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Until now, the task of defining the creative-arts cluster within academe has been an imprecise exercise driven by strategic imperatives to group disciplines that do not easily fit traditional research models, in terms of methodology or output. When Australian art, design, and music schools were amalgamated with universities twenty years ago, it was easy to corral and indeed isolate creative practice as equivalent to traditional research in science and the humanities. It took some time for artists, designers, musicians, and others to discover that such equivalence was worse than tokenism, since it aimed to brand creative practice as being irrevocably different to accepted notions of research. The sort of difference that allowed “equivalent” to be remodelled as an antonym for “identical” when it came to research funding, access to grants, and the status of outputs.

Recently, it has become harder for universities to maintain an exclusionary boundary between the creative disciplines and the long-established university arts and sciences. Partly this is because disciplines, such as creative writing, drama, and multi-media, or new media, have developed post-amalgamation from within existing university humanities disciplines. More significantly, the area of creative arts is the fastest developing area of research in Australian universities, and thus attempting to marginalise creative disciplines is a futile, contradictory exercise.

Indeed, while many traditional university disciplines battle to attract undergraduate and postgraduate students, the creative disciplines continue their exponential rise in the demand for their programs. In the area of higher degrees by research, the past twenty-five years has seen the creative-arts sector go from a base of almost zero enrolled Doctoral candidates to over one thousand across Australia today. Leaders in promoting the creative disciplines, such as the University of Sydney and Griffith University, currently each have over two hundred candidates enrolled in creative arts Doctorates.

The rapid expansion of studio research has created a vacuum into which many of our young and not-so-young Doctoral graduates find themselves. There are few grants available to them; post-doctorate scholarships are almost non-existent in the creative areas; and, above all, there are few journals in which they can publish the results of their research. Studio Research aims to make a modest contribution in filling that role within Australia.
RESEARCH IN THE STUDIO:
EXTENDING THE HORIZONS OF PRACTICE

Grey, dear friend, is all theory. Green is the colour of life’s golden tree.
Johann Wolfgang Goethe, 1829

Goethe’s famous quote from Faust appears in a dialogue in which Mephistopheles (the Devil) attempts to seduce one of Faust’s pupils away from his studies by drawing his attention to the charms of a buxom serving wench in a tavern. In Goethe’s play, Faust himself is drawn into a pact with the Devil because he is losing faith in the apparent certitudes of theory. Goethe’s play is thus a parable concerning the eternal tension between theory and practice that artist researchers know all too well.

The articles in this issue began as papers presented at a mini-conference held at Griffith University in 2010 by postgraduate students enrolled at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, and the University of Newcastle.

Submissions were sought on the theme of ‘The Role of the Studio’ in postgraduate research. We asked for first-hand accounts of how the students’ studio practice had interacted with theoretical research in their progress towards either a PhD or a professional Doctorate in Visual Art, and what role the studio plays in an artist’s practice. The articles published here provide valuable insights into the complexity of this issue, and also signal much hope regarding how productive its resolution can be.

John Barnes, a painter from Newcastle, is critical of those who have prophesied the death of the studio. Artists such as Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, and Daniel Buren, he says, shifted the studio into new spaces that challenged the typical concept of the studio as a “rat-infested garret” or an “opulent space flooded with heavenly sunlight”. For Barnes, the studio remains indispensable. However, it is not “the unbound mind of the artist in which concepts are formed”, but “the place where these ideas are developed and transformed into concrete reality”. He contrasts his pre-academic artistic practice, where he’d paint at home in his sitting-room, with his current practice, which is based in a specialist studio in an institutional context. He concludes that there is no one studio: the media with which an artist works, the materials used, and the scale and budget of an artist’s operation all determine quite different spaces that could be all be called studios.

David M Thomas, from Brisbane, draws analogies between Martin Scorsese’s The King of Comedy and the work of Martin Kippenberger, which each reflect on the subjective transformation that happens within the artists’ studio—in often comedic ways. Thomas argues that the studio is an ambiguous space, a zone in which the artist’s subjectivity is formed in relation to the whole institution of art. In this sense, collaborators, errors, and, in fact, any contextual factors, all contribute to what may be called ‘the studio’.

The next article, by Newcastle-based Helen Hopcroft, provides an example of such a zone, with particular emphasis on its dynamic, process-based nature. Originally from Tasmania, Hopcroft recounts how her studio project evolved from a review she wrote on a (family member’s) musical album, which featured lyrics about characters in Tasmanian history. The review leads her to collaborate on a theoretical article with a researcher who introduces her to an intriguing concept: the ‘Tasmanian Gothic’. As the theme begins to increasingly characterise her image-making, Hopcroft pursues it through different authors’ work, finding it constantly necessary to “close the circle between theory and act, image and idea”.

A similar conclusion is reached by Peter Fenoglio from Brisbane, who makes photographic works based on his investigations into the impact HIV has on the cultural practices of particular Australian Indigenous groups. He regards “being in the studio” to be whenever he meets with his participants, listens to their stories, and takes notes about their totems, relationships, and lifestyle changes. Moreover, as he states, an artist “is in their studio any time they are researching (i.e., investigating and making) works of art”. The studio, he decides, “is where you are at the time”.

William Platz’s studio work is clearly inextricable from his theoretical research for it expressly addresses an art-historical category, the ‘historiated’ portrait, “a portrait of a known individual in the guise of another, typically a historical, mythological, or allegorical figure”. But his work is also intertwined with its exhibition context. As he reports, specific texts and the critical reception of his work have led him to “make further works, studies, and reflections that focus on the specific interactions and theatricalities that take place within the studio when creating portraits”. For Platz, an exhibition is thus an experimental laboratory that is integral to the studio process.

The interaction of theory and practice finds a midway point in systematic, more or less ‘scientific’, experimentation for several of the artists. For example, in her quest to portray the character of the Brisbane River that runs past her own house, Jennifer Stuerzl recalls that “the synergies between studio practice and theoretical research” resulted in an
“enquiry into the scientific and rational perception” of her subject. This prompted her to immerse her canvas directly into the water so that, over a period of several days, mud was deposited onto its surface and she recorded tidal inundations. By these means she became able “to see the river in terms of memories and experience, and a connection with the river ecology, rather than the depiction of a rational and linear succession of isolated images”.

Roslyn Taplin, who lectures in environmental management, and Antonia Posada, an evolutionary geneticist, both also study at the Queensland College of Art. Each of their contributions reflect on how doing scientific research relates to their studio practice,

Taplin, frustrated with how much verbiage about environmental research is produced and how little is done about it, resolved to visually “depict the contrasts between political rhetoric and the need for action”. Accordingly, writing text, she says, is “an integral part” of her art-making. The images she draws are “constructed from the words of the symbolic and platitudinous speeches of political and UN leaders at their conferences on climate change issues”. For Taplin, to see the studio as “separate from society and environmental concerns would be to deny personal responsibilities”.

For Posada, the relation between theoretical and studio concerns is no less necessary, but not as comfortable. Her goal is to develop a studio methodology that makes use of her specific scientific knowledge and practical scientific skills, but that also “embraces the more sensuous and sometimes counter-logical nature of the art-making process”. Making her rigorous taxonomic work possess “emotive power” by evoking “a sense of belonging” requires a constant negotiation between her “inner artist” and her “inner scientist”.

It seems that the studio can be many things, but the studio and the laboratory in their institutional contexts are evidently not quite the same thing.

Dr George Petelin
Executive Editor
STUDIO RESEARCH
ROLES OF THE STUDIO

John Barnes

Informing theories and practices are found in the art studio [where] visual arts research has to be grounded in practices that come from art itself, especially inquiry that is studio based.

(GRAEME SULLIVAN 2005, XVII)

HISTORICAL NOTIONS OF THE STUDIO

The ‘studio’ carries differing connotations. For artists, the mediums in which they work, the materials they employ, and the scale and budget at which they operate all significantly impact their studio’s requirements and meaning. For those not involved with art production, the notion of the ‘studio’ will carry other sets of thoughts and envisioned ideas. These may be influenced by exposure to actual artists’ workplaces but more often they are the product of romanticised and mythologised portrayals. Such imaginings are created via Hollywood movies, such as Vincente Minnelli’s Lust for Life (1956), where Kirk Douglas plays the lead role of ‘the brilliant but tortured artist’, Vincent van Gogh.

To such depictions can be added literary works, including Emile Zola’s The Masterpiece (1886) and Christina Rossetti’s pre-Raphaelite poem In an Artist’s Studio (1890), while in the contemporary Australian context, R Ian Lloyd and John McDonald have created idiosyncratic photographic and verbal portraits of artists through studies of their studio spaces. In painting, the artist in their workplace has been a constantly recurring theme, appearing well before Jan Vermeer’s The Artist in His Studio of 1665, Gustave Courbet’s 1855 portrayal, The Artist’s Studio, and Henri Matisse’s red version of 1911, The Red Studio, each classic works.

Commonly projected views of the studio tend to come from opposite ends of a narrowly imagined spectrum. At one extreme is a rat-infested garret where unheralded masterpieces and scattered tools of painterly labour surround the starving, half-mad, male-genius creator. It is a damp, squalid, dark, and confined space, illuminated only by the faltering light of a near-exhausted candle. At the purple end of this spectrum is a voluminous, orderly, and opulent space, flooded with golden rays of heavenly sunlight where the court-appointed, court-anointed (or, contemporarily, media-anointed) artist-as-celebrity conducts a never-ending soirée, celebrating their apparent genius.

These extremes bear little resemblance to the everyday reality of artistic production. In this postmodern era of plurality and relativity, the purpose and function of the artist’s studio shifts as quickly and as frequently as the changing nature of artistic practices themselves. However, this is not unusual; historically, the studio has always been flexible enough to accommodate the needs and realities of differing artistic practices as they have evolved.

THE STUDIO UN-DEAD

The current moment in which we live and practice art has been described as “post-museum, post-gallery or post-house-of-the-collector” and also “post-studio” (Davidts and Paice 2009, 6–8). However, even a cursory examination of the greater art world shows these prescriptive appellations to be little more than ill-founded projections—headline-grabbers uttered for self-aggrandisement or an undisclosed benefit for those who pronounce them.

The ‘death of the studio’ is dependent on the ‘death of painting’, the ‘death of drawing’, the ‘death of sculpture’, or the ‘death of the image’; in fact, it relies on the death or disappearance of the art-object, whatever its nature. But the art-object has ignored these death threats and not only does it continue to live, but it thrives and multiplies. Despite predictions to the contrary, art has not dematerialised.

In their book The Fall of the Studio (2009), Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice note that premature and somewhat disingenuous death-notices for the studio have been proclaimed by such artist-luminaries as Robert Smithson in the 1960s, Daniel Buren in the 1970s, and Richard Serra in the 1980s, and still continue today (2009, 2–10). Artists such as these felt a need to break free from the restrictions imposed on them by the traditional studio space. They were also attempting to confront the plastic arts as they stood, perhaps to replace them with their own ‘new’ art forms. In reality, these moves were part of a personal choice over how, where, and with what to make art. The scale, materials, and methods of their practices determined and demanded a move from the conventional studio into the countryside or steel-fabricating factories where their works could be better executed.

However, despite their stated aims to ‘replace’ something, these artists, by choosing to work outside the confines of a traditional workshop-studio, actually broadened the possibilities of art-making processes and production. Regardless of what they may have said, often these artists’ conceptual and developmental work was still carried out in
conventional studio environments (though these perhaps bore a closer resemblance to design, engineering, or architectural offices), while at other times the planning and construction phases were carried out in situ.

THE STUDIO AS FACTORY

During the 1960s, Andy Warhol rejected any quasi-prophetic view of the studio's grim future. Instead he saw the opportunity for expanding art-making into art-business, where an art-product was manufactured not in a studio but in a factory. He was able to combine Walter Benjamin's insight into the nature of reproduction with capitalist zeal to produce his art-product on low-tech, guild-like, production lines in his factory-business. The marketing division held a premier position in the overall operation and because of his understanding of the marketplace, Warhol was able to access and supply a new group of consumers, as well as previous ones, with his work.

The art-consumables produced under Warhol's direction and brand name were available to a newly wealthy group of potential art-purchasing patrons, along with the traditional art institutions and established collectors. His factory's exhaustive output was often viewed, reviewed, and promoted as if it was produced for popular consumption. This manufactured perception was founded on the imagery he used from popular culture and the low-tech methods he employed. However, the Warhol factory-studio was always a business operation, producing cheaply made, over-priced, exclusive art-commodities for consumption by a new field of international investors. The success of his operation has been incalculable.

Contemporary international artists such as Olafur Eliasson continue this brand-dominant, production-line method of making and marketing art, combining it in their offices and studio spaces with quasi-scientific notions of experimentation and research. Others, such as Jeff Koons, choose to become designers and directors, outsourcing all their production to artisans who, in turn, occupy their own studios.

THE STUDIO OF POSSIBILITIES

In recent decades, the promotion of site-specific installation art seems to have generated a belief that this type of art-making is something new. However, site-specificity is one of the most ancient of all artistic considerations. Some of the oldest works of art in existence—such as the cave paintings in Lascaux and those from northern and central Australia—are site-specific. So too are the pyramids of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Central and South America. The sculpture, painting, and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, the cathedrals throughout the Christian world, the mosques of Islam, and the temples of every other religion are all inseparably bound to their site and setting. However, then as now, except for the cave-dwellers, much of the conceptual planning and development of these pieces would have taken place in what we describe as studio-workshops, detached or on site, enclosed or en plein air.

With the recent prominence given to site-specific practices comes a conviction among certain decision-makers that such works, along with video-art and performance pieces, are somehow inherently superior to other forms of existing practice. Such prescriptive thinking is severely limiting in a time that Arthur Danto identifies as presenting "a field of possibilities and permissibilities in which nothing is necessary and nothing is obliged" (1998, 122). Each area of practice presents its own field of opportunity in the endlessly additive repertoire of art-making possibilities and a studio is where these possibilities are realised.

The function of the studio has always occupied an indistinct position, being the shifting locus of ever-changing practices. Technological changes in art making creates the need for spaces with different attributes, as required by the nature of the practice. Whether working individually or collectively, painters, sculptors, printmakers, 3D artists, photographers, video- and performance-artists all use workspaces with features specific to their needs. Graeme Sullivan observes that,

the contemporary artist these days is part theorist, performer, producer, installer, writer, entertainer and shaman, who creates in material, matter, media, text and time, all of which takes shape in real, simulated and virtual worlds. (2005, 4)

For those who operate outdoors, the studio can be wherever they choose. The practices of en plein air painters, photographers, and digital artists are all portable, even though many works are developed and finished within a studio's walls.

STUDIO AS WORKPLACE

Until I started my postgraduate research in February 2007 at the University of Newcastle, I had never had a specific space reserved for making and contemplating art. When I lived in the country, the amount and physical size of the paintings I produced meant I could work in a corner of my sitting room at home. When I enrolled in art school in 2002, it was the first time I had access to studios dedicated to different areas of art-making and my needs in the fields of photography, digital media, interactive performance, and sculpture were all well catered for.

After a number of years concentrating on sculpture, installations, and digital media, I returned to painting as my central practice and I therefore needed a studio. I was allocated a space within a large shed that was close to the main
art school building. Despite its poor lighting, susceptibility to flooding, and that it was freezing in winter and sauna-like in summer, my space became the centre of my work’s conception as well as its production. One result of working in such a large space was that I began to produce much larger paintings, the tonal range of which was to shift over time. Such changes were directly influenced by my immediate conditions, such as the quality of available light and the volume of the space itself.

Good as it seemed at the time, this arrangement was not to last; after settling in, a violent storm brought down a mature eucalyptus tree across the shed. Though no personal damage was incurred, I had to move to a new studio within the main building itself. In the new space, I had to accommodate a number of adjustments, as not only was it comparatively small but I was forced to share it with another student.

I knew my fellow occupant from our short period in the old shed where there was plenty of space between us but this was life and work at much closer quarters. My initial feelings were reserved but it was soon apparent that the advantages of our new situation far outweighed any possessed by the old. The new space was light, dry, and relatively warm or cool as desired, and there was ample room. While my practice’s physical requirements were well met, it was from unforseen areas that many less tangible benefits have flowed.

Sharing a space means that one has to consider fellow occupants, but it also invariably leads to sharing and exchanging ideas. The studio became a place for activating a discourse and considering points of view not encountered when working alone. In my situation, our agreed ‘open door’ policy stimulates and broadens academic and artistic interaction as we make direct, informal connections with differing groups in the art school.

As my studio is in the main building, close to the library and attendant academic and technical support, it has become the focal point of my practice and research. It is the place where my work’s theoretical and practical aspects coalesce, where conception transfers into production and discourse infuses output. When one is surrounded by work that is central to one’s research and practice, points of reference are never hard to find.

This is the position to which Davidts and Paice refer in The Fall of the Studio; they recognise that the studio’s function has transferred from a place of manual labour to one of intellectual labour. They refer to Lucy Lippard and John Chandler’s “post studio” projections in The Dematerialisation of Art (1968), where they identify the change in function and focus of the studio that gradually blurs the distinction between academic and artistic pursuits while embodying the “‘studious activity’ that permeates contemporary ways of making” (Davidts and Paice 2009, 7).

Flexibility has always been key to artistic practice, and while artists continue to make art-objects by any means in any medium, workplaces called studios will continue to exist for creating and producing these objects. While the studio is not the unbound mind of the artist in which concepts are formed, it is the place where these ideas are developed and transformed into concrete reality. Studio characteristics will be as variable as the practices they accommodate and as there are no limits to artistic practice, there can be no limit on the nature of spaces in which art is conceived or produced.

Dr John Barnes recently graduated with a PhD in Fine Art, University of Newcastle.

REFERENCES


In the quote above, American grunge guru Jay Mascis suggests, perhaps unwittingly, something of the existential state that occurs in an artist’s studio. Similarly, in Martin Scorsese’s 1983 film The King of Comedy, the basement studio of protagonist Rupert Pupkin becomes a site for a pathological projection concerned with subjective transformation. Curiously, the ontological aspiration encountered in the studio can be connected to the experience of the art museum. These two spaces, usually understood as conceptually separate, are closely linked in that they both relate to and rely upon complex formations of subjectivity.

Working in the studio can encompass many different scenarios. While the most common and frequently romanticised case is the artist working alone, many also choose to work alongside assistants or collaborators. This paper considers the journey made from studio to stardom by fictional character Pupkin, as well as the work of real-life and now-deceased artist Martin Kippenberger, who worked with numerous collaborators and assistants. As I will show, Pupkin’s aspirations and fantasies evoke numerous parallels to the art world, and Kippenberger’s work in particular, which commented on its inner workings. Through his practice, Kippenberger revealed the complexities of subjectivity and its functions in the studio and the museum, deliberately questioning the possibility of an artist’s self-representation. Moreover, he lampooned the idea of the studio as a place for self-construction and the museum as a site for subjective confession, reflection, and transformation.

As his career progressed, Kippenberger increasingly engaged assistants to develop and fabricate his work. There were practical reasons for this, including his desire to expand the professional scope of his practice. More importantly, however, Kippenberger sought to address the difficulty an individual faces when thinking about their ‘self’. I will argue that his involvement with other artists and assistants was intended to provide a sharply objective and satirical articulation of the ever-changing nature of his own self-image and sculptural self-proxies. This active soliciting of help was a solution for Kippenberger whereby the self as both a serious philosophical idea and a suspect popularised zone could be comically compared and therefore critiqued. The works that profit from these relationships demonstrate how one’s studio practice, an individual’s experience of the museum, and the construction of one’s self can intersect.

THE ARTIST’S STUDIO

The artist’s studio is a zone where subjectivities are sometimes consciously, but often unconsciously, conjured. Here the artist asks formative questions of themselves, such as “what kind of artist am I?”; “what kind of person am I?”; “what do I like?”; “what kind of thing would an artist like me do?”; “what role do I play in the story of art?” These questions may, at times, unintentionally mimic modern societal concerns with self-improvement. In turn, the quest for self-improvement is often linked to appearances. The artist’s studio can be a place where, among many other actions, these appearances are considered and manufactured, critiqued and redressed.

However, these appearances do not exist purely within this context, nor do they exist hermetically; they are interconnected and are part of an existing exhibition system. Daniel Buren states that “the Museum on the one hand and the studio on the other are linked to form the foundation of the same edifice and the same system” (2010, 156). As I will argue, in the studio, as much as in the museum, the artist works equally on their teleology of self as on any concrete idea, object, or project. In this way the studio provides the practitioner with a physical space in which to imagine and enact multiple outcomes for their work and themselves.

Humour, also present within these relations and aspirations, is central to Kippenberger’s practice, located in the somewhat heroic and desperate belief that any artist can achieve objective self-understanding. His work plays with the teleological qualities of studio practice, when the artist projects themselves into their own “life movie” with a series of imagined scenarios or professional outcomes (Diederichsen 2008a). For most artists, this imagined projection might manifest itself as something as reasonable as a professional strategy or career plan. The comic tragedy that Kippenberger
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ZONES OF SUBJECTIVE PROJECTION

David M. Thomas

sought to address was that any artist could become trapped in their own grand design. This loss of freedom ironically often comes from becoming too successful or well known for doing a particular thing or being a certain kind of artist.

Unsurprisingly, most artists aim to improve their practice, and by doing this, it is often supposed that they improve themselves. Buren (2010, 161) states that the studio is the place in which a work of art can be seen in its most highly detailed ontological and historically appropriate state. He asserts that the studio, or initial place of production, is the most significant space for viewing the work, where the work is most itself. It may well also follow that the studio—as the site of an artist’s initial point of realisation about these understandings and their relationships—is the place where the artist is most themself.

THE KING OF COMEDY AS A MODEL FOR SUBJECTIVE TRANSFORMATION AND TRANS-STUDIO PRACTICE

An unsettling representation of the above-described condition is found in the character of Rupert Pupkin, played by Robert De Niro, in The King of Comedy. Pupkin strives to be a comedic celebrity and performs in his basement studio, which is a careful recreation of the television studio of his idol, comedian and talk-show host Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis). The studio is complete with cardboard cut-outs of Jerry and his one-time guest Liza Minnelli (figure 1), as well as a large photo-mural of a studio audience (figures 2 and 3). The experience is made all the more realistic by the index of a recorded laugh track.

Pupkin’s belief that he should be the greatest comedic artist is as teleological as Kippenberger’s belief that he has an important role to play in the narrative of ‘Art’ (Diederichsen 2008a). This partially psychotic internalised narrative is projected at both artists’ own image of themselves. The backdrop for this projection and the necessary armature and testing ground for this narrative is the studio. For Pupkin, this imaginary space actually prevents him from attaining the success that he so desires. For, in his basement, Pupkin is genuinely isolated; he can only access the world to which he wishes to belong via his imagination.

Pupkin not only sees himself as an artist among other artists; rather, he dreams of being the best and most powerful artist. Ultimately, Pupkin wishes to replace or become Jerry, and refers to himself as the ‘king of comedy’. Barbara Mortimer notes, “Rupert’s identity is a matter of being transformed into discourse; his status as television image is the highest attainable version of selfhood” (1997, 36). Furthermore, “Rupert intuitively grasps that to be a celebrity, one need only be recognised as one” (Mortimer 1997, 35).

Importantly, Pupkin’s selfhood is not achieved through proven ability, acquired secret knowledge, or a specific qualification or award that signifies a particular set of achieved comic expertise.

At the beginning of the film, Pupkin seizes an opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with Langford, in which he expresses his professional aspirations. Langford’s advice is for Pupkin to leave his lonely basement studio and enter the riskier sphere of action as a real comedian with an actual audience. Pupkin ignores this advice for a more directly psychotic action: he simply imagines that he has a professional working relationship with Jerry. When this fantasy is stripped

Figure 1 Rupert Pupkin’s studio, film-still from The King of Comedy 1983 © Regency Enterprises, 20th Century Fox
away, another even more extreme course of action is sought. He decides to collaborate with an equally crazed character, Marsha (Sandra Bernhard). Living out her own teleological delusion, Marsha imagines herself in an intense romantic relationship with Langford. In order to realise their parallel dreams, the pair kidnap him and render him inanimate in Marsha’s townhouse. By duct-taping him to a chair—in a comically over-the-top manner—they turn him, in effect, into a sculptural object. The ransom for Langford is eight minutes of television airtime, long enough for Pupkin to perform his comic monologue in front of Langford’s audience. The result of this collaboration is that Pupkin, after serving a minimum jail sentence, is catapulted into the kind of heightened state of selfhood, that of a celebrity, the ultimate destination in his teleological fantasy. The celebrity status he achieves is not because of his comic ability but because of the extreme nature of his actions. This creates a strange schism between the television-studio space and reality:

This not quite real, not quite imaginary show seamlessly merges Rupert’s fantasy life (subjective point of view) and the public world of television (objective point of view). In this last scene, they become inseparable: Rupert has disappeared into the two-dimensional stream of televisual discourse, the contemporary identity taken to its logical extreme. (Mortimer 1997, 36)

The psychological and ontological space between Pupkin’s home studio, the television show, and the actual world reflects a similar dynamic that is explored by Kippenberger, which concentrates on that between the artist’s studio, the art gallery/museum space, and the often embarrassing and banal reality of contemporary life.

IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE TO DEAL WITH THE ONE: MARTIN KIPPENBERGER AS TOP BANANA

Pupkin’s fantasy of becoming the ‘king of comedy’—and, more importantly, his basement environment—can be seen as analogous to the cliché of the artist alone in the studio. In order for Pupkin to escape his professional and ontological stasis, he requires real-life accomplices, conspirators, and even hostages. His collaborators are manipulated into transmuting his fantasy into agency. Just as group action was necessary for Pupkin to move from the simulated to the real television studio, Kippenberger’s exhibition and studio practice was enabled through collaborators. In his work, the artist’s studio and activities therein, were always a kind of simulation of the museum space and its activities. Kippenberger’s first major studio began operating out of Berlin in 1978; a Warhol-like factory, it was called Büro Kippenberger (Kippenberger Office). The space functioned as a traditional studio; in it, he created his works with and without assistants. Importantly, it was also a space where he exhibited his and other artists’ work in a quasi-museological manner. Kippenberger produced catalogues, lists of works, and even had stationery produced. Naturally, the discrete nature of these activities became blurred in this single space. In this setting, his collaboration with artists and assistants came together to address the nature of the museum space as
a type of existential studio. This activity often intentionally problematised self-imaging in order to concretely render subjective interpretations of artistic works. In these endlessly elaborate activities, Kippenberger addressed and absorbed the transformative and edifying intentions of the museum space. Not simply wanting to be like an institution but to actually become one himself, Kippenberger eventually accessed actual museums and Büro Kippenberger was given up for the more mobile and fluid method of working with many artists in multiple studio spaces in a number of cities on multiple projects simultaneously.

On a practical and professional level, the immediate outcomes of these working processes were somewhat successful during Kippenberger’s lifetime; he produced an array of large-scale commercial and small museum exhibitions in Europe and North America. However, the approval from larger museums, especially within Germany, was not as forthcoming. More recently, Kippenberger’s practice has achieved acceptance by the international museum community, with retrospectives held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Tate Modern, London. As well as the rich complexity found in his work, this recent acceptance is no doubt partially due to his acts of institutional defiance. Like Pupkin, Kippenberger has become what he most wanted, albeit posthumously, as much because of a perceived institutional transgression as for his artistic ability.

What distinguishes Kippenberger’s studio practice to that of his peers is that he was unconcerned with producing objects that conformed to purely his ideas. Rather, he believed that his work would benefit from potential communication failures and even malfunctions in its fabrication. This is reminiscent of Warhol’s practice where the printed or painted glitch was embraced as ontic slippage. In a more convoluted and deliberate manner, Kippenberger actively encouraged mistakes, misunderstandings, and confusion. This process would often be built on a joke between himself and an assistant, where most of the joke had been forgotten from the night before and the strangely rendered objective remnants were its intended result (Diederichsen 2008b, 147).

As Diederichsen notes, “Their [i.e., the assistants’] job might have been to make his production more difficult or call it into question, or it might have been to speed it up, to develop ideas, or to hamper their development” (2008b, 148).

The studio in these situations was not always Kippenberger’s; he might be a kind of guest or interloper, colonising an artist’s practice as well as their workspace. According to Diederichsen (2008b, 148), these negotiations—with other artists and their spaces—created a conceptual space for the objective rendering of the artist’s self in a way that would have been impossible for him to achieve by himself. The intention of this process was to produce an intrinsic subjective agency in the works. One of the maxims in this process was “to explore the problem of individuality and authorship, the magic of personal presence in art objects, and the controllability of that which is uncontrollable and contingent” (Diederichsen 2008b, 148). Through these elaborate workings, Kippenberger played with the metonymic relationship between artist and work of art, and the transfer

Figure 3 Photo-mural of audience in Rupert Pupkin’s studio (detail), film-still from The King of Comedy 1983 © Regency Enterprises, 20th Century Fox
Figure 4 Martin Kippenberger L’atelier Matisse sous-loué à Spiderman [Matisse’s Studio Sublet to Spiderman] 1996, offset, 58 x 39.8cm © Estate Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne
of the artist’s subjectivity into the art object, which occurs as a consequence of this dynamic.

Kippenberger’s mannered performance of the self might be seen as oppositional to minimal and conceptual art practice, which asserts the object as a pure objective presence. Through avoiding gesture and indexical information, minimalist/conceptualist works are intended to stand only for their material, spatial, and temporal actuality and to negate any subjective quality. Kippenberger’s focus on the subjective also confronts conceptual practices where the object becomes a referent or icon only of a theoretical position; in both these aesthetic positions, the centrality of the subject as content in the work is marginalised or dispersed. Kippenberger’s work reveals that such a desire to neutralise the subject is inevitably undone by the unavoidable dependence on museological and economic systems. In these systems, authenticity and authorship are central to the dissemination and valuing of any work. For example, the naming and identification of works become personalised and therefore subjective, as in “that is a wonderful Judd”, “this is a remarkable Stella”, and “have you seen the Sol LeWitt work?” These blurred distinctions between work of art/object and artist/subject become central to Kippenberger’s project as both context and comical material.

Kippenberger saw his own self-appointed role as “namer” in this process to be as much museological as it was teleological (Diederichsen 2008a). To understand his own position and subjectivity in the field of artistic possibility, it was necessary for Kippenberger to also locate, describe, and name the position and role of the other players in this narrative. Kippenberger’s practice was often concerned with the artist’s point-of-view and would often result in pictorial descriptions of his ontology. Earlier works were often large-scale, literal renderings of the artist in paint, while later works moved to three-dimensional abstracted representations. These later sculptural works are referred to as ‘Peter’ sculptures, and they present uncanny surrogates for the artist. Kippenberger himself used ‘Peter’ as a suffix, literally meaning ‘guy’, as part of his own personal vernacular. For example, when referring to a landscape painter, Kippenberger would call him the “romantic tree guy” or the “romantic tree peter”.

Diederichsen writes,

Kippenberger wanted to take his own Peter-hood as an Object. But how can one observe one’s own thingamajig? How can one see the suffix that is trailing behind one’s self? This is why, for the first time, his assistants became so important in his work as observers of the observer (2008b, 123).

Kippenberger’s teleological understanding was a sense that everything in his world was leading toward the ultimate outcome of himself as an important historic artistic figure. This ‘life movie’ included the museum as the ultimate setting and most appropriate site for his work.

THE MUSEUM AS STUDIO OF SUBJECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

Kippenberger Büro’s blurred functions reveal his opinion that the museum can become an extension of the studio space. He also saw the idea of the studio as a zone for a particular order of narrative content. From photographs of modern artists, such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse in their studios, Kippenberger absorbed the allegorical content of late modernism. Images of Picasso that appear in David Douglas Duncan’s book *The Silent Studio* (1976) became important sources for Kippenberger, who used them to explore ideas of subjective self-creation. For the exhibition *Matisse’s Studio Sublet to Spiderman* (1996) Kippenberger produced a poster, a collage that incorporates an image of Matisse transposed with that of the Marvel comic-book character, Spiderman (figure 4). The combination depicts Matisse using the museum not only as his studio, but more as a substrate for a drawing that he accomplishes through nothing less than superhero virtuosity and a long stick.

In Kippenberger’s installation, *Spiderman Studio* (1996), a studio set was built in the style of a European artist’s loft, with geometric text paintings, a sink, and an effigy of the artist as Spiderman (figure 5). The museum is the framing context for this staging of the artist-in-his-studio. Here, Kippenberger deliberately plays with the mythology and ontology of being in the studio. In the museum, the plurality of the visitor’s experience is in line with Kippenberger’s existentialist assertions that the self (the artist’s and the viewer’s self) can be anything that it asserts to be. Through presenting the artist’s self as a fictitious, partially transparent superhero, Kippenberger suggests that there is no objective fixed state to this self and that the self is constantly in a process of appearing and disappearing. He seems to be warning against this type of introspective and isolated space; that to practise by oneself in this situation could cause one to become trapped in their own web.

CONCLUSION: PLEASE DON’T SEND ME HOME

This discussion has considered the studio as a place where other spaces and subjective narrative outcomes are imagined. In *The King of Comedy*, the artist’s studio is a hidden theatrical space where Pupkin’s self-actualisation is imagined and projected. However, his actual transformation from ‘schmuck’ to ‘king’ can only occur through collaborative action; in this case, a kidnapping that has to happen outside of the home studio. This extreme activity enables Pupkin to then commandeer the actual television studio that his home studio simulated. In this way, the initial studio presents the practitioner with a physical space to enact multiple outcomes for artistic self-actualisation. In this instance, the home studio was ultimately inadequate in activating the object as art, or Pupkin as artist.

One can see this same institutionally and subjectively transgressive strategy at work in Kippenberger’s art practice. The artist’s studio becomes a simulation of the museum space and a type of metaphor for the television studio. The assistants and collaborators who produced many of Kippenberger’s works were, in effect, its cast and crew. In this setting, Kippenberger played with the metonymic transference between artist and work of art. He also elaborated and complicated the all-too-common confusion that exists in art between the artist and their work.

With the help of his assistants, Kippenberger played with the expected reception of the mythical artistic persona and offered it back to the museum as a complex, subjective joke. Kippenberger’s later sculptural works or ‘Peter’ sculptures and installations, addressed the duality between a work of art or object, and the artist self as subject, collapsing it on itself, to create an intentionally funny ego deflation. Works such as Spiderman Studio provided an experience that, for this viewer at least, was simultaneously comically discursive and confrontational.

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REFERENCE LIST


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Let me begin this paper with a personal anecdote. While walking towards my university library, dragging a large suitcase behind me, I realised that I was hungry and so detoured via the university café, where I noticed two fellow postgraduate students deep in conversation. I decided to join them for lunch, and as I sat down, one of them turned to me and asked perplexedly, “How is my studio practice research?” The easiest and the least satisfying answer to this question is the rather dismissive response, “How is it not?” To me it seems clear that studio work throws up interesting questions, which may be answered outside the studio context, and that these answers can, in turn, generate new studio work. The dynamic also works in reverse: research outside the studio, sometimes in an area completely unrelated to one’s usual studio practice, can trigger a whole new line of studio work.

While all artists work and think differently, many experience intense pleasure from spending long periods of uninterrupted time in the studio. This is the still bliss that comes with fulfilling an individual sense of destiny, the kind of autotelic mindset suggested by flow theory. My private description of this kind of temporary mind/body truce is ‘running on the train tracks of destiny’; after spending too much time bumping over rough ground, constantly trying to enforce a hierarchy of competing interests, one experiences a sense of profound relief upon reaching a surface one glides effortlessly upon.

However, while such solitary time is valued by many practising artists, problem solving is essentially situational, therefore artists sometimes need to step beyond their studio to explore other people’s ideas and challenge their own preconceptions. If an analogy is drawn between studio work and scientific research, the problem with an isolated, self-referential and self-generating practice becomes apparent. In my practice as a painter, theory provides a pathway between individual creative work and cross-media or interdisciplinary collaborations. To adapt Lowry and McKinnon’s idea—that a crucial role of theory is to build a “flexible and speculative bridge” between disciplines—theory enables me to participate in collaborative projects. What follows is a concrete example of this.

Although I currently live in New South Wales, I grew up in Tasmania, and spent most of my twenties living and working in London. My cousin Julien Poulson, a musician, has had a similar life/work trajectory: he was raised in Hobart, but spent most of his twenties and thirties living in Melbourne and various international cities. We shared a common early antipathy for all things Tasmanian, which was gradually replaced, as we aged, with a strong but not uncomplicated passion for the island. Like Julien and many other Tasmanian artists, I came to recognise that the island was at the centre of my creative psyche.1

The Green Mist is an entity Julien conceived as a floating, international group of musicians—as he states, a “band without walls”. Their first album, Next Stop Antarctica, is a peculiar mix of pop, blues, and folk, with lyrics that describe characters and events from Tasmanian history. It came about after Julien moved back to Tasmania to help his father assemble a book on the history of Southport, a small town in the deep south of the island. Somewhere in the process of caring for his dying father and sorting through his chaotic paperwork, Julien discovered that the stories his father had collected were sinking into his creative unconscious. Historical narratives and Tasmanian characters began to populate his albums and musical performances.

I wrote a review of Next Stop Antarctica, identifying myself as a family member, and describing how listening to the album evoked, for me, an incredibly resonant sense of place. It embodied my memories of growing up in Tasmania, the strange ever-present history of the place, and even atmospheric features, like the pitch-black shadows, howling southerly winds, and the fast-changing landscape of ice-blue skies and near-constant rain. The review was published in an obscure music magazine and resulted in an invitation to present a paper at a symposium held at the University of

1 Peter Conrad describes a similar epiphany: “Everything that constituted me had been made by the place I left long ago, where I would never live again” (1988, 232).
Technology, Sydney (UTS), organised by Dr Anthony Mitchell, on the theme of ‘music and place’. After the symposium, I asked my colleague Keryn Stewart whether she would be interested in reconfiguring the paper into a journal article. During the process of preparing the article, I dropped back to a primary research role, and Keryn was responsible for nearly all of the actual writing (see Stewart and Hopcroft 2009).

I was fascinated by the way Keryn took my original paper, a brief piece of reflective writing, and systematically explored the link between art and place. She interrogated how the album managed to construct a ‘Tasmanian sound’ by examining all aspects of the album’s production, including its promotion on the social-media sites Myspace and YouTube, its instrument selection, lyrics, album imagery, the musicians’ level of knowledge about Tasmanian history, the album’s fan reception, surrounding press releases, and interview content. Among other things, Keryn connected the theme of the ‘Tasmanian Gothic’ to the band’s music. The term ‘Tasmanian Gothic’ refers to a regional genre that focuses on themes of horror and the uncanny, celebrates a dark and haunting aesthetic, and often depicts the landscape as a kind of human presence or agent of narrative catalyst. Although a significant amount of research exists on the Tasmanian Gothic phenomenon in the visual arts, cinema, and literature, there is less material linking this genre to contemporary-music production.

Aligned with the idea of a personified landscape is an exploration of how traumatic events mark a physical space, and the way remote places, such as Tasmania, with its brutal colonial history, seem to erode the clear demarcations of linear time: the past keeps happening. Maria Tumarkin (2005, 13) uses the term ‘traumascapes’ to describe “…a distinct category of places transformed physically and psychically by suffering, part of a scar tissue that stretches across the world”. Emily Bullock (2009, 33) writes that the Tasmanian landscape “…is haunted by the past and, in turn, haunts its inhabitants”, a sentiment echoed by Simon Schama (1995, 7) in his statement that landscape is “…built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock”. It was after reading Bruce Elder’s Blood on the Wattle (2003), and particularly the chapters on violence against the Tasmanian Aboriginal population, that many of these ideas began to take hold; in my studio I began to seek a visual expression of Bullock’s description of a landscape saturated by both history and memory. I sought to capture the psychic resonance of the place, this odd feeling that too much blood had been shed, too recently, for it to be absorbed into the island’s dark soil.

I discovered Bullock’s research during the wider process of considering the relationship between cultural artefacts and their place of creation, and the specific exploration of the nexus between Next Stop Antarctica and Tasmania. When I contacted Bullock, she was living in Queensland (but has since relocated to Hobart), and was finalising her thesis on Tasmanian Gothic. She kindly sent me some of her unpublished conference papers and referred me to two writers who left a marked influence on my studio practice: Chloe Hooper and Carmel Bird.

In A Child’s Book of True Crime, Hooper splices together the unlikely genres of children’s literature and true-crime writing, and uses them to tell the story of a murder in a small town south of Hobart. This novel was important to my practice for the strange interweaving of a dark narrative into the jolly mindset of children’s literary characters. Hooper describes the book as a tribute to Australian children’s literature, albeit a warped one (Stewart 2005). The novel was the literary equivalent of imagery that I sought to realise in my studio: a kind of picture-book imagery for adults. I responded to the practice of disguising subversive or dangerous ideas in an innocuous format.

Bird’s novel Cape Grimm is also set in Tasmania, this time in the remote north-west part of the island. It is both a love story and the history of a fictitious cult. The narrative is populated by remarkable, otherworldly characters, the most memorable being a red-haired, pale-skinned identical twin brother and sister who eventually marry each other and farm tulips.

While Hooper was significant in terms of genre hybridisation, Bird was important in purely visual terms. The image of the married twins (intimacy piled on top of intimacy to suffocating effect) brought my visual imagination back to Grant Wood’s famous painting American Gothic. Over the years I have experimented with various versions of Wood’s composition, usually near-identical figures standing in front of a squat, colonial style church. After reading Cape Grimm, I painted two children standing in front of a church, the boy cradling a fluffy white rabbit and the girl holding a falcon, surrounded by the lichen-stained gravestones, crushed-pink stone pathways, and wrought-iron fencing typical of Tasmanian country churches. In the background, stone devils squat on headstones and marble angels stride across others. One headstone is inscribed, in tiny script, with the name ‘Leonard Cohen’, a piece of visual humour I refer to as a VCR-joke (terminology that evolved in the age of video, where animators would include references within their cartoons that could only be spotted by hitting pause). A species of endangered orchid found only on the island, an exotic bright magenta with a little red tongue, grows in clumps in the foreground. The painting is titled A Tasmanian Childhood (figure 1).

A Tasmanian Childhood represents the synthesis of many of the ideas generated by exploring Tasmanian Gothic and Next Stop Antarctica. While the image functions primarily
on an expressive level, its conceptual basis includes the interlocking themes of claustrophobia, Tasmanian history and trauma. I found that I shared with Bird a fascination with using historical narrative as the basis for a creative, fictional work. The painting is informed by both readings of Tasmanian history, particularly Blood on the Wattle, and memories of growing up on an isolated island in the days before cheap airfares and the Internet. My aim was to create something that seemed both frozen in time, but capable of contemporary resonance, akin to revisionist fairy tales, a genre that I have recently become interested in. I liked the idea of creating a cast of characters who inhabit a fictional island, closely based on Tasmania, who live out their narratives in an imaginary space, inspired by reality but representing a substantial departure from its confines, a kind of re-imagining of history.

In line with contemporary re-tellings of traditional fairy tales, the narratives of these paintings are neither morally didactic nor prescriptive, preferring to allude to expressive states rather than fully articulate them.

My interest in revisionist fairy tales—and, more specifically, the nexus between word and image and my twin practice as an artist and writer, led me to co-curate, with Caelli Jo Brooker, an exhibition of artists’ books with a fairy-tale theme. Titled Happily Ever After: Alternative Destinies in Contemporary Feminine Narrative (figure 2), the exhibition brought together over seventy local, national and international artists and writers and asked them to work together to create new versions of traditional fairy tales, via the format of handmade books. My involvement in this exhibition can be traced back to the interest in Tasmanian
Gothic triggered by Next Stop Antarctica, and the research process that underpinned the transformation of my initial album review into the UTS journal article.

While I did not create any visual work for the Happily Ever After exhibition, I wrote two pieces of fiction that, in collaboration with other participants, were used as the basis of artists’ books. The first, titled Whalesong, is a story told from the point of view of an Antarctic whale. It describes events surrounding the recent collision between Japanese whaler, Shonan Maru 2, and Ady Gil, a New Zealand-flagged protest vessel. In part a piece of social protest, and in part an attempt to play with the conventions surrounding the writing of the ‘animal voice’, Whalesong aligns with my interest in re-imagining historical events, particularly from the point of view of fictitious entities, and the gothic notion of a personified landscape (or in this case, seascape).

The second piece of writing was a novella with the histrionic title of 1001 Nights: Being an Erotic Memoir and Private Journal of the Virgin Scheherazade — A Gripping Tale of Love, Death, Identity, Transformation and Metamorphosis. Based partly on personal diary entries and using the framing device of Arabian Nights, the novella experiments with the use of tense to build narrative intensity and create a sense of the past collapsing into the present. Even the title itself, with its conflation of the distinct genres of memoir and journal (one written more or less contemporaneously, and the other always retrospectively) refers to this preoccupation. Once again this work reflects an ongoing investigation into the re-imagining of history, and the manipulation of linear conceptions of time for creative purposes, an interest that can be tracked through my investigation into Tasmanian Gothic, the writings of Bird and Hooper, and Next Stop Antarctica.

It is necessary to close the circle between theory and act, image and idea, and reiterate how theory can help practice travel beyond the studio walls. The multiple collaborations initiated by Happily Ever After encouraged many other artists and writers to engage with ideas located outside their ordinary realm of practice. As the focus of the exhibition was interdisciplinary dialogue, a scaffolding of ideas supported these relationships, forming a bridge between creative people and works of art.

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REFERENCES


WHERE’S YOUR STUDIO?

A HEURISTIC VISUAL-ART FRAMEWORK

Peter Fenoglio

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the ‘studio’ is a physical area where one makes works of art. However, the case has been put forward that “art practice...can be conceptualised as research” (Graeme 2006, 19), and therefore, the studio has to be much more. In this paper I argue that an artist is in their studio any time they are researching (i.e., investigating and making) works of art. In other words, your studio is where you are at the time, particularly within an academic context. However, it seems that we need to redefine what the ‘studio’ means within an academic context. What kind of methodology would accommodate a more holistic definition of the studio?

Robyn Stewart argues that investigating your research question and making visual outcomes requires a research structure that is “informed, purposeful, rigorous and ethical” (2001, n.p.). Thus, when I commenced my own visual-art research for my project entitled, Beyond Black Stigma: What Is It To Be HIV Positive?, which involves Australian Indigenous groups, I resolved that my approach would incorporate both in-field and studio research. Initially, I engaged with participants (within an in-field context) and then moved on to my visual-arts practice, using the data and information I had gathered. However, this approach placed me in a position that was confusing: was I an observer or a participant? Sarah Pink throws light upon my dilemma when she advocates that ethnographic social-science research and studio or visual research should have a blurred distinction, and that the individual intentions of the researcher’s subjectivity and their intentions should be a central component of conceptualising the research process (Pink 2007).

The resulting works of art I produce from my research are two- and three-dimensional, ranging from drawings and photography to installations and mixed-media work (figures 1–4). I research issues around social stigmas and cross-cultural protocols by negotiating with ‘insiders’ (known contacts within the groups), and arrange gatherings with groups and individuals. When we meet, I listen to stories, take notes about totems, relationships, and lifestyle changes, and take photographs, and answer questions. I observe and note participants’ feelings as well as my own—as researcher and participant—and later make drawings based on these experiences.

I then import the data and information onto my computer and review the images, which have been mediated from the stories, notes, photographs, and drawings, as well as tacit knowledge (felt knowledge). When I am satisfied with a series of images, I send them electronically, along with printing specifications, to a printing company. Soon after, a parcel arrives and the digital photographic prints are ready to be prepared for exhibition. The giclée print Beyond Black Stigma No. 17 (2010, figure 5), references the lived experience of an Aboriginal group affected by HIV, and references the possum, life’s blood flow, isolation in your own space, unity, safety, and the always-present HIV.

Moving between in-field and visual-art research without privileging one or the other acknowledges the space and time in between. This transition between research modes is what enables social commentary or social-activist art. The in-between space became like what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have identified as a rhizome—whereby knowledge is

Figure 1 Arm and vein research study: Lypodistrophy, the loss of fat under the skin, can be a characteristic of long-term HIV carrying. Life’s blood flow becomes obvious and in many cases instigates the cultural practice of wearing long sleeves and long trousers.

Figure 2 HIV-image research: A beautifully generated image of this deadly virus.
extended and expanded organically and non-hierarchically. They write:

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power...and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7)

By framing my research in this way, I could build a network of research knowledge. It also enabled me to acknowledge my identity and self within the context of the research’s complexity, and also the relationship between in-field and visual-art research. However, it was through discovering Clark Moustakas’s work on ‘heuristic’ research (1990) that I instantly recognised the core processes within my own research methodology. I could identify all the core phases that he outlines: initial engagement; immersion; incubation; illumination; explication; and creative synthesis. After reflecting on and evaluating the paradigms of inquiry used, I concluded that my research may be termed ‘heuristic visual art research’. Thomas Kuhn conceived that science/knowledge is developed through paradigm shifts; paraphrasing him, Poulter (2005, 201) outlines that all practitioners in a certain discipline will not share and agree on a final answer, and that a “central characteristic of a paradigm is that it can attract adherents away from competing theories”.

Moustakas concisely describes heuristic research as:

A process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self in the world in which one lives... Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences. The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments. (Moustakas 1990, 15)

The core heuristic processes of identifying with the focus of inquiry, self dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling and focusing (Moustakas 1990, 15–27, original emphasis) collectively challenge many practitioners who maintain that visual art (research) is only executed in a studio space. Each of these processes could be considered as paradigms. As an example, I would contend that the implicit knowledge inherent in the tacit, and the explicit knowledge that is observable and describable, establishes a paradigm of intuition. Furthermore, practice, analysis, reflection, and establishing theory can be reconceptualised as a “seamless whole” (Peile 1994, in Poulter 2006, 330).

Similar approaches to visual-arts research methodology can be found in the work of Robyn Stewart (2001), Julian Malins and Carole Gray (2004), and Graeme Sullivan (2010), who each owe much to the problem-solving approach of Donald Schön. Schön’s (1983) constructivist thesis about “knowing-in-action”, “reflection-in-action”, and “reflection-on-art-practice” arises from his observations of professional practitioners. Based on a problem-solving method of inquiry, it centres the research process within “art practice” (Sullivan 2010), or the practice of art and design (Gray and Malins 2004). Echoing Schön, Sullivan acknowledges “that effective practitioners have the capacity to bring implicit and tacit understandings to [research] and these intuitive capacities interact with existing systems of knowledge to yield critical new insights” (2010, 67). Self-dialogue is also critical for the phenomenon to manifest through human experience and

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**Figure 3** Freehand circle research study: One participant stated, “I lived in a bubble.” The bubble or circle becomes the area of protection, where one feels safe and free from stigma. It also keeps your inner circle of friends together. The red-coloured circle used in the final image (next page) signifies the group’s blood (and their unity).

**Figure 4** Possum totem research study: The totem of the mob whom I interact with is the possum. This Indigenous symbol shows the journey, the movement over time, of living with HIV.
discovery, which results in new knowledge. In my work this includes experience with the participants/co-researchers, experience within the studio space, and most importantly, my own inner ‘felt’ experience with both.

Sullivan’s triangulated frameworks (2008), which have been somewhat developed from Schön (1983), form another view of heuristic methodology, and incorporate the three concepts of ‘research’, ‘knowing’, and ‘practice’. According to Moustakas, validity in heuristics is derived when the researchers have “collected and analyzed all of the material—reflecting, sifting, exploring, judging... and ultimately elucidating the themes and essences that comprehensively, distinctively, and accurately depict the experience” (1990, 32). Sullivan implies a complementary approach to the issue of validity, stating that “scholarly conventions and research methods have their own inbuilt checks and balances” (2010, 122).

By adopting a heuristic methodology, I immerse myself into the content and context of my research question and the activist canon. I then make works of art that reflect this research. I acknowledge that heuristics can be interpreted as experimental and manipulative (Gray and Malins 2004); however, my passion over my research question and my lived experiences of inquiry have become the focus of the research. Through using a heuristic methodology, I position myself as a subjective joint-participant, observer, listener, as well as art maker of the targeted groups. By considering the groups’ feelings, experiences, and cultural practices through...
the ‘lenses’ of understanding, these feelings, experiences, and cultural practices are filtered, and have and will assist in revealing new knowledge (Terszak 2008). During the same period in which I engage with the participants—discussing their experiences and the impact HIV has on their social interactions—I also make works of art. Heuristic visual-art research methods used in the in-field immersion space, of collecting visual and textual data and information, provides me with rich resources to make these, which encompass elements of the participants’ experiences, as well as professional and personal aspirations. Multiple engagements and experiences further extend and develop rhizome interrelated new knowledge. The principles of connectivity, homogeneity, and heterogeneity within the groups relate to the rhizome.

Heuristic research is a demanding process that requires “rigorous definition, careful collection of data, and a thorough and disciplined analysis. It places immense responsibility on the researcher” (Frick 1990, 79), as it demands that the researcher has a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated, and, if not the experience of such, then a parallel or equivalent experience. Numerous researchers have observed that learning heuristically presents a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shifts. It defies the constraints of convention and tradition. It pushes beyond the known, the expected, or the merely possible (Douglass and Moustakas 1985; Frick 1990). Through my roles as the Director and Chair of Queensland Positive People (QPP) and as Director of the National Association of People Living With HIV and AIDS (NAPWA), I have had personal encounters with Indigenous people living with HIV, and the groups and communities in which they live, and have gathered much anecdotal material.

Another important aspect of heuristic inquiry is the strength of revelation in tacit knowing. Michael Polanyi has stated that all knowledge consists of comprehension that is made possible through tacit knowing: “we all can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1983, 4). Making visible is the truth of making art. Making visual (visible) art references psychological events and tacit knowledge, which occupy consciousness, relate to gained knowledge, and personal experience (Collier 1963). Polanyi identifies the elements of tacit knowledge as being subsidiary and focal. Subsidiary factors attract immediate attention; they are the elements of perception that enter into conscious awareness and are essential to knowing, but are of secondary importance. The subsidiary combines with the focal, or unseen aspects of our experience, and allows a sense of essence of a phenomenon. The focal is a necessary component in the integration, while the ‘felt’ knowledge of being part of the phenomenon within a specific social context, as mediated through visual works of art, becomes an allegory of the phenomena being investigated.

The core processes and the phases of heuristic methodology define the studio space in an appropriate way for social commentary or social-activist visual-art research. The creative synthesis of gained knowledge from the findings of the in-field research space and the mediated work of art is channelled into heuristic methodology.

What follows is a summary of how the phases of heuristic methodology may occur within a visual-arts research space. ‘Initial engagement’ occurs when a researcher discovers an intense interest, a passionate concern, which holds important aesthetic, social, or personal meanings, and compelling implications. Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, ‘immersion’ enables the researcher to be on intimate terms with the question—to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it. ‘Incubation’ is when the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the investigation. The period of incubation enables the inner, tacit dimension to clarify and extend understanding within areas outside the investigation space. ‘Illumination’ occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition, and describes a breakthrough into being consciously aware of qualities inherent to the question. ‘Explication’ is the full examination of what has awakened in consciousness. In order to understand its various layers of meaning, the heuristic researcher uses ‘focusing’, ‘in dwelling’, ‘self-searching’, and ‘self-disclosure’, and recognises that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal and external frames of reference. And finally, ‘creative synthesis’ is when the researcher is thoroughly familiar with all the data in the major constituents, qualities, and themes, and in the explication of the meanings and details of the experience as a whole. Using Moustakas’s framework for heuristic methodology, a visual-arts research program may be resolved as the “creative synthesis is achieved through tacit and intuitive powers” (Moustakas 1990, 31). The heuristic phases are engaged throughout the entire investigation, acknowledging that in every mode of research some form of ‘studio’ practice is negotiated.

As a component of the immersion process (specifically related to the in-field space), I have drawn from a variation of phenomenological methods. My personal responses and feelings are also recorded. My personal involvement has fostered inner, ‘felt’ knowledge, in addition to a comprehensive collection of references and texts, including photographs, drawings, and readings. Having been a visual-arts educator for over thirty-seven years, I strongly support that learning happens when we engage and form networks across and in various contexts. Thus, whether I’m doing literary research, in-field work, making art, or visiting an exhibition, I maintain I’m in my ‘studio’. You are in your studio.
now. The studio space could be a physical space, a cognitive space or a virtual space, but more often than not it is all three. Within the context of the twenty-first century and new, varied, and expanded technologies, together with newly evolved research methodologies, the concept of the ‘studio’ needs to reconsidered.

The journey I take is not linear, nor cyclic, but more similar to that of a ‘pinball’ action: engaging, gaining new knowledge, reflecting, being propelled in a different direction; engaging, gaining new knowledge, illuminating, being propelled in another direction; engaging, gaining new knowledge, inquiring, being propelled in another direction; and so on (figure 6). To acknowledge a heuristic methodology for social commentary or social-activist art is to acknowledge that your ‘studio’ is the space you are in, wherever and whenever you are engaged with the topic.

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THE MUTATED MODEL: ARTIST AND SITTER IN CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITURE

William Platz

Pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively; or they look back at us silently across a “gulf unbridged by language”. They present, not just a surface, but a face that faces the beholder.

WJT Mitchell (2005, 30)

All art is “image-making” and all image-making is rooted in the creation of substitutes.

EH Gombrich (1985, 9)

If the portrait has a special bond with its object-referent, what Richard Brilliant terms its “vital relationship” (1991, 8), then the portrait-picture can never be emancipated from its antecedent master. Conventionally, the portrait is read both as an index of the transaction between an artist and a sitter and, although its iconicity has been largely destabilised in the past century, as a likeness of the sitter. Contemporary art practice indicates that conventional notions of the interface between artist and sitter need to be revised. Through my own artistic practice and research, I have concluded that the portrait-picture is not an imitation in the conventional sense of a substitute or a proxy, but in the Gombrichian sense of a thing in itself—an independent entity that does not replace, or resemble, or represent a referent. The portrait-picture is the reified sitter (figure 1). The sitter displaces both the artist and model, manifesting as the portrait-picture at the intersection of portrayal, pose, and performance. This manifestation becomes apparent when the portrait-picture is plotted on a spectrum that ranges from masquerade to dissimulation. These conclusions are borne out of my studio-based research degree in visual art. This paper will describe the technical and conceptual processes I completed in order to reach them. It begins by outlining my original concerns and intentions, and concludes with what they have become.

At the beginning of my program, I started experimenting with fibreglass as a substratum. After years of using polyester films, polypropylene, acetates, and acrylic sheets, I was seeking an equally fine, stiff surface on which I could synthesise portrait photography with painting and drawing in a robust manner. The ubiquity of the photographic portrait, as both product and referent, compelled me to implicate the photograph immediately in the work as collage. I found that the fibreglass-casting process allowed me to manipulate the photographic portrait’s scale and arrangement before sealing it between layers of transparent glass cloth (figure 2).

The resultant surface is hardwearing and versatile, yet lightweight and flexible. The process also fosters a more dynamic studio methodology in which the works are developed through an ongoing exchange of photography and drawing, rather than a system in which the photograph exists as a passive reference picture to be disregarded upon completing the work (figure 3).

Before I began this project, I happily accepted the conventional dyadic assessment of portraits: an exchange between an artist and a model that results in a very specific picture type—the portrait of a sitter. I was aware that, perhaps owing to the myriad studio pictures by Victorian artists who frequently populated their own interior scenes, the typical idea of the artist and model in the artist’s studio conjures a distinctively nineteenth-century image. The imagery goes something like this: a dramatically lit space—perhaps by

Figure 1 Screen Test 2010, oil, crayon, and shellac on cast fibreglass with orthochromatic films, 61 x 47cm
clerestory, skylight, or stove—is rendered in tenebrous earth tones except for the punctuated hues on flesh, brush, palette, and ornament. The artist, typically male (as I am), may appear rakish, but more likely paternal, commanding, aloof. He is, it seems, wholly unaware of the sexualised negotiation between viewer and object. Sharing his space—and it is quite definitively his space—is the artist’s model. She, typically young and female, may be holding a contrived pose, dressing, undressing, at her leisure, or even sleeping. Although this erotic myth of the artist and model does not survive the twentieth century intact, the studio remains, particularly when it contains artist and sitter, a place of mystery, fantasy, and subsequent paranoia (see Clark 1972; Postle and Vaughan 1999). I am not interested in destructing the myth of the studio, or even to parody it, as this would imply the cool detachment of an observer. As my practice and research is in the field of portraiture—and I am ensconced in the studio—I hope to illuminate the processes from within.

On a basic level, I engage and depict a model through drawing, photography, and digital video. I then manipulate these works into completed pictures. Here, I intentionally forego using the popular term ‘sitter’ to denote the subject of a portrait because, as already indicated, I intend to reframe that term in response to my current studio outcomes. Initially, my practice focused on the intricacies of the negotiations between artist and model and the reciprocal relationships...
between them and the portrait. My research specifically addressed the contemporary prevalence of portraits that are congruous with an art-historical type known as the historiated portrait, or portrait historié (see Bakemeier 2002).

The historiated portrait is understood as a portrait of a known individual in the guise of another, typically an historical, mythological, or allegorical figure (figure 4). I was particularly interested in the strategies used by contemporary portraitists (in which I include myself), which ranged from mimicry and masquerade to impersonation and dissimulation. From the simplest costume elements (as in the work of Renee Cox, Cindy Sherman, or Gillian Wearing) to elaborate and highly detailed tableaux (as in the work of Yasumasa Morimura or Matthew Barney), these strategies can all be read as indictments of the authority and status granted the sitter in a conventional portrait scheme. Each of these contemporary practitioners shift the locus of the sitter from without to within, rendering the model-body obsolete and unknowable.

At the outset, my own method was to design a sequence of panels that could be read as parts of a fictional narrative, for example, a fabulated seduction of Eva Braun by J Edgar Hoover (figure 5). I would then scout a model to simultaneously pose and portray the historiated character. Typically, friends and other artists would indulge me. I would shoot copious photographs, using small and medium-format films, and also create a body of sketches. The results of the photo and drawing sessions would amend the visual narrative, suggesting characterisations, plots and compositions that deviated from my initial outline. The photographs were then enlarged onto high-contrast, orthochromatic photo films using a variety of conventional darkroom techniques before being embedded in the fibreglass. Again, the visual result would amend the narrative. Finally, painting and drawing media were added to the surface, some marks being quite apparent and others disguised by trompe l’oeil effects. The trompe l’oeil was intended to further entangle the imagery and the media (illusion) with the narrative (delusion). As this account indicates, I was ensconced in the conventional portrait-narrative structure (even considering the unconventional and counterfactual nature of historiated portraits) that could have easily been the subject of an art-history or cultural-studies investigation. My practice, however, revealed a more problematic structure underlying the portrait process.

After six months of studio work, I held a solo exhibition to coincide with a formal review of my research. The critical reception pointed to several of my works’ key elements. First, as I am an American artist, my work—informed by traditions of draughtsmanship, narrative sequence, and

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**Figure 4** Index Case 2009, oil, charcoal, and shellac on cast fibreglass with orthochromatic films, 76 x 230cm

**Figure 5** Edgar and Eva 2009, oil, charcoal, and shellac on cast fibreglass with orthochromatic films, 102 x 320cm
THE MUTATED MODEL

William Platz

Figure 6 video-still from Kraal 2009, single-channel digital-video installation

studio photography—is contextualised by the notion of American glamour. This manifests as the American portrait tradition (e.g., Thomas Eakins, James Whistler, John Singer Sargent), American pop (e.g., Mel Ramos, James Rosenquist, Larry Rivers, Tom Wesselmann), and American fashion photography (e.g., Richard Avedon, Steven Meisel, David LaChapelle). Second, my selection of models seemed simultaneously arbitrary and obscured by the narrative. A programmatic, or at least motivated, approach to the use of the model was deemed necessary. Third, through screening a single video on a large monitor, the work hinted at digital media and environments. It presented a set that was entirely physically constructed: a moving river with a wooden trap, moonlit, in which two white whales (the model and I in extravagant plaster masks) floated, were captured with nooses, and removed (figure 6). By being the only piece not constructed of fibreglass panels, and having a prominent soundtrack, it therefore diverged from the other works in several ways. Fourth, the narratives I scripted, although rooted in historical fiction, were opaque and ultimately flat experiences for the viewer.

This feedback led me to make further works, studies, and reflections that focus on the specific interactions and theatricalities that take place within the studio when creating portraits. These revelations were influenced by some specific texts. Like many visual-arts students, I was required to tote a copy of Ernst Gombrich’s The Story of Art to every art-theory lecture I attended in my foundation year. It was Gombrich who guided me out of the notion of painting and drawing as forms, and towards the concept of the image as a form in itself, and resemblance as the content. His Meditations on a Hobby Horse brought the notion of the substitute to a primary position in my understanding of the contemporary portrait. Gombrich’s anti-mimetic position can best be summed up through his notion of schema and correction. The artist cannot depict a model, for instance, without first having some concept of how to effectively do so. This initial concept, or schema, precedes the portrayal of the model. Subsequently the portrayal is a process in which the artist ‘corrects’ the initial schema by ‘matching’ it to the present model. The result is not a mimetic copy, but an autonomous substitute, an independent entity, a mutated subject that does not really match the model, but creates the sitter.

It was a short path from Gombrich to the recent work of WJT Mitchell and his analyses of pictures. Although it may be tempting to charge fetishism, idolatry, or an uncanny animism to portraiture, none of these pathologies is necessary to suggest that portraits possess a special vitality, even autonomy. Indeed, Mitchell overtly confronts these concerns and concludes “...our task is not to overcome these attitudes but to understand them, to work through their symptomatology” (2005, 30). To extend Mitchell’s “thought experiment” about the “desire” of pictures, and answer his titular question “what do pictures want?” is to conclude that they want to propagate, to make more pictures. Combining this notion with his analysis of multistable “meta-pictures” (1994, 35–82) the result is a portrait-picture, aware of its own nature as a picture, desirous of being seen, wanting to propagate, and displaying (portraying) pictorial evidence of that desire. If I return to American glamour, the glamorous
picture presents itself, draws attention to its allure, and exhibits the imperative to make more glamour (figure 7). This portrait-picture has an agency that is as clear and present as either the artist or the model. To twist André Bazin’s proclamation, “It is the model” (1967, 14), I would instead say, “It is the sitter.” It is a new entity, specifically adapted to its environment, and the model is abandoned.

Finally, I processed the subject matter of the historiated portraits—the model in disguise—in relation to Peircean semiotics. Having been well aware of Charles Peirce’s great triad—icon, index, and symbol—it was nevertheless revelatory to discover the deeper triadic relationships that unify his thought through the writing of others (Goudge 1950, 80–103; Greenlee 1973, 33–47; Almeder 1980, 13–33). In particular, his concepts of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness assisted my own investigations. Peirce once simply defined these three concepts as “An, Other and Medium” (Peirce 1991, 184). And, if I take considerable liberties with Peirce’s grand scheme, I can use those concepts to create an accurate image of the portrait-picture, one in which there exists two metaphorical Firsts (the model and the artist—haecceities), a metaphorical Second (the sitter enabling a relative presence), and a metaphorical Third (the studio—the ground or ecosystem or medium of the present). Although each of these ‘agents’ can be read autonomously, the exigencies of the portrait-picture require a concurrent consideration of the three.

The concepts of substitution, Mitchell’s work on the nature of pictures, and Thirdness have significantly contributed to the maturity with which I approach and conceptualise my studio work. They underpin the dynamic that I feel exists between the artist, model, studio, and portrait-picture (sitter). Recently, my works have further entangled these agents, as I have begun to make portraits of professional fashion, print, and art models. When the model is confronted with the studio medium, it provokes a response that is in keeping with my analyses of the portrait historiés. In other words, a performance takes place. I invite the model into the studio. There she sits, stands, ambles about while I prepare lighting, camera, easel, pad, whichever, or perhaps all. The model may be consciously projecting a persona or simply adapting to the implicit and explicit scrutiny, but at either extreme, the result is performative, transformative.

I have come to think of this event as the ‘performative mutation’ (figure 8). It is necessarily co-operative, as the artist depicts the model. Depiction is the making of a picture: a synthesis of fetishism, description, and fantasy. Regardless of the medium chosen, some influence, large or small, of fantasy exists. As my sitter is framed and the carbon is smeared across the surface, or the strobes pop, I form, abandon, and reform a host of fantasies as I affix the picture. I have termed this event the ‘depictive mutation’ (figure 9). Both ‘mutations’ could be read as ‘corrective’, in the Gombrichian sense of the word. The model masquerades as a sitter or impersonates a sitter. The artist manipulates the model until some correspondence with the idea of a sitter emerges. The model’s self-corrective performance exerts pressure on the artist. The artist’s self-corrective practice exerts pressure on the model. The sitter as an independent agent (portrait-picture), quite distinct from both the artist and the model, blinks into existence at the intersection of these two corrective metamorphoses.

The studio contains, briefly, this event. The question remains, what processes lead to the creation of the sitter? And what are the alternative outcomes? It may be tempting to read this research as an attempt to quantify some sort of value in portraiture, to divine a metric by which portraits may be measured to be either simply avatars, simply descriptions, or exemplary pictures. Judgment is intrinsic to the concepts of performance and authority in portraiture, and so rather than shy away from such calculated assessments, my research seeks to use them within the studio context.

In light of Gombrich’s analysis of substitutes and Mitchell’s implication of the image’s autonomy, my studio practice explores the idea that the sitter is not the figure in
Figure 8 Mixed Portrait of Leah with My Mouth: Big Rig 2011, oil, crayon, and shellac on cast fibreglass with orthochromatic films, 102 x 156cm

Figure 9 Untitled Gaea 2011, graphite on paper, 22 x 19cm
the picture, rather the sitter is the picture that contains the figure. The challenge to the portrayer is in creating the studio conditions such that it enables the sitter (portrait-picture) to manifest and suggest the nature of its creation. In pursuing this, my recent work has begun to incorporate self-portraiture with the imaging of the model. I first made casts of parts of myself—the lower part of my face, my right eye, my throat—which the models wear as protheses (figure 10). The fragment of me is animated: the tongue licks at the sitter's face, the eye regards the sitter from within, the throat flushes at the sitter's touch. Additionally, I am making videos, which are screened on extremely small flat screens, the size of mobile-phone screens (figure 11). The scale and quality of the presentation suggests the immediacy and tactility of the model.

I began this short essay with the aim of evaluating the progress I have made in my studio practice. I realise that each consideration, each reading of the primary texts, each studio session, and each contemplation of other artists whose works correlate with my own has contributed to my development.

Thus, only when taken as a whole program can my work coalesce into a significant contribution to contemporary portraiture and the studio practice of portrait-pictures.

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Figure 11 Feejee 2010, single-channel digital video installed on TFT screen, 6 x 11 cm

REFERENCES


The way that the artist’s studio has typically been perceived in relation to research is problematic. Many see it as being clearly distinct from theoretical studies, separate to the research process. However, this paper offers a different view by exploring some of the synergistic relationships that emerged between my theoretical research and studio practice from 2008 to 2010. My research considers ways of depicting the Brisbane River through painting and how this can address the impact of human activity on the River’s ecology. To date, three issues have increasingly dominated my work: first, the concept of time in representing rivers; second, the relationship between art and ecology; third, the relationship between theoretical research and studio practice. I have discovered that my studio research benefits from my theoretical investigations, and this interaction helps me to articulate new relationships of time and ecology in my paintings of the Brisbane River.

TIME IN THE REPRESENTATION OF RIVERS

Contemporary Western society’s understanding of time is based on the twenty-four-hour clock. In this system, time operates by shifts of a second and can be moved backwards or forwards in a linear progression depending on choice, such as daylight saving. Clock time is a scientific calculation that we impose onto our lives and use to regulate our activities. Indeed, many river industries depend on clock time to operate, a local example being the Brisbane City Cat ferries. We have a reasonable notion, therefore, that, as a clock-hand goes around, time moves forward, and that a river moves in one direction from its source to the sea. While this is a valid conceptual framework, there are other ways in which we might experience time, and other ways that we might represent a river. For example, time can be seen to be fluid like a river and rivers are commonly interpreted as a metaphor for life.

Time can be perceived as complex; Philip Rawson (2005, 23) states that time includes “experiencing, remembering and anticipating” rather than a “single category-idea”. Rawson (2005, 27–28) also discusses the “water image of time” and says, “some Western people still refer to ‘the river of time’ as a way of seeing life outside the static abstract-general view of form which has dominated our thinking since ancient times”. I propose that in order to understand the river, one needs to transcend the simple understanding of time as a linear progression of separate entities and move to a more complex interpretation of time. Taking its cue from Rawson, my studio research from 2008–10 represented time like the river of time; it included memories and experience, and a connection with the river ecology, rather than the depiction of a rational and

Figure 1 River 1 2010, oil on claybord, 16.8 x 24cm

Figure 2 River 2 2010, oil on claybord, 40.5 x 30.5cm

Figure 3 River 3 2010, oil on claybord, 40.5 x 30.5cm
linear succession of isolated images. This can be seen in River 1, River 2, and River 3 (2010, figures 1, 2, and 3, respectively). By juxtaposing and layering images of fish, my illusionistic river paintings investigate a complex representation of space and time. This imaginary region allows viewers to reflect on the river over time rather than in a particular time and place.

Complex notions of time can also be seen in my paintings Inundation 1, Inundation 2, and Inundation 3 (2010, figures 4, 5, and 6, respectively). These paintings connect with ‘river time’ by hinting at an inundation that seems to flow beyond the picture plane. The images’ illusionistic rendering of tidal waters, the muddy shoreline, and mangroves indicate the ‘unnatural’ flow of a river modified by humans in recent centuries. I found artist Jem Southam’s series of three photographs titled Lynmouth, October 1998, Lynmouth, November 1998, and Lynmouth, April 1999, which depict the merging of River Lyn in north Devon, England, with the sea, particularly relevant to my studio research. Southam (2005, n.p.) states that “Flood myths are prevalent in almost all human cultures, and today the threat of global warming raises again these historic fears of inundation.” Therefore, inundation has associations with river history, ‘river time’, and our memories and experiences of rivers.

As part of my investigation into time’s complexities, my first paintings in 2008/09 combined time with music as a way of understanding ‘river time’; this is seen in Fragile Nature 3 (2008, figure 7) and River Story: Past and Present (2009, figure 8). By repeating and layering entities, such as mangrove seedlings and coke bottles, my paintings developed a rhythm, like notes in music, which interconnected to form the whole. Furthermore, in River Story: Past and Present, the layering and compounding of images became similar to polyphony in music. My use of layering unifies different time and space regions. For instance, in this painting, ‘river time’ and associated different time and space regions are evoked by superimposing dark mangrove seedlings and a red glaze—symbolic of the contemporary river’s ecology and global warming—over the past, biologically complex, river ecology, which is indicated by the diverse, red botanical and zoological species.

To further understand the river and time, I commenced a series of ephemeral works on polyester canvas during 2009–10, which included Polyester River Traces 1, Polyester River Traces 2, and Polyester River Traces 3 (figures 9, 10, and 11, respectively). These developed in parallel with the afore-discussed paintings. In the ephemeral River Traces series, I investigated ‘river time’ by working at the river’s littoral edge, which is near to my studio. I immersed polyester canvas directly into the water, which, over a period of several days, had mud deposited onto its surface, and thus recorded tidal inundations. I later worked back into these surfaces with graphite powder and materials from the site, such as mud, with mangrove twigs. Finally, I re-exposed the surfaces to rain over a period of up to several hours, depending on the intensity of the downpour and the suitability of the surface. This process developed my understanding of the river at a micro and macro level. By experiencing changes in the water, mud, and plants at the river’s edge, I became more empathetic and increasingly aware of broader environmental issues, such as reduced biodiversity, water quality, and the threat of inundation.

In turn, the experience and accumulated memories of mud, the tidal waters, and the observed fish and plants informed my evolving representation of the river and time demonstrated through my paintings. Therefore, synergies were developing between my studio practice and theoretical...
research, which were guiding my ongoing investigation of the human impact on the Brisbane River ecology. The connection between art and time in my studio practice was also extended by researching the relationships between art and ecology, an area to which I will now turn.

**ART AND ECOLOGY IN MY STUDIO RESEARCH**

My studio practice is informed by theoretical research on the history and health of the Brisbane River, contemporary positions on art and ecology, and research by other artists also working with nature.

River ecology has currency both locally and globally, with climate change and rising sea levels, environmental degradation, and reduced biodiversity being experienced worldwide. The Brisbane River has shown that nature is fragile and vulnerable to human impact. Di Tarte, Director of Healthy Waterways, states, “We are getting back to where we were in the 50s but we will never be back to a pristine river” (cited in Burke 2007, 4). When I interviewed Tarte in 2008, she stated that the water quality and the littoral edge of the river have been irreparably damaged by the impact of human activity. She also stated that the river is now a tidal estuary, as far up as the Bremer River, which is approximately fifty kilometres upstream, and with continued development along river catchments, the silt load could become an added problem. The decreased water quality is evidenced by the water’s turbidity, its algal bloom, and the mud deposits along its shoreline that can be dislodged by water motion (Tarte, pers. comm., 26 June 2008).

These ecological issues are researched in my work in such a way that a connection to nature is fostered by working at the river’s edge, as seen in the River paintings and the ephemeral River Traces imagery. This approach is supported by contemporary positions on ecology, including Suzi Gablik (1991, 173), who argues that “the essence of ecological thinking is not linear, but finds its identity in a continuous flow of mutually determined interactions: the self-in-relationship”. Therefore, my connection with nature that has developed through the ongoing process of submerging canvas at the river’s edge to record traces of mud has fostered an empathy with the river and its changing ecological state. My studio practice and environmental work has encouraged me to question the human impact on the Brisbane River ecology over time, which, in turn, directed me to Val Plumwood’s (1993) theoretical research on the nature/culture divide. Plumwood argues that western philosophy, with its rationality of dualisms, has impacted our perception of nature, and asserts how pervasive and detrimental such perceptions are. Plumwood (1993, 196) argues, “The reason/nature story has been the master story of western culture. It is a story which has spoken mainly of conquest and control, of capture and use, of destruction and incorporation. The story now is a disabling story.” My studio practice and theoretical research considers these ideas in relation to the Brisbane River’s ecology and history since colonial settlement. The synergistic relationships that have developed from my studio practice and theoretical research enrich my work and the concepts in my practice that question the reason/nature dualism of the Western ‘master

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1 Author’s note: This paper was written prior to the 2011 Brisbane flood, which undoubtedly have serious repercussions for the Brisbane River’s ecology.
PAINTING THE BRISBANE RIVER

Jennifer Stuerzl

The interaction between studio practice and theoretical research has fostered an alternative rationality of nature and its representation in my practice. This rationality accepts nature’s difference, values ecological biodiversity, and acknowledges the complexity of time and nature, as explored in numerous research photographs and paintings produced in 2009/10.

Significantly, the synergies between studio practice and theoretical research promoted an enquiry into the scientific and rational perception of the ‘reason/nature story’, as demonstrated in my research photographs River with Quadrat 1, River with Quadrat 2, and River with Quadrat 3 (2009, figures 12, 13, and 14, respectively). A quadrat, used for delineating areas for scientific research, is defined as “small areas selected as samples for detailed study” (Cronquist 1961, 800). In the River with Quadrat photographs, the selection of a reflexive space, marked out by a domestic yellow clothesline, interrogates the scientific ecological measure of the quadrat, which is characteristic of Western culture, and the ‘master story’ that is critiqued by ecofeminism. The domesticity of the yellow clothesline becomes a feminist statement that deconstructs the reason/nature story by being ironically juxtaposed with the mangrove, mud, and inundation at the littoral edge. My process of working, documented in the photographs, investigates the quadrat in different configurations. For example, a rational perception of nature as separate is evident in the closed quadrat in River with Quadrat 1, the transition of the quadrat that is partially open but also closed in River with Quadrat 2, and the more complex, fluid, and lyrical perception of nature that includes connections and ‘river time’ evident in River with Quadrat 3.

The Australian artist Bonita Ely’s research into waterway degradation and the scientific measuring of nature has also influenced my research in a number of ways. Her photographs Drought: The Murray’s Estuary (2009) documented the river’s edge from its source to the sea. On her website, Ely (2009) comments that, as part of her work, she “constructed temporary grids that mimicked the cartographic mapping of minutia in the River’s edge at five locations”. My research, which directly engages with the river, shares similar ecological concerns, such as reduced water quality and biodiversity, and the human imposition on nature but also obliquely refers to methods to scientifically measuring nature. The lyrical investigation of the river-with-clothesline punctures the concepts of the dualistic reason/nature perception of the ‘master story’ Plumwood identifies. It questions the rationality of scientifically measuring and documenting nature, and, by alluding to the ‘river of time’ in River with Quadrat 3, it articulates a rationality that fosters connections within nature and ‘river time’.

Figure 9 Polyester River Traces 1 2009, polyester canvas submerged in water at the river’s littoral edge

Figure 10 Polyester River Traces 2 2010, polyester canvas submerged in water at the river’s littoral edge

Figure 11 Polyester River Traces 3 2010, polyester canvas (detail showing graphite and earth residue)

story’, as argued by Plumwood. The interaction between studio practice and theoretical research has fostered an alternative rationality of nature and its representation in my practice. This rationality accepts nature’s difference, values ecological biodiversity, and acknowledges the complexity of time and nature, as explored in numerous research photographs and paintings produced in 2009/10.

Significantly, the synergies between studio practice and theoretical research promoted an enquiry into the scientific and rational perception of the ‘reason/nature story’, as demonstrated in my research photographs River with Quadrat 1, River with Quadrat 2, and River with Quadrat 3 (2009, figures 12, 13, and 14, respectively). A quadrat, used for delineating areas for scientific research, is defined as “small areas selected as samples for detailed study” (Cronquist 1961, 800). In the River with Quadrat photographs, the selection of a reflexive space, marked out by a domestic yellow clothesline, interrogates the scientific ecological measure of the quadrat, which is characteristic of Western culture, and the ‘master story’ that is critiqued by ecofeminism. The domesticity of the yellow clothesline becomes a feminist statement that deconstructs the reason/nature story by being ironically juxtaposed with the mangrove, mud, and inundation at the littoral edge. My process of working, documented in the photographs, investigates the quadrat in different configurations. For example, a rational perception of nature as separate is evident in the closed quadrat in River with Quadrat 1, the transition of the quadrat that is partially open but also closed in River with Quadrat 2, and the more complex, fluid, and lyrical perception of nature that includes connections and ‘river time’ evident in River with Quadrat 3.

The Australian artist Bonita Ely’s research into waterway degradation and the scientific measuring of nature has also influenced my research in a number of ways. Her photographs Drought: The Murray’s Estuary (2009) documented the river’s edge from its source to the sea. On her website, Ely (2009) comments that, as part of her work, she “constructed temporary grids that mimicked the cartographic mapping of minutia in the River’s edge at five locations”. My research, which directly engages with the river, shares similar ecological concerns, such as reduced water quality and biodiversity, and the human imposition on nature but also obliquely refers to methods to scientifically measuring nature. The lyrical investigation of the river-with-clothesline punctures the concepts of the dualistic reason/nature perception of the ‘master story’ Plumwood identifies. It questions the rationality of scientifically measuring and documenting nature, and, by alluding to the ‘river of time’ in River with Quadrat 3, it articulates a rationality that fosters connections within nature and ‘river time’.

Figure 9 Polyester River Traces 1 2009, polyester canvas submerged in water at the river’s littoral edge

Figure 10 Polyester River Traces 2 2010, polyester canvas submerged in water at the river’s littoral edge

Figure 11 Polyester River Traces 3 2010, polyester canvas (detail showing graphite and earth residue)
Thus Tarte’s, Gablik’s, and Plumwood’s writings on art and ecology and Ely’s art have all contributed to my studio practice, embodying a connection with and a perception of nature that engages directly with the Brisbane River, and reflects on inundation, river ecology, and the ‘river of time’. This is clearly reflected in the Inundation paintings and the River with Quadrat photographs. On completing the latter, the challenge was to extend these concepts of time and ecology into my paintings in 2010. I decided to turn to specific examples of Australian nineteenth-century painting that focused on local ecology.

**THEORY AND PRACTICE IN MY PAINTING**

During the nineteenth century, the documentation of botanical and zoological specimens was developed in line with taxonomic classifications of species such as that developed by Carl Linnaeus. This was a way of rationalising the natural world, based on nature as a commodity, and was a valuable tool for gauging the suitability of sites, such as the Brisbane River, for settlement. During 2010 I explored scientific documentation, such as William Buelow Gould’s watercolours of natural history specimens, and Conrad Martens’s paintings of scenic views, in order to highlight the ecological legacy of these conceptual frameworks.

Gould’s illustrated *The Sketchbook of Fishes* (1832) is a natural-history record of the fish in Macquarie Harbour in Tasmania, where Gould was a convict from 1832 until 1835. Garry Darby (1980, 54) notes that the sketchbook contains thirty-five “watercolour studies of fish and shellfish, which had been collected on the beaches around the area by Dr. de Little”. According to Darby, they “show where Gould’s real ability as an artist was centred. They are in fine detail and drawn with a sure and steady hand.” Gould’s *The Sketchbook of Fishes* informed my 2010 River paintings, which are comparable to Gould’s in their emphasis on analysis and articulation of fish details. However, they are different in several ways: the first is technical—my work uses oil paint on claybord and the painterly effects are therefore different to the watercolour used by Gould; second, the paintings River 7, 8, and 9 (figures 15, 16, and 17, respectively) include toados and catfish that are characteristic of a river with reduced biodiversity and water quality; third, the inclusion of the goldfish (figures 1 and 2) within the illusionistic vista of the Brisbane River, develops a disjunctive affect that alludes to stories of escaped exotic species, the colonial imposition on the river evidenced by the Western reason/nature dualism, and the legacy of this perception of nature. Thus, my paintings differ from Gould’s scientific inventories of zoological specimens because they are an ironic play on the paradox of the contemporary river: apparently natural, it is significantly altered by the Western colonial imposition on nature. Furthermore, Gould’s work
celebrates abundance, colonisation, and the documentation of fish species as a natural-history inventory of curiosities, whereas my work reveals an enquiry into Western perceptions of nature and the affect of such perceptions on river ecology since colonial settlement.

In the paintings River 7, 8, and 9, the human impact on the Brisbane River ecology is further explored by the oblique reference to a nineteenth-century colonial painting of Conrad Martens. Martens’s painting Brisbane (1852) depicts a view from a specific location looking across to Kangaroo Point at a particular time of day and year. This is supported by John Steel (1978, 16), who describes the location as such:

the foreground...shows the ferry landing at Kangaroo Point, in the same position as the present landing.
A ferry in midstream, rowed by one man and carrying one passenger, is crossing from the landing at the far right.

In its depiction of the Brisbane River landscape and its emphasis on documenting the colony, nature, and illusionistic rendering, Martens’s painting confirms the success of colonial settlement. Meanwhile, River 1 questions it by engaging with the paradox of the river’s apparent richness (in terms of its colour and luminosity) and its simultaneous depletion (in terms of ecological diversity, and reduced water quality), represented by the single fish and green algal bloom.

Furthermore, the depiction of inundation in Inundation 1, 2, and 3 investigates similar ecological issues but also connects the Brisbane River to a more global concern for climate change, water inundation, and reduced biodiversity (features of many rivers worldwide).

Therefore, my studio practice in 2010 amalgamated research into nineteenth-century Australian painting with the synergies developed between my theory and practice arising from my interaction with the Brisbane River. Each of these aspects was pivotal to my research into how to represent the human impact on the ecology of the Brisbane River.

CONCLUSION

Like the Brisbane River, the synergies of studio practice and theoretical research are fluid. My research into time and ecology has informed my evolving understanding of the impact humans have on the Brisbane River’s ecology and how to represent this in painting. As with all rivers, the Brisbane River is constantly changing, and my research has responded by developing a connection with nature that is receptive to the river’s broad time frames, past, present, and anticipated.

Through my diverse research and practice, concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘time’ have been explored, as has the theme of river ecology, and the work of artists that connect with my practice. The synergies emerging from the research enrich my studio practice and ensure it is receptive to new investigations that emerge in the future by being cogniscent of representations made in the past. Therefore, I have shown that the perceived role that the studio plays in research is not problematic or distinct from theoretical research, but rather, is constantly evolving and inseparable from it.

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REFERENCE LIST

Figure 16 River 8 2010, oil on claybord, 40.5 x 30.5cm
Figure 17 River 9 2010, oil on claybord, 40.5 x 30.5cm
INTRODUCING CLIMATE CHANGE: ARTISTS’ RESPONSES

Concerns over the build up of greenhouse gases in the Earth’s atmosphere were first brought to world leaders’ attention at the joint United Nations Environment Program/World Meteorological Organisation/International Council for Science Conference at Villach, Austria, in 1985 (WMO, 1986). Since 1991, following the establishment of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, scientists have released reports that summarise the scientific findings about impacts and adaptation responses (IPCC, 1991; 1996; 2001; 2007). Concerns over climate change include rising sea levels, storm events and surges, flooding, extreme temperatures and rainfall, drought and bushfires.

While there have been varying degrees of social and political response to these issues, most have been sadly ineffective. In turn, visual artists and curators have strongly responded, one example being David Buckland, artist and curator, who initiated the Cape Farewell climate-change art project in 2001 in the UK. He argues that “artists can engage the public in this issue, through creative insight and vision” (Buckland, 2001).

Works of art motivated by climate change over the past decade have been driven by both aesthetic and activist goals. The activist dimension has connections to 1960s environmental art as well as trends in the 1980s and 1990s, where art “practices [were] formed in response to conditions prevailing at a given time in both the art world and the culture at large” (Felshin, 1995, 23). Questions of ethical and anthropogenic responsibility for climate change have been raised in visual-art responses on oil, energy, and conflict themes (Hamilton 2008, 16–17). Finnegan (2008, 47–48) discusses artists’ responses on “...how to act, how to mobilise, how indeed as an individual, to engage and intervene”, and comments “...the interlinked flashpoints of oil, energy, human rights, global warming, rampant flows of predatory capitalism...continue to jeopardise world sustainability and demand a rethink of ethics”.

ART AND LANGUAGE: USING TEXT ART TO RELAY CONCERNS OVER CLIMATE CHANGE

Roslyn Taplin

These talks in Copenhagen are among the most complex and ambitious ever to be undertaken by the world community. In sheer sweep and consequence, they are as momentous as the negotiations that created our great United Nations...and built our modern era... Our future begins today. Here in Copenhagen.

(BAN KI-MOON, 2009, ONLINE)

One compelling aspect of contemporary artists’ response to climate change is how they have interpreted the language associated with the politics of the issue—the massive amount of words generated in the e-mails, agendas, speeches, and scientific reports. This paper begins by considering the use of text in art more broadly, before discussing some examples of climate-change art that incorporate text, and recent exhibitions that focus on the topic. This background discussion provides the context for my own studio work, which will be discussed in detail.

TEXT IN CONTEMPORARY ART

The use of text in art dates back to the Art and Language conceptual-art movement that originated in the UK during the 1960s. In Art and Text, Aimee Selby (2009, 37) reflects that the use of text in 1960s conceptual art was “instructional, direct, notational”, but argues that use of text in contemporary art has evolved to a “crucial questioning of the viability of language as a tool for communication” (2009, 7).

In considering the place of text in art, Dave Beech (2009, 29) argues that text art today is “extending and complexifying the substitutional logic of the first wave of text art of the 1960s [and is]...embroiled in the linguistic turn at least twice over, first in the actual presence of language in the work and secondly in the structure of its arrangements”. He also reflects:

Contemporary text art finds itself located at the intersection of contemporary philosophy, contemporary thinking on art and contemporary theories of language...

Contemporary text art holds a strong place within our Post-Conceptual understanding of what art is and what makes it interesting. (Beech 2009, 29–31)

In The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics, Amie Thomasson (2004) argues for a “finer grained range of categories for visual art” from an ontological perspective. In accord with this, Beech (2009) argues for text art to be recognised as an ontological division of art. Similarly, Selby observes:
...text art represent[s]...a fundamental conceptual shift in art practices, wherein the production, motives and intents of works may be seen to in part, or wholly, founded upon a linguistic basis. (2009, 7)

Beech (2009) proposes that text art embodies the three key aspects of contemporary art: the role of skill, deskilling, and reskilling (Roberts 2007); the character of the work of art as a contingent object (Buskirk 2005); and inter-subjectivity (Bourriaud 2002). Beech concludes that the broader “…post-Duchampian ontology makes text one of its key aspects especially with regard to the kind of skills, objects and social relations that text involves” (2009, 31–32).

This ontological perspective on image/text is in accord with my own practice in that I use glyphs (hand-printed and written text), redeploying them as image-making devices. I cannot claim singular authorship or ownership of my work as I appropriate text from climate change speeches and other sources on water needs, food security, and biodiversity loss. Inter-subjectivity is apparent in my work as the text appropriated from UN speeches, which are a substitute for loss. Inter-subjectivity is apparent in my work as the text involved” (2009, 31–32).

As evidenced, Selby's analytical framework goes further in delineating the range of possible relations between words and images, showing that neither image nor text needs to dominate; rather, they may be complementary, mutually contradictory, or incommensurable. In the next section, I will consider the work of several artists who use text in different ways, so as to illustrate how Selby’s framework manifests itself in contemporary art.

APPROACHES TO TEXT IN ART

While many have undertaken semiotic analyses of text in artists’ works (Barthes 1967, 1972, 1977, 1985; Rylance, 1992; Allen, 2003), in Art and Text (2009), Selby extends beyond semiotic analysis by offering insights into the full range of possible relations between images and text including intertextuality and indeterminacy. She classifies and interprets her survey of text in visual art in four ways:

- **text**—“exploring what words can say, and convey... with resonances beyond the forms seeming immediacy” (37);
- **context**—exploring text for “investigation of...broader notions of representation—whether the antagonisms of the social, political or biographical” (91);
- **semitext**—“dislocations of conventional meaning” are created by artists “changing the relationship between the linguistic sign and the image” (171);
- **textuality**—“the occurrences of...[texts] fluctuation between opacity, its fluid state, its condition of indefinability” with “multiple, deferred possibilities of interpretation” (213).

As evidenced, Selby’s analytical framework goes further in delineating the range of possible relations between words and images, showing that neither image nor text needs to dominate; rather, they may be complementary, mutually contradictory, or incommensurable. In the next section, I will consider the work of several artists who use text in different ways, so as to illustrate how Selby’s framework manifests itself in contemporary art.

CONTEXTUALISING TEXT: ARTISTS USING TEXT

Xu Bing, AR Penck, Simryn Gill, Annette Iggelden, George Gittoes, John Wolseley, and Nancy Spero are all artists who use text in their drawings and paintings. Despite being created in different cultural contexts and time periods, their work is interconnected because they all raise questions about language itself. They interrogate text in differing ways, driven by varying political, cultural, feminist, social, and environmental concerns. Before focusing on climate-change text art, it is worth briefly describing some of these artists works and considering where they fall in Selby’s schema.

Xu Bing explores the territory between writing and art by using text in his installation pieces and works on paper. His calligraphic symbols, which superficially appear to be in the tradition of Chinese calligraphy, are made-up characters or “Chinglish” (Chattopadhyay 2006). Collette Chattopadhyay observes that Xu's works that use this text, such as Introduction to New English Calligraphy (2006), “…examine the relation between linguistic intent and subsequent understanding or misunderstanding” (Chattopadhyay 2005, 5). Taking another approach to language, Xu's series of small drawings of mountainous landscapes (“landscritps”), created as part of the Project of the Helsinki Himalaya Exchange in 1999, are entirely executed in both modern and ancient Chinese characters. These drawings, which use Chinese ink on Nepalese paper, represent the landforms and scenery of mountains, rocks, trees, houses, and streams. They echo contemporary China's links with its past cultural heritage and with its Himalayan neighbours. His work can be seen then to fit within Selby's “textuality” category.

AR Penck's oil paintings New System Paintings (including Theory of Image—Image of Theory and Standard Theory—Standard Technique, both from 1973) use scientific and mathematical symbols and text to communicate the oppression in East Germany during the Cold War, the strictures of socialist society, and its impact on the individual. His paintings aim to transcend language and cultures. Raumöffnung (Spatial Opening) (2000) continues with the use of letters and symbols, reflecting the tensions of contemporary society and geopolitics. Thus, Penck’s use of text fits into Selby’s “context” category.

Simryn Gill takes a postcolonial look at nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century books that reflect British colonial power in Asia (Vali 2009). In her Pearls series (1999 onwards) strings of “beads” or pearls, as “layers of history”, are constructed from various books. A 2005 work of 32 strands 75 centimetres in length is composed of, and titled, The Angus and Robertson Atlas of the World (Australia: Harper Collins 1992). Another 2005 work, which has a parallel emphasis on the role of language, is composed of, and titled, KM Pannikar Asia and Western Dominance (London: Allen and Unwin, 3rd impression, 1953). In Gill's
Annette Iggulden uses handwritten text in her paintings and mixed-media works, such as *Christine de Pisan: 1363–1429* (2005), which is part of the “The City of Ladies” series, to symbolise the nonverbal aspects of language and the plight of the silenced members of society—particularly “the historical silencing of women” (Iggulden 2007, 67). She has also created illegible script—“fragments of the alphabet or painted ciphers” (Iggulden 2007, 76)—to symbolise silencing due to gender. This resonates with Barthes’s (1985) observation in “Masson’s Semiology”, when he writes “for writing to manifest in its truth (and not in its instrumentality), it must be illegible...” (155, original emphasis). Barthes (1985, 221) expresses interest in Rénéchot and his body in illegible writing and the illegibility of the palimpsest, saying that with the “palimpsest...what has been written continually returning in what is written in order to make it superlegible—i.e. illegible”. Accordingly, Iggulden’s use of text can be seen to be close to that of Selby’s “textuality” category.

George Gittoes’s practice includes film, painting, and drawing. Described as a ‘war artist’, Gittoes’s subject matter extends much further, covering human rights, oppression, environment, and famine (Mendelssohn 2008, 37). He uses text to highlight the extreme nature of the issues he addresses. Much of the text is drawn from his diaries kept on trips to places of conflict and despair: Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. His collaged drawing *Fear.com* (2002) depicts a damaged human head, drawn in pencil, with a collaged title cut from a New York newspaper that states “Iraq Terror Bids: UN Report Includes Plans for Dirty Bombs, Nerve Gas”. His drawing *The Transformation—Metamorphosis—Kafka NY* (2002) includes text that records his impressions over photographic images of the American flag, the Twin Towers, and the Statue of Liberty. This is collaged over a drawing of two monstrous Kafkaesque insects locked in battle, which represent the US and Iraq metamorphosed by war. Thus, Gittoes’s use of text is best classified as belonging to Selby’s “context” category.

John Wolseley’s practice, which includes pen drawings, watercolours, and installations, focuses on the Australian flora and fauna (Griffin 2008). His subject matter is often drawn from remote outback locations and employs text drawn from his journals that document his experiences of camping at a particular site. Some of his works comment on human impacts, for example, *Wittenoom Asbestos Mine* (1988), which considers the mining impacts in Pilbara, Western Australia, and his work on wood-chipping in Tasmania, *Coupe X Rainforest Tasmania* (1994), which is a watercolour on paper with fragments of print and plant material, and is inscribed with the Latin terms and Indigenous names of numerous rainforest plants. As with Penck and Gittoes, Wolseley’s work is related to its “context”.

Nancy Spero’s work comments on and analyses the political struggle and power relations that women in the US experience. She uses text to highlight the issues that women are confronted by in a society that pays lip service to women’s equality but that in reality subjugates them. *Codex Artaud XXIII* (1972) depicts the French poet Artaud’s texts, arranged with drawing and collaged appropriations of humans and other species, which represent the patriarchal system’s rejection of outsiders. Her installation work at the 1993 Whitney Biennial, *Masha Buskina* (1993), focussed on the first woman executed in the Nazi occupation of Soviet territory (Bird et al. 1996). The work used text surrounding photographs and drawings to communicate her political concerns about victims. Again, Spero’s work uses a “context” related approach.

While this section only surveys a limited number of artists, one can see that the use of text is generally in line with Selby’s “context” or “textuality” categories, which reflect on the social and political, rather than her categories of “text” or “semiotext”. As evidenced in their studio praxis, these artists have been provoked to respond to the environmental, social, and political concerns of their times.

**TEXT IN ART ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

In the last decade, artists’ and curators’ responses to climate change has increasingly focused on language. Beech discusses this type of socio-political reaction by artists in *Art and Text*, where he writes:

> In a word, language is political...an art made of language—draws into questions about how we think, how we live, how we judge, how we feel, how we differ and how we try to resolve our differences (Beech 2009, 27)

James Stuart (2007, 58–59) reflects on text in art as not anticipating that viewers will read much of the text used to create images, but having the expectation that viewers may absorb the occasional word or phrase. Some artists who have used text in their art on climate change include Kathy Barber, David Buckland and Amy Balkin, and Greg Pryor. Their use of text has involved differing mediums and approaches but all convey a definite concern about the issue.

In her installation *Here Today* (2005, figures 1 and 2), Barber presents a neon light in the shape of the lowerscript-
written phrase “here today”, which focuses on the transience of human existence and the disregard for long-term impacts, such as climate change, on the planet.

Buckland and Balkin’s video work Ice Text (2007, figure 3) was created on a Cape Farewell project expedition to the Arctic. Buckland (2008, online) explains the work:

We project video from the boat, a series of texts onto the glacier face. At times the image is swallowed up, disappearing through aeons of ice and then as we traverse the glacier it is reflected magically back with an electronic edge that gives the texts a living urgency.

The uppercase words Buckland and Balkin projected, “POSITIVE PURE TIME DISCOUNT RATE”, refer to Sir Nicholas Stern’s 2006 economic review of climate change and his concern about high rates of discounting in economic analysis driving global warming (Stern 2007). Buckland says they aimed to create:

...texts that bring into focus the state we are in, as the glacier continues its accelerated path towards total melt and oblivion... The texts projected onto ice are slogans that appeal for an immediate emotional engagement with climate. (Buckland 2008)

Pryor’s installation work Black Solander (2005, figure 4) is compiled of thousands of botanical sketches, together with their scientific labels, of plant species found in Western Australia—the south-west of which is the Gondwanaland cradle of flowering plants. The work, all in tones of black, reminds the viewer that coal, as a fossil fuel, is sourced from plant life.

These works use text with contrasting approaches: Barber interrogates our use of language via a contextual approach whereas Buckland and Balkin and Pryor use text to anchor and relay—a semiotext approach.

RECENT EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS BASED ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In recent years, curatorial responses to climate change have emerged in the UK, US, Denmark, Australia, and elsewhere. The aforementioned Cape Farewell project has brought artists, scientists, and educators involved with climate change together since 2001, initiating a series of expeditions to the Arctic to inform artists about climate-change impacts. Exhibitions that have developed from the project include Cape Farewell: Art and Climate Change, which was exhibited in 2006–8 (in London, Liverpool, Hamburg, Madrid, and Tokyo) and Earth: Art of a Changing World, which was exhibited from December 2009 to January 2010 at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, both of which were aimed “...to encourage debate, discussion and creative thinking and the role art can play on the relevance that climate change has...”
on our daily lives” (Soriano, Buckland, and Devaney 2009, online). The latter exhibition included work from thirty artists, including leading and emerging international artists.

In the US, curator/writer Lucy Lippard brought together scientists, environmentalists, and performing and visual artists for the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition Weather Report: Art and Climate Change (2007), which aimed to “...activate personal and public change” (Lippard 2007). The exhibition included installations around the city of Boulder as well as works of art in the gallery itself.

Locally, 2008 saw a major Australian exhibition, Heat: Art and Climate Change, held at RMIT Gallery, Melbourne (Davies 2008). Curated by Linda Williams, the exhibition was held together with a symposium entitled Cultures of Sustainability.

Heat gave international artists “the opportunity to expose the pressing issues of climate change, and highlight how this is a global issue connecting individuals, local communities, cities and nations” (Artabase 2008). The exhibition featured installations around the city of Boulder as well as works of art in the gallery itself.

Locally, 2008 saw a major Australian exhibition, Heat: Art and Climate Change, held at RMIT Gallery, Melbourne (Davies 2008). Curated by Linda Williams, the exhibition was held together with a symposium entitled Cultures of Sustainability. Heat gave international artists “the opportunity to expose the pressing issues of climate change, and highlight how this is a global issue connecting individuals, local communities, cities and nations” (Artabase 2008). The exhibition featured artists from Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Japan, and the UK. Two of my works on paper, Fowlers Gap #2 (2008) and Patonga #2 (2008), appeared in Heat.

Rethink: Contemporary Art and Climate Change was held throughout in response to the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15) in Copenhagen, 2009. It involved concurrent linked exhibitions at the National Gallery of Denmark, Nikolaj Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, Den Frie Center of Contemporary Art, and the Alexandra Institute, Copenhagen. Its focus was on “the cultural and social shifts and displacements that take place concurrently with the ongoing political manoeuvres regarding energy and CO2 emissions” (Witzke 2009, 9). The diverse works presented in Rethink, many of them installations, revealed “different strategies for meeting the challenges that face us and for handling the information crisis represented by climate issues” (Witzke 2009, 16).

The exhibition The World Is Yours, held at the Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk on the northern Zealand coast of Denmark, presented works of art aiming to actively engage the viewer (Holm et al. 2009, 4). The exhibition communicated that we must “consider problems and assume responsibilities beyond our narrow, private circles” (Louisiana Museum 2009), including “burdening the climate” (Hansen 2009, 9).

Both these curatorial examples, as well as the aforementioned artists, indicate the kind of aesthetic and activist artistic practice that has emerged, which links science, art, and communication. As detailed in the next section, my studio practice builds on these foundations.

TEXT IN MY STUDIO PRACTICE

As my response to the political rhetoric on climate change, my recent studio practice has involved three series of drawings on paper. Some address fossil fuel, its historical usage and associated Australian climate impacts, and some refer to the UN Climate Conferences in Bali and Copenhagen. They all involve handwritten text. Often, my works have reflected on the content of political speeches given at UN meetings (e.g., Fowlers Gap #1 and Kinchega #2, figures 5 and 6 respectively).

The discourse espoused by presenters arguably perpetuates the mythology of precaution or the perception that we are taking action with regard to climate change. My studio work aims to prompt viewers to reflect on this.

My work operates on several semiotic levels. I use text to create images of the rural landscape, which has close ties for Indigenous people and where, over the past two hundred years, settlers from Europe and elsewhere have farmed and used the land, establishing country towns for their livelihoods. Australian cities are dependent on rural agriculture and its ongoing productivity for their food supply and yet our future food security is threatened by climate change.

Printing or hand-writing the text is an integral part of my art-making. The words flow into the work that I create to depict the contrasts between political rhetoric and the need for action to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, as warned by climate scientists. This differs from mechanically produced or computer-generated text often seen in image/text, I use text to create images of the Australian regional landscape and ecology, as well as interiors and still-life studies.

The images that I draw are constructed from the words of the symbolic and platitudinous speeches of political and UN leaders at their conferences on climate change issues. The words are often ignored and at times not sincerely intended by those who deliver them. In Copenhagen 2009 #1 and #2 (2010, figures 7 and 8 respectively), I use the speech

Figure 4 Greg Pryor Black Solander (detail) 2005, black ink on black sugar paper, size not specified
Figure 5 Roslyn Taplin Fowlers Gap #1 2008, mixed media on paper, 81 x 93cm

Figure 6 Roslyn Taplin Kinchega #2 2008, mixed media on paper, 100 x 187cm
of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (2009) given at the COP15 to frame the indoor architecture of the Bella Center—the event’s venue.

I have also introduced images of petrol bowser relics to some of my Australian-based images. Old petrol pumps stand in Australian country settlements and properties—some are discarded and disused, while some are still in use in remote locations. These relics signify the history of Australian fossil-fuel consumption and dependence. In my work they are juxtaposed with the landscape that has been impacted and will be further affected by climate-change impacts. By depicting petrol bowser, buildings, interiors, and landscapes in appropriated text as signifiers, I aim to convey multiple denotations and connotations of meaning that signify aspects of the issue of climate change (using the semiotic distinctions of Barthes 1985, 16–20).

**REFLEXIVITY IN MY ART PRACTICE**

In a 2005 *Artlink* editorial, Stephanie Britton wrote:

> The art...we produce as a society has always been a barometer of the health of the society. In the face of ecological collapse [due to climate change], art is being pressed into helping populations turn their attitudes around. (2005, 14)

I consider my studio practice as being reflexive (Rose 2007, 136; Sullivan 2010, 52–3), working in the manner that John Roberts (2007, 102–3) describes as being characteristic of the “post-Cartesian artist” (i.e., I am an artist informed by my political and social sensibilities). Accordingly, I am mindful of my position as a social agent with cultural and political ties and perspectives. To see my studio as separate from society and environmental concerns would
be to deny personal responsibilities. I acknowledge that I hope my works may influence viewers’ understandings and thus promote thinking and reflection about the political influences on the natural environment and sustainability, i.e., in relation to leadership, power, politics, economics, social hierarchies, and cultures. However, I do not intend or expect to tell my audience what to think. I do not see my work as belonging to the field of activism (see Felshin 1995, 23–27) or propaganda. Felicity Fenner observes that “being an aware artist is not the same as being an activist and the contribution of art is perhaps most telling at its most subtle and lateral” (cited in Britton 2008, 80). In discussing Australian artist, Madeleine Kelly, whose work focuses on humanity’s relationship to nature, Tim Morrell (2008, 60) has commented, “Didactic ecological art is hardly necessary now... ideas once held by only a minority of particularly well-informed and thoughtful individuals are now almost universally discussed.” This is the territory that I aim to take up in my art—not to educate, but to reach out to viewers to elicit a personal response about climate-change issues.

I am currently experimenting with reducing the number of words I use relative to illustrative drawing, the devices of illegibility and the palimpsest, and the use of scientific information on ecological resilience (e.g., cases of ecosystems and species lost, endangered, or threatened by climate change). This reflects my growing interest in Selby’s image/text categories of context and textuality, rather than text and semiotext. Clearly, climate change is a serious issue that must be addressed locally and globally. Art can have some efficacy in influencing viewers about the need to act on the issue, as CSIRO scientist Simon Torok commented in Artlink:

Climate change is an abstract concept. It is gradually creeping up on us, almost unnoticeable. And that is where art and science can say more together than they can apart. Together, art and science can inspire an emotional response, inspiring changes in our attitudes and behaviour that ensure our landscapes survive... (2005, 17)
TAXONOMY AS A CULTURAL VEHICLE IN THE ART STUDIO

Antonia Posada

PREAMBLE
As an artist and a scientist, I oscillate between the art studio and the laboratory. Recently, I decided to become a full-time artist, and to keep my scientific practice to only some hours a week. I currently work in an evolutionary-genetics laboratory, which both pays for my art materials and provides me with moments of unrestrained diversions and intellectual entertainment. However, as I develop my practice, I endeavour to make the well-trained scientist in me yield to the artist I want to become. As utilitarian as it might sound, I aim to use scientific protocols and techniques to suggest novel artistic methodologies, and to reveal unexpected connections between ideas. However, I have found that these only emerge when my ‘inner artist’ and ‘inner scientist’ negotiate their terms. My aim is to evaluate if these negotiations have been successful, and, if not, to explore strategies on how to use, and then transcend, elements of science in my works of art. In this paper, I reflect on a 2009 project, explain the personal context that gave rise to it, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of both the methodology and the work, and finally, explore the idea of using taxonomy as the raw material for my work.

In my work as an evolutionary geneticist I am curious about how nature functions and changes throughout time. But as the answers to such riddles are hidden and encoded into the complexities of nature itself, the only means by which we can start to grasp them is through what scientific philosopher Karl Popper called “marvellously imaginative and bold conjectures” (1959, 279). That imaginative process takes the form of a hypothesis that I then test through analysing empirical data produced by experiments. Questions, hypotheses, experiments, analyses, and empirical falsification all belong to the ‘Hypothetico-deductive’ scientific method, in which I have been trained. It is worth considering how much of this framework permeates my artistic practice, and whether my scientific training has been a beneficial or detrimental influence.

PERSONAL CONTEXT: CHRONICLES OF DISPLACEMENT
In 2007 I migrated from Colombia to Australia leaving behind the city where I had lived for twenty-eight years. As I arrived to a new continent, what used to be immediate, tactile, and physical became mediated, digital, and virtual. I saw my family, my old home, my city, and my country through the flat interface of a computer screen that gave me a deceptive impression of closeness. Simultaneously, my new city and its cityscapes were utterly unfamiliar. The translocation of my mind and body in space and time brought about feelings of dislocation and strangeness, combined with feelings of excitement and enthusiasm about the new immediate world. During this time of emotional intensity, I felt the need to elucidate my adaptation process to the Australian landscape, and I believed art could provide a language with which to reflect upon it.

REMAPING AND THE METHODICAL SEARCH OF THE SELF
To map my location in a dislocated reality, I began using my art practice as a triangulation tool. Having recently completed a Master’s degree in Science, my mindset was scientifically tuned and led me to surrender to the procedural comfort of the Hypothetico-deductive method. I could not help but formulate a hypothesis: I would be able to build a new sense of place through juxtaposing images from the news-media and collected objects from my everyday life. Through this, I would become more aware of the distances between Australia and the rest of the world, and become familiar with the new landscape to which I had moved. I planned to build a phenomenological sense of the word here by actively laying down the first co-ordinates of my new location, and by mapping my experiences in this new geography. Following the process described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who said he could know where he was by knowing where the pipe in his hand was (1962, 115), I endeavoured to anchor myself through my relation to certain objects.

Consequently, I decided to begin familiarising myself with the place to which I had moved, and making new connections with it, through systematically collecting objects. The objects became evidence of my daily journeys, reflected my interests, and witnessed my presence in this country. As I walked, I looked for dry leaves, seedpods, and feathers, which helped me to become acquainted with this new landscape full of bewilderingly unfamiliar species, such as banksias, grevilleas, casuarinas, and eucalypts (figure 1). Collecting, identifying, observing, and drawing these objects became both the taxonomy of the objects themselves and the anatomy of my own story and landscape. They helped me claim ownership of my new home.

Concurrently, digital press photographs helped me locate my new position in the world, particularly in relation to Colombia. Being aware of events happening in mine
and other countries, and getting a sense of how far away those events were occurring, helped me to grasp where I was. The computer became the means through which I was able to travel these distances virtually, keeping up to date with a distant world. But, as the collection of digital press photographs grew, it revealed the extremely mediated nature of the portrayed events—so selected, edited, and cropped. Fortunately, this artificiality allowed me to contrast the concepts of here and there, saving me from living in a place that was neither of them.

Once a week, I would compile my collected objects and the press photos into a drawing that I etched onto zinc plates (figure 2). The meticulous and laborious nature of the etching process played an important role in establishing new memories relating to both distant and local events. I am still surprised at how well I can recall what happened during that period of time in my own life and around the world. As the year passed, the routine of the weekly protocol also provided some comfort against the anxiety associated with moving to another country. It was reassuring to build habits in a moment of geographical and cultural displacement.

Week by week, personal events, apparently irrelevant objects, and world news came together in a sphere where the scale of relevance could be deliberately altered, and where distant places such as Colombia and Australia could be juxtaposed: my work became a creative documentation of events that brought together distant realities in fifty-two etchings and fifty-two jars containing objects. I presented all of these in my first solo exhibition, held in September 2009 (figure 3). I invited the viewer to follow a year-long chronology, aiming to challenge their memory about world news, and encourage them to draw connections between the proposed time line and their own personal stories. The spatial display of the work in the gallery coalesced the different elements with an engaging narrative that gave rise to a plethora of interpretations. From my own perspective, being able to observe that narrative as a finished piece allowed me to close the chapter that told the story of moving to Australia and opened a new one about feeling at home. The work helped me realise that home in Colombia and home in Australia were not mutually exclusive concepts. My life can take place in this distant continent, while Colombia is only a phone call away, a click away, a plane ticket away.

Figure 1 Collected found objects, including casuarina and banksia seedpods, leaves, and shells, among many other items.
But when the show was dismantled, the project had reached an end without seemingly allowing for further expansions, explorations, or developments in my art practice. I had believed that my hypothesis had proved its mettle through a year-long test: the juxtaposition of press photos and collected objects helped me become more aware of my new location in the world, and become comfortable in and with the Australian landscape. However, the project had failed in stimulating new ideas, falling into the trap of routine. I realised that I was trying to impose scientific methods on a personal, unique, and non-testable hypothesis. I didn't conduct experiments, but immersed myself into experiences from which I drew, not objective conclusions, but what Popper calls feelings of conviction (1959, 44).

This observation led me to realise that comparing the institutions of art and science, or the stereotypes of the artist and the scientist, is a fruitless endeavour. Neither comparison would enlighten my dilemma of how to make art acknowledging and making use of my scientific training. However, it could become useful for me to look back, for example, at the Nuremberg artisans of the sixteenth century, such as Albrecht Dürer and Wenzel Jamnitzer, for whom nature was the primary source of knowledge. For them, the process of engaging through a bodily encounter with nature and its physicality provided a very valuable type of knowledge (Smith 2004, 59). If what motivates my artistic practice finds its origins in how I relate to my surrounding environment, my bodily encounter with nature can provide both the materials and ideas with which to create my works of art.

Combining this phenomenological approach with my unavoidable urge for the meticulous, organised, and methodical, I decided to focus on one specific discipline within science that I found fascinating, both from an epistemological and a practical point of view: taxonomy, the science of classification, which entails collecting, naming, and organising organisms into a hierarchical system. If I am to put science at the service of my art practice, taxonomy can provide me with both the connection to the place I'm exploring (through the collection process), and a whole conceptual and visual background to use, transform, and transcend. This discussion will now turn to the discipline of taxonomy, and the herbarium as one of its major scenarios, in order to justify how I have appropriated them for my personal and willingly unscientific pursuit.

THE TAXONOMY OF ART AND THE REDISCOVERY OF PLACE

From times before the word 'scientist' existed, humans have been interested in decoding the rationality and orderliness hidden underneath the multiplicity and apparent chaos of natural forms. Taxonomy (from arrangement and law) has itself taken many shapes, ranging from the binomial nomenclature of the Linnaean Systema naturae, to the fictional Borgean classification that includes a category for those creatures that “from a long way off look like flies” (Foucault 1970, xvi). Coherent or not-so-coherent systems of classification have been a key element, not only of scientific endeavours, but also of art and literature. In his book The Infinity of Lists (2009), Umberto Eco provides a comprehensive and illustrating journey through the history of lists in daily life, painting, literature, and even music. Finite and infinite, poetic and practical, are just some of the types of lists that exist, and that provide us with, not only one possible classification system or taxonomy, but with multiple and evolving ones.

Mindful of the unfinished and dynamic nature of the list-making process, I'm investigating the history of expeditionary botanists, who travelled to the unknown world collecting specimens, brought them back to their laboratories, processed them into herbarium vouchers, and classified them according to a complex preconceived system. The list of species (their names and dried specimens, the word and the physicality) is...
Figure 3 The AP (Solo show at the College Gallery, Griffith University), October 2009. Fifty-two hard-ground etchings on Magnani paper in wooden boxes, and fifty-two glass jars with collected objects.
built in the herbarium, a place where the taxonomer draws tentative conclusions about how nature functions, and where they find “the stimulus for further study of questions which specimens may raise but do not answer” (Benson 1962, 52). So too is my studio; it is a place into which I bring my collected and organised version of nature, a place where a poetic and infinite list of plants, experiences and memories gets built, and a place that furnishes room for understanding and appropriating the landscape that surrounds me.

Given that species are normally in a state of flux, and that boundaries between them are unclear, taxonomists find themselves confined to a system that can never be complete or free of arbitrary decisions and judgement. The process I use to gather press photos and found objects is similarly arbitrary. Nevertheless, both the herbarium and my collection provide a link between nature and the concept of nature. They render a tangible scenario, a concrete space where I can reflect upon the complexities of the world. The herbarium may be used as a metaphor for my systematic exploration of, and adaptation to, the Australian landscape, as well as a conceptual and aesthetic source of inspiration for my artistic works (figure 4). Looking at the herbarium from an artistic perspective liberates me from the restrictions of scientific rigour, and allows me to construct far more complex and profound systems than the ones classic taxonomy allows for.

Understanding the herbarium not only as a simple metaphor for an art-studio methodology, but also as the construction of an aesthetically and conceptually complex collection, renders its value far more relevant to my artistic practice. By collection, I mean the process of gathering, classifying, organising, and making objects in a systematic manner for the purpose of owning, beautifying, controlling, and reviving what is out there. I understand collecting in terms of Jean Baudrillard’s work (1996) who defines it as an obsessive acquisition of things that defines my presence at a given place and tells something about who I am. I understand it as the process of exploring, recognising, and appropriating place, and constructing a dwelling. As the process of gathering and organising occurs, the challenge is to make the collection pertinent in an artistic context by transforming the perception of the collected objects, reconceptualising and recontextualising them. My challenge is to make the objects serve the purpose I intend them to serve without falling into the commonplaces of obsessive acquisition, or the sentimental attachment to the nostalgic aesthetic of the objects themselves. A collection taking the shape of a reinterpreted herbarium can become a vehicle for displacement. While in the initial project, I dealt with geographical displacement and feelings of cultural alienation, my current project considers the conceptual displacement between the scientist and artist.

The idea of the conceptual displacement is explored in Gaston Bachelard’s writings (2002). I try to overcome what he called the “epistemological obstacles”, a concept he coined when describing the development of scientific thought. This concept also applies to artistic research; in both fields, knowledge does not accumulate linearly, but follows discontinuous pathways in which errors and divagations are included. Moreover, instead of being detrimental to the progress of thought, those obstacles are the meanders of the self-polemical and auto-critical epistemological flow, through which new ideas and theories thrive. Dried and pressed plants have become the bridge between two ways of observing nature; both ways—the scientific and the artistic—render cultural constructs that take the shape of theories or works of art; both ways are based on risk and curiosity; both ways incorporate critics to their own past experiences.

Putting epistemological similarities aside, if one accepts the explanation for life and its complexities given by scientist to be the only valid one, life would deteriorate and start to lose meaning. It is the transforming power of art that multiplies the concepts of reality, and elevates knowledge to a greater realm; knowledge free of methodological restrictions, free of the need for evidence and reproducibility, free of constraining Cartesian systems. Setting myself free from the scientific method, but having science as source of ideas, materials, and processes, allows me to better explore the Australian landscape and more comprehensively build a sense of home. Bachelard strongly argues that “science is totally opposed to opinion” (2002, 25), and my opinion is that taxonomy can have the emotive power of instilling a sense of belonging to the Australian landscape; that a reinterpreted herbarium can render the means through which I can overcome alienation and longing.

**POSTLUDE**

As already mentioned, it is not my aim to compare science and art as institutions, but rather to appropriate a specific scientific discipline so as to reinterpret it and transcend its boundaries through my artistic practice. The experience of my past project revealed that the search for predictability, reproducibility, and logic was strangling my flow of ideas and creative options. Being aware of this has helped me develop a studio methodology that, making use of my specific scientific knowledge and practical scientific skills, embraces the more sensuous and sometimes counter-logical nature of the art-making process.

I am now creating my own studio methodology, which emerges from surrendering science to the unconstrained transformative and creative power of art. This methodology includes the formulation of multiple hypotheses that are not falsified, but developed, expanded, and reformulated. And instead of getting corroborated by means of experiments,
these hypotheses get explored through experiences that follow a rather circular, random, or fractal trajectory. Giving up the urge for finding one answer, the outcomes of a given project do not need to be conclusive, but suggestive of a multiplicity of answers. In my art studio, taxonomies and herbariums are liberated from the constrictions of evidence and proof, and are entitled to become emotional companions, cultural vehicles, memory devices, reinvented landscapes, and witnesses of endless journeys.

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REFERENCES


Figure 4 Work in progress: Plant species collected around Brisbane, pressed, dried, and mounted on tracing paper. Installation view of the solo show Híbrida, POP Gallery, Griffith University, June 2011.