



MONASH University

Playing the Fool

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Abstract

Playing the Fool

This research project uses Walter Benjamin's theories concerning the constellation and now-time (*jetztzeit*) within the context of Benjamin's description of the historicist and the historical materialist found in Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940). It seeks to use these theories as a methodological approach to art making. It will compare the historical materialist methodology with the art practice of Louise Lawler (amongst others) and look at how a similar methodology functions in my own practice. This methodological approach operates from an intentional position of *unknowing*, a position I describe as 'playing the fool'. This self-reflexive process involves the development of a *network of references* which question the systemic apparatus which supports art making, the viewer and the exhibition context.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arlo Mountford', with a stylized, cursive script.

Arlo Mountford

December 2019

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Generally, there are many more who I should thank, but I would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of Irene Sutton and Kati Rule at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne. Kati is also a fellow candidate and helped to keep things in perspective. Thanks to Gina Mobayed at Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, NSW, who in the midst of the research, curated a survey show of my work, titled *Deep Revolt* (2018). Our conversations prompted me to see ongoing concerns and correlations in the practice, I had either forgotten or failed to see. Thanks also to Monash University and the staff in the Graduate Administration Office for helping me navigate the more confusing side of Graduate Research.

Finally, thanks to my family. Psychologists would no doubt have something to say about the father who decides to embark on a PhD, whilst raising two young children. So, Penelope and Matilda I am indebted to your patience, understanding and inquisitive nature. To Emily thank you for your ongoing support and involvement in the practice, it wouldn't be possible without you.

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Introduction

The concept of *Playing the Fool*, came to me after I laboured over the explanation of an earlier work to my supervisor, Jan Bryant. The work in question, was *Fish out of Water* (2010) (Figure 5), after explaining the origins and machinations of the piece as I saw them, Jan simply asked; “Why?” Generally, I’m adverse to responding to a question directly, and even more so when the question is regarding my art practice, but this question floored me. Part of me wanted to take the high ground, and respond with a diatribe about the necessary ambiguity of art, but given that I greatly respect Jan’s critical opinion, and that I knew, in this case, that this wasn’t true, I responded with; “I was playing the fool”. My intention with *Fish out of Water* was an elaborate joke, the object itself, is a stuffed pike (fish), which is normally installed hanging above a door, in a gallery space. It is often included in my exhibitions, as a reoccurring, absurd motif, which undermines the seriousness of the work around it with its *inexplicability*. It is for this reason that the work isn’t ambiguous and why I couldn’t defend it with such an excuse. The work is a joke *on* ambiguity, a joke which in most cases only I *get*, and subsequently it becomes a joke upon the audience, a derisive joke.¹

At the time of this conversation, I was halfway through the PhD and immersed in Walter Benjamin’s final theses, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), formalising my methodological approach in relation to the role of Benjamin’s, historical materialist.² Benjamin’s concepts concerning the constellation and the dialectical image combined with the historical materialist’s approach, had become crucial. Because it helped to position the methodology as a critical response to the apparatus of museum and gallery exhibition systems and spaces. These spaces along with the discourses of the western art canon, being the representatives of the broader historicist framework. My materialist response to this, through appropriation and references to the material of history, intended to upset the presupposition of the historicist apparatus.

¹ For a more detailed description of *Fish out of Water*, see the footnotes on page 39.

² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), 253–264.

However, as Jan's question and my response suggested, this description of the methodology only described half the picture. The methodology as I apply it, is not so clear cut and oppositional, with the materialist on one side and historicism on the other. Instead it is a state of flux, oscillating in the space between these ideas. The historical materialist position in the practice, is keen not to take an authoritative stance and become a part of the apparatus. Subsequently alongside the political positioning role of the historical materialist, there is also the often-self-sabotaging and humorous role of the fool.

In this thesis I have separated the fool into two parts, the fool and the jester. The fool is captured in the immediate reflexivity of the retort, the *unknowing* and instinctive response to the immediate historicist apparatus. The fool also appears in the practice as a part of the process, the quixotic act. The artist to some degree must implement a delusion of *self-belief*, this being, that the work will function or convey what they intend. The second part is the jester, the jester is more self-aware and to a degree *plays* the role of the fool, using humour and irony to upset assumptions the audience might make about the mythology of the artist and the immediate apparatus of the exhibition, both of which are a result of the presupposition of historicism.

However, the jester and the historical materialist in order to upset this presupposition, must subscribe to their own form of an improved future. A teleological aim to improve the present circumstance, by broadening the immediate discourse through a rupture. This is exemplified by the practice of institutional critique implemented by artists such as Elaine Sturtevant and Louise Lawler, who are discussed in this thesis, and my own methodology as it is discussed. However, perhaps it is possible that the historical materialist and the jester, by embracing the *unknowing* found in the fool, might avoid the trap of predetermination. The derisive retort of the fool jeopardising any stable ground one might position oneself on, in relation to it.

The thesis begins by locating the origins of the methodology in the work *Don't bite the horse's mouth where you eat my friend* (2010). Although this is a work made outside the purview of the research, it is integral to the development of the approach as it has become formalised in the research. *Don't bite* in the history of my practice, represents a decisive response to what

Foucault and later, Giorgio Agamben refer to as the “apparatus”.³ However the response was haphazard, not informed by Benjamin’s concepts of the constellation, the dialectical image or his positioning of the historical materialist. Instead, its retort was instinctive, although the strategies and complexities of the methodology are present, if not properly understood and articulated at the time, this instinct found its target in both the exhibition context, the presumptive mythology of the artist, and ultimately, the artmaking process itself.

The methodology, both as it is functioned in *Don’t bite* and the work made throughout the research, centres around the development of a network which throughout this thesis I refer to as the *network of references*. This network is an accumulation of both historical and contextual knowledge, which builds through a self-reflexive process, in response to the contextual implications of the apparatus. As I will discuss in the thesis, this process is subjective, informed by my own sense of irony, sarcasm, derision and humour.

In Chapter 2 the thesis will focus on Benjamin’s sifting through the material of history as a way of accounting for the past. The process which allows the messianic fragments of the past to form a constellation with the present, in the “now-time” (*Jetztzeit*), a space outside the continuum of time.⁴ A space Benjamin describes as necessary to the understanding of history and the creation of the dialectical image. The thesis will draw parallels between this process and my own *network of references*, positioning the artwork as a space which allows, what I describe, as the necessarily naïve sounding; *fleeting imagining*, to occur. Also in the Chapter, I will use Irving Wohlfarth’s essay, *On The Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin’s Last Reflections* (1977) to elaborate on a system of Benjamin’s concepts, a process both Wohlfarth and I, realise to be counter intuitive to the fragmentary nature of Benjamin’s corpus.⁵ However, this system is useful to help describe what I suggest, is the teleological

³ Giorgio Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?,” in *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (Palo Alto, United States: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁴ Thesis XV. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940.”

⁵ Irving Wohlfarth, “On The Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin’s Last Reflections,” *Glyph* 3 (1977): 148–212.

understanding of the future. One which Benjamin hints at, when referring to the improvement of the present, in his *Theses*, and one I suggest is integral to the role of the jester.⁶

Once the landscape of the historical materialist and historicism has been established, this thesis explores the role of the fool. I will look at two fictional examples, Prince Myshkin from Theodore Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (1869)⁷ and Don Quixote from Miguel de Cervantes' *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1605).⁸ The distinction between these two examples is that Prince Myshkin does not understand the world around him, this being 19th Century Russian society, and thus appears to those around him as an idiot. But Myshkin does not presume to know the world around him, whereas Don Quixote assumes the world around him to be something it is not. Don Quixote is deluded, but Myshkin is simply naïve. In this thesis I will argue that both these forms of the fool contribute to a strategy of *unknowing* that exists in the methodology.

The other side to this fool however, as I have mentioned, is the jester. The jester is more sophisticated than the fool in their response to context, choosing to 'play the fool' in order to question the existing apparatus. In Chapter 3, I will explore a series of examples of the jester found in art history. Beginning with the introduction of the ready-made or the *objet trouvé* (found object), as it was described by Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. I will briefly discuss the contention of authorship surrounding the submission of *Fountain* in 1917, to the Society of Independent Artists. I will then look at Sturtevant's use of the repetition in her practice, which in the 1960s seemed to extend the logic of Pop Art, but caused controversy by her geographic and temporal proximity, to the works she repeated. The thesis will then discuss the distinction between Sturtevant's practice and that of Sherrie Levine, whose work along with others in the late 1970s and 80s, some of whom were included in Douglas Crimp's

⁶ Thesis VIII. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

⁷ Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot 1869* (Hertfordshire, Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996).

⁸ Miguel de Cervantes, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha 1605*, ed. Gustave Doré 1832-1883 et al. (Adelaide: Adelaide : The University of Adelaide Library, 2002).

exhibition *Pictures* (1977), embraced the term “appropriation”. A term which did not accurately describe the repetitions of Sturtevant. Finally, the Chapter will look at the art worlds “Infinite Jester”⁹ Maurizio Cattelan, focusing on his *Another Fucking Readymade* (1996), a work which saw Cattelan intentionally testing the ethical boundaries of the exhibition apparatus, by stealing another artist’s exhibition for his own show. Despite this provocation however, the museum became complicit in the crime, quickly admonishing Cattelan’s act by its inclusion, and in doing so exemplifying how quickly the apparatus assimilates the questions asked of it.

Chapter 4 reviews the work of Louise Lawler. A contemporary and sometime collaborator of Levine’s, Lawler’s photographic practice adds a level of complexity to the method of appropriation. The artworks captured through Lawler’s subjective lens, although recognisable, appear almost figurative, captured ‘unawares’ in the often-compromised position necessary to the machinations of the art world. This being auction houses, during exhibition installs, or the improvised curation of a domestic setting, often found in a collector’s house. If the photographs are taken in museums or galleries, Lawler composes them so that the relationships between works and their context is interrogated. As Roslyn Deutsche describes, Lawler’s lens is derisive, she questions the power relationships and presuppositions of her immediate context.¹⁰ Part of the Chapter focuses on the publication, *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter: photographs and works* (2012).¹¹ Particularly the work found within its pages, *What Else Could I Do?* (1994), which is a photograph of Gerhard Richter’s *Kerze (511-3)* (1982). For me this work exemplifies the disconnect between, what I

⁹ Tom Morton, “Maurizio Cattelan: Infinite Jester,” *Frieze*, last modified 2005, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://frieze.com/article/infinite-jester>.

¹⁰ Rosalyn Deutsche, “Louise Lawler’s Rude Museum,” in *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (Looking Back)*, ed. Helen Anne Molesworth and Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, Ohio : Cambridge, MA: Columbus, Ohio : Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, 2006), 123–132.

¹¹ Louise Lawler, *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter : Photographs and Works*, ed. Dietmar Elger and Tim Griffin (Munich : Dresden: Munich : Schirmer/Mosel , 2012).

would describe as Richter's self-historicising practice, and the historical materialist practice of Lawler.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on works made throughout the research. Chapter 5 focuses on the body of work *Sifting Space* (2018-19) a series of moving image works generated using 3D computer software. Chapter 6 acts as an appendix for other works made within the purview of the PhD. It is important to remember that the context of the academic research has, as the methodology prescribes, greatly impacted the *network of references* which inform each of the works. Subsequently, the works in Chapter 6 almost exist as biproducts of the research ideas, generated in response to particular periods during the investigation. The piece *Annotated Biography* (2016) features throughout the chapter on Benjamin (Chapter 2) for example, as it exemplifies elements of the methodology. However other works although still relevant, are only mentioned in the appendix.

Sifting Space is a group of moving images, the camera travelling through 3D models of recently closed, artist run initiatives and not-for-profit galleries, that have been rendered from my memory. Conceptually there is a strong relationship to Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex* (1995), a fact I only came to realise, as the work developed. In his work, Kelley modelled the buildings he had been educated in. Speaking to the controversial therapy, repressed memory syndrome, Kelley only modelled the interiors he could remember, the unremembered spaces were left as white blocks. Likewise, in *Sifting Space* the models are distorted by the flaws in my recollection.

Also, in relation to *Sifting Space*, I look to Sturtevant's repetitions, which although not perfect, still hinged on tricking the viewer, albeit briefly. As Deleuze suggests the repetition is distinct because each iteration is different.¹² In the case of Sturtevant the contextual and temporal shift, positions her repetitions as questions. They represented an *unknown*, causing a rupture in the art context, at the time of their making. The Chapter also reintroduces Lawler's

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (1968), ed. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

subjective lens, the camera as it pans through the models takes Lawler's style as its starting point, but here it is lost, without the recognisability of artworks found in Lawler's work, it is Lawler's perspective which becomes the recognisable appropriation.

Writing even here in the introduction, about the works creates a dilemma for me as the artist, I often feel compelled to explain the work, which is problematic given that doing so limits the field of interpretation open to the viewer. Lawler speaks to a similar reluctance to explain her work in an interview with Donald Crimp in 2001, "The work works [sic] in the process of its reception. I don't want the work to be accompanied by anything that doesn't accompany it in the real world".¹³ Lawler here is talking about not wishing to "foreground" the work, a sentiment which I sympathise with. And I do feel that some of the writing in this thesis, especially in Chapters 5 and 6, will perform this "foregrounding" function, in relation to my work. Having said this, I must also admit that embarking on the PhD, inevitably requires me to account for the research in writing.

However, there is not only the issue of "foregrounding", but also the complication of translatability. Mieke Bal in her essay, *Translating Translation* (2007)¹⁴ quotes Michael Ann Holly on writing about art, "the act of trying to put into words, spoken or written, something that never promised the possibility of translation".¹⁵ What is interesting about Holly's statement is the autonomy it gives to the artwork, like Lawler it privileges the interaction between the viewer and the work rather than the mediation of the written word. Benjamin in his *The Task of the Translator* takes the argument one step further. Suggesting that despite the idea that art speaks to our "nature and existence", that for the artwork to consider the receiver is detrimental, "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener."¹⁶ Likewise, the methodology as it will be discussed operates as a

¹³ Louise Lawler and Douglas Crimp, "Prominence Given, Authority Taken," *Grey Room*, no. 4 (2001): 71–81.

¹⁴ Mieke Bal, "Translating Translation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6, no. 1 (2007): 109–124.

¹⁵ Michael Ann Holly, "Interventions: The Melancholy Art," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 1 (2007): 7–17.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* 1921," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), 69–82.

response to context, not preconceptions about the audience. This thesis will describe this methodology, but not the exhibition which will follow it. In keeping with the approach, the exhibition is a response to its immediate context and will not be “foregrounded” or translated here.

Chapter 1 Don't bite the horse's mouth where you eat, my friend.

For the purpose of the ongoing research, this chapter describes the strategies and complex *network of references* which contribute to the methodology found in the work, *Don't bite the horse's mouth where you eat, my friend* (2010).¹⁷ (from here on referred to as *Don't bite*), exhibited as a part of NEW010, at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (ACCA).¹⁸ The strategies used to make this work negotiate a space between Walter Benjamin's historicism and the perspective of Benjamin's historical materialist, however, at the time of making *Don't bite*, this methodology was not consciously articulated.¹⁹ Initially the chapter will expand upon the theoretical landscape this methodology is operating in, a methodology which has been formalised through the course of the research. It will then draw examples from *Don't bite*, discussing them as both *unknowing* responses and catalysts for the research strategy. Once these examples have been examined, Chapter 2 will focus on Benjamin's concepts, the constellation of fragments, his particular use of messianic time and the dialectical image. It will identify elements in the practice that are indicative of Benjamin's theories.

1.1 The Landscape

It would be simplistic to separate Benjamin's historical materialism and historicism into two binary opposites, positioning the historical materialist in constant opposition to the authoritarian nature of historicism. It would also be inaccurate, to describe historicism as constantly dismissing what it sees as the superfluous material of history, for the relationship between the two positions, is much more interconnected and complex. The historical material, the fragments as Benjamin would describe them, are equally important to one another, each has the potential to combine with the present in Benjamin's "*Jetztzeit*" or "now-

¹⁷ Arlo Mountford, "Don't Bite the Horse's Mouth Where You Eat, My Friend.," *Vimeo.Com*.

<https://vimeo.com/202459105>

¹⁸ Juliana Enberg et al., *NEW010, NEW 2010* (Southbank, Vic.: Southbank, Vic. : Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2010).

¹⁹ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

time” to catalyse the “dialectical image”.²⁰ ²¹ This act of bringing forth material from the past is a way to combat the presumptive nature of historicism, but historicism is able to shift and accommodate much of the historical materialist redress. Historicism is not a static monolith, its power lies in the institutions, museums and discourses which make up what Giorgio Agamben describes as the “apparatus” and Foucault describes it as the “*dispositif*”.²² The nature of the “apparatus” is that it can assimilate and articulate contradictory discourses within its structure.

This ability to hold two or more contradictory discourses is not necessarily a bad situation. As Boris Groys discusses in his introduction to *Art Power* (2008), the pluralistic nature of contemporary art manages to exemplify this position. In fact, Groys describes modern art “not as a pluralistic field [sic] but a field structured according to the logic of contradiction.”²³ Groys goes on to attribute this, to a shift in representation, suggesting that art has always represented the greatest possible power. First this was the divine, then the natural and now the modern state, which proclaims a balance of power to be its ultimate goal, “art tries to offer an image of the utopian balance”.²⁴ The problem is in order to maintain this balance of power it is necessary to exclude anything which distorts the balance.

It is in the excluded debris, that Benjamin’s historical materialist is sifting, searching for material which will rupture the historicist apparatus. Despite historicism’s ability to assimilate much of the criticism historical materialism challenges it with, it shouldn’t be forgotten that Benjamin wished to break the historicist structure. For Benjamin, the constant agitation of the materialist is not done in order to contribute to or indeed broaden a discourse that,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Walter Benjamin, Howard Eiland, and Kevin McLaughlin, “On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress,” in *The Arcades Project* (United States of America: Harvard University Press, n.d.), 456–488.

²² Agamben outlines his understanding of Foucault’s *dispositif* here. Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?”

²³ In this case when Groys uses the term “modern art” he is including contemporary art. Boris Groys, *Art Power*, ed. Inc NetLibrary (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 2008).

²⁴ Boris Groys, *Art Power*, ed. Inc NetLibrary (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 2008).

subsequently broadens the apparatus, but is done in order to constantly question the apparatus, and the presupposition of power inherited by historicism.

It also shouldn't be imagined that the excluded debris which the historical materialist is working with is limited to the forgotten or the under-represented. The historical materialist works with all the material of history, including the material accepted by an historicist interpretation, recasting it and manipulating the discourses, creating anachronisms and subversions in the historicist system. This movement within the discourses is slippery however, the apparatus is quick to assimilate, and often the line between criticism and complicity is hard to judge.

Both historicism and historical materialism are necessary to the methodology. The power presupposed by the historicist, forces the historical materialist into a position of response or reaction. But the historical materialist is not sitting by passively waiting to respond, it is constantly agitating against the presupposition of the historicist apparatus. It is not apparent that this constant agitation is always in its best interests, the adoption of a pluralistic model by the apparatus can give the impression that historicism is an open and critical space in which to operate (and to a degree this is often the case). But historical materialism, whilst acknowledging improvement, distrusts such consensus, it distrusts historicism's ability to operate from a position of doubt, from a position where its own inherited power is in jeopardy, from a position of *unknowing*. The methodology advocates this historical materialist position, the act of responding and reacting, the retort offered *unknowingly*, operating within the historicist apparatus with a view to question, criticise and ultimately break the apparatus.

This reaction by the historical materialist, given the power relationships between historical materialism and historicism, is of course, a political act. But as I have mentioned it is dangerous to assume historicism and historical materialism are simply two opposed positions. Historicism's position is systemic, it builds upon itself without questioning its position, because it sees no reason to do so. It can operate unwittingly, presupposing the power and the design of its position. This design is linked to a teleological purpose of progress, tied to a

“utopic balance of power”.²⁵ As a part of the methodology applied in the following examples, the historical materialist’s position is, initially at least, not teleological, its reactive impetus is too instinctive and *unknown*. But as the response develops, it becomes less raw and more sophisticated, it can acknowledge improvements as historicism recasts the apparatus. This acceptance of improvement suggests the methodology (although not necessarily Benjamin’s historical materialist methodology) has another agenda beyond responding to the historicist narrative. A teleological vision of a utopic future where the fragments of history are complete.²⁶ ²⁷ This means that this methodological approach sees both historical materialism and historicism as using the past to move towards their own vision of the future, and both have different strategies for getting there.

1.2 The Purview of the Research

Don’t bite came into the purview of the current research as an important precursor. The earlier work was indicative of an ongoing preoccupation with history and how it shapes contemporary art making, found in the practice. I realised in my work there was a continuing concern with how the personal, local and the broader fabric of history combine to create a complex *network of references*. This focus on history and time in *Don’t bite* stands out as an example of a collapse of historical structures in the practice, prior to my engagement with Benjamin.²⁸ And thus, it appeared to offer both a naïve approach to history as well as an *unknowing* response. Since beginning the PhD this *response* has become more formalised, the methodology posing a relationship to history that has crystallised the preoccupations mentioned earlier. It was the work, *Don’t bite* that was the springboard for this conscious development. Having said this, I should point out, that by identifying the self-reflexive,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wohlfarth and Scholem both talk about Benjamin’s use of the Jewish Messianic future. Wohlfarth, “On The Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin’s Last Reflections.”

²⁷ G G Scholem, “Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, Schocken paperbacks (Schocken Books, 1995), 1–36, <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=LeiO6-CZnuoC>.

²⁸ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940.”

unknowing element in the methodology of works made before the PhD, that the focus of the research is not to implement a methodology that operates from a position of *knowing*. Instead the research proposes that this *unknowing* is necessary to the methodology. It will be discussed in Chapter 3 as a part of an artmaking strategy which involves myself, the artist assuming the role of a fool.

1.3 A Complex Network of References

Firstly, a short disclaimer; the work *Don't Bite* is an important work in the history of my practice. Running at 27 minutes, this short film and installation is full of intertextual references, which is the nature of the applied methodology. Each reference has the potential to lead the writing on long tangents, which would distract from the focus of this chapter. Many of them if they were to be unpacked, would require their own chapters. The purpose here, is to describe through examples, how a *network of references* coagulated into a single work and how this functioned within the broader practice. Subsequently the unpacking of each reference is, for the purpose of illustrating past work, necessarily short, but gives a sense of the network as a whole.

1.4 A Sequel

It is useful to know that *Don't Bite* was in some respects, a sequel. Earlier, in 2008, the work *Return to Form: NDINAVIA* was made..²⁹ It was a short film produced in response to a drunken proposal for an artwork made by myself, which due to my very inebriated state, I cannot remember conceiving or proposing. I had myself filmed while I announced the proposal for a new artwork. However, the works concept was centred on a process of responding to this proposal, suggesting aesthetic elements and a method for bringing them about, as well as a character, location, actions, and certain sound elements. I chose to elaborate upon these by including extra characters, a Polar Bear and a Wanderer, as well as a script.

²⁹ Arlo Mountford, "Return to Form: NDINAVIA," *Vimeo.Com*. <https://vimeo.com/194585117>



Figure 1 *Return to Form: NDINAVIA*, Production Still (2008). Photo, Emily Schinzig.

Explaining their motivations throughout the script, these new characters question the initial drunkenly conceived character's reasons for being here, as well as their own. Placing the work in a state of existential crisis, questions are asked, such as:

"Why make this work in the first place?"

"Is the process flawed?"

"What is the discrepancy between the conception of an idea and its production?"

As possible answers to these questions, the script makes references to art history and popular culture.

This process and the tools such as the characters, script and narrative, plus the use of a film crew, developed to the point that by the end of the artwork's production, they could be implemented again in response to a problem. When the opportunity to participate in the annual "NEW" exhibition at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne, was presented to me in 2009, this set of tools seemed like an appropriate way to respond.³⁰

1.5 A New Iteration or a Sequel

The title *Don't bite the horse' mouth where you eat, my friend*, was a response to an offer to participate in a group exhibition of emerging artists, selected by curators at ACCA in 2010.³¹ Undoubtedly, exhibitions such as these offer great opportunities for artists to profile their work to a larger audience, it is assumed that viewers understand the way the museum or gallery has already implemented a strategy of inclusion and subsequently exclusion, when presenting these artists and their works. *Don't bite* started as a working title, which acted as a reminder that I had to live up to the premise of an externally imposed classification: the

³⁰ Enberg et al., *NEW010*.

³¹ It is a common model used by museums and public galleries that see their function during these exhibitions as gateways for artists. Exhibitions such as these appear to legitimise the artist's practice in the eyes of the public, forming a pre-selected group of curator and institution sanctioned, emerging artists.

‘emerging artist’. I used an amalgamation of three colloquialisms which infer a responsibility on the receiver, to not question the opportunity given to them. This reminder was not only ironic, but also sarcastic, providing for the viewer a key, both to the context in which the work was made and through which to interpret the work. However, over the course of the film this sarcasm dissipates, the work becoming less concerned with the context of the exhibition system and more focused on the process of art making.

Irony, n.1. orig. *Rhetoric*. **a.** As a mass noun. The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect; *esp.* (in earlier use) the use of approbatory language to imply condemnation or contempt (cf. *SARCASM n.*). In later use also more generally: a manner, style, or attitude suggestive of the use of this kind of expression. Cf. *IRONIA n.* ³²

Sarcasm, n.1.a. A sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt. Now usually in generalised sense: Sarcastic language; sarcastic meaning or purpose. ³³

Derision, n.1.a. The action of deriding or laughing to scorn; ridicule, mockery. ³⁴

1.6 The Storyteller

The moving image component of the work starts with the Storyteller (the name I gave to the narrator in the work) (*Figure 2*). He introduces the characters and the situation to the audience. This plot device commonly found in fairy tales, is a convention that helps to establish a rapport with the viewer or reader, bridging the gap between the characters and

³² Oxford English Dictionary, “‘irony, n.’,” accessed May 2, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/99565?rskey=bvCU2M&>.

³³ Oxford English Dictionary, “‘sarcasm, n.’,” accessed May 2, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/170938>.

³⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, “‘derision, n.’,” accessed May 13, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/50591?redirectedFrom=derision>.

the audience. However, in the case of *Don't bite*, this introduction is probably where 'derision' as a strategy is most fully activated. The viewer despite the presence of the Storyteller, is not settling into a sofa for a safe and immersive formulaic experience. They are instead located in a gallery space, conscious of the people around them, unsure why they are being directly addressed by this character. Based on his appearance, he also does not seem to be a particularly convincing version of his stereotype.

An inspiration for this scene was Rodney Grahams photograph, "Renaissance Man" (2006).³⁵ In this photograph Graham sits outside what looks to be a classroom dressed as a modern-day Renaissance man. The cut of his shirt is reminiscent of the Renaissance period with its low v-shaped neck which can be tied, and its wide collar, combined with a square pattern which crosses the mid-torso and travels up over each shoulder. Under this he appears to be wearing a dark brown high-necked skivvy, on the bottom he is wearing pressed, lighter brown pants. On his feet are tan leather shoes with a seam down the centre which gives the impression of them being hand-made. Graham's grey hair is shoulder length and he is looking directly at the camera. In his hands he is holding a wooden recorder. His look is one of conviction, this character wishes to convey to us the seriousness of his profession.

This is Graham presenting himself as the character, in another triptych image from the same body of work we see the character playing his instrument as part of a Renaissance trio.³⁶ Graham's character isn't quite sarcastic, but he is presenting us with a stereotype, this image of the academic or teacher whose field of research or interest is so specific it relegates them to edges of the educational system. Graham I believe, treats this character with some sensitivity, but it does trigger a smirk from the audience, at least from those of us who might

³⁵ Rodney Graham, "Rodney Graham, Lobbing Potatoes at a Gong, Renaissance Man," *BAWAG PSK Contemporary*, last modified 2006, accessed April 22, 2019, <http://www.bawagfoundation.at/index.php?id=114&ausstellung=87>.

³⁶ 3 Musicians (Members in the Early Music Group "Renaissance Fare", performing Matteo of Perugia's 'le Greygnour Bien' at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, Late September 1977), 2006

identify with or know someone similar to Graham's depiction. In contrast to Graham's sensitivity, the Storyteller in *Don't bite*, accentuates the stereotypical features of the character. His ridiculous beard and wig, his jacket and pompous voice are a caricature of the sage like figure, depicted by Graham.

There is also a coincidence here with Benjamin's Storyteller.³⁷ Benjamin's Storyteller looks to the orator found in Ancient Greece, making direct reference to Herodotus and his work "Histories".³⁸ In this passage Benjamin describes the dryness of Herodotus's delivery and a lack of explanation, as a quality which allows the texts to "retain their germinative power."³⁹ The Storyteller in *Don't bite* speaks with a similar disposition, and the situation he describes frames the narrative in the form of an epic. However, he is compromised by his appearance, he is playing the part of the Storyteller described by Benjamin, despite being created before my familiarisation with Benjamin. The Storyteller in *Don't Bite* is a pinup board of references. These references are worn precariously, jeopardised by the obviously false beard and wig, the quality of which is cheesy. Like most props found in costume shops their purpose is not to convince the viewer of the disguise, but to instead make it obvious to the viewer that the actor is playing a part. This obvious subterfuge shifts the audience's expectation to one of wariness, they cannot trust what the Storyteller says because he is not who he appears to be. Ironically, The Storyteller could almost be a stand-in for the artist, but he is not. Instead he has been placed there as part of a political response, part of the *network of references*. This depiction of a wisened old man makes a mockery of the patriarchy he reflects.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), 82–109.

³⁸ Herodotus, Aubrey DeSelincourt, and John Marincola, *The Histories*, ed. John Marincola, 1st ed. (London, England: Penguin Classics, 2003).

³⁹ Page 90. Benjamin, "The Storyteller, Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov."



Figure 2 *The Storyteller*. Don't bite Figure 2the horse's mouth where you eat, my friend. Production Still (2010). Photo, Emily Schinzig.

This mockery continues through a *network of references*. The Storyteller is strumming an acoustic guitar and across it is scrawled the quote “This machine kills fascists”. This overt statement lifted from the guitar of American protest and folk singer Woody Guthrie, is itself ironic. It reflects an intolerance typical of a fascist point of view, albeit towards fascism. Although this reference to Guthrie does not make a mockery of Guthrie, it does borrow his derisive attitude. A voice of the disenfranchised farmers and workers during the depression and later a supporter of communism, Guthrie employed a caustic and often sarcastic wit to sing his cause.⁴⁰ Despite this borrowing however there is mockery at play, the Storyteller is a lampoon, not of Guthrie but of the ageing politically left leaning individual, the fan who believes in the mythology of Guthrie. This mythologising is a symptom of an historicist interpretation of the past. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, “myth and history are incompatible”, the passage of time seen as myth, takes the form of a predetermined path, which reinforces the historicists position as one inherited. If the past is predetermined by gods or fate, then the position of power the historicist assumes is preordained.⁴¹ By lampooning this mythology, the methodology derides the simplification of history into myth, positing history over myth, but counterintuitively it does this by using the aesthetics of mythology.

This tactic of using the aesthetics of mythology to lampoon mythology, is ironic. The logic of this irony stabilises the artist in a position of response. And in terms of the methodology as it has been formalised in the current research, describes a concrete strategy. But this response was haphazardly applied, driven by a distrust of the institution and the exhibition criteria. This intuitive distrust spreads to other assumptions, in particular the assumptions about the audience’s position, the art making process and one’s own position as an artist. The result is a series of hits and misses, as the *network of references* builds over the duration of the moving image.

⁴⁰ Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie American Radical* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

⁴¹ Chapter 4, Mythic History: Fetish, Page 78. Susan Buck-Morss and Walter Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing : Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

Another reference in the Storyteller sequence is the presence of a taxidermy hare, referring to the action by Joseph Beuys' *How to explain pictures to a dead hare* (1965).⁴² The reference is twofold; on one level it speaks to the explanatory nature of the introductory sequence. Beuys similarly in his performance, explained pictures through inaudible whispers to a dead hare.⁴³ Perhaps it is unintentional if we believe Beuys' sincerity, but there is an irony to the action. Beuys mumbled to the dead hare, not to the human audience, who were forced to watch the action from outside the gallery. The hare's large ears appear to be perfectly formed for hearing; if the hare were not dead. However, we know that if the hare could hear, Beuys's explanations would still have fallen on deaf ears. The human audience, who Beuys does not address directly, is in some respects secondary, they are witnesses not participants.⁴⁴

Beuys' actions created loose templates for how others should interact with the world. This is the second level of the reference, which refers to the nature of Beuys' persona as a public artist. Beuys positioned himself as an artist who proposed that everyone was capable of being an artist, which in turn characterised him as a guru, mythologising his persona.⁴⁵ Beuys' practice required a belief in this persona from the audience. This belief required Beuys to present himself with sincerity. This performance, as with the rest of his practice is a form of pedagogy through performed example. During the Second World War, Beuys was shot down as a Luftwaffe pilot over the Crimea, and then rescued by a clan of nomadic Tartars. Beuys used this transformative experience to position his practice within a romanticist mythology, which allowed him to assume the position of shaman. As Matthew Gandy writes, this presented a "theatre of hubris" which was ambivalent to clarity, in place of this clarity he

⁴² "Joseph Beuys in the Action 'Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare,'" *Www.Artgallery.Nsw.Gov.Au*, last modified 1965, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/434.1997.9/>.

⁴³ Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, 1st U.S. e. (New York: New York : Abbeville Press, 1991).

⁴⁴ According to Stachelhaus the audience were locked outside the gallery by Beuys for the duration of the performance and forced to watch through the windows. After 3 hours they were let into the gallery here Beuys sat with his back to the audience cradling the hare.

⁴⁵ The flipside to this mantra was that Beuys appeared to already be an artist which in turn lead an audience to look to Beuys as one who had already transcended the banality of the everyday.

operated as a “purveyor of truth”, an interpreter of a “philosophical totality beyond historical and political discourse”.⁴⁶ The role of shaman allowed him to escape critical scrutiny whilst enjoying the hubris of a pedagogical practice.

Nonetheless, according to the Storyteller, who is lampooning mythologised figures, making a mockery of practices such as Beuys’, the assumptions made by the audience are to be distrusted. The situation created by the Storyteller is derisive, this mockery of mythologised figures is almost oedipal, but it doesn’t quite kill them off. It cannot kill them off because the Storyteller character is still integral to the narrative formula, that the work utilises. But the work is derisive and rebellious at the same time as formulaic. In order to both participate in, and oppose the apparatus; it assumes a position of sarcasm. What the Storyteller jeopardises is trust in the relationship between the artist and the audience. Not unlike a jester in a royal court.

The other more immediate discourse the work is derisive of is the submission by the gallery to the idea of the “next big thing”. This teleological formula subscribes to a historicist interpretation which both continues to mythologise the past and perpetuate a mythology of new encounters, for the audience, in the future. To quote the gallery’s website “Each year the next crop of *NEW* is eagerly awaited”.⁴⁷ Although no doubt rhetoric typical of a media press release, here the then director, Juliana Engberg, describes a cycle of harvest and release, positioning ACCA as harvester.⁴⁸ For an artist who participates in this system, two

⁴⁶ Matthew Gandy, “Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 4 (1997): 636–659.

⁴⁷ Engberg Juliana (Australian Center for Contemporary Art), “The *NEW* Series,” accessed April 8, 2019, <https://acca.melbourne/explore/text/the-new-series>.

⁴⁸ It should be noted that *NEW16* in 2016 was the last *NEW* exhibition to be shown by the ACCA and that despite my response to the exhibition system, the *NEW* series of exhibitions which started in 2003, did commission great works and opportunities for the huge number of artists involved. Also, although specific to the ACCA *NEW* Series my criticism extends to a particular format of exhibition, examples of which can be found in the Museum of Contemporary Art’s “Primavera” in Sydney, Australia, and Tate’s “Turner Prize” in London, United Kingdom, amongst many others.

situations are created, the first is a high degree of pressure to perform. The second is the skewed context in which the work is presented. Although it undoubtedly comes from a sense of insecurity on my part, I felt the audience projected the stereotype of the “new and young” on to the artists and their work. In response to this expectation then, the work, *Don't bite*, is at least in part, the sarcastic jester and the exhibition system, the royal court.

Chapter 2 Walter Benjamin

I have briefly described using *Don't bite* as an example, a methodological approach, albeit an approach implemented before the formalisation of this methodology as it exists now. This methodology involves movement between the framework of Benjamin's historicism and historical materialism. Operating as a materialist response, this movement is a self-reflexive action which keeps the agency of the artist oscillating within this space, propelled by a scepticism towards any authoritarian position or system and a fear of assuming or being perceived as operating from a hubristic position. This fear of hubris is a desire to avoid becoming an authority, not wishing to replace the system which the artist has recoiled from, with yet another form of assumed truth. This chapter will delve deeper into Benjamin's theories focusing on *Annotated Biography* (2016) a work developed within the purview of the research, which both exemplifies the methodology and aligns with Benjamin's ideas.

There is a danger of misrepresenting both the studio work and Benjamin, in trying to fit the work to the theories too closely. As Irving Wohlfarth, who will be discussed later in this chapter, acknowledges in regard to Benjamin's work, "To reassemble its elements into such a structure is no doubt to risk over-systematising Benjamin's fragmentary and disparate corpus."⁴⁹ I have outlined in the previous chapter that despite a loose understanding of Benjamin's theories' whilst making *Don't Bite*, his ideas aligned with a general anxiety and political response to historicist assumptions, which I acted upon. This alignment has led me to research and eventually apply Benjamin's theories in my practice. The formalisation of this practice involves the conscious understanding of Benjamin's theories and requires a strategy and framework to operate.

Firstly, I will look at Benjamin's theory of fragments as a "constellation" (as he described the bringing together of disparate elements) and its similarity to my own *network of references*. I will then look at how a constellation of fragments from the past act in combination with the present to form Benjamin's "dialectical image". Proposing that a similar combination occurs

⁴⁹ Page 148. Wohlfarth, "On The Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections."

on a smaller scale for the audience when references to the past combine in the present space of an exhibited artwork. The subjectivity of the viewer's responses causes a *fleeting imagining*, to occur in the individuals mind, outside the continuum of time. *Fleeting imagining* is my term and is better described later in the chapter. I realise the term sounds naïve but believe to call it anything too sophisticated removes a sense of both the intuitive and the momentary from the phenomenon I am trying to describe here.

I will also use Wohlfarth's identification of the "messianic triad", which suggests that by combining the past and the present we must also consider the future. I suggest that Benjamin positions the agency of the historical materialist and subsequently my own agency within the context of the methodology, as one acting with an improved future in mind.⁵⁰ Positing like Benjamin, that accounting for the past is an endeavour towards a better future, this agency is not just responding and reacting *unknowingly* in the present between historical materialism and historicism, but is also, counter-intuitively, presuming a utopic vision of the future, an ultimately optimistic vision which it presumes to share with the audience.

In his *Theses*, Benjamin makes two small references to an improved future. The first suggests the historical materialist must stay in a constant "state of emergency, and this will improve on our position against Fascism".⁵¹ Although this particular thesis does not mention the future it is safe to say Benjamin is suggesting an improved alternative to the present. This form of direct response by Benjamin to his present circumstances, the rise of Nazism in Europe in the 1930s and 40s, is the historical materialist responding to the present. The second reference is in Part B of Thesis XVIII. Here Benjamin warns against "soothsayers" and offers that by focusing on remembrance as the Torah instructs in the Jewish faith, we avoid the "magic" of

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realise that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position against Fascism." Thesis VIII, Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

foreseeing a future. This avoids the future becoming a “homogenous empty line”, instead again as Benjamin suggests, we see in the Jewish faith that this leaves the future open, allowing “the Messiah to enter at any time”. I would posit that this allusion through the metaphor of the Jewish faith by Benjamin, indirectly suggests that the historical materialist struggle, is a struggle towards an improvement on the present and subsequently an optimistic future.



Figure 3 *Annotated Biography*, Install (2016). Photo, Arlo Mountford.

2.1 The Messianic Past

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.⁵²

Benjamin's image of the "Angel of History" unable to stop the "storm of progress" depicts an individual paralysed by the "catastrophe" of history.⁵³ Irving Wohlfarth describes in his essay *On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections*, the angel as the embodiment of the German term *Eingedenken*. The word *Gedenken* according to the Cambridge German-English Dictionary, translates as both "memory" and "remembrance".⁵⁴ Wohlfarth translates the term *Eingedenken* as "recollection" or "remembrance": "the angel's *Eingedenken* is motivated by the urge to recollect the broken past, to remember the dismembered." He describes the angel as re-enacting the "allegory of melancholy and the melancholy of allegory".⁵⁵ This image of the angel, as a figure motivated by a melancholic desire to account for a non-historicist past, is integral to the historical materialist's focus on the fragments that the present has forgotten and overlooked. The angel's gaze is melancholic because it appears trapped by its own fixation on the past. But as Sami Khatib points out the "Angel of History" is not representative of Benjamin, nor does it represent an "abbreviation" of Benjamin's "theses".⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ Buck-Morss also notes that the *Theses* is making a "pedagogical point" one "expressly political". The angel then is only part of Benjamin's concept,

⁵² Thesis IX. Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Cambridge German-English Dictionary, "Gedenken," *Cambridge German-English Dictionary*, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/german-english/gedenken?q=Gedenken>.

⁵⁵ Page 154, Wohlfarth, "On The Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections."

⁵⁶ Sami Khatib, "Melancholia and Destruction: Brushing Walter Benjamin's 'Angel of History' Against the Grain," *Crisis & Critique* 3, no. 2 (2016): 20–39.

⁵⁷ In his essay Khatib uses Freud's essay, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) to distinguish between the two, mourning being a form of object-loss and conscious, whereas melancholia is loss without object and unconscious. Khatib points out that that Benjamin was aware of melancholia's "own undermining of itself" as early as his book *Trauerspiel* (Mourning Play) where he does not distinguish between the two suggesting that melancholia is the playing out of mourning. Ibid.

representing a melancholic desire to hold onto the past whilst inevitably being propelled into the future by time.⁵⁸ It is this melancholic urge which allows the telescoping in on the remnants. As Benjamin describes, it facilitates a “unique experience with the past” through the details, so that they may be brought forth and become part of the constellation.⁵⁹ However, this melancholia can tip over into a mythologising of a past detail, slipping from remembrance into commemoration. Through the act of commemoration, a past detail takes on a disproportionate level of importance in comparison to other events. An example of this is the tradition of celebrating military achievements or defeats. Here, the mythology of a particular detail can distort the importance of other historical details. The mythology of the celebrated event can become a stand-in that overwhelms and conceals the other details.

Wohlfarth also directs us to the German term *Gedächtnis*. According to the Cambridge German – English Dictionary again, the term like *Gedenken*, can also be translated as “memory” but the distinction is that it refers to memory as the “mind’s store of remembered things”.⁶⁰ Wohlfarth translates the term as the “epic breadth” of the past, the chronical of acts and events. Benjamin discusses the chronicler in his *Theses*. “A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history.”⁶¹ This image of the past as a chronical is an important dimension to Benjamin’s theory, because it describes the material of the past as non-hierarchical, with all the fragments of the past being redeemed in the messianic future. However, the chronical is in danger of being interpreted as retrospectively causal. This can occur if the past is assembled by the historian to suggest a chain of events as a truth that supports the historian’s position. It is the

⁵⁸ Chapter 9: Materialist Pedagogy Page 287. Buck-Morss and Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.

⁵⁹ Thesis XVI, Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940.”

⁶⁰ Cambridge German- English Dictionary, “Gedächtnis,” *Cambridge German- English Dictionary*, accessed August 18, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/german-english/gedachtnis>.

⁶¹ Thesis III, Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940.”

assumption of supposedly given truths and the writing of history to support an ideology, which the historical materialist tries to fight against.

The past as a combination of *Eingedenken* and *Gedächtnis* describes an interpretation in constant flux, oscillating between an objective recording of the fragments and the subjective telescoping in on the detail. Each keeps the other in check; *Gedächtnis* keeps *Eingedenken* slipping from remembrance into melancholic myth, and *Eingedenken* keeps the chronical from slipping into causal progression. This oscillation empowers the past. Instead of relegating the fragments to a history already written, each fragment has the potential to be brought into the present as part of a constellation. This is the messianic power Benjamin refers to, each fragment of the past imbuing the historian with “a weak messianic power”.⁶²

2.2 The Constellation

Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.⁶³

When Benjamin wrote this in the *Epistemo-Critical Prologue* to *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928) Benjamin was distinguishing between “ideas” and “objects” (phenomena).⁶⁴ The idea, like the constellation is a representation perceived by the perceiver, that representation again like the constellation is subjective, embedded in history and tradition. However, the objects or stars which make up the representation are objective, they do exist, as does the physical relationship between them. Therefore, the constellation is both subjective and objective, its existence as material is objective, our representation of it (the idea) is subjective.

⁶² Thesis II, Ibid.

⁶³ Page 34, Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London, England: Verso, 2009).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Benjamin's constellation of messianic fragments fits well with the *network of references* found in my practice. The intertextual and historical references being the stars from the past, combined with the present, which form the constellation. However, I am operating from a self-reflexive position. My response is tempered by the tools of derision, sarcasm and irony as well as an allowance for an *unknowing* on my part. I do not know what will occur, or how the *network of references* will shift and change if I add a particular reference.

It is not that what is past casts light on the present, or what is present its light on the past: rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely a temporal, continuous one, the relation to what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. Awakening. ⁶⁵

There is a lot to unpack in this quote from Benjamin's *Passagen-werk*, but first I will discuss the "flash" which forms the "constellation", the "idea" that comes into being as a dialectical image. If we look now to a work made within the purview of the research, *Annotated Biography*, the material references in the work are historical, biographical and contextual. In the piece, the Polar Bear character who is also featured in *Don't Bite* and *Return to Form: NDINAVIA*, appears in short fictional texts written onto chalkboards (Figure 3).⁶⁶ These fictions place the Polar Bear into the context of works made by other artists. The works referenced share a common trait, they each use narrative and fiction themselves in some form. For example, Peter Fischli and David Weiss's *Der Geringste Widerstand* (1981) uses the narrative formula of a private-eye television drama.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Page 462, Benjamin, Eiland, and McLaughlin, "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress."

⁶⁶ For a more detailed account of *Annotated Biography*, see Chapter 6.

⁶⁷ Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Der Geringste Widerstand (The Point of Least Resistance)* (Switzerland: T & C Film Ltd, 1981).

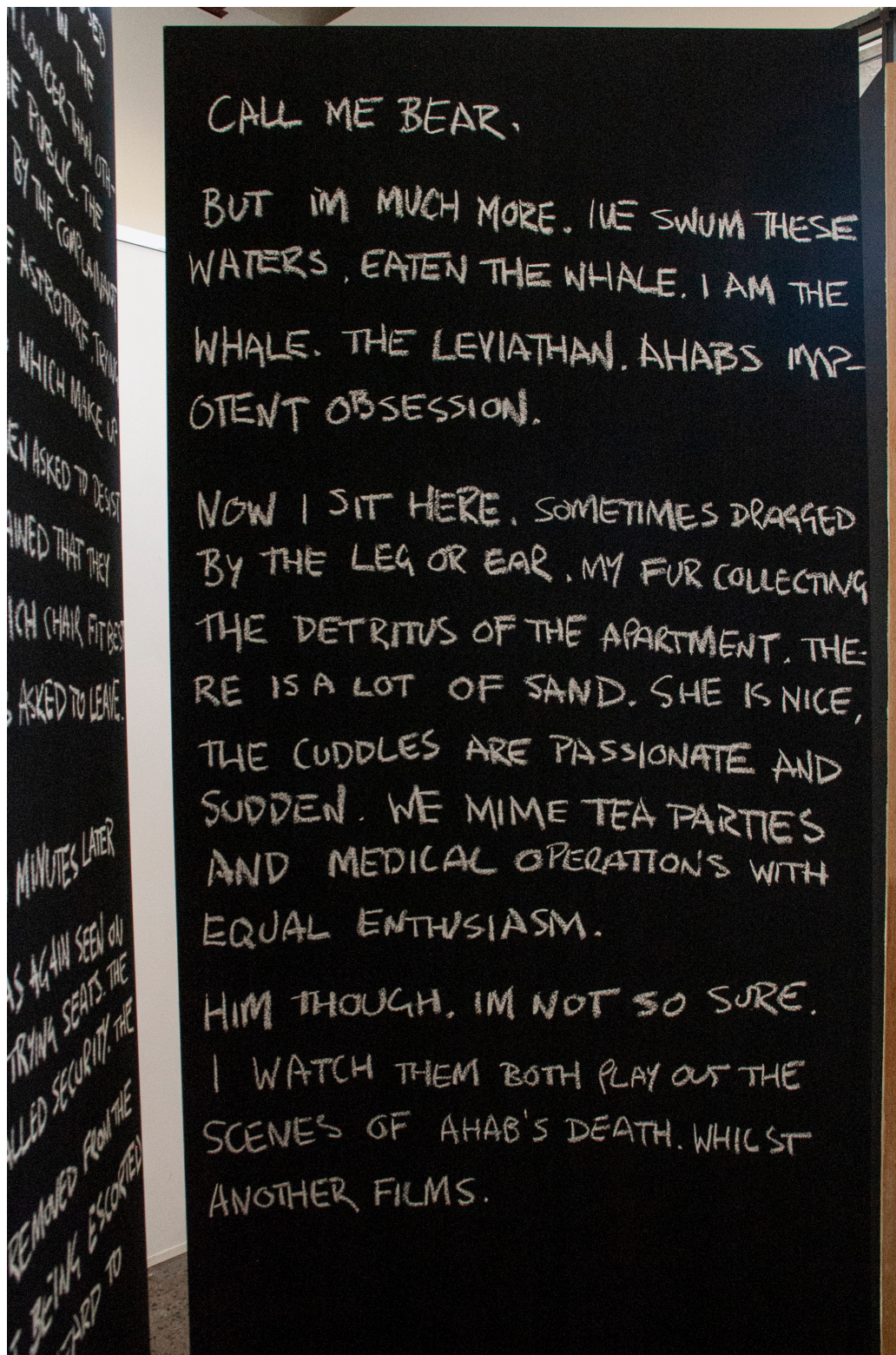


Figure 4 Annotated Biography, Detail (2016). Photo, Arlo Mountford.

This example of Fischli and Weiss's practice is useful, as it also operates within its own loose framework. Almost anti-theoretical, the two were making the Rat and Bear works in the early 1980s, a time when others were looking to dominant critical theories such as structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. In contrast, Fischli and Weiss were making decidedly low brow works, which humorously probed the more profound philosophical aspects of life.

⁶⁸ An example of this oscillation between high and low can be found in the plot of *Der Geringste Widerstand*. Towards the end of the narrative, Rat and Bear leave their search for a formula to become art stars, which has dominated the story up until now. They reflect upon the arbitrariness of the world around them, whilst enjoying a picnic as the sun sets over Los Angeles below. However, this philosophical reflection leads them to stumble upon another strategy for interpreting the world, which they immediately jump upon as a new formula for success.⁶⁹

This humorous bounce between concrete positions also occurs in my *network of references*, where humour allows for the references to be both looking towards more philosophical prospects for the future, and/or (for sometimes these occur at the same time) a deliberate positioning of the viewer in the present. For example, the Polar Bear costume, half stuffed into the packing sack in the corner of the space in *Annotated Biography*, is neither packed nor unpacked. It sits in a state of becoming, suggesting that the Polar Bear's biography is only part written and that the costume will be worn again in the future. The Polar Bears' head which pokes out from the sack appears to be winking humorously suggesting, even prophesising its own return. (Figure 5.) This wink acts in the present, as an act to directly communicate with the viewer, whilst also referring to the past. Both the Rat and Bear works by Fischli and Weiss and my Polar Bear sit between previous incarnations and potential ones in a possible future.

⁶⁸ Nancy Spector, "Clay Figures: Suddenly This Overview," in *Flowers and Questions: A Retrospective*, ed. Bice Curiger, Peter Fischli, and David Weiss (London, England: Tate Publishing, 2006), 122–133.

⁶⁹ This formula became the drawing work *Ordnung und Reinlichkeit (Order and Cleanliness)* (1981), a pamphlet of the work was distributed at screenings of the film.

This referencing to other works which share a common property, both of fiction and costumed antics, forms a link drawn between “what-has-been” and the present, while the mass of historical references contribute to an even larger network beyond an individual work. Other parts in the work, the chalk boards, the inclusion of an earlier piece, *Fish Out of Water* (2010) (Figure 3), have all featured in my own earlier works and contribute to the network as biographical references.⁷⁰ The context of an academic/art school tutorial space provides a third point of reference, again, like ACCA and the NEW exhibition context, all past and future exhibiting institutions are a part of the apparatus, which supports an historicist presupposition.

On the surface, the academic art school context may be overlooked as part of an historicist apparatus. It is not necessarily a space in which history is being written by the victors. And it is generally considered to be a space where the questioning of historicist perspectives is encouraged. But despite this, art schools are by their very nature institutions, operating as part of a hegemonic system of training. They are also often located within larger institutions, given that art schools are often departments inside university faculties. Institutions, the discourses they employ and to which they contribute, are part of the larger formation of the *dispositif*. Giorgio Agamben, builds upon Foucault’s term *dispositif*, adopting the English word ‘apparatus’ to describe the network of power which connects “a heterogeneous set of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions.”⁷¹ Agamben’s development of the term extends the apparatus to “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours and opinions or discourses of living beings.”⁷² Thus, the apparatus is not a manifestation of power and authority but a tool, historicism however, is power and authority manifested. The power assumed by historicism is systemic, the apparatus is presupposed.

⁷⁰ *Fish out of Water* is discussed again in the footnotes, later in the chapter.

⁷¹ Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?”

⁷² Ibid.

When making *Annotated Biography*, I identified two assumptions: that the objects considered in the space were present in a vacuum, not connected to history or the academic context. I felt that this assumption of the vacuum was a wilful act of blindness, ignoring the broader apparatus. The other assumption was a sense of safety felt by me, about what could be exhibited. This context of safety, influenced both the creation of the work and its interpretation, but again this security is afforded the art student by the apparatus, for, as Agamben suggests, the apparatus is anything which “secures, the gestures, behaviours and opinions or discourses of living beings”.⁷³ The methodology and the practice of the historical materialist requires the questioning of historicism and the tools it employs. In the case of *Annotated Biography* both these assumptions triggered a response of derision on my part, towards this sense of security and the wilful ignoring of the apparatus, which I admit in retrospect, may appear misguided, but was necessary. I say misguided because on the face of it I appear to be “biting the hand that feeds”, this “hand” being the institution supporting my position, which I then deride.⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Another derisive strategy was the inclusion of the work *Fish out of Water*. This was a deliberate misnomer, humorously included to confound interpretation and disrupt the network through absurdity. In 2010 I ordered a stuffed pike from a taxidermy business in England and had it delivered to my studio. It later became part of the work *Don't bite*. The ordering of the pike was a response to a review written in 1995 in the UK newspaper the “Independent” by the art critic Brian Sewell. This review dismissed Damien Hirst’s Turner Prize entry work *Away from the flock* (1992) as “no more interesting than a stuffed pike hanging over a pub door...”. In response to reading this review I ordered a stuffed pike from the United Kingdom and hung it over the gallery entrance at ACCA.

The act of ordering a stuffed pike was a reference to the process Hirst himself went through, to procure a tiger shark for another of his famous preserved animal works, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991). For this work, Hirst commissioned the services of the locally famous shark fisherman, Vic Hislop in Hervey Bay, Queensland, to catch the 4.3m shark, freeze it and then have it shipped across the world to the United Kingdom, where it was preserved in formaldehyde. The pike, a fish found locally in the rivers and canals of England was selected by me, using the taxidermist’s website, it then made a similar journey to the tiger shark

Again, as with *Don't Bite* and its references to the museum, the title, *Annotated Biography*, was used as a sarcastic reminder of the academic demands of my academic candidature. A requirement of the research process is the creation of an annotated bibliography, a selection of texts and references which are informing the research. This suggestion of a biographical bibliography is of course also referring to the *network of references* collected in the work, my version of Benjamin's "constellation".

albeit in reverse from the United Kingdom to Australia. Since the making the work, *Fish out of Water* has continued to reappear in my works, usually hung above a gallery door.

Quotes Sewell on Page 27. Les Gillon, *The Uses of Reason in the Evaluation of Artworks : Commentaries on the Turner Prize*, ed. SpringerLink (Online service) (Cham, Switzerland : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).



Figure 5 *Fish Out of Water* (2010). Included here in *Annotated Biography* (2016). Photo, Arlo Mountford.

2.3 The Dialectical Image

“The image, suddenly emergent”, for Benjamin the moment this occurred was not part of the continuum of time.⁷⁵ Benjamin distinguishes between “temporal” time; the passage of time that is “continuous” and the act of recognising “what-has-been” and its relation to the “now”, which creates the dialectical image. Benjamin refers to this moment as standing outside of time;

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by, the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*].⁷⁶

As Hannah Arendt notes in her footnote to the translation, Benjamin’s “now” is not meant to signify the present. By including the term *Jetztzeit* in inverted comma’s, Benjamin is referring to the “mystical *nunc stans*”.⁷⁷ The term *nunc stans* derives from Latin, it is an eternal space outside the continuum of time reserved for the Judeo-Christian god, a space “not subject to the limitations of time”.⁷⁸ Although Benjamin is not referring necessarily to a religious space it is a useful description for the separation of the act of interpreting history, from the “progression of time”. It is also important because it speaks to a stopping, a “standstill” a space where the “what-has-been” combined with the now, can come together in a “flash”. But where and when does this space occur? And if this is to occur, given each viewer’s subjective perspective, it surely occurs separately and differently for each individual.

Benjamin uses the example of Ancient Rome as an historical fragment combining with the “now” of the French Revolution, as the dialectical image “blasted out of the continuum of history.” He identifies Robespierre as the historical materialist envisioning this dialectal

⁷⁵ Benjamin, Eiland, and McLaughlin, “On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress.”

⁷⁶ Thesis XIV, Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940.”

⁷⁷ Footnote, Ibid.

⁷⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, “*nunc Stans*, n. .”, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/129190?redirectedFrom=nunc+stans>.

image.⁷⁹ In contrast, the images prompted by *Annotated Biography* are more a series of *fleeting imaginings*, multiple dialectical images which occur for the viewer, and I can only use myself as an example, dependant on my own subjective moment. This multiplicity of interpretations dependant on the viewer's (my) subjectivity, could be considered less politically potent than Benjamin's dialectical image of revolution. The difference here is scale, Benjamin's example is a national revolution. The *fleeting imagining* however, is the moment an artwork prompts a correlation in your mind, the moment an artwork makes you laugh, respond unwittingly or *jolts* your assumptions about what you are experiencing. This is as potent for the individual as monumental historical events. It is here, that the artwork produces the "dialectical image at a standstill", the moment a *fleeting imagining* takes place in one's mind, outside the continuum of time.

My use of the term *jolt* here is borrowed from Patricia Lee, who uses the term to describe a similar response in relation to the artist Sturtevant's works. In the case of these works, it is the moment the viewer realises they are not looking at, for example, the hand of Beuys, but one of her own 'repetitions', executed by Sturtevant in the same era as the practicing Beuys.⁸⁰ This moment of realisation causes a *jolt* in the viewer's mind, which makes them reconfigure their understanding of the work they are looking at. This breach in understanding is a political act, destabilising the viewer's position.

The distinction between Benjamin's example and the artwork which causes this *fleeting imagining* does not imply a dilution of political potency on the artworks part. The methodology is functioning within a framework of response, questioning historicist assumptions from a historical materialist perspective. Benjamin is describing a moment in history where he can exemplify the political potency of the historical materialist in action. I, on the other hand am applying it through practice, to the more localised context of an exhibition, identifying the structures within this local context and responding. The way a court

⁷⁹ Thesis XIV, Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

⁸⁰ Page 32, Patricia Lee, *Sturtevant: Warhol Marilyn* (London, England: Afterall Books, 2016).

jester may prick the conscience of the royal court; these *fleeting imaginings* operate as ruptures not revolutions, to the continuum of time, history and historicist assumptions.

2.4 The Messianic Future

redeem, v. 2. transitive. a. Of a person: to make amends or atonement for (an error, sin, or failing). b. To make good (a loss).⁸¹

good, v.1. *intransitive*. To become better, improve; to thrive, prosper. Also: to get better, recover. *English regional (south western)* in later use.⁸²

Irving Wohlfarth describes the messianic structure found in Benjamin's theories on history in his essay, as a "messianic triad" in which he positions the past, present and the future.⁸³ The past and its relationship to the present is an ongoing preoccupation of Benjamin's theories and writing. However, it is important to remember that the struggle of the historical materialist, is a striving towards a utopic vision of the future, a future where the messianic fragments become whole. Benjamin does mention the messianic future in his thesis, but Wohlfarth at the risk of over-systemisation, clearly positions Benjamin's theories in relation to a vision of the future (heaven) found in Jewish theology.⁸⁴

Benjamin's friend and colleague Gershom Scholem, himself a Zionist instrumental in the beginnings of the Jewish state in Israel, saw the redemption of history as something achievable through Jewish Mysticism.⁸⁵ In his move to Jerusalem in 1923, he focused on the

⁸¹ Oxford English Dictionary, "'redeem, v.'", accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/160234?rskey=IB9cpQ&am>.

⁸² Oxford English Dictionary, "'good, v.'", accessed August 18, 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/79926?rskey=dED4dw&am>.

⁸³ Wohlfarth, "On The Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections."

⁸⁴ Thesis XVIII B, Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

⁸⁵ Cynthia Ozick, "The Heretic: The Mythic Passions of Gershom Scholem.," *The New Yorker*.

study of original Hebrew texts (The Kabbalah) and later became the first Professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.⁸⁶ It was a move Benjamin, much to Scholem's despair, seemed unable to make.⁸⁷ According to correspondences between the two, it appears Scholem disagreed with Benjamin's interest in Marxism (in particular the Brechtian form of Marxism). However, Benjamin found inspiration in Marxism, proposing that it was through historical materialism not Jewish Mysticism, that the redemption of the past would be found.⁸⁸ For Scholem the future is "conservative, restorative and utopic". He does not see heaven as an individual redemption of one's spirit, as it is posed in Christian theology, but instead as the preservation of what exists, combined with a restoration of the past, "nourished by... a utopian impulse which now appears as a projection upon the past instead of projection on the future."⁸⁹ Again, Benjamin was not necessarily, positing a religious future, but an image of the future as a space, which redeems the past. It is where the messianic fragments become whole, a utopic future which attempts to bring the past with it. This is the utopia to which Benjamin's historical materialist aspires.

⁸⁶ Erik Hinton, "Six Hundred Thousand Faces: What Gershom Scholem's Take on Jewish Mysticism Can Teach Us Now," *The Paris Review*, last modified 2017, accessed September 23, 2019, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/07/13/six-hundred-thousand-faces/>.

⁸⁷ Scholem repeatedly tried to persuade Benjamin to move to Israel to escape the rise of Nazism in Europe, even securing positions for him at the Hebrew University in advance. Benjamin despite appearing enthusiastic towards the idea seemed unable to commit to the move. George Steiner, "The Friend of a Friend. (Correspondences of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem)," *The New Yorker* 65, no. 49 (1990): 133.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Scholem, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism."

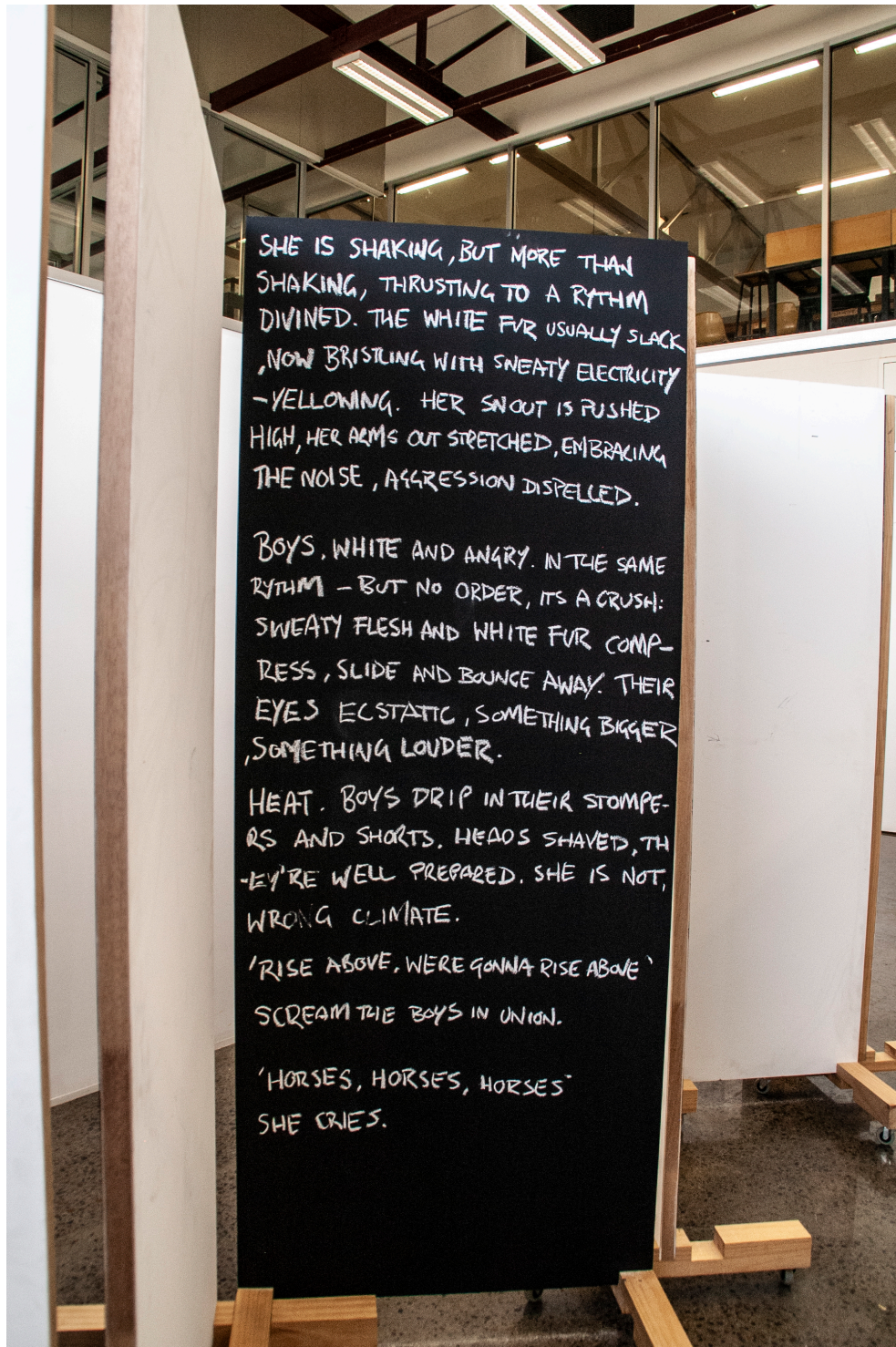


Figure 6 Annotated Biography, Detail (2016). Photo, Arlo Mountford.

As an artist, I find one's role in this vision of the future requires an uncomfortable level of belief. The self-reflexive response, which employs the tools of sarcasm, irony and derision are a reaction to such assumptions, as is an embracing of the *unknown* (doubt). There are two forms of *unknowing* present in *Annotated Biography*. The first is in the accumulation of the references to the past, brought forward into the present to form a constellation, without understanding how these fragments will influence the constellation. This *unknowing* extends to the redemption of these fragments which takes place in the form of a subjective *fleeting imaginings*, a link between the past and the present crystallising according to the subjectivity of the viewer. I can only account for my own subjectivity in this and cannot know how or if, the viewer will respond in a similar way. The second form of *unknowing* is less sincere. There is a distinction between an *unknowing* fool unaware of how the past fragments will inform the constellation, and the jester who plays the role of *unknowing*, not wishing to presume the future, but must still *knowingly* to some degree, envisions a better future. The image of the court jester pricking the conscience of the viewer (royal court) with these redemptive moments is dependent on the audience's (the courts) belief in redemption. To redeem something is to "make amends or atonement" or "To make good".⁹⁰ The concept of "good" is a social agreement; it is an agreed idea of what is right and wrong and how one should act in order to do right to others. The idea of a "good" future is a collective vision of the future being an improvement on the present and past. The jester and the audience both hope for this future but counter-intuitively do not presume it to be the future.

In conclusion, the accumulation of references in *Annotated Biography* is an assemblage that forms a network. This network forms an image in the present by bringing forward these references so that they may activate a *fleeting imagining* in the mind of the viewer. The references to other artworks that use fiction are treated with a high degree of subjectivity. Not only is their selection specific to my personal investigation, this being self-reflexive and tempered by derision, irony and sarcasm, each material reference has been modified, re-written, to include the Polar Bear character. At face value, this manipulation of the material

⁹⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, "'redeem, v.'."

would appear to sit outside Wohlfarth's *Eingedenken*, that is his idea of remembrance slipping into melancholia. The most obvious conclusion would be that it is an historicist re-writing of the material. However, I would argue, this is too obvious a manipulation to fall into either of these categories, historical or melancholic. The texts are a fiction after all, and it does not take much effort on the audience's part, to deduce this. Instead, each combination of historical reference and fictional writing act as a deliberate provocation, designed to be both humorous and to gently question the audience's belief in the material, ultimately with the intention of improving the apparatus.

There is a degree of uncertainty, an *unknowing* on my part, as the *network of references* is assembled and combined, I would describe this as the foolish part of the process. But again, here, I also play the less sincere role of the jester, deliberately contaminating the presented material. This act is a wink to the audience, because I have manipulated the material, again like the tactics described in *Don't bite*, it jeopardises any stable or trustworthy interpretation. If the audience cannot trust that the material is an objective, recorded fragment, it becomes more difficult for them to orientate themselves within the apparatus. It is inside this intentional breach of certainty, that the *fleeting imagining* takes place. It is also where the viewer's own perspective comes into play to complete the dialectic image for themselves.



Figure 7 *Annotated Biography, Detail* (2016). Photo, Arlo Mountford.

Chapter 3 The Fool and the Jester

fool, n.1 a. One deficient in judgement or sense, one who acts or behaves stupidly, a silly person, a simpleton. ⁹¹

Jester, n.2. A mimic, buffoon, or merry-andrew; any professed maker of amusement, esp. one maintained in a prince's court or nobleman's household. **3.** One who jests, or speaks or acts in jest; a person given to uttering jests or witticisms; a joker. ⁹²

... in the Sex Pistols' records, all emotion is reduced to the gap between a blank stare and a sardonic grin, ⁹³

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will look at operating *knowingly* and *unknowingly* within the apparatus. Drawing on examples of artists who deliberately 'play the fool' in order to question assumptions made by the audience, as I have discussed, this role exemplifies the jester. I will also look at the more unwitting reaction to a situation or context. This response begins as naïve and becomes rebellious, although not always aggressive, and with it comes the risk of personal cost to the individual. This reaction can be described by the term punk, as it is used in relation to punk music, a response sometimes nihilistic and often derisive. Or, it can be less aggressive, a more (possibly) naïve attempt to address an injustice by responding with nonsense or appearing nonsensical. Either way the immediacy of the reaction ensures it cannot yet be sarcastic or ironic. These more secondary reactions belong to the jester, who more self-aware, takes on the role of the fool using it to question the apparatus and

⁹¹ Oxford English Dictionary, "'fool, n.1 and Adj.'," accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/72642?rskey=6o4kMW&>.

⁹² Oxford English Dictionary, "'jester, n.'," accessed September 26, 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/101138?redirectedFrom=jester>.

⁹³ Page 72. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces : A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

historicism. These two forms, the jester and the fool operate in tandem within the methodology, the artist being both the fool and the jester.

3.2 The Unknowing Fool

Two examples of the fool can be found in literature: Fyodor Dostoyevsky's, Prince Myshkin from *The Idiot* (1874) and Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote from *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1605).⁹⁴ ⁹⁵ Intriguingly both these characters are fictional, fools placed into a situation by their presumably *knowing* authors. Subsequently the texts become political parables about the society in which the fools find themselves. There is an odd dynamic here, for example, Dostoyevsky's Prince Myshkin is the fool, and the context of 19th Century Russian society is the historicist apparatus. Dostoyevsky, himself, is the jester who knowingly places his character into this historicist context. Dostoyevsky stated in a letter that the premise for his book was to depict "the positively good and beautiful man", who through the fault of not understanding the society he finds himself in, appears at face value at least, as an idiot to those around him.⁹⁶ However, Prince Myshkin is not an idiot, for he understands who he himself is, and as the nature of a parable goes, it is ultimately the context in which Prince Myshkin finds himself which is at fault.

Don Quixote on the other hand does not know who he is. The premise for Cervantes' character is that he is deluded by his books of knightly chivalry into believing that the world around him is this same chivalric fantasy. Subsequently, he mistakes people and objects, famously windmills, as a part of this fantasy. The contrast between these two characters is that Don Quixote believes he does know the world around him, and is mistaken, whereas Prince Myshkin does not assume to understand the world around him.

⁹⁴ Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot* 1869.

⁹⁵ Cervantes, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* 1605.

⁹⁶ Pages 59-63. Richard Peace 1933-2013, *Dostoyevsky : An Examination of the Major Novels* (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge Eng. : University Press, 1971).

For the methodological approach discussed so far, the artist must be both Prince Myshkin and Don Quixote. In order to 'play the fool', the artist must, to some degree, take on the role of Prince Myshkin, in that they must respond to the underlying system which supports the context for the artwork. For example, in the case of *Don't bite* and *Annotated Biography*, this underlying system, the apparatuses which are presupposed by the historicist authority, demand a critical response.⁹⁷ However, my vehicle for response has certain criteria: an insistence that it does not replace the existing system with yet another one, that it must rebel against the apparatus in total. It must help to continually deterritorialise the reterritorialising apparatus, to frame it in terms suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.⁹⁸ In the case of the early 20th Century art movement, Dada, for example, this rebellious response manifested as nonsensical theatre, in the methodological approach employed by myself, it manifests as a derisive retort. Prince Myshkin on the other hand is unable to play the game of 19th Century Russian society because he does not understand the rules, thus he is labelled an idiot, whereas the Dadaist and myself appear as the idiot because they, and I, refuse to play the game.

Ironically, from here the act of forming the *network of references* requires a similar sense of delusion and self-belief to that of Don Quixote. There is a balancing act which occurs between responding to context, and then assembling the network, both of which require a degree of *unknowing*. Whereas Prince Myshkin is *unknowing* because he cannot foresee the consequences of his response to the intricacies of 19th Century Russian society, which in his case often leads to a form of sacrifice. Don Quixote's form of *unknowing*, is a self-motivated delusion. This corresponds to the presumption made by the artist (myself) that the network will translate into a dialectical image or the *fleeting imagining* for the audience. A quixotic delusion of self-belief allows the act of assembly to take place. On one side it is a delusion which metaphorically is more suited to an historicist position. Don Quixote operates by

⁹⁷ As I discussed in the previous chapter, both these cases used the exhibition context in which the works were exhibited as the historicist support to the framework.

⁹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. Félix Guattari 1930-1992 and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

making presumptions about the world around him, instead of questioning he accepts an apparatus, one which does not correlate to the context in which he exists, but to his chivalric fantasy, which is still a system. This uncritical acceptance of a system which is a fault of historicism, is interesting though, because when Don Quixote's chivalric system clashes with the more practical concerns of daily life, a rupture occurs, usually followed by both precarious and hilarious outcomes.

The tactic of humour here is integral to the approach used by Cervantes and is similar to the methodology found in the practice. If we consider these moments in Don Quixote where the ruptures occur, as jokes, we can see them as critical of the apparatus. Simon Critchley explains how this might occur, developing on Mary Douglas's idea of the joke being an "anti-rite".⁹⁹ The "anti-rite" is the humorous mocking of the ritual practices of a society, if a rite is a socially accepted symbolic act, the joke as the "anti-rite" it is the derision of these acts.¹⁰⁰ For example, when Don Quixote and Sancho come across an inn, Don Quixote presumes the building to be a castle, and treats the innkeeper as a lord and his staff as subjects. Initially the rituals (or set of rites) which Don Quixote expects from this encounter lead to a warm-hearted humouring of this strange individual, by the innkeeper. This represents a form of "reactionary humour" by Cervantes, "reactionary humour" according to Critchley can be described as humour or jokes which "reinforce consensus" and "does not seek to change the situation, but simply toys with existing social hierarchies".¹⁰¹ However, this polite humour does not last long, as the encounter continues and Don Quixote's delusion fails to abate, to the extent that he refuses to pay for the night's board, (given that knights of the realm are not expected to pay for such things). The absurdity of the situation breaks the rituals of both the inn and the castle. Here the symbolic rite of the chivalric system clashes with the symbolic rite of the "paying for services rendered" both of which are exposed to be arbitrary social rites. For if the innkeeper was willing to play along with Don Quixote's delusion, why become indignant now? Critchley describes the structure of a joke as being both "congruent" with the

⁹⁹ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings : Selected Essays in Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (London,: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (New York: New York : Routledge, 2001).

¹⁰¹ Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (New York: New York : Routledge, 2001).

established order of a society but then also “incongruent” by exposing the arbitrariness of this established order.

The methodological approach of my practice is similar. Firstly, working in the space between social rites and the anti-rites, I, the artist as historical materialist, knowingly use self-delusion as a strategy, I must step into the role of Don Quixote (act quixotically) in order to assemble the network. Secondly, it is the delusion of self-belief, combined with Benjamin’s “weak messianic power” found in the fragments or references, which provides the power to act.¹⁰² The delusion allows the artist to use the references without becoming an interpretive authority. Unlike Don Quixote who insists on being an authority, I am almost using the references nonsensically, working with congruencies as joke structures and incongruences, anti-rites, to create the ruptures in the apparatus.¹⁰³ Both contribute to the network so that the audience may experience their own form of the *fleeting imagining*, possibly in the form of a joke. Thirdly, the quixotic delusion allows the artist to briefly presume a utopic future, a better future. Again, as Critchley suggests, humour allows us to “view the folly of the world by affording us a glimpse of another world”. This glimpse does not “save” us from the folly, “but calls on us to face the folly of the world and change the situation”.¹⁰⁴ This redemptive notion found in humour, aligns with Benjamin’s revolutionary concepts.

Don Quixote’s acts come at great cost. To those he encounters he is a fool, a fool who through misunderstanding often positions himself and those around him, as the receivers of both physical and emotional harm. Likewise, Prince Myshkin also comes to great harm as a result of his reaction to the context in which he finds himself. The risk of being misinterpreted or misunderstood is interwoven with the strategy of ‘playing the fool’. For once accepting this role, the desire to appear sophisticated must be relinquished. The fool must appear to act indifferently to others, while responding to the immediate context. In my case I look for historical references from the past (Benjamin would call them fragments) which have the

¹⁰² Thesis II. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940.”

¹⁰³ I say “almost” because, to decide to act nonsensically requires the conscious decision to do so.

¹⁰⁴ Pages 16-17. Critchley, *On Humour*.

power to address (smash) the present context. As the process proceeds and the network grows, the fool develops an awareness of the audience as a part of the context, a part of the exhibition apparatus. Here the fool transitions into the punk responding with derision or nonsense before then moving towards the more sophisticated role of jester. The jester still appears humorous like the fool, which to some degree is a disguise, the jester develops this humour to use the tools of sarcasm and irony, to continue to question the historicist presupposition. But even here despite the more sophisticated strategy, the risk of misinterpretation by the audience is high. This confusion is to be expected, given the amount of self-delusion, mis-direct and humour employed.

3.3 The Knowing Jester

The agency of acting *unknowingly*, as a fool, is a strategy. Artists such as Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball and other members of Dada practiced it through nonsensical theatre at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, 1916, as a response to the political climate of Europe during the First World War. This knowing form of naivete, the use of nonsense and absurdity, although often humorous, confounded the audience's expectations. However, it did not always venture towards sarcasm or irony.¹⁰⁵ If we consider the submission of *Fountain* (1917) to the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, the infiltration of the artworld via the readymade, can be seen as a more *knowing* act of absurdity.

¹⁰⁵ And this distinction, the deliberate decision to remain nonsensical was a political act. Absurdity in the face of what appeared to be an absurd war. "The ideals of culture and art as a program for a variety show – that is our *Candide* against the times... They cannot expect us to confuse the increasingly disastrous apathy and cold heartedness with heroism. One day they will have to admit that we responded very politely, even movingly". Ball here is referring to Voltaire's *Candide, ou L'Optimisme* (1759) another satirical novel whose naïve central character becomes disillusioned with contemporary society.

Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996).

Before I continue with *Fountain*, I will address the contention of authorship which now surrounds the work. As Louise Norton suggests in her article written for the Dada publication *The Blind Man No2* (1917), the act of entering *Fountain* into the Society of Independent Artists exhibition left the question of “What is ART?” to a “Board of Censors”.¹⁰⁶ Norton implied that the *independence* advertised by the Society of Independent Artists, whose policy stated that all a member need do, is pay the six-dollar membership fee in order to freely exhibit a work, was actually compromised by the Boards’ ideas about what constituted art (Duchamp was a member of the board at the time). This act itself, questioned the exhibition process held by the Society of Independent Artists. Glyn Thompson, however, offers another contributing factor to the refusal by the Board, Richard Mutt was not a registered member of the Society and subsequently had not paid the membership fee.¹⁰⁷ *Fountain* was not Duchamp’s first readymade, and other artists in Duchamp’s circle were making similar works, *Bottle Rack* for example is attributed to Duchamp in 1914, and in 1913 Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven found an iron ring, an *objet trouvé* (found object) which she anointed a piece of art, giving it the title *Enduring Ornament*.¹⁰⁸ Here is where the issue of authorship comes into contention. Duchamp did not claim ownership of *Fountain* at the time, he stated that this was because he was a member of the Society of Independent Artist’s Board.¹⁰⁹ But if we read a letter written by Duchamp to his sister Suzanne, dated April 11 1917, (two days after the Easter weekend over which the rest of the exhibition was hung, excluding *Fountain*) Duchamp states: “One of my female friends under a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, sent in a porcelain urinal as a sculpture; it was not at all indecent – no reason for refusing it. The

¹⁰⁶ A transcript can be found here. Page153 Dawn Ades, ed., *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Glyn Thompson, “Sloppy Virtuosity at the Temple of Purity: No 23 Francis Naumann’s Recurrent Haunting Ghosts,” *Academia.Edu*, last modified 2018, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/35948845/Sloppy_Virtuosity_at_the_Temple_of_Purity_No_23_Francis_Naumanns_Recurrent_Haunting_Ghosts.

¹⁰⁸ “Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Artworks,” *Theartstory.Org*, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/von-freytag-loringhoven-elsa/artworks/>.

¹⁰⁹ Sophie Howarth and Jennifer Mundy, “Marcel Duchamp Fountain 1917, Replica 1964: Summary,” *Tate.Org.Uk*, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>.

committee has decided to refuse to show this thing. I have handed in my resignation and it will be a bit of gossip of some value in New York.”¹¹⁰ It is this line more than any other fact which throws the issue of authorship into contention. *Fountain* was not attributed to Duchamp until 1934, by Andre Breton, and Irene Gammel suggests that it may have been Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who submitted the work. Von Freytag-Loringhoven died in 1927 and was unable to contest Breton and Duchamp’s claim, in 1917 von Freytag-Loringhoven also made the *objet trouvé* work *God*, which bore similarities to *Fountain*, it used a piece of plumbing, a cast-iron drain trap mounted on a mitre-box.¹¹¹ Both Gammel and Thompson also suggest that von Freytag-Loringhoven who had been consistently rejected by the Society, had good reason to expose the hypocrisy of its Board. So, it is possible that von Freytag-Loringhoven was Duchamp’s “female friend”.¹¹²

This issue of *Fountain*’s authorship is of course exciting to a historical materialist. This is not only because the points of conjecture are found in the “fragments” of Duchamp’s letters and the material document of the photograph taken by Alfred Stieglitz (Footnote 112), but also

¹¹⁰ Despite reporting on the letter here in 1982, Naumann merely points to it being curious that Duchamp does not claim ownership here. Francis M Naumann and Marcel Duchamp, “Affectueusement, Marcel: Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 22, no. 4 (1982): 3–19.

¹¹¹ “Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Artworks,” *Theartstory.Org*.

¹¹² In the comment section of the Josh Jones Article on openculture.com. Lachlan Phillips offers an alternative explanation suggesting that the female friend may well have been Louise Norton. Phillips suggests that Duchamp’s practice by this time already included a form of collaboration, Duchamp would invite others to select objects for him as a readymade which he would then sign. This is exemplified in the example documented in the letters with his sister Suzanne, here Duchamp asks Suzanne to find a bottle rack and sends her a signature to be attached to the object. However, this does not explain the R. Mutt signature. Both von Freytag-Loringhoven and Norton were friends with Duchamp in 1917 and could well have been invited by Duchamp to select objects. Intriguingly the entry slip shown in the only photograph of *Fountain* taken by Alfred Stieglitz shows the address; Richard Mutt, 110 West 88th St, New York City, this was the address of Louise Norton in 1917, however Norton never claimed the work. Josh Jones, “The Iconic Urinal & Work of Art, ‘Fountain,’ Wasn’t Created by Marcel Duchamp But by the Pioneering Dada Artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven,” Openculture.Com.

because the contention “blasts” open the narrative of art history, exposing the historicist assumptions it makes. This is not to suggest that *Fountain* or the practice of the readymade or *objet trouvé* were not explosive ideas themselves, in response to the question, “What is ART?” But what has been blasted open is the art historical narrative’s reliance on the work *Fountain*, having been selected by Duchamp and subsequently part of his oeuvre of readymade’s. This assumption suits the established order because it subscribes to a mythologising of Duchamp’s character as an enigmatic genius, a pattern we see repeated throughout the history of art.¹¹³ This short-circuiting of history by linking a historic shift to one individual and to a lesser degree one work, is flawed because it discounts the details. We know Duchamp was not operating alone, that he was practicing alongside individuals such as Norton and von Freytag-Loringhoven amongst others. We also know that Duchamp did not claim ownership until many years later, despite already having an established practice involving the use of the readymade. I would argue this passage of time helped establish the mythology around the controversial event and subsequently, allowed Breton to attribute the work to Duchamp, an attribution which Duchamp at the time did not dispute, and which he later claimed. This attribution is still upheld by the established order today, the Tate’s website has a detailed history of *Fountain* in which it acknowledges both von Freytag-Loringhoven and Norton, but still ultimately attributes the work to Duchamp. The Duchamp scholar, Francis M Naumann, who first published Duchamp’s letters, and at the time dismissed the comment made by Duchamp to his sister, vehemently opposes the view that von Freytag-Loringhoven made the work.¹¹⁴ The contention that *Fountain* may have been made by Duchamp in collaboration with von Freytag-Loringhoven or Norton, or by von Freytag-Loringhoven herself, seems to have created a secondary *jolt*, the work again upsetting the established order.

¹¹³ I touched on this in the relation to Beuys in Chapter 1|Part 1.

¹¹⁴ Again, this can be found in the comment section. Jones, “The Iconic Urinal & Work of Art, ‘Fountain,’ Wasn’t Created by Marcel Duchamp But by the Pioneering Dada Artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.”

The contention of authorship does not contradict the initial *jolt* which shocked the viewer's expectations and shocked the established context of the Society of Independent Artists. ¹¹⁵ Although the original urinal was never exhibited, (it was rejected, which led to the controversy), the contemporary audience of the time was under the impression the work was submitted by an R. Mutt. The strategy here by whoever submitted the work, was to knowingly confuse the viewer under the guise of absurdity and humour, this introduction of the readymade along with the misdirect of the name R. Mutt, only helping to confound the court. Interestingly either Duchamp, von Freytag-Loringhoven or Norton, using the name R. Mutt here, created a fiction, like Dostoyevsky and Cervantes' characters, R. Mutt was the fool and the author/s the jester.

In Dostoyevsky's book, *The Idiot* the character General Ivoglin is another form of fool, he is a drunk who often, through comical mishap, brings shame to his family. In one passage the General recounts an incident which happened to him on a train years earlier. ¹¹⁶ Although very funny, the details of this incident are not important, what is important is the response from listeners to his story. For it appears that the same incident had been reported in a newspaper, weeks earlier, but happening to someone else. When the General is asked why he would recount the story as his own, he becomes flustered and insists that the same incident happened to him years earlier, despite the similarity in details between the two events. Dostoyevsky leaves it open as to whether the General has deliberately appropriated the story or simply, having read the same newspaper article earlier, has become confused and assimilated it into his own biography.

¹¹⁵ Page 32. Lee relates the *jolt* to Carrie Lambert-Beatty's definition of a form of practice described as "parafictional", here the work is both fiction and non-fiction, the artworks being something other than they first appear, "laying conceptual traps for the viewer", this same strategy is employed by Sturtevant who's work initially appears as another artist's such as Beuys or Warhol amongst others.

Lee, *Sturtevant: Warhol Marilyn*.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility.," ed. Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *October*, no. 129 (2009): 51–84.

¹¹⁶ Pages 100-102. Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot* 1869.

For Elaine Sturtevant, or simply Sturtevant as she preferred to use, there is no such confusion about whether a work “reiterated” is her own. At least, there is no confusion about her part in the recounting of another’s work, the work is hers, but it is a “repetition” of another’s. Following Peter Eleey’s lead in his essay *Dangerous Concealment: The Art of Sturtevant* (2015), I am using the words ‘reiterate’ and ‘repetition’ to describe Sturtevant’s practice of using the image of other artist’s works.¹¹⁷ Sturtevant felt that the term “copy” although not to be dismissed, lacked the dynamics necessary to describe what occurs when viewing her work.¹¹⁸ To use the term ‘appropriation’ is also misleading, Sturtevant’s practice is more aligned with the use of popular images exemplified by pop art and contesting the value systems and audience preconceptions about high and low art. When Sturtevant exhibited *Warhol Marilyn* (1965) at the Bianchini Gallery, New York, she posed a question: *Why couldn’t one make a repetition of Warhol’s Marilyn?*¹¹⁹ Sturtevant’s apparent ‘fool’s errand’ manipulates the viewer’s assumptions about a work, principally how much importance one places on the artist who made the work. Sturtevant’s act here echoes von Freytag-Loringhoven’s *objet trouvé* or Duchamp’s readymade, with its challenge to the audience’s assumptions about authorship. But Sturtevant’s works take the challenge a step further, at first sight they trick the audience into assuming they are looking at a Warhol, a Frank Stella or a Felix Gonzalez-Torres, for example. Then as the realisation that the work is actually by Sturtevant becomes apparent to the viewer, it performs a “jolt” and takes on a more complicated position.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Sturtevant used the word ‘repetition’ drawing on her early reading and translation of Gilles Deleuze’s *Différence et répétition* (1968). Sturtevant, Bruce Hainley, and Michael Lobel, “Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley and Michael Lobel,” in *Sturtevant: Double Trouble*, ed. Peter Eleey (New York, New York : Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 115–127.

¹¹⁸ Peter Eleey curator, *Sturtevant : Double Trouble*, ed. 1924-2014 Sturtevant interviewee et al., *Double Trouble* (New York, New York : Museum of Modern Art, 2014).

¹¹⁹ Sotheby’s, “Sturtevant Warhol’s Marilyn Munroe,” *Sothebys.Com*, accessed November 14, 2019, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/contemporary-art-evening-auction-n09500/lot.2.html>.

¹²⁰ Lee, *Sturtevant: Warhol Marilyn*.

As I have said there is also a distinction between Sturtevant's practice and later appropriation artists, such as Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman and John Stazeker amongst many others. Sherrie Levine's series of 22 photographs *After Walker Evans* (1981) provides a useful similarity to Sturtevant's "repetitions", because at first glimpse, both examples appear to be the work of another artist.¹²¹ However, as Beau Rutland points out Levine's intention is different to Sturtevant's, Levine's work addresses the subjectivity of the photographer, setting up a critical "binary of Levine-challenging-Evans."¹²² As a feminist, Levine was claiming the gaze of the early 20th century male photographer Walker Evans, this act was political, asserting that pre-existing works of art could be *lifted* from history.¹²³ In a statement published in 1982 Levine makes the following assertion:

The world is suffocating. Man has placed his token on every stone. Every word, every image, is leased and mortgaged. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash... A painting's meaning lies not in its origin, but in its destination. The birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter.¹²⁴

This idea of the image loaded with content, the picture captured by the burden of its history is pertinent, because it places the image in both a conceptual and political context, the picture as a response to the image or images it "copies".¹²⁵ Douglas Crimp in his accompanying essay to the now famous exhibition *Pictures* (1981), placed the appropriation artists and their methodological approach as operating "stratigraphically", through the process of "quotation" and "staging" the works, "we are not in search of sources or origins, but of structures of

¹²¹ Sherrie Levine, "After Walker Evans: 4," *Metmuseum.Org*, last modified 1981, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/267214>.

¹²² Beau Rutland, "Sturtevant," *Art Forum* 53, no. 6 February (2015): 228–229.

¹²³ David Hopkins, "The Politics of Equivocation: Sherrie Levine, Duchamp's 'Compensation Portrait', and Surrealism in the USA 1942-45," *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003): 47–68.

¹²⁴ Sherrie Levine, "Statement 1982," in *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Evans (Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery & MIT Press, 2009), 81.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

signification: underneath each picture there is always another picture.”¹²⁶ Crimp makes a similar point to Levine, which is a play on the final line of Barthes’ *The Death of the Author*, “The birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter”, suggesting that the picture becomes active in the mind of the viewer.¹²⁷ ¹²⁸ That is to say that it is in the viewing, that the artwork *occurs*, perhaps as a *fleeting imagining*. This de-emphasis of the picture’s autonomy, instead suggesting an emphasis on the historic, contextual and the reception, is exemplified by works of Levine made with collaborator Louise Lawler, *A Picture Is No Substitute of Anything* (1981).¹²⁹ The work was an announcement card, stating the words and a time and place. The announcement cards are statements performed in the mind of the reader/viewer, the aesthetic details are limited to the traditions of the format of the announcement card, its interpretation however, is not to be found in its origin, but in the viewer’s response.

Sturtevant also de-emphasises the autonomy of the image, in 1971 Sturtevant outlined her thoughts about what her work was *not* doing, “The work cannot be treated in a material or non-intellectual way.”¹³⁰ Implying the practice of repetition or reiteration of works provoked the viewer to (re)consider their own position in relation to the systems of value which support art. But, unlike Levine, Sturtevant’s practice is more fluid than straight critique, as Beau Rutland suggests Sturtevant “so fully replaces the work of Johns or Duchamp or whomever she is appropriating that her work ushers us into unknown contingencies”.¹³¹ Like the jester, Sturtevant forces us (the court) into a state of uncertainty first tricking the viewer, then posing the question of the repetition. As Peter Eleey suggests, it was Sturtevant’s temporal and geographic proximity to the artists, whose works she reiterated that caused controversy in

¹²⁶ Douglas Crimp, “Pictures 1979,” in *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Evans (Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery & MIT Press, 2009), 76–79.

¹²⁷ Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–148.

¹²⁸ Levine, “Statement 1982.”

¹²⁹ Museum of Modern Art, “Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine *A Picture Is No Substitute for Anything*,” *Moma.Org*, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/206060>.

¹³⁰ Page 54. Eleey curator, *Sturtevant : Double Trouble*.

¹³¹ Rutland, “Sturtevant.”

the 1960s, like a jester upsetting the court.¹³² But, if Warhol can appropriate or copy the image of Marilyn from a photograph, isn't it possible that the ubiquity of Warhol's image will also lead to a similar reiteration. And why are we, the viewer, offended by such an act? ¹³³

What's a guy gotta do to piss someone off around here", "you try to move the borders a little bit further and then realise how easily the art world can absorb any blow. But that's okay, I guess that's part of the game [...] Wasn't the dream of the avant-garde to become completely mainstream? ¹³⁴

¹³² Eleey curator, *Sturtevant : Double Trouble*.

¹³³ Concerning appropriation, the examples I have used, Sturtevant and Levine are indicative of my own taste and are both representative of pivotal moments in the history of the field. Sturtevant represents a time before the term, "appropriation" existed in the canon and a clear bridge between the logic of Pop Art the Douglas Crimp's *Pictures* exhibition. Levine's early work exemplifies a model of the method as a rupture to the existing apparatus, and thus represents for my purposes a "knowing jester". However, it would also have been possible for me to discuss the use of appropriation by referring to Australia's own rich history of the practice. Rex Butler in his Introduction to his book, "What is Appropriation" provides a detailed account of Australian artists working in the field throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Here Butler outlines the distinct perspective of artists practicing outside the "metropolitan centre" and their use of appropriation to identify and upset the perceived hierarchy this created. He also distinguishes subtle changes in the attitudes to appropriation by Australian artists and curators between the late 1970's and the end of the 1990's, separating the period into three stages. Butler begins with the rupture of the hierarchy imposed by distance and the authority of the original. Secondly, he then identifies a reaction to this rupture by artists who through appropriation pay homage to their influences, using the "copy" to exemplify the notion that no artwork is made in a vacuum. Finally, Butler describes the third stage as one of "banality" where artists do not question the role of appropriation at all. The question of the original, and the distinction between low and high art having long been dissolved, instead they have become adept at using and manipulating it like any other material. Certainly, it would be possible for me to locate my practice within this lineage, perhaps at the tail end of the "banal", but to do so would not be representative of the practice as I see it. I did not come to appropriation with the intention of continuing a tradition, I see it as a tool to rupture and upset the apparatus. So Instead I will respectfully acknowledge this close history and perhaps save it for another thesis!

Rex Butler, *What Is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the '80s and '90s* (Sydney, NSW: Sydney, NSW : Power Publications and IMA, 1996).

¹³⁴ Morton, "Maurizio Cattelan: Infinite Jester."

If we jump a few decades to the 1990's we come to Maurizio Cattelan, who assumes the role of jester completely. Cattelan drops the philosophical and political rationales used by Sturtevant and Levine and instead adopts the role of the naughty school-boy, offering excuses.¹³⁵ In the case of *Untitled* (2002) Cattelan, having failed to make a work in time for an upcoming exhibition, enters a police station and reports the work stolen. He then exhibits the police report of the theft, in place of the work. ¹³⁶ This is literally, a “dog ate my homework” style of excuse that one would find in a classroom and Cattelan is testing how much we, the apparatus, are prepared to accept. He is cheeky, but ultimately an acceptable member of the class.

It is an earlier work, *Another Fucking Readymade* (1996), which bears a similarity to that of Duchamp, Sturtevant and Levine. Here, Cattelan stole another artist's exhibition and other contents from Bloom Gallery, which he then exhibited as his own, for the group show *Crap Shoot* (1996) at De Appel in Amsterdam. Cattelan appears to challenge our assumptions about authorship, but by now the apparatus has caught up with appropriation. Cattelan's act is different however, in that it does involve the theft of material property, rather than a remade version of another's work. Intriguingly, Cattelan here has also made the museum an accomplice to the crime, De Appel exhibited the work aware of Cattelan's act. ¹³⁷ This may be a question posed by Cattelan of the museum, or it may instead make Cattelan's act complicit to the apparatus.

Cattelan's work tests the ability for the apparatus to assimilate even an intentionally unethical act. But Cattelan seems to do no wrong, unlike Sturtevant and later Levine, Cattelan as the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Diane Stigter, “Maurizio Cattelan: Another Fucking Readymade,” in *Lifting - Theft In Art*, ed. Gavin Morrison and Fraser Stables (Aberdeen: Atopia Projects, 2008), 88–89.

jester remains in the court.¹³⁸ Sturtevant received extended criticism once it became apparent to audiences that her practice of using the image of other artist's works, was an ongoing practice, not just a joke.¹³⁹ Sturtevant in the face of this criticism made a conscious decision to stop practicing, realising that the criticism was diluting the potency of the work. As a retort she famously suggested she was quitting art to play tennis, referring to Duchamp's claim to be ending his practice in order to play chess.¹⁴⁰ Levine was also forced to substantiate her position, this was problematic, as Douglas Crimp states in the introduction to his book *On the Museum's Ruins*; "...Levine's work interrupts the discourse of mastery through the refusal to reinvent the image".¹⁴¹ Like other artists using appropriation at the time there was the desire to not replace the existing authoritative system with a new system. The political act of questioning the apparatus left the interpretation in the audience's hands.

There is no doubt that to a large part this ability of the apparatus to smoothly assimilate Cattelan's act, but to struggle with Sturtevant and to a lesser extent, Levine's interventions,

¹³⁸ Diane Stigter, one of the directors of Bloom Gallery provides a first-hand account of how the act was played out from her perspective, detailing how it was quickly it was assimilated by those involved. Stigter explains that the only thing left in the gallery after the theft was a sticker with the words "Crap Shoot" on it. This sticker immediately alerted them to the fact that they had become part of a subversive act by one of the De Appel exhibition's participants. It apparently didn't take much to work out it was Cattelan based on his reputation. Later that week the Bloom Gallery directors attended the opening of *Crap Shoot* and danced with Cattelan at the after party.

Ibid.

¹³⁹ Claus Oldenburg, who had been a supporter of Sturtevant's work became furious when Sturtevant made a version of Oldenburg's *Store* (1961) with her *The Store of Claus Oldenburg* (1967).

Sturtevant, Hainley, and Lobel, "Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley and Michael Lobel."

¹⁴⁰ Bruce Hainley, "Erase and Rewind," *Frieze*, last modified 2000, accessed October 2, 2019, <https://frieze.com/article/erase-and-rewind>.

¹⁴¹ Here Crimp is comparing Levine's *Untitled (After Edward Weston)* (1981) with Robert Mapplethorpe's classically posed nudes.

Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, ed. Louise Lawler (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1993).

is symptomatic of a system dominated by an historicist patriarchy.¹⁴² However, it is also true that Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *objet trouvé* (which it could be argued is still struggling against an historicist patriarchy), Duchamp's readymade, Sturtevant's repetitions and Levine's appropriation among many others, made it easier for Cattelan's acts to fit the apparatus. Cattelan then in this respect, is the true jester in that he is acting out in a court (apparatus) that has been expanded, as the questions posed of it by Duchamp, Sturtevant, Levine and others have been assimilated.¹⁴³

3.4 Where then, are the fools?

In the examples up until now the fools described; Prince Myshkin, Don Quixote and even R. Mutt have been fictional. Alternatively, the artists described so far, aside from the example of the Dada artists, have been jesters, not fools at all. One reason for this by my reckoning is that the true fool is the historicist, who blindly assumes their position of authority, sustained by the apparatus.

¹⁴² Only a few years after the *Pictures* (1979) exhibition Crimp suggests that appropriation had just become "another academic category – a thematic -through which the museum organises its objects." Noting that works made within the discourse of institutional critique inevitable come to rest in the institutions they critique. Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation (1982)," in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 126–137.

¹⁴³ Ironically more recently this naughty school-boy act of Cattelan's has caught up with him. At his most recent exhibition "Victory is Not an Option" at Blenheim Palace, Cattelan's work *America* (2016) was stolen. Causing many critics to presume it was yet another stunt by Cattelan. However, Cattelan is claiming that this is not the case, he is the boy who cried wolf and no longer believed. What is also interesting here is that now the staged act has been confused with an actual event, perhaps it is here at the breach between staged act and actual act that Cattelan's work can actually question the apparatus again.

Javier Pes, "Thieves Steal the Artist Maurizio Cattelan's Solid Gold Toilet in an Audacious Heist at Blenheim Palace," *Artnet*, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/cattelan-gold-toilet-theft-1651129>.

Whilst writing this, the image of Bas Jan Ader riding his bike into an Amsterdam canal, or falling from a tree into a stream has been my reminder of the fool artist.¹⁴⁴ But a sticking point in these slapstick acts has been that Ader, like Yves Klein leaping into the void, even at the risk of personal injury, always managed to perform them in front of a camera.¹⁴⁵ Klein only claimed to have leapt into the void, the act captured in the famous photograph in a Parisian street, was a re-enactment, photographed and edited in the dark room by the photographers Harry Shunk and Jean Kender.¹⁴⁶ His body was caught by friends holding a tarpaulin before he hit the ground. The resulting documentation in both Ader's and Klein's case, ensured that they became part of the discourse of art practice and art history. So, although Ader's acts appeared foolish they always contributed to the apparatus, they were not foolish but premeditated foolery. It is perhaps Ader's final unfinished work, which was the most quixotic, a triptych which started with the work *In Search of the Miraculous (One night in Los Angeles)* (1973). This was a series of photographs showing him wandering with a torch through Los Angeles at night searching, presumably, for the miraculous. The second part to this triptych involved him crossing the Atlantic Ocean on a small sailboat, which was to also be photographed and documented. The third part was to involve a series of photographs documenting him again, searching at night with a torch, this time in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, Ader disappeared whilst crossing the Atlantic, his boat was found months after leaving Cape Cod, upended, 150 kilometres off the coast of Ireland, by a Spanish fishing trawler, no body was found. Ader's practice could be understood as a form of romantic conceptualism, combined with a typical male machismo which involves attempting feats of endurance, these attempts ultimately leading him to risk his life. However other works, such as *Fall II* (1970) and *Broken Fall (organic)* (1971) involved a sense of self-defeat which downplayed such machismo. It is this history of self-defeat in his practice which gives his final work a fable-like end, possibly one too romantic. What appears foolish here, is not the sailing expedition, Ader was an experienced sailor and had completed a similar trip to the US years

¹⁴⁴ Bas Jan Ader *Fall II* (1970), *Broken fall (organic)* (1971).

¹⁴⁵ Yves Klein *Leap into the Void* (1960)

¹⁴⁶ "Leap into the Void (1960)," *Metmuseum.Org*, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/266750>.

earlier, what is foolish, is Ader's knowingly naïve search, for had Ader not gone missing, would he have ever found his miracle?

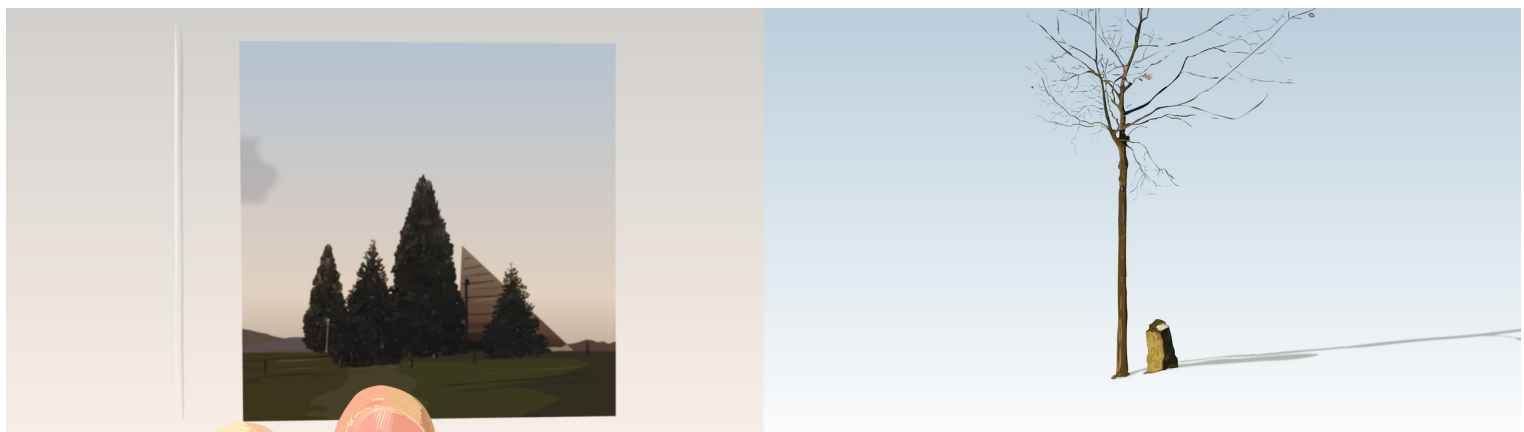


Figure 8 *The Cypse Parts 2 and 3*, Production Still, (2015).

Chapter 4 Louise Lawler

4.1 Introduction

In 2015, I started searching through the catalogue archive at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (CCP). At the time I was researching a work which would present images from the CCP archive in relation to a more general version of art history. My intention was to sandwich the local history of the space, as an institution, with the broader material of art history. The resulting work *The Copse, Parts 2 and 3* (2015), deliberately disregarded any hierarchy which might exist between the two histories, and instead conjured a history for itself out of these archives.

As I came across works that I found to be of interest in the catalogue, I photographed them with the camera on my smartphone. These later became part of a list of images to be included in an animated work, alongside others that were redrawn from a broader source of historical material. This act of appropriation has long been an integral part of my methodological approach, artworks are redrawn often using documentation found in books, magazines and the internet. By the time I came to this method, the “thematic” of appropriation as Crimp described it, was already well established, Maurizio Cattelan’s *Another Fucking Readymade* (1996) had been made and immediately understood as a form of institutional critique. The plethora of images available to me, allowed me to increase the scale of the appropriation, the speed of the animated moving image made it possible juxtapose these images quickly, treating them as stand-ins for the conceptual events and ideas they came from. The process of redrawing on a computer, turned them into symbols of these ideas within a discourse of institutional critique, not dissimilar to the process of photography used by the appropriation artists, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, the process went one step further than these artists, by using redrawing to distance them from their original image. An idiosyncrasy of this process as it was executed at CCP in 2015, is that I was in a poorly lit space, often holding the catalogue or pamphlet open with one hand, whilst photographing with the other. This produced slightly distorted images, with mismatched colours and often my own fingers or hand appearing at the edge of the plane. Initially the plan was to photograph these images again, under better conditions. However, the process of improving the quality of the

photography seemed to remove a level of subjective sorting, which was present in the process and evidenced by my ad hoc photographic technique. Later, when I redrew the works, using software and a tablet, I used the original photographs, complete with their idiosyncrasies, including the fingers. (*Figure 8*)

4.2 Louise Lawler

Since the early 1980s, Louise Lawler has been photographing artworks in auction rooms, private collections, museums and storerooms. These images restage the artworks through Lawler's own lens, in a similar way to the catalogue research just mentioned. Dissimilarly, Lawler's photographs deliberately capture the works with the view to interrupt their perceived importance.¹⁴⁷ Lawler restages the works, questioning the relationship between the artwork(s) and their context. Often the artworks appear to have been caught off-guard, like a celebrity photographed unawares. As objects, they are smaller in physical scale, and disproportionate to the status afforded them by art history. They have been afforded a new, gentler, more approachable presence. However, this lens of Lawler's, as Roslyn Deutsche describes it, is often a derisive one.¹⁴⁸ Deutsche traces this use of derision back (through feminism) to a book by Virginia Woolf called *Three Guineas* (1938). Here Woolf describes a reclamation of the use of derision as a tool.¹⁴⁹ As subjects of derision, women have indirectly learnt from it, derision becoming one of the "un-paid teachers of women (she lists four altogether), educating them about the behaviours and motives of human beings".¹⁵⁰ This appropriation of the intended psychological impact of being derided, is a form of subversion, which until now I have also allocated as a tool of the historical materialist, a response to historicist authority. As a tool of the artist playing the fool, it is a retort, a cheap shot, perhaps, but as Deutsche and Woolf describe it, a much more mature use of the psychological effects

¹⁴⁷ *The Copse, Parts 2 and 3* addressed an unbalance between local and canonised works later in the drawing process, here the found works were redrawn in the same style, which flattened the hierarchy between them.

¹⁴⁸ Deutsche, "Louise Lawler's Rude Museum."

¹⁴⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, ed. Virginia Woolf, 1938.

¹⁵⁰ Deutsche, "Louise Lawler's Rude Museum."

of derision. Historicism is of course also derisive. In the case of patriarchy, it is derisive of its perception of 'womenliness' that it claims is superfluous to its own assumed historicist agenda.

But if Lawler's works are derisive, and they often are, take for example Lawler's *Bird Calls* (1972-82), where Lawler (hilariously) calls the names of her male contemporaries as bird calls, Lawler also operates initially, from a position of *unknowing*. Here the lens responds instinctively to the physical context in which she finds the works, Lawler describes a process of photographing much more than she needs when working, and then, studying the photo's later, looking for an image which exhibits a "poignancy" or "affecting" quality.¹⁵¹ It is here, upon (cool) reflection, that the works become a sophisticated form of institutional critique. In an interview with Douglas Crimp, Lawler describes an uncomfortableness in knowing too much; "I'm not even comfortable taking photographs when I know what I'm taking. I feel as if approaching with too much clarity in advance could eliminate possibilities".¹⁵² It is interesting that Lawler sees her process as an uncertain one, trusting instinct, rather than the clarity and "dryness" of deliberate critique.¹⁵³ I find this process of 'improvising', counter intuitive to the cool ambiguity of Lawler's photographs. But this is because, in the editing process the images that don't hit the mark, are removed. I would suggest the "poignancy" in Lawler's photographs is an attitude, one which whilst still contributing to the discourse of institutional critique, is also humorously derisive. In the same interview, Lawler expresses a similar anxiety towards doing the interview; "My reservations are about wanting to foreground the work not the artist. The work works in the process of its reception. I don't want the work to be accompanied by anything that doesn't accompany it in the real world"¹⁵⁴ The obvious irony here is that Lawler's photographs are all about the foregrounding, it is the context within which Lawler photographs other artists works, which speaks to the reception of these artist's. Lawler then is asking for her works to be considered without

¹⁵¹ Lawler and Crimp, "Prominence Given, Authority Taken."

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Crimp's word, Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

knowledge of her as the artist, privileging the reception of the work by the viewer, which she wishes to be separate from her explanation. However, she does not afford the works she photographs, with the same privilege, this is because Lawler's lens is derisive, like a punk's retort it offends the system it critiques.

4.3 Louise Lawler and Gerhard Richter

In 2010 Dietmar Elgar, head of the Gerhard Richter Archive, invited Lawler to photograph new exhibition rooms at the Albertinum, Dresden. This invitation operates under a pretence of collaborative congeniality by Elgar, but it does Lawler's practice a disservice. Lawler's work is subversive, whereas Richter's work is symbolic and symptomatic of the historicist market and museum system, which Lawler aims to subvert. As discussed further on, Richter has always positioned his work within a western painters' canon, describing it as historical. What is ironic about the museum asking Lawler to photograph these rooms, is that it is as though they have invited the wolf to come sleep with the sheep. Lawler's process, her subjective lens, is one of subversion and derision, so is it a cheeky move by her to capture a moment so indicative of Richter's own historicization? Elgar suggests that Lawler's work acts as a counterpoint, "Richter's aloof approach to his work, which countenances no spontaneous emotivity, finds its congenial counterpart in Lawler's coolly scrutinizing photographs." But I would suggest that Richter and the Albertinum, self-conscious that the creating of one's own archive appears as a self-historicising act, invited Lawler's photography into the archive as an attempt to balance the appearance of such assumptions. Lawler's subsequent photographs contributed to the book, *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter Photographs and Works*.¹⁵⁵ The publication consists of images taken by Lawler of Richter's work since 1990, Richter's work, like that of

¹⁵⁵ Lawler, *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter : Photographs and Works*.

Andy Warhol have repeatedly figured in Lawler's practice, as a result, there were quite a few works which Lawler could choose for the book.¹⁵⁶

Lawler's engagement with male artists is indicative of a practice which bounces against a patriarchal historicism that dominated/s the art market and art institutions. This use of historicism is double-sided in the sense that it relies on the viewer's recognition of the artwork's restaged by Lawler. The artwork photographed provides a key to the works' interpretation, an understanding of the institutional critique it is performing. But on the flipside, it is unclear how the work can function without the viewers recognition. Ironically the historicist framework that Lawler undermines, creates the context for the institutional critique.¹⁵⁷ Sturtevant's work also depends on a similar recognisability, for Sturtevant's "trick" to work, where the viewer presumes her work to be that of Warhol or Frank Stella, for example, can only occur if the viewer is aware of the previous artist's practice, subsequently the more recognisable the artist Sturtevant reiterates, the bigger the trick. But of course, both Sturtevant and Lawler's practice's function on a broader scale than this. Their works call for a constant redress of the status of artworks, of the market and of the original. They question the apparatus in which they are working with a view to broadening their viewer's understanding of what constitutes the system of art associated apparatuses.

To return to Lawler's work with Richter, there was one photograph in the resulting publication that caught my eye, a work which contrasted the historical (historicist) nature of a practice like Richter's with the more historical materialist perspective of Lawler. This was *What Else Could I Do* (1994), a photograph of the oil painting *Kerze (511-3)* (1982) hanging on the wall of a Sotheby's auction room. Lawler's photograph is square, repeating the shape of Richter's

¹⁵⁶ The book seems to have been a birthday present of sorts for Richter, who turned eighty in 2012. I can't decide if a critical anthology of your own work published by your own archive is a gesture of self- historicising, (I guess an archive dedicated to you always is) or if it is a recognition of Lawler's work as a critical practice which derides the self-historicising of particularly, white, male artists by the art world. The word magnanimous springs to mind! Then I guess the answer is in the "/" present in the title also.

¹⁵⁷ As Crimp suggests in 1982. Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation (1982)."

painting, to the right of the painting is a small paper label put there by a Sotheby's employee. The label is not readable, but I presume it contains information about the painting. To the bottom left of the painting there is a blue dot on a white square tucked between the painting and the wall. The lighting in the auction room is slightly off, the brightest point of the spotlight hitting the top left quadrant of the square painting. The bleed from lights illuminating two other artworks on either side of the painting, blend with the spill of the central light. These other lights appear to be higher than the spot on *Kerze (511-3)*, giving the painting a slightly diminutive appearance. These other artworks either side of Richter's are not visible in Lawler's photograph.



Figure 9 *This Springs to Mind. My Photograph of Louse Lawler's Work "What Else Could I Do" (1994) Which is a Photograph of Gerhard Richter's Painting "Kerze (511-3)" (1982), (2018).*

Richter's painting in contrast to Lawler's photograph of the painting, is perfectly executed, the romantic melancholia of its symbolism unashamedly present. Compositionally it uses the simple rule of thirds, the candle appearing one third of the way into the canvas from the left. As an example of Richter's photorealist technique, the light around the flame is exquisite. The black space to the right both repeats the shape of the candle as well as creating a sense of depth to the space in which the candle sits. The work echoes neoclassical paintings, the wall behind the candle, for me at least, conjures the wall of the bathroom in Jacques-Louis David's *La Mort de Marat* (1793). As Tim Griffin points out in his essay *You Are Here* (2012), when in discussion with Jean-Francois Chevrier, Richter refers to his painting as, "An authentic historical reference to romanticism". He goes to great pains to distinguish his painting from other photorealist and hyperrealist painters. Although similar in technique, it is the subject matter which for Richter, separates his work from the others. ¹⁵⁸ ¹⁵⁹ "This is what separates me apart from the hyperrealists representing the present world with its automobiles, freeways, etc. For my part, I paint historical Paintings". ¹⁶⁰ However, as Griffin suggests "historical in what sense?" Richter's use of photography as a resource, in particular his photographic archive, *Atlas* (1962-2013), which has been the source for much of Richter's paintings, is a subjective collection of historic material, mostly personal photographs and newspaper clippings pasted on to sheets of paper. ¹⁶¹ His paintings are not historical in the sense of historic paintings such as David's *La Mort de Marat*, in contrast Richter transmits a feeling or sensation that evokes an historical affect for the viewer. In a sense Richter is trying to historicise this feeling, it is this intention to self-historicise which contrasts so well with the historical materialist perspective of Lawler's lens.

¹⁵⁸ Tim Griffin, "You Are Here," in *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter: Photographs and Works*, ed. Dietmar Elger and Tim Griffin (Munich : Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 9–21.

¹⁵⁹ Rainer Rochlitz et al., *Photography and Painting in the Work of Gerhard Richter : Four Essays on Atlas, Four Essays on Atlas*, 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Barcelona : Consorci del Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2000).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ This idiosyncrasy in Richter's practice is similar to Lawler's process, but its result also bears a strong resemblance to Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas, another historical materialist interpretation of art history.

Lawler's title, *What Else Could I Do?* can be read in several ways. I've noticed that only sometimes the question mark is included when written in the publication. In Griffin's essay the question mark is included, but next to the plate it is removed.¹⁶² This is most probably a mistake in the publication, but it also inadvertently illustrates an ambiguity about the rhetorical nature of the title. It can be interpreted as a statement of exasperation, a response to the painting alone, which is beautifully executed and succinct, but possibly leaves little for Lawler to work with. Could it be praise? But then why use the photo? Is this sense of exasperation more a response to the huge exposure this painting has already received? Did Lawler feel compelled to document the painting because it is so well known, a fan begrudgingly capturing Richter's most mainstream image?¹⁶³ Did Lawler then decide to deride this mainstream understanding of Richter's work by adopting such a title? Or is the title simply derision aimed at Richter's self-historicising and historicism more generally? Again, this could be a statement of exasperation, but this time aimed more broadly, deriding the ease with which the apparatus facilitates and absorbs such works, works which easily fit within a system of presupposed historicism.

4.4 Conclusion

Personally, I sympathise with what I believe is Lawler's multifaceted relationship to Richter and the historicist nature of work such as his. Richter's *Kerze (511-3)* is a work which I instantly recognise because we understand where it sits in the art canon. The art canon is a historicist system which acts as a measure to which an artist can respond, and Lawler's practice, like my own, exists in a grey space between critique of the canon and recognition of the canon. In fact, our practice of derision cannot occur without the canon, its powerful discursive support being the measure by which to respond/resist. This is also the grey space in which a rupture

¹⁶² Page 16 and 28. Lawler, *Louise Lawler and/or Gerhard Richter : Photographs and Works*.

¹⁶³ In 1988 the band Sonic Youth used two of Richter's candle paintings, *Kerze* (1983) which is compositionally a reverse of painting *Kerze (511-3)* photographed by Lawler, and *Kerze* (1982), for the cover art of their album *Daydream Nation*. Kim Gordon et al., *Sonic Youth Daydream Nation* (Geffen Records Inc, 1988).

can occur - the artist 'playing the fool' bouncing between a historical materialist perspective and historicism.

Chapter 5 The studio Research – Sifting Space

5.1 Introduction

The repetition of a movement, like the sifting of a sieve, an archaeologist scoops the sand into the sieve, with their trowel or hand, and sifts. Repeating the same movement until the sand has passed through and the archaeological fragments are left. In the body of work *Sifting Space* (2018-19) which comprises of a series of moving image works, the camera pans across or through the gallery space, the camera is at approximately eye-level making the movement feel like the (smooth) passage of a body. Sometimes the gaze of the camera appears as a passer-by, looking up at the last minute, and at other times, the gaze is more inquisitive searching for what is around the next corner. These impromptu movements of the eye are caught in a repeating loop. The scene ends but is unresolved, as the image fades to black, only to be repeated like the movement of the archaeologist's sieve. The repetition defies the impromptu nature of the glance, but the suspense remains. It is more drawn out, each swish of the sieve occasionally revealing another fragment, another reference in the network.

Sturtevant's repetitions were influenced by Deleuze's *Différence et répétition* (1968),¹⁶⁴ which Sturtevant translated and read when it was originally released in French. This process helped establish a philosophical "ground" for her repetitions in the 1960s and 70s.¹⁶⁵ Deleuze's theory distinguishes between repetition and generality, explaining that generality requires equivalences, cycles and laws. It is phenomena and events that occur in the same way, again and again. In contrast, repetition is a unique series of events or things which are distinguished by their differences. According to Deleuze, repetition is transgressive and "belongs to humour and irony" because it questions the laws of generality "revealing a singularity opposed to the particulars subsumed under laws".¹⁶⁶ In this sense Sturtevant's repetition is distinctive not

¹⁶⁴ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (1968).

¹⁶⁵ The English translation was only released in 1994. Sturtevant, Hainley, and Lobel, "Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley and Michael Lobel."

¹⁶⁶ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (1968).

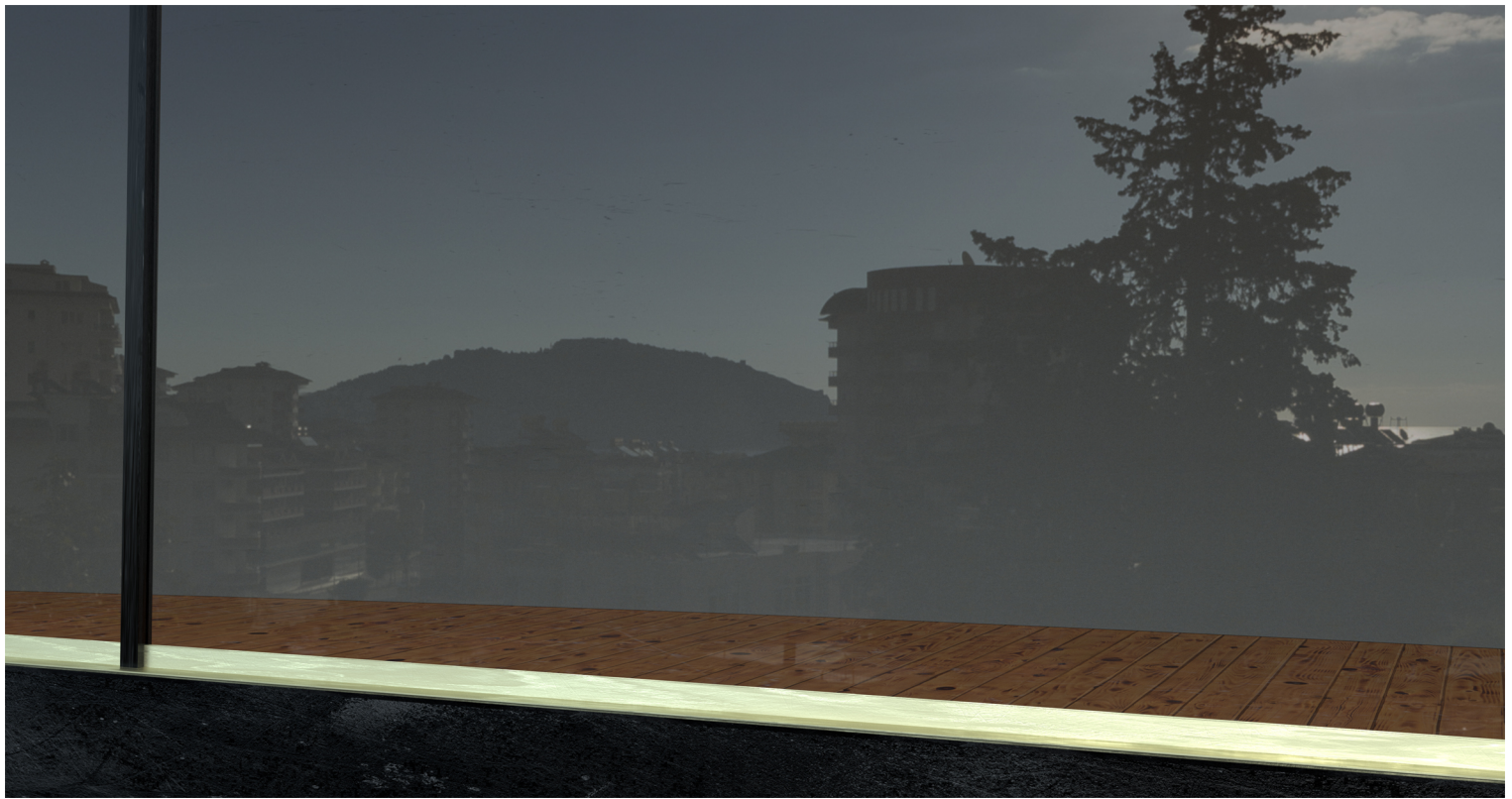


Figure 10 *Gertrude St*, Production Still (2018-19)

only because its physical appearance does not repeat perfectly the earlier version, but also because the intention and context under which the works were made function completely differently.¹⁶⁷ Adding another layer of complexity, Sturtevant's use of Pop Art works, such as Warhol's *Marilyn* (1962), makes her work, *Warhol's Marilyn*, a possible third iteration of the repetition, the first being the publicity shot for the film *Niagara* (1935) which Warhol used to develop his iteration.¹⁶⁸

5.2 Repetition

Another repeated work by Sturtevant, was *STURTEVANT, Author of the Quixote* (1970, published in 2009).¹⁶⁹ This book, makes direct reference to Jorge Luis Borges' short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1941).¹⁷⁰ Borges' story is the account of the fictional writer, Pierre Menard who attempted to "produce a number of pages which coincided – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes",¹⁷¹ repeating the words and lines inscribed in *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1605).¹⁷² This was not a process of copying the text, but of coming to the words by circumstance. For Menard the process was much harder than the task of Cervantes, given the large number of books and texts written since Cervantes' novel, and the difficult context in which Menard must write, this being the early 20th Century and not 17th Century Spain.¹⁷³ Deleuze also refers to Borges' story, suggesting that Menard's repetition, although identical, is "infinitely richer" given the unique intention and context under which the repetition was made.¹⁷⁴ Sturtevant's repetition

¹⁶⁷ Rutland, "Sturtevant."

¹⁶⁸ Elaine Sturtevant, *STURTEVANT, Author of the QUIXOTE*, ed. Udo Kittelmann (London: Koenig Books, 2009).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," in *Collected Fictions*, ed. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Books 1998, 1998), 88–95.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Cervantes, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* 1605.

¹⁷³ Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote."

¹⁷⁴ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (1968).

unlike Borges/Menard's was two chapters of *Don Quixote* written and released as a short run of books, the act both repeating Borges' idea and Cervantes' words.

Similarly, *Sifting Space* repeats both Borges' idea and the content of Cervantes. The different gallery spaces that the cameras pan through, are local artist run initiatives and not for profit institutions, that once existed in Melbourne and Sydney. In some cases the spaces depicted are spaces associated with existing institutions, for example, the video work *Gertrude Street* (Figure 10) shows the front gallery space located at 200 Gertrude St, Fitzroy, despite the fact that this institution, Gertrude Contemporary, has now relocated to the suburb of Preston. A similar shift in location has occurred for two other loops in the body of work, the institution West Space having moved twice since the time depicted in the work, *West Space, Anthony St* (Figure 11), and BUS Projects, *BUS, Little Lonsdale St* (Figure 12) which has also moved from its location at Little Lonsdale St. Other spaces such as Phatspace, Oxford St and First Floor, Victoria St are associated with institutions no longer running. The loose group of people associated with the operation of these spaces having closed the institution when the spaces shut their doors to the public. In all cases, the spaces depicted, represent physical spaces no longer open to the public. The function of these locations having now moved on to different purposes.

As a result, the spaces in the moving image works are developed from memory. Modelled in 3D computer software, the dimensions and the textures are based upon my recollections of each of the spaces. I do not know the degree of contact Sturtevant had with the works she repeated. Although she was friends with many of the artists, I can imagine that it was still necessary to make presumptions and guesses about the details of the work. Of course, the works are not copies, but repeated works, so exactness was not the priority of Sturtevant's actions. However, in order to jolt the viewer, it was necessary that the repeated works resembled the earlier versions, tricking the viewer briefly. In the case of *STURTEVANT, Author of the Quixote*, Sturtevant describes a process "governed by two polar laws. The first permits me to essay variations of a formal or psychological type; the second obliges me to sacrifice

these variations to the original text...”¹⁷⁵ Likewise, the spaces in *Sifting Spaces* adhere to a pragmatic sense of the physical properties of each space, the models depict the locations to the best of my knowledge or memory, but certain educated decisions were also made, for example the thickness of walls is based upon my knowledge of construction standards and the dimensions of standard materials. In most cases it would have been possible to revisit the sites to measure, document and photograph them, but there was a risk that this may contaminate the memory I have of each space. The other reason for not doing so is that these depictions represent a “psychological variation” on the earlier space, a repetition, but also a model.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Sturtevant, *STURTEVANT, Author of the QUIXOTE*.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

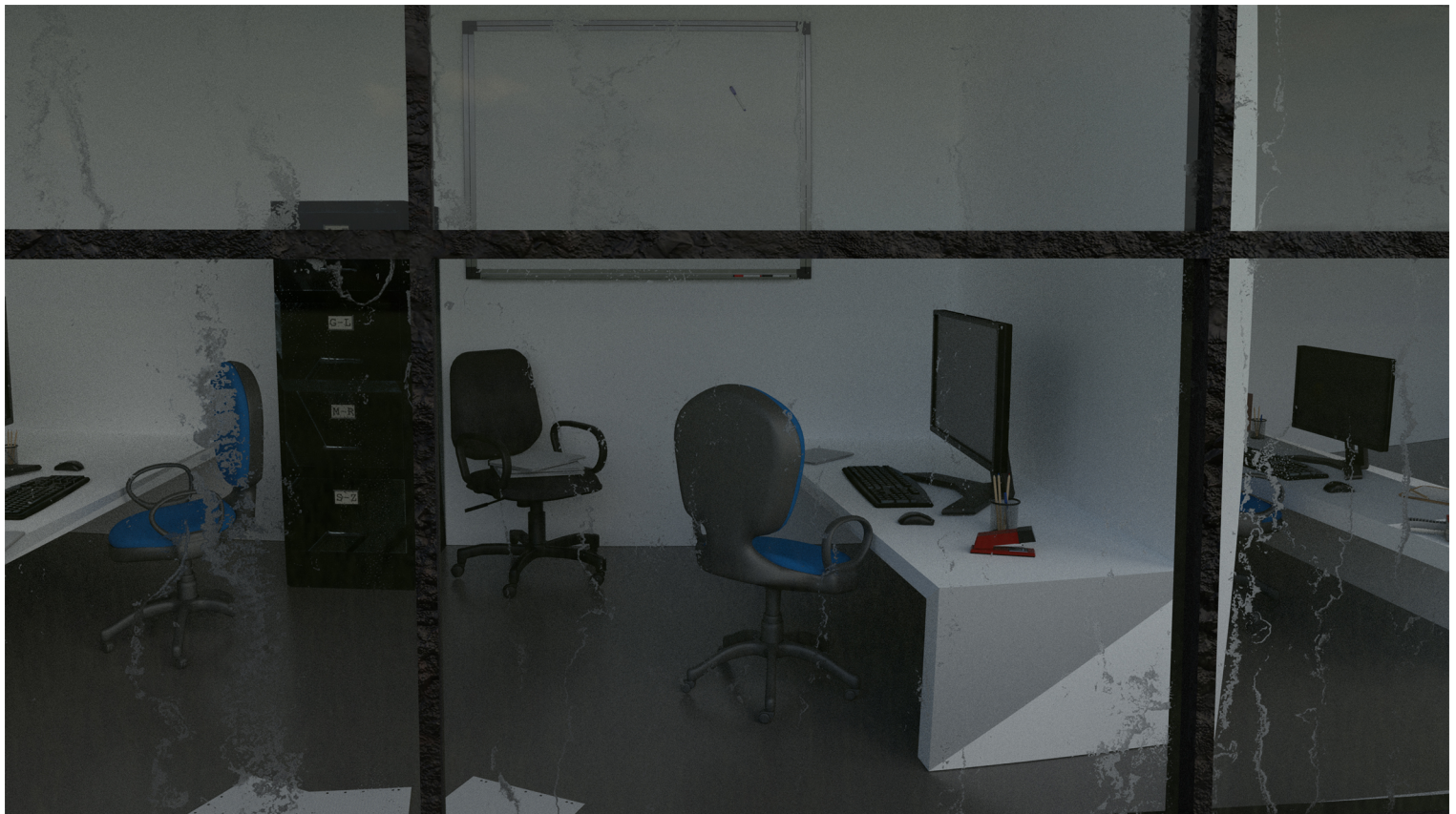


Figure 11 West Space, Anthony St, Production Still (2019)

5.3 Psychological Variation

A similar “psychological variation” occurs in Mike Kelley’s *Educational Complex* (1995), here Kelley made a series of architectural models of his childhood house and every school and educational institution he had ever attended. I had not realised when I began making *Sifting Space* the similarities between this and Kelley’s work. An unconscious move which differed, I became aware, from other works, I had intentionally ‘appropriated’ from history. And in the process of thinking through Kelley’s works, I came to better understand my own. This unconscious use of Kelley’s method exemplified the role of the fool in the methodology as it is discussed in chapter 3. Kelley intended to build his models from memory. As the process evolved, Kelley found it difficult to resolve the aesthetic of an architectural model, with the interior spaces as he remembered them.¹⁷⁷ Eventually it became necessary for Kelley to work with model makers, and to use existing architectural plans to finish the models. This meant that the exteriors presented, formally at least, as something one would find produced by an architectural firm.¹⁷⁸ This move towards an architectural model also resulted in the models appearing as “one superstructure”, with cuts in the model revealing the interior. As this suggested a utopic interpretation, given that models often *model* a more perfect version of society, Kelley saw the “superstructure” as appearing to model a social space in the tradition of Paolo Soleri’s *Arcosanti* (1970) or Rudolph Steiner’s *Geotheanum* (1928). Both public complexes that aesthetically reflect their social structures in their design.¹⁷⁹ In ironic contrast to this however, the interior of the models represented a distortion; Kelley and his team only modelled the spaces Kelley could remember, as he remembered them. In some cases, Kelley’s memory did not match the building plans used to develop the exteriors, here memory took precedent, such as the Catholic Elementary School, which resulted in interiors with classrooms too narrow to actually function as classrooms. If Kelley was unable to remember

¹⁷⁷ Mike Kelley, “Repressed Architectural Memory Replaced with Psychic Reality,” *ANY: Architecture New York*, no. 15 (1996): 36–39.

¹⁷⁸ Mike Kelley, Kim Colin, and Mark Skiles, “Missing Space/Time: A Conversation between Mike Kelley, Kim Colin and Mark Skiles,” in *Mike Kelley Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals*, ed. John C Welchman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 324–339.

¹⁷⁹ Kelley, “Repressed Architectural Memory Replaced with Psychic Reality.”

the interiors, the spaces were filled as white blocks, according to Kelley this was approximately 80% of the spaces.¹⁸⁰ This blocking out and distortion of memory, speaks to Kelley's interest in the controversial form of therapy, repressed memory syndrome. Popular in the 1990s, this practice often used hypnosis to recall traumatic events in the patient's past, which had been repressed.¹⁸¹ Although the work speaks to the influence of architectural spaces on the development of one's personality, the "psychological variant" in Educational Complex is the distortion caused by what Kelley is unable to remember. This also reflects, that one's ability to recall, although flawed, still results in a material work, one made more complex by what it suggests beyond the physical. As with Menard's chapters and Sturtevant's repetitions, the intention and context affect the circumstance, and in the case of Kelley's distorted memory, combined with the aesthetic of an architectural model, the difference between the iterations is what, makes the repetition "infinitely richer".¹⁸²

As with Kelley, *Sifting Spaces* repeats each gallery space as a model so that, the repetitions are distorted by the discrepancies in my memory. The camera pans through each of these modelled spaces again and again like the sifting of a sieve, with each repetition of the loop having the potential to reveal something more in the chasm that falls between the repetitions' differences. These differences are compounded by the *network of references*, which are revealed over time, as the loops continue to accumulate. Kelley's *Education Complex* also expresses the temporal, in the sense that it recalls his past, his childhood and educational years, but the object of the model itself, is static. The blocks representing the unremembered architecture and, in turn, the spaces where traumatic events may have occurred, offer the potential, through regression, to delve into Kelley's past, expanding the temporal dimensions.

¹⁸⁰ Anthony Vidler, "Mike Kelley's Educational Complex," in *Mike Kelley*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 94–105.

¹⁸¹ Kelley goes on to describe "false memory syndrome" explaining that many have accused psychologists of implanting memories according to their "own ideological dispositions". Kelley, "Repressed Architectural Memory Replaced with Psychic Reality."

¹⁸² Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (1968).



Figure 12 *BUS Little Lonsdale St, Production Still (2019)*

I should at this point, make a distinction between the repetition and the loop, which is also a repetition. Each computer-generated model in *Sifting Space* is a repetition of the site they depict. They are rendered in virtual space, guided by my memory of moving around the physical spaces. It could be argued that if one were to follow Deleuze and Sturtevant's logic, these repetitions, are not repetitions but depictions, given the difference in scale and materials. *Sifting Space*, thanks to the power of computer technology, is built to scale in a virtual environment, the camera negotiates the virtual space as it would in the physical world. Subsequently, despite the difference in materials, the works as they are presented in the moving image, do appear as though they are filmed in physical space. However, as a point of difference, when it comes to materials, Sturtevant paid very close attention to the accuracy or 'authenticity' of her 'source' works. For example, it was the "chance find" in a Lower Manhattan hardware store, of the same discontinued black enamel paint used by Frank Stella, that enabled her to make her Stella repetitions, such as *Stella Arbeit Macht Frei* (1989).¹⁸³ This dedication to the material ensured for Sturtevant the expediency in audience recognition of her sources. Sturtevant claimed that the object although crucial, was itself less important than the idea, the idea being the questions it raised as a repetition.¹⁸⁴ With a similar sense of expedience, in my case, towards keeping my subjective memory intact, the repeated object (as it is in virtual space) is similarly influenced by the idea, however the dedication here is to the distortion, whereas Sturtevant's dedication is to the object as a repetition. What occurs in *Sifting Space*, as the camera pans through these models on a repeated loop, is the repetition of distortion. This secondary repetition in each loop, as mentioned through Deleuze, is always different, it is through the process of producing such differences that, the *network of references* is built. The importance of networks to my practice and its relation to Benjamin's 'constellations' was presented in Chapter 2.

¹⁸³ Lee, *Sturtevant: Warhol Marilyn*.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

5.4 The Spaces

Earlier in the research I made a work titled *Out of Time* (2018) this work involved the R.E.M. album of the same title.¹⁸⁵ Part of the reason I noticed this album is because I own it on compact disc, a recently redundant technology, or at least one in the process of becoming outmoded.¹⁸⁶ It reminded me of Walter Benjamin's discovery of the outmoded Parisian arcades that he first encountered through Louis Aragon's *Le Payson de Paris* (1926), a book that detailed the outmoded (people, spaces, objects) in a Parisian arcade.¹⁸⁷ As with the arcades of Benjamin's time, the compact disc belongs to a previous century and earlier method of consumerism. According to Rolf Tiedemann, had Benjamin finished his great fragmentary work on the Parisian arcades, *Passagen-Werk*, it would have become a "materialist philosophy of the history of the nineteenth century"..¹⁸⁸ Buck-Morss also explains that, by focusing on the objects and the architecture found in the arcade, the "Corsets, feather dusters, red and green coloured combs, old photographs, souvenir replicas of the Venus di Milo, collar buttons to shirts long since discarded – these battered historical survivors from the dawn of industrial culture..." that Benjamin could test the relationship between the "concrete" and the "history of philosophy"..¹⁸⁹ The objects and architecture are the "historical referents" to philosophical ideas that form a constellation. In the opening paragraph to his *Convolute, 1935 Exposé*, Benjamin describes the architecture of the arcades, noting that their creation coincided with the early use of iron as a building material. Benjamin sees this use of iron and the tendency to replicate the columns of the Hellenic Period as an example of the way a "beginning is still ruled by the old", in an attempt to distinguish the architectural design from all that is old, this being the recent past, the architecture instead

¹⁸⁵ Michael Stipe et al., *R.E.M. Out Of Time* (Warner Bros Records Inc, 1991).

¹⁸⁶ For a more detailed account of *Out of Time* see the next chapter.

¹⁸⁷ *Le Payson de Paris* became the source for Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. 1897-1982 Aragon, *Paris Peasant 1926* (London: London, Cape, 1971).

¹⁸⁸ Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the *Passagen-Werk*," in *The Arcades Project*, ed. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 929–945.

¹⁸⁹ Introduction, Page 4. Buck-Morss and Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing : Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.

looked further back to a “primal past”.¹⁹⁰ In the same exposé Benjamin also mentions the 19th century socialist philosopher Charles Fourier who according to Benjamin “saw, in the arcades the architectural canon of phalanstery.” Again, according to Benjamin, Fourier describes a metamorphosis in the function of the arcades from one of commercial enterprise, to one of habitation, “The phalanstery becomes a city of arcades.”, a socialist utopia.¹⁹¹

The spaces modelled in Sifted Space have in their past, a similar history of metamorphosis. Gallery spaces residing in buildings which often, have previously been sites of commercial production and enterprise, before becoming, for a short period, artist run initiatives, and in the case of Gertrude Contemporary; public, not-for-profit galleries.¹⁹² Many artist run initiatives still had a relationship with the more commercial side of the art world, for example the term BUS in BUS Projects initially referred, to the word ‘business’. However, I believe this was an intentionally ambiguous name for the space, the allusion being little more than this. TCB Art Inc., another artist run gallery in Melbourne, similarly has a name which ambiguously refers to the commercial world, using the acronym for “Taking Care of Business”, again this can be read as an ambiguous and even ironic take on the actual working policies and aims of these institutions.¹⁹³ Although far from Fourier’s socialist utopia, it is these working policies and aims which to some degree align with the socialist, if not materialist, underpinnings Benjamin and Fourier identify in the arcades. To briefly outline these, one needs only visit the “about” pages at the gallery’s websites, although said in different ways they all centre around; advocacy for artists (usually with a focus on emerging artists), freedom to experiment, risk-

¹⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century: Exposé of 1935,” in *The Arcades Project*, ed. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–13.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Gertrude Contemporary describe themselves as “non-commercial and independent”. The site of Gertrude Contemporary at 200 Gertrude St, Fitzroy was, relatively speaking, there for quite a long time, 32 years, from 1985 to 2017. Gertrude Contemporary, “Gertrude Contemporary/About,” *Gertrude.Org.Au*, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://gertrude.org.au/about>.

¹⁹³ Also interesting in the case of TCB Art Inc is that from 2001 to 2006, the institution shared the gallery spaces with the commercial gallery, Uplands Gallery. Tcbartinc.org.au, “Tcbartinc.Org.Au/Content/About,” *Tcbartinc.Org.Au*, accessed November 28, 2019, <https://tcbartinc.org.au/content/about/>.

taking, public engagement and the support of creative practices.¹⁹⁴ ¹⁹⁵ ¹⁹⁶ A materialist response in regard to these spaces, is my use of them in the work *Sifting Space*, in the work these spaces now represent my own recent past, like the compact disc, they are “concrete” but still indicate to those who recognise them, an earlier time, but also, like the arcade’s iron work, these spaces, again for those who recognise them, speak to an ethos of artist lead, openness and support. Benjamin’s interest in the 19th Century was driven by the circumstances of his time, he saw the 19th Century as an “*ur*-history, a history of the *origins* of the present historical moment,” and he hoped the *Passagen-Werk* would act as a “political education” for his generation, redeeming the 20th Century culture of its “mythic, dream-state” by revealing historical knowledge.¹⁹⁷ For me, the spaces of my recent history found in *Sifting Space* represent an idealistic past, almost utopic, bordering on nostalgia, they tread the line of the “mythic dream-state”, which Benjamin seeks to undermine. But I believe that despite the models presenting as this, through the repetition of the loop and the distortion of memory found in both the models and the recorded accounts of the spaces, that this interpretation, instead speaks to the instability of memory and myth.

5.5 The Glance

The perspective of the camera as it encounters these spaces, takes as its inspiration, the photographs of Louise Lawler. Early on, I had intended to use the virtual models to create still images which spoke to Lawler’s work, but positioned in local spaces, even though she had never exhibited in them. This process removed the recognisability of canonical works found in Lawler’s photographs. Something Lawler uses to engage with the apparatus as a form of institutional critique. By removing this recognisability, the perspective of Lawler’s lens became the recognisable element in the still image, alluding to the absorption of such critique

¹⁹⁴ West Space, “Westspace.Org.Au/About,” *Westspace.Org.Au*, accessed November 28, 2019, <https://westspace.org.au/about>.

¹⁹⁵ BUS Projects, “Busprojects.Org.Au/About,” *Busprojects.Org.Au*, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://busprojects.org.au/about>.

¹⁹⁶ Gertrude Contemporary, “Gertrude Contemporary/About.”

¹⁹⁷ Page 47. Buck-Morss and Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing : Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.

by the apparatus as Douglas Crimp noted in 1982.¹⁹⁸ But this allusion was just one reference in a larger network, as I've discussed in the last chapter, Lawler's lens was/is also derisive and it was this perspective that I wished to appropriate. The inclusion of local spaces combined with local history, (Interviews with arts practitioners about their experiences with the spaces are a sonic component of the loops.) appeared to frame the work in the form of social documentary, albeit one filtered by personal memory. The problem I foresaw with this interpretation is that it placed the work too easily within a known context. Curated exhibitions have dealt with Melbourne and Sydney's rich history of artist run spaces in the past, *Pitch Your Own Tent* (2005) at Monash University Museum of Art, took a documentary look at the artist run spaces; Art Projects (1979-1984), Store 5 (1989-1993) and 1st Floor (1994-2002), exhibiting some of the works shown in the earlier spaces and ephemera from the period.¹⁹⁹ The National Gallery of Victoria's *Every Brilliant Eye: Australian Art in the 1990s* (2017) similarly included ephemera from artist run spaces alongside works from the NGV Collection, illustrating the strong link between these spaces and the broader national history of art.²⁰⁰ In a, possibly insecure, retort to such a categorisation, I chose to steer the work towards the *unknown*, using the perspective of a body's subjective encounter and the casual glance, combined with the distortion of personal memory mentioned earlier, in order to avoid the aesthetic of social history and documentation.

5.6 Conclusion

The *network of references* informing this body of work is complex, informed by the instability of memory and the subjectivity of the glance. It is also dependant on an obscure form of recognisability, for those who do recognise the spaces, it offers another level of complexity,

¹⁹⁸ Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation (1982)."

¹⁹⁹ Max Delany and Monash University Museum of Art, *Pitch Your Own Tent : Art Projects / Store 5 / 1st Floor, 23 June - 27 August 2005, Art Projects / Store 5 / 1st Floor, 23 June - 27 August 2005* (Clayton, Vic.: Clayton, Vic. : Monash University Museum of Art, 2005).

²⁰⁰ Jane Devery and Pip Wallis, "Every Brilliant Eye: Australian Art of the 1990s," *Ngv.Vic.Gov.Au*, last modified 2017, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/every-brilliant-eye-australian-art-of-the-1990s/>.

as it speaks to their own personal memories. The models to others, although certainly somewhere, may offer a more general response, the ubiquity of the gallery space aesthetic, with their white walls and lighting tracks still represented here. Either way the system of the repeated moving image loop, each time revealing a new reference to the network by its point of difference, builds to an unquantified image of the past. One neither myth nor historical knowledge, it exists for me at least in the realm of the *unknown*.

Chapter 6 The Studio – Flourishes on works made throughout the research.

6.1 Introduction

Over the course of the research several bodies of work have been made, some of which are not mentioned in the thesis so far, this chapter will be broken up into sections which will describe each of the works. Not every work exemplifies the methodological approach discussed in the previous chapters and are probably better understood as a series of works, which are biproducts of the experiment. This is not to suggest they are any lesser for this relationship but are instead stand-alone projects linked by a common theme. That being the prism of Benjamin's final *Theses* and the notion that each body of work is subjective and subsequently, an alternate take on the research via my own *network of references*. Each section will describe the body of work and then contextualise it within the written research and the perspective of the period in which these works were made. Essentially describing a methodology as it was applied in the time it was applied.

6.2 Annotated Biography 2016

This work is discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the methodological approach, what follows is a more illustrative account. Situated in a tutorial space surrounded by research studios, this work consisted of six chalk boards which stood upright, formed a concertina shape down the centre of the rectangular space. On these chalk boards were written (in white chalk), fictional accounts of interactions with artworks or historical events. The works referenced were Martin Kippenberger's, *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's America* (1994), Dan Graham's video recording of the punk rock band Black Flag, performing at the New York club, CBGB (1981), Peter Fischli and David Weiss's, *Der Geringste Widerstand* (1981) and Guy Ben-Ner's, *Moby*

Dick (2000).²⁰¹²⁰²²⁰³²⁰⁴ Each fictional account described the same character interacting with the individual works, each piece of writing was also written in a format which corresponded in style to the works being interacted with (which will be discussed in a few paragraphs). The character is that of a costumed Polar Bear, this same bear appeared in *Don't bite the horse's mouth where you eat, my friend* and *Return to Form: NDINAVIA*. In these earlier works the Polar Bear assumes the role of a self-reflexive antagonist, it subverts and questions any overarching theme or narrative conceit which I, as the artist might be relying on to make a work.²⁰⁵ However, in this work the Polar Bear is less self-reflexive and instead more intrusive, the actions it takes upset or even rewrite the narratives found in other artist's work.

Situated at each of the narrow ends of the tutorial space are objects. At one end, in the corner to the left of the opening, bundled in a sack, is the Polar Bear costume (See Figure 7). The positioning of the costume implies that it has been worn and then loosely placed back in its storage bag, this intentional staging, alludes to an event having taken place and as mentioned in Chapter 2, the potential for more to occur. This connects the exhibition through narrative to the fictional text written on the chalk boards. The work is titled *Annotated Biography* but whether it is my biography or that of the Polar Bear is left ambiguous.²⁰⁶ At the other end of the space, hung quite high upon the wall is a stuffed pike (Figure 5). The relevance of the pike,

²⁰¹ Martin Kippenberger, "The Happy End of Franz Kafka's Amerika," *Tate.Org.Uk*, last modified 1994, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kippenberger-the-happy-end-of-franz-kafkas-america-p79164>.

²⁰² This piece of footage was later included in the video documentary *Rock My Religion* (1983-84). Dan Graham, "Rock My Religion," *Moma.Org*, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/107472>.

²⁰³ Fischli and Weiss, *Der Geringste Widerstand (The Point of Least Resistance)*.

²⁰⁴ Guy Ben-Ner, "Moby Dick," *Moma.Org*, last modified 2000, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/120233>.

²⁰⁵ Both these works are discussed in Chapter 1.

²⁰⁶ I also did not have wall text or a room sheet to inform the audience of the title, if the work was to be exhibited more formally this would be the case but for the sake of the tutorial space the audience was told verbally the title of the work. This process itself generated a different context for the work which I didn't necessarily intend.

which is itself a standalone work titled *Fish out of Water* (2010), is convoluted, and like the Polar Bear has appeared in the same earlier works.²⁰⁷ In each of the works it has been a part of, *Fish out of Water* has been left unexplained, the pike is simply placed in the gallery space above a door or at a similar height. My intention is that it functions as a private joke, which if asked, I may explain verbally, but, left to its own ambiguity, the absurdity of its presence undermines any seriousness which might be perceived in the work it accompanies.²⁰⁸ In *Annotated Biography* it played such a role, it could be interpreted as a part of the narrative, polar bears do eat fish, but its main purpose was to act as an anomaly in the constellation, to be unexplainable, to keep the audience unsure, in contrast to the more concrete narrative suggested by the written text and costume.

The style of each text was written in response to the works the Polar Bear character was interacting with. For example, the text referring to Fischli and Weiss's *Der Geringste Widerstand*, was written as a television script, mimicking the police detective drama style Fischli and Weiss used in their work. In this short scene the Polar Bear is sitting at a table in an apartment, when there is a knock at the door. If this scene were to be included in the original film, it would be the moment Rat believes he has found the address of the artist/murderer responsible for the crime he and Bear are investigating. This takes place in a fifth-floor apartment, in the original film we see the apartment interior, but not the artist/murderer, who sneaks up behind the Rat, off camera, and clubs him with a rather flimsy sculptural form of geometric abstraction. The object does seem to render Rat unconscious however, and we next see him as he plummets from the fifth-floor window. The implication I make with the inserted scene, is that it is the Polar Bear, who throws Rat from the window.

The writing style for the fiction which interrupts Guy Ben-Ner's *Moby Dick*, again mimics a style relevant to the fiction used by Ben-Ner. It is written in first person and starts with the

²⁰⁷ For a more detailed account of *Fish out of Water*, see the footnotes on Page 39.

²⁰⁸ Another interpretation could be to see the pike as reference to the equally absurd Monty Python fish slapping dance. John Cleese et al., "Monty Pythons Flying Circus" (United Kingdom, 1972).

line; “Call me Bear” a direct reference to Herman Melville’s “Call me Ishmael” (*Figure 4*).²⁰⁹ The voice in the fictional text speaks with the hubris of an old and wise individual, who has now become the plaything of a small girl, a toy. However, despite the lack of respect the Polar Bear feels they deserve, the Polar Bear isn’t unhappy and appreciates the love they receive from their young companion. This fictional style speaks to the methodology Ben-Ner used to make a series of works from this period of his practice. Living in an apartment in New York, Ben-Ner with the help of his family re-enacted and filmed a slapstick and silent version of Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851). Ben-Ner used items found around the house to create elaborate sets for the scenes with both Ben-Ner’s and his daughter, playing multiple roles throughout the drama. The fictional intervention on the chalkboard in *Annotated Biography* is written in the style of Melville’s prose, but from the perspective of one watching Ben-Ner and his family work. In a sarcastic turn on my part, I have made the Polar Bear sceptical and dubious towards the artist’s intentions.

The fictional text which refers to Kippenberger’s *The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s America* takes the form of a police document. It details an event in which a character, the “accused” enters Kippenberger’s elaborate installation and sits down in one of the many ad-hoc seating arrangements that Kippenberger’s makes available, the “accused” is asked to leave by gallery staff, who is the “complainant” in the text. Later, the “accused” returns and continues to try the seating again, and again, security is called, this time whilst being dragged away the “accused” calls out “It says all applicants will be employed!”. This final call, like Kippenberger’s work is a direct reference, to Franz Kafka’s *America* (1927).²¹⁰ In the unfinished novel, the final chapter involves the protagonist, Karl responding to a placard advertising employment positions at the “The Oklahoma Theatre”, those applying are guaranteed a position, “If you want to be an artist, join our company! Our theatre can find employment for everyone!”²¹¹ By having the “accused” protest their arrest in the fictional interrupt, I was alluding to a

²⁰⁹ Herman Melville 1819-1891, *Moby Dick*, ed. University of Adelaide. Library (Adelaide: Adelaide : The University of Adelaide Library, 2008).

²¹⁰ Franz Kafka, *America*, ed. Max Brod (Ringwood, Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books 1967, 1927).

²¹¹ Ibid.

comparison between the openness suggested by the placard in Kafka's novel, and the limits on interaction surrounding an artwork, once it becomes rarefied in the museum or gallery context. In the "accused's" defence *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's America*, does appear to invite participation. Installed on a huge green mat, looking like an indoor sports field, it comprises of a variety of ad-hoc desks and chairs set up in an interview style scenario. Some desks and chairs look like they've been sourced from second-hand shops or garage sales, others are nothing more than bits of wood loosely fashioned for the purpose. My fictional intervention uses a bureaucratic document (a police report) to refer to the way Kafka's character Karl seems to have little control over his life, instead a naïve, he is propelled along by the rules and whims of others. In the scenario I've described, the confusion occurs because the "accuser", naïve like Karl, is unable to differentiate between the artwork and the system of bureaucracy represented by Kippenberger's work, What the "accuser's" act does is expose the "complainant", the gallery system to be the actual bureaucratic apparatus.

The fourth piece of fictional writing is set in CBGB's in 1981, written in third person as a short narrative. Here the Polar Bear is female, dancing to the screams of Henry Rollins, the lead vocalist for the hardcore punk band *Black Flag*. This concert was recorded by Dan Graham for his film *Rock My Religion* (1983-84). In this scene in the documentary, Graham draws a parallel between the Shaker movement, a religious group from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, who used impassioned dance to rid themselves of evil, and the feelings of disembodiment felt by a group of punk-rock fans at a concert. In my fictional writing set at this concert, the Polar Bear feels the adrenalin of the moment but is also hampered by the incompatibility of her body, the fur and bulk better suited to cooler situations. By making the Polar Bear female in this situation I am deliberately pointing to the extreme, white masculinity present in the footage captured by Graham. Although the issue of gender isn't something Graham necessarily focuses on, he later includes the performances of Patti Smith into the montage, another punk-rocker practicing during this period. Mimicking this shift at the end

of the text the Polar Bear rejects Rollin's anthemic line "Rise above, we're gonna rise above" replacing it with Smith's equally anthemic "Horse's, horse's, horse's".²¹² ²¹³

An obvious theme which links the works referenced in *Annotated Biography* is the use of narrative. *Der Geringste Widerstand* appropriated a police detective television drama style aesthetic and narrative, *Moby Dick* was a theatrical re-enactment of Melville's literary classic, *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's America* provided an end of sorts to Kafka's original novel, and *Rock My Religion* is a straight documentary, albeit with quite an unconventional aesthetic. The narrative found in these works, was used by me, to enter their form and build upon or extrapolate from them, creating new fictions involving my character the Polar Bear. In some respects, there is a relationship to Lambert-Beatty's term para-fiction, artworks which blur the line between truth and fiction, presenting accounts which on the surface appear true but are actually fictions.²¹⁴ However I think, the method I have used is more closely aligned to the Tom Stoppard play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966).²¹⁵ Stoppard's play extrapolated a narrative for the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The narrative uses a conventional theatrical form, to tell the existential tale of two characters doomed to be killed for betraying their friend. Likewise, *Annotated Biography* uses existing narratives to extrapolate a story, which allows it to humorously play with the existing form, in part, becoming a critical companion to the original. However, Stoppard's play is limited to the *network of references* found in *Hamlet*, whereas *Annotated Biography* is informed by a broader history plus characters and conceits from my

²¹² Henry Rollins et al., *Black Flag, Damaged* (West Hollywood: SST, 1981).

²¹³ Patti Smith et al., *Patti Smith, Horses* (New York, 1975).

²¹⁴ Lambert uses the example of Michael Blum, who invented a historical figure Safiye Behar for his work *A Tribute to Safiye Behar* (2005), made for the Ninth International Biennial, Istanbul. Blum's work presented an account of this feminist figure's life, including facts about those she had influenced, such as the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as well as doctored photographs all of which was shown the apartment in Istanbul where she grew up. This just happened to be the same apartment Blum was staying in whilst developing his work for the Biennial. Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility."

²¹⁵ Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, ed. Henry Popkin, 2nd ed. (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1966).

own practice, this forms a much wider and more ambiguous network, which avoids a hierarchy between the “original” works and new work.

The other objects in the space, the chalkboards, like the Polar Bear and *Fish Out of Water*, come from an earlier work and subsequently have their own history as objects within my practice.²¹⁶ The chalk boards have more of a functional purpose than the other objects though, they are the size of doors and are mounted on wheels, the legs have notches so that the boards can be connected at right angles. They can be configured in a space to act as mobile dividers controlling the movement of audience members through the space. The conversion of the dividers into chalkboards was a deliberate reference to the educational context in which the work was being presented. By doing this my initial intention was to allude to the priority of text and writing within a Masters or PhD course.²¹⁷ The configuration of the chalkboards into a concertina style zigzag, running the length of the tutorial space, loosely referred to the shape a pamphlet might make, when it is opened. It was also a response to the rectangle shape of the space, the intention behind the dividers in the original work and as chalk boards here, was to allow for a physical response to the site.

²¹⁶ Museum Divides and Confused Encounters. (2004)

²¹⁷ The first year of my research was under the MFA program, which I then upgraded to a PhD at the end of 2016. I initially struggled with the preference towards writing and text, believing that language circumvented the communication achieved by making art. I think I now believe that the two, writing and artmaking, although not exclusive, exist as two different forms or modes of communication, both equally versatile, dependant on the artist or writer.



Figure 13 Jane is counting the seconds, juggling anger at the situation with the sense that rage could pre-empt the revolution... a revolution obvious, but despite this still unseen. (2018). Photo, Christian Capurro.

6.3 Thought Bubbles (2017- ongoing)

This series of works is still ongoing, at this stage three pieces have been made. They consist of drawn thought bubble shapes like those found in comic books, which are upsized to human scale and then cut from black acrylic using a CNC machine. The bubbles are hung using coloured ropes hanging just above average head height, so that if someone were to stand beneath them, the bubbles appear to be emanating from that individual. The bubbles are held in place via a counterweight using a pulley or if possible, available architectural features and a weight, a sandbag or cinderblock.

Initially the thought bubbles were a response to the research, in part a reaction to my own frustrations with reading and interpreting text. I saw them as a metaphor for the moment when the text I was reading, became a clear in my mind and I experienced a moment of clarity, which often quickly evaporated! This metaphor was ironic too, given that it needed to be supported by the architecture and counterweight, used to hang the bubble.

In the early 1960s, Roy Lichtenstein took the thought bubble from the comic world and used it in a painting. As a form of Pop Art, Lichtenstein elevated the comic book page from its situation of printed expendability, to the rarity of the single painted canvas. This was a liberation of the aesthetic not dissimilar to Warhol's Campbell Soup can paintings and Brillo Box objects. However, much like the work of the commercial designers Warhol appropriated, the comic book already had an aesthetic. In the case of comic books this aesthetic was influenced by an economical imperative, the limited time between issues. This forced writers to develop techniques which conveyed their characters actions quickly and succinctly. The four-colour printing press led to the clever use of pointillism to expand the colour range. The requirement of comic book illustrators and writers to convey the thoughts and emotions of the individuals they were depicting, was done using exaggerated, facial expressions and body



Figure 14 Brad seems to be balancing the responsibility for our predicament with the acknowledgement that our future requires a revolution... one visible only at the periphery of his vision. (2017). Photo, Christian Capurro.

contortions, as well as an expressionistic use of line.²¹⁸ But when more subtle emotions were portrayed this was not enough, more *serious* narratives such as the romance comics Lichtenstein appropriated, involved characters whose inner monologue and emotions propel the story line. In this case, text inside a thought bubble is used repeatedly to convey what the character is thinking and feeling. Although comics often relied on stereotypes and simplistic emotions, elements of popular culture which sit well within the discourse of Pop Art, it could be argued, that when Lichtenstein transitioned the thought bubble from its original context, that the repetition of the image, created a space which allowed the content of the images to be focused on in a more critical context. On the one hand, this could lead the images to being open to ridicule, and I'm sure there is a level of sarcasm involved either on Lichtenstein's part or in the viewers response. But beyond this, the painting's exposed thoughts, simplified versions of our own thoughts, to the same level of scrutiny and critical thinking that Warhol's Soup Cans were discussed.

When making the thought bubble works, I felt it was necessary to refer to the Lichtenstein's paintings, if they didn't already do so in their form, even more so in their titles. Much as I had done with the *Annotated Biography*, I extrapolated a fiction out of an appropriated narrative.²¹⁹ Using two characters, Brad and Jane, Brad who feature's in the thoughts of Lichtenstein's *Drowning Girl* (1963), and Jane who's name seemed like an appropriate counter to Brad. I then wrote thoughts that these characters might have, which could then be visualised as text within the bubbles by the audience, these thoughts became the titles of each bubble. The titles have multiple functions, read together they contribute to an ongoing narrative involving the two characters. But also, the titles are deliberately long, the intention being that the audience struggles to keep the title in mind, whilst looking at the work, much like my struggle to find moments of clarity in reading the research material for this thesis, as

²¹⁸ McCloud offers a unique and broad understanding of the word "icon" to describe the short hand comic book writers and illustrators use to signify symbols, logo's and expressions. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow, 1993).

²¹⁹ Appropriated in this case as opposed to referenced as is the case with some of the works referenced in the *Annotated Biography* works.

mentioned earlier. This difficulty in remembering also leads the audience to possibly, disregard the titles all together, instead experiencing them solely, as sculptural objects.²²⁰

²²⁰ One pleasant interaction I witnessed with the thought bubbles was audience members photographing themselves (selfies) beneath the bubble. Often assuming the cartoon style “I’m thinking” pose.

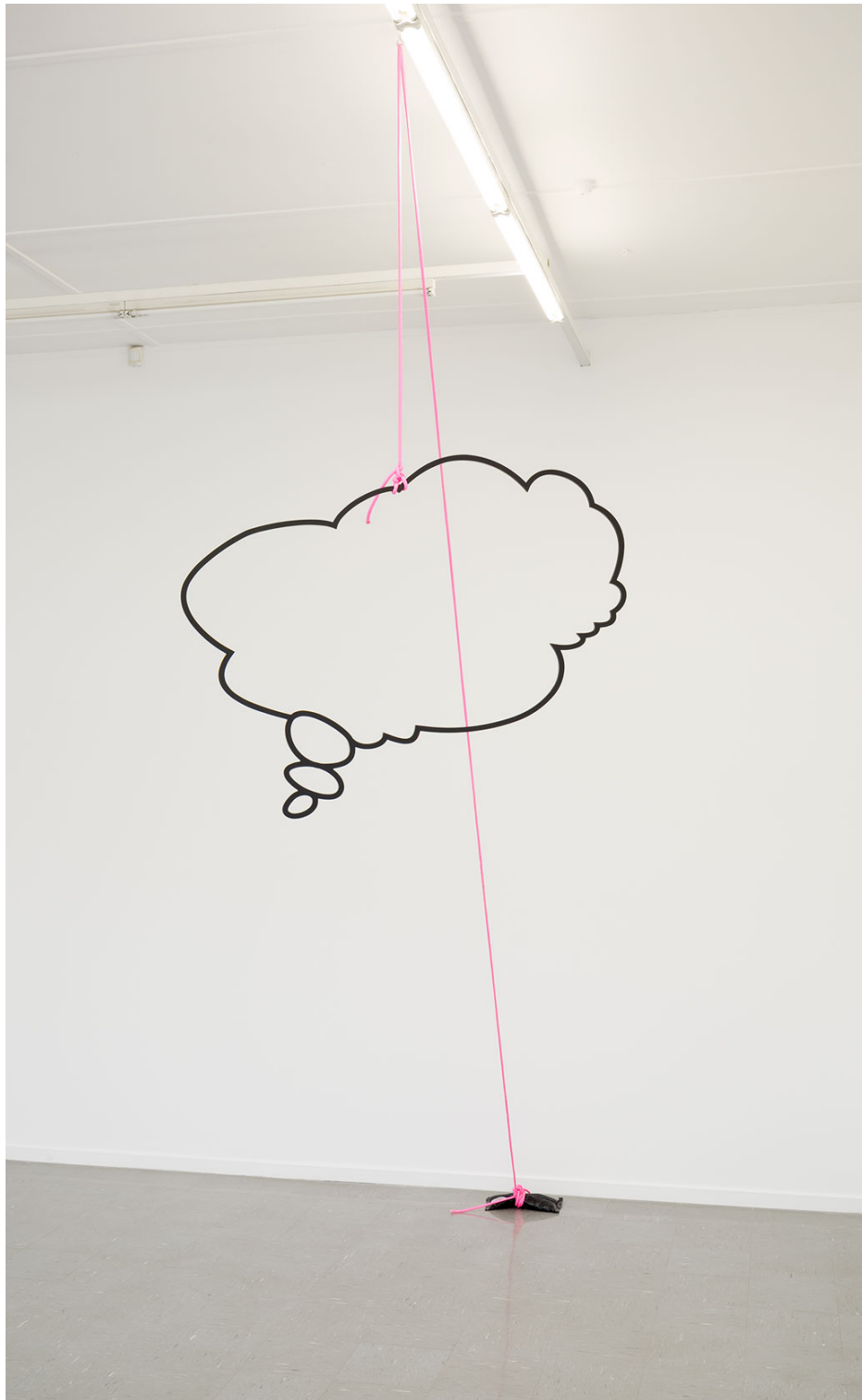


Figure 15 *Did we look away? Brad is maintaining doubt whilst keeping vigilant, doubt and uncertainty will be celebrated after the revolution... till then we must look both ways. (2018). Photo, Christian Capurro.*

6.4 Out of Time (2018)

Wearing one's heart on one's sleeve. This work came from an accidental reacquaintance with R.E.M.'s album, *Out of Time* (1991). As a result of a hard-drive failure, I was forced to digitise my compact disc collection for a second time. Because I stopped purchasing compact discs in the early 2000's this process inevitably became a nostalgic process.²²¹ When I reached the letter "R" the title of this album struck me. I had always assumed the title referred both to the idea of being out of time with the beat, in a musical sense, and the sensation of running out of time. But here it occurred to me that the title could also refer to the notion of being out of step with history, out of step with contemporary thinking, or separate to the historicist timeline. That this position of being "out of time" was similar to Benjamin's *jetztzeit*, a space separate to the continuum of time, necessary for the historical materialist to make the dialectical "leap into the open air of history" (See Chapter 2).²²² In some respects, the rediscovery of this album acted as a catalyst for these thoughts and ideas to take place, a small *fleeting imagining*.²²³ The work itself does not convey all these ideas, but the physical material of the compact disk, the reference to time in the title and the pop-cultural significance of the album and band, lead me to think that by presenting the album in a gallery context it would be possible for it to act as a catalyst for others.

²²¹ I should point out that I digitised my entire collection "warts and all" which means no editing of the collection occurred during the process – this means at times when the collection is played on shuffle I am usually in for some embarrassing moments, but also pleasant surprises! – make of it what you will!

²²² Thesis XIV. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

²²³ A personal note. In the mid-nineties when this album first appeared in my world it actually belonged to my father a friend of his had made a copy on cassette tape and posted it to him. Neither of us had heard of R.E.M., but we both responded to the music. The song (which later became a single) *Losing My Religion* prompted much conversation between us. I was fifteen and the sense of loss and angst in the song gelled with my generally morose mood whereas my father response to the song was much lighter, he also preferred the song *Shiny Happy People*!



Figure 16 Out of Time (2018). Photo, Christian Capurro.

It also occurred to me that the material properties of the compact disc were now if not “out of time” at least “of their time”.²²⁴ To expand on the idea of time inherent in the physical material, I thought it necessary to include other formats of the same album both of which bring with them their own pop-cultural significance. The vinyl record needs very little introduction, except to say that it has been a medium for the recording and distribution of music for the longest time, from the earliest gramophones to contemporary DJing, it is still an important format.²²⁵ However, something has shifted, up until the invention of cassette tapes (excluding cartridges – a format which appeared in the late 1970s/ early 1980s and which has its own particular nostalgic niche.) vinyl records were the dominant format, its distribution linked to the rise of popular music through the 50s, 60s and 70s. The other interesting feature of the record is its resurgence, some believing, the analogue sound of the vinyl record is superior to the digital because of its “warmer” sound, compared to the “colder” digital formats used to encode compact discs.²²⁶ This may well be the case for some listeners, but there is also a sense of nostalgia attached the vinyl record, which speaks to an earlier period and form of listening.

The cassette tape is a format forever associated with the 1970s and 80s as I mentioned in a personal note earlier, I first listened to the album *Out of Time* on a copied cassette (Footnote 222). The ability to copy music with consumer grade tape decks, lead to the “mix-tape” phenomenon. This shift in distribution, made it possible to “give” music to friends and family cheaply.²²⁷ This combined with the cassette’s portability allowed people to play their own

²²⁴ I talk about this regarding Benjamin’s *Passagen-werk* in Chapter 5.

²²⁵ Wile details the work of Emile Berliner, whose company *American Gramophone Company* preceded the more successful *National Gramophone Company* creating the first disc shaped record in 1897. Raymond R Wile, “Etching the Human Voice: The Berliner Invention of the Gramophone,” *ARSC Journal* 21, no. 1 (1990).

²²⁶ And downloadable formats or streamed music.

²²⁷ Stock separates the mix tape into four non-exclusive, categories; the “Letter Tape” which demonstrates the makers musical taste to the receiver, the “Convenience Tape” usually done to avoid purchasing the original recording, the “Lesson Tape” which introduces the music to the receiver, and the “Mood Tape” a collection of songs designed for a particular theme such as a “road trip”. Paul Stock, “Sociology and the Mix Tape: A Metaphor of Creativity,” *The American Sociologist* 41, no. 3 (2010): 277–291.

music in their cars, on the street and of course, directly into the ear via the Walkman. The format was still analogue however and like vinyl records, the playing of the tape did eventually wear out and affect the quality of the music. With the arrival of compact discs this was no longer the case. The first compact disk was made in 1982 and was sold throughout the 1980s, but it was the in the 1990s that the compact disc became the dominant format. The Compact disc did not wear out, it was digital not analogue and with the rise of personal computers it was still possible to make “mix-tapes”.

By placing each format on a shelf in chronological order, from left to right, there was play between the formats and the title of the album.²²⁸ For example: Is one of the formats “out of time”? In the sense that the “superior” audio quality of the compact disc might be the format “in time” in the 1990s. But then one might argue the preference for the “warmth” of the vinyl record is still preferable and subsequently representative of “another time”. Possibly, it was the cassette that was “out of time”? But in the early 1990s, few people had compact disc players in their car, or even in their homes, so there was still a strong market for cassettes, not to mention the convenience of a copied cassette, which was much less expensive. Perhaps the more important point, is that all of these formats are now “out of time”, predominantly individuals no longer buy material objects when they buy music. Vinyl records, cassettes and compact disks are now, like the Parisian arcades in Benjamin’s *Passagen-werk* are the material of a previous century, they represent a form of consumerism used in the recent past.

²²⁸ Ironic, given that each of the formats were released in the same year.



Figure 17 Magic Bus (original photo of Zane Kesey found at <http://brian-robbins.com/mountain-girl-and-the-magic-trip-a-conversation-with-carolyn-garcia/>) (2018).

6.5 Magic Bus (2018)

The following text is the artist statement which accompanied the image above, as it was presented to Bus Projects in 2018. I don't wish to unpack the work as I feel the text which lyrically and rhythmically, I quite like, combined with the methodology as its been described up till now, provides enough insight into the work. However, I will say that the work *Magic Bus* can be understood as a precursor to the body of work, *Sifting Space*.

Magic Bus – Artist Statement.

A photo of Zane Kesey standing in front of *Further*, the bus used by Ken Kesey and The Merry Pranksters to 'turn on' America in the 1960s. The photo is hanging on the wall of BUS Projects at Rokeby St Collingwood. Except it isn't the actual space, but a 3D rendering of the space.

Four points on an improvised timeline. The first Point is the viewer, the viewer could be standing at any moment in time after the printing of the image. This is sometime after September 2018, given that the printing is part of the 2018 Bus Projects Fundraiser. The audience's view of the space is from the outside looking in. The second point in time, is the space of BUS Projects at Rokeby St (At some point this image will be exhibited in the space - creating a cosmic paradox... maybe! Also remember it's not actually the space, but a 3D rendition based upon my memory of the space... Paradox averted?). The third point is Zane Kesey, son of Ken. The photo is taken some time in the 2000s, Zane, with volunteer help, rescued *Further* from its decay, attempting to reignite the trip... Zane in his psychedelic t-shirt represents a blood link to the fourth point, which is his father Ken and the bus *Further*. Extrapolating from this point, the 1960s, the slightly naïve idea of 'turning on' a population, the power of an altruistic motive. A political leaning not dissimilar to the leaning of those involved in setting up and maintaining an artist run space, such as BUS Projects. A very loose ideological loop.

Outside, behind the viewer is the forest. Magic.

Arlo Mountford 2018

Conclusion

A conclusion is a tricky thing, because as the formalisation of the methodology in this thesis might suggest, it is that *knowing*, is problematic. And to conclude something is to come to a resolution, to have sifted the fragments and determined an outcome. A conclusion also implies an end, but we know the struggle of Benjamin's historical materialist is un-ending, despite a teleological hope that an improvement in a situation, through the redress of the historicist apparatus, might contribute towards a better future. As Benjamin suggests, "flowers turn towards the sun, by the dint of a secret heliotropism the past turns towards the sun which is rising in the sky of history."²²⁹ Here Benjamin's "flowers" are "courage, humour, cunning and fortitude" the tools of the historical materialist in their inevitable struggle to "question every victory, past and present of the rulers."²³⁰ The complexity of the historicist apparatus means that to question it, one must even question the tools which one uses, and subsequently, I would add the "flower" of doubt, to Benjamin's repertoire. Suggesting that to not know, to be *unknowing*, can also redress the apparatus, and that if the apparatus were to assimilate the position of *unknowing*, it might cause the historicist to also operate, from such a position. This research then is the formalisation of the tools, with which to continue, tools which insist on the intrusion of doubt, both towards historicism and their own authority. I hesitate to say a manifesto, because of the 'can of worms' such a word might release, but it is a manifesto for moving forward, whilst prioritising the *unknown*, constantly questioning historicism and one's own position in relation to the past.

I have described the origins of the research as they were found in the work, *Don't bite the horse's mouth where you eat, my friend*, a work which responded, in part unwittingly, against what I perceived as the presumptions of the audience and exhibition system. This system subscribed to an historicist understanding of art history, which perpetuated the mythology of the artist and positioned the gallery as a purveyor of this myth. It was Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, which offered a set of tools with which to tackle this problem in the

²²⁹ Thesis IV. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History 1940."

²³⁰ Ibid.

course of the research. But Benjamin's theses only answered part of the puzzle, it aligned with the political perspective of the methodology, however it was Benjamin's concepts of the constellation, *jetztzeit* (now-time) and the dialectical image, which helped to describe and articulate the methodology, in particular reference to the *network of references* and how the *fleeting imagining* might occur.

But even this did not complete the picture. I still hadn't accounted for the use of humour in the practice, which operates as a subversive tool, the ironic, sarcastic and derisive methods of the jester, which question the existing context, whatever this might be. And finally, the unwitting fool, who must enter the fray of the historicist apparatus, *unknowingly*, prepared to mistake windmills and good intentions alike. It was in the history of art that I found examples of both the fool and the jester. Moments where artworks ruptured the predominant apparatus. The rejection of the work, *Fountain* (1917) was one such incident, and it seems even today; this work has returned to spark controversy, given the strong possibility that Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, may have either collaborated with Duchamp or even submitted the work herself under the pseudonym R. Mutt. Regardless of the work's authorship, the object presented the existing system with the absurd, and though rejected, caused a breach in the apparatus. Sturtevant similarly seemed to suggest the absurd, her repetitions; representatively, geographically and temporally, so close to their 'sources', that they both tricked the viewer and questioned the power associated with authorship. However, Sturtevant's intention was much broader than this, looking to Deleuze's *Différence et répétition*, her repetitions asked what it meant to repeat. Finally, the photographic work of Louise Lawler is where I see another act of the absurd. Through a subjective and derisive lens Lawler contributes to an institutional critique which is both part of the apparatus, but also derisive of it. Lawler appropriates the work of her contemporaries, as Sturtevant did (although Sturtevant rejected the 'appropriation' label), but instead of repeating them, Lawler's photographs recontextualise the works which appear in her images. Showing them not as they were intended, but as they are, hindered by the machinations of their context. It is this take on the rupture, one informed by subjectivity, which informs the fool in my methodology. A subjective and instinctive reaction to context.

As I mentioned in the introduction, in an attempt to not “foreground” or translate the exhibition which accompanies this thesis, I have deliberately not discussed the works here. However, given that the methodology privileges the subjective response to context, it would be safe to presume that the context of this particular body of work, is made in response to the research and the academic system within which it is made.

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