. Curiosity is being castrated by information.” Phallic imagery aside, an interesting quote, I think!

As a former Education Director for a New York museum and a Curator of Contemporary Art in a provincial US museum, Huberman probably has plenty of experience of having to explain what art or exhibitions are “about” – as Natasha puts it, to say what is going on before a show has even opened. Huberman’s defence of curatorial curiosity resists putting art at the service of meaning or content, celebrating a radical pedagogic approach that borrows and expands on current interest in Jacques Rancière’s idea of the “ignorant schoolteacher”.

KN. Referring to Huberman’s quote I want to say I’m extremely interested to think about the push for art to be understood as efficiently as possible and how this is potentially not so helpful for the work. I guess it’s an interesting challenge – this idea of information ripping around the art work so quickly and in many ways intended to help clarify things that it ends up telling the art work what it is before the work has had a chance to exist and wonder what it is for itself, or us for it. Is it about slowing things down, or speaking about them differently? In less fixed terms or just less terms?

Megan Tamati-Quennell. For me I have been enjoying writing that has an independence, connected to the exhibition, but laterally. It’s not the kind of writing you can “read” an exhibition through, though. I am thinking of writing by people like Jimmie Durham, Cushla Parekowhai and Paul Chaat Smith, or

bodies of pre-existing text selected to sit in an exhibition catalogue that have some resonance with exhibition or the artist, curator etc.

TS. [again from excerpts] . . . “Exhibiting the Unanticipated. What about the uncertain, hoped for, or unanticipated consequence that arises from the fact that an exhibition is not fully realised until it is presented in a particular place and time? Unexpected connections present themselves when works are hung within sight of each other. The narrative of an exhibition changes, in subtle and sometimes major ways, when it is installed in another venue. Taking a risk on showing a work not yet complete, or one not fully known, can skew the impact of the whole. These are important aspects of many exhibitions: opportunities that the best curators take advantage of when it presents itself, and underscore for visitors. It is one of the factors that distinguish curating from art criticism and art history, although not of course from art itself.

“In the 1988 Australian Biennale, Nick Waterlow focused on the provincialism problem (a problem for white artists). He only partly anticipated the impact of The Aboriginal Memorial, an installation of 200 hollow log coffins painted by indigenous men from Ramingining, a small settlement in the Northern Territory. These were being made in the months before the exhibition, and had their first showing there. They amounted to a counter-memorial, an oblique but quite deliberate critique of the yearlong official celebrations of the Bicentennial of the settlement of the continent by British colonists. They evoked the subsequent suffering of the Aboriginal people, as well as affirming their persistence, not least through such flowerings of their visual culture. Added late in the planning via the intervention of Djon Mundine, an indigenous art adviser, shown in one of the Piers that extends out over Sydney Harbour, and mediated by a ceremony that the painters performed on opening night, The Aboriginal Memorial became, as Waterlow acknowledged, ‘the single most important statement in the Biennale’, highlighting his belief that ‘for many artists, particularly in this century, the Aboriginal presence is the most civilizing and creatively challenging element in our world’. [Quoted from the Biennale catalogue] While this instance of curatorial openness to a crucial artistic manifestation of a key factor in contemporary life is at least documented, how many other moments of similar consequence have disappeared from the record because of the strange reluctance of curators to record the results of their labours?”

NC. Picking up on Terry’s remarks on the “disappeared record” of an exhibition’s unexpected effect, or “live” qualities, I want to draw into our discussion a reference to an example from contemporary New Zealand’s art history whereby the official record (the catalogue), with text that pre-dated the exhibition’s opening, came to powerfully influence readings of a milestone exhibition. It is 20 years since *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* opened at the MCA, Sydney (March 1992). This was the inaugural exhibition at the MCA. It was staged to self-reflexively revise the notion of a regional perspective within an international

setting. In fact *Headlands* meant something different for Sydneysiders who were able to see the show, and New Zealanders who more often read about it.

For many New Zealanders at least, this show was a cultural catalyst while its dissemination operated largely through the controversial catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, through review and reaction. The publication and published responses to the exhibition factionalised the art community in New Zealand, particularly with respect to issues of cultural appropriation and resulted in the serious scaling back of a proposed tour of the exhibition. It continues to catalyse debate as de facto textbook for contemporary New Zealand art history. And yet, according to one of the curators of the exhibition, Robert Leonard, its relation to the show itself was self-consciously tenuous and provocative. As Blair's describes, it was perhaps closer to a "reader" than a catalogue.

I was struck recently in a conversation with Robert, when he referred to the "style" of the exhibition hang, how that itself had been an influential in setting new adjacencies outside historic associations of artists, in fact even perversely dislocating this history. I got the impression that the curators had deliberately created a pepper-potting of artistic style and influence in order to accentuate exhibition themes in what he now referred to as his now outmoded postmodern impulse. The conversation was late at night and we were both tired, but I got a better impression of the *Headlands* show than I'd ever had, by his comical reference to the process of toying with the nation's art history, with slides over a light-box, reorganising through the layout and the organisation of space.

What therefore remains of *Headlands* the event? The nature of this exhibition is now determined not only by the published record, its reception, and the ongoing discourse it generates, but surviving memories of the show itself. This is but one local example and there are others internationally where the catalogue holds sway over the memory of its exhibition.

BF. I, too, never saw *Headlands*, and my experience of it was at even further distance as I was living in the UK at the time. Thus even my experience of the intense debate that the exhibition and particularly publication generated was at a significant remove. In what were to all intents and purposes pre-Internet days (and pre-online book purchasing days) my received impression of the exhibition was in the first instance formed through the few magazines and cuttings I was sent.

I returned to New Zealand at the very end of 1993 with fully formed preconceptions (subsequently exploded) regarding the catalogue as much as the exhibition. To a large extent the catalogue was *the* story, not so much a stand-in for the exhibition (and so I never carried the assumption of it being somehow appropriately or accurately representative of the exhibition) but the very occasion itself. And yet this occasion was re-read (interpreted) essentially through various media strands. This makes me think about how it might be not only the catalogue that

forms or dominates historical memory, but the various threads of critical reception that as a body of text we read in order to establish our own points of connection between, agreement with and resistance to multiple perspectives and viewpoints.

Choice! (1990), is another exhibition from around the same time that exists similarly in my consciousness as an absolutely critical juncture in contemporary art in New Zealand. Again, my reading of its importance is based neither on experience of the physical exhibition nor a specific accompanying publication but via a plethora of received commentaries – some formal, many not – that historically come to mesh with its curatorial premise.

DC. Like Blair I did not see *Headlands* and was only vaguely aware of it in Melbourne at the time. I do however distinctly remember having a copy of the catalogue thrust into my hand almost upon entry to New Zealand in 2000. An artist friend (who was not in the show) saw it as something of an induction manual to contemporary New Zealand art. I was a little nonplussed by its canonical status at first but the quality of the work was certainly strong and surprisingly focused for a national survey where the pressures to show “the full buffet” was somehow resisted. The choice of artists and writers meant to locate key strands of New Zealand art was not diluted by an imperative for too much breadth which was an amazingly acute if controversial decision by the curatorial team. The essays certainly located a breadth of practices with some rigour and above all they felt quite confident and sharp, if a tad straightforwardly postmodern. Of course *Headlands* was highly partisan and only in subsequent years has it become apparent (for a recent arrival like me anyway) how many important artists missed their moment in the sun because they could not be accommodated in the limited suite of clusters and categories.

I always think of the René Block’s Biennale of Sydney, *Readymade Boomerang* (1990) as an example of a catalogue that was as big, literally and metaphorically, as the show. Those famous words “Art is Easy” plastered across the largest pink catalogue I had ever seen was quite something for an undergraduate student wondering how I was supposed to cart the thing back on the bus to Melbourne. On reading Block’s introduction where he spoke about how at a Sydney Opera House concert quite late in the piece he made the decision to remove a large swag of the project, it was amusing to speculate how big the catalogue would have been if he had not had to face up to a significant budget shortfall. Not only did the catalogue speak to an enormous sense of confidence in Australian art at the time, it positioned Duchamp in a global context that included this region as at least a node within the bigger picture. I remember shards of the exhibition like seeing Broodthaers for the first time and great Manzoni but somehow the catalogue is right there front and centre as a work in itself with its full page plates, texts by Fluxus artists and Block’s myth-making curatorial statement. Maybe it’s just a detail but I rarely see the 1990 Biennale catalogue in second hand shops in Australia.

MT-Q. I did see *Headlands* when it was exhibited in Wellington at the National Art Gallery. Having started at the National Art Gallery as an intern in 1990, by 1992 I was a trainee art curator guided by Tim Walker, the then Senior Art Curator and under Director, Jenny Harper. The exhibition itself with its mix of works from Laurence Aberhart, Jeffery Harris, L. Budd, Derrick Cherry, Julian Dashper, Colin McCahon, Milan Mrkusich and Rita Angus amongst others made an impact on me, but perhaps more particularly, so did works like *Nga Morehu* by Shona Rapira Davies, Ralph Hotere and Bill Culbert's *Pathway to the Sea, Aramoana*, Para Matchitt's *Tunga Waka* and Michael Parekowhai's work *Everyone Will Live Quietly*. From a Māori perspective *Headlands* was the first major contemporary art exhibition with a recognised bicultural perspective, including the curatorial involvement of Cliff Whiting, and contemporary taonga from the likes of Rangimarie Hetet and Lyonel Grant. Here contemporary Māori art sat alongside modern and contemporary New Zealand art.

While in retrospect the catalogue sits aside from the exhibition, it noticeably took that bicultural dimension further. This is marked by the interview with Cliff, who utilises concepts like *Turangawaewae*, which I saw as an attempt to ground the art work both in the New Zealand landscape *and* cultural location which had not been seen in other catalogues of New Zealand art to date. The chronology at the back of the catalogue charted significant moments, events, national figures and organisations in art, including Māori art. Then there was Rangi Panoho's essay. Rangi was arguably the first full-time contemporary Māori art curator in the country. While Ngahua te Awekotuku may have preceded him with her projects at the Waikato Museum of Art and History, he was certainly the first contemporary Māori art curator I knew. At the time, I don't think I completely understood the controversy that erupted over his essay "Maori: At the Centre, On The Margins," or the purportedly essentialist position he took in relation to artists Gordon Walters and Theo Schoon's work. I did wonder though how it happened, why there was no counter argument published in the catalogue to neutralise or provide another view. If the essay was so divisive and it was known it would be, why was it published...?

Ultimately for me the catalogue sat aside from the exhibition. It was not evocative or directly reflective of the exhibition. It is a reader that could be added to the exhibition experience, existing independently from the exhibition with enough depth and breadth to give you a sense of what *Headlands* attempted to achieve and provide an expanded experience of New Zealand art.

CB. Reading from one exhibition to another is also an important means to establish meaning and value. In comparison with *Distance Looks our Way*, an exhibition of contemporary New Zealand art that was also designed as an "export" show and which took place almost exactly at the same time, *Headlands* set out to address the nature of New Zealand art practice as it had evolved in the second half of the twentieth century, using artworks to posit arguments of

various kinds. There was nothing wrong with *Distance Looks our Way*, but in comparison to *Headlands*, its failure to tackle the larger issues that were shaping art in New Zealand relegated it, in my mind, to a minor status; a pleasing showcase pitched appropriately for an occasion where nations show off their wares, it offered a selection of “one-offs” that were unique because they hailed from somewhere. That *Headlands* remains hijacked by reactions to one of these curatorial propositions (the Walters’s saga) was disappointing, but not without its lasting consequences. It also gave rise to one of the most vigorous debates this culture has ever had to contend with. *Headlands* mattered, I suppose, because it was discursively rich and it had a sense of its own historicity.

BF. The relationship of “outside” readings of an exhibition with its gradual dispersal into and as history is something we necessarily pay constant attention to at Artspace. We commission and publish critical reflections upon our own projects. These appear not alongside the exhibition project – as explanatory or promotional – but subsequent to it, distanced from it, with all that implies regarding a detached, independent perspective. They appear in our own periodical so we are, in effect, ensuring that the work triggers some form of textual rumination. The periodical is intended as something akin to the reader I mentioned earlier – here occasioned by the event but not in the sense of single, isolated projects but their accumulation into a program. We are, in a sense, attempting to produce an external reading context for our own program, with all the contradiction and compromise that such an endeavor necessarily entails.

Historically, this issue has been most concentrated through the example of the critical readers Artspace produced in response to each Biennale of Sydney from 1998 through to 2006. This was an initiative of my predecessor Nicholas Tsoutas in response to a perceived absence of sustained critical discourse generated either by or in response to the Biennale. The idea as I understood it was to commission rapid response texts by a wide range of writers, subject them to minimal editorial intervention, do a basic in-house design, print, collate and staple bind and have these quite substantial but very simply produced publications out on the street within roughly a week of the Biennale opening. They were in effect intended as insertions back into the viewing experience of the Biennale, as provocations to the evolving discussions taking place in and around the exhibition. And in this regard they were, I believe, extremely important and highly successful. They called for writers to provide their first, almost off-the-cuff thoughts on the Biennale – to think aloud as if in a form of conversation. They were produced entirely independently of the mechanics of the Biennale itself (although Artspace was also an exhibiting venue for those Biennales), and yet for a relatively specialist audience they became a crucial element of the initial reading of the exhibitions. Their necessarily rudimentary production qualities emphasised their somewhat provisional quality, as did the frequently provocative commentary within. Inasmuch as they came to form part of the memory of

those Biennales it was a memory of the immediacy of the moment of gathering around and within the event in some discursive manner. Beyond that they could only ever be partial historical records of the exhibition form itself.

However in 2006 we decided to tie the Biennale critical reader more closely to our developing publication program by significantly increasing its production values. Writers still had the same brief regarding “thinking aloud” and turning critical responses around in a very short period of time, but the production process took longer so the book – as it turned out to be – became less of an insertion into the conversational and critical framework of the Biennale than an entity that appeared to stand outside and slightly after the event. It came to assume the guises of both historical record and critical summation of the Biennale – two roles it was never intended to fulfil. This gap between textual intention and the material form of the publication in effect produced a potential misreading of the book as authoritative account, with attendant dangers should it ever in fact come to “hold sway over the memory of its exhibition.”

NC. Blair, in the final words of your entry on the Biennale critical reader, you mention that, when the publication was formalised through higher print values and standard book production timeline it shifted into the territory of the “historical record”. I’m interested in whether these formal changes affected the writing style, or their sense of readership? In the early editions, both writer and reader are still literally in the room, whereas later, while they write during an exhibition it is for a reader no longer in the room.

BF. In many ways, the earlier critical readers embodied the approach and tone we would now associate with online writing, including the art blog. Texts were rapidly written, often informal in tone and pitched immediately back into the exhibition format as you note, rather than standing apart, but also with the intention (and effect) of dispersing that immediate response as widely as possible beyond the exhibition. They shared the temporal coordinates of the exhibition but an expanded territory of reader contact. These are all things we now associate with online platforms, and were beginning to do so certainly by 2006. Perhaps then the online realm necessitates a refinement of the printed form – a considered rationale for its presence. Put simply, there’s an implication that any text being granted a print format, however rudimentary, is necessarily being marked for a form of independent life and historical significance. And so a writer will most likely approach the text accordingly, however implicitly, even unconsciously that is done.

HR. From this discussion it’s clear that talking, as much as writing, determines an exhibition’s fate. Natasha’s example of *Headlands* seems like a good example. While it sounds like the exhibition catalogue played a key role in the show’s dissemination, it was the talk that it provoked that guaranteed its controversy and its ongoing impact. I think of similarly once-reviled but now influential

exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), or the so-called “PC” Whitney Biennale of 1993 (dubbed by Roberta Smith “the Reading While Standing Up Biennial”). Pascal Gielen terms the kind of talk, speculation, opinion-casting and gossip that fuels the art world as “the murmuring of the multitude.”

As an aside, I also think it’s interesting that we are conducting this conversation online – a format that I value for bring together people in different places with zero carbon footprint, but that can be difficult in practice. It’s challenging to read the tone and affect in online contributions. Some kinds of “reading” are better done face-to-face.

NC. OK, although there is no doubt more to be said in relation to *Headlands* and the interplay of lasting published accounts versus improvisational publications, I want to start a final conversation thread. This relates to the more challenging definitions of “greatness”. I think we all have in mind someone we might consider a “great reader”, but what are the characteristics of a great reader with respect to the exhibition-going experience, what are they doing and how are they behaving? How do you imagine this person operating – their behaviours even. This question relates not just to what they read, but also how, when, where etc? Are there attitudes and values that still apply to this question but need to be readdressed or considered? Lastly, for exhibition makers, or critics of exhibitions, who is your “reader” as opposed to viewer, or can they in fact be separable?

BF. They can be separated, even as they function within a single individual. This is a simplistic distinction, I know, but I think it has some merit. The ideal viewer is attuned to the moment of encounter with the exhibition and to the material detail of the work. The key subjects in this relationship are simply the work and the viewer at a particular time in a particular place. So the ideal viewer is one who gives the attention and the time to allow this relationship to unfold, to grow and shift. In some ways the act of viewing here takes place at a micro level. On the other hand, the ideal reader expands those subjects to include the potentially immense intellectual, cultural and historical sphere beyond the form of the work and/or exhibition itself. For me the reader acts to position the work and/or exhibition within these wider spheres – often speculatively. The reader makes arguments for and against its broader, particularly historical, significance. The reader summarises meaning, value and effect and sets these into play culturally. The reader takes in the big picture. They play a crucial role in opening work and/or exhibition out onto the world. It might be said that the ideal reader can only exist with or build upon the figure and activity of the ideal viewer. But then, there have been some extraordinary readers (or readings), or exhibitions, that have completely by-passed or even refuted their viewing.

MT-Q. I think they can be separate too. I am not sure who the ideal or great reader is, perhaps their characteristics change depending on the exhibition and

experience offered. For me when developing an exhibition those ideal readers are engaged in viewing the exhibition, but perhaps want to gain a different entry in to the work, the artist, the curatorial premise of the exhibition etc. The viewer who wants a level of detail or an expanded or broader context (intellectual, cultural or historical) as Blair outlines, that which cannot be gained solely through the act of viewing. An exhibition can be “read” from afar because of the writing created for it, the catalogue, blog or web text or other forms, but, I don’t think this way replaces the actual full experience of an exhibition. Writing provides additional or other experience but cannot reproduce the moment of being in a particular place at a particular time.

HR. “Great readers,” of course, need “great writers,” which raises a problem that many curators face today. As the institutional belief in ambitious scholarly exhibitions gives way to demands for spectacle, celebrity and event, curators often receive little time to read or research around their projects, let alone to develop their writing. Blair as you have already noted, there is a danger that the proliferation of alternative approaches to audience education and interaction become a “stand-in for the research-based, intellectual, interpretative activity that is being squeezed out of writer/curator roles within a corporatised art world.” In response to the erasure of curators’ time to read, write and reflect, some institutions – like the Artist’s Institute or the Showroom in London – are breaking away from gruelling exhibition schedules to redefine their focus on research, enquiry and participation.

NC. It seems then, that we are arguing to separate out not only the activities of viewing, and reading, but also their associated qualities of “action” and “reflection”. What I sense throughout the conversation is also some distinction attributed to the time necessary for these activities – that the exhibition allows for tangential, fluid time, as opposed to reading which cultivates linear, productive time – albeit with the possible interruption of web-based platforms which Helena argues allow a more discursive reading time.

To my detriment perhaps I often notice myself reading sideways, thinking of other things, “brainstorming” while reading the best of texts. I think many of us do this, and it is what makes us readers “inside” rather than “outside” our topic, it helps us inhabit not only the space of reading, but also our subject (the exhibition). Rather than reading utilising a space “outside” or distanced from the exhibition, I would argue that it is certainly a space independent from the exhibition. It has the potential to exercise your thinking in a way that is sometimes impossible under endurance viewing, or with “gallery legs”. Moments of consequence inevitably come from a union of these functions. We just cannot see everything, and while we can download and reappropriate individual artworks at leisure, we cannot link them in to each other contemporaneously online as yet. Therefore, to “see” more, we rely on the conjunction of words, ours and others.

168.169

ARCHIVE

Reading (2012)

Layla Rudneva-Mackay

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

To be honest, I haven't read for months. My computer has been on the blink; I have bought a new one and am waiting for the new specialist software to arrive which I use to read and write. I read. Not well. I don't read really. My computer reads to me. That's how I read. ... Someone tells me about a good book, I

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... 2:36 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, the window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". Below the title bar is a menu bar with options: File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. Underneath the menu bar is a toolbar with icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. Below the toolbar is a status bar showing "Continuous" (with a dropdown arrow), "by Word" (with a dropdown arrow), "at 125 WPM" (with a dropdown arrow), "@Arial Unicode MS" (with a dropdown arrow), "50" (with a dropdown arrow), and "B I U Single Spaced" (with a dropdown arrow). The main area of the window contains a large text box with the following text: "To be honest, I haven't read for months. My computer has been on the blink; I have bought a new one and am waiting for the new specialist software to arrive which I use to read and write. I read. Not well. I don't read really. My computer reads to me. That's how I read. ... Someone tells me about a good book, I". At the bottom right of the text box, it says "Page 1". At the very bottom of the screen is the Windows taskbar, showing the Start button, several application icons, and the system tray with the time "2:36 p.m." and the taskbar title "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla...".

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

scan every page into my computer and it reads it to me. It's a time-consuming process. I understand, and people often say, what about talking books? e-books? There is lots out there these days, but I guess what I want to read is not out there yet. I emphasize the word yet, because I believe it will be one day.

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:37 p.m.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

What I want is to know stuff; I feel I don't have time to read for pleasure. Many of the audio and e-books are I guess what I would call 'pleasure reading' books. Pleasure reading and privilege sit comfortably together somewhat out of my reach. I mean you are privileged, if you can read for pleasure.

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:38 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, the title bar reads "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". Below it is a menu bar with "File", "Edit", "Scan", "Read", "View", "Tools", "Reference", "Window", "Online", and "Help". A toolbar contains icons for "New", "Open", "Save", "Print", "Back", "Read", "Forward", "Check", "Predict", "Definition", "Synonym", and "Help". Below the toolbar is a status bar with settings: "Continuous" (dropdown), "by Word" (dropdown), "at 125 WPM" (text), "@Arial Unicode MS" (font dropdown), "50" (font size dropdown), "B" (bold), "I" (italic), "U" (underline), and "Single Spaced" (dropdown). The main text area contains a paragraph: "What I want is to know stuff; I feel I don't have time to read for pleasure. Many of the audio and e-books are I guess what I would call 'pleasure reading' books. Pleasure reading and privilege sit comfortably together somewhat out of my reach. I mean you are privileged, if you can read for pleasure." At the bottom right of the text area, it says "Page 1". The Windows taskbar at the very bottom shows the Start button, several application icons, and the system tray with the time "2:38 p.m."

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

Sometimes I scan a whole book into the computer, start listening, and realise that I hate the book or just have no interest in it. Finding things to read is pretty hard, I mean a book that I want to read. I find it hard to tell people what I want to read; maybe this is because I don't really know what there is out there

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:39 p.m.

The image shows a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. The window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". The menu bar includes File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. The toolbar contains icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. The status bar shows "Continuous" by "Word" at "125 WPM" using "@Arial Unicode MS" font size "50", with "B" (bold) and "U" (underline) options, and "Single Spaced" line spacing. The main text area contains a paragraph: "Sometimes I scan a whole book into the computer, start listening, and realise that I hate the book or just have no interest in it. Finding things to read is pretty hard, I mean a book that I want to read. I find it hard to tell people what I want to read; maybe this is because I don't really know what there is out there". The bottom status bar shows "Page 1" and the Windows taskbar with the time "2:39 p.m."

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dyslexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

to read, or even what I want to read is called. I guess it's just like stumbling. Stumbling across books – which in my understanding is what most people do – but also stumbling through books. It has not been a very easy process becoming a reader. Over the years my want to read, has been a huge effort, getting to

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:41 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, there is a title bar that reads "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dyslexia.doc]". Below the title bar is a menu bar with options: File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. Underneath the menu bar is a toolbar containing icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. Below the toolbar is a status bar showing "Continuous" (with a dropdown arrow), "by Word" (with a dropdown arrow), "at 125 WPM" (with a dropdown arrow), "@Arial Unicode MS" (with a dropdown arrow), "50" (with a dropdown arrow), and "Single Spaced" (with a dropdown arrow). The main area of the window is a large white rectangle containing the text: "to read, or even what I want to read is called. I guess it's just like stumbling. Stumbling across books – which in my understanding is what most people do – but also stumbling through books. It has not been a very easy process becoming a reader. Over the years my want to read, has been a huge effort, getting to". At the bottom of the window, there is a taskbar with several icons, including the Windows logo, and a system tray on the right showing the time "2:41 p.m." and the text "Page 1".

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

the place where I can use software, but also using the software is not as easy as I would like it to be. It's not and never will be just like picking up a book and flicking through some pages to get an idea about what's in it.

Walking into the Reading Room. First. The feeling that I know well, that fits

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:42 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. The window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". The menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "Scan", "Read", "View", "Tools", "Reference", "Window", "Online", and "Help". The toolbar contains icons for "New", "Open", "Save", "Print", "Back", "Read", "Forward", "Check", "Predict", "Definition", "Synonym", and "Help". Below the toolbar, there are several dropdown menus: "Continuous", "by Word", "at 125 WPM", "@Arial Unicode MS", "50", "B", "I", "U", and "Single Spaced". The main text area contains two paragraphs. The first paragraph discusses the difficulty of using software compared to reading a book. The second paragraph describes the feeling of walking into a reading room. The status bar at the bottom right shows "Page 1". The Windows taskbar at the very bottom shows the system tray with the time "2:42 p.m." and several application icons.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

quite low in my stomach. Somehow I push past it to engage with what's around me. I sit and wait for my meeting, and think about how I'm feeling in this library. Oh, I am looking around at the books and I wonder what's inside them. I wonder what interesting things I cannot, and will not probably ever know.

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:42 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, there is a title bar that reads "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". Below this is a menu bar with options: File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. A toolbar follows, containing icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. Below the toolbar is a status bar with various settings: "Continuous" (dropdown), "by Word" (dropdown), "at" (dropdown), "125 WPM" (numeric input), "@Arial Unicode MS" (font dropdown), "50" (numeric input), "B" (bold icon), "/" (italic icon), "U" (underline icon), and "Single Spaced" (dropdown). The main area of the window contains a large block of text in a black, sans-serif font. The text reads: "quite low in my stomach. Somehow I push past it to engage with what's around me. I sit and wait for my meeting, and think about how I'm feeling in this library. Oh, I am looking around at the books and I wonder what's inside them. I wonder what interesting things I cannot, and will not probably ever know." At the bottom of the window, there is a taskbar with several icons, including the Windows logo, and a system tray on the right showing the time as "2:42 p.m." and the page number "Page 1".

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

I wonder if my drift, my apparent lack of knowledge of my field will show. I often wonder this. Who can see the mad currents of my thought? Can you see that I don't know lots of things I'm supposed to? It's not for the lack of want or the lack of trying. It really is just for my lack of reading. My lack, oh yes

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:44 p.m.

Detailed description: This is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. The window title is 'Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]'. The menu bar includes File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. The toolbar contains icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. The status bar shows 'Continuous' reading mode, 'Word' as the unit, a speed of '125 WPM', the font '@Arial Unicode MS', a size of '50', and 'Single Spaced' line spacing. The main text area contains a paragraph of text. The taskbar at the bottom shows the Windows logo, several open applications, and the system clock at 2:44 p.m.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

lacking I hate on you. I do not read well,
I am lacking. I think about lacking. I
think about wanting. I think about hiding.
I think about walking out before my
meeting starts. I think about Bilal
Khebeiz's words. I think about me living
here in New Zealand still wanting to
read, and I think about him in exile,

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:44 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, the window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". Below the title bar is a menu bar with options: File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. Underneath the menu bar is a toolbar with icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. Below the toolbar is a status bar showing "Continuous" as the reading mode, "by Word" as the unit, "at 125 WPM" as the speed, "@Arial Unicode MS" as the font, "50" as the size, and "Single Spaced" as the line spacing. The main text area contains a paragraph of text: "lacking I hate on you. I do not read well, I am lacking. I think about lacking. I think about wanting. I think about hiding. I think about walking out before my meeting starts. I think about Bilal Khebeiz's words. I think about me living here in New Zealand still wanting to read, and I think about him in exile,". At the bottom right of the text area, it says "Page 1". The Windows taskbar is visible at the very bottom, showing the Start button, several open application icons, and the system tray with the time "2:44 p.m."

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

saying "our current time has no room for readers anymore..." and that he can't find a "perfect" place for reading. I think how lucky I am to live in a place where if I could, I would read, and people around me do read. Then I feel myself letting in lack again that lacking that I can't read, and the people around me can. I live in

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:45 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, the title bar reads "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". Below it is a menu bar with "File", "Edit", "Scan", "Read", "View", "Tools", "Reference", "Window", "Online", and "Help". A toolbar contains icons for "New", "Open", "Save", "Print", "Back", "Read", "Forward", "Check", "Predict", "Definition", "Synonym", and "Help". Below the toolbar is a status bar with settings: "Continuous" (dropdown), "by Word" (dropdown), "at 125 WPM" (slider), "@Arial Unicode MS" (font dropdown), "50" (size dropdown), "B" (bold), "/" (italic), "U" (underline), and "Single Spaced" (dropdown). The main text area contains a paragraph: "saying 'our current time has no room for readers anymore...' and that he can't find a 'perfect' place for reading. I think how lucky I am to live in a place where if I could, I would read, and people around me do read. Then I feel myself letting in lack again that lacking that I can't read, and the people around me can. I live in". The bottom of the window shows a taskbar with "Page 1" on the right and a system tray with "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla...", "Document1 - Micro...", and "2:45 p.m." on the left.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B / U Single Spaced

a place of relative privilege, but still I fight, I fight my hidden fight, it is a constant struggle to know stuff, I struggle to read.

I can remember very clearly, I guess I was about four years old, sitting at a desk at home, anticipating school, pretending to write, swooping, neatly

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:48 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. At the top, the window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". Below the title bar is a menu bar with options: File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. Underneath the menu bar is a toolbar with icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. Below the toolbar is a status bar showing "Continuous" (with a dropdown arrow), "by Word" (with a dropdown arrow), "at 125 WPM" (with a dropdown arrow), "@Arial Unicode MS" (with a dropdown arrow), "50" (with a dropdown arrow), and "B / U Single Spaced" (with a dropdown arrow). The main content area contains two paragraphs of text in a large, black, sans-serif font. The first paragraph reads: "a place of relative privilege, but still I fight, I fight my hidden fight, it is a constant struggle to know stuff, I struggle to read." The second paragraph reads: "I can remember very clearly, I guess I was about four years old, sitting at a desk at home, anticipating school, pretending to write, swooping, neatly". At the bottom right of the content area, it says "Page 1". The bottom of the screenshot shows the Windows taskbar with several open applications: "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla...", "Document1 - Micro...", and "2:48 p.m.". There are also system tray icons on the right side of the taskbar.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dixlexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

swooping lines up and down, across the page. I remember I did many many pages of this.

Libraries still fill me with a sense of excitement and wonder. I am not sure why, but it's a bit like I am stuck in my 4-year-old body anticipating learning to read and write, sitting at my desk by the

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:49 p.m.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

kitchen with my pencil and my lined notebook neatly looping what looked like L's page after page. That little four-year-old girl thinking she would soon be able to write and write well. Write what was inside her. Funny that. Funny how things turn out. Funny that I really thought that I would be a good

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:49 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. The window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". The menu bar includes File, Edit, Scan, Read, View, Tools, Reference, Window, Online, and Help. The toolbar contains icons for New, Open, Save, Print, Back, Read, Forward, Check, Predict, Definition, Synonym, and Help. Below the toolbar, there are settings for "Continuous" (dropdown), "by Word" (dropdown), "at 125 WPM" (slider), "@Arial Unicode MS" (font dropdown), "50" (font size dropdown), and "Single Spaced" (dropdown). The main text area contains a paragraph of text: "kitchen with my pencil and my lined notebook neatly looping what looked like L's page after page. That little four-year-old girl thinking she would soon be able to write and write well. Write what was inside her. Funny that. Funny how things turn out. Funny that I really thought that I would be a good". The status bar at the bottom right shows "Page 1" and "2:49 p.m.". The Windows taskbar at the very bottom shows the Start button, taskbar buttons for "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla..." and "Document1 - Micro...", and system tray icons.

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]

File Edit Scan Read View Tools Reference Window Online Help

New Open Save Print Back Read Forward Check Predict Definition Synonym Help

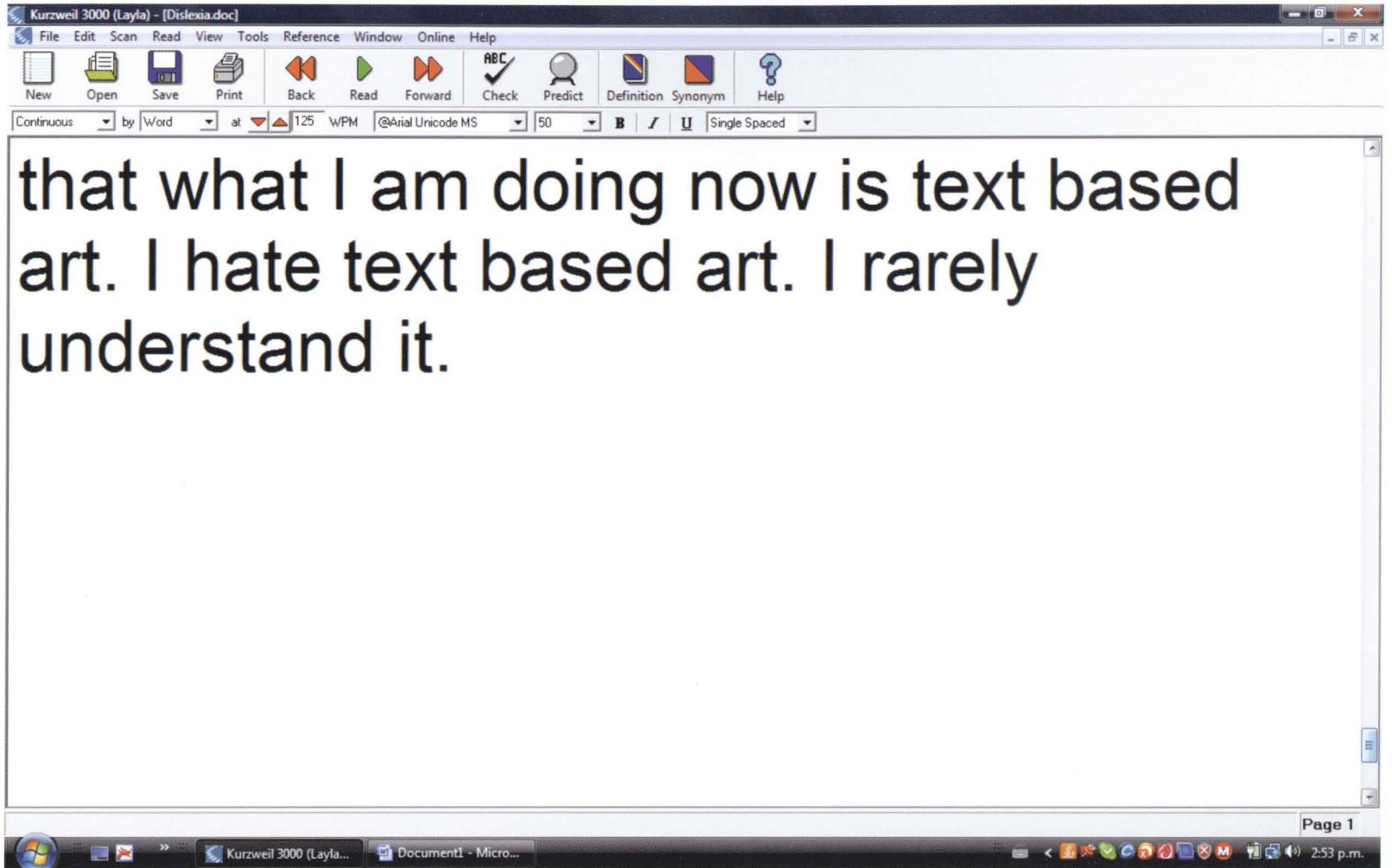
Continuous by Word at 125 WPM @Arial Unicode MS 50 B I U Single Spaced

writer, and soon I would be able to read. Funny I had no doubt then, funny that I would spend my life to date, another 32 years waiting and wanting to read the books in the library. Funny that when I come across my words in this journal I will not be able to read them, yet still I speak-write them for you to read. Funny

Page 1

Kurzweil 3000 (Layla... Document1 - Micro... 2:52 p.m.

The image is a screenshot of the Kurzweil 3000 software interface. The window title is "Kurzweil 3000 (Layla) - [Dislexia.doc]". The menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "Scan", "Read", "View", "Tools", "Reference", "Window", "Online", and "Help". The toolbar contains icons for "New", "Open", "Save", "Print", "Back", "Read", "Forward", "Check", "Predict", "Definition", "Synonym", and "Help". Below the toolbar is a status bar with settings: "Continuous" (dropdown), "by Word" (dropdown), "at 125 WPM" (dropdown), "@Arial Unicode MS" (dropdown), "50" (dropdown), "B", "I", "U" (checkboxes), and "Single Spaced" (dropdown). The main text area contains a paragraph of text. The bottom of the screen shows the Windows taskbar with the Start button, several open applications, and the system tray showing the time as 2:52 p.m.



that what I am doing now is text based art. I hate text based art. I rarely understand it.

Fig. 1
Marti Friedlander
Portrait of Tony Fomison
c 1973
Black and white
photograph
Marti Friedlander Archive
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



*"Well John, I'm just a working man — I like to keep track of my hours."*¹
— Tony Fomison speaking to John Gow

Tony Fomison (1939–1990) is one of New Zealand's best-known painters (Fig. 1). Less well known perhaps, is the fact that he was a prolific recorder and compiler whose assiduous documenting of his daily work — reading, researching, compiling, drawing and painting — led to the accumulation of a rich array of papers, the Tony Fomison Studio Papers.² These fortunately survived his untimely death in 1990 and were gifted in 2009 to the E H McCormick Research Library by his mother, Mary Fomison. The papers came in two consignments: the first from the family home in Christchurch and the second from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Library.

Fomison's papers consist of: notebooks and reading diaries, painting logbooks, sketchbooks, loose drawings, folders of images, ephemera, photographs and slides, professional correspondence, publications and archaeological field-books. What is not part of the archive is anything of a personal nature such as letters from friends or family. Despite their sheer volume, however, they have been surprisingly easy to

archive. The artist's adherence to and belief in structure and organisation has meant that much of the usual detective work was unnecessary, in fact, the single most striking feature of this archive is how meticulous it all seems.

A good example of Fomison's methodology can be found in his reading diaries. These start in June of 1952, when he was 13, and continue until 1956. Of his childhood love of reading Fomison recalls, "We were helping my uncle build his house... I used to take the books [his mother's high school history books] in the car and try to sneak back to the car..."³ and "I remember running away from school, so that I could have two weeks rummaging around with the old books in the back of the public library."⁴ Fomison's sister, Julia, commented, "If you wanted to survive in our family you had to read and I can remember both of us had good reading ability before we even hit school."⁵

Fomison's reading diaries can be seen as a precursor to the painting logbooks; they contain an enormous

literature
education
tobby
photography

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Strachan
(General Editor)
KODAK
N.Z. Ltd
Well. Auckland
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CATS

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London
SCOTT.
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by Alice F. Jackson.
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IDEAL BOOK of
The Tal
A ROMANCE OF THE
NEW ZE

CLASSIC
Illustrations
Plate Coloured
HISTORY

James West
STALK-EDITORIAL
by A.H. REED,
BECKLES
WILLSON
Edward
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ELLIS

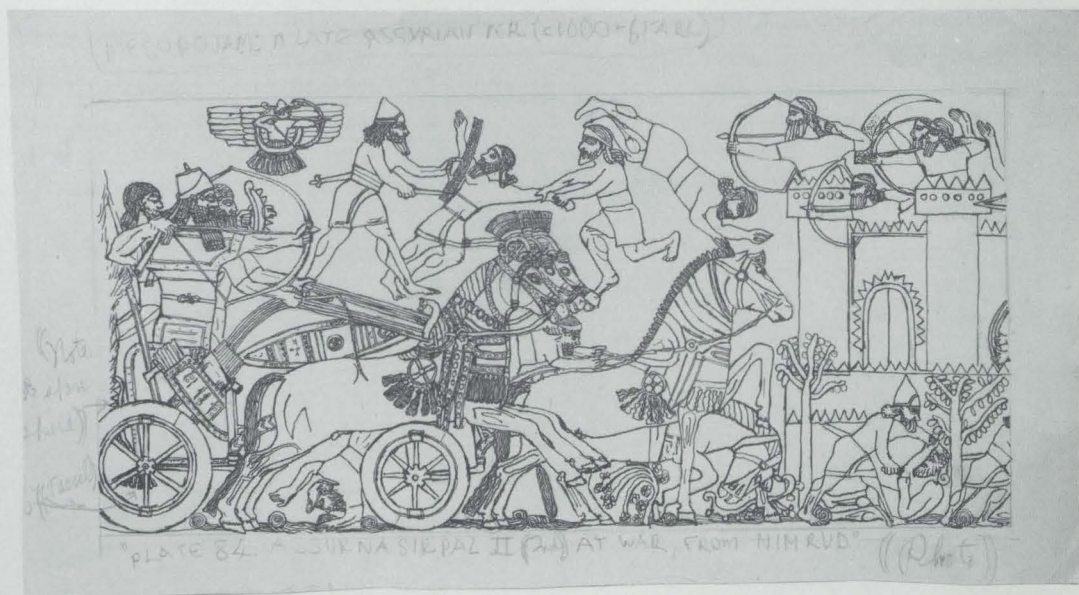
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ROMANCE OF THE
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THE LAST W

Historic Bio
GRAPHY
HISTORY
CANADA
ADVENTURE
WILLSON
ELLIS

NIGHT-BAR AND S-EYE	172	GOING INTO THE PAST	160
YANKEE-R-N	154	THREE-CAME-HOME	170
JUNGLE WARFARE	208	GODS-BE-MY-FRIEND	170
TOUCHING THE ADVENTURES	170	DANCE-OF-DEATH	170
A-WAR-OF-SHADOWS	170	THE-WHITE-RABBIT	170
70 TRAVEL-STORIES	289	THE-WOODEN-HORSE	170
FOR-A-LOUP	170	GODS; GRAVE & HOI	170
SWIFTY-THAT-STROCK	170	THE-SONS-OF-VULCA	170
LEYTE-CALLING...	170	T-O-B-E-N-G-I-A-N-T-O-L-B-E	170
BLACK-GULL	170	ENEMY-COAST-HEAD	170
THE-COLDITZ-STORY	170	SPADE-WORK	170
HEROES-OF-THE-FIGHTING	170	THE-JUNIOR-OUTLINE-OF	170
DARE-TO-BE-FREE	170	ENEMY-SUBMARINE	170
WHITE-COOLIES	170	THE-JUNGLE-IS-NEUTRAL	170
COMMANDO-THE-FROGMEN	170	THE-TUNNEL	170
BATTLE-STATIONS	170	ILL-MET-BY-MOONLIGHT	170
SEVENTY-THOUSAND	170	I-SURVIVED	170
JAPANESE-HISTORY	170	THE-GRADUATE-BOME	170
ONE-OF-OUR-SUBMARINE	170	RETURN-TICKET	170
THE-SPIRIT-IN-THE-CAGE	170	THE-COMMANDOS	170
		U-BOAT-977	170

Grade	Action	Title	Call	Price	Date Bought	Description
ADULT		How The Miners Lived	238	52	1952	
ADULT		How The Miners Live	240	115	1952	
		An Experiment With Sheep				
		Pieter of Normandy	3			
		HENRY WILSON	169			
		Book of Indians				
		Warden of the North	241			
		ACTUAL HISTORY OF FRANCE	236	60		
		PICTURE MAPS OF CANADA	242			
		IN KING'S GARDENS	114			
		How to make Good Plans	255			
		Extinct Animals	320			
		Cats of Destiny	170			
		Den Book for Boys	183			
		The Tail is not	196			
		NEW ZEALAND	324			
		Early New Zealand Adventure	157			
		CANADA	250			
		THE LAST WAR TRAIL	388			
		Silver Chief and Dog	177			
		JOURNALS AND AUTHORSHIP NZ	267			

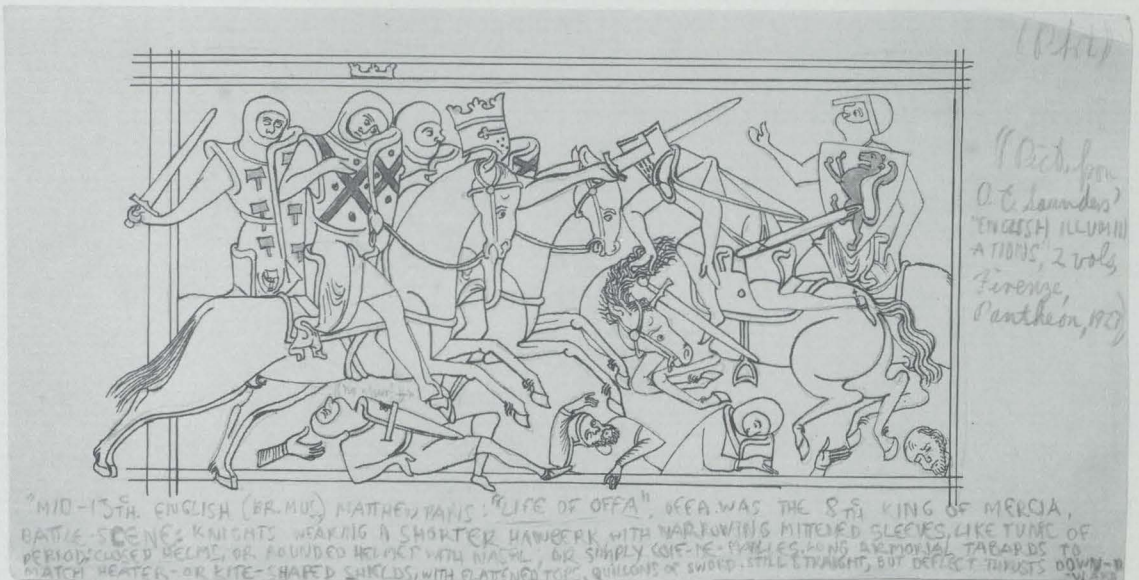
LEFT, TOP AND ABOVE
 Fig. 2
 Tony Fomison
 Reading diary 1952-3
 Tony Fomison Studio Papers
 E H McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki,
 gift of Mary Fomison, 2009



Figs 3 and 4
 Tony Fomison
[Battle scenes] c 1953
 Pencil drawing
 Tony Fomison Studio Papers
 E H McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
 gift of Mary Fomison, 2009

amount of detail on each book read (Fig. 2). Not only does he list the title, author, publisher, publication date and number of pages, but also the dates he started and finished reading each book, and sometimes a synopsis of the contents. Additionally, he includes notes on the illustrations such as how many there were and by whom as well as what they were made up of, for example, “illustrated with 168 figs by Author” and “famous etching of war dances; carving of panel beneath window, famous etching of head showing moko...”⁶ In later entries, Fomison adds details of colour use, the printer, and even from where he secured the book, with, if relevant, price paid.

The archive includes drawings from the 1940s onward and as he commented in an interview in 1976, “By the time I was six I was psychologically addicted to drawing and painting. I’ve got books full of drawings from when the old man was overseas: empathetic battle scenes done to help him win the war”⁷ (Figs 3 and 4). Fast forward to the 1960s and Fomison is producing works based on copies of the



Old Masters, some seen while in Europe but many based on reproductions he kept in his vast collection of images carefully organised by type in manila enclosures. The close to a hundred folders have titles such as "Sacrifice of Isaac," "Whaling, Whalers' Art and Sailors' Art," "Mermaids," "Tarot" and "French Folk Art."⁸

Also within the archive are 32 sketchbooks, all of which Fomison methodically annotated. Spanning 1953 to 1989, virtually every page of every book is precisely dated and titled, and may include an additional note on the subject matter or the artist's location when he drew it.

The Studio Papers include four painting logbooks, which cover Fomison's output from 1969 to 1979. They exhibit all of the attention to detail evidenced in the reading diaries and sketchbooks. As well as the source image for a work (see Figs 5 and 6), they might contain any or all of the following: paints used, working method, position of signature, canvas type,

information on frame, dimensions, evolution of title, sketch of the finished work, meaning of the work, exhibitions and dealer gallery information. When Fomison decided to discontinue the logbooks, he continued to write much of the same information on the back of each painting.

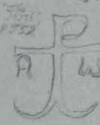
In addition to the Studio Papers held at the E H McCormick Research Library, another significant resource for researchers is the library of books (close to a thousand) Fomison collected and used in a similar way to the other material he collected. Originally held in the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Library (now closed), they were transferred to the Film School at the University, where they have more recently been used as props. The subject matter of Fomison's book collection is as wide as that of his folders' contents including medical textbooks, early New Zealand history and classic children's books, though many of the press clippings and notes that Natasha Conland remarked on in 1998 when researching her thesis, *Telling Pictures: Narrative and*



Plate 127. THE SAVIOR
Correggio, Congregazione di Carità

Restored on the tomb - on glass
stars part of a larger group (I
had seen in Chicago 18) which I
a break line. Had had to cover the
had at turn out to have a window
I had not adequately plugged
the ply, and below with long
trigles marine and plastic glass
Started 8-12-75 on dec
book. I chose plate 127 The
old home "All the Plgs of Man
for finger seems into level into
had in my copy this becom
head, had other emphasis
plye upon the stone' Iron
Just below layer, saw see
detail left white spots of light, the
I painted this monogram on the
oil painting medium. I had

The case of St Anthony of Egypt
(my friend said) it is the letter
of my friend, but seriously called
The cross from its similarity to the
Greek letter T, used in the old
days of the monks as a shorthand
more to save or save in support
copy of letters of signs by paper
to mark. T was used in the
The Anchor cross was actually
function symbol of hope, associated
from a pagan symbol from the
heaven by writers of the Bible & used in
the Antiquity. This version has a
single arm only, and, if cross,
the unbalanced perfection

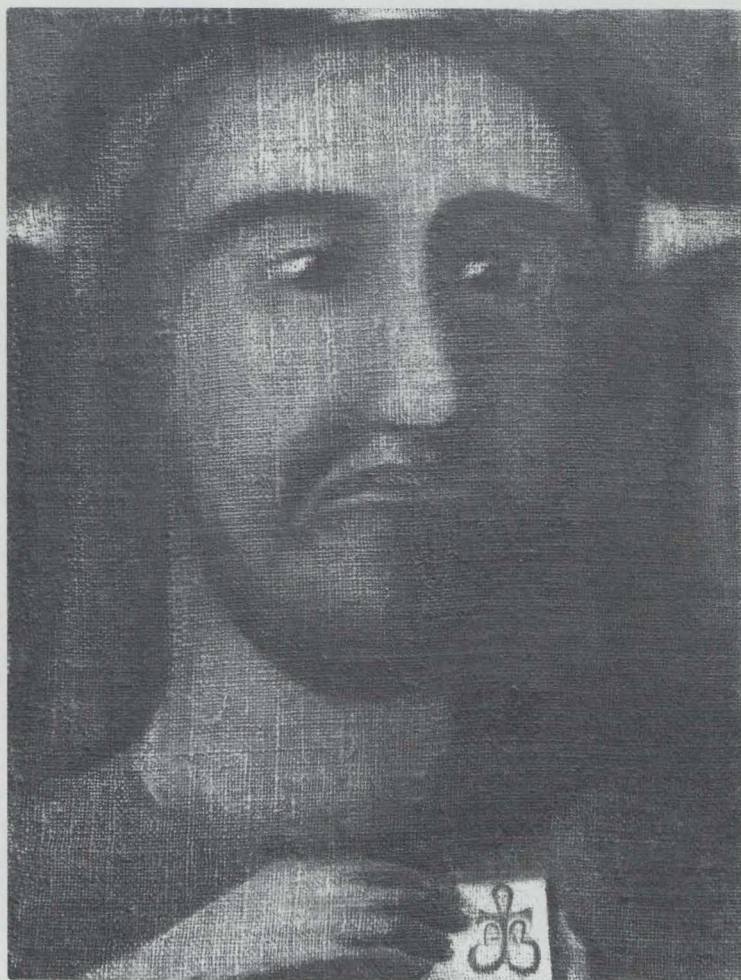
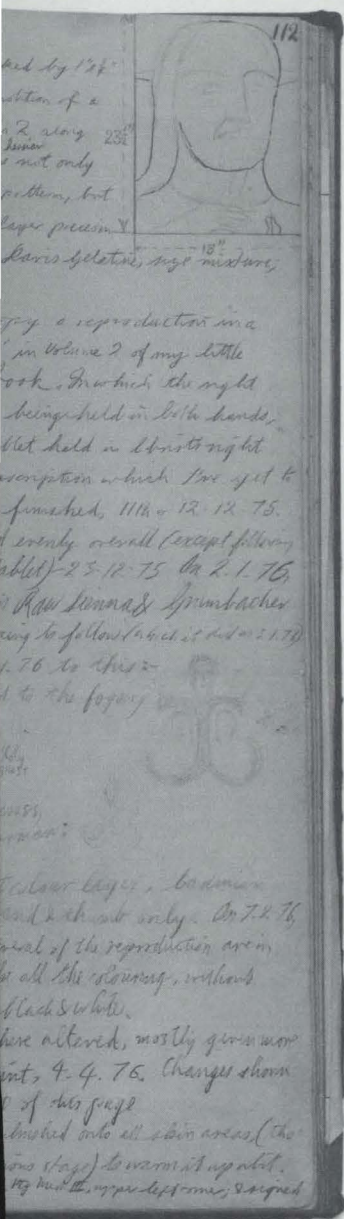


"Anchored cross" as I see the Ten Cross with addition
of a loop which is from the Egyptian symbol
for life. The symbol is, in fact, the loop symbol
of my mouth, which is its similarity to the
human form in a "head" pose of vertical acceptance
is. The anchored cross used by Egyptian
Shutran (1000) when it had variations of the
Tree of Life

This ^{symbol} has evolved the unbalanced
perfection into the long arm of the loop
I have appended just letter of the
Greek word for Christ; I have hung
the Alpha Omega letter, below it, which



As well as from
the idea of
On 27-1-76 I also put
Red Sleep on the face
ply the single garment (to
my vision singled) Russian
reference to the reproduction of
Outlines repainted (I
meant) in the course of
in-bias, in the eye-spatch
17-6-76 very light coat Indian
It previously pleased to have
13-7-76 letter my normal Christ in
"Fountain" 75-76 "anatomical" right.



LEFT
 Fig. 5
 Tony Fomison
 Log book entry for
My Personal Christ 1975–6
 Tony Fomison Studio
 Papers
 E H McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
 gift of Mary Fomison, 2009

ABOVE
 Fig. 6
 Tony Fomison
My Personal Christ 1975–6
 Oil on hessian
 795 x 655 mm
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki, purchased
 1976



Fomison's efforts to order and categorise filter through into his painting. Rather than hide his sources, Fomison made them explicit in his titles, as in *"Carcinoma of the Tongue Ulcerative Type"* Fig. 51 *'Surgery for Nurses' by Bailey and Love, London 1942 (#15)* (1964) or *Study of Hands on Page 235 of "Roxburgh's Common Skin Diseases" 12th Edition 1961 (#42)* (1971). Alternatively, he made mention of the original artist's name, as in *Study of Holbein's 'Dead Christ'* (1971–73). While supplying signposts for the viewer, Fomison still wanted them to work at finding their own meaning. In an interview with curator Alexa Johnston in 1983, Fomison explains that he "doesn't take sides in art's meaning" and that his narrative way of painting "deflects people from seeing the story straight away." He asks, "why shouldn't people take time over a painting...it's a contemplative thing?"¹³ While supplying a familiar cultural image, as Conland writes, "(r)esponsibility for meaning is put onto the viewer who must solve the riddle of its situation."¹⁴

"[A] cranky, gifted and persistent bibliophile and collector,"¹⁵ Fomison appears to have had "obsessive" tendencies; he signed and dated his drawings from when he was 10. While many media clippings quoting those who knew him attest to his "wild" lifestyle, he exhibits many of the qualities of a sedate, dedicated librarian/archivist. Endlessly concerned with the context and origins of the items that made up his collections, he seems passionate in his desire to establish the source and his documentation of it was an extension of this preoccupation. Perhaps, also, his ceaseless annotations were designed to leave no doubt as to their maker, thus ensuring a kind of eternity for himself and his precious collections. By dating pages, contents and books, a linear progression becomes apparent and a form of autobiography results.

Alternatively, were the entries simply a practical way for the artist to document his works? Whether self-congratulatory future owners who find out the original price paid or conservators aided by information on canvas and paint type used, others have cause to



be grateful for his fastidiousness. Ian Wedde suggests however that, though Fomison took his role as a painter very seriously and that the notes reflected this “esoteric guild ideal,” they went much further than was necessary. Indicative instead of one of the allegorical types he collected information on, “Jesters, Clowns... (the) notes have the effect of capitalising the Artist himself.”¹⁶

Another explanation for Fomison’s categorisation and systemisation is that he is “performing the role of agent to the visual world” and that with his collections he is, as the assembler of them, creating a “type of fiction.”¹⁷ The first part of the narrative is the selection process, the second, the gathering of the material, with the conclusion only able to occur “post his death by a convenor of this whole.”¹⁸ He is the interrogator of all of his collections — his archive and its many parts.

In the last two weeks alone, a writer, a curator, an old neighbour of the artist, an archaeologist, a

conservator and an archivist have asked about, or accessed, the Tony Fomison Studio Papers. Clearly, they provide clues to the artist and his work that take his audience deeper into his process and into the historical, scientific, cultural and social realms that fed him.

One of the most intriguing uses of Fomison’s wider archive has relatively recently been undertaken. In 2011, Fomison’s library was the subject of a work by Christchurch-based artist, Robert Hood, who relocated the entire collection to City Gallery Wellington as part of his contribution to *Prospect: New Zealand Art Now* (26 November 2011–12 February 2012). A motivation for *The Fomison Library* (2011, Fig. 9) is Hood’s desire to find a safe home for the library. But, more than this, the project serves as an interpretative act to understand how another artist worked. Hood comments:

[I find it] absolutely fascinating...to see the depth of research that Fomison undertook in



FAR LEFT

Fig. 9

Robert Hood

The Fomison Library 2011

Installation view

Prospect - New Zealand

Art Now, City Gallery

Wellington, 2011

Image courtesy of the artist and Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury

Photo: Kate Whitley

LEFT

Fig. 10

Tony Fomison

Calligraphy within magazine in

The Fomison Library

Photo: Robert Hood

making his work. [In] (a) lot of the books Fomison has made notations...in the front cover of the book, where he has noted the date and where he bought or stole the book from. He has a great calligraphy that often spirals off into these lovely drawings (Fig. 10).¹⁹

The Fomison Library seems to me to be a deeply respectful tribute to a fellow artist, an acknowledgement that some of a person's spirit is reflected in their collections.

1. John Gow reporting a conversation with Tony Fomison, recalled to author, December 2, 2011.
2. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Senior Curator Ron Brownson was instrumental in the acquisition of the Library's Fomison documents and named them the Studio Papers out of respect for the fact that Fomison's studio practice and research information were "always inseparable." He added, "without the practical and insightful awareness of Paul Rossiter, one of Tony's closest friends, the integrity and survival of the Studio Papers would not have occurred," conversation with author, March 11, 2012.
3. Ian Wedde, ed., *Fomison: What Shall We Tell Them?* (Wellington, N.Z.: City Gallery, Wellington, Wellington City Council, 1994), 16.
4. Tony Fomison, *Tony Fomison: A Survey of His Painting and Drawing from 1961 to 1979* (Lower Hutt, N.Z.: Dowse Art Gallery, [1979]), 2.
5. Wedde, 29.
6. School Text Book, Tony Fomison Studio Papers, RC 2009/8/8, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
7. Denys Trussell, "A Provincial Artist Talks of Religious Compassion," *City News*, August 17, 1976, 13.
8. Image Folders, for example Tony Fomison Studio Papers, RC 2009/8/16, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
9. Natasha Conland, "Telling Pictures: Narrative and Tony Fomison," (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1998).
10. School Text Book.
11. This reading habit continued into adulthood, see Conland, 93.
12. Conland, 2.
13. Taped interview of Tony Fomison by Alexa Johnston, November 7, 1983, CD number 518, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
14. Conland, 29.
15. Wedde, 29.
16. Wedde, 27.
17. Conland, 88.
18. Conland, 89.
19. Robert Hood, e-mail message to author, December 20, 2011.



Fig. 1
Research image
(with the artist's feet)
Printed copy of
photograph
Kate Newby's *I'm just like
a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

“Even trees understand me! Good heavens, I lie under them, too, don't I? I'm just like a pile of leaves.”

— Frank O'Hara, *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957)

Kate Newby took a line from American poet Frank O'Hara's *Meditations in an Emergency* as the title of her 2011 commission for Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Situated on the Edmiston Sculpture Terrace, *I'm just like a pile of leaves* was site-responsive and insistent on first-hand experience. It drew Gallery goers' attention to the surrounding cityscape and to Albert Park. The work's uneven, stained expanse of pinkish concrete, from which a yellow climbing rope emerged to lasso a nearby historic oak, the standard-issue cinder block wall and embedded ordinary footpath detritus — bottle tops, sticks, buttons, nails and small stones — were at once familiar and disorientating. At first glance parts of the installation, such as the cinder block wall, appeared lifted straight from industry, contrasting with the richly coloured and painterly concrete floor. Less obvious than its constituent parts but intentional nevertheless was the subtlety of the work's embrace of the everyday, and qualities of “embeddedness” that seemed at one with the Gallery's surroundings. At deinstallation in March 2012, the expanse of pink concrete floor in

I'm just like a pile of leaves was ripped up with the same tools used in roadworks, leaving almost no remnants. Any meaning tied to the work's physical experience is now lost.

What does remain is Kate Newby's *I'm just like a pile of leaves*, 2011, Archive, compiled after the work's demolition and comprising the project proposal; annotated pencil sketches on watercolour and tracing paper; watercolours showing proposed objects, some of which never eventuated; research images taken in Auckland and abroad; colour photographs with oil stick and Vivid Marker jottings; documentary images taken during the installation; and industrially produced concrete samples. The archive also holds artefacts of the artwork, including a section of the floor and wall, saved during deinstallation (Col. pl. 1).

The Newby archive is now stored in manufactured archive boxes with museological conditions in mind (Col. pl. 2), serving to emphasise that it exists, as

Alex Potts has written, “at a different level from the physical phenomenon itself.”¹ Potts argued that the physical nature of material traces, like those stored in the archive, have the potential (in the absence of the original artwork) to be “integral to the phenomenal qualities of the work of art we conjure up in our mind’s eye.”² However, the Newby archive was not composed to self-consciously “capture” or represent the artwork proper; it instead records the artist’s working process and some of the materials she used. Full of textual and visual material made by the artist’s own hand, it provides an insight into her thinking and experiences. It also, for the most part, includes material that predates the work and reveals much about the context and space in which Newby worked in the unfinished redeveloped Auckland Art Gallery. The archive is a mostly two-dimensional record of thought and working processes.

Reading the sketches, research material and watercolours reveals a long process of decision-making and negotiation which is seemingly at odds with the fleeting observation present in O’Hara’s *Meditations*. Interpreting the volume of research material and preparatory sketches in the archive tells the story of a complex development, which belies the characteristic spontaneity of Newby’s oeuvre. Her practice typically involves working with materials associated with construction including fibreboard, bricks and concrete, which, when combined, create a hand-made, individually rendered effect. But the Edmiston Sculpture Terrace commission was a large-scale project in an outdoor environment with a life of six months; it needed to withstand high visitation and environmental impact. The archive’s watercolours and quick sketches reflect the ephemeral nature of Newby’s practice and make clear the project’s long development, with its complex logistics and health and safety requirements.

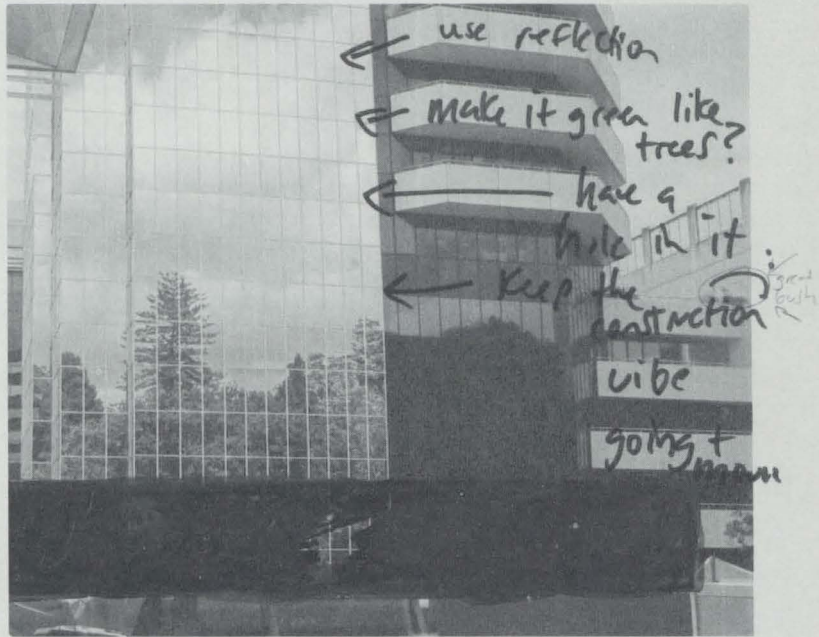
Newby’s original proposal and sketches (Col. pls 3, 4 and 5) show her intention to reference the cityscape and park that lies beyond the Terrace. In them you can see her literally composing the space, using a

combination of architectural floor plans and her own photographic notations. She wanted her spatial interventions to “work with elements already at play in the North Terrace such as various viewpoints, wall, the terrace ground, and trees;”³ yet the Terrace had quite literally not yet been built. Down the side of one enlarged photograph (Col. pl. 5), Newby wrote: “Keep the construction vibe going and more — great bush!” Her playful annotations include to-do lists: “Remember: concrete, watercolour effect, call Terry.” Scribbled on images of the Terrace and its periphery, they sound like diary entries, with the writing’s tone suggesting personal use different from the formality of the proposal submitted to Gallery staff. In fact, Newby had not intended her working material to remain with the Gallery, rather, the notes and jotted-down commentary reveals a private process, and the steps she took as an artist to personalise public space.

One of the most labour-intensive and technically complex tasks involved in the work was the construction of the pink concrete floor. And by far the greatest amount of the material in the archive refers to the construction of and material used in the concrete floor — its thickness, position, gradient, weight distribution solutions and strength (Col. pl. 7). Newby’s lightly tinted watercolours illustrating this part of her proposal (Col. pls 3, 6 and 8) contrast with later more careful drawings (Col. pl. 7) which reveal technical issues and the “red tape” she faced in constructing a 6 x 12-metre ramp of concrete. The cross-section sketch of the floor (Col. pl. 7) shows how Newby negotiated drains on the Terrace and considered base layer options. This was annotated with questions such as: “A light weight substance for height, what?;” “Age it;” “How thick does the concrete need to be so it does not crack?;” “Wooden block? Or another framing device?;” and, at the bottom of one sketch the more bleak, “Is it still the project I want to do?”

The archive shows some of the logistical issues the artist faced — due to the physical constraints of the new building. There is also a sense in the archive that Newby bends or reorders logistical — literally

Fig. 2
 Research image of
 terrace under
 construction (detail)
 Printed copy of
 photograph with
 Vivid marker
 Kate Newby's *I'm just like
 a pile of leaves* Archive,
 E H McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



concrete — problems to her own will and in so doing creates a space in order to have, as Jon Bywater has written of previous work, “things on [her] own terms.”⁴ The collected documentation is not only interesting for its ability to show “what has been” it also suggests “what for example could have been,”⁵ like the proposed seat with “handmade rocks” and “real boulders” (Col. pl. 6) and the various iterations of text. Newby’s experimentation with different lines of text, or “speak,” which she initially imagined inscribed into the concrete floor included, “Ooh windy,” “I ran out,” “I’m just like a pile of leaves? You are so Big?,” and “I’d feel just terrible;” but these, along with the earlier sculptural elements like the planted stonewall and seat, would never eventuate (Col. pl. 10). We can see that in the process of working to realise “things on [her] own terms,” Newby heavily edited her work.

Different from the technical drawings, the first set of sketches and watercolours of the floor and wall appear informal, not over-thought; their freshness is

reflected in the painterly marks and rough edges of the oil stick on colour photographs. Newby’s pale mid-toned watercolours (Col. pls 3, 6 and 8) give an impression of what she imagined the final work would look and feel like, and these diverge in their mode of documentation from the heavier pen and oil stick sketches (Col. pls 4 and 5) in which she drew over colour photocopies of North Terrace photographs. In those sketches, Newby solves problems presented by the site in order to achieve the artistic intention as described in the watercolours.

Images in the archive (Col. pl. 9) taken during her many site visits show her first-hand experience of major construction — a site surrounded in scaffolding, unfinished walls and columns. In one drawing (Col. pl. 4), fellow artist Fiona Connor stands on the roughly painted pink concrete floor in her trademark denim, cut out and stuck down like a paper doll in a scrapbook. Here we see Newby going beyond the logistics of the project, perhaps imagining its place in her world, populated with her friends.

Newby did not, as O'Hara did, write about or respond to the everyday — she built it somewhat laboriously as these materials reveal. The archive is most telling for its ability to extract this account of the labour entailed in her construction of the “everyday” or vernacular, a far cry from the casual and temporary effect implied by “a pile of leaves.” While some objects, such as found bottle tops and shop-bought crystals, were quickly placed in the concrete by Newby before it set, others, such as ceramic rocks and branches, Newby made herself as pseudo-found objects. You see some of these objects in planning images and the floor remnant saved during deinstallation, but there is no record of their collection or manufacture in the archive.

One of the most playful and surprising elements in *I'm just like a pile of leaves* was the yellow climbing rope, which tethered the Gallery to Albert Park behind it. The rope continued a theme in Newby's work reflecting ideas about “resistance, escape routes, and opposition.”⁶ Sketches in the archive show her working through various propositions for using a rope and then for how it might be secured to the Terrace (Col. pl. 6). From her dashed-off notes which read like loosely connected thought bubbles, we learn that she initially planned to imbed the rope in layers of flooring material: “Polythene, fibrecrete, plaster.” In addition to her drawings, a short, knotted section of the rope rests in the archive.

Newby's installation — her “intervention” as she might describe it — created tension between public and private spaces, between what she wanted to do (her “private space”) and what she could get away with doing (what the Gallery's public space would allow). A close reading of the archive divulges this. Mischievous notes, such as “Keep it simple — cheeky, Tough. Drop something off the roof onto the ground,” open for consideration the artist's complex relationship with the site and the project.

improvisational nature of the work and individual almost “craft-based” production. Reading the archive affords a clear view of the artist's intentions for the work, which some readers may take as being commensurate with its “meaning,” and demonstrates how acutely aware Newby was of engaging with “context.” The *I'm just like a pile of leaves* Archive offers readers a complicated story of an artist's vision meeting the practical demands of its realisation.

1. Alex Potts, “The Artwork, the Archive, and the Living Moment,” in *What is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession, Archive, Encounter* (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 119.
2. Potts, 120.
3. Kate Newby, “I'm just like a pile of leaves.” Project Proposal for Auckland Art Gallery North Terrace Commission, 2011.
4. Jon Bywater, “Discreet poetry: Kate Newby's ‘Get Off My Garden,’” October 2009, on the occasion of the exhibition: Kate Newby, *Get Off My Garden*, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland, http://hopkinsoncundy.com/img/Kate_Newby_Jon_Bywater.pdf.
5. Marieke van Hal, “An Active Archive,” *Manifesta Journal* 6 (Autumn/Winter 2005): 382–85.
6. “Kate Newby Presents First Institutional Solo Exhibition in Europe,” http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=40331&int_mod=1 (accessed December 15, 2011).

Col. pl. 1
Section of concrete saved during deinstallaion
Kate Newby's *I'm just like a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Col. pl. 2
Various colour concrete samples from Peter Fell and section of rope
Kate Newby's *I'm just like a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

In totality, the archive reveals a long process of decision-making seemingly at odds with the





Col. pl. 3
Terrace
Pencil and watercolour
sketch
Kate Newby's *I'm just like
a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Col. pl. 4
Research image of terrace
under construction
Oil stick and collage
on printed copy of
photograph
Kate Newby's *I'm just like
a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Col. pl. 5
Research image of terrace
under construction
Printed copy of
photograph with
Vivid marker
Kate Newby's *I'm just like
a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



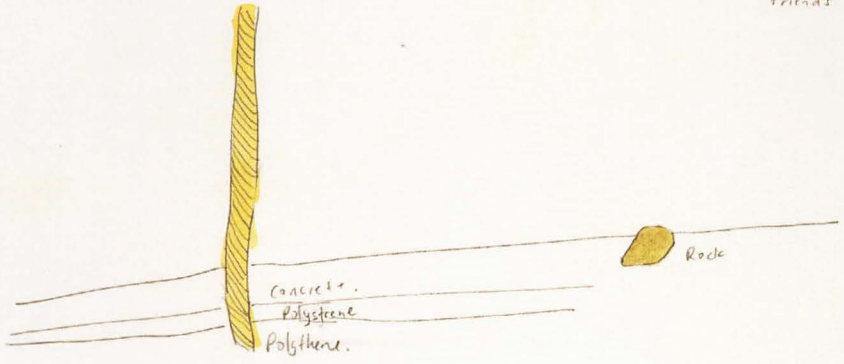
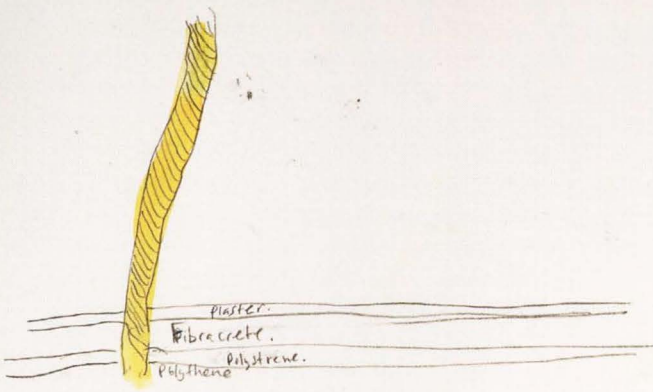
legs.

I'd feel ju

ooh wind

legs. legs.

That's nice to be
but I miss our
friends and parties



Fiber rock

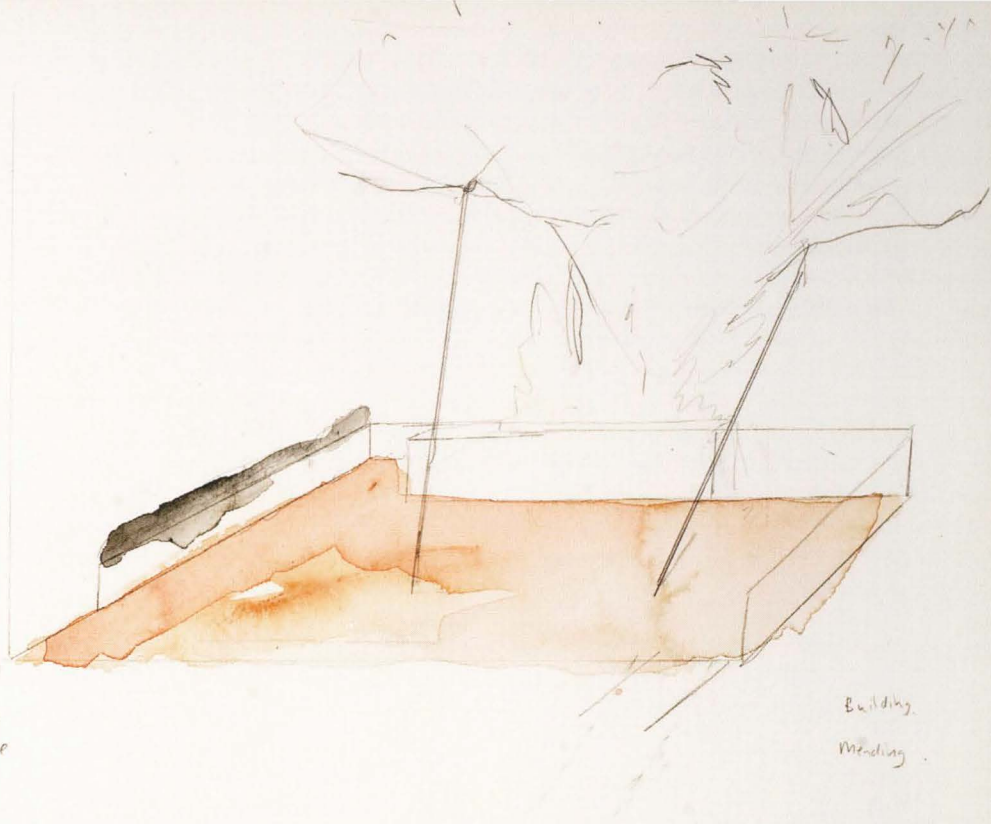
wider reinforcing pole

terrible

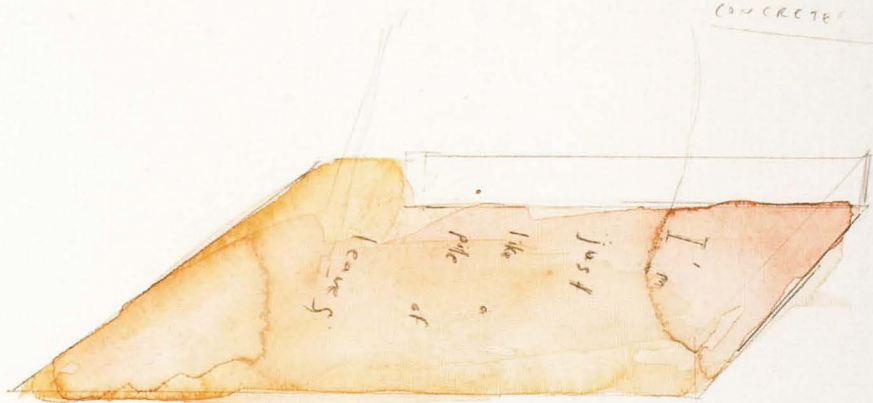
Payins attention to
viewports

admission of
the architecture

Building
Mending



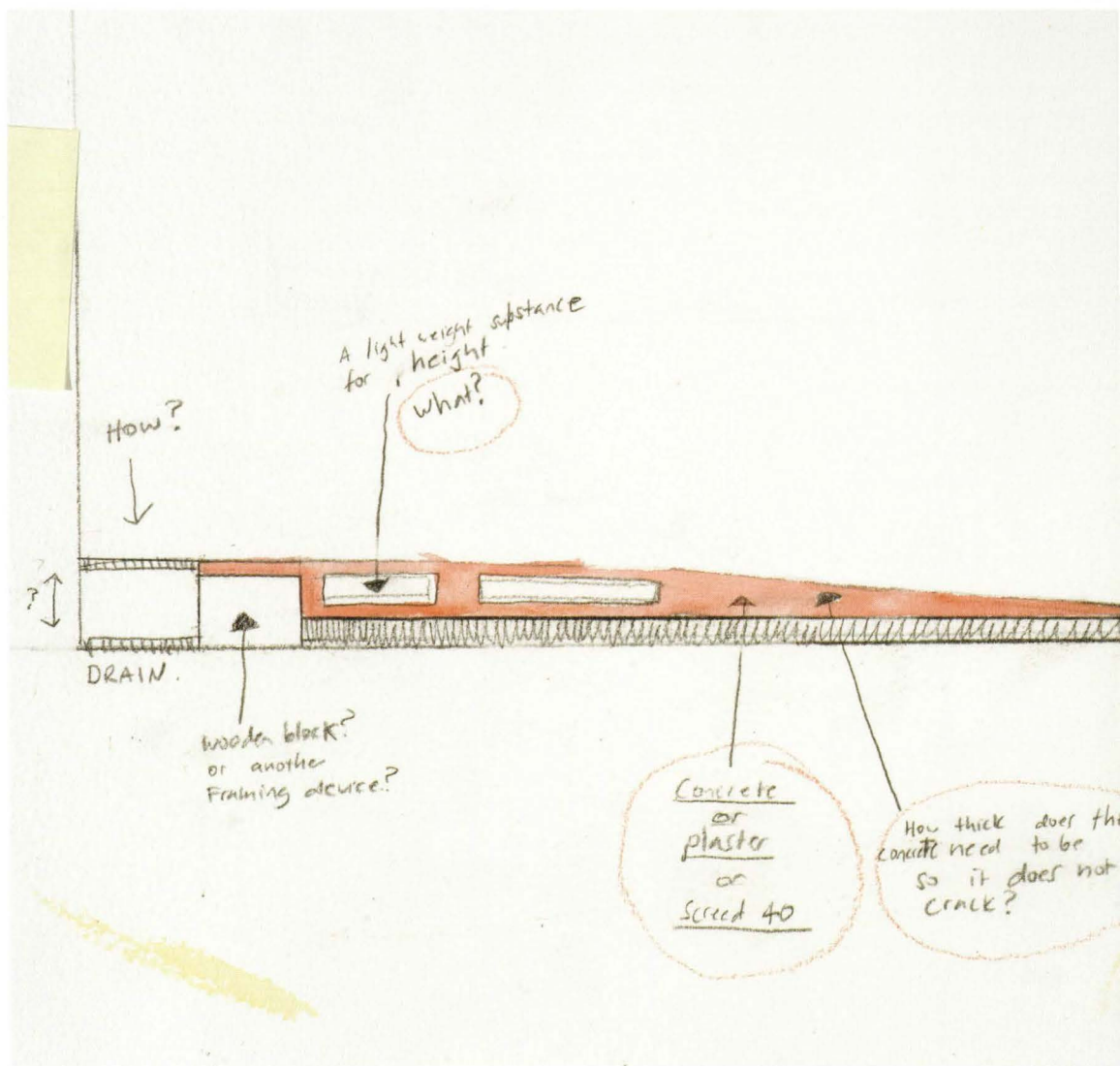
CONCRETE w/ WRITING



CONCRETE SURFACE :

- potholes
- stains
- oil
- ribs
- concrete on concrete





PREVIOUS SPREAD

Col. pl. 6

Various iterations of commission elements
Pencil and watercolour sketch

Kate Newby's *I'm just like a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

ABOVE

Col. pl. 7

Cross section drawing of concrete floor
Pencil and watercolour sketch

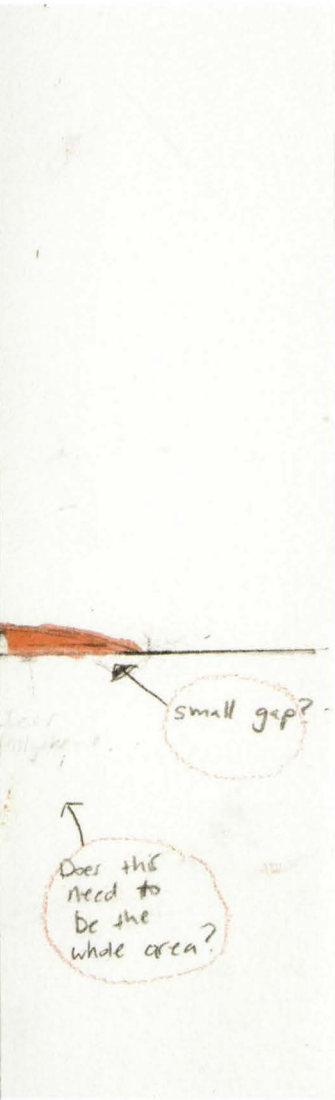
Kate Newby's *I'm just like a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

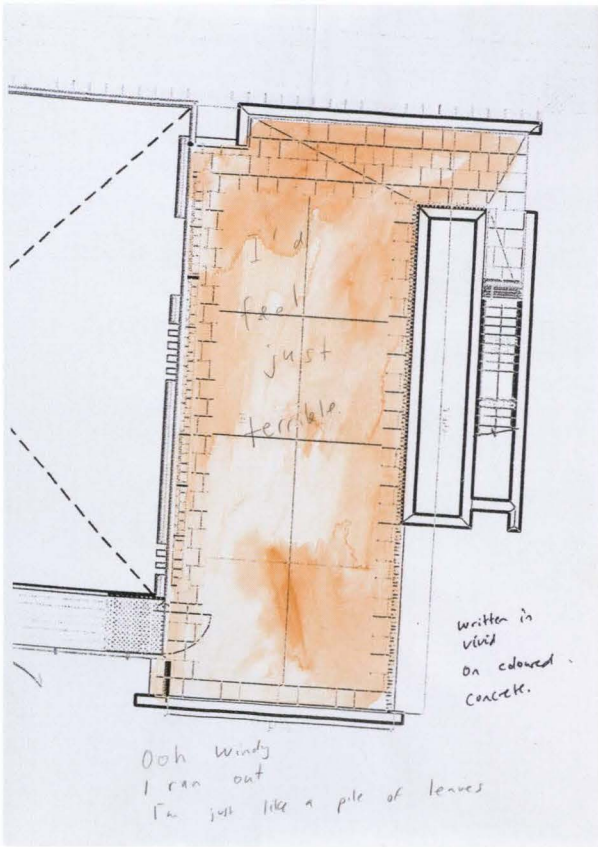
RIGHT

Col. pl. 8

Plan of concrete floor and wall
Pencil and watercolour sketch

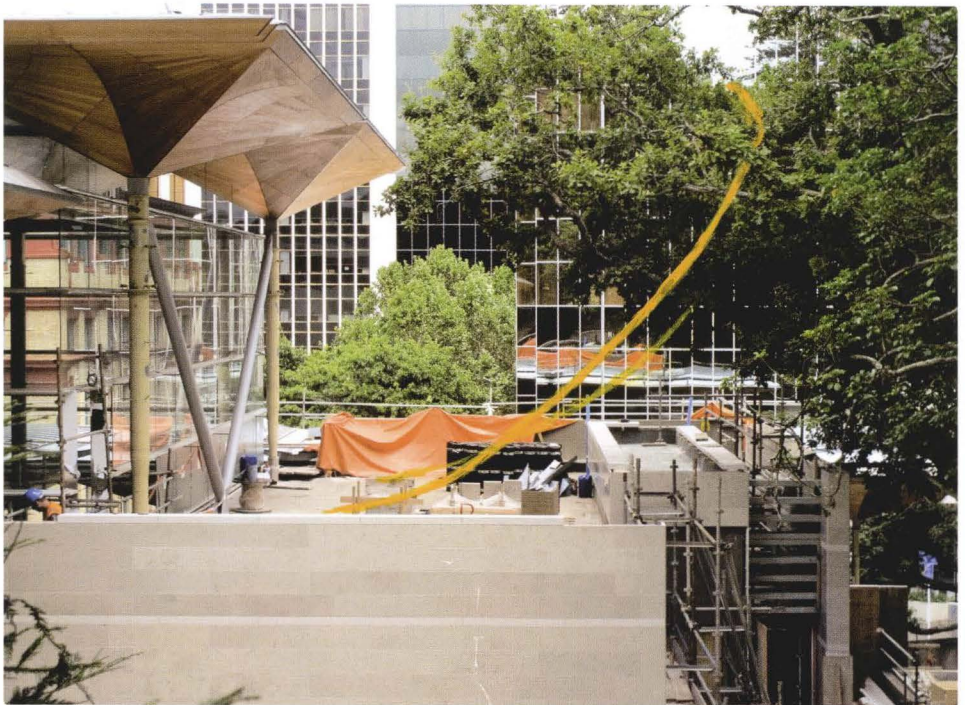
Kate Newby's *I'm just like a pile of leaves* Archive,
E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki





Col. pl. 9
 Architectural plan
 Pencil and watercolour
 sketch
 Kate Newby's *I'm just like
 a pile of leaves* Archive,
 E H McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Col. pl. 10
 Research image of terrace
 under construction
 Oil stick on printed copy
 of photograph
 Kate Newby's *I'm just like
 a pile of leaves* Archive,
 E H McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



**Room for Reading: The Foundation
of the E H McCormick Research Library**
Anna Parlane



Fig. 1
Mackelvie Gallery 1953
Sculpture court with
entrance to offices
and library (at rear)
Black and white
photograph
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Auckland Art Gallery's E H McCormick Research Library first opened as a small reading room on 12 October 1953. An area of a few square metres, containing bookshelves and chairs and doubling as a waiting room adjacent to the staff offices, the Library's quiet beginning was somewhat overshadowed by the fanfare surrounding the opening of the Gallery's latest renovation and the installation of its first artificial gallery lighting system.¹

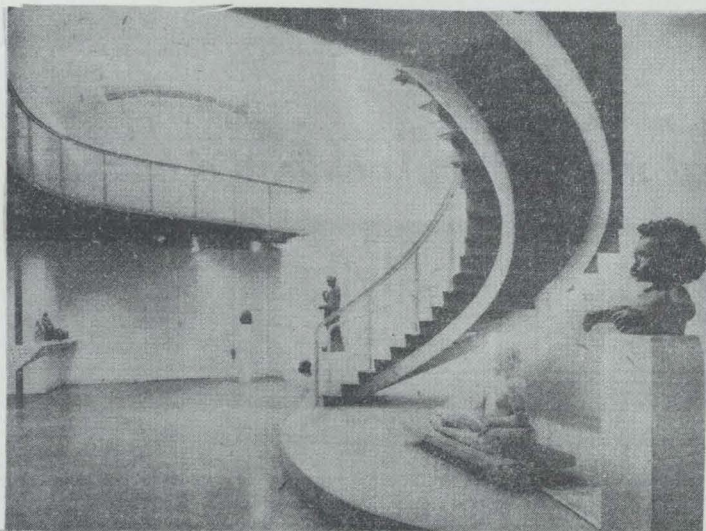
The reconstruction in question was a dramatic modernisation by Auckland City Council's Chief Architect, Tibor Donner, of the 1916 neoclassical Mackelvie Gallery. Donner carved up the cavernous space, splitting it into an upper and lower area, to create a sculpture court, workshop, offices and library on the ground floor, with a mezzanine picture gallery above (Fig. 1). Photographs documenting the renovation focus on the cutting-edge perspex lighting troughs and the gravity-defying curved, cantilever staircase that was the centrepiece of Donner's design — when the library

appears in these images it is only ever as incidental backdrop (Figs 2 and 3). The opening of the remodelled Mackelvie Gallery was the most visible of a number of changes associated with the appointment of Eric Westbrook in 1952 as the Gallery's first dedicated director.² Westbrook was formerly Chief Exhibitions Officer at the Arts Council of Great Britain, and British art historian Sir Kenneth Clark was horrified by his decision to move to New Zealand, writing to him: "You are making the worst mistake of your life. I wouldn't mind so much if you were going to Australia."³ However, Westbrook was young, energetic and resourceful, and though his tenure as director lasted less than four years he transformed the Gallery from a forlorn appendage of the Public Library into an exciting centre for Auckland's cultural life.⁴

While the Gallery's new library only ever received brief mention in 1953's media reports, it was indicative of a larger shift in the Gallery's institutional identity than is suggested by its diminutive



Art Gallery Redecorated



The City Art Gallery's newly decorated Mackelvie room, as the public will be able to see it on Monday. The mezzanine floor, approached by the swirling stair at right, has doubled the usefulness of the whole chamber, by turning its once useless upper walls into hanging space. Beneath it now are the director's new offices and a restful reading room, and (beyond the doors in the background of this picture) a room for storing pictures not on show.

LEFT
Fig. 2
Newspaper clipping
The Auckland Star,
8 October 1953
Gallery Scrapbook
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

RIGHT
Fig. 3
Opening ceremony for
renovated Mackelvie
Gallery 1953
Left to right: the Mayor,
Sir John Allum, Mr M
Tongue, Mr R O Cross,
and gallery director,
Mr E Westbrook
Black and white
photograph
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

proportions and unassuming presence in the press. The Library was one of the foundations laid under Westbrook's direction that allowed the Gallery to grow into a centre of art scholarship in New Zealand.

Now a standard and indispensable resource to most major art galleries worldwide, specialist art gallery libraries enable the research that supports an institution's collection and exhibitions, often also providing an invaluable record of local art history and the work of gallery staff. Such libraries have a mutually supportive relationship with the curators and researchers that form their core user group: as the library facilitates research, the researcher can also help build the library's collection.⁵ In this way, an art gallery library becomes like a portrait of the institution, its staff and priorities, past and present. The creation of Auckland Art Gallery's library in 1953 marked the period of the Gallery's independence from Auckland's Public Library. No longer falling under the jurisdiction of John Barr, who had functioned in a double role as City Librarian and Art

Gallery Director since August 1913,⁶ the Gallery became for the first time an institution with an autonomous mandate and the dedicated attention of its ambitious director.

Westbrook, despite being remembered primarily as a populist (and occasional *enfant terrible* who attempted to introduce juvenile delinquents to art and bring jazz concerts into the Gallery's hallowed halls),⁷ recognised the importance of the Gallery as a location for specialist scholarship. In a report written in August 1955, he stated,

Whatever public activities are engaged in, the Gallery has never lost sight, I hope, of the fact that its programme and the quality of its work must depend upon a firm background of research and genuine scholarship... Research however, cannot be undertaken without the tools of the trade, and it has been our aim to build up a sizeable art library which can be used by outside students and by the staff.⁸



While the need to form an in-house reference library was indicative of the Gallery's growing ambition, it also corresponded to a broader cultural shift towards scholarship within New Zealand's visual arts.

Until the mid-twentieth century, no Australian or New Zealand universities taught art or art history. The first fine arts department in an Australasian university was established at the University of Melbourne in 1947 under the 33-year-old Joseph Burke, a graduate of Yale University and former assistant at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Poet and cultural Renaissance man Rex Fairburn became, in 1951, New Zealand's first tertiary-level lecturer in art history, teaching the history and theory of art at Elam School of Fine Arts.⁹ Elam's incorporation into The University of Auckland (then Auckland University College) in 1950 also formed the impetus for the growth of the School's existing small collection of reference books into a functional academic library.¹⁰ The libraries at Elam and the Gallery developed in concert from the early 1950s, firmly establishing Auckland as the first centre of art research in New Zealand.¹¹ It wasn't until 1979 that the National Art Gallery in Wellington formalised its collection of books into an in-house library, and 1987 when it was staffed and opened to the public as a research facility.¹² Gordon Brown remembers the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Library during the 1950s being "so blasé they let other departments use their book budget."¹³ As Ron Brownson, Auckland Art Gallery Librarian from 1978 to 1995 and current Senior Curator, noted in 1988: "Auckland's historical commitment to research and its involvement in art scholarship and publication has meant that other regions in New Zealand have not developed research facilities to such a degree."¹⁴

In 1955, the Gallery's library consisted of 341 books and subscriptions to 14 periodicals. The foundation of this humble collection arrived in the form of a donation from Auckland's Society of Arts in early 1952, subsequent to Westbrook's appointment as director but before his arrival in Auckland. A memo written by John Barr reports that:

The collection, consisting of books and magazines on art, has been donated to the Art Gallery with the proviso that the Library may select from it any items to fill gaps in the Library's reference files... The remainder will be handed over to Mr. Westbrook, Director of the Art Gallery to form the nucleus of an Art Gallery Library.¹⁵

Before leaving London to take up his post at the Gallery, Westbrook arranged for a subscription to be made to the publications of his former employer, the Arts Council of Great Britain, and promptly ordered their entire back catalogue upon his arrival in Auckland, paying a grand total of £5.12.0 (Fig. 5).¹⁶ Westbrook also subscribed to a press cutting service which provided material related to the Gallery and to art generally; and he initiated the exchange system, the first in New Zealand and still in place today, where Auckland Art Gallery catalogues are traded for the publications of international galleries.

Given Westbrook's ambition to make the visual arts accessible to a wider public, it seems appropriate that his first recorded purchase was the two-volume work, *Art and Everyman*, by Margaret H Bulley (Fig. 4).¹⁷ Brown remembers that during Westbrook's tenure, the Gallery lent periodicals and popular books to members of the public, though there was no cataloguing system in place and borrowed material would often not be returned. Colin McCahon, who was on the Gallery's staff from July 1953, regularly complained that the journals he wanted to read had gone missing.¹⁸

Despite being somewhat lacking in the basic skills of librarianship, Westbrook was firmly dedicated to the development of art historical and curatorial scholarship at the Gallery. He observed in 1955 that:

In New Zealand, art historical studies have had little chance of developing, but there are encouraging signs of an interest being taken in this field, and it is pleasant to record that the Gallery has been in the forefront of this comparatively recent development in our cultural

life. Here I must pay tribute to one man who, while not a member of the Gallery staff, has set standards which have gone to the credit of the Gallery in many overseas countries.¹⁹

This man was Dr Eric Hall McCormick, a meticulous historian and an avid user of the library that now bears his name, from its inception in the 1950s until his death in 1995. McCormick is regarded as the pioneer of art historical scholarship in New Zealand. Vincent O'Sullivan described him as "One of our most eminent scholars...[with a] probing, sympathetic, devoted attention to what life here means, how we find voices and images for our own distinctiveness."²⁰ At the celebration of the naming of the E H McCormick

Library in 1999, C K Stead stated simply: "We needed such a person. He filled the post."²¹

Westbrook worked to cultivate a scholarly environment at the Gallery by forging associations with skilled researchers like McCormick and Una Platts. The impact on the depth and quality of the Gallery's exhibition and publication output was immediate. With Westbrook's enthusiastic support, McCormick's 1954 *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* became the Gallery's first major publication (Fig. 6). The production of the book tied into Westbrook's intention to turn the Gallery into an authority on Hodgkins' work, and "a centre of information on this artist whose reputation is now world wide."²²

July, 1953					
BOOK NUMBER	AUTHOR	TITLE	PRICE	PURCHASED	
1	Bullsey, Margaret H.	Art and Everyman. Volume 1	52/6		✓
2	" "	" " " 2	" "		✓
3	Evans Joan.	English Art 1307-1461	47/-		
4	Rice, D. Talbot	" " 871-1100	"		
5	Hölfflin, Heinrich	Classic Art.	37/6		✓
6	Gowing, Lawrence	Vermeer, (Johannes)	60/-		
✓7	Fosca, Augusto	The Eighteenth Century - Watteau to Tiepolo.	105/-		✓
✓8	Reynolds, Joshua.	Elizabethan and Jacobean. (Costume of the Modern World)	13/3	Pineux Bookshop.	✓
✓9	Redie, Brian	The Dominance of Spain.	" "	" "	✓
✓10	Blum, Aron	Kathy Bowden	" "	" "	✓
11	Digby, George W.	French Tapestries from 14th to 18th centuries	7/6	South's Book Depot.	
12	Baard, H.P.	Man's Hats - The Civic Guard Portrait Groups	42/-		✓
13	Hatston, F.S.B.	Candlesticks. (Master Painters Series)	42/-		✓
14	Nicolson, Benedict	The painters of Ferrara	" "		
15	Cladel, Judith	Rodin.	" "		✓
16	Benson, Bernard.	The Italian Painters of the Renaissance	37/6		
17	Leggato, G. Di San	Painting in France - 1895-1949	18/9		
18	Blunt, Wilfrid	Sweet Roman Hand.	15/-		
19	Leach, Bernard	A Potter's Book.	31/3		✓
20	Killet, Mary D.	Child Artists of the Australian Bush	17/9		✓
21	Blunt, Wilfrid	Japanese Colour Prints.	15/9		✓

Fig. 4
Register of Books
1953-c1960
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tamaki

Eric Westbrook, Esq., Director,
Auckland Art Gallery,
Auckland, C.I., New Zealand.

R/1223
28th May, 1952.

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN
4 ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.1 WHITEHALL 9737

PUBLICATIONS

	Price s. d.
THE ARTS COUNCIL: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES. 12 pp. (postage 1½d.)	free
ANNUAL REPORT, 1950-1. 100 pp. including a 24 pp. photographic supplement (postage 2½d.)	2 6
SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF NO. 4 ST. JAMES'S SQUARE. 19 pp., 8 illus. (postage 1½d.)	1 0
PLANS FOR AN ARTS CENTRE. 40 pp. including 20 pp. of plans and illustrations. Published for the Arts Council by Lund Humphries (postage 3d.)	6
BRIDGWATER ARTS CENTRE. 8 pp., 4 illustrations. (postage 1½d.)	4
THE CHESTERFIELD CIVIC THEATRE: an account of its inception and opening. 4 pp., 1 illustration. (postage 1½d.)	2
NOTES ON CIVIL THEATRES, by Charles Landstone, O.B.E. 8 pp. (postage 1½d.)	3
NOTES FOR MUSIC CLUBS AND SOCIETIES. 30 pp. (postage 3d.)	1 0
CATALOGUE OF THE ARTS COUNCIL'S GRAMOPHONE RECORD LIBRARY. 160 pp. Price on application.	
<i>The Arts Council Gramophone Library consists of about 6,000 discs which represent most of the recorded repertoire available in this country. Records may be borrowed (free of charge) by approved organisations.</i>	
EIGHT CONCERTS OF MUSIC BY ENGLISH COMPOSERS, 1300-1750; a commemorative book. 57 pp., 9 illustrations. (postage 4d.)	1 6
OPERA FOR ALL. Programme of Grand Opera Group: 1951-52, with a Note on Opera by Professor Edward J. Dent. 8 pp., 4 illustrations (postage 2½d.)	3
THE VISUAL ARTS IN YORKSHIRE. 64 pp. (postage 3d.)	1 6

EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

Postage extra: single copies 3d. each except where otherwise stated. Orders of over 10s. in value, postage from 1s. 6d.

A special reduction has been made in the price of many of the following catalogues.

PAINTING		Price s. d.
BRITISH SCHOOL		
British Painters, 1939-45. 1946. 11 pp., 8 illustrations.		3
British Painting, 1925-50 (First Anthology.) Introduction by David Baxandall. 1951. 11 pp., 13 illustrations		6
British Painting, 1925-50 (Second Anthology.) Introduction by Hugh Scrutton. 1951. 24 pp.		3
Modern British Pictures from the Tate Gallery. Introduction by John Rothenstein. 1947. 20 pp., 16 illustrations.		6
Recent Purchases by the Contemporary Art Society. Introduction by Raymond Mortimer. 1951. 8 pp., 4 illustrations.	1 0	
Some 20th-Century English Paintings and Drawings. Introduction by David Bell. 1950. 31 pp., 8 illustrations.		3
English Art and the Mediterranean. Compiled by The Warburg Institute. 1943. 96 pp., including index. (postage 4d.)		6
English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth Century. Introduction and Notes by Ralph Edwards. 1946. 20 pp., 8 illustrations.		3
Society of Mural Painters. Introduction by Hans Feibusch. 1950. 16 pp., 15 illustrations.		4
Painters of the Sea. Foreword by J. Wood Palmer. 1951. 8 pp., 4 illus.		6

carried forward: 5/10

Fig. 5
Arts Council of Great
Britain publications list
with Eric Westbrook's
annotations 1952
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Fig. 6
*Frances Hodgkins and
Her Circle: An Exhibition
Arranged by the Auckland
City Art Gallery on the
Occasion of the Auckland
Festival of the Arts 1954*
Pelorus Press, 1954
Cover
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



McCormick's research also underpinned the 1954 exhibition *Frances Hodgkins and Her Circle*. This was easily the Gallery's most ambitious exhibition to date, which McCormick described in his catalogue introduction as an attempt "to put [Hodgkins] in the setting of her place and time, to suggest possible influences and analogues, and, for comparative purposes, to range her beside a number of her New Zealand contemporaries."²³ Platts, with the assistance of McCahon, researched and developed the 1954 exhibition *Frank and Walter Wright*. In her catalogue essay, Platts also self-consciously positions herself as a researcher attempting to contextualise the Wright brothers' work within New Zealand's social and art history: "It must be emphasised that the full record is not yet complete, but here is something that may serve in the meantime."²⁴

The theme of an incomplete record and labour still to be done recurs as an endless refrain through the written documents of this period. Peter Tomory, Westbrook's successor as director of the Gallery from March 1956, wrote in his initial report:

I consider that this Gallery is in an excellent position to create for itself a unique professional status in New Zealand. But if this is to be done, we must be able to carry out a reasonable amount of art historical research, both on the pictures in the collections and on any other art historical matters which may arise in the Dominion... At the moment, even some simple enquiries cannot be answered for lack of reference material. We should be able to carry out general research without having to resort either to Melbourne Gallery, or University, or sources in England.²⁵

Tomory has become a near-legendary figure in the Gallery's history. Westbrook brought the Gallery to life but, as McCahon maintained, Tomory was "certainly the right person to succeed as Director and clamp down on sanity and organisation."²⁶ Tomory's significant contributions to New Zealand art historical scholarship have been well documented.²⁷ At the Gallery, he assiduously built on the foundations that

Westbrook had laid, taking a special interest in the development of the library. In the year from June 1956, the library's collection grew from 550 items to over 850 as Tomory set about equipping the Gallery with what he considered to be basic art historical reference material.²⁸ Reversing Westbrook's open-door lending policy, the reading room became the Research Library for the use of staff and "serious students," although a selection of art journals were displayed in the ground floor sculpture court for members of the public to browse.²⁹ Tomory also employed Gordon Brown, then librarian at Elam, to devise a classification system so the process of cataloguing the library's collection could begin. Brown's simplified Dewey-based system was similar enough to the system used by the Public Library to enable book processing to be done by Public Library staff. The first edition of the Gallery's *Quarterly* was published in the winter of 1956 shortly after Tomory's appointment (Figs 7 and 8). Originally, it was in essence a newsletter — as Tomory commented, "Auckland may be the best run and most ambitious Gallery in New Zealand, but unless we publicize these facts...we shall be merely working with our light under a bushel."³⁰ When Brown became the Gallery Librarian in July 1965, he took over production of the *Quarterly* from Tomory and began running longer and more in-depth articles.

Tomory's emphasis on professional standards extended to the exhibition programme, where he ruffled the feathers of some local artists by discontinuing the Society of Arts' traditional biannual exhibitions and generally discouraging those he saw as "closet aesthetes promoting chocolate-box art."³¹ In 1959, he curated the exhibition *Old Master Paintings from the Private and Public Collections of New Zealand*, noting in his introduction to the catalogue that:

The majority of works, including those from public galleries, have here been catalogued fully for the first time. The necessary research has been rendered more difficult by the explicable absence of an extensive art reference library. The Gallery's own reference library is being

improved year by year, but is still inadequate. Thus the usual debt to one's professional colleagues for information and suggestions has in this case become almost embarrassing.³²

Despite this assertion, this was an exhibition that would have been inconceivable at the Auckland City Art Gallery of previous years and by a less capable and knowledgeable researcher.

Art history as a discipline depends on the amassing of documents, the building of an archive of material. Donald Preziosi describes such an art historical collection as:

[A] centralized *data mass* to which the work of generations of scholars have contributed ... within which every possible object of study might find its unique and proper place relative to all others. Every item might thereby be sited (and cited) as referencing or indexing another or others.³³

The development of the Gallery's library has been contingent with the development of art scholarship in New Zealand, as pioneering researchers have insisted on the value of such a resource, and have contributed what McCormick called "all that niggling, exhausting, but also gratifying labour on which art scholarship must rest."³⁴ The essential service provided by an art gallery library is room for reading, and space for the research that both Westbrook and Tomory understood to be the engine that drives an art gallery forward; room to read as McCormick did, "for the sake of reading and to allow the books to marinade in his mind."³⁵

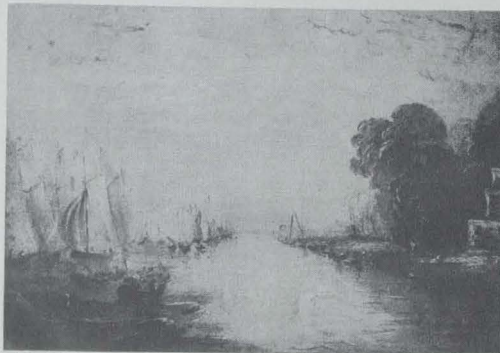
Auckland Art Gallery Librarians

Gordon Brown 1965–69
Ross Fraser 1970–74
Tim Garrity 1975–77
Ron Brownson 1978–95
Pauline Lellman 1995–2000
Catherine Hammond 2000–present

Figs. 7 and 8
Auckland City Art Gallery
Quarterly, no. 1 1956
Cover and inside pages
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

QUARTERLY



J. M. W. TURNER

Yachts at Cowes

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY QUARTERLY

NUMBER ONE — WINTER — 1956

FIRST NUMBER

This is the first number of *Quarterly* to be published by the Gallery. We hope in subsequent issues to include articles on works in the permanent collection, forthcoming exhibitions, alterations and additions to the building, and many other aspects of the Gallery's activities.

AUCKLAND GALLERY ASSOCIATES

The Associates have recently embarked on an active programme of activities. The general air of these meetings is informal and coffee is served as a conclusion. The subscription is low and not only will the subscriber be able to join in these activities but will assist the Gallery in acquiring from time to time additions to the collection. A recent bulletin from the Art Museum at Worcester, Massachusetts, informs us that their membership is 300,000, one hopes therefore that Auckland may do the same.

It is hoped that those who subscribe to the *Quarterly* will join the Auckland Gallery Associates. For those who are not resident in Auckland there is the very reasonable Country Member's subscription of 10/- a year. Single copies will be available at 1/6.

BUILDING IN PROGRESS

From now until well into 1957, extensive re-reading and decorating will be taking place in the Gallery. (Details of which may be seen on page five.) We must therefore ask our visitors' indulgence for any inconveniences they may be put to. These alterations will not, however, curtail our programme of exhibitions.

PAGE TWO

J.M.W. TURNER, R.A. (1775-1851)

YACHTS AT COWES Oil on canvas 13 x 20 ins
Signed *J.M.W. Turner 1825*

This delightful oil sketch by Turner was purchased by the Committee from a New Zealand source in 1955. Although in an advanced state of deterioration, our restorer, Mr. Lloyd, cleaned it and now it is as fresh looking as it would have been when it was painted.

This sketch is clearly connected with Turner's visit to the Isle of Wight in 1827, where he stayed with Nash, the architect, at East Cowes Castle.

There are in the Tate Gallery nine pictures painted during this visit. These nine paintings were painted on two pieces of canvas and were separated for the first time in 1906. Our sketch is obviously a variant of No. 2000 *Shipping at Cowes*, No. 2 for the compositions tally so closely that it is possible that our sketch was executed during some other visit.

All the Tate sketches remained in Turner's studio until his death, when they were bequeathed to the nation.

Therefore one may only surmise that Turner had a visitor to his studio in 1835 who bought the sketch and Turner signed and dated it. This was not an uncommon practice.

Whatever the solution of the date may be, the Gallery is very fortunate in possessing such a beautiful painting.

JAMES TISSOT (1834-1902)

STILL ON TOP Oil on canvas 34 x 21 ins
Signed *J.J. Tissot*

This attractive painting was presented to the Gallery in 1921 by Lord Leverhulme. Tissot has received renewed attention in the last few years and an exhibition of his work was organised by Sheffield Arts Gallery (England) and later toured by the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Tissot, who was born in Nantes and sought refuge in England after the Franco-Prussian War, is at best, a very fine illustrator of his period, although his oil sketches suggest that he might have been a more considerable artist. The painting here is probably related to *Preparing for the Gales*, now in the collection of Leonard P. Lee, Esq. The garden is the artist's at his house at Grave End Road, London.

The date of the picture is probably about 1873-4 as the black and white dress is the same as that worn by the left-hand model in *Coming Aboard*, which is dated 1875. Tissot was so accurate in his painting of dress that it is not difficult for the social historian to date the artist's paintings reasonably accurately.

It is strange to note that Tissot in his last years painted only religious subjects and spent the last two years of his life in a monastery at Bouillon.



J. J. TISSOT

Still on top

Acquisitions

The following works have recently been purchased by the Library and Art Gallery Committee.

HENRY MOORE (Born 1898) *Head of a Girl* 1923 Bronze Height 6 1/2 ins

DAVID COX (1783-1859) *Coming from Church* Oil on canvas 14 x 22 ins

FRANCES HODGKINS (1869-1947) *Ornaments, 1942* Gouache 21 x 14 1/2 ins

JOHN LINNELL (1792-1882)

The Fishing Party
Oil on canvas 27 1/2 x 36 ins
EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917)
Femme Mettant Son Bas Bronze 18 1/2 ins

The following works have recently been purchased by the Mackelvie Trusts.
THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, RA (1727-1788) *John Sparrowe, Bailiff of Ipswich* Oil on canvas 50 x 60 ins
JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERRY, ARA (1734-1797) *Portrait of Mrs. Boyle* Oil on canvas 30 x 25 ins

PAGE THREE

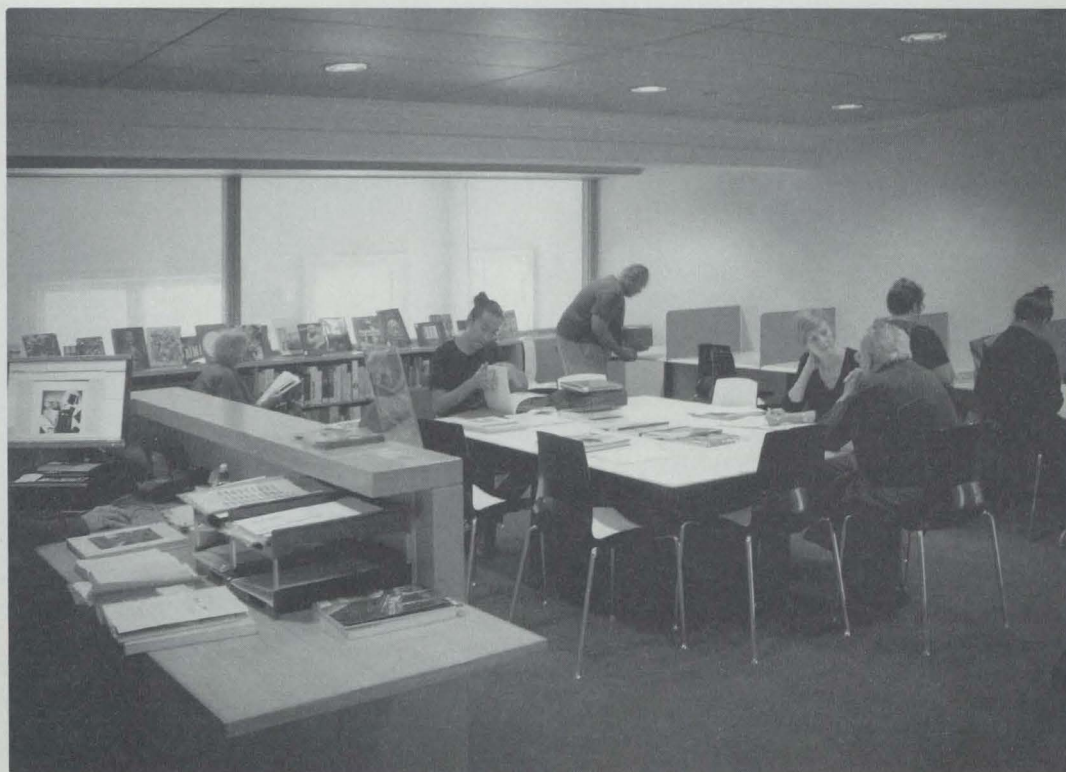


Fig. 9
The author interviewing
Gordon Brown in the
reading room of the
E H McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
2012
Photo: Catherine M.
Hammond

1. Ross Fraser, "The Gallery's First Eighty Years," *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly* 49 (1971): 12.

2. Westbrook flew from England to New Zealand to be interviewed for the director's job in January 1952, and was appointed on the 7th of that month. He later joked that the warmth of the New Zealand summer influenced his acceptance of the post (Pat Baskett, "Early Summer of the Arts," *New Zealand Herald*, December 10, 1992. Archive folder GDS 03/1, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). The Gallery flew him back to England via America, to enable him to visit galleries in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington and New York before returning to London from Montreal. With his wife Ingrid and daughter Charlotte, Westbrook departed again for New Zealand by sea on 6 March 1952, assuming duties in Auckland on 1 April 1952.

An article in the *Auckland Star* comments that "The best demonstration we have had so far of what the Auckland City Art Gallery is becoming under its new director is made in an exhibition which opened there today — the exhibition of 'Acquisitions 1952–53'. In it, Mr Westbrook for the first time shows his full hand — or nearly his full hand. His trump card is the redesigned Mackelvie room, yet to be

opened" (A A, "Art Show Indicates What is to Come," *Auckland Star*, September 17, 1953. A.C.A.G. Scrapbooks September 1953 to July 1958, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki).

3. Philip Jones, "Driven by an Artistic Passion: Eric Westbrook, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, 1915–2005," *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 11, 2005. Archive folder GDS 03/1, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

4. Westbrook did, in fact, go to Australia when he left Auckland at the end of 1955: he was Director of the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne from 1956 to 1973 and headed the Victorian Ministry for the Arts from 1973 to 1980.

5. Deborah Barlow, Head Librarian at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, writes: "It is important for the librarian to establish relationships early on with the curators for the purpose of building the best collection possible... Curators usually have in-depth knowledge of the current and upcoming publications in their narrow field... This is the first place where librarians can concentrate their efforts in building the collection" (Deborah Barlow, "Art Museum Library Collections and Collection Development," in *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, ed. Joan M Benedetti, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007, 95).

6. Barr's tenure ran from 21 August 1913 to his retirement, aged 65, on 28 July 1952. From this date, he was appointed Honorary Curator of the Old Colonists' Museum, which occupied the same building as the Auckland Public Library and Art Gallery.
7. John Currey, "Marrying the Arts, in Melbourne," *Manawatu Evening Standard*, February 5, 1966. Archive folder GDS 03/1, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
Westbrook made a sustained effort to introduce lunchtime jazz concerts to the Gallery. There was even discussion about inviting a jazz band to play at an Auckland City Council meeting in an attempt to persuade councillors to allow the concerts to go ahead. Westbrook felt that jazz music could tempt young people into the Gallery. The Council felt differently and did not allow the scheme to proceed, although they permitted the Gallery to stage classical music events, which were very popular ("Believes Jazz Will Tempt Youth into Art Gallery," *Auckland Star*, October 8, 1954 and "Council May Sample 'Hot' Jazz," *New Zealand Herald*, October 7, 1954. Auckland Council Archives ACC 275/54-23/382).
"Westbrook...transformed Auckland's gallery from a 'moribund, musty, dusty' institution into a lively big-city gallery. Attendances multiplied by the power of 16 after he transformed the interior, displayed leading exhibitions from around the world, and staged recitals, lectures and poetry readings...he was certainly a populist who took art to the people" (Jones).
8. Eric Westbrook, "Director's Report on Administration and Activities at the City Art Gallery from April 1952–August 1955," 33–34. Archive folder HS 04/35, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
9. Victoria Passau, "A Portrait of the Library: A Fine History," (Research paper, Library and Information Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), 18.
Art history at The University of Auckland was taught under the auspices of Elam until the Art History Department was formally established in 1969, with the appointment of Anthony Green as New Zealand's first Professor of Art History (Simon A Franks, "Elam 1890–1983," MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1984, 56). Keith Sinclair also records that Michael Dunn became a lecturer in New Zealand art history in the department in 1970 (Keith Sinclair, *A History of the University of Auckland, 1883–1983*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1983, 249). The Canterbury College School of Art was incorporated into the University of Canterbury in 1950, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/art-schools/3> (accessed January 17, 2012) and art history was introduced at Canterbury in 1974, <http://www.fina.canterbury.ac.nz/about.shtml> (accessed January 14, 2012). Tony Bellette was appointed as the first faculty member of the art history programme at Victoria University of Wellington in 1976, <http://library.victoria.ac.nz/library/about/policies/sics/arthisory.html> (accessed January 14, 2012). The Department of Art History at the University of Otago was formed in 1990 (Anne Jackman, Reference Librarian, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākēna, University of Otago, personal communication, January 11, 2012), although papers relevant to art historical study were taught prior to this within other departments, notably through the initiative of Dr Roger Collins, originally the Professor of French (Gordon Brown, interview with author, January 11, 2012).
10. Victoria Passau, Client Services Librarian at The University of Auckland Fine Arts Library notes that Elam's integration with Auckland University College "significantly changed the School's roll and demographic. Elam's new academic status required the reassessment of its curriculum especially in regards to art theory... The School's shift into a more academic world opened up a range of opportunities, including the development of an academic art library" (Passau, 18).
11. The closeness of the two libraries even extended to the fact that the same man was appointed as the first permanent Librarian of both: Gordon Brown was the Elam Librarian from 1964 to 1965 and the Gallery Librarian from 1965 to 1969.
12. "The National Art Gallery Library and Resource Centre," *National Art Gallery Newsletter* (Oct/Dec 1987): 6; and Nicola Woodhouse, "The Hector Library, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa," *Art Libraries Journal* 24, no 4 (1999): 37.
13. Brown, interview with author.
14. Ron Brownson, "Four Colour and Full Gloss: How Do We Service Art Reference?," *ARLIS/ANZ News* 26 (1988): 19.
15. John Barr, memo to Town Clerk, March 17, 1952. Archive folder HS 04/30, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
16. Eric Westbrook, correspondence with Joan Rogers, Publications Officer, Arts Council of Great Britain, May 1952. Archive folder HS 04/30, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. See also Library Committee meeting, June 3, 1952, Auckland Council Archives, ACC 108/5.
17. Auckland City Art Gallery Reference Library Register of Books 1953–c.1960. Archive folder GDS 10/2, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
18. Brown, interview with author.
19. Westbrook, "Director's Report," 33.
20. Vincent O'Sullivan, "Portrait of E.H. McCormick," *Listener*, July 18, 1981, 19.
21. C K Stead, notes compiled after an address at the naming of the E H McCormick Research Library, March 1999. Archive folder GDS 10/3, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
22. Eric Westbrook, letter to Town Clerk, "Frances Hodgkins: Selby Collection and Eric McCormick Book," July 29, 1953. Auckland Council Archives, ACC 108/5.
23. E H McCormick, "The Exhibition," *Frances Hodgkins and Her Circle* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1954), 5.
24. Una Platts, "Frank and Walter Wright: Artists," *Frank and Walter Wright* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1954), unpaginated.
25. Peter Tomory, "Auckland City Art Gallery Director's Report," April 1956, 9–10. Auckland Council Archive, ACC 275/56-23/422.
26. Colin McCahon, quoted in Courtney Johnston, "Feeling and Illustration: Reading Peter Tomory's Art History," *Journal of New Zealand Art History* 27 (2006): 27.
27. See, for example: Courtney Johnston, "Feeling and Illustration," 27–37; Courtney Johnston, "Peter Tomory: The New Zealand Years, 1956–1968," (MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2004); Mary Kisler, "The Peter Tomory Archive," *Reading Room* 3 (2009): 154–63; Peter Tomory, "Looking at Art in New Zealand," *Landfall* 46 (1958): 153–69; Peter Tomory, "The Visual Arts," in *Distance Looks Our Way: The Effects of Remoteness on New Zealand*, ed. Keith Sinclair (Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade for the University of Auckland, 1961), 63–78; Peter Tomory, "Art," in *The Pattern of New Zealand Culture*, ed. A L McLeod (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1968), 176–208; Peter Tomory, *Painting 1890–1950* (Wellington: A H & A W Reed, 1968); Peter Tomory, *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972).
28. Auckland City Art Gallery Reference Library Register of Books 1953–c.1960. The E H McCormick Research Library today holds over 35,000 volumes.
29. Peter Tomory, "Auckland City Art Gallery Director's Report," 6.
30. Peter Tomory, "Auckland City Art Gallery Director's Report," 9.
31. Peter Tomory, "The Bridgehead Revisited," *Landfall* 185 (1993): 16.
32. Peter Tomory, "Introduction," *Old Master Paintings from the Private and Public Collections of New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1959), 3–4.
33. Donald Preziosi, "Introduction," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16–17.
34. E H McCormick, *The Inland Eye: A Sketch in Visual Autobiography* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Associates, 1959), 43.
35. E H McCormick, quoted in Gordon McLauchlan, "A Lasting Literary Legacy," *New Zealand Herald*, April 1, 1995. Archive folder GDS 10/3, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Staff Publications and Presentations
2010—12

Books and Exhibition Catalogues

Ron Brownson, ed., *Art Toi: New Zealand Art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki*. Foreword by Chris Saines; managing editor, Catherine Hammond; with contributions by Natasha Conland, Jane Davidson-Ladd, Mary Kisler, Ngahiraka Mason, Christa Napier-Robertson, Anna Parlane, Hanna Scott, Roger Taberner and Julia Waite (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011).

Ron Brownson, *The Walters Prize 2010*. Foreword by Chris Saines (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2010).

Ron Brownson and Anna Parlane, *Choi Jeong Hwa : Flower Chandelier* (Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki, 2011).

Natasha Conland, *Kate Newby: I'm just like a pile of leaves* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011).

Natasha Conland, *Jeppé Hein: Long Modified Bench Auckland* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011).

Natasha Conland, *Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon: the 4th Auckland Triennial* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2010).

Natasha Conland, *Made Active: the Chartwell Show* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2012).

Mary Kisler, *Angels & Aristocrats : Early European Art in New Zealand Public Collections* (Godwit, 2010).

Mary Kisler, managing editor, *Degas to Dalí: from the National Galleries of Scotland* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2012).

Mary Kisler, *Promised Gift of Julian and Josie Robertson* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011).

Ngahiraka Mason, "Exploring a Māori Aesthetic," in *The 17th Biennale of Sydney: The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age* (Biennale of Sydney, 2010).

Ngahiraka Mason, "The Power of Place," in *Manu Toi: Artists and Messengers* (Mangere Arts Centre, 2010).

Ngahiraka Mason, "Change and continuity: Kowhaiwhai," essay in *Te Taumata Exhibition Series : Kura Te Waru Rewiri : 10 June to 17 July, Corban Estate Arts Centre* (Auckland Council, 2011).

Ngahiraka Mason, "Creativity & Spirituality," in *Kura: Story of a Māori Woman* (Mangere Arts Centre, 2011).

Ngahiraka Mason, "Ka Kata Te Po," in *Ka Kata Te Po* (Te Manawa Museums Trust, 2011).

I Spy NZ Art: New Zealand Art from the Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Editorial team, Hanna Scott, Julia Waite, Caroline McBride and Christa Napier-Robertson (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011).

Journal and Magazine Articles

Sarah Hillary, "LA Stories," *Art News*, Sept 2010.

Mary Kisler, "Dynamic starbursts," review of *Van Gogh – the Life* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith in the *Listener*, February 11, 2012.

Mary Kisler, "Leave the substance for the shadow," review of *Surrealism: The Poetry of Dreams* from the Musée national d'art modern, Centre Pompidou, Paris at the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane in the *Listener*, July 30, 2011.

Mary Kisler, "Master class," review of *European Masters: 19th–20th Century Art from the Städel Museum*, at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in the *Listener*, October 16, 2010.

Ute Larsen and Camilla Baskcomb, "Counterfeits and Conservation - Responsibility or Liability?" *Journal of Paper Conservation* 12, no.4 (2011): 26–30.

Ute Larsen and Camilla Baskcomb, "Outside the Square: A Considered Approach to the Treatment of a Three-dimensional Paper Object," in *Contributions to the 6th AICCM Book, Paper and Photographic Materials Symposium. Melbourne, 17–19 November 2010*, 29–33.

Ngahiraka Mason, "The 17th Biennale of Sydney," review in *Art and Australia* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 146–7.

Online Publications and Websites

Ron Brownson, "Photography and the Portraits of Gottfried Lindauer," in *Whakamīharo Lindauer Online*, www.lindaueronline.co.nz.

Ngahiraka Mason, "Piecing Parts of a Puzzle Together: Researching Ana Rupene and Child," *Whakamīharo Lindauer Online*, www.lindaueronline.co.nz.

Sarah Hillary, "The Materials and Techniques of Gottfried Lindauer," in *Whakamīharo Lindauer Online*, www.lindaueronline.co.nz.

Sarah Hillary and Ute Larsen, "Merging Techniques – New Research into Lindauer's Use of Photographs," *Whakamīharo Lindauer Online*, www.lindaueronline.co.nz.

Conference Papers

Camilla Baskcomb, "The Art of Restoration: Edwin Harris, a Rediscovered Panoptique Watercolour," paper presented at the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials (NZCCM) Conference, Christchurch, October 21, 2010.

Sarah Hillary, "Better than Ever? The Theft of a

Painting from a Conservation Viewpoint," lecture presented at the Australian Registrars Conference, Christchurch, February 26, 2010.

Sarah Hillary, "The Early Use of PVA and Acrylic Paint by New Zealand Artists: An Overview of the Study to Date," lecture presented at the Twentieth Century in Paint Project Meeting, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, February 16, 2010.

Sarah Hillary, "The Early Use of PVA and Acrylic Paints by New Zealand Artists," lecture presented at the Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, August 2010.

Sarah Hillary, "Modern Paints in Aotearoa: The Early Use of PVA and Acrylic Paint," lecture presented at the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials (NZCCM) Conference, Christchurch, October 20, 2010.

Ute Larsen and Camilla Baskcomb, "Outside the Square: A Considered Approach to the Treatment of a Three-dimensional Paper Object," paper co-presented at the 6th Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials Book, Paper and Photographic Materials Symposium, Melbourne, November 17, 2010.

Caroline McBride, "Whakamīharo Lindauer Online: A Website for the Community," paper presented at the ARLIS/ANZ conference, *The Exquisite Line*, Darwin, September 15–17, 2010.

Ngahiraka Mason and Caroline McBride, "Whakamīharo Lindauer Online: Linking People," lecture presented at the National Digital Forum 2010 Conference, *Linking Data Linking People*, Wellington, October 18–19, 2010.

Contributors

Christina Barton is co-editor of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*. She is an art historian, writer and curator who is currently Director of the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Deborah Cain is an art historian who lectures for the University of Waikato at the Shanghai International Studies University. She has published on a wide range of cultural topics, including in *Third Text*, *Sites*, and other journals.

Natasha Conland is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. She writes regularly on contemporary art for journals and catalogues in the Asia Pacific region, significant recent curatorial projects include group exhibition *Made Active: The Chartwell Show* (2012), *Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon: the 4th Auckland Triennial* (2010), the *SCAPE Biennial of Art in Public Space* (2006), *CAFÉ 2*, Busan Biennale, South Korea (2006), and et al.'s *the fundamental practice* for New Zealand's representation to the Venice Biennale (2005).

David Cross is an artist, writer and curator based in Wellington, New Zealand. He has exhibited throughout New Zealand, Australia and Eastern Europe including Perspecta 99 in Sydney and ACCA in Melbourne and performed in international live art festivals in Poland and Croatia and the Czech republic. His writing has been published in numerous journals and magazines including *Art and Text*, *World Art*, *AAANZ* journal and *Photofile*. He is Associate Professor in Fine Arts at Massey University where he directs the Litmus Research Initiative. In 2008–09 he co-directed the *One Day Sculpture* series of 20 temporary commissions across New Zealand with Claire Doherty.

Wystan Curnow is a Research Fellow at the University of Auckland. He is co-editor of a forthcoming history of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. His poems *Young Wonne* and *Montparnasse As Was* appeared in the *London Review of Books* (December 1, 2011) and *Percutio* (Paris, 2012) respectively.

Blair French is Executive Director of Artspace Visual Arts Centre, in Sydney, Australia and Curatorial Convener for the 6th (2010–11) and Curator for the 7th (2013) iterations of *SCAPE: Christchurch Biennial of Art in Public Space*. His publications include edited or co-edited monographs on the work of Bruce Barber, Shaun Gladwell, Rose Nolan and Paul Saint; the books *Out of Time: Essays Between Photography and Art* (2006), *Twelve Australian Photo Artists* (co-authored with Daniel Palmer) (2009); and as editor, *PhotoFiles: An Australian Photography Reader* (1999). With Andreas Beitin and Leonhard Emmerling he is currently co-editing a two-volume reader in association with Dusseldorf-based artist Mischa Kuball's major "platon's mirror" project to be published by Verlag Walther König in 2012.

Robert Leonard is the Director of the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. He previously worked at a number of New Zealand art museums, including a stint as Contemporary Art Curator at Auckland Art Gallery, where he curated the 2005 exhibition *Mixed-up Childhood*. In 2002 he was J D Stout Research Fellow at Victoria University of Wellington. He was one of the founding editors of *Reading Room* and is Managing Editor of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*.

Caroline McBride is Librarian/Archivist at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. She was the joint project

manager of Whakamiharo Lindauer Online and was on the Gallery team who produced I Spy NZ Art: New Zealand Art from the Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Kate Newby is an artist currently based in Auckland, New Zealand. Recent exhibitions include, All parts. All the time (Coopers Park and Olive Street Gardens, Brooklyn, New York, 2012), I'm just like a pile of leaves in Toi Aotearoa (Auckland Art Gallery, 2011), Melanchotopia (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2011), I'll follow you down the road (Hopkinson Cundy, Auckland, 2011) and Crawl out your window (GAK Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, 2010). In 2012 Newby participated in the International Studio and Curatorial Program ISCP, New York and the Fogo Island Arts Corporation Residency, Newfoundland.

Anna Parlane is a writer and curator currently undertaking postgraduate research at Melbourne University. She previously worked as Assistant Curator, Auckland Art Gallery and Curatorial Assistant for the 4th Auckland Triennial Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon.

Laura Preston is currently Guest Curator at Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. She was the Curator at the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington from 2008-12. She has also worked at the Witte de With, Rotterdam and Artspace, Auckland.

Helena Reckitt is Senior Lecturer in Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London. She recently curated Keren Cytter: Based on a True Story, a solo exhibition of the Israeli artist's work at Oakville Galleries, Ontario, that will travel throughout North America.

Layla Rudneva-Mackay is an artist based in Auckland, New Zealand. Recent exhibitions include Pointing At Tress (Starkwhite, Auckland, 2012) coinciding with a new monograph Green With Envy (Clouds/ Starkwhite, 2012), A Rock That Thought It Was A Bird (Artspace, Auckland 2010), Staging Space (The Physics Room, Christchurch, 2010). She is currently a DocFA candidate at the Elam School of Fine Arts, National Institute of Creative Arts and Industry at The University of Auckland.

Allan Smith is Senior Lecturer at Elam School of Fine Arts, National Institute of Creative Arts and Industry at The University of Auckland.

Megan Tamati-Quennell is the curator of Contemporary Māori, Indigenous art at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Megan has worked as a curator and art writer for 23 years. Recent writing includes "Imagined Futures and Utopian Dreams," in Close Encounters, the Next 500 Years (Plug in Inc, 2011), "Mana Wāhine Maori," in KURA: Story of a Maori Woman Artist (Toi o Manukau 2011), "Knowledge as a Taonga - Hemi MacGregor's Remix," in REMIX: Works by Hemi MacGregor (The University of Waikato, 2012).

Julia Waite is Assistant Curator/Assistant Project-Coordinator at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. In 2011 she assisted Natasha Conland Curator, Contemporary Art with the development and installation of the inaugural Edmiston North Terrace Sculpture Commission. Recent curation has been focused on the modern period. In 2012 she curated Speed & Flight, an exhibition of British linocuts from students of the Grosvenor School of Modern Art, and an exhibition on the 1930s figurative paintings of Lois White.

John C. Welchman is Professor of art history, theory and criticism in the Visual Arts department at the University of California, San Diego and co-director of the Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts. His books include *Modernism Relocated: Towards a Cultural Studies of Visual Modernity* (Allen & Unwin, 1995), *Invisible Colours: A Visual History of Titles* (Yale, 1997) and *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Routledge, 2001). He is co-author of the *Dada and Surrealist Word-Image* (MIT Press, 1987) and of *Mike Kelley* (Phaidon, 1999); and editor of *Rethinking Borders* (Minnesota UP/Routledge, 1996), *Institutional Critique and After* (JRP|Ringier, 2006), *The Aesthetics of Risk* (JRP|Ringier, 2008) and *Black Sphinx: On the Comedic in Modern Art* (JRP|Ringier, 2010). The most recent of the some 20 books, catalogue texts and essays on Kelley he has authored or edited include, "Mike Kelley and the Comedic" for the artist's upcoming retrospective (Stedelijk, Pompidou, MoMA, MOCA, 2012-14) and *On the Beyond: A Conversation between Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw and John C. Welchman*, [Kunst und Architektur im Gespräch/Art and Architecture in Discussion] (Springer, 2011).

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THE SPACE OF READING
ISSUE/05.12

Contributors Nick Austin, Christina Barton, Len Bell, Roger Blackley, Jan Bryant, Gregory Burke, Rex Butler, Anthony Byrt, Deborah Cain, Natasha Conland, David Cross, Abby Cunnane, Wystan Curnow, Richard Dale, et al, Blair French, Tony Green, Terrence Handscomb, Ron Hanson, Bilal Khbeiz, Chris Kraus, Lee Weng Choy, Robert Leonard, Chus Martínez, Caroline McBride, Kate Newby, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Anna Parlane, Laura Preston, Helena Reckitt, Layla Rudneva-Mackay, Walid Sadek, Anna Sanderson, Marnie Slater, Allan Smith, Michael Stevenson, Megan Tamati-Quennell, Julia Waite, John C. Welchman, Anna Marie White.

**AUCKLAND
ART GALLERY
TOI OTĀMAKI**

THE MARYLYN MAYO FOUNDATION