

ENJOY PUBLIC ART GALLERY  
SECOND OCCASIONAL JOURNAL

OVER

UNDER

AND

AROUND

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

ROGER HORROCKS / TIM CORBALLIS / BOPHA CHHAY

MIRANDA PARKES / DAN ARPS / M&W / MARIA WALLS

AND CREON UPTON

EDITED BY

RACHEL O'NEILL AND THOMASIN SLEIGH



# Enjoy

## Over Under And Around

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**Over Under And Around** is the second of Enjoy's occasional journals to be published, the first of which, *Public Good—itinerant responses to public space*, edited by Paula Booker and Marnie Slater was published in 2008.

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**Tim Corballis** has spent the last fifteen years writing fiction, non-fiction and something in between. This has included the novels *Below* (2001), *Measurement* (2002) and *The Fossil Pits* (2005), all from Victoria University Press, as well as collaborative work with photographer Fiona Amundsen. He is currently working on a doctorate in Sociology investigating what happens to aesthetic theory when it is migrated to the antipodean context.

**Roger Horrocks** has written on film, literature, and art, including a biography of Len Lye (2001) and a book on Lye's films and sculpture (2009). He curated an exhibition of Lye's work at the Gus Fisher Gallery in 2009. His film *Art that Moves* has had a number of festival screenings and won the Van Gogh Award at last year's Amsterdam Film Festival. His current project is the libretto for *Len Lye: the opera*, which will be premiered at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland in September 2012, with music composed by Eve de Castro-Robinson. Roger's publications this year include an essay on the artist José Antonio Sistiaga for an exhibition in Spain, and a history of local film for the Te Papa book *New Zealand Film*.

**Rachel O'Neill** is a writer, artist and editor living on the Kapiti Coast. Since moving to the Wellington region in 2006 she has been involved with Enjoy as (in order of appearance) an exhibiting artist, writer, Trustee and editor. She is pleased to be showing off and reflecting on the visions and dedications of Enjoy's publishing managers, writers, artists, editors, proof readers, photographers, volunteers, readers and viewers, in this here journal.

**M&W** thank Maria and Dan for their participation. M&W seek to mobilise art's content.

**Thomasin Sleigh** is a writer, editor, art historian, drummer and publicist who lives in an old dairy in Petone, Lower Hutt. She has written about the work of several artists who have exhibited at Enjoy over the years. She also contributes regularly to various art publications throughout Australasia. In 2010 she completed her masters thesis in Art History on the writing of Wystan Curnow and as such, is interested in the histories of art criticism and writing in New Zealand.

**Miranda Parkes** is a closet writer who, since beginning at age 11, has amassed a banana box full of journals and poetry in her wardrobe at home in Christchurch. However, none of this has been published and she is better-known as an artist. Parkes has been practicing fulltime since graduating with a MFA (Distinction) in painting from the University of Canterbury in 2005. She has exhibited widely throughout New Zealand with recent solo shows including *Smasher* at Antoinette Godkin Gallery in Auckland (2010) and *Cracker* at Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch (2010). Her work is represented in significant public and private collections in New Zealand, Australia, the U.K and U.S.A. Parkes was the Tylee Cottage Fellow, Whanganui (2009) and William Hodges Fellow, Southland (2007). Parkes has her second solo exhibition in a public gallery upcoming in 2012 at The Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui.

**Creon Upton** lives in Christchurch. Prior to 2011, he considered this fact fair justification for a perpetual state of maudlin discontent. More recently, it has come to represent his stock-in-trade inner excuse for all manner of social grotesqueries—including, but not limited to, violent mood swings, haughty petulance, anarchist survivalism, shameless nicotine addiction, seditious ideations, and failure to self-censor with malicious aforethought. Thankfully, we understand that earthquake survivor syndrome (ESS) has recently been classified as a disease of the mind by the American Psychiatric Association: Creon informs us that he will soon embark upon a 12-step recovery programme.

**Maria Walls** uses a range of media to deform art—including still and moving image, audio, un/installation and writing. Her ongoing research investigates selection, collection and un/framing policies. It is similarly concerned with language, conversations, translations and renditions, ruse, malfunction, anomaly—incompletion is embraced. Art is scrutinized as an enquiry into itself as a product of collective thought, auratic echoes and activity. The topic under study is the impossibility offered by an un/art not/about art about art. She is currently completing her *Doctorate of Fine Art at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland*. This practice is largely viewed in private circumstance.

## ENJOY PUBLIC ART GALLERY SECOND OCCASIONAL JOURNAL OVER UNDER AND AROUND INTRODUCTION

This is the second in Enjoy Public Art Gallery's series of 'occasional' journals. 'Occasional' because they are tend to arise—unbidden by Enjoy itself—when the need/energy/workforce manifests to address a particular set of topical concerns. Our concerns quickly came to focus on a poetic framework. We wanted to commission writers to create new texts in response to an archive of existing texts, specifically Enjoy's archive of critical writings. This archive of written texts is possibly one of the most diverse, accessible, and stimulating archives of contemporary art writing in New Zealand. Since 2006, Enjoy's staff includes a dedicated publishing manager whose role is to coordinate a rigorous and stimulating publishing programme, and who commissions writers to respond to each Enjoy exhibition. These texts are then published as PDFs on [enjoy.org.nz](http://enjoy.org.nz), listed on the website page dedicated to documenting the relevant exhibition, and further grouped for easy access in a dedicated 'Essays' section. Enjoy also publishes special print publications, this journal being one example.

We were interested in the possibility of generating new writing from this local archive because of a shared instinct that writing often ghosts art and, just as often, the other way around. What happens when written texts are viewed as visual as well as textual experiences? What might a visual and textual ghosting suggest about contemporary art practice, the art object, exhibition, archive, and print and online publishing? To find out, we invited a group of writers whose work we admire to select a text from Enjoy's online archive and to write a response to it. We were deliberately open in our editorial brief, suggesting to our chosen writers that they could respond to a general overarching theme in a text from the archive, or simply a small excerpt. The responses are surprising, contingent, and radically different in their approach. They engage with Enjoy's online texts, a text from the first Enjoy journal, *Public Good*, an exhibition that took place before essays were commissioned, and the structure of Enjoy's publishing programme itself.

Bopha Chhay and Roger Horrocks tap into the ways writers, bloggers, word artists, and theorists are tuning in to an ever-increasing proliferation of modes of art-making. Indeed,

an excess of possibilities is likely to be one of the more visible factors informing contemporary practice, as well as the publications with mandates to explicate art's production and enjoyment. Websites, essays, reviews, blogs, YouTube soundbites, interviews, and press releases connect works with audiences. The online conversation then dictates what the archive of the conversation will look like, and there's a high chance that the archive won't stay afloat in and of itself once the conversation has moved on. In the essays collected here these ideas and more are put forward for considered reflection.

Miranda Parkes and Tim Corballis take a poetic and experimental approach to the construction of meaning and acts of reflection. By drawing on the modernist love of accident, Parkes has created a poem from an archived text. While cutting up a text for re-purpose is, on the surface, an act of vandalism, tensions arise more from the sometimes-agreement of intention and meaning between Parkes' text and the original essay. While agreement might not be a complete summation, the old and new texts share moments of a sympathy that is both assertive and almost melodically open-ended. Tim Corballis literally ghosts the original text, positioning his new writings in parallel with the original. Both texts establish internal rhythms, sympathies, and suspicions that encourage debate, while also insisting on the rigours or rigorous desire for communal trust, and the complicated striving for integrity of verbal action.

Creon Upton and M&W take up the structures of the ghosting of art and writing, at least as starting points. When singular acts of identity and personal interest are thrust back onto democratic principles and chants of open access, a certain necessary disenchantment with idealism takes place. But what happens then, and to what purpose? Creon Upton neither answers nor deflects the question. Rather, he flexes the oft-denigrated muscle of boredom to deflect the ways idiosyncrasies of interest and intellectual engagement both connect and disconnect readers and viewers. It's the rhythm of assertion not its permanence that is, dare we say it, of interest. M&W practice ghostliness with embodied confidence, by asking another

writer to generate a text on their behalf about an exhibition that took place before Enjoy's online essays were commissioned. They deflect the role of authorship, and recreate a formal documentation of exhibition, while also shining light on the act of commission, which has its Latin root in the word for 'entrust'.

You will find that each collection of texts and images has its own internal dialogues. Though disparate in their issues and approaches, the texts housed collectively in this journal present a different way of thinking through art writing. It is one which recognises the contingency of knowledge and announces at once the fallibility and potential of writing as a way of understanding, looking at, and pointing to art.

When thinking about contemporary writing and publishing, one engages with a temporally fixated mass of user and market generated concerns and facts. Google is ubiquitous but is hardly democratic. Contemporary art could be seen to exist in a similarly narcissistic web—with art criticism a key node in a circumscribed game. This journal admits to ogling, er, googling grand analogies in the eye as well as tapping into what we hope is a crowd of eager voyeurs. However, we also intend to explore the world around us as it feeds into a contemporary art discourse that responds to, resists, and perhaps exceeds the less than humble search function.

We hope that the multiplicity of agendas that are observed and prompted to interact here—over, under and around time, so to speak—offer new insights into the contemporary archive, artwork, and art text.

**Rachel O'Neill and Thomasin Sleigh**  
October 2011

## LONG DISTANCE CONVERSATIONS SHUDDHABRATA SENGUPTA

I am a prisoner of phone booths. STD/ISD/ PCO/ FAX/Xerox by Japanese machine, booths. I am enthralled by their darkened glass panes, stenciled signage, and plastic flowers, the late hours they keep, and the stories that gather on their wallpapers. Like an idiot hungry for tales of travellers who idled in the serais of the Delhi sultanate, I waste my time in the phone booths of nineties New Delhi. Even when I have nothing to say and no-one to call.

An STD phone booth is like a caravanserai, where you can alight at odd hours from the journeys of everyday life and hear news of distant places. The phone booths close to where I live host Afghan refugees and Israeli backpackers, Malayali nurses and Gujarati traders in transit. I go there to sit next to travellers and people with faraway relatives, and to listen to strange languages being spoken. I go there to eavesdrop on the world, because the world inhabits phone booths. I go there to whisper in my head the magic of distant place names – Adas, Addagadde and Ahwa, Galagali, Galsi and Gambhoi, Kanjirapuzha, Kalna and Kantilo, Zira, Ziro and Zineboto. Or, I search farther in the book of codes for cities with enchantments – Rosario, Erevan, Chittagong, Oruru, Tenerife, Uppsala, Valparaiso, Leipzig, Hafnart-Joerdur, Zauqa, Dewaniya, Sabh, Sert and Yundum ... and Aqaba ... and Sandnes ...and Los Angeles.

All this is possible in a New Delhi phone booth. But there are other, more serious purposes that justify their ubiquity. Business, family, marriage, news of sudden death, examination results, birthday greetings and homesickness. Love, real estate, births, exports. Arrivals and departures. The distress of stranded tourists, illness and the stock market. In the course of an hour and a half waiting for a clear line to Bombay, I hear snatches of all this. I hear of broken engagements and faulty diagnoses, of mothers-in-law and travel agents, of missed opportunities and the daily grind. I hear the trivial details of everyday lives compressed to save time and money.

There are thousands of phone booths in a city like Delhi, and their numbers grow exponentially. As they thrive, they replace barbershops, grocery stores and milk queues as the hubs of conversation and social life in a

neighbourhood. Gradually, each booth builds up a clique of regulars, nodding acquaintances to each other, but well aware of the intricate details of each other's family histories. This tends to happen because it is impossible not to have a fair idea of what people are saying in a phone booth. The most private conversations become public when they are long distance. People still tend to shout down the phone line, both because the lines are bad and because the act of speech traversing the distance, say from Lajpat Nagar to Dhanbad, still seems by consensus to require greater volume, intensity and projective power.

Phone booths also become centres of nightlife, venues for illicit assignations and coy flirtations between students and singles living in one-room bedsits. I have seen a love affair form and then conduct itself after both its protagonists met at a booth. One travelled to a distant city and many long phone calls later, betrayed the other, who continued to call long distance from the same phone booth to berate her unfaithful "has been" lover. Each phone booth has a distinct character, which consists of an amalgam of the people who manage it and its repertoire of clients. Thus, there are little holes in the wall, which are proof of a panwallah's sharp business acumen. Salesmen and commercial travellers gather here for a late-night cigarette and have abbreviated conversations about money, with their out-of-town partners. Then they call up their wives, perfunctorily.

There are phone booths run by auntyjis that cater to a family audience. Men and women in nightdresses and children come here to talk at length to relatives in the course of an after-dinner stroll. Their conversations are lively and encompass a universe that stretches from infidelity to toilet training. Hi-tech booths with fax machines and the beginnings of e-mail are the arena for the urban professionals, who can't get rid of their mobile phones even when surrounded by so many other kinds of telephones. These are efficient but unfriendly places manned by sharp-looking young men.

Even late into the night, in the quarter-charge hours, this crowd makes it a point to be well dressed, and are a little anxious to be noticed. Here the operators and bosses sit behind an array of the latest in telephony. They transfer calls, co-ordinate conferences between five

different callers and exude the kind of power associated with priests, magicians and orchestra conductors. There are STD booths that offer Xerox facilities, which are favored by university students. They come to ask their parents in their hometowns for money and to get their lecture notes and texts photocopied. These are malnourished and often lonely people. Their eyes red with sleeplessness and worries about exams, careers, the rent, and impossible love affairs. They often stand still after their conversations and ask for credit, or painfully part with their very little money. They leave the phone booth just as they came, embarrassed and forlorn.

Then there are the dingy and suspect premises hidden in the basements of commercial complexes. These see little activity, barring unsuspecting tourists trying to call Jerusalem or Amsterdam. The real players here are the owners themselves, the men who sit behind unused telephones and wear dark glasses even when indoors and surround themselves with the musty smell of cheap incense. They crowd their walls with images of the Sai Baba of Shirdi and Jai Mata Di stickers. On hot summer afternoons, when no one ventures out to make STD calls, they dial in to Indore, Bulandshahar, Cuttack and Mogulsarai and rapidly read out a list of numerals: 5, 9, 3, 43, 17 ... Those are the conduits of the satta trade, relayers of the day's lucky digits to number-gambling cartels spread across the underbelly of small town India. When approached to make a phone call they will often tell you with an implacable, greasy and mysterious smile that the lines are out of order.

Phone booths in the city centre, close to railway stations and cheap hotels, are home to a floating population of tourists and travellers in various stages of fatigue and enthusiasm. As they unbuckle their voluminous rucksacks and unzip their hip pouches to take out scraps of paper with phone numbers in Belgium or Germany, they can be seen imagining the prospects of return and mapping their future itineraries. Will it be Ladakh before Goa? Or Dharamshala before Benares? These are the roving envoys of *The Lonely Planet*, fixing their next destination well in advance, enquiring after jobs left behind, and desperately trying to make friends as they wait their turn. Invariably, they are overcharged by smooth phone booth owners, who hide their

**I have seen a love affair form and then conduct itself after both its protagonists met at a booth. One travelled to a distant city and many long phone calls later, betrayed the other, who continued to call long distance from the same phone booth to berate her unfaithful "has been" lover.**

**Long Distance Conversations / Shuddhabrata Sengupta**

racism behind the complicated arithmetic of time and money conversions.

Despite the inherent variety of the people in them, the phone booths have certain common features – such as a big yellow sign with a red arrow, plastic bucket chairs, a calendar image of Shiva or Ram astride the would-be temple at Ayodhya, a statuette of Ganesh or the Virgin Mary, a framed print of a fat baby reading the Holy Quran, wallpaper, Formica tables, aluminium and glass partitions, second-hand air conditioners, plastic flowers and a black-and-white television set at an elevation. Sometimes on the wall behind the manager there is a film star's portrait, or a large poster of alpine Switzerland, or a set of clocks with the hands showing different hours, each neatly labelled with legends saying UK (London), USA (East Coast and West Coast), GERMANY, NEW DELHI, TOKYO, MOSCOW (Russia) and GULF.

The decor of phone booths suggests an imagination which brings together sections of airports, the kitsch of drawing rooms, the aspirations of the office premises of a small business, the comforts of domesticity, projections of the world abroad, and the trappings of efficiency. These interiors negotiate simultaneously between nostalgia and the desire for a better, more glamorous life. A Protestant Work Ethic, and the rules of use are sternly spelt out in notices in bold type: "Be Brief - Time is Money," "Work-is-Worship," "Wrong numbers dialled will be strictly charged for," "Management is irresponsible for line failure or engage tone" and "Make no love talk here – others are in queue."

A group of Malayali nurses, exceptionally graceful, who answer to the names of Minnimol, Gracekutty and Malathi regularly call up family in their hometown Kalamassery. They ask after nephews and the price of coconuts, sometimes they are worried by the fact that the money order sent for Easter hasn't reached, or the news that a cousin has eloped. Every week on the appointed day, after their calls are made and the change is tendered, the boss of our phone booth asks them searching questions about the Christian faith. Is the Holy Ghost a ghost? Was Jesus reborn after his death? Did the Virgin Mary have a normal delivery? Do Christians have

caste? Painstakingly, the Malayali sisters answer these queries in halting Hindi. Sometimes they promise to find out from the priest and clarify a difficult issue. Once they leave, the boss shakes his head solemnly. These exchanges are not brief. The boss doesn't charge them for wrong numbers and he lets them jump the queue. No one seems to mind. Not even the anxious exporter who makes a scene if anyone else redials a number.

Minnimol, Gracekutty and Malathi are the familiars of our booth. When I can't get through to a friend in a city that was once called Bombay, or I get too much interference on the line to Frankfurt, Munich or Sydney, I think of Minnimol's patient "try again, simply one more time only," and sometimes it works. Or at least we all like to think it does.

Not everyone comes away from our phone booth contented. Raminder Kaur breaks down every time she speaks to her son in Vancouver. Her husband, who escorts her out, is always smug. He never speaks – though he helps her dial the long and complicated code number. Each time she makes a collect call, and each time her son disconnects at the other end, and each time she gets hysterical she begs us all to help her dial again. But her husband cajoles her out of the booth and takes her back into the unhappiness she comes from.

A medical representative stops by on his way after a long shift on Wednesdays and Fridays. He deals in drugs for psychiatric ailments, and I have seen him pass strips of pills quietly to Raminder Kaur's husband. Each time he dials a number in Bangalore, he takes out a letter and says something furtively into the phone. Then he steps out of the aluminium and glass cabinet and sits quietly in a corner of the booth, staring at his polished shoes, or carefully examining his fingers. After all the calls are nearly over, at 12:40 or so, there's just me, a Backpacker still trying to get through to Barcelona, and the boss, who is watching cable TV. The phone rings, and the dealer in pills for unhappiness rushes in, unloosens his tie and asks: "Husband is asleep?" The boss and the backpacker are asleep as well by now, and for the next twenty-five minutes the shiny-shoed salesman makes long-distance love to a married woman in Bangalore. Sometimes he breaks off from Kannada, and begins talking

about her long hair in English. The peculiar, furtive melancholy of his voice is perhaps the only consolation that she has ever had, and till ten past one on Wednesdays and Fridays he sings her his song. He remembers their days together, promises to write, tells her about Delhi, and about how the mental hospital here is nothing compared to the one in Bangalore. He asks for news of her children, jokes about the sleeping husband, and promises to see her soon. In the end he whispers to her things that are perhaps too intimate to speak out aloud.

The backpacker is awake by now and impatient again, and he wakes up the boss. The drug salesman finishes his call and before leaving offers me some pan masala. The backpacker calls Barcelona and he can't get through. I try calling a friend in Germany and I can't get through either. The boss begins counting the day's takings. One thousand and twenty-seven rupees. Then he begins rolling down the shutter. The boss of my neighbourhood phone booth is a generous quasi-insomniac, but even he locks up his business at one o'clock. The booths that claim to provide twenty-four hour service actually stay open only till midnight.

There are very few places you can go to at the dead of night to call. I offer to drive the backpacker down to the all-night STD phone outside the Eastern Court buildings on Janpath. I still have to make my call and so does he. We drive in silence, we have things to say to the people we have to call – not to each other. Then my companion decides to tell me that his friend is dead and cold in a hospital morgue, that he is catching the next flight back in the morning with her body. He lapses into silence. When we get there, he lets me wake up the operator and get the cards with which to work the phones. He shuts the door tight behind him when he calls and I cannot hear his voice. When he is done, he thanks me and leaves before I can ask him if I can take him to his hotel, or to the hospital. As I dial I can hear a taxi go away into the night.

A phone call is measured in terms of time and money, in red liquid crystal display digits that glow in the dark like malformed fireflies. The backpacker's call to Barcelona that night was brief and it cost him three hundred and fifteen rupees. He never bothered to pick up his receipt



# THE LAST PICTURE ROGER HORROCKS SHOW AFTER LONG DISTANCE CONVERSATIONS SHUDDHABRATA SENGUPTA

when he left. How did he say what he had to tell his friend's family? "Flavia and I are coming home tomorrow, but she is not alive," or "Flavia died this morning at six-forty-five in her sleep" or just, "Flavia is dead."

A phone call breaks the pattern of an evening in a Barcelona home. Sudden distant death intrudes upon a family sitting down to supper. They make more phone calls, arrange for the funeral, find a picture of Flavia taken just before she had left for India and send it to the photographers for enlargement and framing. They wait, and so does the backpacker, and the time and distance involved in the transit of the body make it difficult to mourn. Death, Flavia's particular death, takes on an unreal, virtual mantle, existing only in a phone call made at midnight in the Eastern Court phone booth.

An Afghan doctor and his wife, recent refugees from a meaningless and forgotten war, come to a phone booth I know to ring up Kabul. I asked them once whether they still have friends or relations there. "No," they said, "every one dead, or in exile. We call only to see if the house we left behind is still standing. When the phone rings, it means that the house has not been shelled." Sometimes I think of all the telephone conversations that criss-cross the earth and all the things that still remain unsaid. Numbers don't match, there is static interference, satellite links fail and even when people get through they don't know what to say, or are unable to say what they mean. Perhaps all that is unsaid collects each night and hovers above us like an unknown layer in the atmosphere until it is blown away on the rare days when people find it possible to really speak to each other. Those are the days on which the STD booths shine, their tin and paint banners gleam as if washed in a new rain. And the quiet hum of phone lines and many ringing dial tones signal the everyday fact of people enjoying the things they have to say to each other, across real and imagined distances.

This essay was first published in the *India Magazine* (August–September 1996) and reprinted in *Public Good* (2008), *Enjoy's* first occasional journal edited by Paula Booker and Marnie Slater.



International phone call receipts for a conversation between Bombay and Wellington. Courtesy of Marnie Slater.

All activities involved with words or images are going through a huge upheaval. The transformation of the media is creating new cultural industries but it is also putting old ones out of work. The urban landscape is changing as bookshops, newspapers, CD stores, video and DVD libraries, and many other familiar businesses are closing their doors or struggling to re-invent themselves. One of the areas least affected so far is art. Will it continue to be business as usual for art galleries, or is it possible in the near future that they too will become an endangered species?

These questions grew out of my reading of Shuddhabrata Sengupta's essay 'Long Distance Conversations' published in *Public Good* (2008), *Enjoy* Public Art Gallery's first occasional journal. This essay is a lively, down-to-earth description of phone booths in India at the height of their popularity in 1996. Phone booths were 'hubs of conversation and social life' because many were not soundproofed like New Zealand phone boxes. It was possible for waiting customers to 'eavesdrop', to share family debates, seductions, homesickness, announcements of births and deaths, and dodgy business dealings. They were simultaneously both a rich site of community activity and a centre of 'long distance' communication with the world.

But what do phone booths have to do with the current status of art? In fact, the editors of *Public Good* had already connected the two topics by choosing to include Sengupta's essay in a collection of texts about 'art sited within public space.' The essay functioned as a 'long-distance conversation' between two countries (India and New Zealand) and two eras (1996 and 2008). In that context the ferment of New Delhi social life resembled a kind of performance art. It reminded me of David Mealing's *A Jumble Sale* staged in the Auckland Art Gallery 20 years before Sengupta's essay.

I want to use this essay to explore a different aspect of the topic—the changing role of art in public space as that space is being transformed by the digital revolution.

## An elegy for the phone booth

The community phone booth as Sengupta describes it can be seen as an analogue for the way a contemporary dealer gallery functions—both as a local, communal site and as a dialogue with the wider world (since art today is very much a global conversation). A gallery's ambience is created by its community of visitors, just as a New Delhi phone booth has, according to Sengupta, its own 'clique of regulars, nodding acquaintances'. Exhibition openings provide opportunities to drink, gossip, flirt, do business, and exchange serious talk. Personal experiences in galleries cover a similar range as Sengupta's list—when we 'eavesdrop' on the art, we gain a sense of life that is powerful in its 'volume, intensity and projective power.'

But in 2011 I'm struck by the fact that this media species, the phone booth, has followed the dinosaur into history, since individual mobile phones arrived with SIM cards, and the Internet took over some of the social functions of the phone. These new media have strengthened global connections but also destroyed once-essential local sites of communal life.

By 2008 Sengupta's essay already evoked nostalgia, and today, in the age of Skype and Twitter, it has come to seem even more a slice of history. Its author has moved to Facebook and over the last decade has become an expert on digital media. One of the benefits of those media is the fact that I could strike up a 'long distance conversation' with him in India via Facebook. Sengupta replied to my enquiry in less than an hour. He explained that he had not written anything more about phone booths, but being reminded of his essay made him feel that 'the passing of the phone booth has a certain melancholic sweetness about it.'

Phone boxes (as we call them) have almost disappeared in New Zealand. In the USA, shocked older users have uploaded protest videos on YouTube such as *Where Have All the Phone Booths Gone?* There are now only four outdoor phone booths in the whole of New York city. Peter Ackerman decided to write his book, *The Lonely Phone Booth*, after his puzzled 3-year-old son saw one of them one day and said 'Daddy, why is that phone in a box?'

Artists have been quick to find a use for the obsolete booths. In France one was turned into an aquarium. In London and Los Angeles, Banksy has made several versions of a murdered phone booth—an appropriate sign of the times. And in 1989 one of the first pieces of performance art in China consisted of firing a gun into a gallery installation of two phone booths (the artists Tang Song and Xiao Lu were arrested).

There have been various attempts to save booths by re-inventing them. China is turning them into Wi-fi hot spots. Austria is converting them to charging stations for electric cars. Other suggested uses include privacy booths, smoker's dens, and Twitter kiosks. Much energy has been expended on the Internet figuring out what Clark Kent can do when there is no phone booth for him to change costume, or what Dr Who will use for a TARDIS.

British Telecommunications de-commissioned its booths and offered them to any local community that had a bright idea for recycling. A village in Somerset turned one into a micro public library (with customers expected to leave a book for each one borrowed). Great Shelford in Cambridgeshire adopted a phone booth as the site of a changing art installation. And Settle, a small town in North Yorkshire, has converted one to an art gallery which it claims to be the smallest in the world. These uses retain a local character but they will survive only so long as the community supports them.

Today many other familiar sites of social life are being replaced by digital technology. I have already mentioned objects such as books, newspapers, CDs, videos and DVDs, but other objects also are starting to recede into history, such as the home letter box, the landline phone, the television set, the wristwatch, the analogue camera, the typewriter, the fax machine, and the reel of celluloid film. For decades they have been part of the fabric of family or community life. A shopping centre that no longer has a Post Office, phone box, bookshop, CD store, DVD rental library, or newspaper and magazine shop becomes a bland and 'melancholic' place for some older visitors. Indeed, shops of all sorts are now struggling to compete with online buying (or 'e-tailing'). To quote the headline of a recent *Economist* article: 'Clicks Trump Bricks.'



**I am a prisoner of phone booths. STD/ISD/ PCO/FAX/Xerox by Japanese machine, booths. I am enthralled by their darkened glass panes, stenciled signage, and plastic flowers, the late hours they keep, and the stories that gather on their wallpapers. Like an idiot hungry for tales of travellers who idled in the serais of the Delhi sultanate, I waste my time in the phone booths of nineties New Delhi. Even when I have nothing to say and no-one to call.**

## Long Distance Conversations / Shuddhabrata Sengupta

A big question, then, is why should the visual arts be exempt from the radical changes that have shaken up other sites of semiotic activity? Will the gallery be the next institution to lose its special aura? When we walk into a gallery, the art tends to consist largely of static objects of one kind or another. Will a day come when such objects feel as old-fashioned as a snail-mail letter or a vinyl record, or when the gallery setup feels as old-fashioned as a phone booth?

Concentrating hard on a stationary object is integral to literary culture as it is to the visual arts. Nicholas Carr has said of the invention of books: 'To read a book was to practice an unnatural process of thought, one that demanded sustained, unbroken attention to a single, static object' (*The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, p.64). Carr argues that this kind of attention is passing out of fashion in the 'fidgety' atmosphere of the on-line world.

The favourite technologies of art have not changed much over the years—many painters still use oil, watercolour, or acrylic. Now they must compete with new media, computer programmes, and moving images. Granted, the unique object has continued to be seen as a good investment. But if audience taste becomes more digital and movement-oriented, then static art will start to feel dated—the culture of an older generation.

Ah, but won't people always want special pictures for the walls of their houses? When I visit people who run a website design business from their home, I'm struck by the fact that their walls are mostly clear. Will the homes, or cafés, or galleries of the future have few paintings and many flat screens with changing, moving images? As the digital era develops, it is possible that the pleasures we derive from contemporary art will increasingly be satisfied in that way.

The etiquette of the gallery may also start to seem restrictive. The fact that visitors are expected to look but not touch—like the 'shhhh!' rule for audiences at classical concerts—may clash with the growing appetite for interactivity, for the opportunity to become involved. The older generation is not eager to interact with art because that would seem inappropriate, reducing art to a mere game. But for the digital

kids who have grown up with computer games, it is natural to want to comment, share, edit, embed, mash-up, and play with a text.

A physical gallery space for contemporary art may also come to seem too localized and site-specific. If an artist can exhibit online, why exhibit only in Cuba Street or Karangahape Road? Granted, he or she can do both. The gallery can also have a presence in both worlds. But to maintain the material version, the owner has to keep painting walls and paying rates and rent. Because clicks are cheaper than bricks, there is a real possibility that we will lose some of our most distinctive meeting places for art, as we have already lost some unique record and book shops.

### Past and future

Of course this is not the first time the gallery (or museum) has been under threat. The start of the 20th century brought new materials and methods, though most art still consisted of static objects. Modernist artists continually provoked the gallery to rethink its policies. Later, the institution was challenged by street art and outsider art of various kinds, and Pop Art eroded its high culture status. Post-object art introduced new kinds of interrogation, and political artists (such as Hans Haacke whose work was discussed in *Public Good*) have continued to question the alliance of art institutions with wealth and power. Nevertheless, the gallery has so far weathered these storms and managed—in one way or another—to assimilate all these forms of art.

The question today is whether digital culture is the development that will finally unsettle the gallery as a physical centre for art. In entertaining this possibility, I can't help being aware of a strange historical coincidence. The beginning of both the 19th and 20th centuries was a period of radical change in both art and technology, and this seems to be again the case for the 21st. Of course all periods are periods of change but it is also true that some represent an exceptional burst of innovation. The end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century brought the upheaval of the Romantic Movement. Romantics such as Shelley and Coleridge were excited by the scientific discoveries of their day. Then the next turn-of-century (the

period from 1880 to 1910) saw huge changes in technology—the introduction of film, radio, telephone, electric light, automobile and aeroplane. Modernism in literature and the arts would surely have happened regardless of those changes but many of its practitioners were fascinated and energized by them.

In terms of our own time, it is true that the Internet and the computer have already been around for several decades, but arguably the start of the 21st century has seen their influence reach critical mass. A great spike in the rate of change has affected all existing media. It remains an open question, however, whether those technological changes have coincided with a wave of innovation in the arts comparable to Romanticism or Modernism.

I am struck by the fact that so many aspects of the Web and digital technologies seem to follow naturally from art developments of the last 40 years—the push to greater internationalism; awareness of a vast historical and geographical archive to be tapped; Post-modern appropriation and reworking of images from both popular and high culture; open and unlimited sexuality; the interest in multi-media; the desire for interactivity (in art environments, for example); the shift to conceptual or Post-object art; the interest in virtual reality and the created persona; the idea that there is no reality outside of discourse (in the broadest sense of the term), and confidence that the creative use of new media can be revolutionary in political as well as aesthetic terms. (Consider the use of Facebook and Twitter in today's revolutions in the Middle East).

This is to suggest not a direct influence but a striking parallel between the digital world of the 20th century and tendencies that surfaced in vanguard art during the previous half century. Granted, we seem still to be in a transition stage. For example, die-hard book lovers insist that the Kindle will never replace print, and are confident that smart bookshops and libraries will weather the storm; but the sale of electronic books is relentlessly increasing. (Already e-books represent a third of the front-list titles sold in the USA and UK.) If the first stage is the sale of traditional books via the Internet, the second stage (which is now emerging) will see

**I am still a prisoner of [galleries]. I am enthralled by the stories that gather on their walls. A [gallery] is like a caravanserai, where you can alight from everyday life and hear news of distant places. I go there to eavesdrop on the world because the world inhabits [galleries]. Each [gallery] has a distinct character, which consists of an amalgam of the people who manage it and its repertoire of clients. Sometimes I think about all the [art] conversations that criss-cross the earth.**

## The Last Picture Show / Roger Horrocks

the development of a completely new kind of e-book with a range of added capabilities that will promote a new approach to reading. At some point it may cease to be appropriate to continue using the word 'book.' It is sobering to think that just a few decades ago most readers would have found it inconceivable that the printed book could ever be at risk of becoming obsolete, after having dominated western culture for more than 600 years.

There may be two similar phases for digital art. At present, a gallery can use the Internet to illustrate and market paintings. Or it can sell copies of digital art as limited-edition items. At the moment there is an interest in painting programmes such as the pictures done by David Hockney on his iPad. At Philip Dadson's recent exhibition of moving images at Auckland's Starkwhite Gallery, the visitor could select a single image from which a high-quality copy could be printed out and then framed. (The process of choice certainly helped to encourage close viewing.) Nevertheless, the way that people live with images is changing so rapidly that audiences may come to expect something less traditional.

In addition to Dadson there are a number of talented digital artists at work in New Zealand, including Stella Brennan, Lisa Reihana, Sean Kerr, Simon Ingram, Clay Bodvin and Greg Bennett. The Enjoy Gallery has hosted Douglas Bagnall's 'Cloud Classifier' (with a related text, 'Looking Up' by Louise Menzies, on the Enjoy website). Digital artists have a local network—ada\_list@list.waikato.ac.nz—and an excellent anthology, *The Aotearoa Digital Art Reader* (Auckland, Aotearoa Digital Arts and Clouds, 2008). Still, there is not a lot of digital art on display in our country as yet because the technical resources of galleries are limited. And our arts funding bodies give less support than those in Australia and other countries. (See the *Digital Art Reader* p.170).

Most digital artists are happy to have an opportunity to exhibit in a gallery. For many visitors there is still a tingle of surprise in seeing moving digital images on the walls instead of paintings, but that novelty will soon be exhausted. For galleries, the screen may turn out to be the Trojan horse of the digital revolution,

because whereas all visitors know when they see an oil painting in a gallery that they are in the presence of 'art', a screen may come to seem merely another screen in a world that is full of screens. That, for better or worse, will signal the arrival of the second phase.

### Is the gallery really at risk?

This essay is being written in 2011 and it will soon become as much of a time capsule as Sengupta's 1996 essay. For older observers such as myself this is an extraordinarily confusing period. I am fascinated by digital art, and my previous involvement with the moving images of film provides me with at least a starting-point. In areas outside of art the digital era clearly represents massive progress in terms of the vast databases that can now be created and mined. But I'm also aware that my personal habits are still those of a digital immigrant.

I began writing this opinion piece in a notebook; and while I am now working on a computer I will soon print out the text as hard copy to read and correct. I tend to be attracted more to a long text than a short one because I'm hopeful it will have more depth and complexity and demand slow reading. In many young people those preferences are fading. They prefer a variety of shorter texts, calling for surfing and multi-tasking skills. I'm well aware that digital natives may find the present essay too long and linear, with not enough images, links, or interactivity.

I'm apologetic about my computer habits. But I think more often we need to consider what is being lost as well as what is gained. Changes in technology encourage utopian enthusiasm, but they also bring chaotic change to the existing social infrastructure and threaten the careers based on it. Today, many writers are concerned about the future of local bookshops and publishers. The existing setup has provided an opportunity for a critical mass of local writers to operate as full or part-time professionals but the uncertain economics of electronic publishing make them anxious. Granted, those writers that have struggled to get published can feel some Schadenfreude in the increasing financial pressure on the local publishing industry.

What will happen to the visual arts if the local infrastructure of galleries, dealers, art magazines and books similarly begins to disappear? Over the last four decades the emphasis on the stationary, unique art object as a collectible has worked especially well in New Zealand. Because it is such an expensive business to insure and transport overseas art to our shores, our dealer galleries have specialised in local art. In this respect, artists have had an advantage not shared by local writers, musicians or film-makers who have had to compete with a flood of overseas material produced in multiple copies and shipped here cheaply. Granted, the number of professional artists is still small—many struggle to make a living, and many works of art are not sold but change hands as gifts or cultural barter. But the art business in New Zealand has seen amazing growth since the early 1960s when there were almost no dealer galleries for contemporary art. The Yellow Pages now include hundreds of entries for 'art galleries' in New Zealand. Some are small amateur ventures but the list includes a wide array of professional dealers as well as public galleries. The more specialised *Artzone*, a magazine appearing five times a year that carries information on current exhibitions, averages 100 pages and lists approximately 200 galleries, most of them specializing in local art.

This is an impressive infrastructure for a small, marginal country such as ours. Those who grew up before galleries, publishers, record labels and film companies started to blossom in the 1960s and '70s retain a profound sense of the vulnerability of local creative industries. But now that an art scene has developed, what could go wrong? Many artists thrive on change so they should have no difficulty handling technological developments. What is less certain is the accompanying economic change.

Imagine a future when every artist in the world has a website and something like a blog or a Twitter account. This sounds like an exciting development because in theory anyone will be able to keep in touch with any artist anywhere in the world. But if all the action shifts online, will we continue to take a special interest in local artists? At the moment we follow them closely, looking forward to their annual exhibitions at this or that dealer gallery. Magazines and



books also help to maintain the sense of a tradition of New Zealand art. But what if these local institutions lose their audience? We will certainly benefit from an increased knowledge of the global but it is likely to be at the expense of the local; and that is a matter of concern for a small, marginal country such as ours.

In principle the Internet should create new economic opportunities, but in many fields this remains unproven. The existing structure of professional careers may collapse, as has already happened in some areas of book publishing and television programme-making. The Internet is full of amateur energy with so many individuals generating words and images that the culture is now awash with digital texts, photographs, videos and mash-ups. This is a positive, democratic development, and it does not have to undermine professionalism—the ideal situation will encourage both openness (the amateur do-it-yourself ethos) and recognition and financial support of the best work—but that is not how things are shaping up.

It is instructive to see what has happened to movies. A few years ago there was much talk about the advantages of the 'long tail'—the boost that the Internet could give to specialised material—but the situation now looks more complicated. The market has been polarised, as *The Economist* observed (on 26 November 2009), between big budget blockbusters like *Avatar* with hugely expensive CGI (computer generated images)—and at the other end of the scale a flood of low budget or amateur films (which nowadays can be made with simple equipment such as a mobile phone). The problem is that most of the films in the middle range are disappearing.

The art equivalent of a Peter Jackson-style blockbuster will be a few galleries on a Te Papa scale that offer spectacle, interactivity, and entertainment. Also, the biggest and most famous heritage museums such as the Louvre, Uffizi, Prado or Museum of Modern Art will continue to thrive as tourist attractions. It will help if they have a large special feature such as unusual architecture (the Guggenheim at Bilbao) or an exhibition space for huge works (the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall). At the other end of the scale there will be web (on-line) galleries. What's at risk in this scenario is most of the middle

range, including the site-specific local galleries that specialize in contemporary art. This will mean disaster for many professional artists and dealers. Granted, do-it-yourself ventures by young artists will continue to pop up, but that sort of activity will tend to be amateur.

My concern over the potential costs of the digital revolution makes me realise how much of my response is still shaped by earlier art, such as the importance of the site-specific and medium-specific. If those concepts disappear, then important strains of Modernist thinking will be lost. Production values on YouTube can be very depressing. Those who have lived their lives with film have a sensuous, physical relationship with it, as many writers have with the book and painters with paint. People seem no longer to notice poor quality in moving images, or if they do notice it seems not to bother them. To digital enthusiasts, all that counts is content and it doesn't matter what medium is involved. This use of the term 'content' implies a rejection of the long Modernist tradition of medium-as-message. A digital immigrant has many divided loyalties today, enjoying the energy of new developments but feeling reluctant to lose the best of the older traditions.

Predicting the future, especially in a time of exceptional change, is a risky business. Recently there have been some successful revivals of live events. For example, Jim Allen's 1974 performance work *Contact* has been re-staged this year in three New Zealand galleries. In the realm of music, there has been a surge of rock concerts and tours. Does this prove there is a special appeal in the live, communal event? Let's hope so. But many of today's rock tours are an emergency response to the fact that CD sales are drying up because so many listeners are downloading music, either cheaply or illegally.

#### Above our heads

I am hoping that my pessimistic scenario for the future of art remains no more than a fanciful thought experiment. Distinctive local cafés, restaurants and bars still thrive despite the endless expansion of shopping malls and cloned, branded outlets that appear to be managed by computer from corporate headquarters somewhere in outer space.

To celebrate our dealer galleries with their idiosyncrasies and rich community life, I'll end by quoting some more sentences from Shuddhabrata Sengupta's essay. I'm replacing the term 'phone booth' with 'gallery':

I am still a prisoner of [galleries]. I am enthralled by the stories that gather on their walls. A [gallery] is like a caravanserai, where you can alight from everyday life and hear news of distant places. I go there to eavesdrop on the world because the world inhabits [galleries]. Each [gallery] has a distinct character, which consists of an amalgam of the people who manage it and its repertoire of clients. Sometimes I think about all the [art] conversations that criss-cross the earth. And perhaps all that is not yet said collects [in a gallery] and hovers above our heads there.



# AN IMAGINARY ARCHIVE

## GREGORY SHOLETTE

### BEFORE

## PRELUDE AND SUITE

### TIM CORBALLIS

#### An Imaginary Archive

The cultural economy of art is dependent upon a sphere of hidden social production involving cooperative networks and collaborative production—systems of gift exchange, unremunerated group labour, collective forms of practice—all of which resemble a species of missing mass or cultural dark that nonetheless anchors aesthetic value within the formal art world. Despite being entangled with this other, shadowy productivity, the art world refuses to acknowledge its presence. Recently this relationship began to radically change. Thanks in large part to the spread of digital networks dark matter is getting brighter. The once hidden archive has split open, its ragged contents are spilling out into view. This missing cultural mass is both a metaphor of something vast, unnameable and essentially inert, as well as a phantasmagoric proposition for what might be possible at this moment of epistemological crisis in the arts and structural crisis in global capital.

Sholette's Imaginary Archive is a public art project that explores this realm including collectivised and collaborative cultural practices that have been at the centre of this shift in dark matter; from dark to light. Graphics, text-based artworks, imaginary books and other speculative objects produced by the artist along with other collaborators, explore the splintering of cultural memory into a series of alternative historical possibilities and desires. Ultimately this installation/research project asks the following question: How are socially-based cultural practices perceived, shaped, limited, or liberated by their relation to historical memory?

#### prelude: one voice / dissonance-heteroglossia

*I've been working on this for so long. Working, call that work? Someone's got to earn the money around here. I mean, it's too hard, just too hard, and I'm tired. Have a lie down. Sleep earns us nothing. Sleep then, sleep. Sleep my darling. Wake refreshed. No, let me retreat here into my cube for a while—I've lined it with furs that still have something of their natural smell, one that can't be smelled anywhere else, even in nature. It's the prison I go to so I can escape it in my dreams. When I'm outside it I'm not dreaming and life seems false as a dream. I don't understand. And I'm busy. Oh listen to me, listen, will you? Listen? I can't, no I can't. So let me just go to my own special place too, let's all go to our own. You've got your cube—which needs a clean by the way. No matter, no-one else comes there. Do you remember when we met? We had such visions. We thought we might curl up in an enlarged cube, one made comfortable for all of us. Imagine the pong! Maybe partitioned off into individual private rooms. Oh yes, we started to*

*build it. In our dreams! No really. Really, in our dreams—what is built in our dreams is real. Or more cubes, cubes for all, all cubes, a world of cubes. Stack them! And move them about. That would be work, that would, wouldn't it? That would be work fit for us. Then we'd work, we'd carry on our work, not a water cooler, not a solitaire screen, not a five minute ciggy out the back in sight. Just forklifts, cubes, and the great, unlimited space for them bought for us with ever-accumulating liquidity. But we'd have to split ourselves: in the cubes; and driving the forklifts. No, the thing to do is to try to be disciplined, to try to concentrate, to limit ourselves, to speak as if we were one.*

Art work by Gregory Sholette, installed at Arty Bees Bookshop, Manners Street, Wellington. Image courtesy of the artist.



#### Notes from the Collaborators

##### Dara Greenwald

Free Space/Alternate U Course Catalogue, #13, 1975 was found through examining the history of how free schools contributed to the development of radical culture. During this session of the Alternate U, it was located at the Muste Building/339 Lafayette Street in New York City. The building is also known as the Peace Pentagon and it is now slated for destruction. Although not fictive, the object feels like a possible fiction of a past when a free school had offerings every day of the week and offered courses like Soho Art Through Anarchist Eyes. This piece comes out of my primary source research into the cultures of social movements which is part of a larger project entitled The Interference Archive (with Josh MacPhee).

##### White Fungus

Blank Canvas was a short-lived Wellington political zine sparked by local events. The first issue, Kerry Prendergast and the Creativity Hoax, was published in 2007 in the lead-up to local body elections. The publication was an unrestrained attack on incumbent mayor Kerry Prendergast and her business interests, including surveillance technology company Surveylab, whose clients include the US military.

The second issue was a response to the 2008 mass arrests of activists across the country—including Tuhoe, Maori sovereignty, environmental and peace activists—and the invocation, for the first time, of new anti-terrorism laws imported from the US. The issue examined the local arrests in relation to the “Global War On Terror”. Plans for two further issues of Blank Canvas were shelved after the zine's producer, White Fungus, relocated to Taiwan in 2009. Now for the 2010 Wellington Collaboratorium, White Fungus has produced the covers only for these two non-existent issues.

##### Blank Canvas Issue 3

Blow Massey: A Creative Campus Expose Issue would have been an unsparing look at Wellington's Massey University and the commercialisation of New Zealand education.

##### Blank Canvas Issue 4

The Henry Kissinger and John Lennon Issue would have looked at the culture and politics of the 1970s in New Zealand and abroad.

##### Jeremy Booth

I've used the tactile, experiential nature of the wider Archive to anchor a series of subtle interventions within it. My project sees a number of papers, copies and notes inserted into other books. Seemingly unrelated, and undoctored, the inserted material positions the environmental evolution of New Zealand as key to its present social, cultural and political direction.

#### suite in 9 continuous movements:

##### serial voices / one voice

*The memory of a thing is like the thing itself. The memory of stepping out is like stepping out and seeing it all again, those places I loved and saw futures in. And this means that by remembering them I can recreate them—or create memories, which is close enough. Stepping out, taking with me my old jacket, I remember it, touch and smell that memory! And the futures we saw in the places, the seeing was like the futures, so that seeing we created the futures, or created a seeing that was like the futures—you get the picture. Then, remembering stepping out, I sniff the jacket and create the jacket and find myself in the places and recreate them and recreate the seeing of the futures, recreate the creating of the futures... so that I recreate the creation of*

*the future itself! Leaving all this behind with its furs. With its reports of the city outside, just squalid realpolitik. Even thinking about the powers that be, with their business interests, money in the palm of a hand and the taint of the gun in the other—even thinking about the long reach of that gun, all this makes me appreciate my cube, what you can do in it, the escape that can be had while remaining in it. Now I come to think of it, the smell, maybe it's*

*the furs, not the jacket after all. I assume, that is, that there's a world out there, fairly much as reported to me by the newspapers delivered to me through the slot during my longer residencies, along with my gruel. This residency has lasted years, maybe, raising disturbing questions about the real origin of those memories (my old school). But I can as easily assume that the memories are real and that the world reported in the newspapers is false. I flip-flop between the two assumptions—between some real present world and this other one, the recreated-created future that might easily by now be the present if things had been otherwise, as they might for all I can say. What*

*might be? My old school, still standing, with offerings every day of the week and courses like Soho Art Through Anarchist Eyes. Maybe I better keep those anarchist eyes shut. All those ignorant schoolmasters! I find it hard to believe I've ever learned anything—though I seem to think I*

*know plenty, mostly about the past. Oh, and the present of the newspapers. Why is it so hard to reconcile them? Memory drags up these promises and I can't but believe them. No matter. No matter, the past is so long gone, and its*

*futures impossible to touch. Nuzzle into the furs, imagine they line the jacket, breathe in! Surely there is some scrap here, some remnant—a bit of paper, a book, something to touch that will act as aide-memoire, and, well, proof. Proof of something not yet, not yet then, that will have been? Ah I feel my unity beginning to... no. Fossick around and I find a scrap or two, to be*



Constructing the Archive.  
Photo: Sarah Hudson.



The Archive installed at Quilters Bookshop,  
Chuznee Street, Wellington. Image courtesy of Enjoy.



The material speculates as to the possibilities that may have unfolded if British-born Thomas Shepherd had stayed on in the fledgling colony, after his brief visit to Wellington Harbour and the Auckland region in the mid-1820s. Shepherd was an associate of the famed English landscape designer Capability Brown. A surveyor for the New Zealand Company, he professed views on ecology, conservation, and the integration of natural and social environments that would not be considered in the country for another century, at least.

*sure, sure of what? Radical doubt is so passé. The best this scrap might do is speculate as to the possibilities that may have unfolded: Shepherd was an associate of the famed English landscape designer Capability Brown. A surveyor for the New Zealand Company, he professed views on ecology, conservation, and the integration of natural and social environments that would not be considered in the country for another century, at least... Hard to read in this light. It doesn't sound very realistic. I must have clipped it from somewhere. I'll roll it up and chew it until it forms a dense sticky wad with a*

#### Johan Lundh and Danna Vajda

Focusing on the material conduit of a 1980 vintage french military jacket, RED FRED works with the extent of cultural memory embedded within the loaded history of everyday objects. We will send a French military jacket to be hung within the archive, that will become its own infrastructure for a pocket sized archive of its personal history. This archive includes a "pocket recorder" playing a strange audio of a past-life hypnotist, regressing the jacket to an exploration of its past incarnations, and a text analysing the theoretical implications of this peculiar method of hypnosis. Invoking multiple incarnations of the French military jacket both as an object and a signifier. These incarnations include the design and subsequent factory production of the jacket in rural France; the jacket as worn by a soldier (by the peculiar nick-name of "Red Fred") involved in the French Nuclear Tests conducted off the Polynesian coast of Moruroa (and the subsequent controversies between France and New Zealand over the tests conducted in the 90s); the following adoption of the jacket by Green Peace activists, artists, "fashionistas". The past-life narratives are interspersed and not told in historical chronology. This anti-chronology is meant to complicate any straight forward semiotic development but rather show the jacket as an object embedded in numerous contradictions, conflicts and personal and political struggles.

*satisfying texture. I can keep it with me that way, in my armpit or behind my ear, a constant reminder of another world. So, stepping out—wearing jacket—the problem is that there are two exits from a cube like this: one to the present, if there is a present, one to the future or past or whatever it was I was talking about earlier. Earlier? The jacket and the chewed up paper will be a comfort whichever way, keeping me warm and reminding me of the other path. What ifs upon what ifs. Maybe the jacket and the furs are the same thing? It would certainly solve two mysteries: where did the furs come from and where did the jacket go... and thereby serve to boost my confidence in my memories. I'll try to piece them together and see if their edges line up in jacket-like manner. No doubt there will be imperfections, decay caused by age and the effects of radiation. Ah, so hard to tell. It's certainly not something I'll be wearing in public in its current state, for fear of giving quite the wrong impression. Or maybe it's just an old pile of furs thrown in with my gruel and newspapers after all. The comfortable weight of it on my shoulders. I remember that. The odds and ends in the pockets. Its military look, so popular with the young people who've never known the horrors. They issued us with sunglasses. Or at least so I imagine. If it were true their broken frames would still be around somewhere. Or it's possible I was just given it by someone who told me about the tests, the sunglasses, the*

#### Malcolm Doidge and Grant Corbishley

Collaboratorium (definition): is a decentralised and egalitarian environment where collaborative projects within the three practice arenas—conceptual, participatory and industry—are fostered. And methodologies such as recursive processes, consensual decision-making and holistic approaches are explored. Collaboratoriums acknowledge local contexts: in this case, Aotearoa, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and indigenous systems such as Awhitanga, Te Ohu, Kotahitanga and Kaitiakitanga, and support trans-discipline practitioners.

The space that the Wellington Collaboratorium inhabits is not a neutral space; Enjoy is a locality that comes with a received history and established identity. "If a collaboratorium emerges within [such] an existing hierarchical structure, a redistribution of pre-existing territories is necessary, via dialogic processes including listening." The philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara argues that "Western

*radiation, sotto voce and conspiratorial, as if I hadn't read all about it in the newspapers. There are advantages to the cube, and disadvantages too, besides the smell—which, depending on your preference, could be either. It has to be said that while certain things are possible here, it also has its particular history, one that it's possible to forget while idling and dreaming within it. It's possible to imagine it floating, free and strangely structureless despite its rectilinearity, or because of it, as if it were in space or underground or neither, and more, just a thing, a place or space carved*

*out of the void and part of it, itself void and empty, weightless, a singularity if you like or nongularity, an ungenerality, especially if you close your eyes. But this would be, probably, to misrepresent the truth, that it's just a cube, a frame with plasterboard and a door or more than one door and located firmly within the aforementioned city, the one I prefer not to think about. It even has a street address, at least until next time it gets wheeled*

philosophy and art must, rather than concentrate on assertive saying, begin to acknowledge the role of listening as a creative practice." (Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 1990, p.26) We would like to explore steps to ensure robust exchange, regardless of disciplines and territories and to employ a dialogic approach to cut up, and redistribute these existing territories.

#### Maureen Connor

My project begins with the discovery of a book, *The Making of a Modern Bank*, a self-promotional hardback, published in 1923 by the Continental and Commercial National Bank of Chicago. Although the illustrations, fonts and layout as well as the language of the book have a distinctly Edwardian, "Boston Brahmin" style long absent from contemporary book design, the reassuringly upper class quality of the text is used to this day in the advertising copy of banks and finance companies. And there are other parallels to recent financial episodes. Despite their apparent fiscal strength and expertise, Continental and Commercial National Bank announced in this publication, they had to be rescued just a few years later, in 1930s, by a \$50 million loan from Reconstruction Finance Corp. (a federal agency) and became Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust Co.

For my contribution to Imaginary Archive I'm picturing what might have happened if this "bail out" had not occurred. Instead, what if the bank's enormous building, which takes up an entire city block in downtown Chicago's financial district, was given over to housing the indigent, specifically to the organisation Hull House, begun by Jane Addams as a Settlement House in 1889? By the 1920s, Hull House had itself expanded to include most of another city block, one on Chicago's south side, they could shelter only a small fraction of those left homeless by the Great Depression. What if the \$50 million loan to Continental and Commercial National Bank had instead been granted to Hull House to shelter these "forgotten" men and women, as they were called at the time?

Bank Book, describes the possible outcome of such government largesse. Using the form of a pop-up book to "document" the transformation of the bank into a communal homestead for Chicago residents down on their luck, each turn of the page represents a different stage in the conversion of the Continental and Commercial National Bank building from business to domestic space. The primary models for these transformations are the floor plans, spatial proportions and cooperative arrangements developed by "material feminists", who are described by Dolores Hayden in her 1981 book, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, as "women who identified the economic exploitation of women's domestic labour by men as the most basic cause of women's inequality."\* Starting in the 1870s, a time when larger U.S. cities began to build multiple dwellings, material feminists proposed ideas such as communal cooking and childcare, as a way to turn isolated domestic work into social labour while still preserving private living quarters for individual families.

\*Hayden, Dolores, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T., 1981) p. 3

*off to a new one on its forklift. It lacks windows, or seems to. That is, it's hard to tell if the windows are windows or cleverly framed screens of some kind. Does it matter? Screens are supposed to be windows on the present. Discuss. But I still feel doubtful, as you would of any view that seems to offer a vantage, a topographical laying out of the territories and the promise of, um.*

*Preliminaries aside, then, I am almost ready to step out once and for all. Is it possible to leave through both doors at once? Be simultaneously in the present and that future that's also present and past and recreated and created? I feel ready to try. It's all an elaborate myth or metaphor in any case. But to say that makes it seem as if I can just open my eyes! As if stepping out were just stepping out of a metaphor—and as if, in any case, that were an easy thing. Take money, for example: we all know that's just paper and worthless metal—but do we treat it in that way? Of course, money, here in the cube, money hardly enters into it. And it does. The cube is awash in money, afloat in its liquidity; money is the void that the cube floats in, if you like, if I'm not mistaken. There's no money in the void in money, the void in money which, by the way, is also the void that shows that money is a void, if that makes any sense whatsoever to anyone, and if anyone*

*cares to pay attention. So having done that, you can play all kinds of tricks with money in here: juggle it, create it, abstract it from its necessities—which are commonly known to be unnecessary, etc. Oh don't worry, I'm leaving, I'm stepping out, just one last conversation before I do. It's necessary to be fully prepared, though preparation itself is impossible. For example: will I have enough money? But, recall the aforementioned difficulties therewith. I'll have none; or, on the other hand, I'll have as much as I wish—but who would take payment in such coin? I will need a visionary, an investor or speculator to take me on as his son and bring me up in the arts of business and influencing people as if I'd arrived on the shores of a mythic America—where, by the way, everyone is male and women are objects of beauty and cultural capital.*

*Shouldn't I then scratch around here for a coin or two or a note, something that I might at least use to buy a bowl of mush or congee? I can't expect favours. But at the same time, the world I step into will be overlaid with that other world, if worlds strictly speaking can overlay, the one that is created-recreated and has its peculiar relation to temporality. Would anyone be concerned with the state of my pocketbook in such a place, a place of such marvellous abstraction? But then, doesn't that very abstraction recall us to the whole substrate, the void of money, the most abstract—oh. You couldn't really call this cube a dwelling place, despite its street address. For that you need to step out. Well, in that case, I just need to be brave, to make the leap of faith that stepping out entails. I'll go up to people and shake hands. What about the jacket? Possibly, as noted, not the best first impression to give. I'll be cast off from society, if there is a society, and forced to sleep in a cardboard box with only the jacket/furs for warmth. Actually this would in many ways be not so different from my current situation, apart from the absence of*





### Murray Hewitt

My contribution was two fold. First being the “local knowledge” helping Greg with the install of the structure in the gallery. And second I have contributed a spiral bound travel guide, Must sees for all Kiwis, containing stills of 60 sites from the New Zealand wars.

*the void of money. Void equals plenum. Only someone in a cube would say something like that. I'm not overly practical, I admit, which means that a cube kind of suits me. However, the cube has a curious, klein-bottle like structure, again a cubey kind of thing to say, that means its outsides and*

### Oliver Ressler

Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies

After the loss of a counter-model for capitalism—which socialism, in its real, existing form had presented until its collapse—alternative concepts for economic and social development face hard times at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the industrial nations, broadly discussed are only those “alternatives” that do not question the existing power relations of the capitalist system and representative democracies. Other socio-economic approaches are labeled utopian, devalued, and excluded from serious discussion, if even considered at all.

The thematic installation, Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies, focuses on diverse concepts and models for alternative economies and societies, which all share a rejection of the capitalist system of rule. An interview was carried out for each concept. Interview partners include economists, political scientists, authors, and historians. From these interviews, a video in English was produced. In the exhibition, these single-channel 20- to 37-minute videos are each shown on a separate monitor, thus forming the central element of the artistic installation.

The project presents alternative social and economic models such as “Inclusive Democracy” from Takis Fotopoulos (GB/GR), “Participatory Economy” from Michael Albert (U.S.A.) and “Anarchist Consensual Democracy” from Ralf Burnicki (D). Chaia Heller (U.S.A.) presents “Libertarian Municipalism”, Paul Cockshott (GB) “Towards a New Socialism”, Heinz Dieterich (MX) “The Socialism of the 21st Century”, Marge Piercy (U.S.A.) the feminist-anarchist utopias of her social fantasies, and the underground author p.m. (CH), the ideas of his concept “bolo’bolo.” Other videos focus on certain principles that might be of importance when discussing alternative economics and societies: Nancy Folbre (U.S.A.) speaks about “Caring Labor,” Christoph Spehr (D) about “Free Cooperation”, Maria Mies (D) about the subsistence perspective and John Holloway (MX/ IE) about his ideas of how to “Change the World Without Taking Power.”

As interesting historical models, Todor Kuljic (SCG), thematizes workers’ self-management in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s, Salomé Moltó (E) talks about the workers’ collectives during the Spanish Civil War (1936–38), and Alain Dalotel (F) discusses the Paris Commune of 1871. One of the videos discusses the Zapatist Good Government Junta, a self-governing, direct democracy network, which is currently present in certain rural areas of Chiapas, Mexico.

*insides get very confused. It might be speculated, if you’ll allow just the briefest interlude before I really do step out, that the whole world is a little like that—outsides and insides getting confused, dream and reality and possibility all rolled into one self-penetrating bottle, not much good for containing anything. I don’t mean to be esoteric, to suggest, say, that the cube is the world, that the cube’s outside—but wasn’t there more than one?—is the world and its inside and the world’s outside and that I am alone in it all. That would be bad news. My unfocused cries. The thunder heard by no-*

*one, what would it mean? Uncaused. Rolling thunder in a rolled-up world, full of the logic of echo that is the echo of echo. No, I’m not suggesting that at all. As if stepping out were just a matter of perspective, as if I’d already done it and found myself inside, as if there were no alternative. No, all that, quite passé, or at least I like to think so. No, instead, stepping out into the world I would land in a street, an ordinary street where people stroll during their lunch hour. Why would I assume that? Perhaps they are looking instead for an evening meal or a place to take an alcoholic beverage. A couple, for*

*example, a woman whose hair is extraordinarily fine so that her scalp gleams through it, and a man holding her by the elbow with a bent claw—they are dressed up as if in celebration, stuffed ridiculously into clothes they think flatter them. I should at least cover my genitals with a scrap of fur. That was a good first attempt, though there was not so much in that vision that was positive, or offered redemption. But no, at least they loved each other, didn’t they, despite everything, they held onto each other. They were making something of a bad situation. If I can imagine that, then I can imagine even more wonderful things. Imagining with sufficient discipline—that is what makes things real, or at least possible. My first sketch lacked precision. What colour were the clothes, say? There were some nice touches though. It might be objected that it still wasn’t the real praxis of stepping out, one that would converge the dream, the memory, the recreated-created with the real, as if imagination could do that, and turn it into something worth*

*writing home about. You can see why I’ve been putting off that stepping-out or out-stepping. It’s by no means an easy task. I suspect it involves the question of alliances, of funding and fundraising, of appropriating all that liquidity and putting it to different uses, something a cube in the void-plenum of financial accumulation is not really designed for at the best of times, even at the moment of its stepping-out. Or was that out-stepping? And then I wonder again if I’m just clutching at straws, or worse, putting*

Chosen from each of these 16 videos is one quotation significant for the alternative model that it presents. The quote is placed directly on the floor of the exhibition room as a several meter long text piece. This floor lettering, made from adhesive film, leads exhibition visitors directly to the corresponding videos and thereby provides a kind of orientation within this non-hierarchically arranged pool of videos. These videos offer stimulus and suggestions for contemplating social alternatives and possibilities for action.

### Yevgeniy Fiks

My contribution to the Wellington Collaboratorium consists of several fictional publications (sometimes with content, sometimes just cover), which present several (im)possible narratives of cultural politics in the Soviet Union and the United States. These publications present as factual, several events in Soviet and American art history of the Cold War and post-Cold War era. These cultural occurrences (such as an official exhibition of Soviet Non-Objective Art in Moscow in 1947 or the 1977 art album Trotsky in Soviet Art published by the official Soviet publishing house) question “the impossible” of history. What this project addresses is not what could have happened but rather what has never materialised, for as viewed from 1917-1919 these events were possible, awaited, even expected to happen in the future. For a Russian revolutionary subject of 1918-1919 a statement “by 1947 Soviet non-objective painting WILL HAVE ACHIEVED great progress” was a real historical truth. Not wishful thinking but a fact. The events and occurrences that found materialisation in these publications present alternative historical trajectories as imaginable.

*off the moment by thinking about it too much. I should just be going then. But follow what thread? I can’t go without knowing where or how. Which door, as it were, and what to do once opening it and finding myself on the other side. Why, for example, must it be a man and a woman? Two men, two women, would equally have done. Two people—sometimes the indeterminate is better. Or better: some people, preferably more than one. Here they go. And they care deeply for one another, that much is obvious—they hold onto each*

*other’s elbows or ankles, they pick parasites from one another’s hair. They’ve managed something, some mutual imagination I suppose. They speak with cries and hiccups and pat each other’s shoulders. They are a kind of central committee for themselves, constantly determining the structures under which they will live. There’s bickering over the correct line—but that just shows that the correctness is mostly in the bickering. That’s not bad, if I say so myself. I could almost step out into that, though it would still be a dream. Would I be one of them? A more problematic question. I can’t help thinking of myself at a distance—but the distance is a reflection that I’m not one of them, but rather, that I’m all of them together. How about that? Not surprising I suppose that I should see myself in my dream as an externalised multitude of some kind, a clamour, a group held together by the imagining. What does it mean? Does it mean I’m finally ready? Probably. Probably not. It’s just another delusional, passé way of saying I’m the world and that I can switch it this way or that with a flick of my wrist. Unlikely. Out then! Step out, outstep, outstepout.*



# STAGING AN ONLINE CACOPHONY DEBATING THE MERITS OF ONLINE AND PRINT PUBLISHING AND WHAT THIS MIGHT MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF ART WRITING BOPHA CHHAY

Our constant and continual need to maintain simultaneous social networking personas via social media is a reflection of our ultimate dependence on the internet, as a core necessity in the ways we communicate, transmit, conduct and receive information.

Within the world of publishing the speculative claims of the impending death of print have long been stipulated. The increasing accessibility of art writing and publishing via online platforms makes it necessary to negotiate and reconsider the ways we apprehend printed matter, and how this might alter our approach and practice of art writing. The future of publishing must acknowledge and take into consideration the online platform.

Publishing platforms and presses which continue to ensue production solely through printed matter, run the risk of being labeled as vanity presses, or are immediately categorised as pandering to the needs and tactile requirements of those with a taste for nostalgia. The practice of collecting and the cult of the object has ensured that printed matter has etched its own particular niche. Archives, libraries, and bookshops are essential nodes and lynch pins of information systems, public information dissemination, and consumer supply markets. These institutions remain societal providers of literary tactile engagement.

Acknowledging the changing nature of publishing, many visual arts publishing groups, independent publishers and presses are exploring the relationship between publishing and writing within contemporary art by integrating shifting platforms into their work. Actively seeking out ways to establish a more democratic platform for publishing, in line with the evolution of web publishing, the online Enjoy publishing programme (<http://www.enjoy.org.nz/node/115>) was established in 2006. The objective: to commission emerging writers to respond to the works of emerging artists exhibited at Enjoy, and to generate engaging dialogue as paramount to Enjoy's modus operandi.

Printed monographs, journals and magazines no longer dictate the potential scope of published writing, nor its accessibility. By expanding publication into the outreaches of the internet alternative styles of writing and other avenues of dissemination are being further investigated. One of the core objectives of Dexter Sinister (<http://www.dextersinister.org/>), the two-person collective of Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt, is to maintain a continual conversation within their work about the relationship between typography, design, publishing, interchangeable document type, and online publishing, in a way that actively pursues and delves into the experimental processes of contemporary art publishing and writing. Dexter Sinister explores the potential of the outreaches of the internet; investigating concepts of territory, seeking out new and revisiting older sites, the spatial surface of the page or the interface of the web. Similarly, New York based bookshop, press and publishers Printed Matter ([www.printedmatter.org](http://www.printedmatter.org)) navigates the disjunctions between print and online publishing. Facilitating a dialogue that seeks out the nuances of publishing and enclaves of writing styles within publications made by artists, they specifically claim publications conceived of by artists 'as artwork for the page'.<sup>1</sup>

Is there truth to the claim that print matter will suffer eventual demise in the face of information being freely accessible online? How do these experimental strategies and tactics allow the surface of the printed page or online webpage interface to be recreated or re-envisioned? In what ways does online accessibility create and allow for new styles of art writing? As an experiment, I invited the Enjoy Online Publishing Programme and the Enjoy Print Publishing Programme to enter discussion in an attempt to decipher the nuances between online and printed matter. Can an effective dialogue be maintained between the two? And what does this mean for art writing? Will dialogue, or ghosting occur? Is the ghost best visualised as a sparring partner, where the tension occupies the space between the work and the writing, like a companion? Is it possible to pinpoint and reveal traces of a zeitgeist of art writing within the different modes of art publishing? I also wanted them to discuss typography, design, syntax sabotage, footnotes, shadows, absent responses and archival gaps.

## Enjoy Print Publishing

asks **Enjoy Online Publishing**  
Tell us about one of the latest additions/acquisitions to the Enjoy online publishing programme and how this might sum up, or come close to capturing the spirit of the online programme?

*A recent acquisition to the archive of Enjoy's online publishing programme Was sei Aufklärung? ([http://www.enjoy.org.nz/files/Was%20sei%20Aufklärung\\_%20by%20Tim%20Corballis.pdf](http://www.enjoy.org.nz/files/Was%20sei%20Aufklärung_%20by%20Tim%20Corballis.pdf)) by Tim Corballis was a response to the exhibition Charming the Snake of Reason.<sup>2</sup> At the outset of Was sei Aufklärung? Corballis hints at the multitude of voices that sit within the spaces of the exhibition, staging his response as if to engage the reader within a walking tour. "This, of course, is somewhat disorientating. In two places or, maybe, in one place that exists simultaneously within two different spaces. All this, when you think about it, is enough to give you a headache. For this reason, let us perhaps try to think how we got here; and this will, of course, mean two different stories, both of them already familiar enough to be sure." *The voice of the author becomes a companion accompanying the reader through the exhibition. Setting up a playful series of estrangements. In a way the author takes on the role of a guide or a facilitator, even that of a mediator.**

*What I find most compelling about this text is Corballis' use of multiple voices, which gesture toward an interpretation of the work, offering a point of leverage with which to gauge it, while never imposing any direct representational meaning onto it. The response offers a sounding board, an attempt to start to decipher 'meaning' from the materiality of the work bound within the impetus of the curatorial hand. Was sei Aufklärung? offers a series of conversations, which is reminiscent of the objective of the Enjoy online publishing programme, which presents an incongruous set of writing styles and in turn creates an online cacophony of voices.*

## EOP asks EPP

Would you say that the print programme operates in this way to foster a multiplicity of voices, in a similar way to the online programme?

*Viewed together as a collection, I would say it creates the affect of a multiplicity of voices, especially as most of the writers are emerging writers with fresh voices and perspectives. The main difference in the way the writing is experienced online and in print lies in the accessibility and distribution of the material. Online accessibility allows for a broader readership, while print publishing allows for an engagement with the materiality and experience of the text. The experience of the text therefore becomes reliant on the way the text is presented through design. Design and format become key to the way the text is apprehended, read, consumed, digested.*

## EOP asks EPP

The listing of the PDFs categorised by year resembles an index. Every exhibition is documented online, with a page dedicated to it, as part of the archive of exhibitions. On each exhibition page, there is a brief description, documentation in the form of images, and the commissioned essay appears in PDF format at the bottom of the page. The stylistic appearance of the essay on the Enjoy website seemingly positions it as a note or a reference. Visually, this suggests the online publishing component is a footnote to the exhibition. This wouldn't be the case in a print publication. Do you agree with the implication that print holds more weight than online publishing?

*I think that neither print nor online publishing holds more weight than the other. In a way I quite like the idea that these links to the PDFs are visually reminiscent of a footnote or a reference. Footnotes often seem to be the holder of interesting facts, figures, and miscellaneous detail and direct references to source material. Information and notes relegated to the margins, sidelined as irrelevant, edited from the main text are thoughts that are essential and require referencing but are not essential to the main argument. It's almost as if the reference space of the footnote, becomes the host of the conversation within the margins, where these*

*ideas and parallel considerations that cannot be wholly integrated into the main body of the text are held. These ideas are like shadows that work to prop up the main text, and they act as indents that point to other potential sources of interest, legitimate tangents. Parallel considerations take up residence and open up the potential for information wormholes. It reminds me of those internet wormholes you can get lost in, YouTube being the prime example. One video leads to another which leads to another which generates others you might want to view, with recommendations based on your prior views. Automated triggers offering other potential gateways into online depths and recesses.*

## EOP asks EPP

It reminds me of the way that bibliographic references such as the Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal library categorisations work. I guess stumbling upon interesting (and not so interesting) materials in internet wormholes is like coming across interesting books in the shelves of bookshops and libraries. There's something nice about just 'happening' upon books and texts. In a library or bookshop, a publication may be grouped with other publications of a similar subject matter. In a way this allows for a distinctive voice to arise. Does online availability eliminate these possibilities of tangible meandering, stumbling upon the physicality of written materials, and allowing for grouped publications to generate intrigue and dialogue?

*The distribution of material is a key issue. There are many logistical hurdles that must be negotiated to ensure readership. Harnessing online capacity as a resource ensures that material becomes accessible. Cost is less of a factor limiting information accessibility. In that sense it becomes more democratic. While the focus of the Enjoy publishing programme is on nurturing emerging writers, the immediacy of online publishing enables a wider audience, including dialogue with other artist-run spaces. It also allows for material to be published in alignment with online social media culture, including blogs, Facebook, Twitter etc. The meandering takes place online, as opposed to the tangible, in real life experience.*

## EOP asks EPP

Do you think that the accessibility of information online makes a difference to the way writers respond to projects at Enjoy? Is the web changing the way we write?

*In consideration of the wider context of online space, the site of the internet has been associated with the cusp of technological development, where an alternate reality can exist and where emerging practices are freer to take place. It is a site where possibility is enabled. In this regard it can become a space that frees us to approach art writing practices differently. It seems to allow for a generosity in the practice and process of thinking, writing and production. Within the space of Enjoy's online programme, the online PDFs encourage more open and playful forms of art writing. Ann Poulsen's piece on summer resident Simon Glaister<sup>3</sup> offered a playful A-Z guide—a list of bullet-pointed facts offering images and sensations provoked by Glaister's work. Poulsen maintains a safe following distance as if to shadow and in no way impose. She lists points of significance, allowing subtleties of language, humour, and spelling mistakes to be embraced. Her unorthodox essay formatting also encourages a different kind of interpretation, one not limited by contemporary art vernacular, which art writing frequently perpetuates. Excerpts from Ann Poulsen's guide Categorically: a personalised catalogue remind us that humour and a lenient editorial approach allow different practices and approaches to be found to the way art is written about, outside the arenas of art critique and review:*

- h) held tightly
- a critic's breath; and convictions
- t) tough to copy if I wanted to
- originality is easier, which is why it is so often scorned
- w) whether dependent
- the moral storm
- x) xtremely xpensive to make
- regrets<sup>4</sup>

1. <http://www.printedmatter.org/about/>  
2. *Charming the Snake of Reason*, curated by Marnie Slater. With Ruth Buchanan, Aline Keller, Bik Van der Pol, Sjoerd van Leeuwen, Maria Pask, Marnie Slater and Sjoerd Westbroek at Enjoy Public Art Gallery, 20 Oct – 13 Nov 2010.  
3. Ann Poulsen, *Wild Profusion, sudden vicinity; the summer residency of Simon Glaister* at Enjoy Gallery, February 2010.  
4. et al.



# TERMINATOR THREE WAS A WOMAN

## TAO WELLS

Everything next is written for money, shifting writing whatever I feel, to an abstract task pulling me along a line I wouldn't have walked, this is work. I lost interest by the time *Terminator Three* came out, she should have been so kick arse instead she meandered around throwing stuff, the Apocalypse is an epoch that you can experience working, poetic widows yearned for, searching ashes for meaning.

Instructions have indicated that this is not a review, is it a love letter? I've preferred oral submissions in the past due to their performance over time, rather than having some moron pouring over your insides, cave equipment rope and lights attached to the lungs of a breathing bird, how can I say that the poetics of this show were defensive? That the best bits were how it didn't work, that it had the ambition of an android to re-populate the earth and no CUNT no COCK, a neutered nurture drawn on glass, maybe just a light sketch etched.

Of course this is why I laughed, I said to the artists "your talk went right over my head, you sound like you're straight out of art school". I appreciated the gap and breath that happened before their reply attack ensued, sharp and full of the glamour of someone whose haute couture has been mocked, but the new tone included me. Thanks. I meant that I didn't enjoy being sold to, the show as you described it was invulnerable, didn't need audience its responses were figured out already, cold ticks them off, but I didn't get that, I thought there was poetry somewhere in the room but the art, well it could have been made under a pseudonym there was so much baggage to get through, guns, ammunitions from so many site specific cultural war fares. Art, if it wants to be art, is in line with a whole lot of other super commodities. I was kind of hoping that the catalogue would fall away, rot, I just wanted to know that these new people were speaking about delicate brushes with material and form and space in a way that made you think but not about anything in particular.

I remember one of the artist's comments; the shine from the ball against the bow of the sagging silver sheet, yes that was important, YES it is important I know what you mean and how dare you say such radical statements, no I don't need to know that Sol le Witt's™ grid

gave you what. Now I'm confusing the experience of the show with the artists and what they said the impression they gave me... somebody say something make them pull back stop hitting us on the head with references from art, I am not in the mood to trade horses I want to float like the ball in the room, where the strings are left to trip all the un-suspecting idiots looking out the window cause the object is so fleeting that life keeps taking over. I feel the whole thing works as a lead off to a virtual experience of art, the real being a completely constructed space. One that on entering you are stripped of physicality and enter as eyeballs to roll around utopian landscapes of dreamers with history books and poems handed down by our fore fathers... dreaming of four mothers... or vice versa.

*Leading to Form* is where the curator as artist produced by an art school has recently shined brightest and is trimmed the neatest. Sarah Rose and Holly Willson together with a whole lotta other people run NEWCALL a good looking gallery in Auckland that has been putting on an eclectic if not down right exciting mix of shows since the beginning of the year. Great angle, being part of gallery, says that you know your shit, and at the Wellington artist talk they delivered a meal of intentions and historical frameworks.

Now writing about this reminds me to tell you what I saw when I entered the gallery, their show. I burst out laughing with a good natured giggle, I had the sensation of joy that parallels the reunion of a sock and a sock that you have missed being presented in a public exhibition, as a three dimensional genetic hybrid computer simulated clone thingy now accidentally purporting to know the way to the door of the future (I'm next door you dropped me).

Enjoy has rules for curating, I drew them up from much experience, I was trying to draw attention to this battle in technology, this conversation about who gets to write the history is tested in roles, same as acting, actors playing curators, artists, a few rules for the transparent engagement around the power to present, who owns the projection? Who writes the marketing art... this jockeying for power is entrée to the bit about writing prose around responses to art works so here I go feeling suddenly generous (a loan from others who've done me).

In this show I was given the option, to be in a virtual world, made flesh and real in this world. I'd heard that most toddlers, when faced with a spider in a virtual world, smash it with virtual hammers, that glee of feeling free and able to smash the delicate of things you don't want to understand slammed in my face or rose like an air bag as my body crossed the threshold from outside door to inside gallery. My laughter was a joy that was seeing the gallery's redundant old-fashioned values laid out like books at a used clothing store. They were interesting books, but really they were not to be seen as books at all. You should see the adventure the rush of pleasure that words tumble when ingested in the mind's eyes cycle of love inside a mind's mind that surface was smeared all over this space little lovers were insecure and precious about how they were fucking in the open without blankets, but not raw lust carried them through no, it was aesthetics, old fashioned aesthetics, liberated from gravity and sent into three dimensions as if photo-graphs were out thoughts, and thinking came with a flash. A crowd around a screen. Look at me I took his is it poetry, will you see and agree with me? It's like something I remember seeing before.

Remember when you saw that thing, and you read that book and now we're here in the future reading it in our mind's photo album, What did I take home?... Ambition. Ambition to be a soothsayer to read the patterns of time like a throw of the dice a hand full of ruins. I'm being asked to trust their readings of the future, but I too can read. No mind, an echo is can you read. (I'm going to write for 30 more seconds)

I wanted to be them like I wanted to be terminator, see the world through the eyes of a good looking camera (with sound) and line up my enemies to my state of being and roll them through my poetry and watch them come out smelling of flowers. Of plastic or something as good as real. It's fun.

**Holly Willson and Sarah Rose**  
*Leading to form*  
7 August – 23 August 2008



Holly Willson and Sarah Rose, *Leading to form*, 2008.  
Image courtesy of the artists.



# WAS TERMINATOR THREE A WOMAN ?

MIRANDA PARKES

AFTER

# TERMINATOR THREE WAS A WOMAN

TAO WELLS

## a performance

rather than having some moron searching ashes for meaning  
she meandered around throwing stuff  
the best bits were how, attached to the lungs of a breathing bird  
your insides, shifting, sound like you're straight out of art  
and breath, just a light sketch etched, to repopulate the earth

## an abstract task

is it a love letter?

this is why I laughed  
how dare you say such radical kick-ass haute couture  
your talk went right over my head

attack ensued  
cave equipment rope and lights  
this is not the Apocalypse  
artists sharp and full of glamour need audience

I said thanks to the cold cunt  
Of course I meant that I didn't enjoy being someone whose responses were  
figured out already  
pouring over whatever I feel  
how can I say I've preferred oral

I wouldn't have walked along a line for money, but the new tone included me  
a neutered nurture drawn on glass  
the whole thing is so fleeting that life keeps taking over

I lost interest

## over time

everything that had happened before  
poetic widows  
yearned a cock ambition  
submissions in invulnerable poetics  
indicated that this is experience working, android  
writing to an epoch that you can review  
the past due for its instructions

by the time I appreciated the gap it didn't work  
the show as you described it was sold  
is written  
and no landscapes of dreamers with history books  
enter eyeballs

a whole lotta other people shined brightest  
their reply call run  
pulling me to their school  
an exciting mix of virtual poems  
trimmed the neatest

## physicality

a good looking rose  
putting on eclectic shows  
stripped of experience  
you are entering completely constructed space

Holly and Sarah dreaming together  
and vice versa.

I feel the gallery  
o  
Auckland rolls as four utopian mothers  
since the beginning of new

I want to float like poetry  
where the strings are out the window  
...somebody say something downright real

the ball in the room  
somewhere in the room  
left to trip all the unsuspecting idiots

Was Terminator Three a Woman? under construction, 2011.  
Image courtesy of the artist.



## fathers

battle in technology

make them pull back, stop  
it ticks them off

the mood to trade attention handed down  
in line with a whole lot of rot

I just wanted to get through  
hoping that the people were speaking about brushes  
but I didn't get that, there was so much baggage  
delicate guns, site specific ammunitions, cultural warfares, other super  
commodities.

I thought that the fore-references would fall away  
it wants to be art  
material and form and space, experience  
Witt's confusing the will

Art wells  
the art from art  
kind of hitting against the bow  
well it could have been made under a sagging silver sheet

## son

shine from the balls, enjoy  
ha  
with suddenly generous feeling  
yes it is important  
the reunion of sensation and joy

that has been mocked  
a sock and a sock, I drew them up

## I

I need the object  
you know your natured shit statements  
but not about anything in particular.

I am not in the grid  
that parallel historical loan from others  
jockeying for power

I was one that made you think  
they gave me no pseudonym  
the artists (who've done me) giggle

## this missed history

horses know what you mean  
she should have been Terminator  
Great Sol  
The way to the door of the future

## I remember

*in a public exhibition there was the power to present a meal  
but who owns the entrée?  
writing prose around responses for the transparent angle  
causes conversations about who gets to write the rules*

*a genetic hybrid computer simulated clone gave you what?*

*Wellington being presented as a three dimensional impression  
yes that was important  
looking is being  
so here I go  
know that these new comments catalogue artist talk*

*(I'm next door  
next to you  
you dropped me)*

*I had rules that didn't work*







## PHARMACY

### DAN ARPS

Pharmacy was an old digital print shop on the Terrace. Ciaran Begley (one of the Enjoy founders) had set this show up for me as an offsite project because he liked my proposal (a follow up my installation *Observation Deck* work that involved lowering the lighting track to about waist height), but there was no way they would let me do it. I was to respond to the site.

The space was huge. I had five days. I made something that was supposed to look a bit like a giant Panadol tablet, constructed quickly out of core-flute and hot glue in the manner of a rinky-dink chemist shop display. The next thing was a big silvery blob, which was meant to act as a counterpoint to the pill was the problem that the pill was the solution for, the disease the headache, but the art school minimalist reflex kicked in; we put it a back room. Made of cardboard from the computer boxes in the back room and covered in tinfoil. (There is something amazing feeling that you get when you buy a lot of strange stuff in the supermarket, very late at night, it feels like you are testing the limits of consumer freedom, the invisible hand.) My favorite was room the one used for making the blob, which was left with detritus from making, save for removing the broken cutter blades. There was something right about the size of this office cubicle and the streaks of light that came through the grey glass partitions, a power point had come off the wall with a beefy cable that I thought of as bodily – limp and pathetic.

The space and the show have stuck, in part because all the problems have me endlessly rearranging it in my head; now everything might be piled onto the pill, or nothing in the space but remnants of construction. With this show I still think a lot also the way a series of spaces can work to effect a kind of slow psychological build-up; a creeping weirdness.

Like lots of my work *Pharmacy* only exists now as photographs, so much curly logic and undecipherable intentions. Because I was never totally happy; (five days is to short a time to make and install for five rooms) it was always tempting when working from the slides to go too far with the clone stamp when editing out the unresolved aspects of the work. So, this time I rescanned the original slides and here they are, dustier and a bit hairier, unaltered.



Dan Arps, *Pharmacy*, 2001. Installation view.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

## M&W

### AFTER

## PHARMACY

### TOWARDS

#### — DECK OBJECTIVE

## OBSERVATION RETROSPECTION

We first encountered Maria Walls writing in the HSP catalogue *Canvas* (Summer 1999–2000). That text convincingly read as a superb mobilisation of content, and rather simply wrapping all this around the semaphore of Simon Lawrence's work from that show, we can, as far as introductory remarks go, quite simply suggest that Maria writes with the idea that art matters, that it doesn't just aggregate but also accords.

It makes sense then, especially given the idea that M&W attempts to privilege the provisionality of knowledge, that we would commission Maria to write about Dan Arps' show *Observation Deck* (August, 2000). Believing in writing that gauges and responds to the mobility of an artists' practice, we're not at all surprised by Maria's clinical beat in this text for it functions as a symbiotic relay of the rotational and observational vices of Arps' show. Furthermore, such mobility isn't just indicative of this particular work but stands out as a style of writing that should be celebrated as an active rubric for the types of engaged reception we all ought to practice and collectively endorse that much more often. So we'd also like to take this opportunity to point towards Maria's substantial body of writing and in particular her superbly relevant text on Robert Hood's show *Wrecked Pathological Stimulus Soap Rotational Vacuum Idle Earth Manifold Detergent Runtime Dada Glue* currently housed in The Physics Room's 2009 Annual.

As far as Dan Arps' involvement in this particular publication goes, let's just say that his initial show not only served as the genesis for our commissioning of Maria's text, but also served as the catalyst for an in-filling of Enjoy's archive of accessible documentation via Arps himself. Interested in the alter-narratives that populate history, M&W has always aimed to glean the imperfect traces of both formal and informal archives of experience, so we're extremely fortunate to have been able to allow Dan's other(ed) Enjoy show, *Pharmacy* (2001) to finally re-surface. We couldn't have planned for this extension, this retrofitting on the official record of events, but one suspects, given the familiarity and fraternity that both Maria and Dan actively cultivate the possibility of such a reflexive reconstruction was always on the cards, if not already in play.



Dan Arps, *Pharmacy*, 2001. Installation view.  
Image courtesy of the artist.



## — DECK OBJECTIVE

## OBSERVATION RETROSPECTION

## MARIA WALLS

The important point to note from these observations is the reverse of these observations.

For instance, when there is attention, art may be unstable and may develop. Using these techniques are sometimes ways of determining what the work is / not doing.

### Was the art weighed?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

### Was it stripped to practical limit?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

D'Arp is credited with the 1982 discovery of direct sight as posed within an art event, institution, facility, or process: the idea that art can be most brazenly observed.

Within the exacting science of fine art, D'Arp's **observational research** [OR] is a technique that involves a watch over designed phenomena within its most un/natural setting. It assimilates with **experimental research** [ER] in which the quasi-artificial environment is also created to control for spurious factors, and where at least one of the variables is manipulated as part of an exhibition. Although previously having installed crowd control into the High Street (cnr. Hereford and Colombo – now *defunct*) and later a wonky corporate veneer wall into a Sydenham office arena, it was not until just last week that D'Arp actually built a platform to simply *Enjoy* the view.

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### Personal Observation vs. Mechanical Observation [PO/MO]

#### What is the audience actually looking at?

Sometimes, one may develop special relationships with key artworks. If this occurs, ensure that no personal information given is included within the actual data.

#### How interested is the viewer?

Some audiences have ethical misgivings with the deceit involved in art. Consider how you will present yourself, both in terms of appearance and how you will explain your purpose to others if necessary.

#### How much should I disclose about who I am and what I am doing?

When conducting art, one should be discreet enough about who one is, was, or indeed might be, and exactly what it is that one is actually doing in order that normal activity is [not] upset. The audience do not identify themselves – they either mix in with the art subjects undetected, or they observe from a distance. The advantages of this are: (1) It is not necessary to seek cooperation, and (2) The audiences' behaviour will not necessarily be contaminated by the presence of the audience.

#### How was the art determined?

We were told that it was art: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

We consulted a reliable art chart: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Other \_\_\_

In art, findings reflect only a unique population: there are problems with bias. Often it is assumed that the viewer may, “See only what s/he wants to see.” Note — partiality, cannot be overcome, and is instead exacerbated by all art training.

Observations are often in/flexible and need to be structured around a hypothesis. This is called **disruptive research** [DR].

### Detect gallery traffic patterns:

- observe the dirt on the floor (short term).

- observe the wear in the floor (long term).

The extent of visibility loss depends on the amount of air in the art and the thickness of the supporting documentation. Documentation reduces visibility. Art phases can vary in depth and density. This is discussed in the (sealed) section on bush.

Here it appears similar to pollution and in fact becomes part of it.

### How To, or Instructions Towards Better Observation [B.O.] —

1. Conduct trace analysis.
2. Utilise eye-tracking analysis whilst subjects survey.
3. Commission gallery shelf space audits.
4. Search art patterns through what it is that is dis/regarded.

Are people un/comfortable or un/willing to look at the work? Well done. You can/not see attitudes. You can/not be everywhere. There are certain things you can/not mind. For example, questions regarding sexual behavior are better left to the exhibition after-match at a shabby local venue. In order to obtain reliability, art must/not be seen several times (there is concern that the bystander's presence may change the art).

Process by which mass and art transferred to record:

Art Worker wrote it \_\_\_ Someone else wrote it \_\_\_

Other \_\_\_

Type your notes into computer files using a standard format.

D'Arp knows that top quality art lessons incorporate an introduction or anticipatory set, an activity and closure. The transition from one segment to the next is needed to keep the art orderly. This case illustrates that use of closed-ended observation instruments promotes the reliability of meaning. The findings are thus more credible and likely to influence art managers to make necessary improvements. The audience participates in what they are observing so as to get a finer appreciation of the marvel. Audiences that participate tend to lose their objectivity and sensibility [LOS].

### Unobtrusive Formulaic Observation [UFO]

In disguised field analysis the audience pretends to join (or actually is a member of) a group and records data about that group. The group does not know that they are being observed for art purposes. Here, the artist may take on a number of roles.

### Overt observation [OO]

Here the audience identifies itself as the artist in order to justify a purpose. The problem with this approach is that artists modify their behaviour when they know that they are under inspection. The art researcher who is engaged in participant eyewitness tries to learn what life is like for an insider while remaining, inevitably, an outsider. This method is in/distinct not/because the artist approaches the audience in her/his own environment but because the audience becomes the artist.

Did Art Worker interpret results for the other?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

External validity, is described by D'Arp as the extent to which art's findings are also true for other people, in other places, and at other times.

Name of Observer:

Date:

Time:

Place:

*Observation Deck* was an exhibition by Dan Arps. It was held at Enjoy in 2023.



**TEEN ANGST**  
**WILL NATURE MAKE A MAN OUT OF ME YET ?**  
**ASKS TAO WELLS TO HIMSELF THROUGH THE**  
**GRAVITY VORTEX**  
**RUDOLF HUDSUCKER**

'What's real? What's not? That's what I do in my act, test how other people deal with reality'  
 —Andy Kauffrnan

'Nature does not know extinction; all it know is transformatian—from 'Gravity's Rainbow',  
 —Thomas Pynchon

Some artists pick away at the fabric that we call reality, while others content themselves with a knowing critique, but few are as ready and really prepared to put a concept fully to the test as the perpetually in-flux artist Tao Wells.

Relying on the authority of an art gallery opening, Wells has drawn a curious crowd into his space, ever expectant of some validated art experience. He knows we're after art. That's why we've come here, in thirst of that art experience and eager for the stick-on badge legitimacy we call inside knowledge and real art credentials.

It's like John Lennon in the psychedelic 60s, over in India, whispering in the Maharishi's ear: "Can you slip me the answer?" That's how Paul McCartney tells it at least.

The room, or Enjoy, or Tao's room is filled with scientific and philosophical experiments, boyhood trophies glued together and data sketched...but The Artist's shorthand is indecipherable and The Artist, himself, has retreated into the corner, behind what looks like an upturned skateboard ramp.

"Get on with it" a voice interjects into the gallery. The voice belongs to David Raw, local comics artist and a man suspicious of art.

But The Artist stays put.

"Is this it, aren't you going to entertain us? This is so goddamn pretentious!" Raw continues...then, provoking comment from the silent Artist, picks up and relocates a piece of Wells's sculpture.

The Artist, his skin easily pricked, explodes from the corner and grabs Raw by the scruff of the neck and hauls him out of the gallery.

The crowd wonders, is this art?



Tao Wells, *Will nature make a man of me yet?* 2007.  
 Photo: John Lake. Image courtesy of the artist.

Wells returns, and after more arguments among the audience, the crowd is led out onto the street, down Cuba Street to the pub The Mighty Mighty, full of Saturday night patrons, where The Artist buys his audience a round of jugs of beer. Perhaps now they'll be more receptive to his message.

Wells steps on to the stage, talks or rants into the microphone about how no one "gets" his work and that he's a real avant garde artist and to hell with all the rest. Ranting, ranting and more ranting becomes a litany of complaints against a shadowy technical establishment...until a group of choral singers slowly emerge from the audience to lift Wells above their shoulders and carry him triumphantly out of the bar in the splendor of a teenage fantasy.

But back to Enjoy and the difficult artworks, a year's work presented in two days. Wells has constructed a maze of optic puzzles for the disenchanting, clues to a de-patterning philosophy of gravity which Wells describes as "an analogy to counter Plato's Cave analogy, of reality, and Christian religious use of light as the

single metaphor for truth."

Wells has positioned himself in a standoff against the Enlightenment and all its unwitting adherents. It is a position of perpetual antagonism against a system of thought that is not aware of its own currents or origins. In many ways, it's as though Wells has set about building himself a time machine. But at present, plans remain scattered about the ground, diagrams tacked to walls; while, promisingly, a window intersects through a table. The simultaneity of all history has been declared and Wells is leaving town for some other space.

**Tao Wells**  
*Will nature make a man of me yet?*  
**Enjoy Public Art Gallery**  
 24–25 November 2007

**AN ENTIRELY SUBJECTIVE RESPONSE TO A CERTAIN**  
**CATALOGUE OF TEXTS ALLUDING SPECIFICALLY TO**  
**RE: DON'T FORGET YOUR FIRST QUESTION /**  
**ENCOUNTERS & END POINTS /**  
**CHARMING THE SNAKE OF REASON / TEEN ANGST**  
**CREON UPTON**

And scrolling down the page, fingers coming to arbitrary rest at my mouse pad's southern end, at the centre of my screen then I read: 'Only boring people get bored, right?'

And I was momentarily arrested, guessing that I was in the wrong here, right?

For being bored.

For having just that moment announced it, yelling it up the stairs—for I'm guessing the thirteenth time—midway through yet another opening paragraph, endeavouring to care, readying myself to close yet another PDF file, and to open yet another (in hope), yelling, 'I'm bored!'

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Epigraph:  
 'You're talkin' a lot, but you're not sayin' anything'  
 —Talking Heads

\*\*\*

Yet it seems that I was not such a boring person when I read 'Encounters & End Points' by Vera Mey and Reuben Schrader, for those authors did not take too long to say, nor resorted to language too sophomorically opaque in saying it, that disquisitions on subjunctive German verbs, with particular reference to Kant and then Foucault's rejoinder to him, and enlightened discussions of the Enlightenment, and of the identity politics at play perhaps—that these may not be all entirely useful in considering an encounter with Art, or in imagining how and why and for whom and what that art comes to be, and to mean.

And, boy, it needs to mean.

I mean, whom else but to art school graduates should I turn for ideas to fill my days?

And to whom else would I turn but to those fine artists' critics for those ideas' elucidation, explication, but never-ever obfuscation?

Don't get me wrong: I'm not bitter—just bored.

\*\*\*

And I read Rudolph Hudsucker on Tao Wells, and I read an epigraph there that came from

*Gravity's Rainbow*, a novel by Thomas Pynchon, whom we all know is a writer not nearly as vague or obscure or difficult as his reputation might suggest; who never fails in fact to say precisely, candidly and disarmingly directly just exactly what he means—assuming only that his reader might be paying sufficient attention to actually notice.

But this was a strange epigraph that Hudsucker chose, because, well, it is already an epigraph itself in *Gravity's Rainbow*, at the opening of Part 1 in fact—before, that is, the novel proper even begins—and it is a quotation from one Wernher von Braun, rocket engineer for the Nazis and then for NASA, the historical figure whose spectre hangs over the novel, embracing it in its shadow of death.

So when von Braun is epigraphed at the outset, saying 'Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation', we can guess that Pynchon's point—if you'd call it a point—is that this reductive truism represents a most childish means of rationalising one's total abdication of responsibility.

*'Don't worry,' I explained, 'this is merely a transformation, and with that I thrust my scissor blade neatly into Tao's throat.'*

And Pynchon's quoting of von Braun has been transformed by Hudsucker into a celebration of Wells' in-flux-itude, where transformation is integral to a performance of self that both impresses and enrages us.

So does that transformation work for Tao as it did for von Braun? Does it act as a panacea for the troubled gurgling of a disquieted conscience?

Is Tao's performance also irresponsible?

I think at times it can be, and I think at times Tao knows it, and I think at times he shames himself with his egotistical, self-regarding work. But at the same time, that work always seems able to turn somehow, without too much flinching, to the question of its own ego, and to address its own unhealthily human nature (petty, corrupt, self-deluding, inclined towards illiberal solutions).

And Tao seems honest enough not to circumscribe all this within some pre-arranged, pretentious and quasi-didactic obscurantism, cowering behind a giant, protective word-pillow, a suffocating mass of impenetrable nouns, stitched together by mere syntax, devoid of useful meaning—heavy, immobile and indefatigable, an emotionless, dreaming nemesis, absorbing body blows and leaving all comers slothful and wary, worn out by the frustration and tedium of an engagement that forever begins in defeat.

Rather, on naked display, the ego shows itself to be vulnerable and appalling in precisely equal measures.

Wells would love to be, in un-ironic reality, carried on the shoulders of the people—aloft, glorious, the rebel impossibly adored, transformed finally into a definitive voice, into a leader unto the future, bedding down with Bomber Bradbury to read together, in concert and out-loud over National Radio, falteringly like schoolboys, single-minded manifestos for change.

And I enjoy and admire how that messianic impulse—Tao's Bono Complex—is not denied, repackaged or stage-managed; that it is allowed to be, and is given the space to become, a foremost and definitive—if nonetheless mildly emetic—subject of his art.



