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REFLEXIVITY IMAGINED AS ART PRACTICE

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Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice

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Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice

Art Practice is Reflexive Behavior
Bicameral Consciousness as I imagine it
Art, Reflexivity and Metaphors
Access restricted
Layers [Now]
enquiry

Summary

Abstract of research paper

Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice is an enquiry into self-awareness and introduces an art practice that uses a methodology of reflexivity. This adaptive and emergent methodology uses a group of simple components and a flexible recursive process that can be modified to suit changing contexts. Being able to imagine re-duplications and proceed with reiterations using available materials including existing ideas is correlated with my art practice. The changes are documented at intervals for use as feedback in future reiterations. The chapters of the enquiry show the various ways reflexivity may be perceived in the worlds of politics, art and aspects of contemporary culture as responses of self-aware consciousness. I introduce my art practice and demonstrate the connections language has to self-conscious reflexivity.

Description of exhibition

Access Restricted-Operational Reasons refers to a multi-media sculptural work that will be adapted to an SCA exhibition space, before and during the exhibition. The sculptural work refers to my research about reflexivity consequently linking it to the written component of the examination. This artwork/creative process combination has an enclosure that frames and reveals an ongoing body of open-ended experimental sculptural works in which all cannot be accessed at once. Ideas are metaphorically re-combined with selected pre-fabricated parts, re-making in a dialogue with materials from our environment.

Language says: 'You will go here, and when you see this, you will turn off there.'
In other words, it refers to discourse about the other [*discours de l'autre*]." ¹

Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice is a document that complements my art practice by the consideration of the relationship between conscious self-aware systems and art. The themes of enquiry: reflexivity and imagination are integrated with ideas about science, politics and commodification to develop a socio-historic view of interests relating to my art practice. The ideas connected to reflexivity informed and became, to an unanticipated degree, part of my art practice whilst creating this document and as such this refers to a simultaneous integration of conscious and unconscious behaviors, imagined here as a relationship between living systems and their environment.² A series of essays using selected aspects of Western history regarding self-awareness and reflexivity are presented. The essays include views alternating between speculation and critical discussion showing ideas connected to reflexivity, as I imagine it.

This document records the research and shows how a circular two-way methodological framework informs my art practice, where perceptions of the environment that surround me are repeatedly folded back upon themselves. The idea of reflexivity as self-awareness became central to the understanding of my art practice and the document can be considered part of a creative practice that also uses language as a material.

¹ Friedrich A. Kittler, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, and Erik Butler, *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*(Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013). Chapter 13. The Artificial Intelligence of World War: Alan Turing. p179-180.

² Living system –autopoiesis, a system capable of maintaining and reproducing itself, term created by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. See Chapter 1, part 2.

Contemporary ideas about the origins of conscious self-awareness from Julian Jaynes and Humberto Maturana Romesín are introduced in chapter 1. The title of this document becomes a gateway into a consideration of how I imagine, what I imagine and why I imagine. The research trajectory of this investigation over the candidature is retraced starting with a thesis of Julian Jaynes about the origins of consciousness and moves through to Humberto Maturana Romesín's contemporary ideas of self-awareness.

After a consideration of relevant terms and ideas, various short and long form examples of creative practice are introduced. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are all examples of creative practice that integrated ideas as they developed. These four chapters implicitly relate to each other because they are my responses to the question of what reflexivity is and how it is expressed and integrated into an art practice. As a result, these chapters are explicitly related because each shows different types of reflexivity, containing various points of view in response to the developing understanding of my art practice. They also provide examples of the types of reflexivity that I consider to be integral to my creative practice integrating personal responses, as an enquiry about imagination. The short form examples of reflexivity as creative practice in chapter 2 give indications of how I perceive and respond to my environment. The examples introduce selected ideas of interest from different points of view with a brief outline and discussion.

I refer to the use of available materials and information towards uncertain aims, selectively combining what is of interest in a 'bricolage' style.³ This observation serves to explain how my art practice manifests itself physically. A bricolage style of creative and playful re-interpretation is also used in this document to make abstracted observations towards vaguely apprehended points of interest. The adaptive and emergent methodology of the bricoleur is

³ Bricolage –French- involving a “dialogue with the materials and means of execution” is a dialogue about ‘best fit’, finding available materials that best fit a means of execution. ‘Bricoleur’, a person using a bricolage way of doing things, selected use of what is available.

an indicator of reflexivity in practice. The use of a bricolage methodology that allows for a creative process to be modified suiting new contexts is considered in chapter 3.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are longer form examples of reflexivity that have informed my creative practice and instructively elaborate the main themes. Each long form discussion is followed by reflections to highlight the ideas offered. In chapter 3 the artist Kim Jones and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss are introduced to initiate a dynamic discussion about the use of available materials, that includes working with pre-existing ideas, considerations of process and outcome based methodologies. Approaches to making thought visually explicit are also articulated around ideas of bricolage, the mythical and the 'proto intellectual'.

Chapter 4 contains responses to cultural structures that include commodification and variations of sublimation. The idea of 'spiritual masochism', a term used by the philosopher/anthropologist, Bruno Latour is compared and contrasted with the *Holy Fool* from philosopher, artist, Michael Leunig in a discussion about the indirect search for antidotes in human endeavor.

Chapter 5 uses selected viewpoints from the cybernetician Norbert Wiener and artist Santiago Sierra to elaborate the influences that have contributed to the strategic use of restriction and access as part of my art practice.⁴ The specialist use and subversive manipulation of information in science and art as practiced in the service of culture are discussed.

⁴ cybernetician – cybernetics and mathematician, a term Wiener preferred.

The rationale for my art practice and caveat.

I am motivated by what is going on around me to make art (practice creativity) for reasons associated with biological and cultural evolution.⁵ As much as I do comprehend what I am doing with my art practice, it seems to be a culturally sanctioned response or outlet (of incomprehensible and frustrated desire) to something that I am unable to do (at work or in social life).⁶ This document will not attempt to measure reflexivity but will instead present ideas that are imagined as types of reflexivity in other people's behaviour and in my own.

Image: to introduce creative practice; an arrangement of objects on plinths in front of walls- work in progress documentation



Figure 1. *Pty Ltd Inc.* DB. 2013. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. SCA studio. Coloured image DB

⁵ E. Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus. Where Art Comes from and Why*(1995).

⁶ Norman Oliver. Brown, *Life against Death; the Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, [1st ed.] ed.(Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959).

Chapter 1

Reflexivity



Part 1: The Title

The title of this document '*Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice*' contains the main thematic ideas of the document. The thematic ideas are reflexivity, imagination and art practice and they will be referred to in various ways, firstly as an example of reflexivity in this research. An important point of reference for me was the transition from researching around themes of the provisional titles to then selecting and articulating the main themes of this document; art practice, imagination and reflexivity, presenting them with a new title. In my mind, the title should be an expression that is connected to the main themes of the document. The new title name was adaptively created from the working title and selected ideas were developed from it. The transition from the provisional titles of this document to the title '*Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice*' signaled an ability to move around the terms of the material. This ability to move around terms and incorporate new material is an example of my reflexivity relating to the process of this documents various re-formations. This document's title corresponds with, and is a response to the research about self-awareness and art. The adaptive abilities of language are crucial to the developing concept of a self-aware art practice, as will be explained.

This chapter will retrace the steps from where I started the research, to where I have progressed so far. This retrospective elaboration on the details, of the process is the intention of the document as a whole and I have already started here with details about the title. I use the title *Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice* to introduce what I imagine is an art practice that uses reflexivity, for locating and orientating the general ideas used in this paper.

The short phrase 'reflexivity imagined' suggests that I will be doing the imagining. 'Reflexivity imagined' then becomes paradoxically self referential in

the sense that the phrase could be explained as; I'm doing the thing I'm doing, with the thing I do it with.⁷ This recursive paradox comes about because, at least partially, I will be consciously using my imagination to consider reflexivity. The circularity of this explanation of my imagination and self-referential paradox may be deferred momentarily by changing the focus of the discussion to 'how do I imagine?', thus changing the focus or 'stepping out' from the circularity.⁸ So how do I imagine? I would like to say here, I imagine imagination as..., but this is also paradoxically recursive and unhelpful as similar words are used consecutively and so they do not clearly explain how I imagine. Again changing the focus of the discussion, how can imagination be explained? Imagination is usually thought of as an innate human trait, something that is just there in our minds, part of the way humans think and often associated with creativity.

I cannot simply explain how I imagine because imagination takes place in my mind; I do not have complete access to that place. I have linked self-awareness to imagination and reflexivity in the previous paragraphs, showing how the terms are interrelated and elusive because of the recursive circularity of the language used for explanation. I give a background to these ideas before providing examples of what I imagine reflexivity is, in my art practice.

Part 2: Retracing the Steps

This part of the chapter will provide a historical overview of self-awareness and its connection with its environment to inform later discussion. Julian Jaynes' 1976 book *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* was an initial point of reference for this research.⁹ Jaynes' book introduced ideas about the evolution of self-awareness with an overview of the development of human consciousness in a way that was new for me. Jaynes, a psychologist, provided a description of factors relevant to the

⁷ Self-referential paradoxes are potentially infinitely recursive feedback loops

⁸ Douglas R. Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop*(New York: Basic Books, 2007).

⁹ Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

contemporary mind that I felt could be used to provide a location from which to continue an enquiry.

Jaynes' thesis offers an account of the emergence of self-awareness using the term bicameral consciousness to describe pre self-conscious thinking. Jaynes' persuasive narrative account of bicameral consciousness works with inferences tied to literary references where Jaynes' explanation of the 'origins of consciousness' is said to reveal how the development of language was intrinsic to the emergence of self-awareness. According to Jaynes, self-aware consciousness, as we have come to know it, came after language and evolved in conjunction with the development of language.¹⁰ Jaynes regards the *Iliad* as a psychological document of great importance because it is the first written document that has enough certainty of translation to be considered in his hypothesis.¹¹ Jaynes presents the case that there is 'generally' no consciousness of the 'self' apparent in the poem *Iliad* written approximately 900-850 B.C.¹² Jaynes goes on to describe in another poem *Odyssey*, dated to approximately 1000-800 B.C., how self-consciousness is apparent within the text.¹³ The *Odyssey* is about a "hero of the new mentality of how to get along in a ruined and god-weakened world".¹⁴ Jaynes' 1976 book gives what he cites as some of the earliest accounts of self-aware thinking, such as the *Odyssey*, to more recent examples of psychoanalytic discussion such as why schizophrenia is related to vestigial (remnants of) bicamerality.¹⁵

Jaynes' thesis indicates humans were not conscious in the way we now understand consciousness and the origins of self-awareness are a result of a 'breakdown of the bicameral mind'. The term bicameral mind is a way of describing cognition by using its biological properties and mapping them to a conception of the way it works. Jaynes indicates the bicameral mind can be

¹⁰ Ibid.p66

¹¹ Ibid.p68

¹² Ibid.p69

¹³ Ibid.p273

¹⁴ Ibid.p273

¹⁵ Ibid.p404

thought of as specific parts of the brain that deal with language and speech occupying the two chambers or two hemispheres.¹⁶ According to Jaynes, people began to be self-aware when it was no longer culturally acceptable to attribute ideas from sources imagined to be speaking to them from outside sources, except in special cases. Jaynes mentions an early example of bicameral consciousness connected to the preservation of dead kings propped up on stones in Eynan dated at around 9000B.C, and suggests their voices were hallucinated by the living and were the first gods.¹⁷

After researching around Jaynes' thesis, I felt it did not adequately account for human behavior that exists alongside the conscious in the contemporary world. To provide a counterpoint to Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* thesis, I will introduce the concept of 'structure-determined living molecular systems' as briefly as possible.¹⁸ The phrase is a reference to concepts that I think (believe, imagine) are related to consciousness and will be discussed before returning to Jaynes' ideas, and continuing to retrace the path of my research.

My understanding of consciousness during the research was pre-conditioned by popular culture.¹⁹ However, in the late stages of this research I could not reconcile popular culture ideas of consciousness in a way I was content with. I believe that I can now reconcile ideas of self-awareness and the development of my art practice by using Humberto Maturana Romesín's insights. Romesín is a Chilean biologist and psychologist who gives an account of self-awareness that integrates the conscious with its environment.²⁰ I can find no mention of the term unconsciousness in Romesín's article *Anticipation and*

¹⁶ Ibid.p100 the neuroscientific details are not considered here.

¹⁷ Ibid.p139, 161

¹⁸ Humberto Maturana Romesín, "Anticipation and Self-Consciousness. Are These Functions of the Brain?," *Open Peer Commentaries* (2008).

¹⁹ Psychology in popular culture seems to have been created around ideas by Sigmund Freud and continued by Freud family. Psychologists such as Giza Rohiem, Wilhelm Reich and Sandor Ferenczi refer to Freudian concepts of consciousness from which they build their theories.

²⁰ Also known as Humberto Maturana and Humberto R. Maturana. I use the name on the article.

Self-Consciousness. Are These Functions of the Brain? Instead, I find terms like ‘structure-determined systems’ and ‘operational-relational environment’. To my mind, these phrases relate to the idea of biology and culture as being mutually inclusive phenomena. A description of conscious behaviour separated from its environment seems, for the purposes of explaining my art practice, unhelpful.²¹ A quote from Romesín that relates to ‘reflexivity imagined’ and its recursive predisposition at the beginning of Chapter 1 is relevant here.

“The self is not an entity; it is a particular feeling in a manner of operating in a flow of recursive coordinations of consensual coordinations of doings that involve the distinction of the doer of the doings as the observer of the doings being done.”²²

The quote initially looks like something was accidentally repeated in translation. The translation can be made sense of, given time and a little more background information. This quote is about self-awareness, language development and the consensual meaning of words, as I will briefly explain. Common word usage arises ‘from’, and by agreement over time, ‘as’ the word is repeated, in the same context. I will use another quote from Romesín so the reader has an opportunity to get familiar with this recursive style of word usage and to help explain Romesín’s initial quote above.

“Objects, entities, notions, ideas, concepts etc., arise as coordinations of coordinations of doings, and do not exist otherwise. The meaning of the words, sentences, signs and symbols is not in the words, but in the flow of coordinations of doings that they coordinate. And a word can have as many different meanings as there are different flows of recursive coordinations of doings in which it participates.”²³

²¹ I cannot briefly explain this detail any better. For me the split of unconscious and conscious seemed too simplified. The split needed to be accounted for differently, to show that the split is not an arbitrary artifice of western thought practices. The split is deceptive. Romesín gives a satisfactory and detailed account of how the term ‘consciousness’ actually implies a biological system.

²² Romesín, "Anticipation and Self-Consciousness. Are These Functions of the Brain?." section 26

²³ Ibid. section 22

The above discussion and quote about self-awareness developing in conjunction with language is similar to ideas contained in Jaynes' thesis. However Jaynes' thesis appears to suggest a continuum from the bicameral mind to the self-aware mind that may be misunderstood as a continuum from the unconscious to the conscious. The 'bicameral mind' would then have been more responsive to its environment, including the imagined 'guiding voices' and less aware of itself, its own internal dialogue. Romesín's research on emergent self-awareness and language development uses a biological framework for his analysis instead of a psychological one to develop similar understandings to Jaynes' research. The literary analysis Jaynes used for his thesis contained useful insights to the evolution of language, culture and self-awareness. I think that once language became something that could be stored, transported and separated from its source (author/s), early kinds of copyright authentication issues were perceived. The authors then began to leave traces of themselves, instinctively marking or signing their presence, while others assumed a role in remediation of the language, adding traces of their selves.²⁴

Early in the research I had an idea that the self-awareness implied by Jaynes and the reflexive methodologies of academia that I was reading about in preparation for the research were similar.²⁵ I started looking for ways to cross-reference this idea and the results are as follows. Brian J. McVeigh's recent work from the University of Arizona called *Mental Imagery and Hallucinations as Adaptive Behavior: Divine Voices and Visions as Neuropsychological Vestiges* conveys a medical sense of bicameral consciousness aligned to psychology.²⁶ McVeigh's paper cited here supports Jaynes' *The Origin of*

²⁴ More about copyright, culture and commodification, see Chapter 5

²⁵ *Reflexivity, the picturing of selves, the forging of method*. Ian Stronach, Dean Garratt, Cathie Pearce, and Heather Piper
Manchester Metropolitan University.

Creativity and Reflection: An Approach to Reflexivity in Practice.
Paul McIntosh/Claire Webb. Faculty of Health. Suffolk College. Rope Walk.
Ipswich. Suffolk

²⁶ Brian J. McVeigh, "Mental Imagery and Hallucinations as Adaptive Behavior: Divine Voices and Visions as Neuropsychological Vestiges," in

Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind thesis in an uncritical way using specialised medical language. McVeigh's paper indicates that research into bicameral consciousness has formal contemporary relevance in neuro-science. McVeigh is responsible for providing me with an insight into that world.²⁷ For me it offered up new words for categories with subcategories and terms like introception, not to be confused with, but a visual type of introspection.²⁸ Another term McVeigh uses is extroception, again a visual type of thought appearing to come from outside of oneself.²⁹ Both Jaynes and McVeigh use the term autoscopic, looking at yourself via your mind's eye, to describe hallucinatory phenomena.³⁰ In the following quote about distinguishing in language any kind of entity, Romesín seems close to a similar elaboration of autoscopic.

"...an operational-relational matrix of coordinations of doings as a domain of human living in which the participating human beings distinguish entities that could be themselves."³¹

McVeigh's neuroscience classifications might help clarify professional opinions on details but provide no obvious further insight regarding this paper except for his use of the term 'self reduplication' that can be connected with autoscopic recursion.³² The imagined self appears in an autoscopic recursion, where the recreated real world becomes a version of 'I imagine'. Jaynes' thesis seems to predict that in the course of time people would become more

Second Annual Julian Jaynes Conference on Consciousness. (University of Prince Edward Island, Canada.2008).

²⁷ I thank Brian J. McVeigh for providing his unpublished conference notes and entering into a good-natured exchange of personal views and topical information via email.

²⁸ McVeigh, "Mental Imagery and Hallucinations as Adaptive Behavior: Divine Voices and Visions as Neuropsychological Vestiges."p2. introceptions (mental imagery or inner quasi-perceptions)

²⁹ Ibid.p2 extrapeption (audiovisual hallucination interpreted as divine voices and visitations in ancient times)

³⁰ Ibid.; Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.

³¹ Romesín, "Anticipation and Self-Consciousness. Are These Functions of the Brain?." section 26

³² McVeigh, "Mental Imagery and Hallucinations as Adaptive Behavior: Divine Voices and Visions as Neuropsychological Vestiges."p1 Hallucinatory self-reduplications (autoscopy, out-of-body experiences)

adept (evolved) at being self-aware and McVeigh's contribution seems to do just that. McVeigh describes a set of medical variations of adaptive hallucinations that can be categorised and named using a similar historical literature analysis of their emergence that Jaynes' thesis outlined.

A review by Bill Rowe for *The American Journal of Psychology* of Jaynes' thesis does not offer any direct refutation of the thesis but does restate and develop various aspects in detail.³³ Rowe's review cites the late Australian philosopher David Stove's review of *The Origin of Consciousness* and Iain McGilchrist's book *The Master and His Emissary*.

In the next quote from a recent text, Nicolas Bourriaud indicates similar ideas to Jaynes' 'dead kings as gods' notion mentioned above, attributing an outside voice to an idea or a thing. In the following quote Bourriaud suggests:

"Contemporary art constantly oscillates between reification (the transformation of the living into a thing) and *prosopopeia* (a figure of speech that represents a thing as having a voice)."³⁴

Bourriaud proposes art is a special case in contemporary life where people who interact with art can hear the 'voice' of inanimate objects. For Bourriaud art moves between points of symbolic transformation, from 'the living into a thing' to then being able to attribute a voice to inanimate objects in bi-directional cycles. Bourriaud and Jaynes attribute voices to the inanimate; Bourriaud to art, Jaynes to the dead kings mentioned above, to propose certain ideas. This, I think, shows that vestiges of bicameral thinking, in terms that are almost mystical, could still be with us.

³³ Bill Rowe, "Retrospective: Julian Jaynes and the Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind," *The American Journal of Psychology* 125, no. 3 (2012).

³⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, "Coactivity. Notes for "the Great Acceleration" (Taipei Biennial 2014)," http://www.tfam.museum/File/files/01news/140620_2014TBpress/2014%20Taipei%20Biennial_Notes_en.pdf.

In summation we are looking at the term reflexivity as related to art practice. Reflexivity has been described above as taking an outcome or detail (from what is perceived to be occurring or has occurred) and feeding it back into a process of occurrences, in ways that the living system may not be, or only partially be conscious of. Self-awareness in my opinion embodies continuous biological and culturally determined responses to internal and external stimuli that include unconsciousness and conscious perceptions. After reading around the subjects of consciousness, self-awareness and methodology, I contend that consciousness involves (self-aware) reflexivity. The bi-directional circularity and self-reduplication of reflexivity noted above indicates that a bio/cultural 'operational-relational matrix of coordinations' integrates the terms unconscious and conscious. An outline has been traced of reflexivity that combines consciousness and unconsciousness in this chapter. I have shown they co-exist but do not quantify the integration of consciousness and unconsciousness. I propose that the contemporary mind uses a methodological reflexivity in its usual cognitive operations on a continuous basis.³⁵ The internal and external stimuli mentioned ('operational-relational matrix of coordinations') can be effectively described as types of responses to the environment. I have also shown that the term bi-directional circularity is a simplification of exchanges within a complex system (matrix of coordinations) that exists within and around structure-determined systems.

My art practice can now be characterised as being responses to environment or in other words, I do what I do because I am at that place. I would also like to suggest that in the origins of self-awareness are the traces of consciously self-aware behavior creatively being able to mark itself. This is an early reduplication of the self in practice. The imagined self appears in an imagined real world. My art practice is also part of a physical and cognitive circularity that substitutes alternative responses to the environment, including its culture that I habituate.

³⁵ The term 'reflexive methodology' I avoid, to me it implies being unconsciously conscious, possible but paradoxical.



Figure 3. *Global Day View* DB. 2014. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Coal[W]hole, NSW. Colour image DB. Detail from *Bilateral Global Restructure*.

Image:

Mediative visual link from previous chapters theoretical concerns to the next chapters creative responses. Photographed image made at a place I increasingly like to be. Site-specific installation. Images also created at night, see Chapter 2 icon and Appendix 1

Chapter 2 Reflexivity as Creative Practice



This chapter focuses on a discussion around creative responses, Art Practice and outside influences beginning with two examples of personal responses to environment that introduce and move around ideas of subjectivity and objectivity in language. These responses are reactions to experience and thoughts. As thought experiments they are a kind of play of ideas and provide some insight to my cognitive ecology (what I was/am interested in). Both examples in this chapter are responses in short form - i.e. imagined thought experiments; the first example is narrative based and the second example is image based.

First example:

“I’m the biggest hypocrite I know.”

We laughed, not quite knowing what to do with that mixture of self referential and objective commentary.

The conversation slipped into a familiar pattern, unpacking and creating everyday abstractions, feeling almost omniscient, as though we could hold any point of view.³⁶

I wrote the above narrative while looking at a cartoon image on the table in front of me.³⁷ I could somehow empathise with the image in front of me and understand it.³⁸ I imagined being with Michael Leunig and a friend in an autoscopic hallucination. I scribbled the few lines below the image in front of me and copied it later, not for any particular reason or with any idea of how it

³⁶ May 2014, me writing and thinking about the previous night

³⁷ Front cover page, CityHub. May 15 2014. cityhub.net.au

³⁸ See Figure 11 *Holy Fool* Michael Leunig

could be useful. Writing my thoughts just seemed like a good idea at the time. This is an example of written creative practice in short form that is developing a sense of self-awareness. This example shows an unusually concise piece of writing; I normally ramble on when trying to make a point. The words came out quickly with the only editing done at the time it was first written. It occurs to me that I'm quoting myself in the above narrative and this would be a type of reiteration of self.

Second example:

What if Schrödinger's cat was called ART? I just named the cat Art

Image: alludes to experimental Quantum theory, paradoxical complexity and logic.

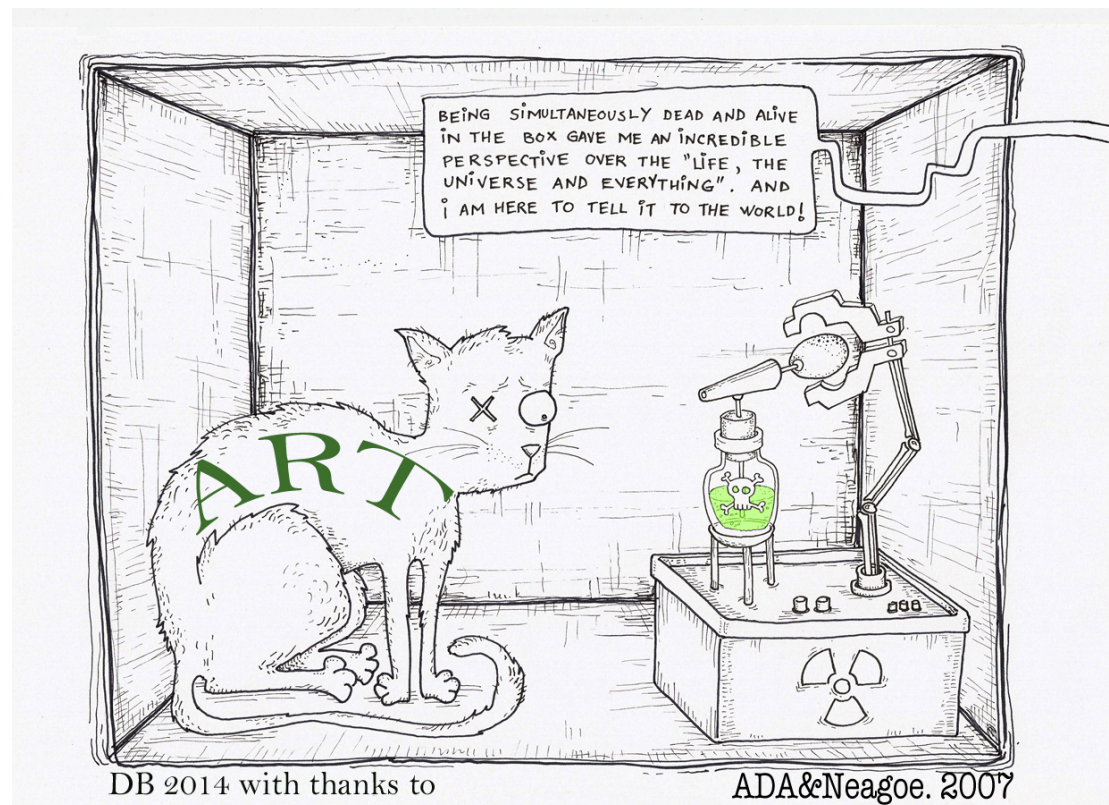


Figure 5. *Cat called ART*. DB. 2014. ADA & Neagoe. *Schrödinger's cat in the box, having its near-death experience*. 2007. Image altered by DB.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Schrodinger_cat_in_box.jpg

Accessed: 29/6/14. Creative Commons image

This appropriated and digitally altered image is an illustrated thought experiment about restricted access (subjectivity and objectivity in science and the limits of measurement) that follows a speculative thought about exhibiting art and not exhibiting art, and the problems or complexities of experience.³⁹

My supposition in this example is that the accessibility to, or containment of, an artwork was in some ways comparable to Schrödinger's thought experiment, as I understand it.⁴⁰ I understand that there are other ways to understand Schrödinger's thought experiment than will be described here. In addition, I now have a different understanding of the experiment than when this thought experiment was developed. The ability to imagine that the different understandings could be different realities or points of view and that they can exist simultaneously is also a way to describe Schrödinger's thought experiment. I thought that the exhibition of artwork could be like putting an experiment in a box, i.e. that art is like a thought experiment and that you can imagine results. I began to think about access to artwork, I started imagining how comparison and transformation of an idea could be elaborated in a way that showed the artwork while restricting access to it and realised this was not a new idea.

The above thought experiment indicates ideas by analogy and metaphor. Many layers pre-exist here such as the reference to Schrödinger's cat, experimental Quantum theory, paradoxical complexity and logic. I have tried to subvert the original intentions of this by substituting (shifting it to) a new subject. I'm indicating here that if the subject was for example, 'art', and by trying to measure or evaluate it you will potentially, almost certainly change

³⁹ Speculative determination not to exhibit my art, see chapter 4

⁴⁰T. J. Axon, "Introducing Schrödinger's Cat in the Laboratory," *American Journal of Physics* 57, no. 4 (1989).

The thought experiment 'Schrodinger's cat' originated from Austrian physicist Erwin Schrodinger in 1935 is sometimes interpreted as a joke because of its paradoxical implications. In short, the concept of superposition (not supposition), in the 'many-worlds' interpretation, the observer is able to imagine and integrate opposite representations without conflict, i.e. allowing two or more realities to coexist simultaneously.

the meaning in the work similar to the way a molecule would be affected by analysis. There are two new layers that I see as relevant here. The first; exhibiting art is like putting Schrödinger's cat in a box; the context may change the artworks meaning. Secondly, as I'm analysing my art practice, its meaning/s will shift according to the context of the analysis. As a student who practises art and will be expected to exhibit artwork, this is relevant for both reasons.

In summary this chapter has presented two examples of my creative practice and associated speculative ideas, the first one as short narrative and the second as an illustrated thought experiment. Both examples are layered with multiple ideas upon pre-existing ideas that were created in response to facets of this research project. The next chapters use a discursive style to present thoughts about where materials come from and why choose them for art practice.

Chapter 3: Proto Intellectual



In this chapter, the first of three longer discursive variations, selected topics are introduced to show what I imagine are different people's responses to their environment. In this chapter approaches to making thought and myth visually explicit are articulated around artist Kim Jones and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss drawing inferences about the conceptual and practical interrelationships of process and outcome based methodologies in the pre modern and modern eras.⁴¹

How the adaptive and emergent bricolage methodology is an indicator of reflexivity will be discussed using ideas based around methodology and reflexivity.⁴² An artist who uses bricolage allows for outcomes that can be modified, to suit the context. Two types of bricoleur are mentioned; the pre modern bricoleur and the proto intellectual bricoleur, they are very similar and refer to people from the time period leading up to the establishment of contemporary social groups.

The bricoleur, materiality, process and language are discussed here to indicate the relationships that reflexivity has to my art practice. My studio work consists of making provisional structures and theoretical propositions in a body of work to be exhibited called *Access Restricted/Operational Reasons*. This work has emerged in conjunction with the writing of this document, i.e. part of the work refers to information in this document. For example the work *Access Restricted/Operational Reasons* will include an enclosure that may restrict access to the work. I have and will continue to indicate my interest in, and speculate on the accessibility of information.

⁴¹ The term modern means different times to different disciplines and people, here it is a title for an approximation to Lévi-Strauss's time of writing in the 20th century; also see Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*. Pre modern era dated from early civilisation occurring approximately 12000 years ago. I use the term when avoiding the use of 'primitive'.

⁴² Bricolage -see introduction

Hot glue and bamboo barbecue skewers were initially chosen as the material for an ongoing body of open ended experimental sculptural works because it provided a simple component based platform that was rich with a type of site specific architectural potential but not limited by scale or cost. The bamboo and glue works have grown in the space over the period of the candidature, climbing the walls, inhabiting the top of cupboards and hanging from the ceiling. These works are emergent, in the sense that the structures emerge from the process and materials in an intuitive way. These provisional lightweight structures are fabricated around selected materials as a way of containing and linking associated ideas. The new associations become new components of the ongoing changing variations of my creative practice. The imagination is investigated using the creative practice to make alternate connections, building with parts. The considered constructions of my imagination are derived from the occasional deliberate mis-use of materials. Later in this chapter I will describe an individual work of mine, *'un'Obskewered* (Figure 10), and talk further about the materials and also mention how everyday objects and ideas get caught up inside these provisional structures.

Hot glue can be used to make flexible links or nodes, connecting and creating tangential links quickly. It has its limitations; it is relatively weak and unstable as a consequence of its flexibility. The ability to make a hot glue and bamboo skewer temporary construction quickly is, for example, like making a theatre set where an illusion for an audience is required, creating an environment for the actors while hiding the backstage machinations. The artist Kim Jones presents some of that hidden backstage action as the main performance, distressing the audience with candid references to his personal experiences of military service. Jones's presentation of his personal experiences as part of his artwork is the reason for his selection in this discussion because I think Jones uses reflexivity in art practice, i.e. Jones is responding to his environment using details of his personal experience and re-articulating them.

Kim Jones meets Claude Lévi-Straus:

Here reflexivity as expressed through the process of art making and theoretical modes of understanding is explored and Kim Jones' artwork/practice is discussed using Claude Lévi-Strauss' views as a point of reference to help the understanding of my art practice. In other words I'm going to contextualise my artwork/practice using Kim Jones and Claude Lévi-Strauss as a basis of the discussion. Claude Lévi-Strauss is relevant here for both his schematic pictorial representation below in Figure 7 and his discussion about the material environment of pre-modern thinking and its outcome/process methodological implications.

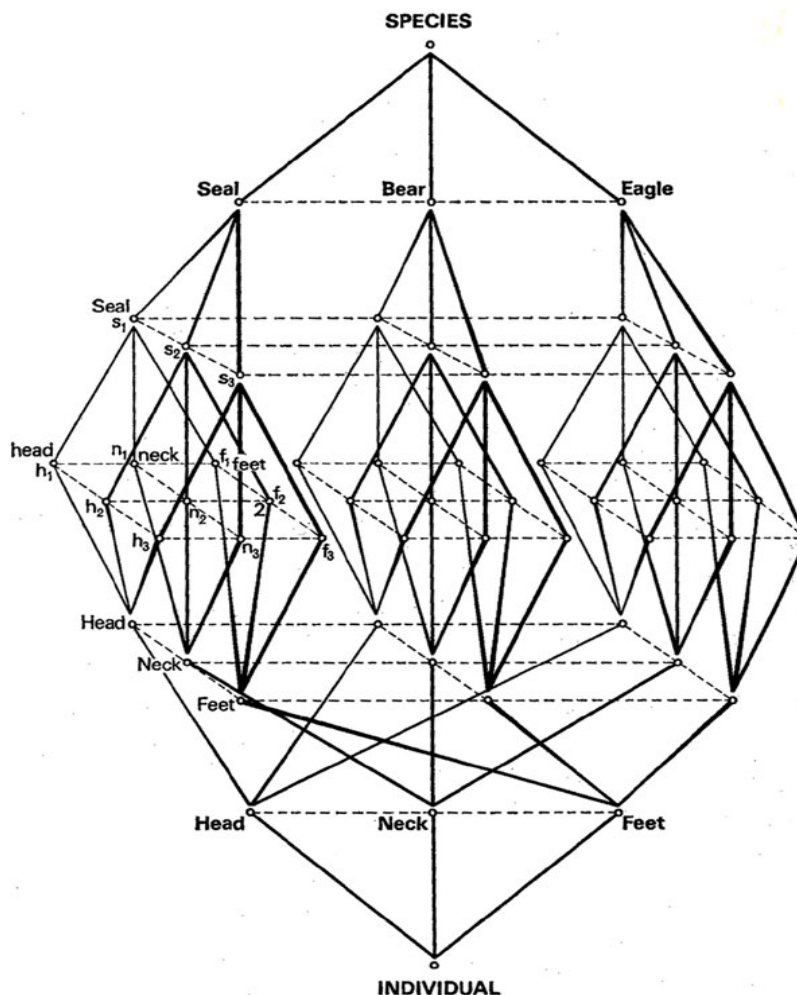


Figure 7. *Totemic Operator* from Claude Lévi-Strauss' book, *The savage mind*.



Figure 8. *Telephone Pole*. Kim Jones. Performance in 1978
Los Angeles, CA. Photo by Ned Sloane.

Figure 8, the image above is an example of Kim Jones' art practice, he is shown clasp a pole with its many connecting wires and with what appears as a clumsy handmade replica of the wires and poles attached to his back. Jones is disguised and distinguished by a stocking-type mask and boots. This mixture of performance and place appeals to me, I empathise with what is represented in the image, in conjunction with the person who it centres upon.⁴³

⁴³ A discussion with a friend Gawaa Lundaa many years ago involved my interest in the way electricity poles looked and what they represented. Gawaa, a self-described Mongolian desert nomad responded with a story. In his story he describes how following poles with wires in the Mongolian desert leads to town or community.

Kim Jones is known as a solitary performer who became a part of the Californian art scene in the mid 1970's. After doing a year in Vietnam as a marine, 1967-68, he studied art in the early 70's, qualifying for a MFA at the Otis Art Institute, Southern California in 1973. Jones used materials that included mud, sticks, foam, rubber, tape and hessian to form an explicit exoskeleton, enacting or performing art, becoming to be known as 'Mudman'. His military experience and art training contribute to his seemingly naïve and not-so benign gestures. He became a conjurer of the mythical in the southern California post Vietnam War era, as I will describe.



Figure 9. Video stills from *Rat Piece*. Kim Jones.1976. Performance at Cal State University, Los Angeles.

Jones is infamous for his *Rat Piece* where he set fire to three live rats in a cage and joined the rats' cries of pain with his own howls, performed in 1976 at the Californian State University, Los Angeles. His book *Rat Piece* closes with the palindrome RATS LIVE ON NO EVIL STAR, an enigmatic statement that had paradoxical and contradictory associations to the artist.⁴⁴ The palindrome is said to suggest Jones' 'double bind', something he shared with other veterans of the Vietnam War.⁴⁵ His identification and personification with the rat generally seen as the unclean and unwelcome also suggests his vulnerability to, and understanding of public opinion. As an artist Jones found a way to transport and inhabit his art in a performative mode, taking himself to his audience of passers-by.

⁴⁴ Sandra Q Firmin and Julie Joyce (eds);, *Mudman: The Odyssey of Kim Jones*, vol. 15, The Art Book (2008).p59

⁴⁵ Ibid.p59

David McCarthy's review of the book *The Odyssey of Kim Jones* includes this comment about Kim Jones:

"Their invocation of Odysseus' heroic struggle to return home after the Trojan war immediately situates the artist and his labour within a mythic framework."⁴⁶

Jones' military service and return home biographically links him in the writer's imagination to Odysseus' heroic struggle to return home after the Trojan war. This presents a further opportunity to place Jones by analogy next to the conceptual associations of an older mythical narrative. How Jones became associated with the mythical, as suggested above is now further discussed identifying art's methodological connections to mythical thought via Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropological speculation.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, an anthropologist and ethnologist, used the study of semiotics, more specifically, linguistic semantics, to develop theoretical positions "on the plane of speculation".⁴⁷ The English translation of Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* appeared in 1966. In the book he makes observations about scientific knowledge that include the type of dialogue that the pre modern bricoleur and the modern engineer have with nature.⁴⁸ The observations he made were an attempt to account for the lack of abstraction in pre modern thought as part of a debate in anthropology about the limits of understanding another cultures reasoning.⁴⁹ According to Levi-Strauss, the pre modern bricoleur would have used perceived environmental relations and objects as a basis for their own speculations and experience. An example is

⁴⁶ David McCarthy, "Mudman: The Odyssey of Kim Jones by Sandra Q Firmin and Julie Joyce (Eds)," *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Claude. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind / Claude Lévi-Strauss*, [New ed.] ed.(London :: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972). p16-17

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p18

⁴⁹ Philip A. Dennis, "Levi-Strauss in the Kindergarten: The Montessori Pre-Schooler as Bricoleur," *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l'Education* 20, no. 1 (1974).p4

the pre modern bricoleur's process of manipulation until it works methodology where the bricoleur may find it difficult to explain abstractly how things work.⁵⁰

“The bricoleur deals with his world not by thinking about it abstractly, but by manipulation of it.”⁵¹

Lévi-Strauss' proposes that

“Mythical thought is a kind of proto intellectual ‘bricolage’.”⁵²

Lévi-Strauss indicates that proto intellectual thinking used categories that were available or in use already. For example in the *Totemic Operator* (Figure 7) he reveals how he imagines the totemic relationships between individuals and species emerged from perceptions of those people's environment. Strauss' *Totemic Operator* schematic shows how a person and their physical attributes could be linked to the experience and knowledge of animals such as the bear or the eagle. Lévi-Strauss' thoughts quoted above were of their time and could be imagined in contemporary terms as language in practice. This is a link to the concept of outcome or process based methodological distinctions. Andrew Pickering details methodological distinctions extensively in the book *Science as Practice and Culture*.⁵³ Pickering's book serves to show how reflexivity involving experiment and intuition is a process over time producing scientific breakthrough and consequently creates further knowledge. Pickering indicates modern science including engineering is more process based and experimental than scientific institutions and scientists liked to admit in the past.

The reflexivity of scientists, engineers and people in general is thought to be based in social adaptation, a concept posited by George A. Kubler, in his

⁵⁰ Ibid.p4

⁵¹ Ibid.p4

⁵² Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind / Claude Lévi-Strauss*. p16-17

⁵³ *Science as Practice and Culture / Edited by Andrew Pickering*, ed. Andrew Pickering, trans. Andrew Pickering(Chicago :: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

book *The Shape of Time* which identifies a process characterised by 'working with the unknown', with useful outcomes being adopted over time.⁵⁴ The concept of reflexivity itself seems to be emerging over time in conjunction with the early users' language or what Lévi-Strauss calls the mythical thought of the proto intellectual bricoleurs.

This colliding of references, Lévi-Strauss' 'mythical thought' and 'bricolage' with Jones' art practice allow us to consider how choices of materials and working methodologies can speak. Artists may not be actively seeking to make links with myth or myth making in their material choices or working methodologies. Jones' acquired persona of 'mudman' with the sometimes savage, almost raw combination of materials and their place, in their time, is attention grabbing and may indicate a modern mythology in the making. If as Levi-Strauss proposes

"The elements of mythical thought similarly lie halfway between percepts and concepts."⁵⁵

Then creating and personifying a myth could involve using materials in a similar way, not in their usual usage but in ways that evoke mythical or imagined narratives. The points of intersection between percepts and concepts are areas that an artist may work with. To explain this idea further it may be said, for example, that what you think you see (percepts) are linked with an abstracted version of what you think (concepts). That is conceiving and perceiving a way to work with materials at hand towards some perceived but incompletely understood barely expressible aim. An example of my work evoking that narrative can be seen below in Figure 10.

⁵⁴ George A. Kubler, *The Shape of Time : Remarks on the History of Things* / George Kubler (New Haven, Conn. :: Yale University Press, 1962).

⁵⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* / Claude Lévi-Strauss. p18



Figure 10. *'un'Obskewered*. DB. 2013. Mixed media. Height 1.86m. Studio documentation. Image DB

The image above is an example of a group of materials lending themselves to an interpretation of the object being a scarecrow and stories that are in some way linked to a human appearance. The narratives this work brings to mind about the mythical may also involve the qualities of the object, its simple wooden base and framework torso with a relic of shirt material to 'dress' the work. In this work, I used my own shape as a guide to its dimensions and the material choice guided the way it was made. This creative practice of working with materials and narrative concepts has an internal logic that allows the process to be continued after due contemplation and documentation. Often parts of the work are reused, necessarily bypassing the 'exhibition' of the work and commercial stages of professional art practice. The parts can then be quickly re-used and arranged in various other combinations. Ideas evoked from each iteration are carried over, creating increasingly layered

associations. A dialogue then begins between the parts, some things are physically modified to accommodate new arrangements and occasionally another structure or component emerges, a new favourite, for a time.

Lévi-Strauss' observations about bricolage involving a "dialogue with the materials and means of execution" is a dialogue about 'best fit', finding available materials that best fit a means of execution.⁵⁶ Material availability and its limitations could change a means of execution so emergent action or adaptive modifications are required. The dialogue is adaptive and emergent where there is a possibility that the outcome could be redesigned as opposed to a predetermined design process with a calculated outcome.

The choice of ready to hand materials and building techniques that are adapted to suit the requirements of the moment is a process that involves integrating and compressing abstractions, thoughts of what can or will not be used and why that might be, in its ambient matrix of associations, learnt and adapted to over time. The links between Jones' performative art installations and Lévi-Strauss' methodological bricolage helps to show different kinds of responses from a similar time but from different parts of the world. Both Jones and Lévi-Strauss are using what is about them. Jones and Lévi-Strauss use the concepts, materials and a bricoleur methodology that suits their purposes, artistic or academic.

Is the so-called modern 'civilized' world revealing its bias toward outcome based and technically driven methodologies, as 'the preferred option'? In other words, are modern people inclined to remediate the environment by substituting physical separation and virtual controls? Jones uses an expressive combination of media, (the visual, the performative and the auditory) helping to direct our attention back to his art practice.⁵⁷ A combination of method and material that recognisably stands out such as

⁵⁶ Ibid.p29

⁵⁷ It is relevant here because Jones' physical presence in his artwork and the viewers' physical responses to his presence include smell. Stretching of the connection to proxemics towards an intangible concept (smell) of materials, where language becomes technical or poetic.

stinking organic materials (including himself and rats) is an example of Jones manipulating spatial relations in his artwork. When mud and sticks are mixed with everyday items such as foam, rubber, plastic and tape then where attached to Jones's body, a transformation took place, the familiar became unfamiliar; he again did almost the opposite of what we learn not to do.⁵⁸ The participating viewers at Jones's counter-intuitive performative art installations experienced a metaphoric link to pre-modern mythology in a contemporary setting, providing a transformation for contemplation.⁵⁹ Viewers of Jones's performative art installations experienced a metaphoric link to pre-modern mythology when they were able to identify themselves as partly implicated, by their appropriation into the artwork, they had become part of the artwork and they, the viewers were co opted into to it by proximity and association

Reflexivity- methodological markers

Jones and Lévi-Strauss use materials and concepts available to them and represent (remediate) materials and concepts. Reflexivity being condition of consciousness; Jones' and Lévi-Strauss' implicit or explicit explanations to an outcome or motivations may be considered separately as culturally based. The adaptive and emergent bricolage methodology is an indicator of reflexivity. An artist who uses bricolage allows for outcomes that can be modified, to suit the context, in contrast to having to comply with a predetermined outcome. The artist is then aligned with a process-based methodology and is afforded an opportunity, in this scenario, to work more closely with the pre-modern mindset associated with the mythical. I choose to associate myself with a pre-modern mindset and its so-called mythical qualities; the adoption of a proto intellectual bricolage way of practicing art aligns itself to the use of pre-existing narratives and the creative manipulation of their linguistic connections.

⁵⁸ Making a fool or a spectacle of himself publically without a legitimising cover of, for example the street performer with approval of local authorities.

⁵⁹ In Jones *Rat Piece* he uses rodents (animals), this could be linked to myomancy, a type of pre-modern divination.

Smedley, Edward. *The Occult Sciences: Sketches of the Traditions and Superstitions of Past Times, and the Marvels of the Present Day*. England; United Kingdom 1855.

also <http://www.occultopedia.com/m/myomancy.htm>

The discussion in this chapter has drawn attention to behaviour that tends to use what best fits, behaviour that can be an integration of ideas or a way of combining material things. Conceiving and perceiving a way to work with materials at hand is an evolving dialogue with process. I have indicated ways I imagine reflexivity can be seen in other people's dialogues with their environments. The example of my work is part of an ongoing process grounded in 'proto' type material choices and a two way dialogue characterised here as a bricoleur methodology that embodies reflexivity in the process of creative practice.



This chapter introduces responses to the way capitalism makes everything a commodity using viewpoints from Bruno Latour, Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch and Michael Leunig.⁶⁰ The commodification of culture is an all-encompassing subversion of society and contributes to:

“..... normalizing the abnormal.”⁶¹

As a creative response to the normalising of the abnormal, I would be tempted to somehow ‘un’ normalise the abnormal, as part of an indirect search for antidotes as human endeavour. Ideas about a restrictive and subversive strategy in theory and practice are explored in the following.

During the course of the MFA and research for the paper, it became evident that a strategy was needed to help adjust myself to the difficulties of repeated theoretical attempts to rationalise art practice in its research context.⁶² Intuitively I felt a change was required that was somehow strange or obscure; in short I had to do something differently. A reasonable change seemed to be to propose not showing my work in the usual fashion.⁶³ This became a withholding or restrictive strategy to not show the work at all. The work could be made for a place that was difficult to see and that would become the ‘new’ subject of the justifications. The strategy problematically added another layer to be integrated to an already large group of ideas relating to my art practice.

⁶⁰ Paul Wright, "The Cultural Commodification of Prisons," *Social Justice* 27, no. 3 (81) (2000).

⁶¹ Ibid.p16

⁶² Tactic might have been a better word choice.

⁶³ Maybe called impractical, masochistic, asymmetrical equity or inversely reciprocal but was a response to events that surrounded me.

My counter intuitive restrictive strategy seemed unusual at the time; wanting to not directly satisfy the viewer by not presenting work in a straightforward way also had a comedic and foolish air about it, but was somehow liberating. One morning around the time, I was considering the implications of the restrictive strategy I came across a street magazine with a Michael Leunig cartoon on the front cover, as shown below in Figure 12.⁶⁴



Figure 12
Holy Fool by Michael Leunig.
May 2014. front-page City Hub.
<http://www.altmedia.net.au/leunig-the-holy-fool-speaks-at-swf/9304>

The cartoon image seemed to represent my dilemma in dealing with a counter intuitive strategy, i.e. restricting access to the artwork at an exhibition. I imagined the cartoon characters; the man and duck were together in a vast universe looking towards the empty horizon of an uncertain future. The man is frightened, the duck stoic. Had Leunig's *Holy Fool* cartoon image spoken to me? I wondered what Leunig and his artwork/practice might be able to clarify (tell me) about my artwork/practice. Before discussing the further implications of my restrictive strategy, Leunig's art practice is briefly introduced.

Michael Leunig is a contemporary Australian cartoonist and philosopher, a seemingly odd combination.⁶⁵ Leunig's cartoons show an interest in the 'everyday' cycles of politics and polemics of commodification. As by way of explanation Leunig is quoted:

"This archetypal being called the holy fool, with its expressive outsider ways, its simple gestures, its joy and pathos, its unabashed authenticity and felt life, its naturalism and rejection of worldly sophistication lives somewhere beyond the horizon of modern life – or

⁶⁴ See also 'an imagined narrative' Chapter 2, example 1

⁶⁵ A combination I was unaware of, odd because Leunig seems to play the fool himself, pretending not to understand.

else in the primal playful reaches of imagination; a humble being who stands in sharp contrast to the common aspirations of contemporary urban humanity. Perhaps its existence in the mind is a natural antidote to fashion, political consciousness and the cult of cleverness, which so stifle and afflict creativity in Western culture.”⁶⁶

Leunig’s art practice may seem simple and loaded with childlike qualities, as does the *Holy Fool*. Leunig’s *Holy Fool* acts to invite simplicity as a response to complexity of culture. Bringing Leunig’s lines of thought together from the quote above we might get the suggestion that it would be worthwhile to consider the ‘Holy Fool’ with its resistance to sophistication and cleverness, its playful authenticity that Leunig identifies as a reasonable antidote to contemporary western culture. This is a response that I imagine could be characterised as Leunig’s reflexivity being revealed. It is resistance to our own desires and doubts as an informal strategy to contemporary western culture that is discussed next.⁶⁷

The concept of Masochism will be developed here to elaborate on the restrictions being implied in the strategy of withholding artwork or its partial accessibility. The origins of the term masochism are briefly discussed followed by a discursive contemplation via a quote from Gilles Deleuze on the connection of the phrases the Holy Fool and Spiritual Masochism. Deleuze’s insights will provide a contemporary philosopher’s critical ideas about Masochism.

The Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch (1836—1895) text *Venus in Furs* has become the seminal text for what has become known as Masochism.⁶⁸ This term is associated with many things but here it will be used to explore the idea of withholding or restrictive practices as a conceptual tool to understanding a facet of modernity. A reading of von Sacher-Masoch might suggest that

⁶⁶ Michael Leunig, "Regressive Painting and the Holy Fool," <http://www.leunig.com.au/index.php/ideas/painting>.

⁶⁷ Often unwritten or obscured but with Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch it was written

⁶⁸ Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*(Barnes & Noble Publishing, 2004).

complete fulfilment of desire is not and/or does not bring with it complete satisfaction for some, and in that case to delay or even defer satisfaction is a superior method of extending an interest or complex fetishistic obsession. Deleuze observed that in Masoch:

“...history, politics, mysticism, eroticism, nationalism and perversion are closely intermingled.”⁶⁹

This quote offers insights concerning the individual and their social relationships in terms that could be considered relevant to culture and society. Deleuze's observed interminglings in the quote above shows parts of a cultural continuum that he sees in Masoch's text. In other words, history, politics, mysticism, eroticism, nationalism and perversion are closely related to personal and cultural identity. Elements of masochism are now compared to the spiritual; does the *Holy Fool* signify an oppositional force to the notion of a Spiritual Masochist?

'Spiritual masochism' is mentioned by the French Professor in Sociology, Bruno Latour, in the 2014 Royal Academy Lecture in the Humanities and Social Sciences called *The Affects of Capitalism*.⁷⁰ The remark can be thought of as a supposition, or part thereof, that the search for knowledge about ecological security is actively subverted by economic modernism.

Latour's term 'spiritual masochism' indicates his concern for how the capitalisation of culture is misdirected at best.⁷¹ Leunig's *Holy Fool* guiding rationale of naturalism and a rejection of worldly sophistication can clarify the phrase 'spiritual masochism'; a metaphoric explanation can be created. The metaphor would be; spiritual masochism is like nature rejecting the world.

⁶⁹ David Kirby, "Mr. Post-Everything -- Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty by Gilles Deleuze / Venus in Furs by Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch," 1990.

⁷⁰ Bruno Latour, *The Affects of Capitalism, The Royal Academy Lecture in the Humanities and Social Sciences*.(2014). Latour makes the comment specifically in relation to the Australian Prime Minister.

⁷¹ Local and international political governance aligns its self with capital to ever-greater degrees, at the expense of public and their environment.

With this 'spiritual masochism' can be understood as a situation of conflict, not able to be accepted completely on its own terms. To clarify this point, I do not think that capitalism and spiritual practice sit comfortably together even as a concept. An example of 'spiritual masochism' is seen in contemporary political commentary as Latour indicates in his lecture *The Affects of Capitalism*. Human spirituality, in the broadest sense, is not likely to be best served by an association of the political links to capitalism and religion. Deleuze's quote above, inferred that in Masoch's writings; personal and cultural identity are related in ways that are difficult to integrate. So linking religion to this already heady mixture of irrational and difficult to integrate ideas we get the concept characterised here as spiritual masochism. Spiritual masochism is then an attempt to make attributes of something appear desirable by withholding or subverting other closely related, but difficult to admit ideas.

Obscure Isomorphism: Subversive Masochism

In summary direct discussion of environmental and political issues are avoided; instead, ideas around the topic of the human libidinal economy and cultural commodification were elaborated. A reading of von Sacher-Masoch suggests a complex response to the social and material world. His type of behavioural variation 'Masochism' allows a personal satisfaction from an explicit withholding of intentions by a substitution, welcoming less favourable or contradictory conditions, as a reward.⁷² The idea of masochism can seem counterintuitive and instructively that is one of its main points. The counterintuitive masochistic game of double bluff gives the player a sense of at least being in the game, even if in that game their role is to lose.⁷³

I have brought together Latour's thoughts about capitalism and spiritual masochism with Leunig's *Holy Fool* as types of responses to the contemporary environment from individuals of western society. Leunig's art practice associated with its thoughtful counter narratives have been

⁷² Negative reduplication? Creating a situation where the desired outcome is not desired.

⁷³ Or to work that brings self-esteem, security and a wage.

highlighted where he is given a certain licence to make nearly any comment publically in cartoon form.⁷⁴ Latour's critique of the Prime Minister of Australia, by linking him to the idea of spiritual masochism could be seen as an indicator of a subversion of capitalism by linking it to the spiritual, or conversely a subversion of the spiritual by linking it to capitalism. Masochism and spiritualism have been linked to subversion in various ways to show responses to the paradigms of contemporary ideas. In this chapter I have indicated that some sort of antidote to the theoretical and physical conflicts of the contemporary is being searched for by developing counterintuitive tactics or ideas.

⁷⁴ Alice Goodman, "Enter the Duck: The Poetic World of a Political Artist," Sydney Writers Festival, <https://atthefestival.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/enter-the-duck-the-poetic-world-of-a-political-artist/>.



The uses of information and its systematisation into specialist categories are discussed in this chapter to make clear their connection to art practice, and by association, other interconnected specialisations such as finance and technology. Selected viewpoints from Santiago Sierra and Norbert Wiener introduce the manipulation and specialist uses of information in science and art as practiced in the service of culture. Cybernetics - the science of communications and automatic control systems in both machines and living things is introduced to show its associations to culture.⁷⁵ Santiago Sierra's art practice and the way he displays information is discussed in reference to cultural commodification. The effects of information control are noted and consequences are considered.

Norbert Wiener (1894–1964) was a mathematician who in the late 1940s established the science of cybernetics. In his book *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, 1954, Wiener lamented the commodification of information. He tried to avoid a morality-based critique of market information transmission and proposed that information and institutional bodies are mishandling for what purposes that it may be used.⁷⁶ A quote from Wiener states his views about what he calls the 'mercantile attitude' to information transfer:

"It is my business to show that it leads to the misunderstanding and mistreatment of information and its associated concepts"⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*(Da Capo Press, 1954).

⁷⁶ Information created in the guise of science for security uses. Society has lost control of the information being created for their benefit.

⁷⁷ Ibid.p113

Wiener is suggesting that the commoditisation of information is simplistic and short sighted. Information control that relates to art practice is discussed in the following quote as he addresses the problems associated to ownership and copyright of an artistic creation.

“There are other rights which no copyright law can cover, which almost equally raise the question of the capacity of any man to own an artistic creation in an effective sense. Here the problem of the nature of genuine originality arises.”⁷⁸

Weiner’s insight here is about authenticity of information and the problematic possibility of putting borders around information or quarantining it from individuals, society or from other nations. The question being posed here is- to what degree can an individual or group own and control the information that was, at the very least, partially created by others, incrementally over time? As Weiner states:

“Information is more a matter of process than of storage.”⁷⁹

After gathering it, information can or should be shared like food, not just stored away, for the limited use of only a few. The equating of food to information can be used to illustrate that some information can have a limited shelf life, for example tomorrows weather forecast. Whereas other types of information, for example astronomical data is like honey that stores well and is used for healing and nutrition. Astronomical data is socially useful over time providing various benefits such as navigation assistance and tidal information.

Moving now to Santiago Sierra’s art practice and the way information is displayed or covered to explore contradictory social practices. Selected from an interview about responses to his work at the 2003 Biennale, the following is a quote by Sierra regarding a museum night watchman he paid to live for 360 hours behind a wall at an Art center in New York:

⁷⁸ Ibid.p118

⁷⁹ Ibid.p120



Figure 14. *Person remunerated for a period of 360 consecutive hours.*
Santiago Sierra. 2000. Installation view, Contemporary Art Centre, New York.
<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra>

“...I realized that hiding something is a very effective working technique. The forgotten people want to communicate - something that you also express in your work.”⁸⁰

This quote from Sierra indicates art practice is informed by a technique of hiding something you imagine others want to communicate.⁸¹ Sierra’s work metaphorically hides the content by appearing to present something else in its place. The caption to the above image (Figure 14) reveals that a man was paid to work in an art gallery, lying on the floor and looking out a small opening into an unknown space at floor level. The information Sierra is likely to be communicating metaphorically is about the global movement of people as economic immigrants and its connections to the art industry, and by inference, the exploitation of minority groups (for example indigenous subcultures) as low paid production workers. Sierra’s *Person remunerated for*

⁸⁰ Teresa. Hegarty Margolles, Kerry. Sierra, Santiago., "Santiago Sierra," *Bomb*, no. 86 Winter (2003), <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra>.

⁸¹ Is Sierra imagining hearing them speak?

a period of 360 consecutive hours installation is a fairly direct example of a person being commoditised as art. Sierra's artwork could be about people being exploited by institutions who appear to be looking after their best interests equitably.

Another example of an artwork that works that limits or denies accessibility is *Palabra Tapada (Covered Word)*, Venice Biennale Spanish Pavilion, 2003.⁸² The pavilion guards required visitors to display a Spanish passport as a condition of entry. A wall just behind the entrance was installed and it restricted the view to the room, the room was empty except for the wall and some rubbish on the floor. Here Sierra's puts concepts on display, by partially hiding them in his performative art installations. The concepts he puts on display are actual contradictory social practices that relate to information uses, such as how people are diminished by bureaucratic mishandling for political, economic and security reasons.

Sierra's art works find a relationship with Wiener's views about information and process, Sierra has worked in numerous situations with illegal workers whose rates of pay or illegal status become part of the art content. While Wiener has revealed the tendencies of institutional facilities to gather information and store it, identifying a process that commoditises the information by limiting its availability.

The restrictions to information and accessibility highlighted here are the focus of both Wiener and Sierra. They also share concerns about communicating information. Sierra does it with a science as practice approach where he creates illustrative social experiments as art. Wiener shows his concern by giving an explanation of information theory as a commodity in the guise of science for military use and its deleterious effects on social communication and culture. An example may be how nationalised patent law institutions have become specialists in maintaining corporate investment rights and promoting

⁸² Margolles, "Santiago Sierra".

further commodification in the global market.⁸³ Capital and commodity are also culturally linked to science and art, as they both require investments of money and time. Sierra acknowledges this in the following quote:

“In the art world you always work for the powers that be: banks, governments and so on. Who else can pay for an exposition in a museum? You have to be conscious that we all work for a machine.”⁸⁴

Sierra and Wiener are publicly presenting views we would not normally contemplate. Wiener uses his skills, influence and experience to bring awareness to what he sees as the mistreatment of information as it affects people and their cultures. Wiener’s question of the capacity of any man to own an artistic creation in an effective sense continues to be a point of legal debate and critical consideration. Wiener’s cultural views about information’s use and abuse would be (was) simply no match against the values information as a commodity can acquire.⁸⁵

⁸³ The Australian Patent Office (APO) is a division of IP Australia, which is an agency of Australian Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, and Research that is housed in new and large building facilities in Woden, Canberra. This is a physical expression of its (IP- Intellectual Property) place in the national governmental structure controlling (restricting and promoting) information.

⁸⁴ Margolles, "Santiago Sierra".

⁸⁵ Contemporary media corporations (providers of information) are said to be worth billions of dollars and have immense political power.



Figure 15. *Palabra Tapada* (Covered Word), Santiago Sierra, 2003.

Installation view, Venice Biennale.

<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra>

Sierra appears to be fully cognisant of the political use and abuse of information as seen in (Figure 15), *Palabra Tapada* (Covered Word) 2003, and in (Figure 14), *Person remunerated for a period of 360 consecutive hours*, 2000. The references to contradictive social practices in Sierra's artwork can be thought of as ridiculous or insincere if you are not able to understand the underlying meanings or motivations. His artwork contains some unpopular ideas and critical ways of seeing the world as it might be and so becomes a metaphorical cause of friction between people. Spectators become critically implicated as being part of the cultural institution's decisions; the inequities of which they are made aware are the uncomfortable experiences of others. The spectator/viewer is asked to resist becoming the subject of the artwork by maintaining their objectivity, their view from the outside. For example, the work could be perceived as presenting a form of gradients from subjectivity to objectivity, made accessible to the viewers via Sierra's art installations. Then through their own reactions, they decide how to understand the work and the levels of empathy or points most worthy of concern.

Sierra and Wiener present us with views of apparently contradictory situations, from different disciplines that are unexpectedly convergent. Artwork and art practice can present information metaphorically, as Sierra does, to comment on social information exchange in the art industry. Scientists and science use information to present research. Both Sierra and Wiener use information as a tool in their work. Sierra withholds information to help make it more obvious and Wiener created information that he thought he should have had more control over.

The capitalisation of culture and its relationships to individuals are called to attention here. If conceptual information is exchanged and stored to extend power relationships between people then knowledge itself may be seen as an inherently inequitable possession.⁸⁶

Image: Enclosed structural reform platform.



Figure 16. *Harvester (combine) #555*. DB. 2015. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Detail. Photo DB.

⁸⁶ Especially if it is being withheld from general use or if used to exploit and subvert rather than contribute.

The elaboration of my understanding of the term 'reflexivity' related to my art practice is the general intention of this document. The written research was framed around titles that changed many times while I worked through the various ideas that came up. Titles for me are placeholders for sets of information. I have used this research to explore the process of titling and explaining the information associated, continually refining the ideas in a similar way I would with art practice. A summary of the parts and process of collating the document, including speculative ideas about the results of the research follows here.

Julian Jaynes' ideas on consciousness and thinking in his book *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* was an initial reference and provided a starting point for a line of enquiry that allowed me to compare and contrast ideas. The insights of Humberto Maturana Romesín's regarding the development of self-consciousness in living systems was used to develop a critical discussion on Jaynes' thesis. Other references about the 'origins of consciousness' were introduced, followed by perceptions of art by Nicolas Bourriaud indicating that art moves between points of symbolic transformation in bi-directional cycles. I posit Jaynes' and Romesín's ideas about the development of self-awareness are a way of talking about types of responses to the environment of living systems. I further indicate that self-awareness is linked to the environment in recursive multiple-way cycles and this is what I imagine is called 'reflexivity'. Language is shown to play a central role in the development of conscious self-awareness and by association is an integral part of social development.

Chapter 2 shows 'reflexivity' as creative practice in short form variations. The two examples in this chapter are personal responses to environment that introduce and move around ideas of subjectivity and objectivity. These abstracted responses are reactions using ideas from personal experience and cultural sources. This creative practice uses words as a material, in an imagined narrative that is a response to environmental factors. The second

example, *A cat called Art*, is a manipulation of various responses by different people over time in a thought experiment and appropriation and manipulation of an image.

An early combination of ideas in chapter 3 became a discursive longer form of creative practice. The ways materials are chosen is deliberated, first as physical things then as conceptual tools that can be manipulated and used suggestively to create conceptual relationships. Making thought visually explicit is articulated around how Kim Jones became associated with the mythical and is identified using art's methodological connections to mythical thought via Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropological speculation. Lévi-Strauss' ideas about bricolage being a dialogue an artist has with the materials and means of execution was articulated around Jones' art practice. Materials and methodology were linked to contemporaneity via a consideration of narratives about mythical and the 'proto intellectual'.

I have introduced a counter intuitive restrictive strategic conceptualisation that was a response to various practical and theoretical issues to help adjust myself to the difficulties of rationalising my art practice in its research context. Masochism as a possible way of elaborating the restrictions being implied in the withholding of art practice was discussed. I detail ideas about how deriving satisfaction from an explicit withholding of intentions by substitution and welcoming less favourable (contradictory) conditions as a reward is something that is not fully understood, but something that I now imagine we all do. I imagine masochism is something that has an adaptive type of quality that living systems can draw upon but masochistic tendencies can also be used against them.

Santiago Sierra and Norbert Wiener were used to introduce systems of information that can be used to manipulate social and personal relationships. I suggest that information should not just be stored away for the limited use of only a few in this discussion. Sierra's art practice and the way that he metaphorically hides the content by appearing to present something else in its place is detailed to enquire about contradictory social practices. How I react to

the way information is manipulated for political and artistic ends is expanded because I feel these ideas contribute to my art practice, as they are part of my ecology.

On reflection, the chapters show an overall tendency to discuss transformations of one kind or another. For example, the way the titles of this document changed, the way language evolved in conjunction with self-awareness and the transformational effects of language itself. The last three chapters converge around the ideas about subverting or withholding the transformations. The strategies of withholding and subversion are something that came out of the research experience and I have revealed that this is significant both within art and within life. As a strategy, subverting or withholding transformations in art practice is like attempting to make the material of the art somehow desirable via the economies of cultural and personal value.

I will now consider how I might have changed in response to the development of this document with a view to giving insight to my creative practice and research exhibition. Proximity effect in reverse, at an art exhibition it might be reasonably expected, out of habit, that the art can be seen or experienced at the viewer's discretion. I am likely to in some way confront that expectation in response to the exhibition and the world I perceive. I could for example assume a persona that arbitrarily will not admit spectators or require submission to an arbitrary set of obligations and release forms before entry. The viewers of my art practice may instead be obliged or manipulated into imagining for themselves the 'art'. 'Un' accountably, for operational reasons the artwork may be more understandable to the viewer the less they know, see and the further away they are.



Figure 17. *Harvester (combine) #999*. DB. 2015. Mixed media.

Dimensions variable. Detail. Photo DB.

Image: created at time of final document edits.

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Figure 18 *Harvester (combine) upside-down #4215*. DB. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Photo DB. 2015.

Appendix 1 *Documentation*

Images of creative practice sequenced chronologically from beginning of candidature to examination exhibition.

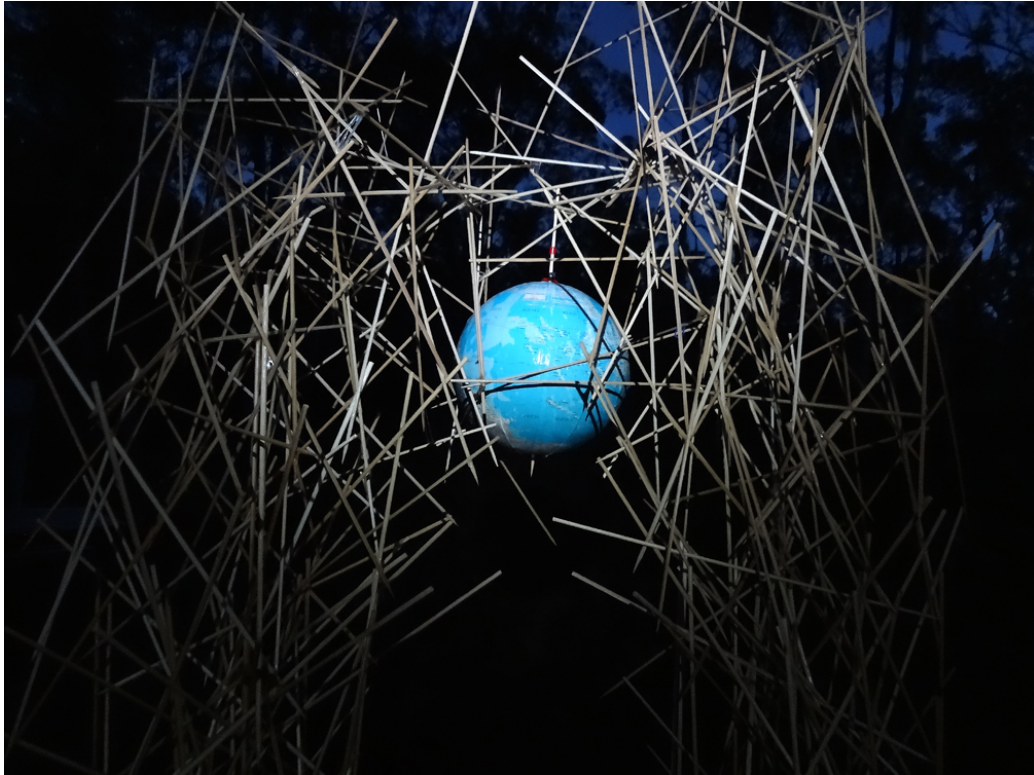
The chapter icons are reproduced as reiterations from my primary source practical research documentation. The chapter icons were used as conceptual place markers during the development of the research.



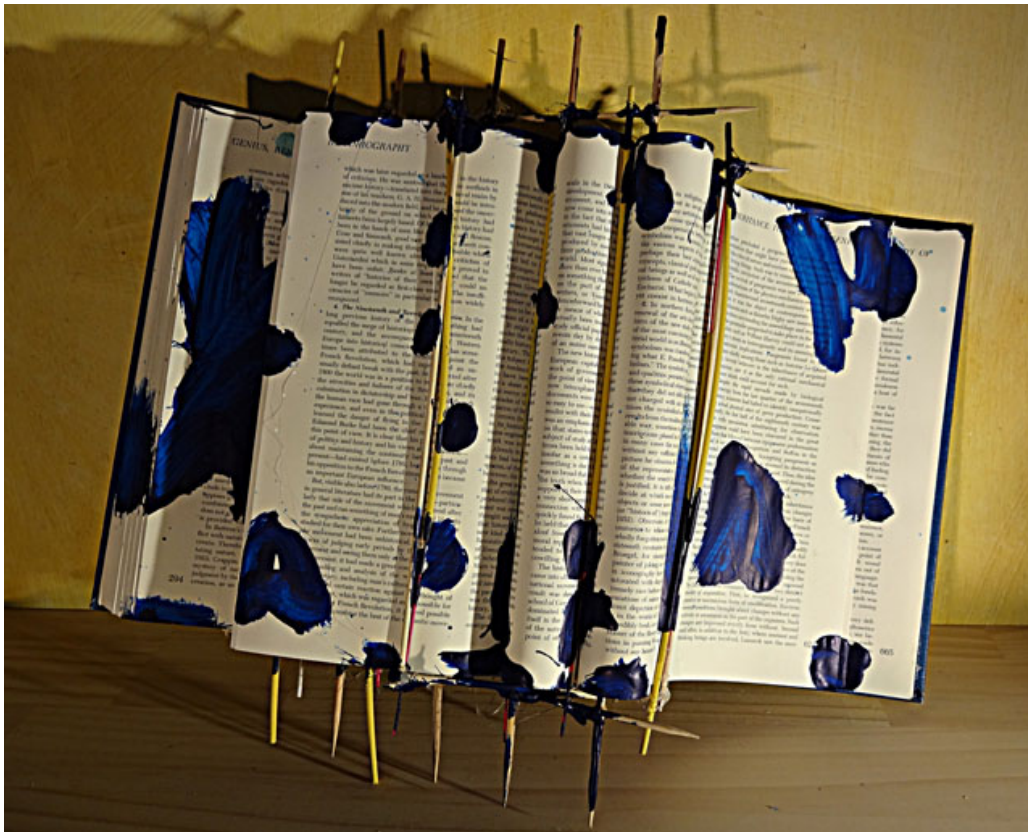
9 July 2013. Image from DSC01911. Sequence number 1



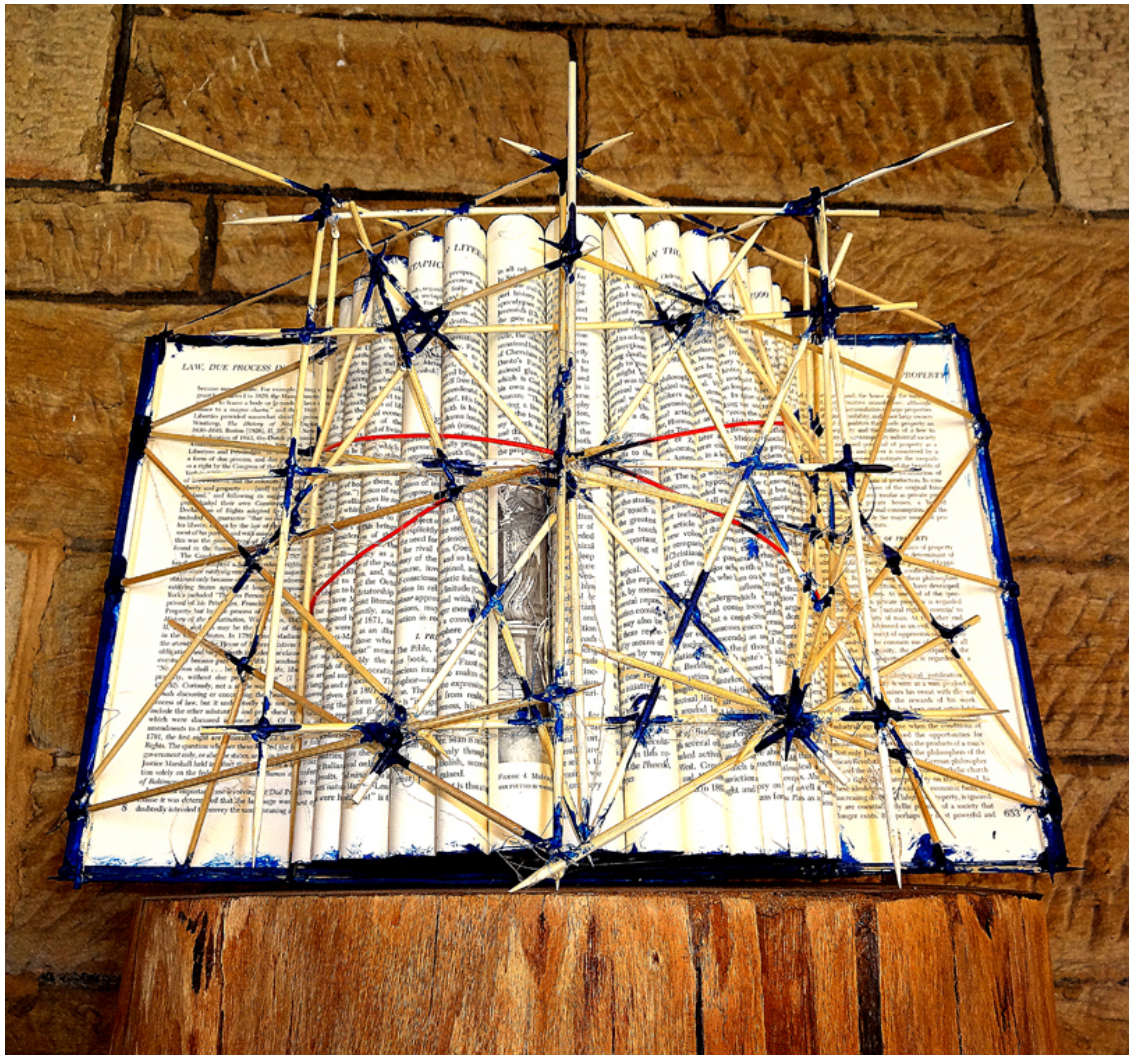
20 August 2013. Image from DSC02177. Sequence number 2
1 years worth of supermarket receipts folded into structure



17 February 2014. Image from DSC02851. Sequence number 3
Icon for Chapter 2 created from detail of this image.



8 July 2014. Image from DSC03098. Sequence number 4



12 July 2014. Image from DSC03168. Sequence number 5

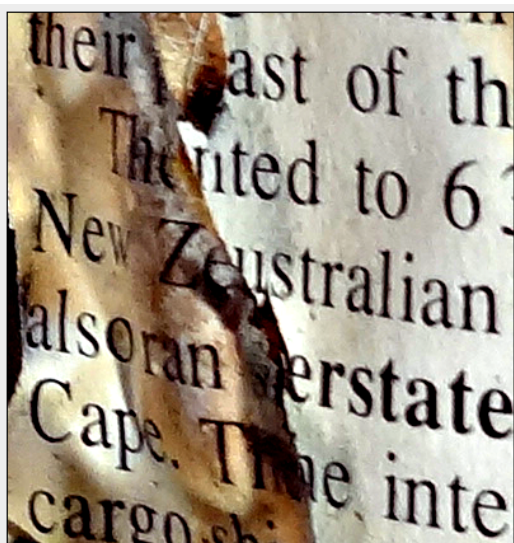


25 July 2014. Image from DSC03225. Sequence number 6

Icon for Chapter 1 created from this image



8 November 2014. Image from DSC03435. Sequence number 7
Icon for Chapter 5 created from this image.



8 November 2014. detail from DSC03435 (above). Sequence number 8
Icon for chapter 4 created from this image. *New Zeustralian*.



5 June 2015. Image from DSC04200. Sequence number 9
Harvester Combine series



7 June 2015. Image from DSC04256. Sequence number 10
Harvester Combine series



7 June 2015. Image from DSC04297. Sequence number 11

Harvester Combine series

Exhibited Works. SCA gallery. 2015
Access Restricted-Operational Reasons



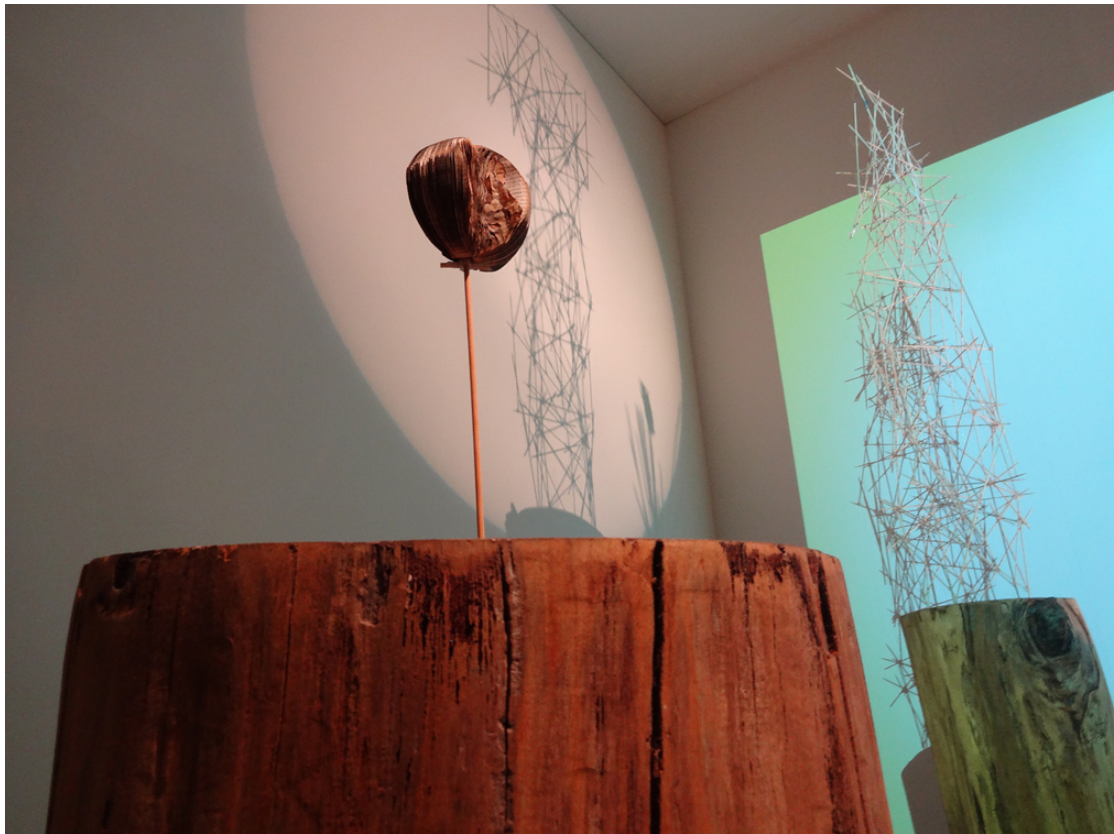
19 September 2015. Image from DSC04687. Sequence number 12
Examination exhibition. 'Reception area', there is an entry space on right hand side between temporary partition and wall.



19 September 2015. Image from DSC04671. Sequence number 13
Examination exhibition. 'Reception area' detail



20 September 2015. Image from DSC04692. . Sequence number 14
Examination exhibition, facing 'Reception area' entrance



20 September 2015. Image from DSC04699. Sequence number 15
Examination exhibition. Detail.



20 September 2015. Image from DSC04749. Sequence number 16
Examination exhibition, facing double door entrance



27 September 2015. Image from DSC04853. Sequence number 17
Examination exhibition.

Note: Central sculptural element different to sequence number 14.



27 September 2015. Image from DSC04858. Sequence number 18

Examination exhibition. Documentation image.

Access Restricted-Operational Reasons. Reflexivity Imagined as Art Practice