

# text/object

an exhibition of collaborative and inter-disciplinary works  
by staff of the School of Visual and Performing Arts, Charles Sturt University

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Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

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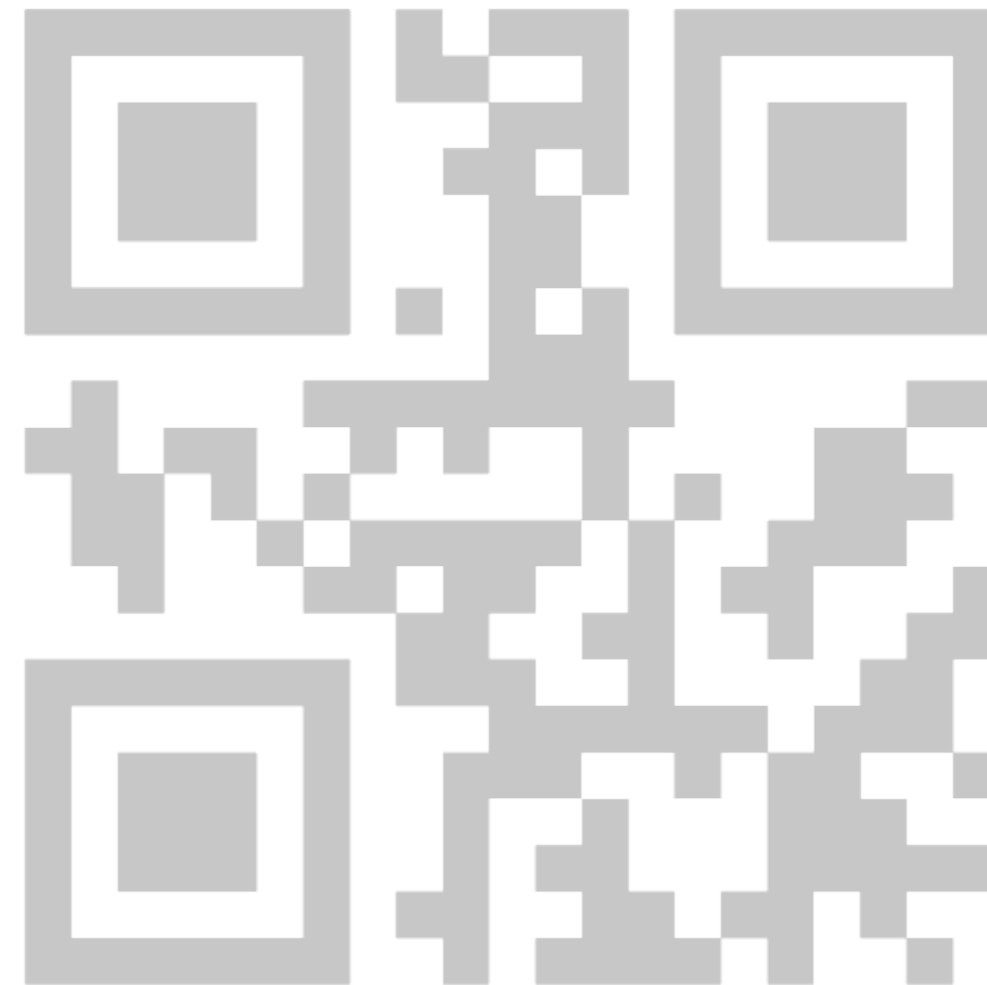
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Design: Scott Howie



The Wagga Wagga Art Gallery is proud to host *text/object*, an exhibition showcasing the work of staff from the School of Visual and Performing Arts at Charles Sturt University. *text/object* continues to build on the strong connections between the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery and the University. Following on from *Transference* in 2000 and *conduit* in 2005, (which accompanied the *Leading from the Edge* Public Galleries Summit hosted by Wagga Wagga Art Gallery), *text/object* is the third exhibition in the series and the largest.

The curatorial premise, developed by Dr Johannes Klabbbers, explores the practice of cross-disciplinary collaboration, inviting practitioners to explore new directions beyond their comfort zones. The participants in *text/object* naturally bring their personal concerns and specific practices to such a challenge. *text/object* features works by artists, designers and performers working with each other and members of the community, locally, nationally and internationally. Hence a wide range of media and approaches to collaboration are explored.

One of the major roles of the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery is to showcase the work of regionally-based, local artists. The Wagga Wagga Art Gallery has two exhibition spaces dedicated to community groups and local artists: the Links Gallery and the newer E3 art space. However, local artists are not consigned solely to these designated spaces. In the case of *text/object*, the artists exhibit their work in the Main Gallery space, alongside touring exhibitions and those curated by the Gallery. The exhibition gives an indication of the range and diversity of creative practices being taught, studied and researched at the School of Visual and Performing Arts at Charles Sturt University, and reflects the fact that the participants in *text/object* are committed to maintaining professional careers as practitioners whilst working as educators.

I would like to thank the artists in this exhibition, the curator Dr.Johannes Klabbbers and Dr.Neill Overton for the catalogue essay. I would also like to thank Arts NSW, the NSW Government's arts policy and funding body for their support of NSW artists and the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. In a regional centre such as Wagga Wagga the relationship between Charles Sturt University and the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery is an important one and exhibitions such as *text/object* fulfil a significant role in nurturing these connections and cultivating the intellectual life of the region.

Cath Bowdler  
Manager  
Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

There is a special and lasting relationship that exists between Charles Sturt University and the City of Wagga Wagga and there is no better demonstration of this association than that which has been forged over the past four decades between the School of Visual and Performing Arts and the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. How fortunate for all parties that Wagga Wagga City Council invested in the cultural development of the city with an active arts policy that included a gallery and library complex.

During this time both staff and students from the University have exhibited in the gallery complexes; these exhibitions have included every genre of arts practices, allowing the contributors the opportunity to challenge and occasionally provoke controversy; *No More Lies#1 2005*, Michael Agzarian and Jamie Holcombe's *Fucking Bat and Man 2005*, which was a caustic commentary on the censorship of David Ahern's *Fucking Bat and Boy 1990*, that had been removed from a student exhibition in the original city art gallery in Gurwood Street.

Traditionally staff exhibitions have primarily focused on the achievements and ingenuity of the individual; *Conduit 2005*; *Transference 2000* whereas this latest offering *Text/Object* has required that the majority of the participants move away from their comfort zone by demanding that they engage in a collaborative process.

Collaboration is a multifaceted concept traditionally more common in the performing arts where actors, musicians and designers make use of collaborative processes as an integral means of creating visual and aural experiences. For many of the visual artists represented here, the debate has shifted from the individual "what will I do?" to the collective "what will we do?" from "how will I do this?" to "how should we best approach this". Of greater importance has been the dialogue that has taken place between the collaborators to ensure that their collaboration is seamless and equitable and not simply, you do that bit and I will do this, but rather a journey of the partners traveling a common route to a common agreed outcome; a process that requires continuous and committed discussion.

This exhibition has been long in gestation with discussion and debate between and among the collaborators for the best part of twelve months. I trust that you will accept the invitation to be part of the journey, a first for the school.

Professor David Green  
Head of Campus - Wagga Wagga  
Charles Sturt University

## 1. Creative (practice as) research

Walter Benjamin may have felt that the art work became democratized in the age of mechanical reproduction but forty years later in 1976, for Rosalind Krauss (*The artworld*) has been deeply and disastrously affected by its relation to mass-media. *That an artist's work be published, reproduced and disseminated through the media has become, for the generation that has matured in the course of the last decade, virtually the only means of verifying its existence as art.*<sup>1</sup>

And so it seems in demonstrating to our peers, and most importantly to the University that determines on the basis of 'ticks' in columns whether to continue to employ us, that our work has value. This value can only be demonstrated by what the outcome of our creative research is not: a catalogue with framing essay/s which 'situate' the work, the appointment of a curator, the reviews and advertising generated and the importance of the institution in which we exhibit; these are the measurable outcomes of our 'creative research'. A phrase which, as Paul Carter notes *ought to be a tautology, in the present cultural climate is in fact an oxymoron. A research paradigm prevails in which knowledge and creativity are conceived as mutually exclusive (...) a narrowly reductive empiricist notion of research, which (insists) on describing the outcomes in advance...*<sup>2</sup>

But in Australia today a publicly funded art school is viable only in the context of a larger tertiary institution, and only then by offering many different courses in ever increasing numbers of combinations and flavours, many of which are necessarily vocationally oriented, or appear as such. In this outcome driven product oriented context, haunted by the spectre of 'The Industry' and OHS considerations, the potential for exploratory, experimental and speculative creative practices and research in order to materialise ideas, and opportunities for critical engagement and a critique of the dominant paradigm are rare indeed.

But persist we must and persist we will. With this exhibition and the accompanying texts, in the catalogue, on the website and through a publicly accessible on-line discussion forum (<http://truthbeauty.info/conversations/text-object>), I hope to have facilitated at least some conversations and 'material thinking' to use Carter's term, by insisting on adding the layer of the exploration of collaborative processes to what can often become the solipsistic creative research that takes place within the odd beast that is the twenty first century art school in regional Australia.

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## 2. Art vs life

The most devastatingly brilliant exhibition I have ever been to was Sophie Calle's *M'as-tu vue* in Paris in 2003. Mostly I enjoy the childlike state to which I am reduced by my almost non-existent French when I am in Paris but Calle's work is to a significant extent an invitation to a conversation. It is an almost literary body of work and very few concessions are made to non-French speakers. Here and there you find a room brochure with less than perfect English translations of selected excerpts; the most startling of which in the Pompidou was in the room containing *A Woman Vanishes* (2003) where Calle warns the audience that she may be observing them, and classifies visitors according to various animals:

*Four ways of visiting an exhibition by J.F.Barbier-Bouvet*  
*The ant goes methodically past every picture wall, careful not to miss anything. Its approach is docile submitting to the indications or logistics of the exhibition with an obvious desire to learn. The butterfly zigzags around the show flitting from ne*

*picture wall to another. Like the ant, the butterfly follows the order of the exhibition but asserts its will by sampling where its fancy takes it. The grasshopper advances by leaps. When it sees something of interest far away, it heads straight to it. Its movements are totally free. Indifferent to the logic of the exhibition it reacts only to the points that strike a chord. The fish slides along. It can slow down or speed up but it almost never stops. The fish keeps its distance contenting itself with grasping the spirit of the exhibition.*<sup>3</sup>

I walk very quickly through the gallery relying on my intuition to locate good work. I am sure this method causes me to sometimes miss works which are good or great, but life is short and I have a very fine nose. I am half fish, half grasshopper. So maybe that makes me a crab: I move sideways and sometimes, rarely, I stop. I hide under rocks. I too like to sit in corners and watch the way people look at art works :

*there is one section in the art gallery of new south wales where the curators have allowed two large windows. it is right smack bang in the middle of a room full of very valuable but extremely dull australian paintings which are of interest mainly as historical curiosities. it is these two windows to which everyone is instantly and irresistibly drawn and in front of which most people spend much more time (and have more to say to each other) than in front of any of the artworks. it seems it is not just that the harbour and the war ships and the bits of grass which can be seen from the windows are more interesting than the boring little landscapes and people in the paintings, but right here right now it is just so damned obvious that art can't compete with life : real light and real people in real time.*

*there are blinds though, which can be drawn across : real life is not on permanent exhibition.*

*sydney winter 2007*<sup>4</sup>

When I used to teach people who wanted to become artists I would say to them: The ration of bad to good art is about ninety nine to one, but it's the one percent which is good, that makes it worthwhile. Your job is to locate that one percent and contribute to it. I met someone who, upon discovering I have a doctorate in fine art, became very keen to go to an art gallery with me. I guess if you have a doctorate in something useful like podiatry, people keep asking you to look at their feet. I said: You might be disappointed because I tend not to spend a lot of time with the art works. I am actually more interested in books and cakes and so especially in a large public gallery you are more likely to find me in the bookshop or the restaurant. I also told her about the one percent but perhaps she thought I possessed the power to make the ninety nine percent seem less boring to her. But no doctor and no curator that I know of, has supernatural powers.

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## 3. Create, curate or perish

I am not an experienced curator, but I have spent most of my working life thinking and talking about, and looking at art; and arranging ideas, texts and objects in spaces, temporal spaces, two and three dimensional spaces, real and imaginary. During the last decade and a half I have also created spaces for those objects and ideas, many of them virtual.

Rather than a traditional curatorial statement I was hoping to simply reproduce an e-conversation about collaboration and curating with two of the artists in this exhibition, Julie Montgarrett and Ruth Hadlow, after a real life conversation about these topics in Wagga in the freezing court yard of the

School of Visual and Performing Arts during Ruth's Artist in Residence in the winter of 2008. However as I write the conversation is proving very interesting and continues to unfold, or to be more accurate, to fold in on itself, the time frame has proven a barrier.

I began:

*i really think the term curator is somewhat too grandiose a term for what i have done here in this show which is simply to set a parameter and some sort of (very wide) theme. in addition i have had some conversations with some of the participants about their collaborations as they were thinking about them and working on them, and encouraged them to have conversations with each other. but i haven't been in a position to invite or not invite artists because it is a show by staff of the school of visual and performing arts and i could not exclude people simply because i did not find their work or their ideas interesting. politically that would just not be feasible. secondly each member of staff was free to nominate who they wanted to collaborate with. some people chose to work with another member of staff, others decided to work with other people in the community, one member of staff even chose to collaborate with his two year old child. what did w.c. fields say? don't work with children and animals?*

*i suppose william wegman would argue that he is collaborating with his weimeraners, but are they collaborating with him? i would have thought agency is one of the basic requirements for collaboration. can a beekeeper be said to be collaborating with the bees to make honey?*

*also there will be works in the exhibition which i would not have included if i was truly curating it. so i am not sure that i am wholly comfortable with the idea of being called the curator, to claim to have curated the show. nevertheless a number of very interesting works and processes have emerged in response to the theme and as a result of the parameter that only works which were collaborations would be included. so i feel very positive about that.*<sup>5</sup>

But back to spaces: I have made numerous websites, but I have a problem with the idea of information architecture. 'Information' is one of those generic terms popular in late capitalism which implies quality and desirability; and doesn't architecture sound grandiose? Even more so than 'curator'. Which brings us to the more recent innovation of 'web curator'. I guess it would be difficult to attract applicants for the position of web monkey.

*In the 1970s (...) in The Production of Space (Henri Lefebvre) argued that space is produced through the enactment of social relations. Space, according to Lefebvre, is created by the flows and movements of relational networks—such as capital, power, and information—in, across, and through a given physical area. A building, in Lefebvre's reading, is a map of the interactions of the people who inhabit it; an architect is not a builder in an otherwise empty wilderness, but an observer, chronicler, and shaper of the networks that exist around her—in short, a map maker.*<sup>6</sup>

In Lefebvre's terms an exhibition and each of the works in it, are an index of a complex set of relationships. Bourriaud<sup>(7)</sup> too is interested in reading art works as the products of relationships, between humans, between spaces and between objects. This methodology can be equally effective in a range of creative contexts, which is especially relevant to us as practitioners and didacts in an environment where objects are made and designed and texts are produced in a range of mediums.

This seems to open up the possibility of a creative discipline which straddles design, art, philosophy and architecture. It explores relationships between people, objects, texts and ideas. It is by necessity collaborative and can find expression in a myriad of different ways: a website, an installation in an art gallery, a building and so on; or in something far less tangible which does not sit easily in any spaces or contexts which we are familiar with.

Let us return, by way of an example, to a work by Sophie Calle, *Hotel* (1982). The work is exhibited as a series of photographs with large text panels:

*Wednesday March 4, 1981. 11:20a.m.*

*I go into room 30. Only one bed has been slept in, the one on the right. There is a small bag on the luggage stand. A beautifully ironed silk nightgown lies on the chair that has been pulled up near the bed: it clearly has never been worn. Everything else is still in the traveling bag. All I see there is men's clothing: grey trousers, a grey striped shirt, a pair of socks, a toilet kit (razor, shaving cream, comb, aftershave lotion), a dog-eared photograph of a group of young people surrounding an older woman, a passport in the name of M.L., male sex, Italian nationality, born in 1946 in Rome, his place of residence, five foot seven, blue eyes. The bathroom is empty, so is the closet, but in the drawer of the night table I find: a box of Panter cigars, a fountain pen, airmail stationery, a leather box with the initials M.L. On a piece of paper is the address of a Mr. and Mrs. B. in Florence, a wallet with five identical photographs of a blond woman and a wedding photograph showing the man in the passport in a tuxedo and the blond woman in a wedding gown. There is also an old bill from the Hotel C., dated March 4, 1979, in the name of Mr. and Mrs. L for the same room, number 30. Exactly two years ago, M.L. spent the night in the Hotel C. with his wife. He has come back alone. With the embroidered nightgown in his suitcase. His reservation was for last night only. He is leaving today. I'll do the room later.*<sup>8</sup>

I am not sure how the University's Ethics Committee would deal with a proposal for a research project where "the artist takes a position as chamber maid in a hotel and photographs the guests' opened luggage, laundry, contents of bathrooms, and the rubbish bins, noting details gleaned from their diaries and letters."<sup>9</sup> Yet there is no doubt the process employed by Sophie Calle produces the most startling art works. It seems to differ from other well-respected academic disciplines such as history or archeology mainly in that their subjects are

dead. At the same time we must also beware of taking (what she says about) her work at face value. As her collaborations with the novelist Paul Auster demonstrate: Sophie Calle is also interested in fictions.

#### 4. An invitation to a conversation

Why collaboration? Already most of what happens in and around an art school is necessarily collaborative. Being located in Universities, as all but one Australian art school was forced to be in 1989 by John Dawkins (to whom we can also be grateful for the introduction of HECS), we have to collaborate on a range of policies and issues with the University and the Faculty of which we are a part. Needless to say not all members of the Academy in disciplines other than our own, necessarily understand, or are sympathetic to, the nature of our research and practice, and its outcomes.

Secondly we collaborate internally, with staff, both general and academic, and of course with our students, since teaching and learning can only take place if there is a willingness to engage in dialogue, to have conversations. The exchange of ideas is fundamental not just to creative research and practice but to all research, be it in the arts or in the sciences; and perhaps that is why at the end of the day, it is appropriate for an art school to be part of a University.

For those members of staff in the performing arts and in design, collaboration is often a necessary evil in their discipline areas, however as individual practitioners, perhaps because creative people are by nature often reclusive and/or individualistic; or because so much of our daily work in the University involves negotiation and compromise, when we retreat into our studios or work rooms we welcome the



opportunity to act and think as intelligent independent units. But in all cases it is with whom you collaborate that makes all the difference.

*Historical situations, always new, unveil man's constant possibilities and allow us to name them. Thus, in the course of the war against Nazism, the word "collaboration" took on a new meaning: putting oneself voluntarily at the service of a vile power. What a fundamental notion! How did humanity do without it until 1944? Now that the word has been found, we realize more and more that man's activity is by nature a collaboration. All those who extol the mass media din, advertising's imbecilic smile, the neglect of the natural world, indiscretion raised to the status of a virtue — they deserve to be called collaborators with the modern.*<sup>10</sup>

'Collaboration' can have a number of meanings and certainly during and after the second world war, as Milan Kundera points out in the quote above, a sinister connotation. To be a collaborator is about the worst thing you could have been accused of in the decades following the war in Europe. But in terms of creative practices, collaboration can also take many forms, as discussed by Neill Overton in his essay elsewhere in this catalogue. As we can see in this exhibition, a collaboration can result in a single, synthetic or composite work to which each collaborator contributes equally, or in two or more discreet works placed together under one title.

But it is always the result of a conversation. Conversations are almost always improvisational and collaborative in nature since it takes at least two people, thinking and responding to each other, to have a conversation. Thus my idea for the curatorial process for the exhibition was simple, open-ended and above all collaborative, inviting artists to collaborate, to participate in a conversation and to exhibit an index of relationships thus formed.

I knew before I started, that the curatorial process is fraught

with difficulties. As Ruth Hadlow points out : *The curator is often the broker or conduit between the artist/artwork and the audience/public sphere. One needs to be attuned to the politics of the opportunity, savvy enough to play the particular roles required, while at the same time remaining faithful to the ideas and intentions of one's work. It is a difficult balancing act.*<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, like Julie Montgarrett, I experience many acts of curatorship like I do most artworks : as assertions, rather than as invitations to engage in dialogue : *The process of curation appears to have moved away from a role of conduit/broker as Ruth said aptly, in most cases to one of leading dictator with delusions of grandeur. The role of curator as an astute observer/critic/collaborator/aesthetic/cultural director has become increasingly subverted into one of individual ambition to escalate personal career profile via the preferable elite marketing vehicle of 'art exhibition.'*<sup>5</sup> Where, in Ruth Hadlow's words, *are those curators with a subtle ear and eye, who seem to be able to keep an eye on what artists are doing and listen to that over a period of time, putting exhibitions together based on the ideas at play in the artists' work rather than their own?*<sup>12</sup>

Audiences too collaborate with the artist/s, since like conversations, it takes at least two people for art to 'work'. This exhibition is an invitation to audiences to engage in a dialogue with the artist, and to respond to the dialogue between the curator and the artist/s.

So here is a map of some of the conversations that have been going on during the last year or so in and around the art school in town, and beyond. I hope some of them are worth joining in with.

I would like to thank: The exhibition participants, the staff of the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, in particular Cath Bowdler and Stephen Payne; Neill Overton and Anna Poletti for their insightful catalogue essays; Katrina Flaskas; Kate Lynch and Patrick McNamara for their work on the website; Chris

Orchard for assisting several exhibition participants; Scott Howie for designing the catalogue; the Faculty of Arts for assisting with the catalogue printing costs; and the Acting Head of the School of Visual and Performing Arts Professor David Green for giving me the opportunity to curate the exhibition.

As for the works in this exhibition which have (one of) my name(s) attached to them, I faced a different kind of problem: I decided to stop making art at the end of 2005. So for this exhibition I handed over an unfinished tentative fragment from 2002 to one collaborator, and an unfinished tentative non-artwork to another. I also collaborated with

another artist, an old friend from my own art school days, with whom I have been having conversations about art for twenty years, by providing a title and a framing text for a fragment from real life which he told me he had decided to make into an art work. I learned from Sophie Calle that a text can form an integral part of an art work, can make or break an art work, can *be* an art work.

Hence *text/object*.

Dr Johannes Klabbers  
October 2008

<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Krauss. 1976. *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism* October, Vol. 1, Spring, 1976. p59

<sup>2</sup> Paul Carter. 2008. *Material Thinking*. Melbourne University Press. p7

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Sophie Calle *A woman vanishes* (2003) Room brochure *M'as-tu vue* Pompidou Centre Paris December 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Author's diary entry July 5th, 2007. (Unpublished)

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Hadlow, Julie Montgarrett and Johannes Klabbers. 2008. *On curating and collaboration*. <http://tinyurl.com/oncuratingand> (accessed 22.9.08)

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Rester. 2008. *Mapping Memory: Web Designer as Information Cartographer*. <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/mappingmemory> (accessed 27.8.08)

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud. 2002. *Relational aesthetics*. Paris: Les Presses du Réel.

<sup>8</sup> Sophie Calle, *Hotel* (1982). [http://www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum/lessons/movpics\\_calle.php](http://www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum/lessons/movpics_calle.php) (accessed 22.9.08)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum/lessons/movpics\\_calle.php](http://www.guggenheim.org/artscurriculum/lessons/movpics_calle.php) (accessed 22.9.08)

<sup>10</sup> Milan Kundera. *The Art of the Novel*. 1988. p125-126

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Hadlow, Julie Montgarrett and Johannes Klabbers. 2008. *On curating and collaboration*. <http://tinyurl.com/oncuratingand> (accessed 22.9.08)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

### Collaboration: Cannibals of the Hidden Mind

The greatest collaborations never occurred. They existed in the hidden mind as thought or intention never fully realized; derailed dramatically on the iron rails of their own molten ambitions. Salvador Dali famously began a collaboration with Walt Disney in 1946 on an animated film called *Destino* that burnt out and never saw the light of day. Even by invoking this now, it raises an image of a dark Mickey Mouse melting on a beach surrounded by waxen fob-watches, animated three-fingered white gloves upheld by telegraph pole branches and lobsters, with black strings of shadows yawning towards an abyss. Such signals are the potent perimeters that collaboration conjures in thought; rattling like tiny bottles of nitroglycerine in crates on a truck.

Kurt Schwitters in MERZ in 1919 was a collagist/painter/sculptor and typographer - it was said that 'he realized environments' in the sense of making them manifest. **Real**-izing of environments and landscapes of connections is a romantic impulse leaning into myth. Schwitters's works such as *Mz 231 Miss Blanche* 1923 typify these collisions of text with chocolate wrappers, train tickets, feathers, smudged paint and a disconnected, formal Cubist grid geometry. The artist collaborates with the media to be led in the direction they initiate. John Wolseley used the land as co-conspirator in a drawing's development by burying a half-drawn page in the desert, and returning years later to view nature's completion of it... eaten away, stained by the rain, or blessed with mysterious tracks of nocturnal insects who have lumbered across its surface in Gosse Bluff - yellowed; tea coloured, the paper improved for being pocked or sun-bleached. Lloyd Rees said much the same thing regarding the seductions of ink; we become mere co-conspirators with its buttery fluidity, which flows onto the paper in ways of its own - making the artist a tram conductor along the way, rather than driver of the artwork.

Collaboration involves this same giving over to chance or to the inherent nature of the materials at hand; a relinquishing of control of all aspects to the convergence with another artist/image-maker's work and ideas. Theatre by its nature was always collaborative; which is *why* the Dadaists sprang from the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, out of theatre and performance pushing art off the walls and into the living moment. When a film script leaves the author's hands, or a costume designer's works take the stage - by their very nature of being collaborative mediums, in theatre, music or film, their control leaves the jetty and sets sail into other hands and interpretations. These types of collaborations are well understood; are explicit - whereas those between printmaker and technician, performance artist and photographer, painter and text - are often more covert operations; hidden as we direct ourselves towards the final outcome displayed on a gallery wall rather than at the process beneath. These collaborative undertakings are the uncertain traffic of art, ideas and means; trusting to ravens.

In Lautreamont's phrase, "Beautiful like the fortuitous meeting, on a dissection table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella" resides all the required logics of meeting and incident ...and further that "Breton summarized the surrealists' investigation of the use of incongruity, juxtaposition, and transformation", a procedure he termed "the cultivation of a systematic bewildering".<sup>1</sup> Surrealists shuffled the rational like cards; waiting to reveal sense from senselessness. To bewilder is after all an incarnation of wonder; a reaffirmation of truth.<sup>2</sup>

Uncertain traffic conspires between media, between thought and expression, and between image and its evolution: the now iconic images of Jill Orr's *Bleeding Trees* performance works from the 1979 Sydney Biennale, her naked back bowed and head immersed in the dirt, are as much a

collaboration with *the photograph* that recorded this body performance as the work itself. The photograph becomes the work's lasting trajectory into history; its embalment of the performance, if you will, to take on board Mike Parr's thoughts on 'photodeath' that the photograph imposes on the live immediacy of the performance.<sup>3</sup> The photograph conspires to impose a mummified stillness upon the moving image. In the recent *Marking Time* Conference at COFA, at the University of New South Wales, this debate continues into how time came to emerge as a "constituent parameter of the very nature of an art work"<sup>4</sup> - in fact how contemporary art lends itself to mapping the passage of time, looking at this incursion of movement and photography into the domain of painting out of the twentieth century. Of Marcel Duchamp's sequential painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), Professor Mike Esson said it was made: "At a time when artists were trying to claw back the area taken away from them by photography."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps not only 'claw back' contested territory, but more importantly collaborate to find neutral ground towards art's active future.

Artists no longer originate - they collaborate with past artists - to place themselves in the continuum of all images that have preceded them. All of postmodernism is a collaboration with the styles of past art; exhumations of the past reassembled towards new purpose; realignments to offer new interpretations. It is impossible to paint a bull or the human figure without the spectral impressions of all previous works within art history clinging there like so many cicada shells on a tree trunk. Ghost-brush and the twin devil-dogs of the moonrider leap into view. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all art was locked into a collaboration with photography: either in how images were produced, or documented; certainly with what an image *meant*. Photography represents the second real collaboration with art; the first was with literature, in the 'painting out' of the written word. With the advent of

the shutter mechanism, the blinking eye of the machine refused to be obviated until it imposed its aesthetic upon painting. Now, all painting sits in the ambient shadow of Cartier-Bresson, or of Bill Viola's sepulchral, tidally majestic *Five Angels for the Millenium* (2001).<sup>6</sup> These are 'paintings' that move and engulf with sound; where video meets the Renaissance and the sublime Turner seas of the churning eye of the octopus, to slowly pull figures loose from the watery stone-yard of Viola's elastic blue ponds.

The false dichotomy of new media/old media is subsumed through collaboration; it becomes an immersion in the bottomless art well. Collectively, contemporary art is only an archeology intending to resurrect the flaked bones below to other meanings than the initial ones. The twentieth century announced itself in the chocolate wrappers, paste glue and feathers of Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* drawings. These are the first real integration of text from magazines, newspapers and posters into pictorial painted form. The arguments can be made for Picasso, Braque or Rodchenko, but it was Schwitters who saw text as more than found object or form, by privileging typography as 'visual art'. In his *Dada/Merz* shards of words - the collaboration between graphic design, newspaper typography and painting tore the belly out of gallery art. Picasso had already used chair caning, torn music sheets, and a flurry of mud browns to create the Cubist language of fragmentation - skidding city traffic trapped in a perpetual mirror maze - to make the leap of *time* into space.

The 'new media' have enforced collaborations of science and technology into art; of the mechanical imposed upon the hand. The ancient imperatives of hand, eye and mind persist in art - but no longer in that order. Collaboration can take manifold expressions. It is more than hybrid arts practices that transgress across borderlands of differing art

and design disciplines. Often it is the shotgun marriage between disparate forms of artists; of matching means to idea, towards this evocation of the bewildering.

Robert Klippel and James Gleeson represent one of the purest collaborations in past Australian art; in 1947 and 1948, the formalist sculptor Klippel built a series of small wooden marquettes, from his usual language of organic-machine parts, and totemic block forms. Upon these Gleeson painted all manner of surrealist mysteries elucidated from T.S.Eliot's poems; of hidden worlds brought into vague tableaux curving around the tiny theatrical assemblages Klippel had made, towards an 'x-ray magic' beyond their individual efforts. Klippel's wooden seed-machines juxtaposed themselves against the Surrealist mindscapes of James Gleeson's oeuvre in their collaborative painted sculptures such as *No.35 Madame Sophie Sesoris (a pre-raphaelite satire)* 1947-48. Or as Gleeson stated regarding this collaboration: "Some time in the first half of 1948 we decided to pool our technical skills in a work in which painting would be used to suggest the interior structure of a carved form."<sup>7</sup> It was named after a character in 'The Burial of the Dead' sequence from poet T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Furthermore, Gleeson added: "On one level the carving-construction-painting sought to catch the spirit of this part of the poem, but - the idea was to suggest that by some kind of x-ray magic, one could look through the opaque skin of the form and see all that lay within."<sup>8</sup> In this collaboration, each artist retained their

own essential language, and out of this combination created not individual works, but a 'third entity' that sprang to life like a crash at an intersection. The best of collaborations acts upon us in precisely this way; we are witnesses at the scene of the unfolding accident.

Schwitters's definition in 1932 was that "With determination, one can destroy a world and, with knowledge and a respect for possibilities, construct a new world out of the ruins."<sup>9</sup> This offers a firm grasp of the explosive potential buried within collaborations; as a walk into the dark which shatters predetermined intentions, and in its wake releases the new and unexpected. Max Ernst spoke of collage as a 'confrontation', and perhaps collaboration is at its core this same testing of opposites to arrive at new dictates. He wrote that:

*Collage technique is the systematic exploitation of the chance or artificially provoked confrontation of two or more mutually alien realities on an obviously inappropriate level - and the poetic spark which jumps across when these realities approach each other.*<sup>10</sup>

I am drawn repeatedly to this concept of 'elegant irony' that underpinned Raoul Hausmann and Hannah Hoch's works; her language of collage and montage that bespoke these strategies of collaboration as this notion of a bridge between paths of working that a 'poetic spark' leaps across.

Dr. Neill Overton  
October 2008

<sup>1</sup> Anna Blakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*, New York: Noonday, 1959, p.154.

<sup>2</sup> Neill Overton, *Of Magic and Surgeons*, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery cat., November 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Mike Parr, *Photo(graphed)*, 1984, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art cat., p.57.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Rush, *New Media in Art*, Thames and Hudson, 2005, p.12.

<sup>5</sup> Professor Mike Esson, *Marking Time* Conference, COFA, University of New South Wales, 3rd October 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Viola, *Five Angels for the Millenium*, 2001, video artworks, Whitney Museum of American Art. Press Release, 17 October 2002.

<sup>7</sup> James Gleeson, *Robert Klippel*, Bay Books Pty. Ltd., p.60.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>9</sup> Serge Lemoine, *Dada*, Universe Books, St. Martin's Press, 1987, p.55.

<sup>10</sup> Max Ernst, in Dietmar Elger, *Dadaism*, Taschen, 2004, p.74.



**Text/object: A brief survey of some text/objects in and around Melbourne, as a means of considering what exactly a “text/object” might be...**

When you encounter the free, weekly zine *YOU* you meet a text/object head on. A small bag, sealed with a row of staples, inside which is a single page photocopied letter addressed to ‘you’. To access the letter, you need to negotiate the sealed bag, which every week is hand decorated with stamps, spray paint, found ephemera or photographic prints. The zine, made in Melbourne and distributed nationally and internationally, plays with the textuality of the object, and the materiality of the text, in a simple yet provocative way. An encounter with *YOU* is an invitation to collaborate: the reader / viewer is invited to unpack the object in order to access a narrative which has been unfolding every week for five years (see You). If you choose not to participate, the bag remains sealed – a silent object.

In May 2008, The National Trust and the Heritage Council of Victoria launched an appeal to raise \$30,000 from public donations to help restore the animated neon Skipping Girl Vinegar sign. In a report on the appeal, ABC Melbourne claimed that: “Neon signs like the skipping girl and the Nylex and Pelaco signs, also in Richmond, are special because they’re a visual representation of our industrial past” (ABC, unpag). The broken Skipping Girl sign becomes a text/object among a small collection of remaining ‘electric sky-signs’ which are read as historically important; they ‘speak’ of a time in the city’s recent past and are considered to be of value: the remaining signs (Pelaco, Nylex and the Girl) are all listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

In the State Library of Victoria, Manuscript Accession number MS 13420 refers to a collection of documents once belonging to the Australian author Peter Carey; the catalogue description reads as follows: *Comprises drafts and*

*proofs of the novel True History of the Kelly Gang; papers relating to research into Ned Kelly; correspondence from editors and publishers; and articles about, and reviews of, the novel. Also, drafts, proofs and papers relating to 30 days in Sydney: A wildly distorted account, ‘A genius cat’, ‘The locked room’ and Jack Maggs. Also, general correspondence from publishers, editors and agents, organisers of conferences, writing festivals and literary awards, and artists, researchers, translators, fans and friends. Includes photographs, programmes, invitations, certificates, book cover designs, catalogues, video cassette, theses and laptop computer used by Peter Carey during the writing of True History of the Kelly Gang. The collection reflects Peter Carey’s writing processes and the development of True History of the Kelly Gang, his professional activities other than writing, and life in New York’s literary community.*

Archives are perhaps the most obvious places for text/objects to reside, but the inclusion of a laptop computer in a collection of author’s papers is relatively new. In the future, we imagine, the experience of working in the archives will be radically different, as scholars log on to Carey’s laptop rather than “opening old, yellowed letters” or encountering “pressed flowers and handwritten recipes” and “worn newspaper articles” with which to begin an imaginative, material engagement with the author (New, 12). Is a laptop computer a text/object?

Self-published art works, neon signs, laptop computers: three kinds of text/objects located in Melbourne which, when taken together, illuminate and suggest how it is that an object can share some characteristics of a text, and a text can demand an engagement which recognises its status as an object.



The perceived material connection between the artefact and a specific moment or person in time is the first noticeable thing these objects have in common (see Benjamin). Unlike mass produced items (even in the case of the laptop, which is mass produced), these objects become texts because of their claim to an association with the specific: Melbourne’s industrial past; the anonymous Luke You who mysteriously labours over photocopiers and paper bags; the working life and writing process of an acclaimed Australian author. These objects can function as texts – as vehicles of narrative or fragments thereof – because they can distinguish themselves from the undifferentiated mass of consumer items we encounter every day. While any given edition of a Peter Carey novel is also a vehicle for a story, the particular copy is unlikely to be valued for its object-hood; unless of course it has the author’s signature in it, in which case it joins the realm of artefacts.

What precisely is the nature of this material connection? The

first thing to note about it is that it is almost an entirely imaginative one; the object becomes text in the mind of the beholder. The Skipping Girl neon evokes – even in those with a tenuous understanding of or interest in Melbourne – an imagined industrial past; where workers lived within walking distance of their factories, and Australia (as Prime Minister Rudd likes to remind us) *made things*. The specificity of what was made (are we nostalgic for vinegar when we look at this sign?), by whom, and in what kinds of conditions, are not the focus of this imagining. It is the muted sense of passing time and the inevitability of change which animates the neon as text/object; just as the imagined working bodies of Carey and Luke You animate our engagement with the tools and products of their labour.

The power of the object to inspire narrative in the viewer is one element of what Walter Benjamin famously called “aura”. Benjamin saw “aura” as a key problem for the politicisation of art and culture, as it was “aura” which fed the bourgeois romantic imagination as it sat in quiet contemplation of objects and basked in the glow of their uniqueness. It was “aura” that locked art into a specific relation to ritual, and individual objects into an economy of authenticity; authentic and inauthentic objects are valued differently and, as the daily transmissions of *Antique Roadshow* remind us, authenticity trumps use value in terms of determining the monetary worth of objects. For Benjamin, the revolutionary potential of art began with photography and film, mediums from which no original, authentic print is possible (Benjamin, 218); these mediums, by definition, refuse to be fixed in time and place, and therefore resist being read in terms of the romantic (and for Benjamin anti-revolutionary) potential of “aura”.

However, the text/object does not operate solely on the mind of the viewer / reader through its aura; it engages the viewer *through* the body. The experience of scale, dimensions and tactility are key to our sense of the object and its narrative potential. We stand *before*, we sit *in front of* or with a text/object: we perceive it through our bodily relation to it. The staples in the *YOU* bag call out warnings to your fingers; the keyboard of Carey's laptop seems to shine faintly and smugly with the oil of the authors fingers. A text/object is always calling – or whispering – to the body of its viewer: making us feel smaller or larger, sensitising the 'skin of our teeth' or making our feet tingle in recognition of the size of a stride. Standing on the street beneath the Skipping Girl Vinegar sign, or before an object which manipulates scale, we find ourselves thinking through spatial relations: that is, the object asks us to think of it as a text concerned with scale.

We experience scale and an embodied reaction to a text/object in this exhibition, in *Smith Says*: the point where the fingers meet the rough edges of the paper activate my own finger tips. It is not that I can imagine those fingers in the picture holding the object – it is that my own fingers are remembering rough edges, the experience of reading / viewing becomes a material encounter (and this is where, of course, texts can function as objects and so become text/objects).

So, extending beyond Benjamin's concept of "aura", a text/object is something which carries narrative – either literally or in its potential to inspire it – in or through its material qualities which are only partly constituted in its authenticity. Text/objects are also concerned with the narrative potential of bodily encounters; authentic or not...

Dr Anna Poletti  
October 2008

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We became interested in the notion of text as object, and sought out examples of words on public display in our community that are also, quite literally, objects. We settled on a couple of buildings in Wagga Wagga that feature large letters in high relief, and we set about altering the “truth” of those locations. We used the photographic medium to give our images a convincing, creditable appearance, but then used digital imaging to rearrange the text objects to form partially self-referential anagrams.

“WW” is a tribute to the grand old iconic 2WG radio station sign and its intrinsic connection with the Wagga Wagga locale



Derrida speaks on the *Gift of Death* that no single creature may take the burden of death for you. That is to say no other being may offer its life so that yours may be saved eternally, they may offer their life and succumb to death in place of an instance of death (eg: *taking a bullet for you*). Effectively taking a single death in place of your own but this sacrifice affords you more time but does not release you from the inevitability of death itself. As we are singularly responsible for our own casualty we must come to terms with the implications of our own fragile and plainly illogical nature for ourselves. With the inevitability of death assured, how can we hope to deal with the lack of continuity that this seemingly futile existence lends us?

Psychiatrist Robert Lifton explores this notion by detailing several means by which one can live on beyond death listed as different *immortalities*. We have

by associating ourselves with each others mortal lineage designed work by which we may create monument to our existence, and to each others continuation or survival. By indulging our desire for *creative immortality* we have defined a sort of *meta-prosthetic* existence by which we can aid each others immortal self. The very nature of collaborating to us has been the allowance to flirt with each others mortality, generating images and words that define each other (the biographical) whilst simultaneously trying to self-censor to retain the rights to our own immortal lineages (the autobiographical). The work ends up attesting to no singular individual, but to the memory of the collaborative party itself. It is another *memory* that we leave behind, that may yet outlive our own bodies.

Remember that you are mortal.

“...death is the place of one’s irreplaceability. No one can die for me if ‘for me’ means instead of me, in my place.”

Jacques Derrida

*The Gift of Death* (2nd Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008

return to oswiecem (2004-8)  
mixed media



damian candusso / johannes klabbers

I am a Mischling's son. Mischling is what the Nazis people called people with Jewish grandparents. They were not allowed to vote or marry Aryans without special permission or join the army. On the other hand they were not exterminated either.

After a few weeks he rang me and said : Have you got any other versions of these recordings that you can send me? No, why? I asked. He said : There's not much there.

He is right.

Johannes Klabbers

In the winter of 2002 I travelled by train from my home town of Utrecht to Krakow in Poland and from there to the town of Oswiecem, to the former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, a pilgrimage I had long wanted to make. In the warmer months Auschwitz is a significant tourist attraction but this day there was half a metre of snow and it was ten degrees below zero so it was virtually deserted. I decided that I would try to record the peculiar silence in the (reconstructed) crematorium there. Unsurprisingly the results were less than spectacular but I was wondering if one of the leading sound producers in Australia who had recently joined the staff of SVPA, could do anything to bring out this silence, and I handed the sound files over to him.

Working in sound up until this point in my career, I have been used to filling silence with sound. Whether it be recorded or created. This is very different - Johannes wanted the artwork to replicate this silence. There was no sound - and I was not going to "create" any new sounds. What I am doing is working with these "captured frequency's of silence" and working with them to convey a sense of journey to the unknown, whilst still preserving the silence of Oswiecem.

Damien Candusso

*"The silence that surrounds the phrase 'Auschwitz was the extermination camp' is not a state of mind, it is a sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined."* Jean-Francois Lyotard.  
*The Differend: Phases in Dispute. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 (56-57)*





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words in bold from Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) *Reading Images The Grammar of Visual Design*, Routledge, London p.236 - 237.



I gave my 18 month old son a computer of his own after tiring of his constant demands to do “word numbers” on my laptop. Over a period of two weeks, he typed constantly. It was the first thing he wanted to do when he woke up and often the last thing he wanted to do before he went to bed. Mostly it was random letters, then numbers, then one day he discovered the forward slash and the back slash keys. In an incredibly deliberate and painstakingly slow manner he proceeded to fill line after line with the slashes making a sawtooth pattern. It was a pattern he would return to again over the next few days.

It was such a considered action that it struck me that I was witnessing something very interesting. Not in a ‘look how clever junior is’ kind of way, more being present at a moment when a set of neurons fired and he

was able (and I don’t think I am pushing this too far) to generate order and pattern according to some newly forming aesthetic.

The deliberate, repeated and continued production of this pattern became our text. Over the last six months Jasper and I have been exploring this pattern and its possibilities to become object, though you (and he) might just think we’ve been playing with blocks.

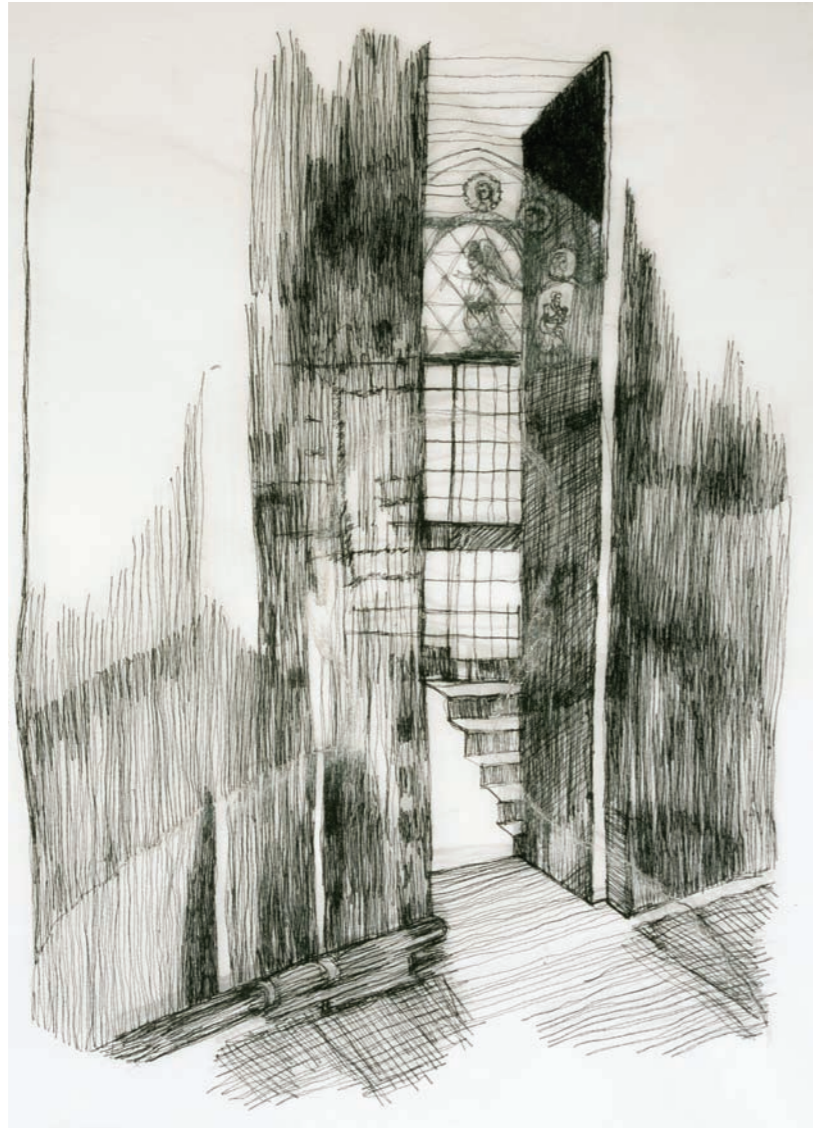
Scott Howie

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Jasper Howie

*“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist when he grows up.  
- Pablo Picasso.*





James Walsh, convicted of forgery in 1859, was a prisoner in Fremantle Gaol, Perth, Western Australia between 1859 and his death in 1871. Confined to a small cell for 21 hours each day, he secretly drew on the limed washed walls of his cell despite the risk of further punishment. Working with a metal button each night, he covered the drawings part, by part, each morning with the meagre gruel provided for prisoners' breakfasts.<sup>1</sup> The process of making the drawings required a form of double memory. Firstly, the drawings were of paintings he recalled from his training as an engraver and intricate memory of set motif, pattern and forms for repetitive copying was an integral part of this craft. Secondly, only able to draw a section of each image each night, he had to remember what he had drawn and covered the previous night. Each section of the large scale figurative images on the walls were effectively drawn 'blind'. It is also likely that he worked with little or no light to make the drawings each night – probably no more than a candle flame. Once found,

James Walsh's drawings were obliterated by layers of lime wash. Ironically, the layers of lime wash intended to destroy the drawings, instead preserved them. His cell drawings were rediscovered in 1964.

The proposed collaboration is based on these works and the circumstances of their making by this 19thC forger artist. It will be informed by direct observation of the preserved cell and its murals; by photographic records of sections of the cell walls and ceiling; by existing text references and historic records of the prison; by the ideas of working from memory and fragment - of working 'blind' and the role of imagination in situations of confinement. A series of drawings, collages and embroideries will evolve from the collaborative process based on individual initiation of some works and shared development of other means and imagery via exchange, memory, night drawing strategies and 'working blind'.

<sup>1</sup> Michal Bosworth, *Convict Fremantle: A Place of Promise and Punishment*. University of WA Press. C. 2004. P.51

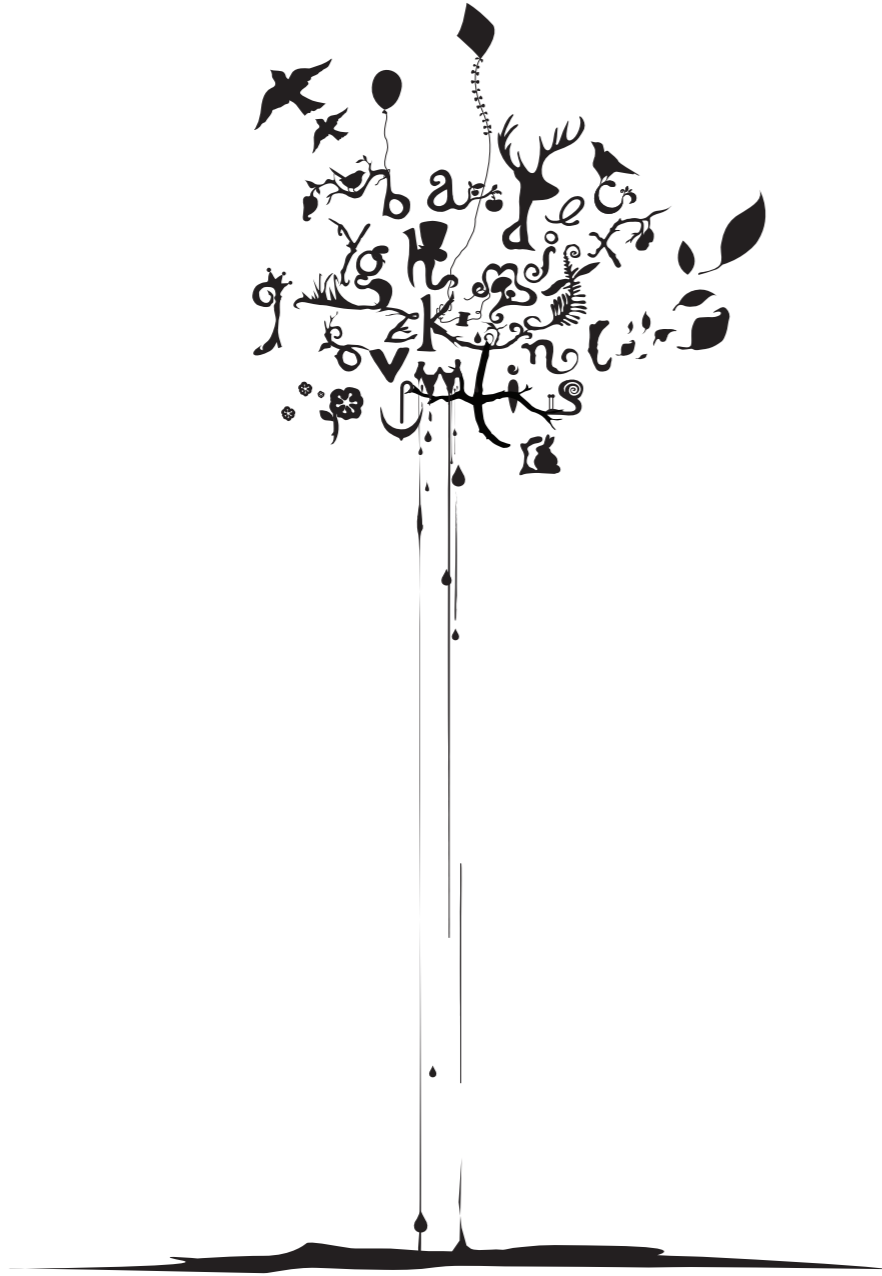
light source 'calligraphy'  
digital prints

margaret waller/ helen pithie



Light takes on a rhythmic quality as it intersects volumes of darkness. Space is dissected by glowing colours to create a new sense of place.

These images, captured in the transition between day and night, are fleeting and unique. Chance makes the images an open-ended abstraction of moving line, shape and colour.



*...our shared appreciation of all things cute, strange and quirky generated a simple idea that has since taken on a life of its own and has evolved into a playful combination of shapes, symbols, objects and language. The distance (myself in Hobart, Emily in Wagga) has forced us to communicate primarily via email and phone to convey our thoughts and ideas. Without the luxury of facial expressions and hand gestures, words and images scribbled on paper have done the majority of the talking.*

Peta Riddell

*...a mutual desire to develop something primarily light and 'quirky' is really what has driven our collaboration. After many eclectic (often illegible) sketches and wordy ramblings sent via email we have arrived at something which has remained true to our initial idea. We wanted to combine the fields of Jewellery and Graphic design in an unpretentious manner – utilising fundamental elements from our respective 'trades' to create a work that unashamedly aims for frivolity.*

Emily Snadden

Our aim has been to develop a stylised typeface that is essentially frivolous in its appearance and it's purpose. The piece is realised through the combination of illustration, print, object and wearable forms. The three dimensionality of the work enables the viewer to engage with the piece and the space it exists in. The typeface lends itself to unreadability, the oversaturation of visual imagery within the layout means that its success relies on the viewer deciphering the image. It requires the viewer to implement memory triggers to locate the icons within the mass of imagery and graphic styling. The characters and their associated imagery relate to thought processes and the evolution of ideas. Ultimately this imagery references fundamental childhood thought patterns, mind maps and the subconscious. Selected pieces from the installation may be removed and worn as brooches – their original context now removed/irrelevant as they become part of the wearer's personal space. The wearables aim to highlight the shapes created within the design (rather than the letterforms) through the utilisation of a variety of materials and finishes. They aim to add a level of 'quirk', rather than distract from the visual imagery behind them. The three dimensionality of the forms transforms something quite generic like a letterform character into a precious, wearable item with it's own personality.





I became interested in making zines because I thought that in the realm of zines I could get away from the idea of skilful production and high art. When I make a zine I like to construct it from whatever happens to be lying around, a piece of writing, some objects, an old poem, some mail that I have just collected from the post office. With 'copy' I wanted to make a zine that was a one off, and to play with size and scale. I decided to avoid all the techniques usually employed by zine makers so 'copy' is made without a photocopier and no glue, tape or scissors are used.

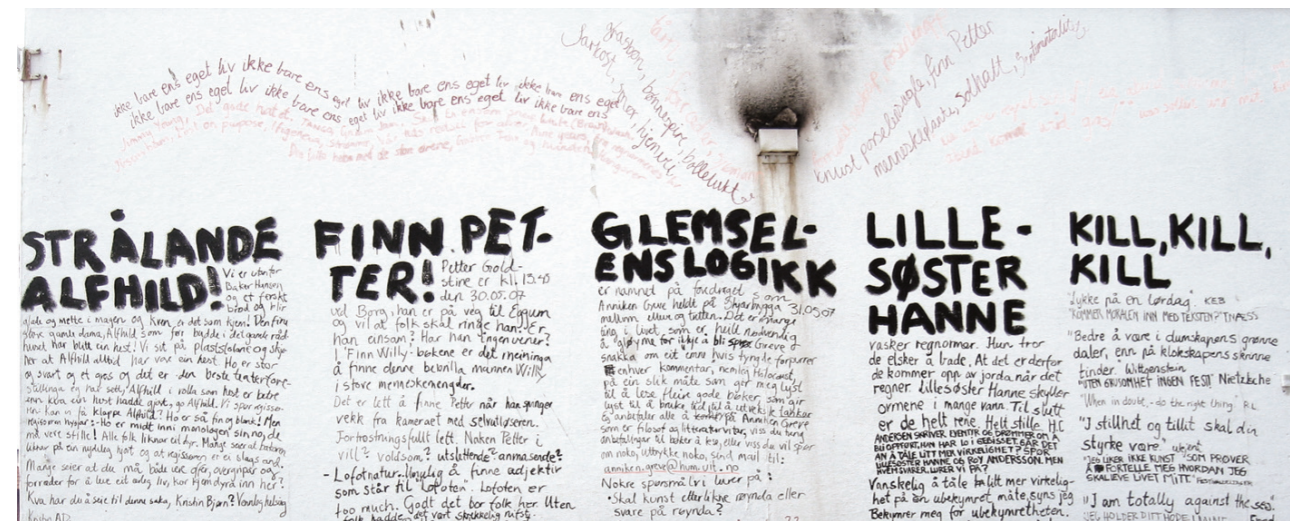
When it came to thinking about collaboration I thought it might be interesting to hand over these

extremely primitive looking objects to a highly skilled photographer who would bring to bear all that modern technology and several decades of dedication to craft had to offer on them.

Johannes Klabbers

The small-scale zines made by Johannes possess a rough, unsophisticated, less than 'perfect' quality, which is explored in my images. The photographs depict the zines as if they are found objects, handled and read by a series of strangers of unknown identity.

Jamie Holcombe



Life experiences affect art making. In this work, møte (which translates to “meet”) the affect of exposure to another culture, varying environments and recurrent meetings with another artist have been explored. As a collaborative project, we were also interested in drawing as a form of expressive communication both in real time and over distance via electronic communication.

the creative process and the affect of the Norwegian culture and the isolation of being an expatriate (which directly translates from Norwegian as “alien”), upon our lives.

Whilst working in Norway for the Scandinavian Design Group from 2000-2003 I came in contact with Tobias Apelgren, a Swedish designer/illustrator. We have effectively been collaborating in our art making since. The process began in the studio with the comparison of sketches and sharing of various accumulated visual references. This process evolved to what we coined as a “møte”, a session in which a blank sheet of paper was progressively filled in a collaborative manner.

The meeting process expanded from the corporate environment to cafes, bars and parks around the city, Vigeland's Parken in Frogner being our favorite. We expanded the creative process to journeys, sometimes to Koster, a small island off Sweden, or to the mountains, on sailboats and later through Asia and back to Australia. On each journey a series of drawings, photographs and the collection of various design paraphernalia and web site addresses recorded ideas to share and explore. Persistently exploring cultural constructs we also questioned the future of “culturally distinctive” design due to the exposure of art makers and designers to imagery via the internet and the popularity of travel.

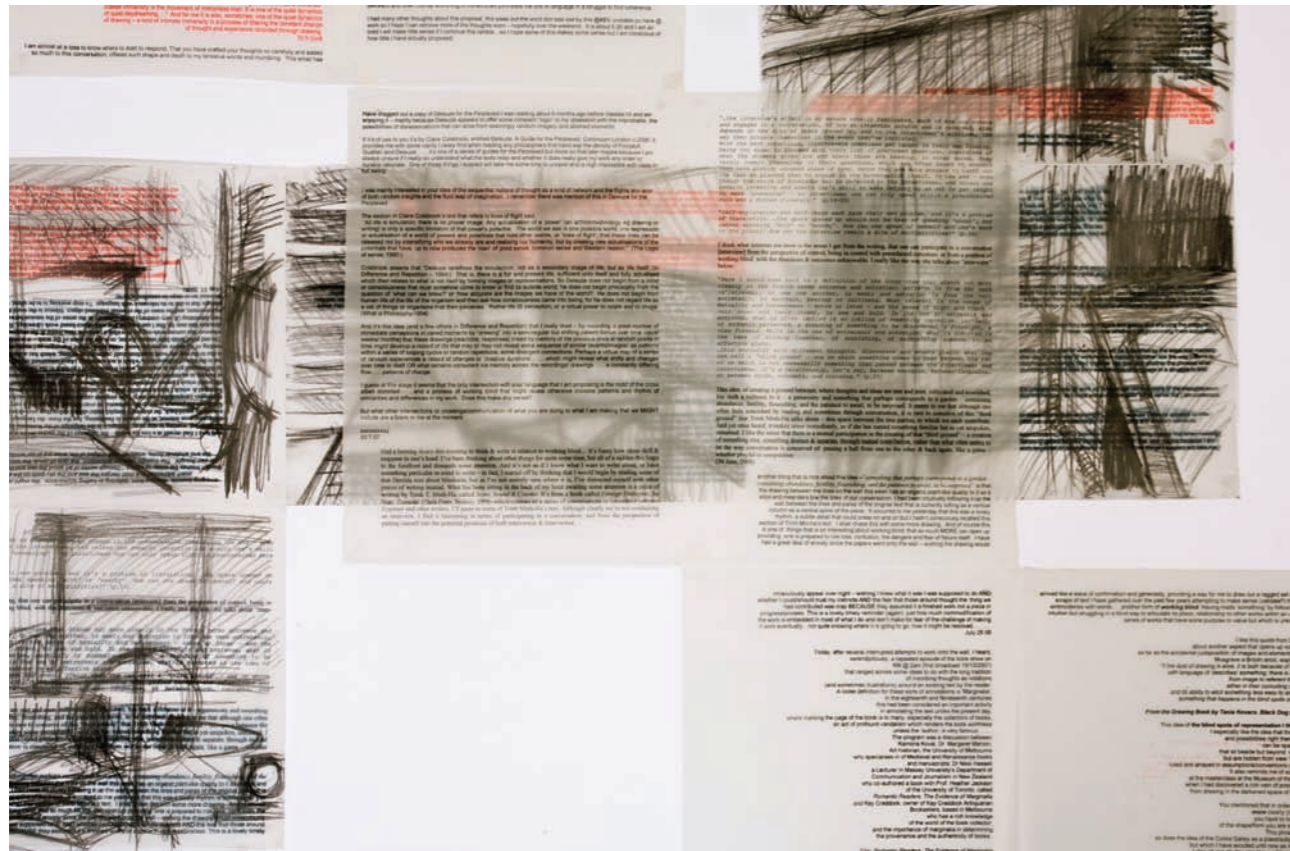
The first mark, often a reference to the cultural constructs within Norway (which we both found particularly interesting since we were expatriates) would be made in pencil or ink. In response to the initial mark we would cooperatively illustrate a narrative, often beginning at the centre of the page and spiraling out. Taking turn about, editing the other artist's illustration or simultaneously drawing we would progressively fill the page. The process was wonderfully expressive exploring annotations, observations and interpretations of both

We have continued our collaborative art making relaying ideas and drawings through mail and email. Møte is a celebration of our interaction and continued correspondence. It documents that effects of outside influences upon our art making and the creative process as a valid form of communication even in the context of the electronic environment. Regardless of distance, there is still the capacity to collaborate.



working blind  
mixed media

julie montgarrett / ruth hadlow



*working blind* is both a collaboration and a 'conversation' between the two artists documented via emails and text (in the form of ever expanding word documents) and night drawings (worked over the printed text) as a kind of circular correspondence over a period of fifteen months between July 2007 and October 2008.

The initial subject of the proposed collaboration was the process(es) by which ideas are developed both as text and as image/object. Both artists are involved with the idea of working blind – of not knowing quite what will emerge as ideas and possibilities are questioned and teased out over time. Ruth Hadlow said in conversation in August, 2008 '*the business of working blind is more about letting things find their way, come to the surface quietly and subtly. Following things instinctively.*'

The collaboration is therefore process driven and initially identifies collaboration as a form of conversation which, by default, is a critique of both of these conventions as a means of developing ideas.

The conversation tracks the similarities and differences of this idea for each artist. The intersection of text and drawings made in the dark, represents the multiple

crossings; connections and differences in understanding for each artist of what it means to be "working blind" that have emerged over this time. The conversation has been delayed by circumstance; shaped by available technologies; drawn-out by call and response; redirected by readings and discovery; teased out by questioning and like all good conversations (and many working processes) there is no conclusion, it is on-going and unfolding. It shifts and re-shapes itself over time as each artist searches in the dark for the right meaning and form. Margaret Atwood wrote in the introduction to 'Negotiating With the Dead, 2002; Into the Labyrinth' that the process of writing was a kind of 'writing in the dark' or if you will, a working blind and this introduction concluded, that the process involved "obstruction, obscurity, emptiness, disorientation, twilight, blackout, often combined with a struggle or path or journey- an inability to see one's way forward, but a feeling that there was a way forward, and that the act of going forward would eventually bring about the conditions for vision...Possibly then, writing has to do with the darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it and, with luck, to illuminate it and to bring something back out into the light."

**the letter always/never arrives at its destination**  
mixed media



**why does a letter always arrive at its destination?  
for the same reason that it never arrives at its  
destination?  
is the destiny of a letter always to arrive at its  
destination?**

sometimes stories appear in the media about letters which were lost for many years and which are eventually delivered, but stories about letters which are never received do not often make it into the newspapers.

if there was more than a certain level of doubt about the likelihood of a posted article arriving at its destination, the public would soon lose confidence in the postal system and it would collapse entirely. the system works because people believe it does. yet different levels of confidence about the postal system exist. the distance an article has to travel is inversely proportional to the perceived likelihood of its arrival at the intended destination, as is its weight, and the vehicle by which it is to be transported. surface mail is usually by sea and is also the least 'deep' method for sending something.

**ryszard dabek (with johannes klabbers)**

unsurprisingly perhaps the english postal system used to be class based. there was first class mail and second class mail. i would imagine an oafish stupid person who was paid less and worked in poor conditions being in charge of second class mail, whilst the first class mail was handled by highly paid good looking intelligent people who were paying attention. the ultimate pariah is the postman who throws his mail in the ditch.

we do not expect mail to be lost but are we surprised when it does? sometimes we are able to ascertain why. perhaps we got the street number wrong. sometimes wrongly addressed mail is returned to the sender, if one was indicated. sometimes people change their address and forget to inform people who may want to send them something. is there still such a thing as a dead letter office?

when i got home from his funeral there was a cheque from my father waiting for me. he must have sent it a day or two before he died.



### What is time?

*If no one asks me, I know; if I seek to explain it, I do not  
- St Augustine.*

This simple pithy statement summarizes the human experience. The human concept of time, visible throughout human societies from the ancients to the complexity of modern society, is so omnipresent and knowable and yet defies easy explanation. Coordinating and recording activity requires systems, temporal structures, to relate events to the regularities of the Universe. The temporal structure is an intrinsic part of the reality of everyday life. Each day demands that we synchronise what we want to do around the time that we have available. The temporal categories of the day, week, month, and year are all temporal structures for our projects. The time-order of everything we do

appears an inherent part of the natural environment: Yet, it is a structure we are socialised into, internalise and accept as a fundamental reality.

### Know Time

Synchronizing work with the time I know I have available doesn't always work for me so I collaborated with a couple of people to whom the opposite was the norm. As a result of discussions with Alan (Sydney) and Kari (Finland) I looked at visual ways to represent our differences and similarities, combining images, text and philosophies into a body of work that encapsulates our different ideas on time in and the things we do.

Michael Agzarian



authentic  
dvd

ashley wain / padraig mcnamara



I often watch people walk and wonder what it is that makes them move in the way they do. Watching them in a crowd, in a rush, dawdling, hunched, strutting, walking with a spring in their step, some with imbalance—are they aware of this state. I consider what factors are responsible for influencing them, injuries, shoe selection, emotional state, do they walk like their peers or do they walk like their families. Analysing on a personal level how we, ourselves move is a much more difficult question and when taken into the field of acting the question becomes even more important and problematic. How do you gain an understanding of your body, what part is natural movement of the animal and how much is a construct of our environment via emotion or structure.

Mary Starks Whitehouse, who was a dance teacher and psychotherapist, designed an activity to help acting students make connections between their emotional state and the expressive nature of their personality, it is called 'Authentic Movement'. She said, "The body is the physical aspect of the personality and movement is the personality made visible."<sup>1</sup>

My collaborator, Ashley Wain is an actor and uses this technique as a form of kinetic meditation to gain confidence in expression and to explore the natural fluidity of movement.

Ashley and I wished to move beyond documenting the exercise, to a level of visualising some of the internal process as well. The multiple layers of footage, especially in the beginning are designed to portray opportunity and the process of finding both the natural and expressive outcome. The consequent layers and focus towards the shadow instead of the body are deliberate to visualise the inner sense of expressive freedom and the lifting of constraints.

My original guitar score that accompanies the work uses a constant droning bass E string. The composition was improvised during viewing to compliment the final video footage so it runs parallel to the theme of meditation. This gives a centre to the music that leads to simple melodies, which are inevitable in the same way as the identification of the self, leads to inevitable movement as personality.

The process of Authentic Movement is normally done in pairs, where the 'witness' passively observes without judgment, to experience empathy and understanding of the 'mover' and of themselves. I hope this video will allow the observer to experience this process.

Padraig McNamara

<sup>1</sup> *Authentic Movement: Essays by Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow V. 1.* Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999 (p.52)

