

et al.

arguments
for
immortality

abnormal mass delusions?
ADVANCES
IN TREATMENT

an outline

arguments for immortality

blanche ready-made trust
bud shoop
buddholdings
constance strange
c j [arthur] craig and sons
dora's productions
et al.
horian metkel
frank craig
l budd
l budd et al.
lillian budd
lionel b
lional gootschalk
marlene cubewell

Published on the occasion of their major exhibition *abnormal mass delusions?* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *arguments for immortality* captures the rich visual history of the group of artists now known as et al. Together they have produced a poetic stream of imagery and writing that, with GPS precision, has consistently positioned members at the leading edge of contemporary New Zealand art.

merit grötting
minerva betts
mythic investments (nz) ltd
p mule
populist productions
roland wailer
william brightly sands

From early unwrapping of cinematic narrative, through the application of blinding, to the group's most recent installations, *arguments for immortality* offers an opportunity to unravel some of the intended complications of these intriguing and provocative artists.

Among the artists featured is lillian budd, author of *april snow* and collaborator with the metal work importers and manufactures c j [arthur] craig and sons. It has been said of her "had l budd not existed someone would have had to invent her". That aside, lillian budd, working with wrought-iron furniture and huge Xeroxes, produced some of the most eloquent objects of the eighties.

Also highlighted are the complex aesthetic negotiations of merit grötting, who brought to the group the startling process of blinding, a technique that secured for sculpture what method acting had delivered to the stage. Nothing proved too sacred for grötting's white-laden brush. Driven to the point of obsession, grötting applied her whitewash to a dreamscape of fixtures, furniture and fittings. Her infamous blinding of gallerist Peter McLeavey's chaise still resonates as a key moment in the uneasy history of relationships between art and commerce.

The lives, antics and achievements of these key artists along with marlene cubewell, blanche ready-made, l budd, lionel budd, minerva betts, and their merciless critic and interlocutor p mule are all extensively documented.

This lavishly illustrated book investigates the gripping story of how a loosely associated group of artists grew into the disciplined art fabricators now known throughout the world.

Edited by Jim Barr, Mary Barr and Gregory Burke.

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arguments for immortality

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et al.

arguments for immortality

arguments for immortality is dedicated to the memory of artist, critic and gallerist Giovanni Intra (1968-2002), who was a commissioned writer for this publication, but unable to contribute an essay owing to his untimely death.

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

abnormal mass delusions?



Lionel B., *Studies in the Sublime*, 1998
Ivan Antony Gallery, Auckland
photographer: Jennifer French

background image page 1:
et al., *serial_reform_713L*, 2003, (detail)
background image page 3:
et al., *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic device*,
2000, (detail)

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

ARGUMENTS FOR IMMORTALITY

arguments for immortality focuses on the group of artists now known as et al. and is the latest in a Govett-Brewster Art Gallery publishing programme documenting major projects by mid-career contemporary artists. These projects consist of exhibitions accompanied by publications featuring new writing on the artists and differ from standard survey or retrospective exhibitions in that the featured artists are actively involved in the presentation and interpretation of their work.

SUPPORTERS

Generously supported by Aalto Colour; Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa; Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington; Starkwhite, Auckland; Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch.

LENDERS

Blanche ready-made trust; Govett-Brewster Art Gallery; Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington; Jim Barr & Mary Barr Collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery; Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch; John McCormack; Jane Vesty and Brian Sweeney.

ASSOCIATES OF THE et al. COLLECTIVE

Anon, Anon 2, Anon 3 & Anon 4, Rod Barnett, Jan and Luit Bieringa, Len Cheeseman, Kirsty Gregg and Dominic Feuchs, Howard Greive, Miranda Harcourt and Stuart McKenzie, John McCormack, Hamish McKay, Jonathan Organ, Brian Sweeney and Jane Vesty.

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY

Principal Funder: New Plymouth District Council

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Et al. members especially thank all collaborating artists with whom they have worked, including Miranda Harcourt, Chris Heaphy, George Hubbard, Incubator Records, Daniel Malone, Rosy Parlane & Dion Workman, Martin Popperwell, Eduard Salmon, Birgit Schindler, Guy Treadgold, Maria Walls, P Void, Ivan Zagni, and Gloria Zelenka.
Special acknowledgement to Ralph Marrett.

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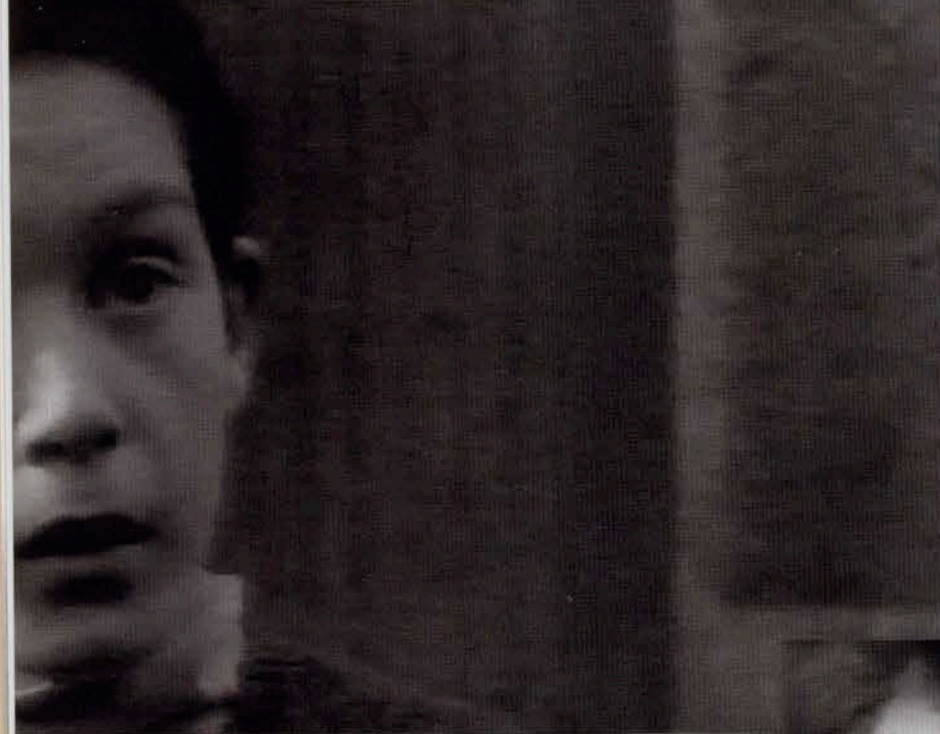
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1. 'The truth, the truth! There's no truth.
These men, they make it up as they go along.'
Alex Krycek

There was a time when the role of art was considered to be an investigation of the truth. The truth, it was believed, could be revealed in great art in a way that was not possible through other disciplines like philosophy, science and theology.

Truth in art took some big knocks over the twentieth century. Duchamp certainly put the boot in. Here he is responding to Pontus Hulten in 1964:

'The public is the victim of a really staggering plot. The critics speak of "the truth of art" as one says the "truth of religion". People follow like sheep... Me, I don't accept, it doesn't exist...'

This is the world of resistance occupied by et al., a group of art makers and art-like product producers that has been evolving for the past thirty or so years. Its modus operandi has been a network of alliances and mergers, of partnerships and liaisons. In spirit it has moved between the intimate homeliness of hand production here, and the formal protocols of corporate process there. Throughout this enjoyable turmoil, however, the eclectic gathering held fast to one important principle. In unity lies strength.

2. 'Truth titillates the imagination far less than fiction.'
Marquis de Sade

The many iterations, combinations and individual efforts that have resulted in et al. had an early airing in dora's productions and later popular productions. These

loosely formed film collectives took Duchamp's swipe at artistic truth in the spirit it was given, as an assault on narrative.

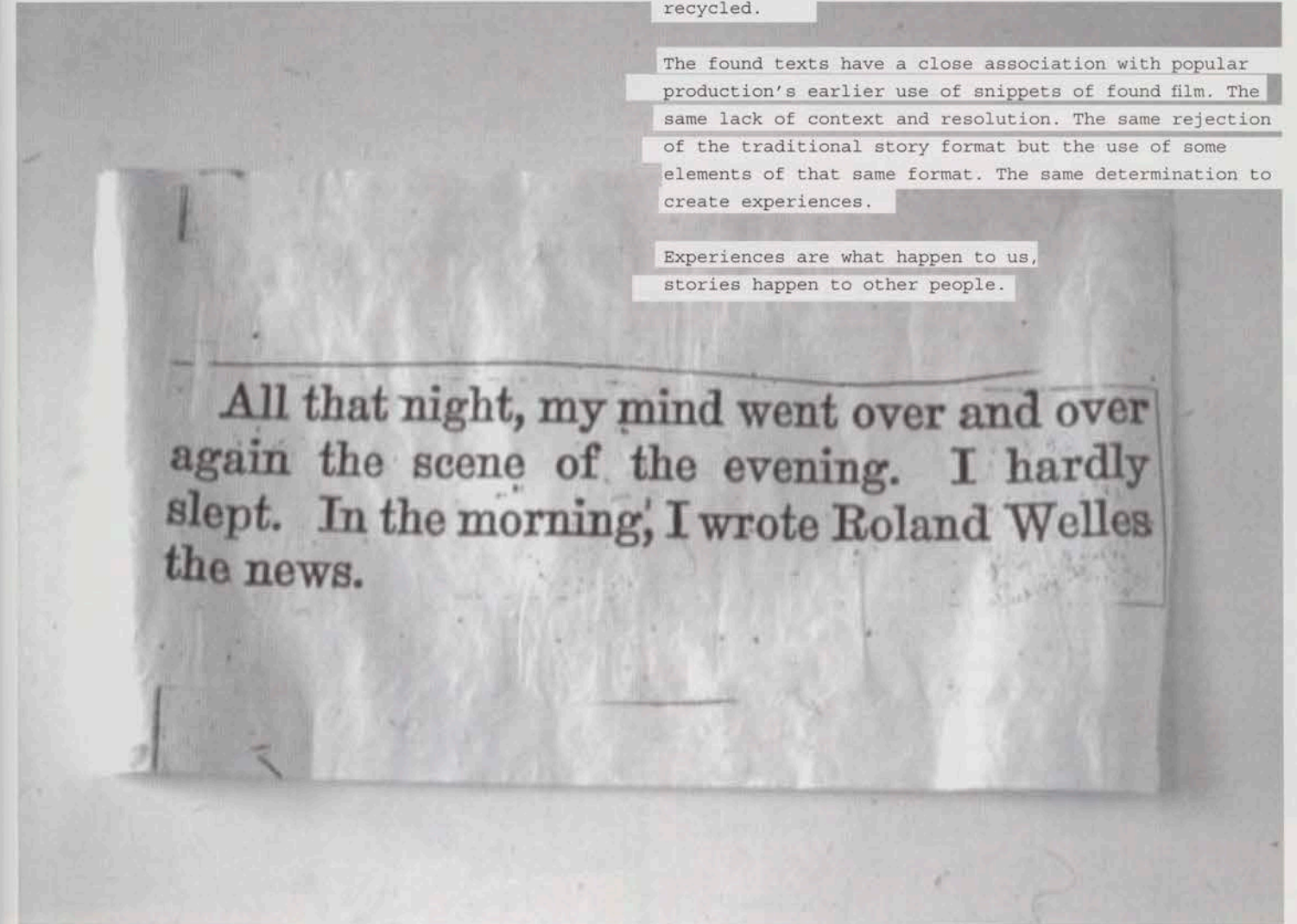
Popular productions created poetic films including *the story of 1990*, *wonder what 1990* and *utopia 1993* (p.107). Using found footage and insinuating disruptive graphic and audio elements, they thwarted attempts to create narratives from their entertainments by slumming it with bargain basement post-production. These films and others made by members including minerva betts and blanche ready-made tested the standing of home movies as evidence. The nostalgia and inconsequential detail we value most about these flicks of picnics, farewells and birthdays careen against atonal sound tracks and footage shot by the group until, finally we doubt their validity. This tension between the banal and the emotive has been picked up as a generative field by many contemporary artists. Douglas Gordon's *24 hour psycho* is a good example. As Andy Warhol so sagely put it,

'The best atmosphere I can think of is film, because it's three-dimensional physically, and two-dimensional emotionally.'

Operating alongside popular productions in the late eighties was lillian budd. Budd, often in association with other et al. collaborators such as merit grötting, blanche ready-made, c j [arthur] craig and sons, minerva betts, marlene cubewell, p mule and others, began to toy with the truth implied by found objects.

As far as we can establish, collaborators like the craigs, grötting and ready-made had no art credentials to speak of. The craigs, for instance, appear to have converted their interest in manufacturing spare parts into an art-making practice with no known formal training. Grötting and ready-made may have attended art school, but at this time there is no evidence to support this supposition.

And so a further complication. The group appears to challenge André Breton's assertion that 'manufactured objects (are) promoted to the dignity of objects of art through the choice of the artist'. If Breton were right, how could the craigs et al., no matter how closely they were associated with an established artist like l budd, claim the objects they presented in public were art? And if they did so, why should we believe them?



3. 'But that was another story.'
Rudyard Kipling

By 1990 lillian budd was established as, if not the leader of the group, at least as one of its most prominent members. Her next move was a series of works employing items of furniture. An eclectic range of objects including heaters, small tables, office furniture and light fixtures was juxtaposed with enlarged photocopies of found texts. Both objects and texts were often glossed with resins. Nothing was new. Everything recycled.

The found texts have a close association with popular production's earlier use of snippets of found film. The same lack of context and resolution. The same rejection of the traditional story format but the use of some elements of that same format. The same determination to create experiences.

Experiences are what happen to us,
stories happen to other people.

What seizes our attention in the roland welles text illustrated on the previous page is the mystery of that personal pronoun. 'I hardly slept.' The 'I' is so immediate, so compelling that we want to believe it is budd relating this event. Budd has stripped the story of all detail except that very specific name. roland welles. And if roland welles has been found in some novel somewhere, then that is where 'I' must reside as well.

Two works use this roland welles text. One presents only the text in a form so enlarged that the type has begun to blur and disintegrate. The other work, *guide to roland welles* takes another direction. It is one of a series of works with enlarged texts, as well as found and manipulated objects: *art to express New Zealand*, *modern world*, *the story of*, all made in 1990.

In these works the text plays a different role. Questions about the ownership of the voice recede as the selected objects front up. In *the story of* and *art to express New Zealand* the words seem to be quasi-captions to the objects with which they are linked, rather than independent statements. The enlarged photocopies are also a nice nod to Jim Allen who introduced the technique to New Zealand in his work *O-AR 1* in the mid-seventies. Taken from obsolete brochures, books and magazines, the associations they suggest with the objects at first seem arbitrary. But human beings are experts at detecting patterns and meaning (and perhaps even truth). Almost instantly we perceive narrative, explanation, commentary.

The text for *art to express New Zealand* 1990 on the other hand appears to be a sly dig at the representation of a true New Zealand through 'realist' chocolate box art, the territory owned by the New Zealand pastoralist school Peter McIntyre, Douglas Badcock, John Crump et al. However, this thought is quickly subverted as the borrowed text reveals itself as tourist promotion for the real New Zealand. In case the ironic edge is missed, the two wall lamps and tin box remind us that Christian Boltanski is also part of et al.'s repertoire of sources.

modern world 1990 takes budd's complications another step, although it is hard to say even now, in what direction. The text adjusts a tiresomely detailed explanation on borrowing money into a commentary on buying art. It is accompanied by an object, of course: a small book skewered on a stand. But this object plays second fiddle to a much grander one; lighting fixtures that are set to illuminate not the art, but the text.

By the time we come to *the story of* 1991 budd seems worn out by the game. The three words lie exhausted at the bottom of the sheet. Unable to muster enough energy to suggest narrative, they resign themselves to being a brief caption. Even the appliance included as part of the installation can't put any heat back into the situation.

4. 'I don't mind being called a liar when I am lying, when I am about to lie or just finished lying... but not when I am telling the truth.'

Homer Simpson

As the nineties progressed budd's stage became more crowded. Generous by nature, budd had always encouraged other manufacturers, fabricators, conceptualists and authors to collaborate in production. But whereas in the previous decade budd had acted as something of a sieve, by the mid-nineties other members of the cast were becoming more boisterous. And none more so than p mule.

Mule pushed the rhetoric around the found object up another notch as its works accepted what was found at face value. In most cases this was art magazine reviews of exhibitions. These reviews were pumped up into large-scale wall hangings with the text carefully worked over by hand. Excisions, additions, white-outs. These amendments, though, mostly served to co-opt the words of the original writers to an entirely other purpose, rather than fiddle about with the meaning.



Mule used the found texts to give its project a step up and save valuable time. The texts had gained a certain weight and authority from their appearance (once) in magazines such as *Artforum*. They feel like historical evidence. Why not make the most of it? If the truth wasn't at stake, ownership certainly was. Reviews that once thrilled or shamed other artists were converted into fodder for mule, budd et al.

5. 'There can be no whitewash in the White House.'
President Richard M Nixon

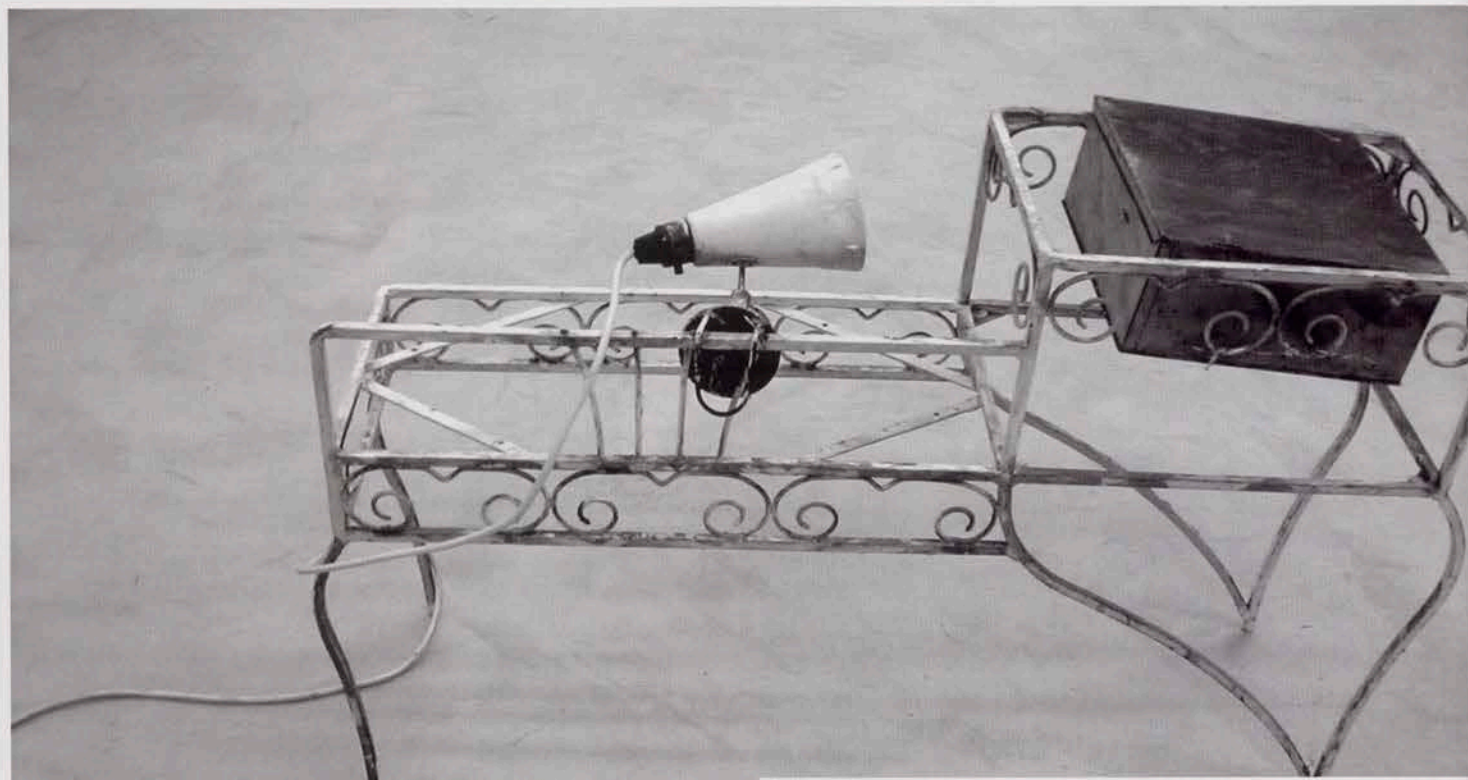
In the practice of blinding taken up in the early nineties et al. confronted the truth head-on. Blinding can be read as a proprietary term for what we call whitewashing. At one level it is the application of a thin layer of roughly applied white paint to objects. At another level blinding is an approved way to disguise and suppress the truth. How to lie and deceive.

No one claims credit for a whitewash. We always accuse our enemies as being responsible. Thus when Ezekiel attacked other prophets of his day he accused them of 'painting the walls with whitewash'. Buddholdings takes the process in a different spirit entirely. It sees its potential to produce art efficiently. Blinding gives disparate objects an uncanny unity that means they can then be promoted as original and specialised art works. Buddholdings has created a way to manufacture the truth in fact.

Following the cancellation of an exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, buddholdings ramped up its promotional efforts. Client testimonials were sought and direct mailed to prospective purchasers.

'I like the portability of the filing unit, its wheels makes the unit very easy to move around the home.'

merit grötting, *sticky label* (from the *atelier of merit grötting*), 1992 collection Jim Barr & Mary Barr, on long-term loan to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery



'We really like the way the book and the turned wooden stand are painted the same acrylic white. It makes it a very handy thing to have around.'

In this business context, blinding shifted from painterly gloss to brand. The objects came full circle. A number of them like *sticky label* (from the atelier of merit grötting) 1992 originated as office equipment and seemed destined, conceptually at least, to return there

Blinding returned et al. to its business interests. But with buddholdings the business concept became more fully entangled into the process. This widened how people could respond to the work, offering a new complicity to those outside the group. For instance, in his article 'Gaining interest' in *Art New Zealand* 67, Ross Cunningham presented his article as an auditor's report.

'Not one interested in short-term returns, cubewell reinvested the dividends earned from her critically successful, if underexposed, initial investment in the blonded chaise market at the Peter McLeavey Gallery.'

6. 'A truth ceases to be the truth when more than one person believes in it.'

Oscar Wilde

For a group that is so closely aligned, the personalities within et al. are surprisingly distinct. Initially, of course, individual members were known for particular signature works. Lillian budd's poetic arrangements, grötting's blinding, mule's found texts and l budd's incorporation of persistent sound are examples. For all this individuality there were few times when named contributors were not also acting as part of the group or represented by one of the group's many enterprises.

Members of the group have also often collaborated with other artists, a number of whom have had long term relationships with et al. George Hubbard, Guy Treadgold and Martin Popperwell are examples. And yet none of these artists considers themselves as part of et al. but rather as having worked alongside a member or members of the group.

The group nature of the various artists and people who create the exhibitions, installations, films and soundscapes is held together by the largely unspoken agreement of the members. So while it is a documented fact that the group exists, it is also true that it exists in a way that is difficult to prove.

The whereabouts, history, identity and even physical appearance of members of et al. have been the subject of intense discussion. Not everyone has accepted et al. at face value. So what is the relationship of et al. to members of the group? Certainly not leadership, although there is sometimes a cultish aspect to et al.'s personality. Perhaps we should look on et al. as a kind of brand.

In the world of brands there is a neat distinction between a branded house and a house of brands. A branded house is a company which is identical with the brand it presents to consumers. McDonald's. Coca-Cola. Toyota. The name of the company evokes the signature style of its products and services. A company that takes the house of brands approach has, on the other hand, under its name a number of different brands with their own character and identity. Such house of brands corporations are often very large and their own names are not always familiar ones. General Mills, the giant American foodstuffs corporation, is a classic.

Think of et al. as a house of brands.

et al

7. 'The truth knocks on the door and you say, "Go away, I'm looking for the truth," and so it goes away.'

Robert M. Pirsig

In the last decade computer games have invaded commercial culture. With global sales of around \$US30 billion in 2002, they rival Hollywood as shapers of what we aspire to, what we want. Et al.'s installation *o studies* (2001) takes on games in an edition of five (rather than five million or more) and wrests some small measure of control from the corporate game industry.

First the set-up for the gamer. A grey-painted banner with the words 'the preliminary practice / visualizing the mind as vacuous / obtaining the benefit / of bliss'. Beneath it an outmoded monitor, keyboard and mouse sitting on a fold-away table. In front of the table a metal seat painted grey.

While computer games set out to simulate reality and to create a convincing world, the absence of truth, or at least a place where such a vacuum might be found, appears to be the subject of *o studies* 2002.

The banner that heads *o studies* gives a clue. The truth in this particular work, it suggests, might be put to one side. *o studies* (p.112) rather appears to promise the player a meditative opportunity. Like commercial games here is a chance to clear the mind of all thought, truth or otherwise. Time has no meaning. It is the state sought in meditation. Thinking neither of the past nor the future, but resting in the calm absence of information (and also, let's face it, an absence of truth - whatever we decide it is or isn't) between the two, *o studies* can be seen to offer a way towards this meditative state.

The first screen is black with white type. The text appears to have been executed on an old typewriter and says 'someone asked "how long will it take" o said "no time at all"'. Many of the graphics have been scavenged from earlier et al. works, small photographs of speakers double as buttons, a TV screen dimly broadcasts a found text.

After a considered pause the computer takes you to the first screen automatically. This purports to set out a schematic of your progress through the game. From there you are on your own. Even experienced gamers do not find this game easy. The usual tricks let you down – and there are no cheat-sheets on the Internet. By clicking on backgrounds, icons and words in a prescribed order it is possible to advance through the ten screens to the game's end. But make a wrong move, mistake the timing, and you get tipped back to the beginning again.

The screens seem to be loosely aligned to the ten accepted steps towards achieving a meditative state.

Screen one: Finding balance.
Screen two: Breathing.
Screen three: Listening to the physical senses.
Screen four: Listening to the interior senses.
Screen five: Finding the internal balance point.
Screen six: Finding centre.
Screen seven: Listening to the collective unconscious.
Screen eight: Listening to nature.
Screen nine: Listening to silence.
Screen ten: Letting go.

o studies suggests that by playing the game you might be set free. Free in a space where there is only flow. No words, no images, no lies from the past, no promises for the future.

8. 'Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.'
Sherlock Holmes

In the late nineties, an installation by I Budd et al. engaged the idea of truth with new purpose. The installation *studies for existence* 1998 looked to examine how the truth might be extracted, rather than explored or imparted.

The installation was centred around a number of chairs with video monitors attached to their backs. The arrangement was confrontational although who was

confronting whom remained in doubt. The immediate effect was of the set-up for an interview or an interrogation with multiple participants. Of course the chairs remained empty throughout the exhibition so whether the questioning had just ended, or was about to begin, was never made clear.

studies for existence saw interrogation as a group undertaking rather than a one-on-one engagement. Any TV cop would have immediate doubts as to how well simultaneous interrogation would work. Part of the power of the process is the isolation, helplessness and uncertainty the subject feels in the face of the impersonal machinery of control. Machinery that here exerts control through technology and text. Little wonder that Stalin, master interrogator, called writers 'the engineers of human souls'.

The purpose of interrogation is to determine whether the subject is telling the truth. Someone is accused. Someone else evaluates their veracity. And here the coercive nature of interrogation is revealed. This is not an interview. The process requires far more questions. Many, many questions. Determining out of all this information what is true and what is not, makes interrogation an art (albeit a sinister one) rather than a science.

Interrogation is a search for the truth, but it can be used in service of a larger purpose: the positioning and acceptance of a new truth. Brainwashing. In this process the individual is exhausted by the recently 'reformed' group members as much as by the interrogator.

Et al. moves on to this theme with dispassionate clarity in the recent work *serial_reform_713L* 2003. Again rows of empty chairs stood in for participants but this time in a far more complex setting. With tables, monitors and handwritten tracts on grey-painted walls, the installation takes on the appearance of a school hastily converted to a darker purpose. Roughly assembled sound and video systems, their wires trailing, only add further threat to an already threatening situation. Giving context to the apparatus of the installation are a large number of grey-painted boards with handwritten messages. These further connect *serial_reform_713L*

(p.110) with et al.'s ongoing investigation into the truth. Like so much of the material et al. leaves behind, the information is fragmentary. The texts include lists of the 'Five Cs' of torture and a sampling of Robert Jay Lifton's twelve psychological steps to thought reform. Each one further demonstrates that et al.'s research continues to subscribe to the principle of the found object. Torn out of context and deposited in et al.'s world, these snippets (found objects perhaps?) mix the gravity of poetry with the brutality of evidence.

'You want answers?'
'I think I'm entitled.'
'You want answers?'
'I want the truth.'
'You can't handle the truth!'

Col. Nathan R. Jessup and Lt. Daniel Kaffee

Is there any truth to the work of et al.? Not truth to materials, if blinding is anything to go by. At best it's little white lies. Nor, by the unstable approach et al. takes to spelling, are all works true to the letter. How about the unvarnished truth then? Certainly the thick skeins of resin have disappeared from et al.'s work since the late 1980s, but there is still an unnatural sheen on many produced since that time. The plain truth could hardly be further from the complications et al. has concocted over the last dozen or so years. In fact, so far as et al. is concerned the truth of the matter is...

Studies for
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THE TRI-IMPPOSE TROUBLES

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1. Viz the maxim, 'half the failures in life arise from pulling in one's horse as he is leaping'. One wonders if this is the same for mares, or indeed mules.
2. 'The most impeccable scholarship, utilizing newly verified documents, voluminous footnotes, and convincing empirical generalizations only succeeds in further indoctrinating us into the art mystique' (Jack Burnham, *The structure of art*, New York: George Braziller, 1971, p2).
3. Perhaps the crowd might be classed as a new archetype. As the epoch's psyche changes, so does its symbology, surely. Issues like this raise questions such as the status of et al. characters? A familial complex? Or imaginary friends demanding obedience on the behalf of the audience? Personae and dramatis personae too are inadequate descriptions. Et al. are perhaps more like invocations, and the resulting work, like work dreamed.
4. 'Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces' (Walter Benjamin, *The arcades project*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1982, Klla, 8). Benjamin's expansive project (conceived in 1927 and uncompleted at the time of his death in 1940) was a study in the daily life of the collective; a 'primal history', in Benjamin's words, that led to his being likened to a rag-picker. He put the nineteenth century forward as a collective dream, one which we might pore over and one day awaken from. Or at least this is how it apparently looked at the outset.
5. Jung sadly put the skids under the efficacy, and even the ethical efficacy, of group therapy situations. 'A group experience takes place on a lower level of consciousness than the experience of the individual... The psychology of the crowd inevitably sinks to the level of mob psychology' (C. J. Jung, *The archetypes and the collective unconsciousness*, New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1959, p125). It should be noted that et al. had abandoned any practical interest in psychodrama many years ago.
6. Jung may have had multiple personalities himself, which may go some way to explain his archetypal theories - the idea that within our psyches there are many and various entities, e.g. the shadow, the anima and animus, the mother and father, the child, the trickster, the kore, the spirit, the hero... There is no complete list, as it is a mutable sort of Greek chorus that depends on the mythology of the individual. Jung also wrote about how complexes, including familial ones, can grow to the point where they achieve their own consciousnesses. Crowds appear spectrally from time to time in theoretical writing: see, for example, Baudrillard's description of a condition brought on by 'uncertainty, indecisiveness, exponentially' (Jean Baudrillard, 'From radical incertitude, or thought as impostor' in Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, *French theory in America*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p62).
7. '(... as if an obsessional neurotic style were capable of producing only a single question)' (Avtal Ronell, *Finitude's score: Essays for the end of the millennium*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, p110).
8. Et al. asked that the cut-off point for work to be regarded here was to be 1993, the date of 1 budd's first invitation to exhibit overseas. The project was staged on the site of the Polish ghetto of Łódz that was walled off from the rest of the city during World War II. After their belongings were stripped, the people starved and struggled with disease until eventually being shipped out to extermination camps. The soundtrack to the budd work executed there was The Platters' song with the refrain 'smoke gets in your eyes' - clearly a work about failure.
9. I was reading a story in *Asteroid impaired*, an Art Center anthology of new Los Angeles fiction, by Alexis Hall called 'No sweetness here' in which she talked about envying couples, but more interestingly, being one's own crowd: 'I couldn't draw hands or noses and I too had complained about the phenomena known as "couples shows"'. The same group of lovers, in the same show, different name, spouting post-modern bullshit. And none of them can draw hands. How I want to be a couple and refer to thoughts by "we". "We went to the store... We thought it was going to be..." How quickly I would adopt that pronoun, that plurality, and shed in one fluid moment that brassy "I". The dark side of subjectivity could be flung off as easily as a silk raincoat. I, walking in this field, arms raised, have too much of the excess - too much I, a team of ME's. A team that is always against me. My brain is not my friend. It thinks of ways to torment me...! [Just read an interesting article about George W. and his liking for the 'first person perpendicular'-ed.]
10. Jack Smith spoke similarly of Uncle Fishhook, a character he created in a film that got banned, and ended up in court: 'It inflated Uncle Fishhook; it made his career; I ended up supporting him. He's been doing my travelling for fifteen years. He's been conducting a campaign to dehumanize me in his column. There's just a list of monstrosities...' (Jack Smith, *Uncle Fishhook and the sacred baby poo* poo of art, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001, p244).
11. The et al. project accepts art is a big experiment - with failure is a necessary part. Et al. prefer the fail-to-succeed model to more conventional ideas of aspiration, enterprise or success in art: 'Cultures and traditions are no longer continuous, a fact that can either be regretted as a loss, decay and ruin, or embraced as a way of making room for invention and mobility' (MT in 'Question time by Jim and Mary Barr' in *Spacefictions*, Wellington: Catherine Scollay Gallery, 1991, p3.)
12. 'Themis, that lover of order, has given birth to the asylums of man' (Holderlin quoted in David Rattray, *How I became one of the invisible*, Semiotext(e), New York: Columbia University, 1992, p252).
13. Much of et al.'s work uses, or channels, electricity, and employs communication devices. It often emits sounds, and there is evidence of attempts to telepathise in some of the works. There is also sometimes what might be urgent cracklings over some sort of a cosmic radio. Further to this point, spiritualism and communications technology were historically intertwined. There was a huge spiritualist scene in America, dominated by women, at the time of the telegraph's invention by Samuel Morse in 1844 and subsequent introduction. The telegraph's disembodied voices were linked with the occult in the minds of the population of the day. 'A new age was dawning, one of electrical impulses, invisible energy, and other unseen, unexplained phenomena' (Barbara Goldsmith, *Other powers, the age of suffrage, spiritualism and the scandalous*, New York: Knopf, 1998, p22).

Furthermore, 'Almost a century before, Benjamin Franklin had said the electricity represented the force of "disembodied spirits"' (ibid, p32).

14. Blaise Cendrars (a pseudonym meaning something to do with fire and cinders) is also a key point of reference. In his novel *Moravagine*, there are three passages of interest here:

a) 'Woman is malignant. The history of all civilizations shows us the devices put to work by men to defend themselves against flabbiness and effeminacy. Arts, religion, doctrines, laws and immortality itself are nothing but weapons invented by men to resist the universal prestige of women. Alas, these vain attempts are and always will be without the slightest effect, for woman triumphs over all abstractions'

(*Moravagine*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1926, p73).

b) 'The latest discoveries of science as well as its most stable and thoroughly proven laws, are just sufficient to allow us to demonstrate the futility of any attempt to explain the universe rationally, and the basic folly of all abstract notions' (ibid, p118).

c) 'I can understand your wanting to rest and get back to your books (...) But why don't you leave that to the police archives? Haven't you got it through your head that human thought is a thing of the past and that philosophy is worse than Bertillon's guide to harassed cops? (...) Everything is disorder dear boy. (...) What can you do about it my poor friend? You're not about to start spawning books, are you?' (ibid, p215).

15. Huserl always banging on about the carpenter - I see a clear link here to the nail in budd's books.

16. As Albert Einstein said, don't get too hung up on mathematics, 'elegance is for tailors'.

17. 'If art has made everything art, perhaps fictional art is the next logical step' (Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the blurring of art and life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p102).

18. Further to the matter of the blurring of art and life, I made the bagels from the back of Allan Kaprow's book and I really believe that the man has never made bagels before in his life. They were complete failures for several reasons. Unless he intended readers to make small tyre-like objects to be installed in an alley.

19. Kaprow said that art is life and life is dreamed, and Jung, that dreams are about difficulty, ergo, art is about difficulty. Dreams are often characterised by sustained attempts, eg. to overcome, establish, analyse, control, ally...

20. I had this dream where I was starting to write this essay and I decided that the grey in the work I saw is the grey of newspapers. Not normal newspapers

but information bulletined by people under hypnosis or psychotropic drugs, or otherwise 'touched'. And then the person sleeping next to me asked me if I was going to make pickles this year.

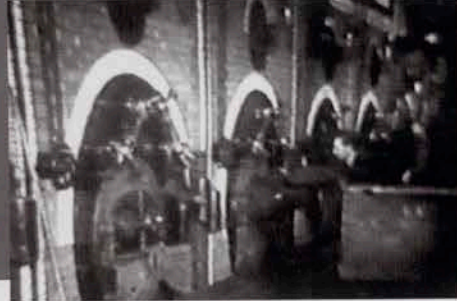
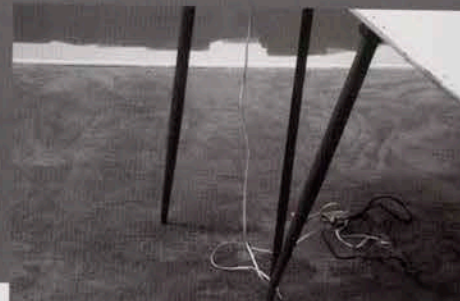
21. It is commonly thought that either one is awake or one is asleep. But no such actual division exists. There is evidence of a significant overlap; in other words we continue to dream while awake. Are you awake? Are you sure? Artaud reckoned that 'Apart from a few very rare exceptions, the general tendency of the era has been to forget to wake up' (quoted in Nicholas Fox Weber, *Balthus: A biography*, New York: Knopf, 1999, p268).

22. Artaud said that all writing is shit. Author René Crevel once observed to René Char that words are shovels. With language we dig our graves.

23. Words drip in the down-the-page way we all have of writing. No wonder they love the cellar so much. So, what about the basement - is it the buried archive of Freudian analysis? Reading Sartre's *Nausea* I considered that perhaps the basement is evidence of a successful portal established to the past. Brian O'Doherty said that the house of modernism has 'a basement - flophouse where failed histories lie around mumbing like bums' (*Inside the white cube: The ideology of the gallery space*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, p65).

24. 'Schizophrenia: an uncontrollable tendency to assume the personality of another person, invariably in direct contrast to the person who suffers from the condition' (Gibert Oakley, *The power of self-hypnosis: The key to confidence*, London: Foulsham, 1989, p137). Schizophrenia is therefore about trying to stave off failure - the persona is what one is NOT, therefore it is aspirational. In other words, the so-called schizophrenic hopes to achieve a greater sense of personal power via the adoption of a more desirable or more useful relational persona. 'Everyone is mildly schizophrenic in the nicest possible way.' It is worth noting at this point that I do not subscribe to the nosological sense of the term schizophrenia. There is no clinical evidence of it being a disease, rather a socially ascribed term demonstrating how the family/modern (capitalist) society 'ejects from itself all that it cannot draw into accepting the artfully invented rules of its game' (David Cooper, *Psychiatry and anti-psychiatry*, London: Tavistock, 1967, p45).

25. "What is this self," he wrote later, "that experiences what's called being - being a being because I have a body? Mr. Habits, Mr. Nausea, Mr. Revulsion, Mr. Cramps, Mr. Dizziness, Mr. Spanking, and Mr. Slaps keeps pace with Mr. Disobedient, Mr. Reaction, Mr. Tears, Mr. Choked in a scandalized soul to make up the self of the child" (Ronald Hayman, "Antonin Artaud", *Antonin Artaud: Works on paper*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996, p17).



26. Lyotard too implored us to 'Let go all grasping intelligence'.

27. 'Yes, he would write the book and it would be a failure and it would be read aloud in the garden and so the garden would disappear' (Eldon Garnet, *Reading Brooke Shields: The garden of failure*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1995, frontispiece).

28. I would extend this and proffer that I budd is the book; viz 'There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (a book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)' (Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the self from Freud to Haraway*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p139).

29. In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A thousand plateaus*, there is also talk of preferring the idea of the pack to that of the singular entity; and that this preference is an anti-psychoanalytic act – given the way they describe psychoanalysis individualising and destroying: 'We've only said two things against psychoanalysis: that it breaks up all productions of desire and crushes all formations of utterances' ('Dead psychoanalysis: Analyse' in Gilles Deleuze and Claire Farnet, *Dialogues*, London: Athlone Press, 1987, p77, first published in 1977). I feel funny positively banging on about schizo-analysis, D&G's preferred method, remembering joking about gluing the pages of *A thousand plateaus* together. Perhaps to fulfil its title sculpturally? Many of et al.'s books are glued together, some resined, and others sealed in suction-wrapped plastic.

30. Panopticism is the way Foucault says that we are controlled – hegemonic institutions monitor us, seeking 'to individualise, normalise, and hierarchise' (Mansfield, op cit, p61). Is telepathy or spiritualism, then, an attempt to break panopticism by linking us up again? Another weapon is what Foucault called 'dynamic self-creation'. 'If power/knowledge works at the level of the subject, then it is at the level of the subject that it will most effectively be resisted' (Mansfield, op cit, p63).

31. Rimbaud: 'I is someone else'.

32. French for grey is gris; and Artaud called his spells gris-gris (grey-grey). Gris-gris, a Haitian physical spell, is known as the iron fist of Voodoo. On the preponderance of grey in the work of et al., is the grey covering something or a primer? L budd said of the preponderance of grey in their work that it relates perhaps to their memories of Eastern European prisons. Grey, according to Nikolai Kublin's sound-colour symbology, has the theosophical colour meaning of fear (according to the 1914 Charters and Declarations of the Russian Futurists). Gris-gris, it also occurs to me, could be about a double grid pattern of ritual magic drawn on by Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs (who also spoke of 'the uselessness of physical colour theory').



33. 'In Burroughs's work, magic is never far from technology and writing is never totally divorced from magic' (Douglas Kahn (ed), *Wireless imaginations*, Boston: MIT Press, 1992, p430). The essay continues, 'In spite of his cautious skepticism, however, we cannot be certain that Burroughs is speaking only metaphorically when he describes the tape cut-up technique as "electronic table tapping"' (ibid, p431). Burroughs stated that he believed that all writers are involved in ESP, and that writing and painting have common origins in ancient rituals 'to produce very definite effects'. He was also known to have successfully cast a fatal spell on a rude newspaper vendor.

34. Marked in *wireless imaginations*, a book of p mule, was a list of G. I. Gurdjieff's 'Inner Octaves' that matches each musical note with a universal meaning, ie. C/Level of Result; D/Level of Actualisation; E/Level of Preparation; F/ Level of Small Details; G/Level of Specifics; A/Level of the Particular; B/Level of All Possibilities; C/Level of Absolute (ibid, p201).

35. In seeking the absolute/one loses everything/Antonin Artaud.

36. Burroughs 'views Western culture as ruled by a system of mass ventriloquy in which disembodied voices invade and occupy each individual.' (Kahn, op cit, p411.)

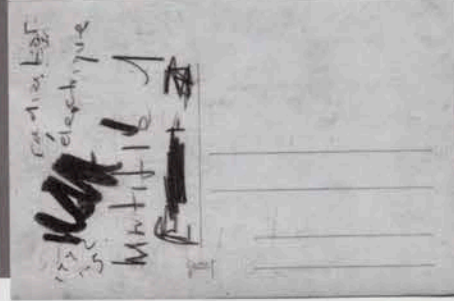
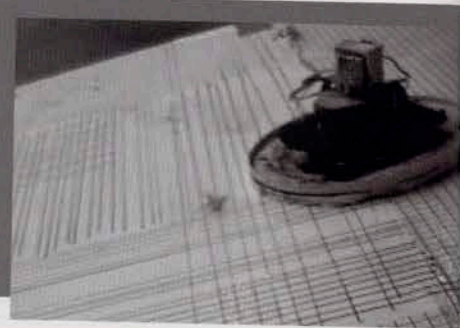
37. Common sense is no good for scientists.

38. Wittgenstein, in *On certainty* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1969), argues that certainty about anything is impossible – we can think something is so, believe it is so, but not know it to be so because our reception and processing devices are not of the requisite order for certainty. Consider his following points:

425. It would be completely misleading to say: 'I believe my name is L. W.' And this too is right: I cannot be making a mistake about it. But that does not mean that I am infallible about it.
467. I am sitting with a philosopher in a garden; he says again and again 'I know that is a tree', pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: 'This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy.'

39. Concerning the video screens in the work of et al., in German the TV is called 'far see-er'.

40. 'Thought must become a critical mass just like the system itself. No longer is it a question of making the system contradict itself, forcing it to experience a crisis as happened to critical thought (and yet we know today it is regenerating itself in the spiral of the crisis), but engage it through failure, collapse, and catastrophe.' (Jean Baudrillard, op cit, p61.)



41. 'As for psychoanalysis and telephony, they share a notion of certain seances which will have to be brought to light (in French, the word for a psychoanalytical session is indeed "seance"). This eerie voice will be picked up at the other end, a kind of deep end from which Thomas Watson, who attended nightly seances and apparently made successful connections to the dead, began cooperating on the invention of the telephone' (Avital Ronell, *The telephone book*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p99).
42. On Watson's experiments: '(the table, like a nervous horse, reared up on two legs), dialing ghosts rises to the status of "experiments", ligaturing the rhetoric of science and poetry' (ibid, p245).
43. Alexander Graham Bell (reputed to be an artist of the beyond) invented the telephone, but only as a by-product of failed attempts to contact his dead brother and to help the deaf see sounds: 'My original scepticism concerning the possibility of speech reading had one good result: it led me to devise an apparatus that might help the children... a machine to hear for them, a machine that should render visible to the eyes of the deaf the vibrations of the air that affect our ears as sound... It was a failure, but that apparatus, in the process of time, became the telephone of today. It did not enable the deaf to see speech as others hear it, but it gave ears to the telegraph...' (ibid, p328).
44. 'Watson may have been the first person to listen to noise' (ibid, p259). This assertion was made in reference to the way he spent hours ear cocked to the stray electrical/static currents and their snaps, grating sounds and chirping made by his device as it came to life.
45. Psychiatrists have identified proffering confusing statements as straight out passive aggressive.
46. O'Doherty also pointed out that, 'Hostility to the audience is one of the key coordinates of modernism, and artists may be classified according to its wit, style, and depth. This hostility is far from self-indulgent — though it has been both. For through it is waged an ideological conflict about values — of art, of the lifestyles that surround it, of the social matrix in which both are set. The reciprocal semiotics of the hostility ritual are easily read. Each party — audience and artist — is not quite free to break certain taboos. The audience can't get mad, i.e. become philistines. Its anger must be sublimated, already a kind of proto-appreciation' (O'Doherty, op cit.).
47. 'Those who find advanced art without contemporary relevance ignore that it has been a relentless and subtle critic of the social order, always testing, failing through the rituals of success, succeeding through the rituals of failure. (...) Classic avant-garde hostility expresses itself through physical comfort, excessive noise, or removing perceptual constants' (ibid, pp74-5).
48. Mary Shelley, like Eminem, created a monster — Frankenstein — which was also a story about the failure of human endeavour. Didn't she also publish that under a pseudonym? Shelley was also the daughter of an early proponent of women's suffrage. Marshall Mathers, like mt, developed persona/e that have taken over — 'I've created a monster/cos noone wants to see Marshall no more/they want Shady/I'm chopped liver' (Eminem, 'Without me' off *The Marshall Mathers LP*, 2001).
49. 'Proof is only possible in mathematics, and mathematics is only a matter of arbitrary conventions. (...) The more necessary anything appears to my mind, the more certain it is that I only assert a limitation. I slept with Faith, and found a corpse in my arms on awaking; I drank and danced all night with Doubt, and found her a virgin in the morning.' (Aleister Crowley, *The book of lies*, York Beach: Samuel Wiser Inc., 1976, first published 1913).
50. 'War is failure, beauty and perfection are the products of decency and consideration.' (Attributed to Donald Judd.)
51. Further thoughts on the interpretation of the chosen name budd include buds and arborescence. I also think of the rose is a rose is a rose is a rose work in the Barrs' collection (and Gertrude Stein — 'a rose is a rose is a rose', Stein's reification of words, and how she made the idea of an indeterminate and discontinuous universe integral to her work); and about Rose Sélavy, Marcel Duchamp's drag name. *Citizen Kane*, I remember from Film Theory, starts with 'Rosebud'. *Citizen Kane* is a great text about failure too. All the money and power in the world won't buy happiness. Randolph Hearst, the subject of the film, was a publisher, like the book-making lillian budd. Furthermore, to force a parallel, *Citizen Kane* was made during World War II, which, in form and content, goes with et al.'s operative-behind-enemy-lines aesthetic.
52. Next time someone accuses one of being unreasonable, one might retort: 'Reason is a narrow system swollen into an ideology. With time and power it has become dogma, devoid of direction and disguised as disinterested inquiry. Like most religions, reason presents itself as the solution to the problems it has created' (John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire's bastards*, Toronto: Penguin, 1992, p3).
53. Et al.'s use of the screen as a device is vividly pedagogical, not necessarily affirmatively however. Consider the following: 'The idea that a radical political efficacy does not rest on truthfulness deserves careful consideration (...) And what this means basically is that such a politics is no longer centred around the question or pedagogy, which has always been the case, for politics has always been the case, for politics has always been pedagogical. Thus, we should no longer say "we shall gain victory, we shall grow stronger if we manage to awaken truth which is alienated, concealed, repressed etc"' (J. F. Lyotard, 'On the strength of the weak', *Semiotext(e)* vol.3 no.2, p213).
54. '...a fundamentally pluralized space and in complex systems of mobile connexions. To us then, schizos began to appear potentially immensely rich. And the less the Oedipal pressure upon them, the more they complexified their relationship to their environment. The question, though, was no longer how to make them fit into the normal world, but how to open a breach in the normal world for the non-oedipalized schizo. It is in this sense, I believe, that schizophrenia may be considered as a revolutionary process... this has been made obvious through the effects that the whole process has had on the Machinery of State Power' (Francois Péraldi, 'A schizo and the institution', *Semiotext(e)* vol.3 no.2, p28).
55. 'She knows there's no success like failure/And that failure's no success at all' (Bob Dylan, 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' off *Bringing it all back home*, 1965).
56. For further reading on the subject of mules and their unavoidable neuter-al role in the network, see 'On Christmas and neuroses' (Felix Marti-Ibanez, Centaur: *Essays on the history of medical ideas*, New York: MD Publications, 1958, pp245-482).



the test errors



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GREGORY BURKE

'The history of the gramme is also that of electronic files and reading machines: it is a history of technics. The invention of man is, in other words, technics.'

Bernard Stiegler

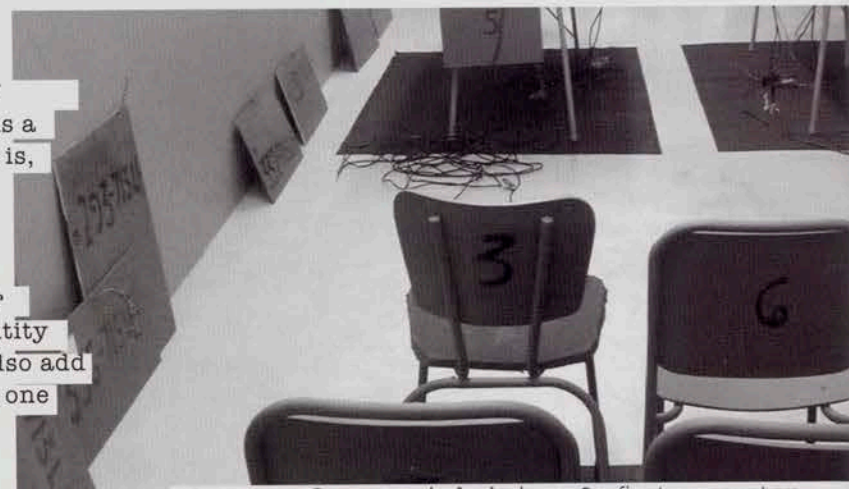
'In *In Memoriam to Identity*, Kathy Acker points out that so long as "I" has her identity and her sex, "I" is nothing new. I would also add that, as long as one believes in grammar; one believes in God.'

Rosi Braidotti

Days after seeing *trial run* in Auckland, a one-week trial of the et al. installation *serial_reform_713L* 2003 before it opened in Christchurch, I returned to the space to find that the non-uniform grey walls that have become a signature feature of an et al. installation remained, but the installation's component objects had gone.

Instead the space was sparsely populated with wrought iron furniture that had been painted white; familiar 'blonded' pieces that could have been fragments from a previous et al. installation, or residual stock from a former iteration of the artists (the currently defunct c j [arthur] craig and sons). The space could be read as a new installation, consistent with the ambiguities and uncertainties that are courted by et al. Notwithstanding such doubts the space felt curiously emptied out, not so much because of a lack of physical density but more because recent installations by et al. have become characterised by a chimerical presence. It is as if the spaces are occupied by phantasms or invisible forces that are harnessed and made manifest through et al.'s use of both high and low technologies.

There is irony, of course, in proposing that *serial_reform_713L* insinuates presence, given that the most dominant signifier in the installation are



the rows of unoccupied chairs. On first encounter these instil a sense of portent, for the installation appears to invite the viewer to witness some form of instruction or training room out of session; a room where technology is used coercively on grouped individuals and a room where crude notice boards are placed around walls or on chairs scrawled with ambiguous but commanding phrases such as '... the so-called waking state is unreal', 'Approaches to re-education', 'Negative identity' and 'Behaviour control'. Combined with the austerity and retro-aesthetics of the furniture and technical apparatus, these disturbing notations add to the sense that there is something sinister to the scene, as if the room were a latter-day site for the practice of what the Soviets termed Psychopolitics, or the process 'of asserting and maintaining dominion over the thoughts and loyalties of individuals... and the masses...'.¹

This air of menace and abnormality is heightened by the fact that a computer continues somewhat dysfunctionally to go through its serial program punching out numbers, and loud speakers continue to transmit intermittent voiced messages, while there is no one there. The absence of the subjects, reprogrammed or otherwise, and the inevitable question of where they may be, combined with the persistence of the apparatus in continuing the session, produce a deranged sense of presence and a deferral of consciousness into the machine.

'There is a myth that technology is an "instant" medium, whereas metal sculpture is a "permanent" medium. The irony is that metal sculptures have often been destroyed due to lack of storage space, and that instant and fragile electronic information often gets kept for years due to the convenience of storage and retrieval. The 1990's are gone!'

Note, 2001²

Et al.'s use of technology to provoke a disturbance of, and interplay between, presence and absence has been discernible in their work since the 1980s, at times leading to considerable levels of consternation with audiences. One memorable example occurred during a film screening at the *Now, see, hear!* conference in 1990. The et al. film *dora or dora's lunch or dora dora dora* 1990 consisted entirely of projected white leader accompanied by a soundtrack of repetitive female laughter. Such repetition heightened the potential of the audience to read the laughter as neurotic or even hysterical. At that time the artists' film production arm was known as popular productions. Those who knew the production team identified the person laughing by its playful character. Removed from its context, however, the laughter had no discernible subject other than the audience itself. This targeting was emphasised by the distress of a large number of the audience, who interpreted the laughter as being irreverent, even aggressive. It is true that this interpretation was in part fuelled by the context. Two politically charged films that included homoerotic material preceded the et al. screening.³ But a reading of the laughter as contingent on the visual content of the preceding films served to underscore the fact that the laughter was in effect a disconnected signifier, reflecting the artists' own assertion of the time that they were 'for the disembodied voice'.⁴

Of course all recorded voice is disembodied, but traditionally radio and film encourage a suspension of disbelief by linking the voice to a body or person. Et al.'s film heightened a disjunction between the laughter and the image, or non-image, thereby inculcating a voice out of place and out of character. As psychological and emotional communication, the laughter changed form and meaning dependent on context and audience. Of significance was not so much what was lost in the translation, but what was revealed through a translation and repetition process reliant on audio-visual technology. The laughter was disturbed by this process and therefore became disturbing. The result was that identity and presence were explored and revealed as a phantom in the machine.

In 1991 Roger Horrocks quoted the artists as saying, 'People hated the sound (of [our] early films) and this encouraged [us] to challenge assumptions about technical perfection'.⁵ This acknowledgement is ambiguous, not revealing whether the artists were challenged or whether they were encouraged to further challenge audience expectations of the fidelity of the filmic soundtrack. One can find evidence of both in the development of the work and even within individual films. From the 1980s the films have often incorporated a wide range of original and appropriated audio and visual material. The quality of this material has ranged from first generation to material degraded by the copying process, through to pure static in both image and sound. Furthermore, not only do the artists use found footage and audiotape, but frequently such footage has been reused time and again, often to the point where it becomes hard to discern which work is which. Footage in the film *dora or dora's lunch or dora dora dora* 1990 has been configured as *grand canyon suite* 1989, *dora's lunch* 1989, *wonder what* 1990 and *wonder what wrong* 1991.

page 26:
popular productions, from *re-worked*, 1999, (film stills)

this page:
et al., *serial_reform_713L*, 2003, (installation detail)
Starkwhite, Auckland

The use of degenerated material led Roger Horrocks to observe that et al.'s 'films and videos have an unusually high "noise to signal" ratio'.⁶ Here Horrocks is referring to theories of communication, where noise is a term describing random disturbances of the communication. Horrocks's observation is certainly true as a description of the effect of the work, but in et al.'s films, rather than noise being a random disturbance of the intended signal, noise becomes an intended disturbance of a random signal. It is as if images or signifiers are selected somewhat randomly by et al. to allow noise to take precedence over the signal and ultimately transform into signal. We might well ask why the artists position noise as signal. Certainly all films by et al. are anti- or non-narrative in a traditional cinematic sense and the use of noise helps to subvert narrative readings and expectations. But if this is their primary intention then there are numerous ways to achieve this, as evidenced within the history of experimental filmmaking. Indeed the scratches in the film emulsion can be compared with the experimental films of Len Lye, but whereas Lye acutely choreographed his marks, et al.'s marks rely on the seeming randomness of noise.

The probability that there is more to the artists' privileging of noise is reinforced by many of their two-dimensional works from the 1980s and early 1990s. Here the graphic and textual elements were degenerated with the aid of a photocopier, often to the point of disintegration. The artists' decision to use photographic technology is in keeping with much contemporary art and is consistent with et al.'s use of film and video. Of consequence is their decision to use a device that maximised degradation through multiple copying, in favour of a camera. In these works, as with the films, noise comes to the fore, thereby suggesting significance, a significance produced by and through the machine. To follow this line of interpretation, the artists appear to use technology to release meanings otherwise hidden within the text or image, or within the machine itself. In other words, if through the process of

copying and degradation the artists intend the technology to release otherwise sublime or hidden meaning, then in so doing the apparatus becomes both the signifier and the principal reading machine of this content for the audience/subject.

'In the software age we believe we are beginning to model ourselves on information processing, and not on machine construction, which is contrary to the general readings of our work. Limitations become merely local boundaries defined by the lack of adequate translations and transformations. Thus the overall worldview, combined with dispelling of backward elements, and last efforts actually manifests as the final thought summary. Ultimately submission, and the new Harmony.'

Note, 1986⁷

Such a position tends to blur or complicate distinctions between technology and the human and therefore to raise the spectre of technology as instrumental in a drift into an anti-humanist or even a post-human condition. Certainly et al.'s references to, if not use of, technology can be interpreted in terms of anti-humanist potential. The artists' graphic works in particular have frequently represented a range of technological instruments related to domestic or scientific contexts. An example is the work a *self-(re)presentation* 1987-1989, which includes pictures of medical instruments as well as 1950s-era phonograms, a herald perhaps for et al.'s later use of turntables in their installations. Other works have represented domestic instruments that have been interpreted as menacing.⁸ On the other hand, these depictions could also be seen simply as a light-hearted parody of the more venal desires manifest within popular culture and the modernist domestic dream.

The work of that period seems to wilfully court both readings, thereby engaging uncertainty as a means to evade categorisation. For example, in 1988 they changed the name of their film production arm



'dora productions' to 'popular productions', which on the surface suggested a move away from niche to mass markets, the irony being that the resulting works were no more targeted to mainstream media than previously. Yet the work in some ways resists simply being interpreted as an analysis, through reference to popular culture, of the insidious aspects of modernism and its decline, given that the artists can be shown to embrace technology and aspects of popular culture. Take the artists' use of sound, for example. While frequently the soundtracks to the films are intense, fractured and degraded, they are also at times remarkably upbeat, such as in the film *the story of* 1991, which included a dance-oriented rhythm track engineered by a member of the company. While frequently sound appears to be used as a disruptive element, or as interference, it is also used for its musical qualities, which more recently was manifest in the installation *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic exchange* 2000, with its gentle and ethereal soundtrack. The work courts polarities but as the artists have stated they are 'for all forms of auditory pleasure'.⁹

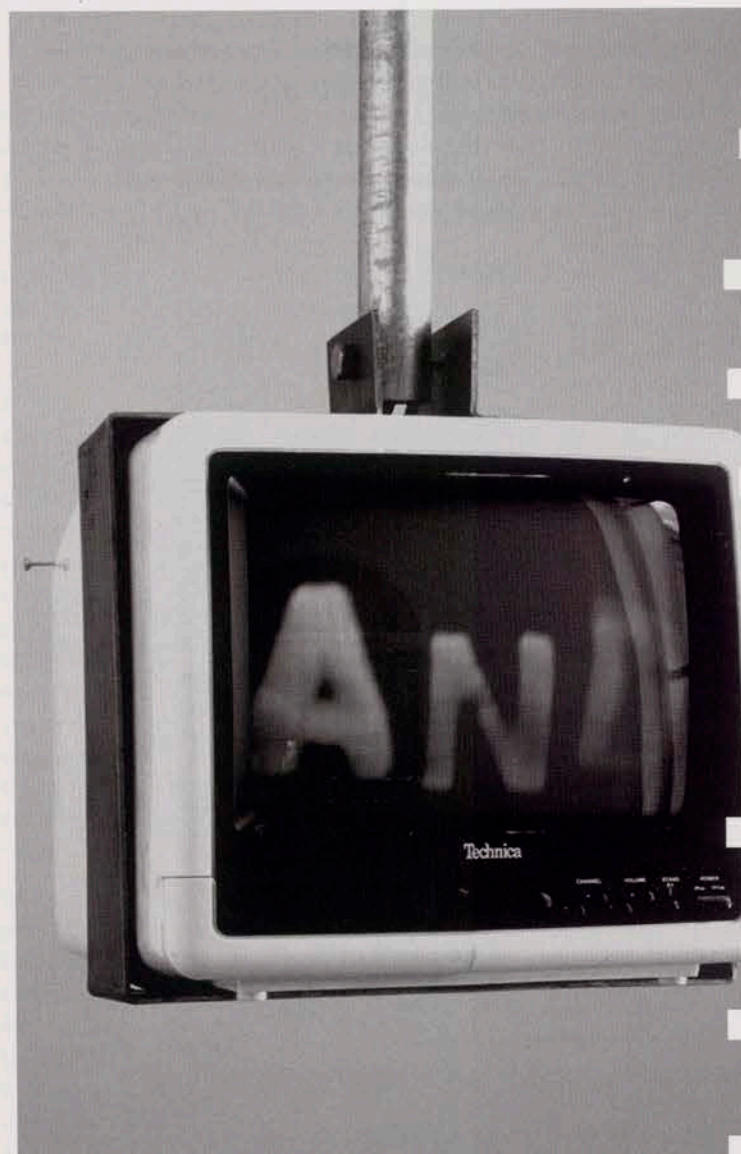
'Human beings have always been an integral part of any of our technology of images. Perception is the input channel to the mind, and with new technologies, the call is to the body, then the mind will follow. Therefore we talk about user-"friendly", the ease of human interface, comfort of use, the accuracy of human perception.'

Notes, 1987¹⁰

Notwithstanding the implicit and explicit ambiguities expressed within the work, it has in recent times taken on a more disturbing technological demeanour, indicated particularly in the move to installation with the attendant proliferation of electrical wires, discordant sounds, video screens and errant machines. Installations such as *the voice of silence* 1997, *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic device* 2000 and *simultaneous invalidations, second attempt* 2001 (p.102), marshal outdated technologies such as loud speakers emitting distressed sounds, old computers and screens, turntables, lights, amplifiers, electronic measuring and switching devices, exposed circuit boards, coils, clamps, steel pipes and industrial equipment, for their sometimes threatening and sometimes pathetic emotional and psychological resonance.

Even recent discrete works such as *untitled (lionel's reminiscences on penis envy and land issues)* 1998 exude a sense of menace. Here the artists present video as object in the form of computer trash, an early-model monitor hanging in space, locked in place by a steel brace bolted to an industrial steel pole attached to the ceiling. Positioned at head height, the grey monitor confronts the viewer as an entity emitting a hypnotic green light, amplified by an eerie and modulating drone and a slowly strobing and indistinct horizontal image. Given the cold aesthetic of the machinery, the image might allude to a militarised topos, as if we are witnessing a landscape under surveillance. This reading is encouraged when, after an extended period and for a short time, the blurred

et al., *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic device*, 2000 (studio detail)



word LAND shimmers and glows full-size on screen.

Land is a trope common to the history of both art and war. French cultural theorist Paul Virilio has linked the two in his reflections on the relationship between technology and war: 'Military space is an organised form of perception... one could say that military architecture was the first incarnation of land art'.¹¹

¹¹ budd, *untitled (Lionel's reminiscences on penis envy and land issues)*, 1998 (detail) collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery photographer: Bryan James

Virilio is sceptical of technology and those who are optimistic about it, including artists. He cites the Italian Futurists who, like the Constructivists, were motivated by a Utopian if somewhat romantic view of technology and says, 'I completely reject the fascist impulse I see in their work'.¹² Such twin poles of fascination with and fear of technology have punctuated the history of modern art.

In particular an engagement with systems aesthetics can be seen to be one of the factors motivating what Rosalind Krauss termed the dematerialisation of the art object in the late 1960s. Systems aesthetics provide the operating logic behind many of the land art projects of that time, while in 1969, in the exhibition *Software* at the Jewish Museum in New York, curator Jack Burnham drew parallels between emerging dematerialised art practices such as conceptualism and new information processing systems. The show included the first public exhibition of *hypertext*,¹³ presented adjacent to the work of Joseph Kosuth. Jane Livingstone, writing on the *Art and technology program 1967-1971* of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, at the height of Land Art, Conceptualism and Minimalism in the United States, notes in relation to the reluctance of some artists to participate with 'war-oriented' industries associated with the program, 'I have heard the area of "systems" or "information" esthetics dismissed as a "fascist game"'.¹⁴ Later in her article she embraces technology more optimistically by suggesting, 'A natural outcome of an artistic/technological endeavour which employs a system philosophy might be an art which conditions human sense perception and radically sensitises people'.¹⁵

Livingstone's comments track a shift in the interests of artists in technology in the 1960s, away from machines toward information processing, and reflect alternating utopian and dystopian views of the socio-political potential of technology that continue today in debates concerning the interrelationship between art and information technology.

A dystopic and thereby techno-phobic view can be read in the installations of et al. The ways in which machines are mixed and deployed suggest the artists are concerned to examine the relationship of technology to issues such as systems of domination, conformity, oppression, behaviour modification and surveillance in contemporary society. For example in *serial_reform_713L* the suggestion of brainwashing in the work is particularised by apparatus and aesthetics that could date back to the eras of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, while the air of abnormality transmitted through machines echoes the assertion of Psychopolitics that, 'by our technologies, you can even bring about insanity itself'.¹⁶ It might be that et al. are investigating and critiquing the legacy of the development of a scientific and thereby mechanistic understanding of mind, body and consequently human behaviour.

Of relevance to et al.'s work are their repeated but random references to Descartes and Pascal, philosophers who attempted to link philosophy with 'new' scientific models in the seventeenth century. Descartes in particular argued for a mathematical and thereby mechanistic foundation to existence, while Pascal used a mathematical model to argue the odds for a belief in God. Numbers and suggestions of mathematical models abound in et al.'s work, most obviously in *serial_reform_713L* through its computer programmed data projection of sequenced numbers. If we think of numbers as a means of measuring, then numbers establish laws and norms, including norms of human behaviour. Establishing norms also introduces the notion of deviance from the norm, a principle underpinning the development of psychology and the 'social sciences' from the nineteenth century. As Janine Marchessault has noted, 'The conception of the body as a mass to be programmed can be understood to reference a history of western science in which a mathematical model serves as a matrix to which all bodies are made to measure'.¹⁷ It should therefore come as no surprise that the Soviets acknowledged the early twentieth century Russian psychologist Pavlov as a father of 'Psychopolitics' or brainwashing.

'...since there's no overcoming the craze for skepticism regarding our work, until things change we'll just have to keep secret the ultimate development of our research...

In brief as follows:

1. The ten causes of regret.
2. The ten requirements [that] come next.
3. The ten things to be done.
4. The ten things to be avoided.
5. The ten things not to be avoided.
6. The ten things one must know.
7. The ten useless things.'

Note, 2002¹⁸

If *serial_reform_713L* suggests pessimism about technology it also reveals an increasing technical sophistication, particularly in regard to computer programming. This fact combined with et al.'s own tendency to use terms like 'convenience' and 'user-friendly' in relation to technology allows for alternative readings of et al. in relation to technology. Such readings of the installation are amplified by the ambiguities surrounding the shifting nature of the identities of the et al. collective. On the one hand it is clear from the context that we are to read *serial_reform_713L* as an art installation, presented by a group of artists titled et al. We are never sure though whether et al. is actually a group, or whether et al. is a single artist with multiple personae, an artistic strategy utilised by a range of artists from Duchamp on. So, if we assume that et al. are a group of coherent and singular identities, then there is a suggestion, through their pronouncements in the installation, that at least some members are technology optimists.

To take this argument further, with *serial_reform_713L* it is not immediately clear whether the installation is being presented as an artistic critique of socio-political developments, or whether et al. themselves have become consumed with the potentials of technology in effecting behaviour modification. This latter possibility allows for a reading of et al. as an artist group increasingly consumed by technology, and even a reading of et al. as technocrats, a group whose purpose is driven by the demands of technology.

To return to the precedent of conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Edward A. Shanken, in comparing information (content) with computer software, says of Kosuth's work, 'one can interpret the artist's propositions as operating like instructions in the mind of the viewer'.¹⁹ The use of random philosophical quotations by et al. can be compared with Kosuth, but if we are to see these as 'operating instructions' then the very randomness of the propositions would likely disturb a unified sense of self. The fragmentary propositions of *serial_reform_713L* are another matter and are assertively characterised by a sense of instruction. Certainly et al.'s use of software reflects their recent tendency to mix machine-age and information-age technologies, thereby confounding the pre-information-age references in the installation. It also supports the group's own assertion that 'we believe we are beginning to model ourselves on information processing, and not on machine construction'.²⁰

This assertion counters the reading that the body is a machine to be programmed in favour of proposing the body itself as a program. Such a view has gained momentum in the information age and follows the research of bio-physicists into DNA; leading to theories that intelligence itself exists not so much in the mind but in a body's cells. Computers are now being used to decipher the DNA life 'code'. Following this proposition the coded or DNA body becomes 'a cybernetic organism

replicating the very structures of identification and consumption enabled by the new information technologies upon which its existence depends'.²¹ In turn, such developments in popular science have resulted in a shift from thinking of the body as a machine, toward thinking of the body as information, information contained at a molecular level. In other words, our understanding of the body reflects our technological development.

The transition from a machine-based to an information-based model for the body begins to shift an understanding of self into the realm of the metaphysical and allows for the possibility of intelligence and even consciousness existing outside the body. If intelligence, and thereby consciousness, is a code that can be deciphered, then scientists believe it might be possible to translate that code into a computer program. This is a possibility explored in science fiction writing and cinema, at least from Phillip K. Dick in the 1950s onwards, and by contemporary scientists developing prototypes of artificial intelligence. It is also a possibility evoked by et al. in installations where machines interconnect and interact to suggest the idea of a technological super-nature. The notion of a technological sublime is particularly insinuated in et al.'s installations by the use of searing and overwhelming sound as in *the voice of silence* (p.99) or in the mystically glowing monitors of *untitled (lionel's reminiscences on penis envy and land issues)* 1998 or *o studies* (p.112) 2001. Even the paranormal is overtly suggested in the title *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic exchange*.

Et al.'s recent installations seem to insist on opposed readings. One cannot escape the very materiality of the technology, highlighted by exposed wires, exposed circuit boards and malformed and junked hardware. We might read this as fitting easily into the realm of much contemporary art with et al. simply being a group of artists laying bare myths of techno-culture. We can also read et al., however, as a group of artists seriously exploring

the possibility of immateriality and the technological sublime. Still further, we can read et al. as a group of quasi artist-scientists manipulating technology for ulterior motives. Virilio, for example, sees a relationship between religious and technological culture and suggests of the new information technologies that they 'bring into effect three traditional characteristics of the divine: ubiquity, instantaneity and immediacy'.²² Such characteristics support the recent growth in mass and digital culture of technological fanaticism or fundamentalism. Yet, notwithstanding the potential of et al. to transform into a sinister 'Heaven's Gate' type sect, their most overt intention appears to be an elucidation of metaphysical problems manifest through and within information technology.

'of the immateriality of the soul
of the existence of material things.'²³

If we can track a shift in approach to technology in the work of et al., it is one of adding and peeling away layers of disturbance. Early films and static works utilise technology as a means to ventriloquise, or throw voices, while the machine is used as a reading device for hidden content that is effectively produced through the machine itself. In later works presence is evoked without bodily reference. The self is explored as a product of technics, the body is cast off, its traditional signifiers transmogrified. The artists' use of technology is one of deforming technics away from expected uses, but in using technology for cross-purposes they also deform a sense of self. The machine is exploited as a switching device, allowing et al. to trans-mutate from being a body to a code, from a signal to noise and back to signal, and from being an individual to a crowd.

- 1 Kenneth Goff, *The Soviet art of brainwashing: A synthesis of the Russian textbook on psychopolitics*, posted on <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/7006/psychopolitics.html>.
- 2 Sent to author by et al., 2003.
- 3 The film screening occurred at the *Now, see, hear!* conference, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1990. The two preceding films were Peter Wells' *A taste of Kiwi* (1990) and Stuart Main's *A state of siege* (1987).
- 4 Artists' statement in *Constructed intimacies*, Auckland: Moet & Chandon New Zealand Art Foundation, 1989, unpaginated.
- 5 Roger Horrocks, 'Popular Productions', *Pleasures and dangers*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1991, p159.
- 6 *Ibid*, p162.
- 7 Sent to author by et al., 2003; et al. quoted in *serial_reform_713L* 2003.
- 8 See Christina Barton 'A place for popular memory', *Pleasures and dangers*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1991, p156.
- 9 Artists' statement in *Constructed intimacies*.
- 10 Sent to author by et al., 2003.
- 11 Paul Virilio interviewed by John Armitage, 'From Modernism to Hypermodernism and beyond', *Virilio live*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001, p22.
- 12 Paul Virilio interviewed by Nicolas Zurbrugg, 'Not words but visions', *Virilio live*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001, p154.
- 13 Hypertext is an interactive computer program utilising a text linking structure, a development of which is Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) used for the World Wide Web to encode character and text-formatting information.
- 14 Jane Livingstone, 'Thoughts on art and technology', *A report on the art and technology program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971, p44.
- 15 *Ibid*, p44.
- 16 Kenneth Goff, *The Soviet art of brainwashing: A synthesis of the Russian textbook on psychopolitics*, posted on www.geocities.com/Heartland/7006/psychopolitics.html.
- 17 Janine Marchessault, 'The secret of life: Informatics and the popular discourse of the life code', *New Formations* 29 (Technoscience), 1996, p122.
- 18 Sent to author by et al., 2003.
- 19 Edward A Shanken, 'Art in the information age: Technology and conceptual art', *Leonardo* Vol.35 No.4, p435.
- 20 *Op. cit.*
- 21 Janine Marchessault, 'The secret of life: Informatics and the popular discourse of the life code', *New Formations* 29 (Technoscience), 1996, p128.
- 22 Paul Virilio interviewed by John Armitage, 'From Modernism to Hypermodernism and beyond', *Virilio live*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001, p36.
- 23 Et al. quoted in *blind I-II* (from the installation *the visible that was*), 1996, acrylic and coloured pencil on canvas blinds.

William Budd, a self-(re)presentation, 1989
collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
photographer: Bryan James

9. Bells at armpits.

Philosophical
post-91 +

JOURNAL

of New Zealand



I ~~find~~ find
that I still feel
assured of
my existence

L. P. A. D.

Photograph of the Attractive Exhibit—entered by Kemp-
thorne Prosser & Co.'s N.Z. Drug Co. Ltd. at the Otago
Advances Fair, held in Dunedin 21st to 31st August.

The ten things not to be avoided

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- 2
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- 10 / 11 / 12

The artist collective et al. frequently writes using the first person pronoun, 'I'. There's a strong philosophical tradition of writing in the first person. What these two strands of activity share is a preoccupation with doubt, or more precisely, the systematic and pervasive questioning of existence.

Philosophers from René Descartes to Jean-Paul Sartre have chosen the first person point of view to articulate their theories on existence. 'I' underscores the most prosaic diaries and fully-fledged autobiographies, it is an assertive statement, it assumes we know who 'I' is, it assumes a one-to-one relationship, it assumes that 'I' exists. The work of the et al. collective makes no such assumptions, it tests the limits of 'I', explodes a unitary sense of self, eschews a focused point of view, and obscures a clear sense of a place in the world.

The radical scepticism of the et al. artists links their work to those philosophers of doubt, indeed they quote existential texts, and then drastically undermine their own observations, erasing and editing their own work. They perniciously question existence, they disrupt a sense of chronological time, and they enlist multiple identities to challenge a singular first person point of view. A member of the collective, author lillian budd, came on the

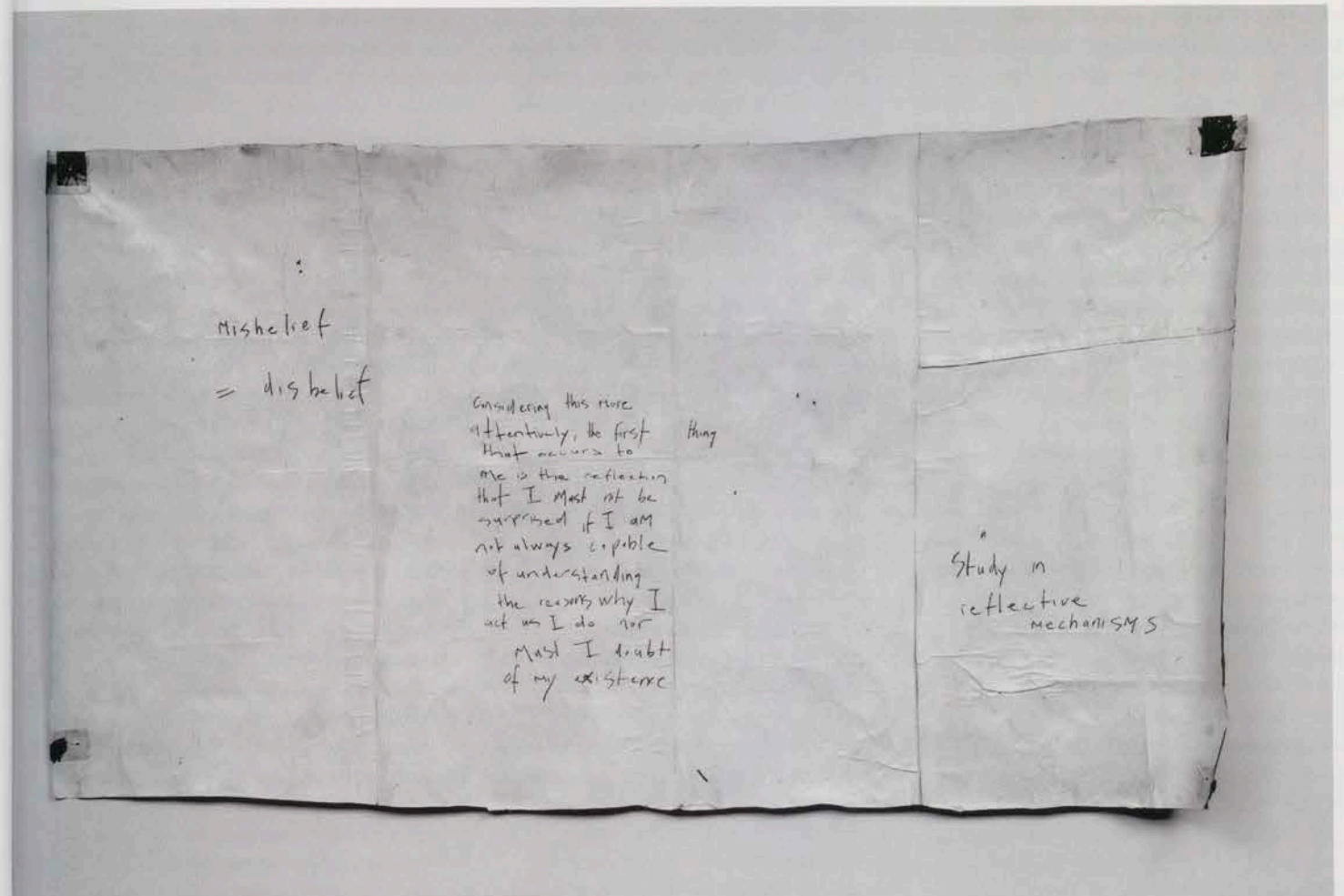
scene as a writer of *April snow*, 1991. The identity was launched with a cost-effective, black-and-white business card sporting a by-line '10 years on the shore, daily quotes', a sly pun more likely to promote the prolific literary quotations that fuel the artist's works than good honest pricing structures.¹ The card went with a suite of other artists' cards produced at the same time and collectively they testified to a collective of branded artistic identities. One card, this time for buddholdings, sported the by-line 'the complete book, what constitutes originality'. For artists engaged in wholesale quotation of other people's texts, originality is a problematic issue.

The business cards align the et al. artist collective with Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, who was also involved in large-scale fictions and the problem of originality. Famously introducing the items in his first exhibition as 'something insincere'² his works often played on large-scale myths, such as his *Musée d'art moderne, Département des eagles, Section XIXème Siècle (Museum of modern art, Department of eagles, Nineteenth century section)*, 1972. Like l budd (another et al. identity), his works explored the status of the ready-made object as artwork. Transforming himself from poet to artist in 1964, Broodthaers also produced a large number of text-based works so his writing

activities make a useful framework to consider the work of the et al. collective.

Like Broodthaers, the artists in the et al. collective have deployed a cavalry of materials to make art, films, writing, books and editions as well as large-scale installations, and the connections are more than just superficial. Broodthaers' editions were usually ironically small in number, demonstrating a healthy scepticism about this format of production that emerged in the 1960s, epitomised by German artist Joseph Beuys' mass-produced editions. Similarly, l budd produces artist books in editions, but inevitably finds ways of modifying them, supplementing the titles with overwriting, plastic shrink-wrap, paint, resin and masking tape. In doing so l budd moves the edition back to the status of an original.

Broodthaers' works are deeply involved in questioning the status of a ready-made object as real or imitation, questioning whether it belongs to a system of objects or of representations. This distinction between real and represented echoes the separation of mind from body, instigated by Descartes, or Plato's spurious scepticism of images as opposed to things. The et al. artists are similarly embroiled in the production of ready-mades, from the recycled wrought iron furniture of



c j [arthur] craig and sons whose business cards state that they are 'manufacturers and distributors of spare parts', to the prolific use of found texts by p mule. All members of the collective use recycled and found materials, and the activities of the collective are deliberately and democratically presented without hierarchy. A member of the collective, lionel b, states in an interview, 'We are interested not so much in the image per se, whose source lies in the phenomenal world, but rather the image as

artefact, or imprint, or even wholly determined by some inner process'.³ Lionel alludes to an inner process, what we would call consciousness, or what Descartes might call the rational, thinking mind.

Known as a critic and artist historian, p mule's works attempt to historicise the group's research activities. Often grafted from ready-made texts, the writings carry blatant alterations of

original source material. In *selected writings*, 1993, mule has repetitively photocopied a typed sample of art criticism to the point of graininess. In addition, the text has been erased in places where an artist's name is indicated, and overwritten in handwriting with 'blanche ready-made' or an abbreviation of that name. More intrusive editing has also been used – thick black deletions obliterate large chunks of text, whole lines and even paragraphs. This ad hoc system of

erasure is allied with the way that other artists in the collective, such as l budd, have edited over their own work.

'I have always kept very active notebooks... notebooks like a journal or a kind of travelogue. It is mapping a course through various readings, quotes, associations, observations, experiments and ideas for pieces, all jumbled into one. There was an occasional picture but for the most part it was all written down in words, even the visual things.'⁴ The reverse is also true given that the written projects by et al. artists are loaded high with visual aesthetics. P mule's cheeky review of an exhibition at Hamish McKay Gallery was obviously grafted from the pages of the *New York Times*. Conspicuously edited with cursive black ink pen, the text becomes more than a review, it becomes an aesthetic object, a script or poetic manuscript.

Artists in the et al. collective have used a relatively narrow range of texts in their work, often drawing on the existential works of philosophers like Descartes and Blaise Pascal. Often the texts borrow the redemptive tone of these early scholars, albeit as cushioned, indirect jibes. It is no coincidence that the texts quoted by the artists are frequently written in the first person. The most clear-cut example of the artists' Herculean use of a first person point of view is an exhibition at Jonathan Smart Gallery in 1995, *the artists in conversation*

with their voices. Credited to l budd et al., it presented remnants of an interior monologue on large, whited-out wallpaper panels.

The project mimicked the conventions of diary writing; they were handwritten, they used dates to introduce the text, and they are clearly written in that intimate personal code—the first person—the language involved in all observations of the self.

'Several other questions remain for consideration regarding my own nature or mind, I will however on some other occasion perhaps resume the investigation of these.'⁵

One of the diary-style conventions used persistently in this project is the demarcation of time. Using diary dates normally implies a specific time-based chronology; dates link together to create a chain of events. l budd et al. use this habit of diary dates to construct a sense of time, but only by making reference to a distant future or past. Like the text on lillian budd's business card that reads '10 years on the shore' the time period is generic, non-specific, without a start or end point that could be used to plot a trajectory or chronology. In some exceptional places dates are used, say 8 June. On the whole however, the text on each of the panels is vague, alluding loosely to a sense

of time, with statements like 'on some other occasion' but without establishing a coherent chain of events.

This disruptive diary brings to mind Jean-Paul Sartre's autobiography *Les mots* (1964). In it he gives an account of his spontaneous storytelling as a child, spinning yarns to the bus conductor. He conflates that boy with his present self in crisis at age fifty, writing an autobiography, too apathetic to invent stories. 'The autobiography moves alternately between past and present, as it singles out evolving strains of thought, but violates strict narrative continuity.'⁶ Sartre's tale challenges the one-to-one direct link between narrator and subject. He disrupts time to the point where the reader can no longer trust the ability of the narrator to give an accurate account of events, in chronological order. More importantly, this example challenges any transparent one-to-one mapping between a narrator and an author.⁷ It is this relationship between narrator and author that has implications for the projects and writings of the et al. collective.

the artists in conversation with their voices as a title self-consciously alludes to the problem of identifying too strongly with the artists 'behind' the text. Instead it relegates the artistic self to the status of a disembodied voice or a textual ready-made. The project is loaded with shaky angst.

Multiple personalities in the et al. collective mask any sense of a real identity for a singular artist/author. The multiple artists in conversation with their own voices absurdly point out that there is no reliable connection between the narrator/writer of these texts and a 'real' artist 'behind' the work.

In the work l budd's wallpaper presents a cacophony of dates, a stream of consciousness text scrawled on the walls of a confined space. The use of dates and months begins to demarcate time, but the demarcation founders without the years to pin these observations down, to build a sense of reliable chronology. The sense of time used by et al. is generic, like the use of 'I'. It refers, but only just, it points outward to an objective reference point, but doesn't provide enough information to establish a coherent and stable time period.

'Suffice to say that today as ten years ago, I am completely seduced by my own belief in the impossibility of existence.'⁸

This text fragment also begins by making reference to time. But reading the wallpaper panels to establish a chronological narrative is now even more hampered by the writer's overwriting of certain sections. The editorial markings are clearly evident. Handwritten, l budd's text has been overwritten, crossed out. In other panels of

the installation, the text has been whited-out with semi-opaque white acrylic paint. A sense of time is established by the use of this editorial hand. The overwriting suggests a later re-reading, a revision of the earlier text.

The censorious editing hand has removed the words 'my own belief in', abbreviating the extract to read as a more depersonalised statement about the impossibility of existence. The phrase is pivotal for it demonstrates one of the ways that l budd has not just adopted the language of doubt, 'the impossibility of existence', but employed the strategies of doubt too. Not satisfied to present a first person statement that questions existence, it revises that question by overwriting, and it begins to erase *the self*, the 'I' of the statement. Existence is being depersonalised and radically questioned quite literally before our eyes.

The use of the first person techniques by et al. artists, as well as by Descartes and Sartre, is integral to the objective of systematic doubt, it's the end game for all such lines of questioning, the point where doubt can go no further. It is not by coincidence that they adopt the first person singular for their work; the use of 'I' is central to the very question of existence, the disturbance that motivates their inquiry. Text fragments such as 'forgive Descartes, I am Pascal' used by l budd establish a fictional

relationship between these two philosophers. René Descartes (1596-1650) and Blaise Pascal (1623-62) were of different generations, but both used introspective methods to generate philosophical proofs. l budd by appropriating their first person texts, steps into their shoes, personifies them, and conflates the artist's or writer's voice with those of the philosophers. Moreover the artist borrows the tone of salvation and redemption from these characters.⁹ This slippage is possible because both budd and Descartes wrote with a first person narrative point of view. The 'I' of the text is ambiguous, signifying either the artist's or author's voice, or the voice of the author from which the text is taken, or indeed the philosopher's own voice.

The voices texts effectively establish a fictional autobiography as a work in progress. The diary extracts point to an identity in radical conflict, or in a state of profound questioning of an autonomous self behind the writing. The 'I' in these texts is not just an unreliable narrator but one that is engaged in a radical repositioning of self, in a state of flux or slippage. Avoiding the use of an exclusive 'I', the writers instead prefer to use a process of quotation, that points outward to a multitude of voices.

The questioning of existence is played out in the work of the l budd collective by using multiple

identities. Science fiction writer Samuel Delaney's novel *Babel-17* (c. 1967) is a useful corollary. 'Babel' no doubt refers to the biblical Tower of Babel and its multitude of spoken tongues. Indeed the book takes its title from a newly discovered, specific and highly sophisticated analytical language. The mysterious *Babel-17* language is eventually understood, not deciphered, by a poet, not a programmer - a point that reinforces the poetic and aesthetic potential of natural languages. The remarkable thing about this language and the reason it has implications for the et al. collective, is that this mysterious language has no word for 'I'.

The character who speaks *Babel-17* is selfless and helpless, slavishly adrift in space without any ability to articulate his existence. Unable to signal any difference between I and Thou he cannot register any identity, let alone a unitary personality based on a singular viewpoint. [Babel-17] "programs" a self-contained schizoid personality into the mind of whoever learns it,¹⁰ which is an interesting parable for the multiple personalities and erasure of ego in the et al. collective.

"The lack of an "I" precludes any self-critical process. In fact it cuts out any awareness of the symbolic process at all - which is the way we distinguish between reality and our expression of reality."¹¹

By contrast, the 'I' referred to by the et al. collective is pluralistic, multiple and generic. Their use of 'I' is excessive and repetitive to the point of mis-recognition. The massive installation at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery source (*origin and exclusion*) 1987 (p.102) is the epitome of this excessive first person claim. The three-metre-high walls were scrawled directly with text, obsessively tattooed with 'I am s/he'. Like *the artists in conversation with their voices* the gallery space was transformed by the mural-sized wall texts into an immersive and evocative three-dimensional viewing experience.

While McCahon, a New Zealand artist from an earlier generation, proclaimed 'I will need words', the status of language with contemporaries of et al. artists is less secure, the artists less confident that words will do the job. With et al. artists, the sketchy and provisional nature of hand-drawn texts is exploited. Adapting a monumental phrase from New Zealand's vernacular art history, 'I am', this installation turns up the volume, with obsessive, relentless repetition. 'I' becomes a stammering text uncertainly written graffiti-style on the walls: I, We, She is distorted, repeated and blurred to the point of mis-recognition. The artists have commented that the 'I' used in their writing was a 'generic I' that enabled authorship to slip between different people's theories, and not be anchored

to a specific individual.¹² The attitude of the collective is perhaps best characterised by another philosopher, Simone Weil, who writes 'If the "I" is the only thing we truly own, we must destroy it... Use the "I" to break down "I".'¹³

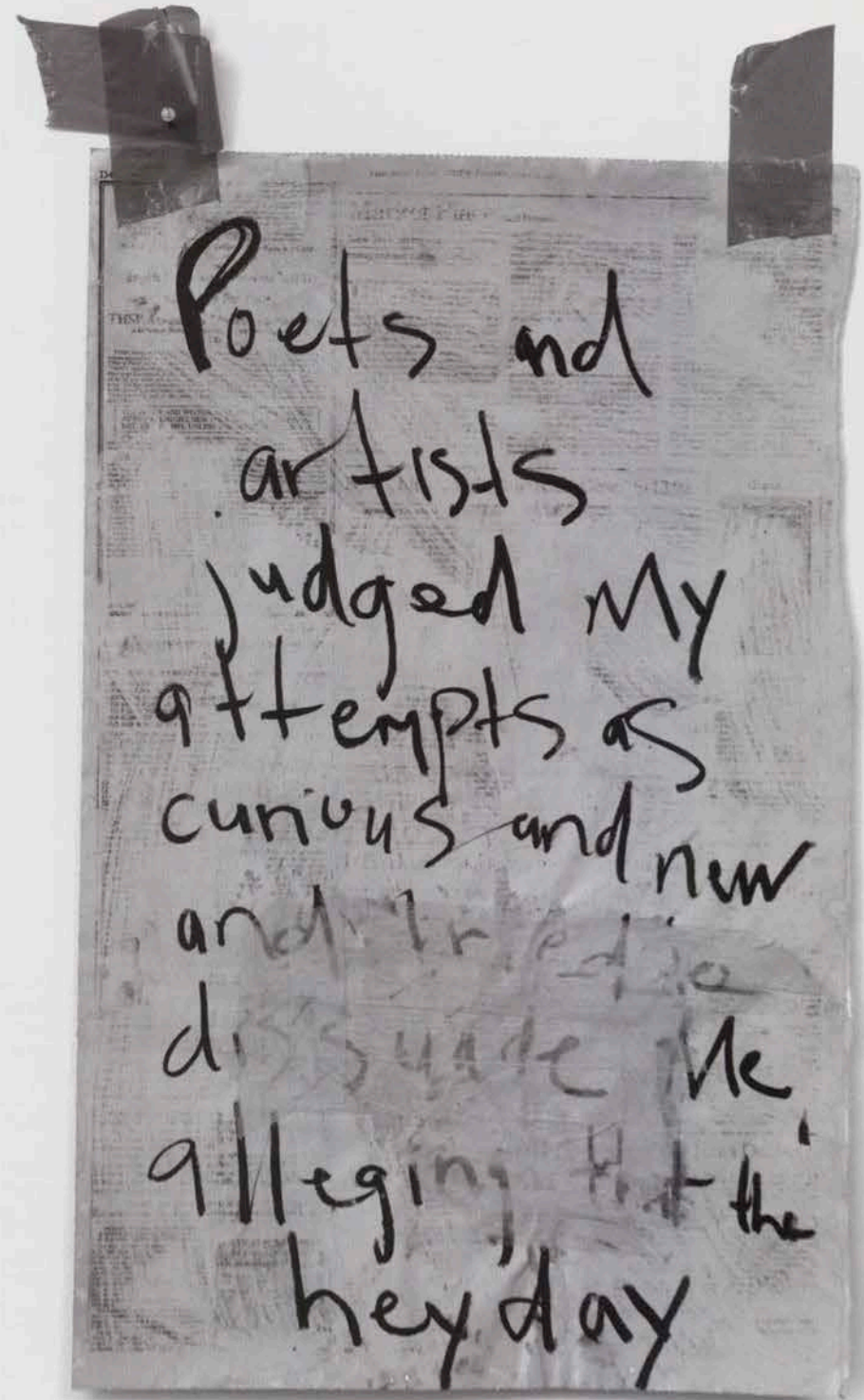
The works of I budd make existence itself into a fiction, a play of first person dupes. Disbelief could be a natural ally to decipher these works, a healthy scepticism, however that territory has already been claimed by Descartes and quoted by budd. Instead it's necessary to suspend disbelief, to dupe ourselves willingly, or, in other words, approach disbelief with open arms.

A project, this time by buddholdings, demonstrates an interest in semantics. In contrast to the *conversations* installation, *monomimes* 1994 shown at Jonathan Jensen Gallery implies a text for one.¹⁴ Unlike a traditional pantomime, with multiple characters played by one person, a mono-mime posits a script for a singular part. Furthermore, mime's connotations of a gagged, silent actor who is unable to articulate with words recall the problem of the character from *Babel-17*, the character with no sense of self. Like the props in Broodthaers' *Department of eagles* project staged in a modern art museum, the protagonist in this text creates a running script of bit parts, walk-on roles and fake identities. The

monomimes use characters as props, picking them up and putting them down, walking on and walking off.

The *monomimes* texts are spread over multiple panels, and again are written in the first person. A title panel, scrawled freehand over the pages of the *New York Times*, suggests that blanche ready-made and p mule are 'in conversation with the voices' so we assume that multiple characters are present. However, the text goes on to suggest that the author/artist is operating in a singular way: 'without any supporting cast I modestly performed a few monomimes in drawing rooms and for the general public'. So it seems that the artists of the collective deliberately distort the singular potential of the first person pronoun, using it to refer to many people, not to one singular voice.

The artists use two primary strategies to disrupt the conventions of autobiographical writing: they distort the sense of time involved in constructing a narrative and they adopt multiple personalities. Both techniques work against the potential to establish a chronological narrative sequence for a singular author/narrator/artist/maker. Like the troublesome and vague references to time in the *conversations* installation, the multiple identities of the artists undermine any strong relationship between the first person narrator and the author of the project. The self has been radically de-



buddholdings, from the series *monomimes*, 1994
photographer: Jennifer French

stabilised. Both techniques cast doubt on the identity of the first person, singular subject. The texts self-reflexively point away from their source material, they suggest that 'I' is unknowable.

Furthermore, the process of quotation itself is subject to the same circular and doubt-ridden questioning, by being erased or edited. The editing process is used by the artists to cast doubt on their own existence, to perpetuate a systematic process of doubt that started with the quotation of existential texts. The writer in the et al. projects has not only adopted the language of doubt, borrowing philosophical texts expressing doubt about both belief and existence, but has also adopted the techniques of doubt, by eroding a fixed point of view, using a first person narrative that is provisional in nature, and

harrowed by overwriting, editing and uncertainty.

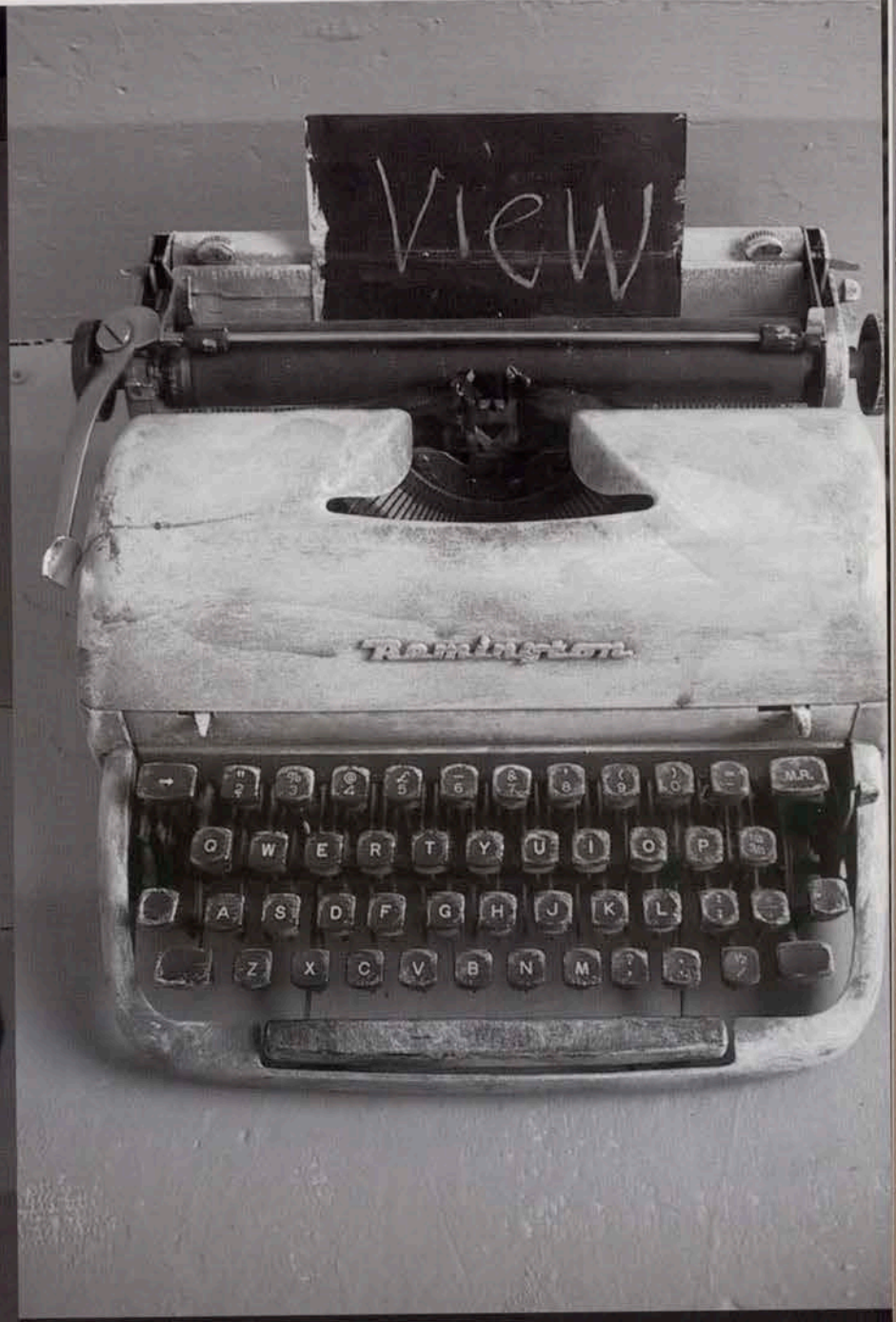
The et al. collective has poured doubt on Descartes, the prince regent of doubt himself. Its techniques of doubling or circularity are the point at which doubt unravels, starts to go bad, begins on a path of infinite regress by which no concept or being is immune from radical, fundamental doubt. It turns, from radical scepticism into wilful misbelief.

- 1 All citations of business cards are from p mule workbook (1990-1991).
- 2 Benjamin Buchloh (ed), *Broodthaers: Writings Interviews, photographs*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988, pp71-72.
- 3 "Maria Walls interviews lionel b", *Log Illustrated* 13, p13.
- 4 "Interview with lionel b and Florian m", Auckland: George Fraser Gallery/Auckland University, 1999 in conjunction with the exhibition *The body inscribed: Challenging tradition*.
- 5 l budd et al.'s *the artists in conversation with their voices* exhibited at the Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, 1995.
- 6 Suzanne Nalbantian, *Aesthetic autobiography: From life to art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin*, England: Macmillan, 1994, p23.
- 7 In defining 'Fictional autobiography' Regine Hampel makes a useful distinction between two types of text. An autobiographical text characteristically makes a narrator the central character. A merely unreliable narrator maintains a split between 'I' into narrator and

- 8 character. However, *fictional* autobiography makes a distinction between narrator and author. 'I write therefore I am' *Fictional autobiography and the idea of selfhood in the Postmodern age*, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2001, p20.
- 9 l budd et al.'s *the artists in conversation with their voices* exhibited at Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, 1995.
- 10 Both philosophers put philosophy to the task of proving the existence of God at a time when humanistic, secular and scientific thought was having a dramatic impact on conceptions of the world and humanity's place within it. Samuel R. Delaney, *Babel-17*, England: SF Masterworks/Millennium, 1999 (reprint), p190.
- 11 Delaney, *ibid.*, p189.
- 12 *Conversation with the artists*, 2002.
- 13 Chris Kraus, *Aliens and anorexia*, United States: New West Coast Series, 2000, p27.
- 14 The work was shown in an exhibition at Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch entitled *the supplementary thrill of discursive thought*, 23 August-10 September 1994.

Considering this more attentively, the first thing that occurs to

me is the reflection that I must not be surprised if I am not always capable of understanding the reasons why I act as I do, nor must I doubt of my existence



the fun useless things

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'I don't care a fig for beauty.'
lionel b, attributed

ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT

The last time I heard the word 'beauty' was when Julian Sands yelled it, then fell out of a tree in the Italian countryside. I was a teenager at the movies, watching pompous Merchant Ivory and loving it, for I was becoming an 'artist', and artists did things like yelling 'beauty' and falling out of trees. An even more exciting moment involved Sands skinny-dipping in the forest, and it was all mossy rocks and swinging testes and I was going to be an artist! And Helena Bonham-Carter might have been prim but she played her Beethoven passionately - *with mistakes* - because this is known as having an 'artistic temperament'.

Of course, when I finally went to art school, no one ever said the word 'beauty'. 'Beautiful' was the kind of compliment that someone who didn't know anything about art gave you when they came to your (deliberately unbeautiful) exhibitions.

'In the art world, beauty is nearly a synonym for pallor. Saying an artwork is beautiful is a bit like calling someone "nice": it means that stronger, more definite qualities are probably missing'
James Elkins, *Pictures and tears*

Strangely, the word 'beauty' has been making a comeback in some quarters; there's a veritable cartel of aging white (*synonym for pallor*) males in the U.S., people like David Hickey and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who want to resuscitate the term. Most of these critics trace their notions of beauty-along with its unruly sibling the sublime - back to Kant and Burke, or as far back as Plato. Confusingly, while these antique thinkers often regurgitate each other's wisdom, they sometimes disagree. Plato saw morality and order as the ultimate beauty, and Burke agreed that beauty was a composed, refined quality, in contrast to animal lust. But Kant decided that since beauty was instantly perceptible, it was therefore less meaningful, while the sublime, requiring reason to understand, appealed to the prim Protestant mores of the time.

Because et al. make works that often perplex and confuse, rather than rewarding their viewers with optical pleasure, it's hard to imagine they would ever be called 'beautiful'. And yet, their moral purpose is as cloudy as their aesthetics, making it equally problematic to align et al. with a Kantian sublime 'embodied above all in moral laws or commandments in which the individual must subjugate his or her personal desire-system to a broader sense of human well-being' (Thomas McEvelley, "Turned upside down and torn apart", *The sticky sublime*). It is Kant's elision of the sublime with gravitas that gives the new (old) wave of Hickeyesque beauty-boosters something to hiss at, and I'm sure they would roundly renounce the anti-aesthetic of et al.

STINKY SUBLIME

'You have an overdue book,' the librarian told me.

'Which one is it?' I asked.

'The stinky sublime' he said, without batting an eyelid. I wonder how he could have known about marlene cubewell's maggot-infested chaise at Artspace all those years ago... Stinky sublime indeed!

Well, these days, what is 'sublime', except a mediocre ska band from Long Beach?

MORTIFICATION

Hickey and Gilbert-Rolfe take umbrage at what they see to be the compulsory moralising of the contemporary art world, and view beauty, unattached to critical ideas, as the way out of this post-modern puritanism or mortification of the senses. Hickey lauds his own personal idea of beauty (which seems to include Mapplethorpe and Renaissance masters) while making derisory comments about an imaginary 'therapeutic institution', a politically correct uber-establishment which his buddy Gilbert-Rolfe critiques for forging 'Benjamin, Duchamp, and Foucault into a unified instrument of redemption.' (*Beauty and the contemporary sublime*) Gilbert-Rolfe has little time for this holier-than-thou trinity or axis of evil - his ideas of beauty reside in a handful of superficial abstract painters and video artists whose names I can't remember. ('Finish Fetish', that Californian coinage, is certainly not a vice of which et al. can be accused.)

New Zealand's own one-man critical cartel, T. J. McNamara, is equally unimpressed by the Duchampian quotation that has been so integral to the et al. oeuvre. 'This is Duchamp's ready-mades gone crazy and without any philosophic or artistic point. In Milton's words once again, "a waste, wide Anarchie of Chaos damp and dark"' (*"Exhibition from Hell"*, *The New Zealand Herald*) McNamara was referring to *te kore*, a collaboration between l budd, Guy Treadgold and Eugene Hansen at 23A gallery Auckland. McNamara begins his tirade contra-anti-art thusly, 'They've got Milton nailed to the wall.' Well, we all need to kill our gods from time to time (viz: Nietzsche, Frazer, Freud and Sean Connery in *Zardoz*). In *te kore*, et al. effect a kind of transubstantiation of the word, making it flesh again.

COMMITMENT TO DENIAL

Gilbert-Rolfe imbues his version of beauty with the blank frivolity of glamour, and says that 'Painting that doesn't seek such a convergence is, in its commitment to denial, consigned eternally to the sublime as a poetics of the negative: not beautiful, eruptive, rough, sincerely non-aesthetical, lumpy, scabrous, always threatening to lapse into the merely human in its attempt to get beyond just that, ie, to preserve pathos (meaning) in the course of invoking terror (meaninglessness)'.

This is probably the best description of et al.'s aesthetics I have ever heard, though they can be frivolous too. Sometimes dark, lumpy and scabrous seem like tropes consciously mocking the 'postmodern nihilist' - a ready-made art world persona.

MURKILY GENDERLESS

'I don't give a fig for the sublime.'
p mule, attributed

It's arguable that the dichotomy between the sublime and the beautiful is still relevant, when our ideas of what constitutes art have so radically altered in the last century. Yet Gilbert-Rolfe's characterisation of beauty as feminine and the sublime as androgynous definitely places et al. in collusion with the murky genderless sublime. Et al. maintain a decisively un-glamorous approach, an almost feminist refusal to play the attractive object to the scopophilic subject or 'art appreciator'. Indeed, some of the et al. works, in their dimly lit environs, with their hastily scrawled messages and poorly applied paint, beg to be not looked at.

In *Arts of impoverishment*, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit examine three artists from different fields whose works constitute a similar kind of anti-practice - discouraging their audience from actually experiencing their art: Samuel Beckett, Mark Rothko and Alan Resnais. In discussing Rothko's famous Houston Chapel (fourteen large black paintings) the authors talk about blindness, '... not only will our looking fail to be rewarded with something significant to see, but the very act of seeing may become irrelevant to the painter's project. Indeed, to paint for the blind may be his highest vocation'.

Et al.'s consistent use of the ready-made blind as a physical trope alludes to the format of the portrait as well as the window, and can be seen to 'domesticate' gallery space. But the object remains, above all other visual cues, a *blind*, that is, a reference to the non-visual. Like Samuel Beckett's self-proclaimed 'literature of the un-word', et al. endeavour to make an art of the un-seen.

L budd collaborated with Guy Treadgold for an exhibition called *The visible that was at the Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, 1998*, putting vision into the past tense. Record turntables (sunk in plaster of paris inside suitcases) were the primary focus of this show, playing what Warren Feeney called 'repetitive caustic sounds' (*Christchurch Press*). Music that deafens, art that blinds, business as usual for et al.

BLIZZARD OF ELECTRONS

'... I think of his earlier compositions where into the body of the musical statement he incorporates a punctuation of dehiscence, flottements, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity bitched to hell because the units of continuity have abdicated their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons'.
Beckett on Beethoven, attributed

Since the 1990s, et al.'s installations have always included a sound component. From early works featuring samples on vinyl and tape loops, to lathe-cut locked grooves, to more recent computer-generated sound, et al. consistently interrupt the viewing process with discordant sonic accompaniments. The sounds, far from being soothing or beautiful, seem to fit perfectly into Burke's equation of terror with the sublime, as outlined in *Philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas on the sublime and beautiful*. This rather practical collection of observations includes detailed

descriptions of the effects of sounds on the human psyche. Volume is one of the key triggers; 'Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror'. Suddenness can also be pantswetingly fruitful: 'It may be observed that a single sound of some strength, though but of short duration, if repeated after intervals, has a grand effect'. Let's not forget the power of intermittent noises: 'A low, tremulous, intermitting sound, though it seems in some respects opposite to that just mentioned, is productive of the sublime.'

MUFFLED MINOR KEY

Terror might not be too far-fetched a response to sonic bombardment: 'Professor Gavraud discovered that the whistle with a pea in it issued to all French gendarmes produced a whole range of low-frequency sounds. So he built a police whistle six feet long and powered it with compressed air. The technician who gave the giant whistle its first trial blast fell down dead on the spot. A post-mortem revealed that all his internal organs had been mashed into an amorphous jelly by the vibrations (Lyall Watson, *Supernature*).

Et al.'s fascination with mind-control in works like *serial_reform_713L* might be more than superficially creepy. Recently, 65-year-old cells from the Spanish civil war were unearthed in which 'psychotechnic' torture had been practised by Anarchists against their Fascist enemies. Horrors such as beds placed at 20-degree angles, floors scattered with bricks, curved walls covered with optical paintings, tricks of perspective and dizzying lighting effects, drove prisoners to distraction ('Anarchists and the fine art of torture', *Guardian Newspapers*). Et al. critique such abuses of power while utilising similar methods to make their point, because 'The Empire never ended' (Philip K. Dick, *Valis*).

STRUCK BLIND AND IMMOBILISED

Beckett in his *German letter* of 1937: 'As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it - be it something or nothing - begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.'

Why should artists want to destroy the very conventions that serve them, to eradicate the structures which endow them with protection and understanding? This primal attraction to chaos is a metaphysical longing for the dissolution of boundaries, the erasure of the individual self at the heart of much religious and romantic experience.

In *The sticky sublime*, McEvelley posits Goethe's Werther as the 'quintessential Romantic hero' who 'fell in love with the sublime' and 'ecstatically killed himself'. To merge with the infinite was the noblest intellectual goal of the time. Bersani and Dutoit see a similar desire to exchange identity for infinity in the works of Rothko (also a suicide). 'The Chapel's renunciation of its visuality allows us, paradoxically, to see a mode of consciousness wholly at odds with the enforcing of ego boundaries. Under the pressure of that blinded seeing, the viewer's self can momentarily be reduced to the cognition of consciousness and the world-of the self

and nonself - as non-oppositional, as boundary-free fusions or, in other terms, the cognition of being as incommensurable with identities.'

Et al. dissolve boundaries variously; they are a multiple-producing collective. Their personae have the fluidity and interchangeability of atoms, at odds with the cult of the individual genius which is the mainstay of the art world, while their works are never discrete objects, but re-shuffled 'situations'.

Bersani and Dutoit discuss Nietzsche's *The birth of tragedy*: '... individuation is a metaphysical error or crime. It violates the total relationality of being, which means, for example, that the human has affinities - of design, positioning, movement - with the nonhuman and that objects (including ourselves) are always being repeated and lost in other objects to which they correspond as forms (...) Dionysian art tells us that we no longer have to be single; it undoes the privileges and remedies the lost solitariness of psychological individuality. And this means renouncing the superstition of difference and recognizing the superfluity of the self's value.' Dionysus, in his incarnation as Bacchus, is the god of vines, intoxication being a shortcut to boundary dissolution. In et al.'s latest techno-extravaganza, cords and cables snake like maniacal sargasso which the dreadlocked chaotician (god) would adore, unravelling in the process any notion that might equate 'technology' with 'progress'.

METAPHYSICAL ERROR

Room with a view is hardly the most appropriate filmic reference for opening an essay on et al. The moment in cinematic history which resonates most eerily well with l budd and cohorts, is the moment in *Poltergeist* where the static-filled television set engulfs the screen. Et al.'s video works have always flirted with static - which is, for the video artist, what the drip is to the painter (art made with mistakes).

In *The holographic universe*, Michael Talbot asserts that the universe is made up of white noise (*blizzard of electrons*) which our order-seeking brains interpret as spatio-temporal objects. Et al. have always endeavoured to lift the veil of order and allow us to become reacquainted with the chaotic white noise seething beneath our (still rather) Victorian veneers.

When static fills the screen in *Poltergeist*, the little girl intones 'They're here' - an ominous, nebulous plural. 'Et al.' is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase 'et alia' meaning 'and others'. 'Mitakuye Oyasin' is the Lakota or Sioux phrase uttered frequently during rituals to remind people of their personal relatedness to everything that exists. It can be translated as 'All my relations'. 'Here comes everybody' is a phrase which crops up repeatedly in James Joyce's *Finnegan's wake*. HCE are the initials of Joyce's (anti)hero, so his name translates roughly as et al. In *Ulysses*, the protagonist is Leopold Bloom, surely a memetic, if not genetic, relation to Lionel? Both occupy some kind of border zone, becoming leonine, becoming floral.

AFFINITIES WITH THE NON-HUMAN

Et al. not only subvert authorship with their collective and abstain from readings of masculine or feminine influence, they mock the artists' 'stable' by admitting p mule into the fold. Et al.'s galloping relay of artists is deliberately unstable.

The mule is a mythical beast because it is sterile and stubborn. Interestingly, p mule is an art critic. Sterility suits et al.'s repudiation of gender differentiation (the title of et al.'s feature film, *epicene*, further emphasises this tendency, not to mention mule's undifferentiated 'p'). Yet there is fecundity inherent in the name 'budd' and the constant referral to 'figs' in et al.'s textual scrawls. The fig is a classic symbol for female genitalia, though, interestingly, the fig leaf is used to cover up said parts. The word 'fig' then, is both lewd and prudish.

FLOGGING

Blinds, in Florian Merkel's interview with l budd 'indicate the eyes looking within'. Indeed, Marlene Cubewell is portrayed blindfolded, reclining on a blonded chaise, in the billboard *fig 2.3* exhibited at the 23A Gallery in Auckland. What, the viewer might ask, was Marlene Cubewell seeing as she reclined on that chaise?

'His eyes were parched, he closed them and saw, clearer than ever before, the mule, up to its knees in mire, and astride its back a beaver, flogging it with a wooden sword.'

Samuel Beckett, *More pricks than kicks*

Not only is the mule sterile, but the beaver, it was once thought, would gnaw off its own testicles to save its life (*mossy rocks, swinging testes*). A wooden sword is also a blunted phallus, making the image a trinity of emasculation, stuck in the primeval, entropic ooze.

DAUGHTER OF DARKNESS

'Cosmos (...) is the order the world had before the angry gods tore it apart; it was an order of beauty to which in their rage they paid no heed. The rage to destroy the orderliness of beauty, "Longinus" is saying, is the sublime. The sublime is sheer chaos, beyond reason, beyond finity, beyond order.'

Thomas McEvilly, *The sticky sublime*

Therefore, the Maori stages of void and night are Cosmos, as are Rangī and Papa in their cosmic clinch, while the angry young gods who tore them apart embody Chaos, which still reigns today.

There are many versions of the stages of void and night. Most of them begin with Te Kore (The Void) although the Reverend Maori Marsden says that Io begat Te Korekore, a double negative which appears to have affinities with Eastern philosophies; 'By means of a thorough-going negativity, the negation itself turns into the most positive activity. It is the negation of negation. Te Korekore is the infinite realm of the

formless and undifferentiated. It is the realm not so much of "non-being" but rather of "potential being". It is the realm of Primal and Latent energy from which the stuff of the Universe proceeds and from which all things evolve.' ("God, man and universe: A Maori view". *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Maoritanga*)

the voice of the silence 1997 (p.99) sounds like a stage of Maori cosmology, but in fact it's a work by theosophist Madame Blavatsky. Et al.'s implied interest in spiritualism (table-tapping, strange sounds from the aether) was recently outed by Jonathan Bywater: '... et al.'s media appear mediumistic. These tables mock up levitation; the sound dances like a planchette over a Ouija Board' (catalogue for *simultaneous invalidations, second attempt*).

Channelling the ghost of et al. past
(Auckland Art Gallery, 1997)

Eight great black blinds are gates or doors to intergalactic or negative space. Four on either side, so that the viewer is surrounded. In the centre of the room,

four turntables, each lined up with a set of blinds, pierce the air and ear with their drones. Like the eight tri-grams of the I-Ching, these black spaces loom like portents, like mystical castigations. Each blind has a bare bulb hanging before it, a bud of light like a hieroglyph singing 'IDEATION' even louder than the terror-forming locked groove screaming out of the speakers. This naked light, though, is a double entendre: the hanging light bulb is also the universal glyph for imprisonment, torture and mind control.

NEGATIVE SPACE

'I am nothing. I am nothing.'—text scrawled on works for the Adelaide installation *Art across the oceans* which travelled to Copenhagen. Clearly this is a nihilistic parody of Colin McCahon's cosmic affirmation 'I am'. L budd takes us back much further than neat 'n' tidy Genesis, to a zone where 'Chaos never died.' (Hakim Bey, TAZ)

FROM PALANQUIN TO PALIMPSEST

Et al. play with the dichotomous notions of order and chaos, juggling yin/yang polar opposites, blinding or blacking on a whim (though, these days, et al. are greying). Nietzsche characterised the primal struggle as being between two emblematic gods: Apollo (order) and Dionysus (chaos). These Grecian deities correspond to the Vedic traditions of Vishnu (the preserver) and Shiva (the destroyer). Indeed, et al. have played this latter role, destroying *maya* (illusion, eg. earthly reality, material goods), most notably in the infamous liberation (*moksha*) of gallerist Peter McLeavy's chaise longue.

This symbol of bourgeois equipoise, quoted in Manet's *Olympia* etc., was McLeavy's pride and joy until merit gröting unceremoniously covered it in white paint as part of an installation in 1992 (gröting's show was subsequently cancelled).

What does such an act of white-washing mean, particularly in the socio-economically loaded environment of the dealer gallery? It is surely an act of protest rather than facelift, although white objects have their own aesthetic currency. But et al.'s paens to white are incidental, for if the gallery walls are already white, et al. are likely to paint them another colour. In all cases, interruption/irruption is the key. When marlene cubewell exhibited a blonded (the better to have fun with?) chaise at Artspace in 1993, p mule subsequently blacked it and tagged it.

Gilbert-Rolfe thinks that beauty in art disappeared 'from the gray and brown and roughness of Courbet onwards. Roughness perhaps assuring one of the presence of the sublime at its most masculine, while grayness, as Goethe pointed out, "is all theory," which beauty is not'. Gilbert-Rolfe tries to discredit art that needs theory to survive, by (paradoxically) writing a work of critical theory about art. So, maybe gray matter really does matter. (Or grey matter, for that matter.)

DISAPPEARED

By blinding objects, et al. make relics out of contemporary society by symbolically 'voiding' us, recycling meaning as the universe recycles atoms; discrete units to be rearranged in perpetuity.

Blacking objects has a connotation of servility - the blacking of shoes, tarring of roads, the blackboard of enforced education. Never one to avoid a void, et al. have recently produced a series of blacked lunchboxes, *the 5ds*, a little like the three Rs: Desensitisation, Despair, Denial, Deceit, Dependency, Dread, Debilitation. Actually, like the three Rs (which don't all really begin with r), there are seven, rather than five Ds. This disparity in numbers brings to mind Orwell's *1984* where, 'two plus two equals five'.

When I was young and it was time for class photos, a roving photographer would come to our school. The shortest girls always sat in front, and with our hands in our laps, the photographer would exhort us to 'Hold your play lunch, girls!' At that moment, our collective 'play lunches' were a mute chorus of desensitisation, despair, denial, deceit, dependency, dread and debilitation. *the 5ds* are the black boxes which never get found at the scene of an accident, or if found, cannot enunciate what went wrong.

MOKSHA

Et al.'s negative poetics, while seeming to have very little to do with beauty, and while they perhaps mock the stern 'n' craggy face of the sublime, nevertheless possess their own internal combustion of eruptive illogic. The Empire never ended, but then again, Chaos never died. Et al. offer their viewers the liberation born of disruption, because the rage to destroy the orderliness of beauty *is* the sublime. And when order itself has become bereft of beauty, its very destruction is a beautiful thing.



Modern

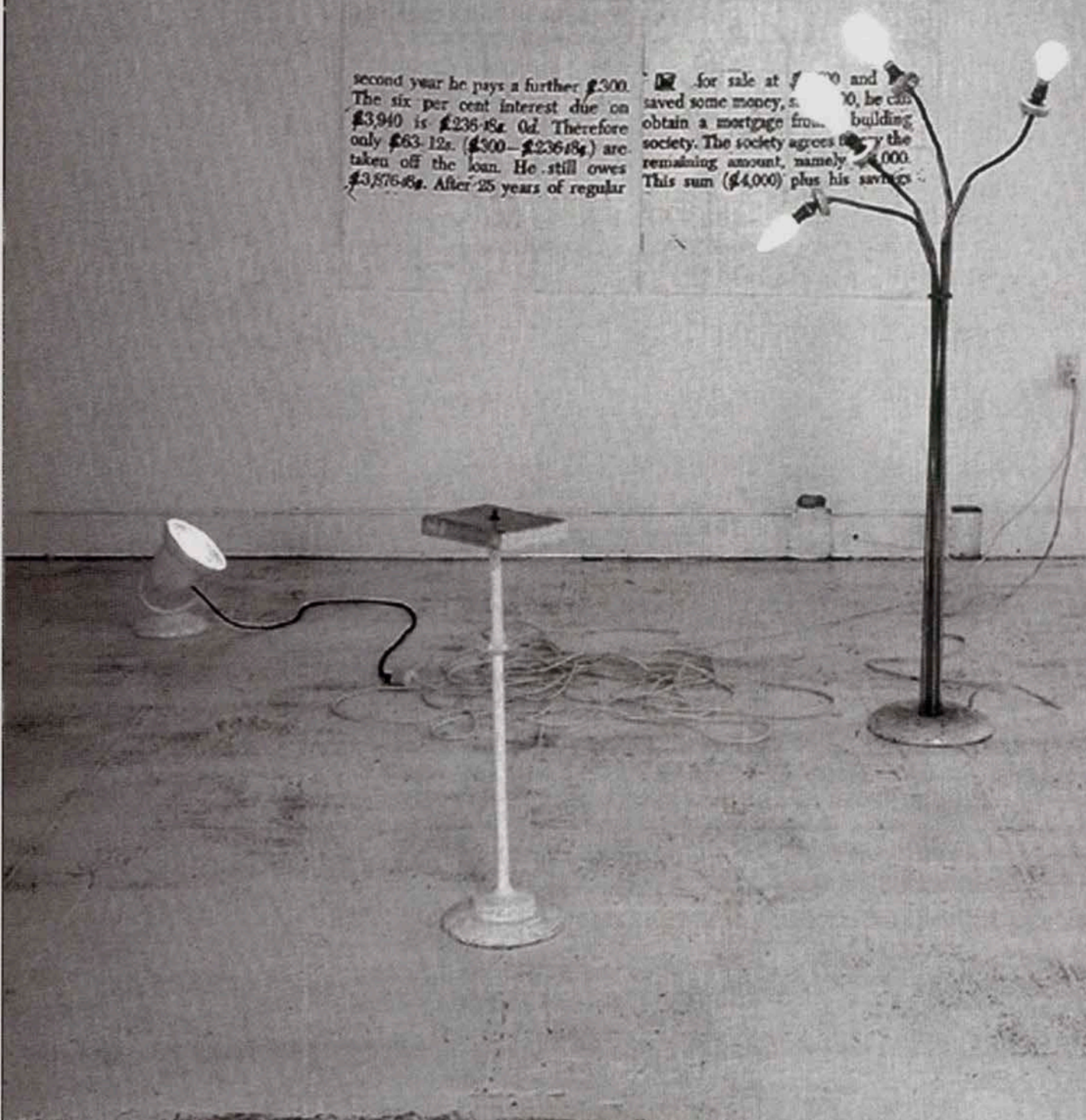
A MAN SAVING \$200 a year would take over 22 years to save \$4,500—enough to buy a good house. Very few people want to wait all this time to get a house. So if a man sees a

World

house for sale at \$4,000 and he has saved some money, say \$1,000, he can obtain a mortgage from a building society. The society agrees to pay the remaining amount, namely \$3,000. This sum (\$4,000) plus his savings

second year he pays a further \$200. The six per cent interest due on \$3,940 is \$236.84. Therefore only \$63.12 (\$200 - \$236.84) are taken off the loan. He still owes \$3,876.88. After 25 years of regular

payments of \$200, he can obtain a mortgage from a building society. The society agrees to pay the remaining amount, namely \$3,000. This sum (\$4,000) plus his savings



the ten causes of regret

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Current, as well as referring to the present, is the force or flow, the circuitry that connects all elements together. To consider the work of et al. within the connotations of 'current theory' is to draw attention to an important aspect of recent installations such as *simultaneous invalidations* 2001 (p.102) and *serial_reform_713L* 2003. In order to engage with these installations, one must take note of the operating mechanisms, the physical workings and apparatus that combine to create a dynamic, experiential situation for the viewer. Events alluded to in these recent installations, things et al. may feel we need to recall, inform the content of the particular investigation. Yet in terms of an experiential engagement with the work, it is the incorporation of *functioning* elements that is crucial. Specific memories are important but it is the operating systems' simulation of the workings of the mind that gives the work its power. The aim of this essay then, is to trace connections between memory and archive: the particular and the general – individual associative memory and the social or collective constructs that make up our everyday.

MEMORY

When one thinks of memory, one thinks of specific memories each of us has. There are also social and institutional manifestations of memory: museums, libraries and archives that are organised in similar systematic and institutional ways. They house the legacies of civilisation: knowledge, traditions and histories encapsulated in a vast range of texts, materials and objects – evidence of our existence.

Memory can be defined as identity, a protection against a loss of self. It develops as our own and moves as we move. It is of the past but is not the past. Memory is our everyday, a context balancing and moderating our actions and is linked with 'trans-generational memory', a shared reality that affirms the concept of a 'collective unconscious'. It allows us to imagine and invent. It shapes and enriches our thinking, a necessary function in our ability to act in a conscious manner. It is intrinsic to a sense of belonging and we must belong in order to exist as humans. It can be considered a spatial layering; a backwards/forwards movement that constantly brings us back to ourselves; a mechanism that helps us remember the world we have created. Minds can also be manipulated and be targets for propaganda. In this sense, memory is crucial in maintaining some sense of what has happened. It mitigates against individual and collective amnesia, against denial.

In his study, *Matter and memory*, Henri Bergson challenged the view that movement (as a physical reality in the external world) and image (as psychic reality in consciousness) were opposites. Instead he proposed the idea of a 'movement-image', and a more profound 'time-image' to account for an essential connection between memory and matter, perception and spirit, body and soul. He recognised a constant play between psychic life and its motor accompaniment. While our mental functioning is essentially turned toward action, metaphysically our minds strive to transcend the conditions of useful action. The complexity of this process ultimately reflects the complexity of reality itself.

In recent et al. installations there is similar tempering of utility and social accord by creative expression and philosophical thought; a constant monitoring of actions and consequences. They focus on the human predicament, expecting the audience to react to both evocation and provocation. The circuitry employed in the installations, the 'current', alludes to human circulation. Electricity, like the central nervous system and arteries within our body, is one force that binds the words, images and objects together. An et al. installation therefore is only ever 'complete' when the viewer, following the leads (cables, strings, tapes and wires), traces the interconnectivity between disparate elements towards some individually determined position.

Bergson investigated common ground between two distinct systems: the world of science and consciousness; one system based on 'absolute value' and the other based on the less predictable centrality of the human body. By contrasting the realist within us with the idealist, Bergson defined a conundrum: part of us is given to prescient experience yet we are idealistic, because it affirms the continuity of the past, present and future. Perception then is full of memories, a condition that defies philosophical views of perception as a kind of interior, subjective vision. Bergson's view reinforces memory as a plurality of moments and perception of the external world as a small matter compared with all that memory adds to it. The material world is best assumed to be an aggregate of images because, as Bergson concluded, it is impossible to assume otherwise. The representation of matter then is the measure of possible actions upon the body and, it would seem, the task before us in the strange grey rooms set up by et al., is to unravel, discover, recover (for ourselves) where, as Henri Bergson puts it, 'the operations of memory and the office of the body begins and ends'.

Memories complete and interpret at the same time: recollection is both detachment from the present and an adjustment. Like the constant focusing of a camera, it is a movement from the virtual to the actual. Bergson suggests we constantly discover in present circumstances that which resembles former situations. Perception therefore, is a synthesis of mind and matter and the consciousness of one's own body is a coupling of memory and the present moment, and a physical extension in space. This backwards/forwards momentum and the fact that memory can be realised creatively as spatial layering through juxtaposition, is fundamental to the collective's recent projects. Their seeming intention is to bring us back to ourselves by telling stories of our past.

Et al. shatter perceptions that we are singular, unified beings, continuous from childhood, moving from a fixed past to an uncertain future. This equates with recent neurological research that suggests we are all divided and discontinuous. The cognitive processes underlying our sense of self, (feelings, thoughts, memories) are scattered through different zones of the brain with no special point of convergence. Rather the parts come together in a work of fiction. It's as if the human is a tale-telling machine; that the self is a story. Not that our lives are fictions, for we live in a world with physical and moral dimensions, it's just whether we are weaving the story or whether the story weaves us. The current theory, as revealed by et al.'s installations, is that self and brain have a live connection, that self is a complex set of implicit and explicit memories best understood as changes in patterns of connectivity between brain cells, neurons and synapses; the spaces between, the points of connection. In other words, it's all to do with the wiring.

***simultaneous invalidations* and *serial_reform_713L*: tendencies and transmissions – et al.'s ongoing research reminding us who we are**

Given that systems, circuits and integrated sets of synapses are fundamental to an understanding of memory, it can be suggested that they are crucial to et al.'s ideas. The layout of *simultaneous invalidations* and *serial_reform_713L* can be considered diagrammatic, like circuit boards or mappings of neural functioning. The cables, wiring, tapes, cords and strings (for sound, image and lighting – to hear, see and read) are enabling connectors for the activation of associative memory; the current in other words, that threads the work (the body) and the viewer together.

Et al.'s found film footage (sometimes used to evoke particular, but perhaps incorrect, historical references), the audio elements, the computer programs (often playing on lurid green-lit screens), the outdated apparatus (including gauges, aged laptops, lamps and abandoned industrial equipment), are not only juxtaposed, they are made to operate in disturbing ways (skewed or slightly off register, like a projection at odds with the

shape of the screen), in order to evoke particular emotional and psychological responses. Nothing can be taken at face value: neither is anything necessarily treated respectfully nor with regard for 'authenticity'. The elements can seem exaggerated or out of place, and the combination of the old and abandoned with new technologies (including theories as well as equipment) hints at conformity, oppression and surveillance, aspects of bureaucratic mismanagement, and a calculated obsolescence in contemporary industrialised society.

Working with the idea of 'trace' and 'memory' that these objects and images conjure, et al. also work the audience by unsettling complacency and encouraging social and institutional critique. Their characteristic texts and quotations, gleaned from psychology texts and literary and philosophical traditions, question ideologies that condition us. Further, these notations are often categorised using a mnemonic system (for instance, the four Cs – behaviour control, information control, thought control, emotional control: the five Ds – deceit, dependency, debilitation, dread, desensitisation), a reminder of rote methods for the memorising of key facts. Original referencing is ignored, rather the words and phrases, like the equipment, are recontextualised to unmake sense, to undermine programmed learning.

This blurring of making/unmaking is reflected in the calculated tension between a sense of impregnability (and the viewer's vulnerability) when it comes to subject matter and presentation, and the seductive, poetic and quasi-theatrical atmosphere that draws you into the work. The collapsing of the personal, political and the impersonal, that one associates with official socio-political narratives, is deliberate and crucial to the collective's investigation of the role of archives and societal tendencies to memorialise. The artistic solution, which simultaneously orders and preserves and disorders and confuses, echoes what Jacques Derrida terms 'archive fever'. This is an oscillation based on a Freudian dichotomy between the desire for repetition (remembering and memory) and the destructive fear of death (forgetting and amnesia).

For Derrida nothing is less reliable than the concept of 'archive', especially the relationship between private and public archives. Et al.'s installations are an encapsulation of this contested space, framed in terms of presence and absence. They bring to our attention how both past and present are constructions, dependent on memory and systematic, often institutionalised, ordering. In this sense the outmoded but resuscitated equipment represents a concern with failed connections. Archives rarely speak on behalf of individuals (sometimes victims). Instead they leave silences and absences. It is this 'in-between' territory that is explored in *simultaneous invalidations* and *serial_reform_713L*. To this end theatrical means are employed to pull things into focus, possibly with the aim of pushing the audience towards catharsis. The installations themselves, the way they are set up, not only mimic/mock the organisational structures of archives, how archives construct and mediate identity (national and social character), they reveal how we are trained to respond to and reinterpret archival material in 'approved' ways. Archives can suggest melancholic nostalgia, but for et al. they are a resource to be explored and exploited, a means of facing the future.

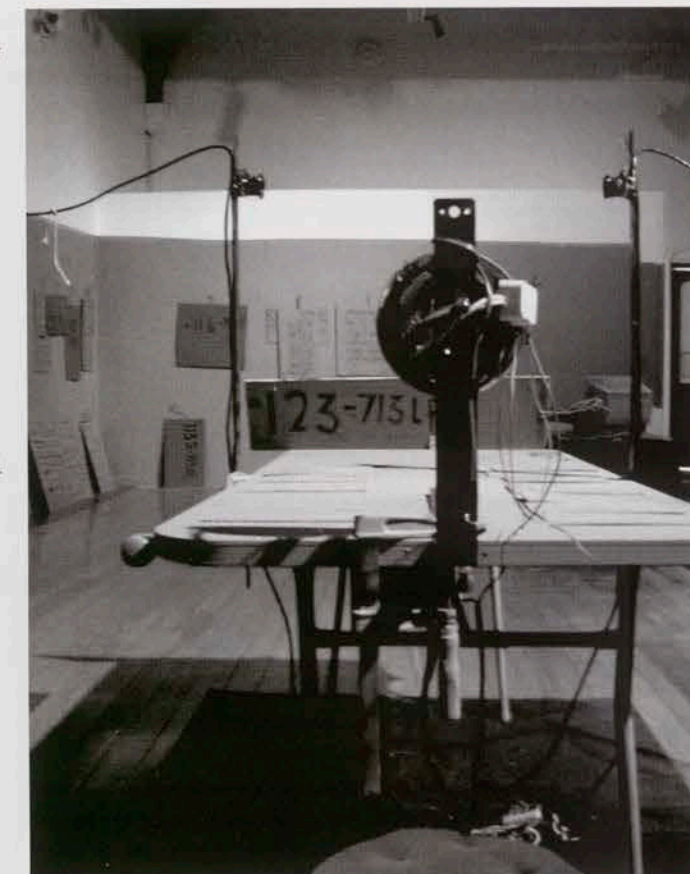
*simultaneous invalidations*¹ is a project (as its three variations suggest) that can never be finished. Invalidations becomes a viable alternative for understanding human experience, a necessary undoing of socio-cultural constructs as a way out of certain psycho-intellectual binds. It consists of an arrangement of thirteen skewed, spindly-legged kitchen tables whose vinyl tops have been either drilled around the edges and then stitched with string and wire, or replaced with discarded circuit boards. The 'deformity' and DIY circuitry allude to the (dis)functioning of the mind and the role of memory. Tables also refer to sets of figures, tabulations and rote learning, but here calculatedly chaotic and unbalanced. The way the room has been wired together with sounds that speed about the room from speaker to speaker, suggests a classroom abuzz with the transference of knowledge. It's as if we have entered a 'mind-field'. Two projections, one playing on a

tiny monitor encased in a rusted box, suspended on a metal arm above a camp stretcher, the second screening large scale and directly onto a rough plastered wall, also comment on group behaviour.

The large image is particularly resonant: it depicts a factory where orderly white-coated workers are busy with machines that seem to be large ovens. Of course, filling in the gaps, our minds conjure up an explanation, the footage recalls Nazi Germany. Evocative images do this. They compel us to imagine what's going on in the picture. We make meaning, drawing upon a collective bank of memorable images that reveals the influence and impact of cinema and photojournalism. Images deceive as much as they reveal truths. The fact that certain qualities are readily associated with a horrific past, whether indeed the images are of that particular circumstance or not, is a reminder of the faith we place in photographic evidence. In constructing a sense of what's going on in the world, televisual distribution traps us within an increasingly mediated reality and subjects us to greater political and ideological manipulation.

simultaneous invalidations focuses on derangement and creates a situation whereby brain functioning and systems of learning are laid bare, stripped of illusion and comfort, in order to expose the networks and structures that affect us individually. The body has been described as a field of interpretative possibilities, the locus of a dialectical process of interpreting anew an historical set of interpretations that have become imprinted on the flesh. The connection between this installation, the body and memory, is the fact that the body reveals one's 'cultural history', and as the operating mechanisms suggest, it is a body that is eminently interpretable. Et al.'s use of a signature grey then is more than a background colour. It suggests propositions that can never be seen as black or white. Despite the reference to institutionalised learning or some historic archive/bunker, it is more than a 'bureaucratic grey'. It alludes to the brain (grey matter); to the burden of memory, the weight and responsibility of accumulating knowledge and the ever-increasing store of over-determining images.

*serial_reform*², with its enigmatic 713L coding, is another carefully devised, strategic investigation. One enters a 'zone', a constructed/reconstructed situation/event. It could be the past or the future, but there is the sense that it's some place we've been before; a training room, a language lab, a psychology experiment in progress or the setting for a dissection lecture. It feels forensic. Five grey-painted, folding tables trailing wires, each one clamped together, each with a hastily wired speaker, are laid in a line. Each one suggests a body, an absent presence. Nearby is a workstation, a central controlling unit, and on the back of the chair, a numbered uniform-style grey worker's coat. It seems a re-programming (possibly sinister) has been going on, or is about to begin... again. It's hard to tell if operations were suddenly abandoned or wait



et al., *serial_reform_713L*, 2003
(installation detail)
SOFA Gallery, University of Canterbury

in readiness for the next 'session'. Notes and signboards, scraps of texts and coded rudimentary charts are accompanied by an endlessly looping recitation. At times some strange 'elongated' male voiceover mixes with more grating mechanical sounds.

Articulation, annunciation,
auscultation: expression, diction
and close listening. From a body of
visual, perhaps archival evidence,
it seems we are being asked to
look and listen for telltale signs.
Fathoming symptoms in other words...
from operations room to operating
theatre. In this 'enclosure' we are
reminded of our intellectual abilities
and technological capacity. The body,
the human system, laid out, as in
simultaneous invalidations, is being
measured again, its networks exposed.

In a statement titled 'disclosure'³
lionel gootschalk, spokesperson
for the group, said *serial_reform*
would be 'attempting to document
experimental approaches for altering
consciousness'. It was hoped that
the research could be undertaken in
Antarctica, the vast whiteness, the
Void, envisaged as an ideal blank
slate/state/space from which to start.
The aim would be to explore 'mind
control and behaviour modification
as apparent methods and apparatus for enhancing human potential'... 'establishing systems of error as valid
parameters of investigation'... and to these ends, they would incorporate 'outdated and dysfunctional apparatus
as the embodiment of incoherent thinking systems'.

The statement reiterates (despite its quasi-'A. E. Skinner' tone) the important link Bergson described between
the world of science (its quest for absolutes) and consciousness (the realist/idealist split). Presenting an
artistic project in the manner of a psychology experiment, the collective becomes a 'research' team intent
on revealing a continuous connection; how the body is society is a system exposed. In the room there is the
hint of external causes (for instance, who drives central control?) that threaten disintegration and possibly,
extermination. And as the word memory now extends to include computer-speak (megabytes and hard drives), there
is terminal and terminal; the PC itself and what lionel b (of the collective) once called 'flick-of-the-switch'
finality. At the same time (as if echoing Bergson's two distinct worlds) there is idealism, a belief in the
body as a persistent reactor-resistant and enduring, a measure of all things...

THE ARCHIVE

Recollection in the form of 'a collection' or archive is, in itself, a social critique; a selective process that determines our knowledge of the past. Given that et al. incorporate functioning systems into their installations, it is not surprising that the archive, as the storehouse of evidence, comes under investigation. There is an acknowledged indebtedness to Marcel Duchamp. Motivated to explore in the broadest possible way Duchamp's concept of the ready-made, the collective draws upon twentieth century history as both subject and residue; a ready-made from which to pick and plunder in order to re-examine aspects of our recent past.

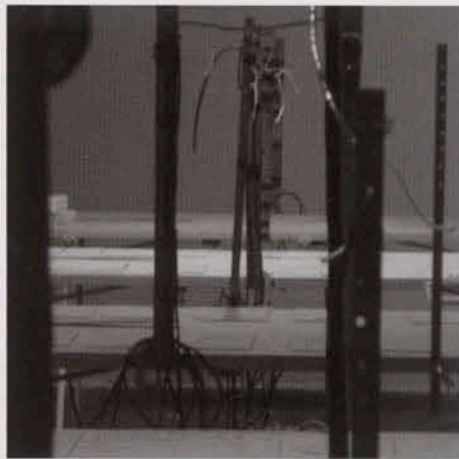
The collective's investigative installations infiltrate zones of high culture, the museum and other systematic, hierarchical structures. Duchamp in terms of a dual Marcel/Rose persona, can be seen to represent two art histories - the generative, patriarchal history associated with avant-gardism, and a feminine, possibly postmodernist approach that is anti-authoritarian, linguistically playful and psychoanalytically informed in the way it explores inter-subjectivity. Et al. can similarly be considered as voices from a 'museum of selves', acknowledging that 'performative urge' that reflects a fundamental human identification drive crucial to any construction of identity.

It is of interest to note that the derivation of archive is the Greek word *arkheion*, meaning house or domicile, and as Jacques Derrida comments in *Archive fever*, while it decontextualises, the collection or archive 'evinces an irrepressible urge to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return of the most archaic place of absolute commencement'. He suggests that although

it is a mnemonic apparatus, the archive is constituted by the very inevitability of mnemonic loss. In other words, the very death of memory is formative of archival desire. Collections then are organised around the conflict between memory and loss, and between decontextualisation and relocation, which is of course the structural paradox of homesickness.

Here Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, his 'box-in-a-suitcase' project containing reproductions of his past artwork, is an important reference. Begun in 1935, the work encapsulated Duchamp's period of displacement due to the German occupation of Paris, from 1940 to 1942, when he sailed to New York. It was his whole life's work in a suitcase. It has been suggested that the suitcase represents a model for a post-national avant-garde, that his work comments on the material, institutional and technological displacements of modernism and modernity, that it reveals the institutional narrowing of art through selective history, museum culture, exhibition practice and discourse. It connects also with the reformulation of the museum as proposed by André Malraux (begun in 1935), one that would incorporate photographic representation as a way of overcoming constraints imposed on collections determined by 'original' objects. This 'museum without walls' would be an historical construct based on an endless cross-referencing made possible by the use of reproductions of works that

et al., *serial_reform_713L*, 2003
(installation detail)
trial run, Starkwhite, Auckland
photographer: Jennifer French,
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki



supposedly encapsulate the spirit of their age. This 'disconnection' of object and context has motivated other artists to examine the functions of museums and archives, either by exploring their logic or by revealing the contingent nature of their spaces and networks.

Such investigations, like et al.'s installations, represent a significant shift in contemporary art practice: from history to culture, and from 'art' to the visual – an extended field with psychoanalytical and anthropological dimensions. The intention is to generate meaning rather than restrict or confine responses. Continuing the 'dismantling' that began with Duchamp, these strategies are a key aspect of the collective's practice.

If we return to the link between the archive, memory and loss, and homesickness, it is possible to experience *simultaneous invalidations* and *serial_reform_713L*, with their jumble of forgotten objects, abandoned ideas and equipment, as encapsulating the past, yet without nostalgia. This echoes Walter Benjamin's definition of memory as something fluid and contingent upon its materialisation according to the desires and needs of the present. Benjamin also focused on photography and film in his coming to terms with a 'new conception of history' – because these images are no longer rooted to site (he considered reproductions as homeless representations and homesick memories as dislocated montage) they are able to contest any rampant nationalisation associated with a 'territorialized identity'. Combining associative memory and archival evidence (especially the use of found film and photographic 'evidence'), et al.'s installations expose a contemporary

sense of dislocation and, in terms of art practice, their disruptions paradoxically reinstate an all-important experiential aspect to the visual.

It is a disruption that parallels the abandonment of single authorship in favour of a polyphonic collective approach – a response, a necessary erasure perhaps, connected with a growing dissatisfaction with a prevailing art system that is hierarchical and exclusive. The disturbing, enigmatic aspect of these recent installations can also be seen as the collective opting for a more cathartic dimension that comes from encouraging viewer interaction/reaction, within what could be described as staged operations, as allegorical tableaux. It is the individual body infiltrating or invading the social/ideological body that undermines the networks and systems reconstructed by the collective for this very purpose.

The installations are ongoing processes. They represent a determination to unmake conventions, a process that equates with Simone de Beauvoir's conviction that people are constructs... 'from the matrix at large, not from God, or nature, or even Mother'. Humans are self-fashioning... it's about discovering voices and a range of different speaking positions to challenge the singular, institutionalised body. The multiples and divides within one's self can be considered as personal co-ordinates, each a particular relation between time and space. In this sense, the collective approach is iconoclastic, systematically destabilising relations between past and present by working beneath the patina of the real – a way of discovering the processes of the real in order to reveal just how much it has been pre-digested for individual and social consumption.

et al., *serial_reform_713L*, 2003
(installation details)
SOFA Gallery, University of Canterbury

*

simultaneous invalidations and *serial_reform_713L* represent an inner view of the detritus of the exterior world. Within them one can recognise the collective's interest in strategic, creative solutions: we are forewarned of insidious links between 'creative expression', 're-education' and 'coercion', and the potential (mis)uses of reprogramming. Experimentation and endless trials, hinted at in the project titles, attest to the very human factor of failure and miscalculation. Further, the wonky tables and projected images in *simultaneous invalidations* and the almost inexhaustible number of possible arrangements of text panels in *serial_reform_713L* (which allude to an enormity of codes of behaviour), suggest that evidence and calculations are, at best, equivocal. There can be no perfect method, no totally satisfactory outcome; it's all supposition. This accurately reflects the functioning of memory, the plurality of moments, the way the past impacts upon the present. In these 'control rooms', laboratories devoted to personal/social research, the viewer can envisage the body's workings from the inside as if witnessing essential 'synaptic interconnectivity' keeping the conductive mechanisms at play and thereby arrive at a better understanding of self.

I am indebted to the following authors whose writing on particular subjects inform this essay:

Memory, the body and current neuroscientific research:

Henri Bergson, *Matter and memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (from the fifth edition 1908, revised by Bergson October 1910), New York: Zone Books, 1991; Paul Broks, clinical neuropsychologist, from a discussion about his forthcoming book, *Into the silent land*, Atlantic Books; Joseph LeDoux, *The synaptic self: How our brains become who we are*, Viking, UK, 2002 and an essay "Connecting the self and the brain", *Australian Financial Review*, 8 January 2003, pp42-43; Simone de Beauvoir in Lorna Sage (ed), *Moments of truth: Twelve women writers*, London: Fourth Estate, 2001, p151; John Ralston Saul, *On equilibrium*, Melbourne: Penguin Books Australian Pty. Ltd., 2001, especially chapter 6 'Memory', p213.

Duchamp and the archive:

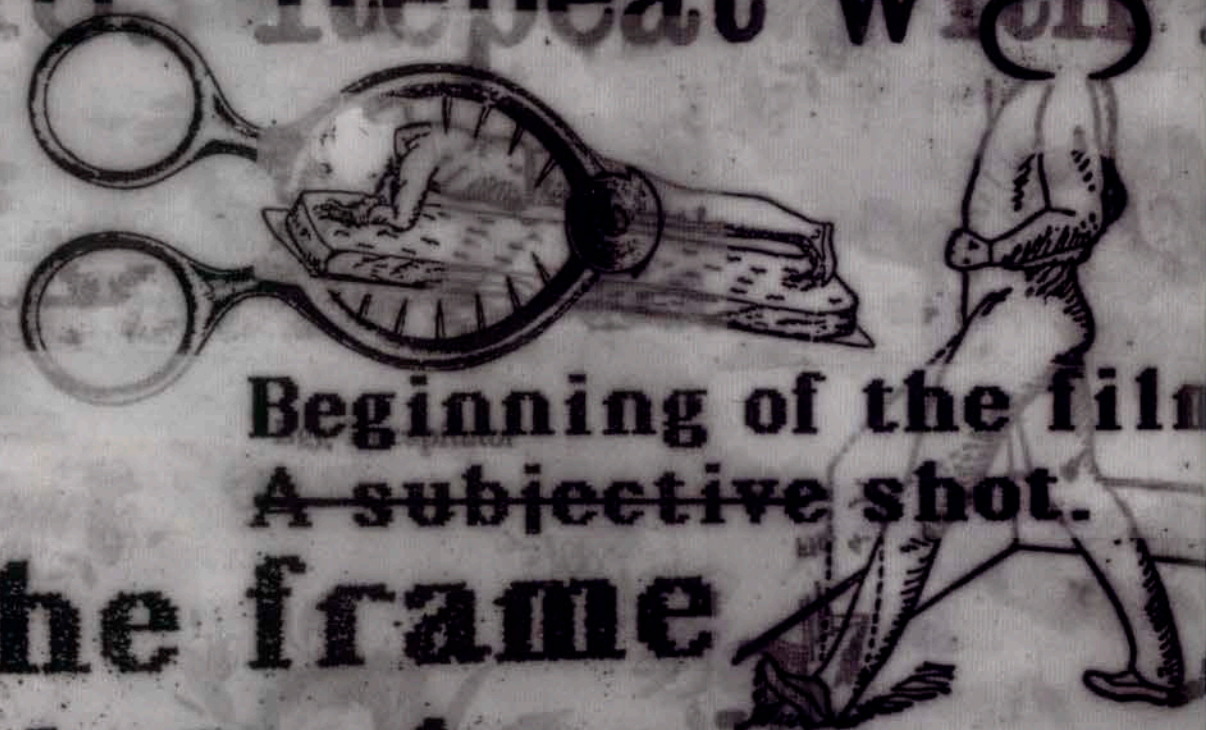
T.J. Demos, "Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*: Between institutional acculturation and geopolitical displacement," *Grey Room* 08, pp6-37; Jacques Derrida, *Archive fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995; Juliana Engberg (ed), Linda Williams, Margaret Morgan, *Persona cognita*, Melbourne: Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1994; Hal Foster, "The archive without museum", *October* 77, p97.

- ¹ *simultaneous invalidations*, first version as part of the group exhibition, *In glorious dreams*, Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, December 2000; second attempt, Artspace, Auckland, February 2001; and second attempt, the Annexe basement, Christchurch Arts Centre, July 2001.
- ² *serial_reform_713L* was presented as part of The Wanderer Project, SOFA Gallery, Christchurch Arts Centre, December 2002-March 2003, a two-part collaborative exchange exhibition curated by Mark Kremer (Amsterdam) and Ewen McDonald (Sydney), with new work by Mike Tyler (Amsterdam/New York) and et al. (Auckland).
- ³ Statement emailed to author prior to the installation.

page 66:
1 budd, from the series *man the masterpiece*, 1990
collection Jim Barr and Mary Barr

up to horizontal

18 Repeat with



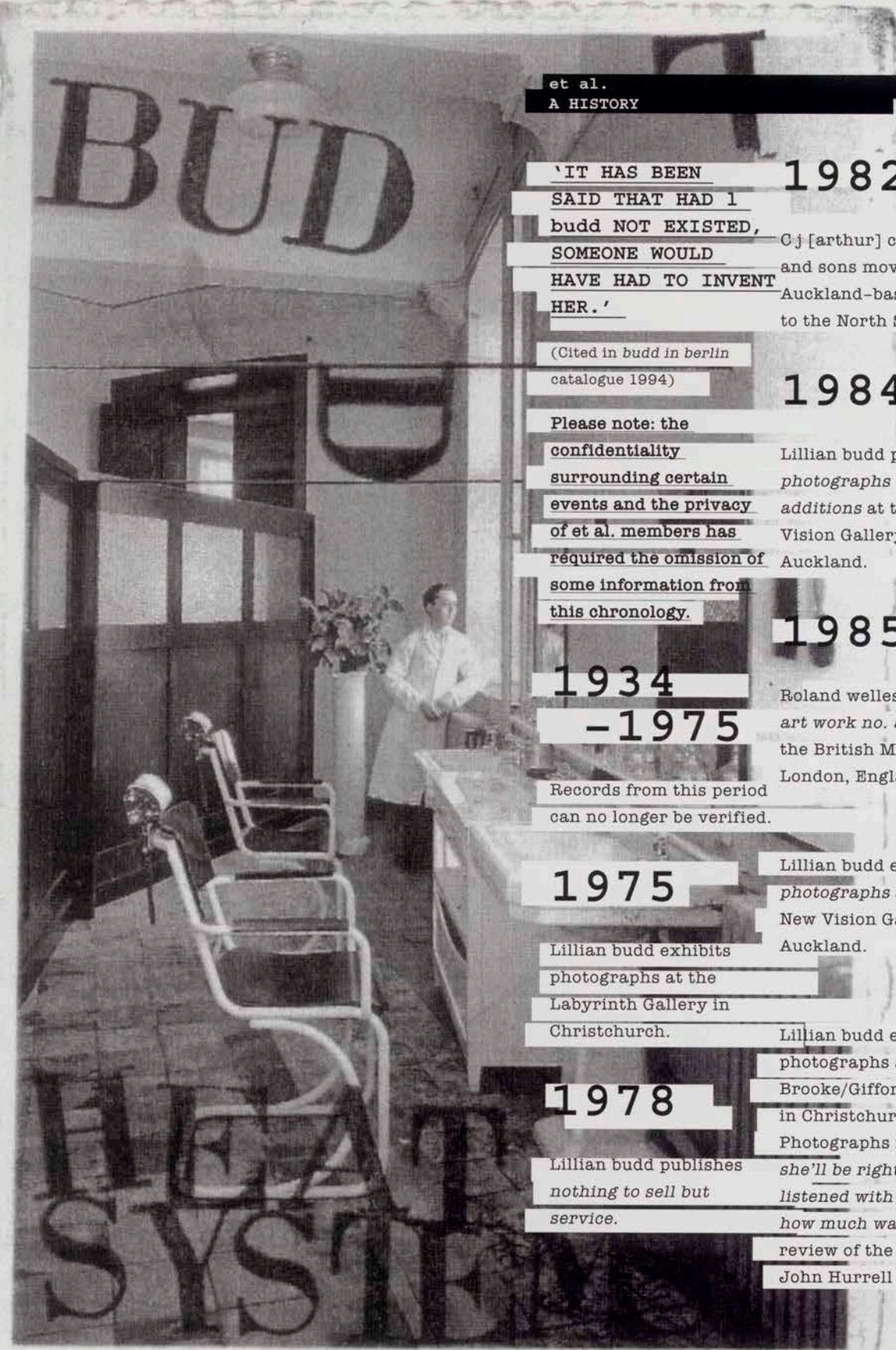
Beginning of the film
~~A subjective shot.~~

e the frame

voices begin Fig. 2.

~~There are no voices.~~

CHRONOLOGY



1 budd, postcard, 1985
(Leige, Belgium)

et al.
A HISTORY

1982
'IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT HAD I budd NOT EXISTED, SOMEONE WOULD HAVE HAD TO INVENT HER.'

Cj [arthur] craig and sons move their Auckland-based business to the North Shore.

(Cited in *budd in berlin* catalogue 1994)

1984
Please note: the confidentiality surrounding certain events and the privacy of et al. members has required the omission of some information from this chronology.

Lillian budd presents *photographs and additions* at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland.

1934 - 1975
Roland welles begins *art work no. 5* outside the British Museum in London, England.

Records from this period can no longer be verified.

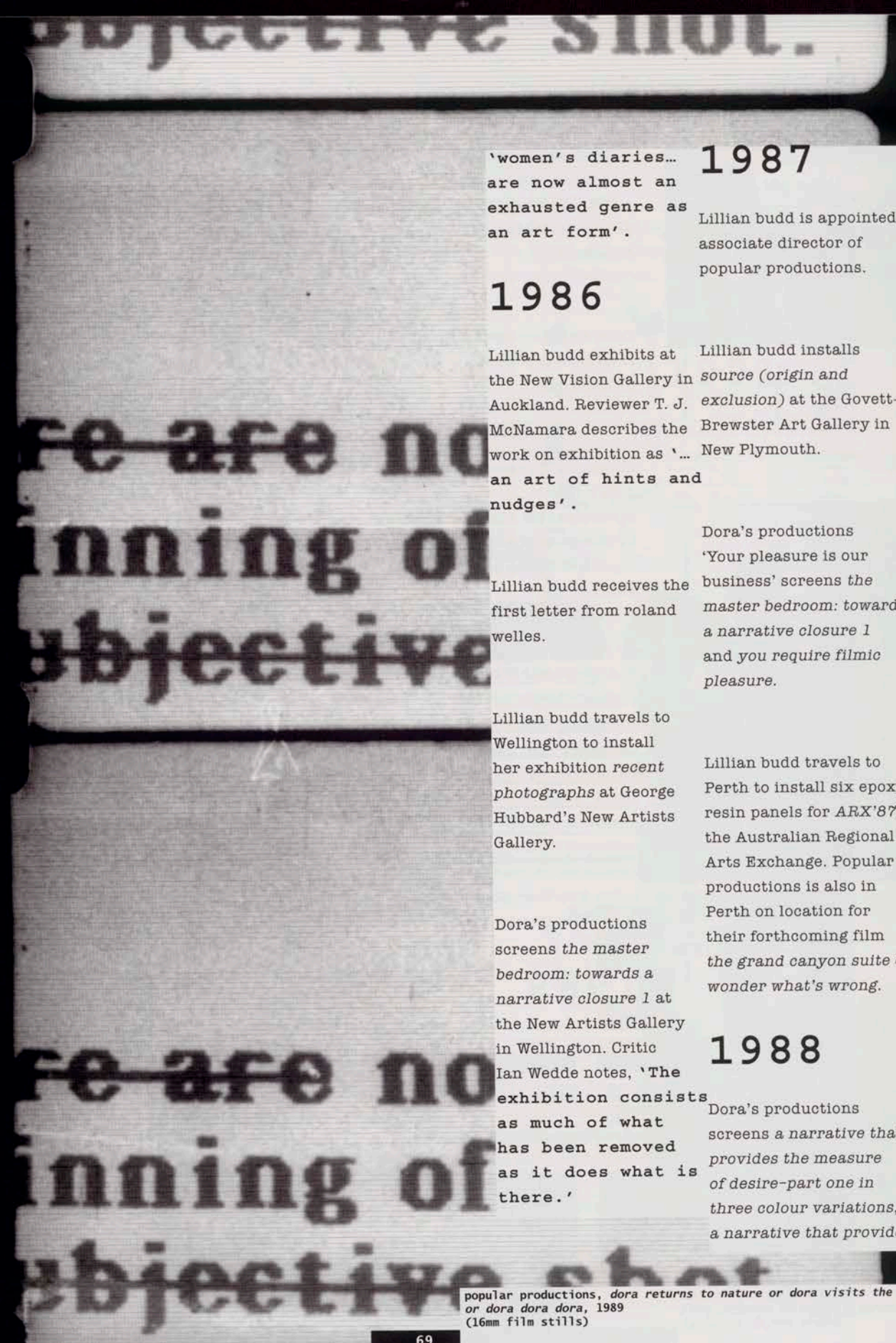
1975
Lillian budd exhibits *photographs* at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland.

Lillian budd exhibits *photographs* at the Labyrinth Gallery in Christchurch.

1978
Lillian budd exhibits *photographs* at the Brooke/Gifford Gallery in Christchurch.

Lillian budd publishes *nothing to sell but service*.

Photographs including *she'll be right, they listened with joy and how much waiting*. In his review of the exhibition John Hurrell notes that



'women's diaries... are now almost an exhausted genre as an art form'.

1987
Lillian budd is appointed associate director of popular productions.

1986
Lillian budd exhibits at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland. Reviewer T. J. McNamara describes the work on exhibition as '... an art of hints and nudges'.

Lillian budd installs *source (origin and exclusion)* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth.

Dora's productions 'Your pleasure is our business' screens the *master bedroom: towards a narrative closure 1* and *you require filmic pleasure*.

Lillian budd receives the first letter from roland welles.

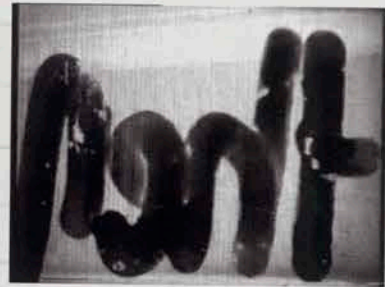
Lillian budd travels to Wellington to install her exhibition *recent photographs* at George Hubbard's New Artists Gallery.

Lillian budd travels to Perth to install six epoxy resin panels for ARX'87, the Australian Regional Arts Exchange. Popular productions is also in Perth on location for their forthcoming film *the grand canyon suite* or *wonder what's wrong*.

Dora's productions screens *the master bedroom: towards a narrative closure 1* at the New Artists Gallery in Wellington. Critic Ian Wedde notes, 'The exhibition consists as much of what has been removed as it does what is there.'

1988
Dora's productions screens a narrative that provides the measure of desire-part one in three colour variations, a narrative that provides

popular productions, *dora returns to nature* or *dora visits the sea* or *dora dora dora*, 1989 (16mm film stills)



the measure of desire
- part two and grand
canyon suite-parts one
and two at Artspace in
Auckland.

Dora's productions
reformed as popular
productions.

California, Santa Barbara.
Popular productions
is represented at
International Centre of
New Cinema in Latvia.

JUNE

Lillian budd installs
vinyl wall coverings at
Artspace in Auckland.

Lillian budd presents
*dora's bathroom: a set of
six recipes for success*
at George Hubbard's
Cupboard Space in
Wellington.

MAY

Roland welles completes
art work no. 5 outside the
British Museum.

T. J. McNamara, New
Zealand Herald art critic,
comments that, 'The
thought in the
material deserves
much tighter
presentation' in his
review of lillian budd's
exhibition *frasher ideas*
at the Aberhart North
Gallery in Auckland.

DECEMBER

Lillian budd installs the
rapid jelly set at the
Southern Cross Gallery
in Wellington. Works
included *lime, apricot,*
pineapple and blackberry.

1989

BEFORE JUNE

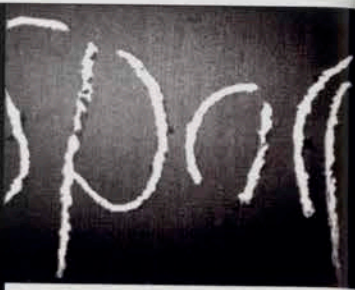
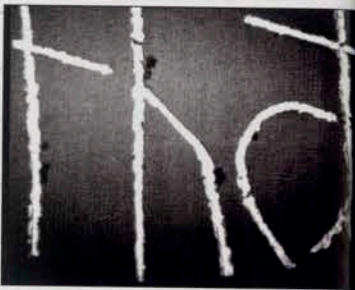
Roland welles exhibits
*in Cross currents: Book
works from the edge of
the Pacific*, University of

1990

MARCH

Lillian budd exhibits at
the Lazelle Gallery in
Auckland. Works include
*fresh ideas from man the
masterpiece, wonder -
plant life and eyes across
the tasman or home at
last no. 4.*

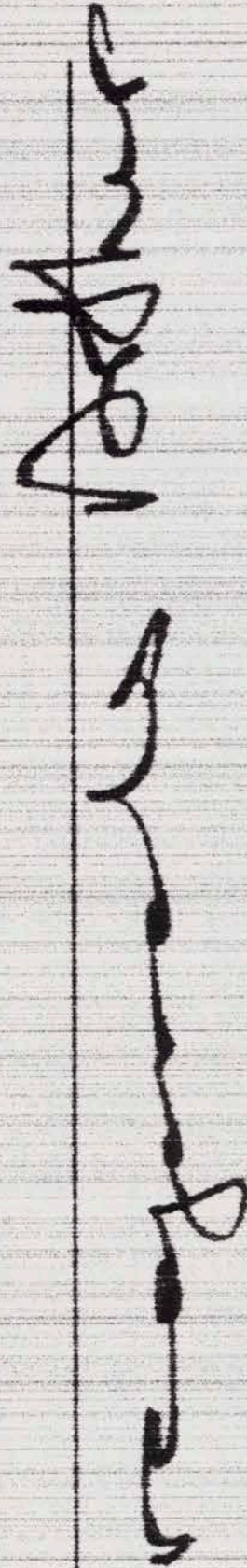
popular productions
the master bedroom:
towards a narrative closure, 1987
(super 8mm film stills)



ART FOUNDATION

21 JUN 1991

compliments



CJ ARTHUR CRAIG AND SONS

Lillian budd exhibits
nicola or floral or betty in
Now, see, hear! at the City
Art Gallery in Wellington.

Lillian budd exhibits
modern world at the
George Fraser Gallery in
Auckland.

Popular productions
screens *wonder what's
wrong (version b).*

Lillian budd travels to
Auckland to present *'That
was the guide she turned
to - the woman-man, the
dabbler in paint-boxes,
the critic of carpets wall-
papers'* at the Gregory
Flint Gallery. The works
in the exhibition are: *the
critic no. 5, the guide no.
23, the dabbler no. 41 and
moderno.*

Lillian budd exhibits
moderno update at the
Gregory Flint Gallery in
Auckland.

Lillian budd installs work
at the Bond Store in
Sydney, Australia for *The
readymade boomerang:*

Certain relations in 20th
century art, the eighth
biennale of Sydney,
curated by René Block.
Lillian meets On Kawara
and performance artist
Terry Scott.

Lillian budd receives two
telegrams in consecutive
weeks from On Kawara in
New York. Both telegrams
read 'I am still alive'.

Popular productions
screens *the story of,
wonder what (version
a), wonder what's wrong
(version a).*

Lillian budd writes and
publishes *April snow*
following the success of
the long day closes.

CJ [arthur] craig and
sons, manufacturers and
distributor of spare and
used parts, is selected as
the preferred supplier for
buddholdings (nz) ltd.

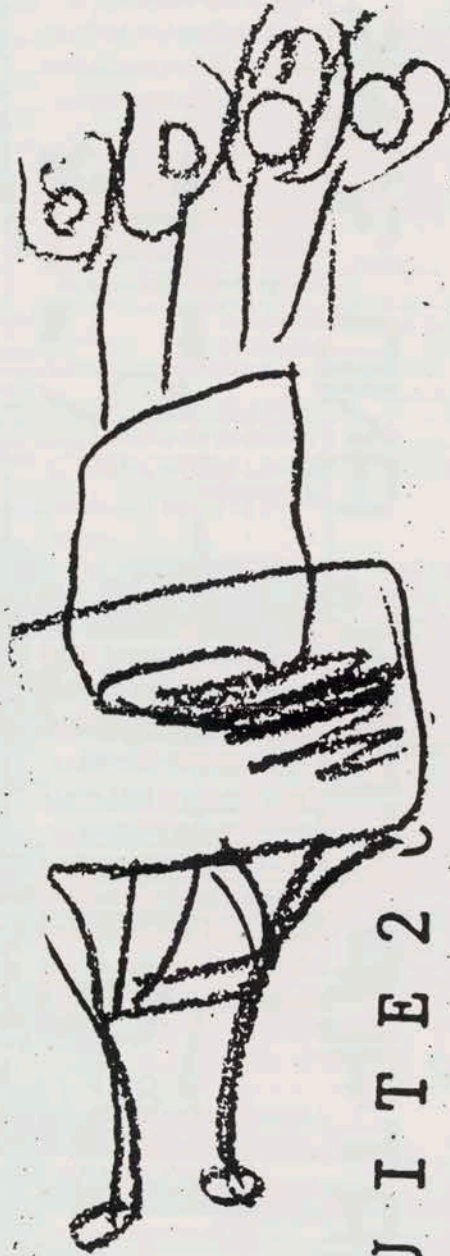
CJ [arthur] craig and
sons acquires the
works of a number of

c j [arthur] craig and sons
business card, 1991

(author L. Budd)

Modern Arrangements

S U I T E 2 0 2 .



l budd, modern arrangements, 1991
invitation
Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland

miscellaneous artists
for stock and re-releases
them as works by lillian
budd.

Cj [arthur] craig
and sons initiates an
advertising campaign in
the *New Zealand Herald*
to secure raw materials
for l budd installations.

Popular productions
begins work on the film
discreet investigations.

MAY

Cj [arthur] craig and
sons exhibits its first
works *spring tide* and the
story of in Space fictions
at the Catherine Scollay
Gallery in Wellington.
The catalogue features
an interview recorded
on behalf of cj [arthur]
craig and sons taped on
23 March.

The first cj [arthur] craig
and sons business card is
printed.

Cj [arthur] craig and
sons establishes the cj
[arthur] craig and sons
art foundation.

Buddholdings is
established by lillian
budd. L budd and bud
shoop relocate to the
HB building, #3A Lorne
Street, Auckland.

JUNE

Cj [arthur] craig and
sons hire frank craig as
senior consultant floor
person for the cj [arthur]
craig and sons art
foundation.

Merit grötting receives
a letter from art dealer
Peter McLeavey asking
her to exhibit.

Popular productions,
in association with the
Auckland Art Gallery,
screens five films at
Artspace in Auckland.

Cj [arthur] craig and
sons negotiates with
the National Art Gallery
in Wellington to place
dora's productions' and c
j [arthur] craig and sons'
archives in the national
collection.

For a brief period l budd

16 October - 2 November 1991
Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Custom Street, Auckland
Previews Tuesday 16 October 5-5:30 PM, Floor 2

joins Julian Dashper in
commercial partnership.

director merit grötting.

1992

JANUARY

Buddholdings in
association with euro
tours offers 'the complete
break 1992-1994', a
five-day return tour from
London to Madrid.

Buddholdings organises a
photographer to be sent
to Berlin to document
heating systems.

AUGUST

L budd publishes one
hundred and fifty copies
(with one hundred
uncut sheets set aside)
of the catalogue *what
constitutes originality*.
L budd writes, 'I've
got the painting
I made later from
that sketch. It was
exhibited too, and
called *sundown*.'

L budd writes and
publishes *ask me no more*.

L budd writes and
publishes *modern
arrangements-what
constitutes originality
part II*.

OCTOBER

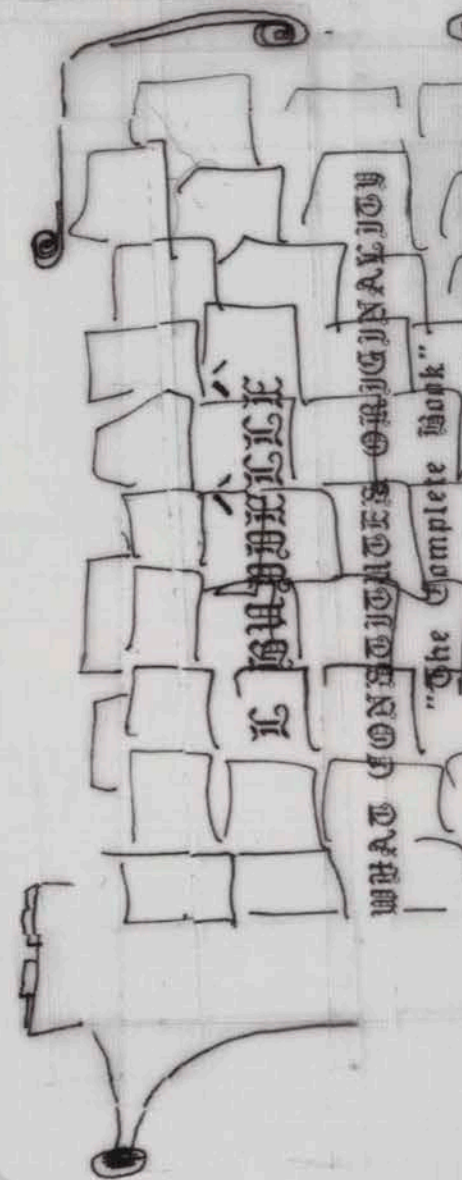
L budd, author, exhibits
modern arrangements at
the Gregory Flint Gallery
in Auckland.

M row (alias p mule)
publishes *ordinary-
extraordinary: the work
of l budd*. M row writes,
'Budd's shapes

NOVEMBER

Popular production holds
the *utopia: a discreet
investigation* premiere in
its Lorne Street studios.
The original sound is
by George Hubbard and
Daniel Barnes and titled
a quiet tear for Spain.
Hubbard attends the
premiere with *utopia's*

are referential,
evocative,
subjective. If they
manifest an idea
in its simplest
form, this form
is nonetheless a
created, contrived
one, not a modular
form, borrowed,
as is, from



Local Heat
Installation

p mule, Local heat, 1992
(from green spiral-bound notebook)

the industrial environment (such as a square, a rectangle, a cube, a circle, a grid).

L budd tours Europe and writes *journal d'un voyage utopique une nord*

L budd exhibits at ARCO in Madrid, Spain.

L budd invites 'genuine art lovers' to the retrospective wallpaper installation at McLeavey Gallery, Wellington. The invitation makes it clear that 'everything must go'.

FEBRUARY

L budd visits Germany and makes own photographic records of radiator installations.

L budd records heating systems at ICA Gallery in London, England.

L budd publishes the *complete break* which she describes as a set of '300 exemplars non signés non

numéroles'. L budd researches wallpaper at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England, and notes that a 'portion of wallpaper entitled *Double entendre* is produced by colour screen print 54.5 x 74.7'.

L budd returns to New Zealand.

MARCH

Merit grötting joins the group.

L budd paints over resined panels of art work acquired by c j [arthur] craig and sons.

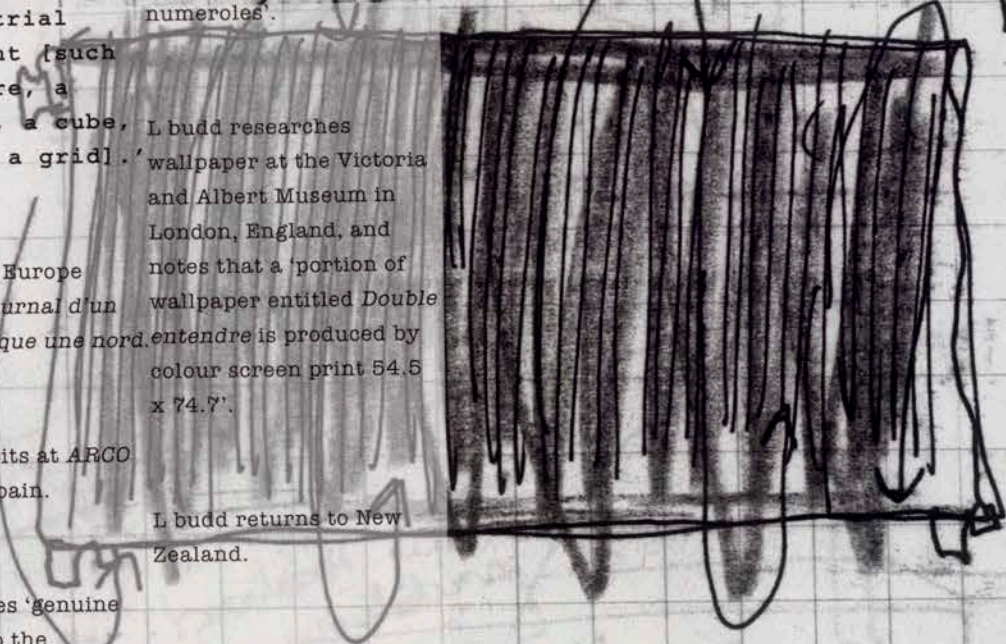
L budd's solo exhibition opens at Jonathan Smart Gallery in Christchurch.

P mule writes *something to do*, the first serious critique of l budd's sculpture and installation work. Mule notes that

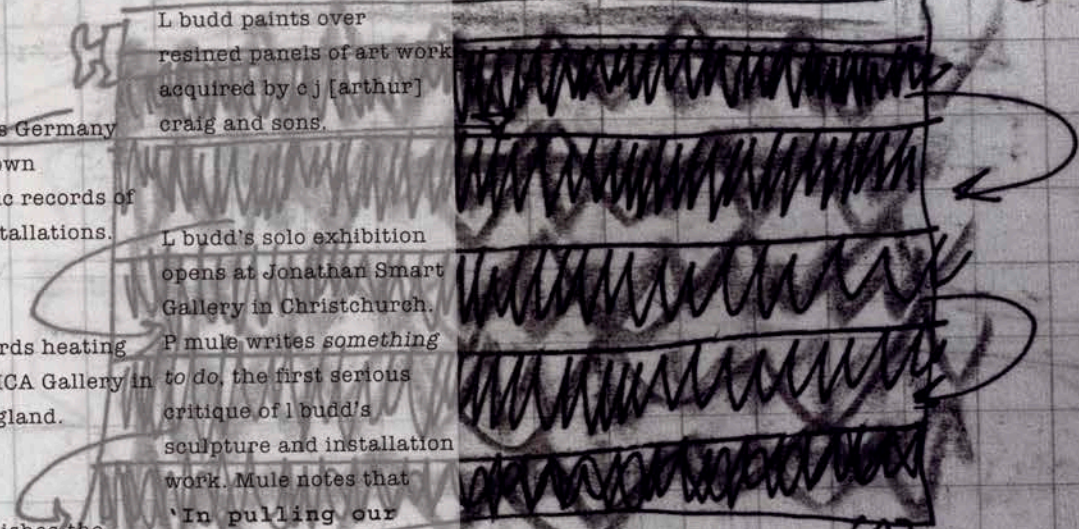
'In pulling our focus out to the edges or perimeters of things, Budd's glance purposefully

l budd European tour working drawings, 1992 (from green spiral-bound notebook)

Handwritten notes: "Titled", "radiators with fringes", and arrows pointing to the sketches.



Handwritten note: "fringed cushion" with an arrow pointing to the sketch below.



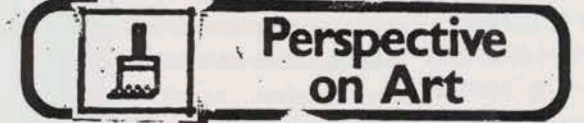
Handwritten note: "heat machine with fringe" with an arrow pointing to the sketch above.

stylish treat

JUL 1992

Mythic Investments (NZ) LTD

Contemporary Art in Sydney, Australia.



avoids the centre, or leaves it empty.'

Teststrip is launched as an artists' run space and opens on Vulcan Lane in Auckland (1992-1994). Founding members are l budd, Kirsty Cameron, Judy Darragh, Giovanni Intra, Denise Kum, Daniel Malone and Lucy McDonald.

Popular productions screens *utopia: a discreet investigation* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Australia.

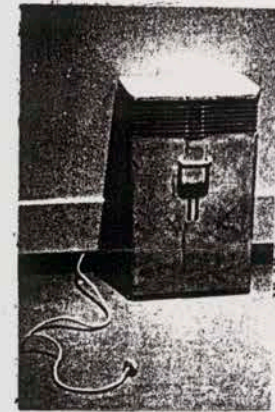
JUNE

Mythic investments (nz) ltd is established.

MAY

L budd, floor person and public relations consultant buddholdings (nz) ltd advertise an end-of-line clearance sale direct to clients ('due to the postponement of their super-warehouse sale scheduled for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery "common but collectable"). The sale includes large locker and untitled filing cabinet on wheels (aka *sticky label* [from the atelier of merit grötting]) in a fully illustrated catalogue.

Merit grötting installs work at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in Wellington. A disagreement over blinding protocol leads to the cancellation of the exhibition. The chaise, blonded by grötting, is withdrawn from the gallery for approximately one year for re-covering. Surprisingly the blonded chaise is recovered in green rather than its original plum.



On show are a shabby, rusted awning and a battered set of lockers with each interior painted pale green. These are labelled *Abstract Paintings* and purport to come from the *Surface Tension Series* from the studio of one, Merit Grötting.

Here is rubbish presented as rubbish art. Find what significance you will of it, it remains resolutely rubbish at any level.

An exhibition that maintains the artist's reputation as nothing but a cultural anarchist is found in the window of the Gregory Flint Gallery.

Mythic investments (nz) ltd presents bud shoop's installation of work from the atelier of merit grötting at the School of Fine Arts Gallery, University of Canterbury.

L budd exhibits in and attends the opening of *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand art* at the Museum of

Handwritten note: "27.7 resolutely yours Budd."

A discussion recorded between merit gröting and Rita Angus in Spain is published in *Midwest* magazine. The two artists discuss blinding, wrought iron and the outcome of 'found emotions'.

JULY

Bud shoop is appointed public relations consultant for mythic investments (nz) ltd.

Merit gröting re-installs the cancelled McLeavey exhibition titled *from the atelier of merit gröting: a life devoid of outward event* at the Gregory Flint Gallery in Auckland. T. J. McNamara perceptively notes, 'on show is a shabby, rusted awning and a battered pair of lockers with each interior painted pale green... Here is rubbish presented as rubbish art. Find what significance you will of it, it remains resolutely rubbish at any level.'

In Wellington, popular productions screens the New Zealand premiere of *utopia: discreet investigations* directed by merit gröting.

AUGUST

The atelier of merit gröting publishes the installation *untitled photograph* in an edition of fifty.

Budd archive established at Cubewell House.

A photographic record of the budd heating systems installation presented in Liege is published in the magazine *Midwest*.

SEPTEMBER

L budd exhibits an *untitled blonded table* work at Cubewell House in Wellington.

P mule rewrites *something to do*, a review of l budd's work.

L budd leaves the Gregory Flint Gallery in Auckland.



merit gröting, *lockers*, 1992 (installation detail), Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland

l budd, *untitled*, 1992 (installation detail), Cubewell House, Wellington

merit gröting, *business card*, 1992

NOVEMBER

Marlene cubewell's *untitled* work is installed in Tiananmen Square, China and at Yoyogi Park, Tokyo in preparation for the Cubist exhibition *Square deal*.

Merit gröting joins D Smith in the exhibition *Smith and gröting* at Artspace in Auckland. P mule writes, 'Smith's odd melancholy relentlessly morbid pictures often featuring asses recur - in a dismal human world.' Of gröting mule notes in 'dangling references, idiosyncrasies and of lame jokes' that the show 'comprised mainly of a variety of plaster casts offering a sort of trash parody of contemporary art's simplest presentation strategies'.

H. Sam writes (San Francisco, November 1992) of 'Spliff & gröting beautiful pictures show' in the official catalogue (eds. Crushed Honey/

Starve My Ego) that 'The National Council of the NEA says it only makes decisions about grants based on "Artistic Merit" [I'm not sure what they mean can you explain?] Many people confuse "Artistic Merit" with the more commonly used generic phrase "artistic merit" often used to refer to creative quality. "Artistic Merit" is an official government term that refers to art that is wholesome and uplifting in accordance with the guidelines established by the American Family Association.'

1993

FEBRUARY

Blanche ready-made & p mule install *some shoe drawings and selected writings* at Teststrip, 10 Vulcan Lane, Auckland. In the publication *selected writings* p mule notes 'the deliberate avoidance of a commanding voice that speaks with conviction on some subject or other can end in a dissipation of a work's energies. Blanche r-m has long concerned

merit gröting, *shoe*, 1992 (film stills) Smith & gröting, Artspace, Auckland

herself with this problem.'

venues throughout New Zealand (1993-1995).

Buddholdings withdraws permission to display work in *Feminist perspectives in recent New Zealand art 1973-1993*. The members feel that they are unable to represent specific gender interests.

Buddholdings, established by lillian budd, l budd and bud shoop, closes the HB building at #3A Lorne Street premises.

MARCH

Marlene cubewell installs chaise titled *selected writings, b r-m & p mule* in *Gaining interest* at Artspace in Auckland.

Merit grötting and blanche magdalen ready-made travel to Wellington as members of the Teststrip touring party for the installation of the exhibition *Teststrip at Cubewell House*. Grötting and blanche ready-made exhibit an arrangement of blonded office furniture accompanied by a blonded catalogue.

In an adjoining exhibit p mule writes 'blanche takes abstract forms as a point of departure, creating sculptures rich with metaphoric associations and symbolic content.

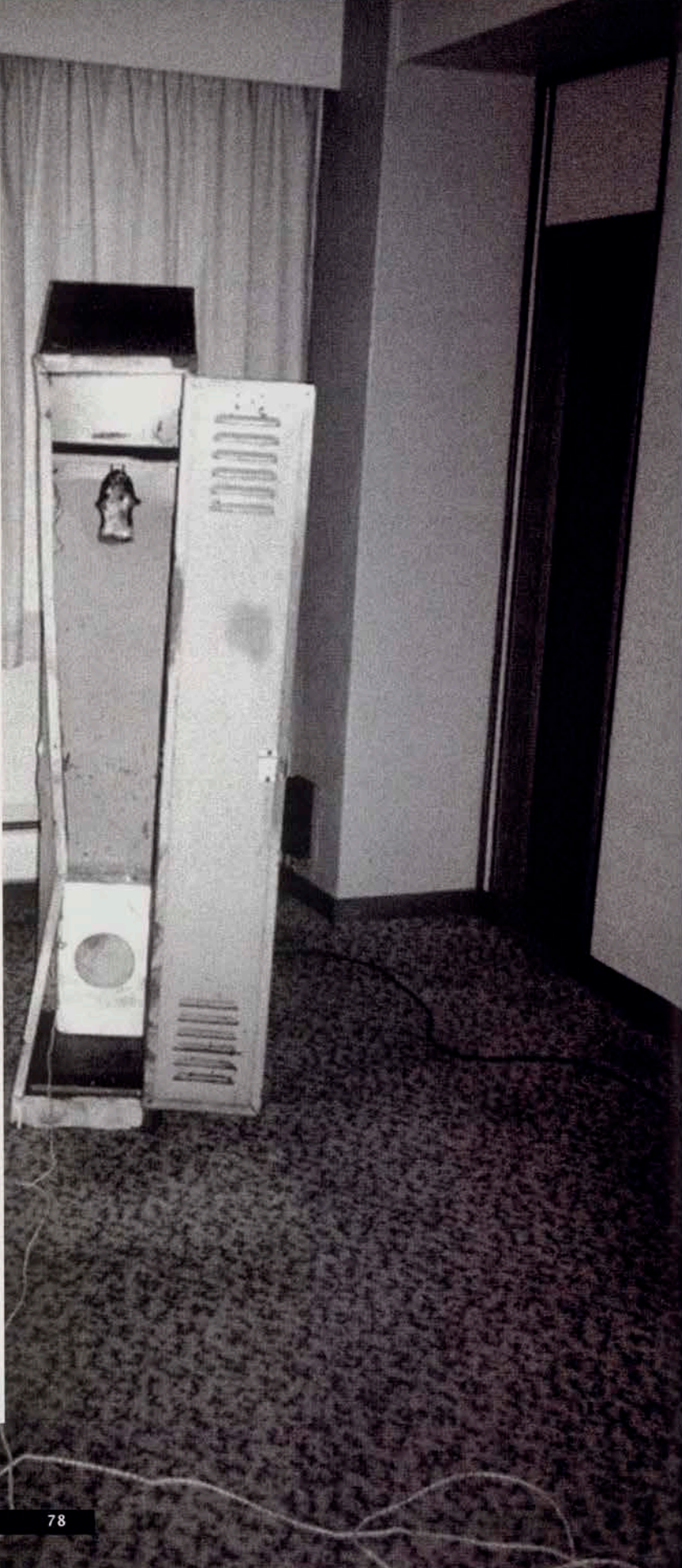
Works do not adhere to laws or formulas that dictate formal perfection

Marlene cubewell is included in the exhibition *Square deal* at Cubewell House, Wellington.

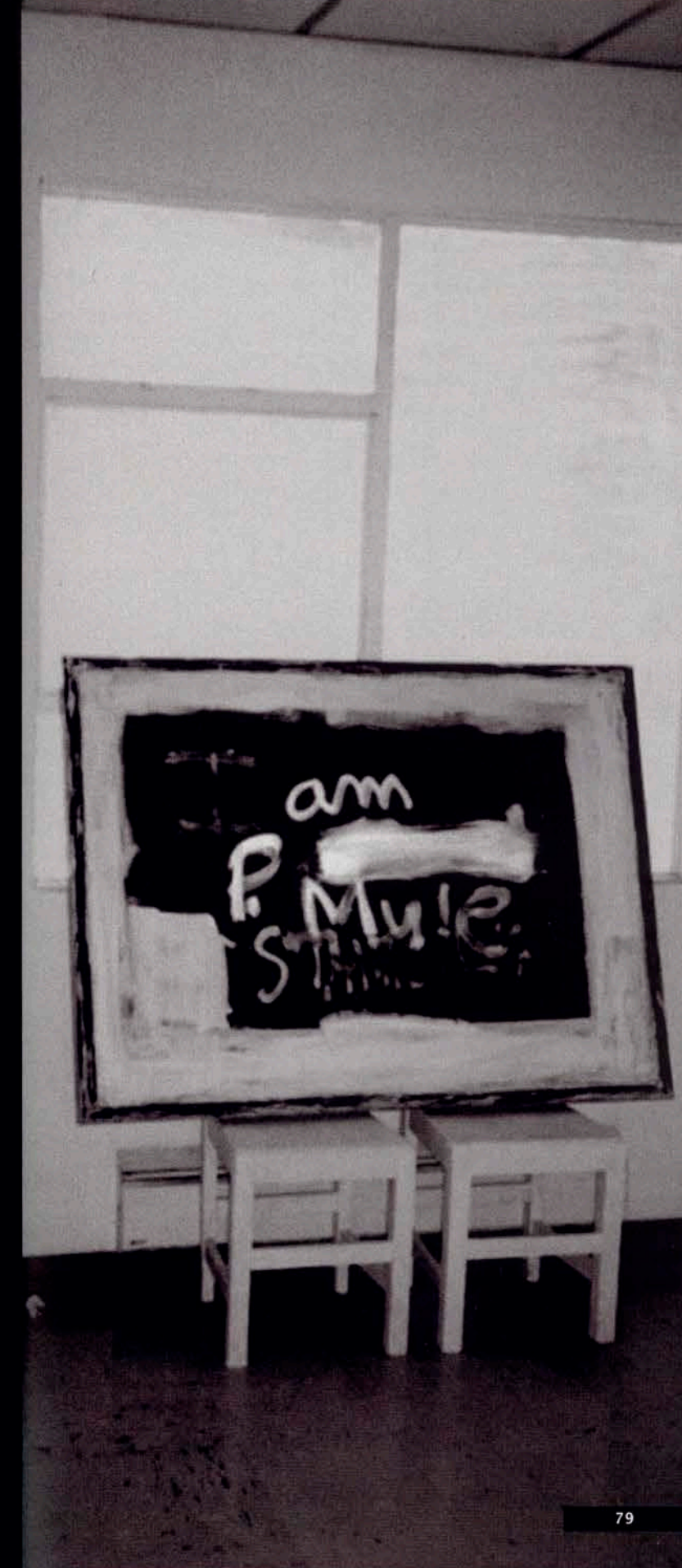
but rather to the exquisite imperfection of nature. The current show presents maggots in both indoor and outdoor settings.'

L budd is commissioned to design set and props for *Verbatim—a murderer and his victims speak*, a solo performance by Miranda Harcourt touring prisons, schools and theatre

L budd develops signage for the merit grötting exhibit at the Auckland



marlene cubewell
Locker and red shoe, 1993
Square deal
Cubewell House, Wellington



City Art Gallery.

originally conceived with eduard salmon in Auckland.

L budd is invited to exhibit in Lodz, Poland, by the Organising Committee of the Fourth Construction in Progress.

P mule hires minerva betts to do occasional secretarial and public relations work.

P mule's review *blanche ready-made*s published in the catalogue for *Gaining interest*, an exhibition held at Artspace in Auckland.

Blanche ready-made proposes the cover for *Poetry New Zealand 7*, published by Brick Row.

APRIL

P mule travels with Teststrip artists to Wellington. Paints and exhibits *i am p mule stand up for the After (after) McCahon: Refashioning the new* exhibition at Cubewell House, Wellington.

Merit grötting exhibits at the School of Fine Arts Gallery, University of Canterbury. Four heaters are installed and 'painted by students according to shoop's method with business cards affixed to sides of each heater'.

MAY

Buddholdings relocates to Christchurch in response to 'the recent and dramatic population drift south'.

P mule reviews the blanche ready-made exhibition at Cubewell House, a Teststrip Touring Show. Mule writes, 'blanche's random assemblage strip the readymade bare, relieving the tradition of the found object of a century's worth of theoretical baggage...'

Popular productions begins editing footage for a 16mm feature film

p mule, *i am p mule stand up*, 1993
After (after) McCahon
Cubewell House, Wellington
collection Jim Barr & Mary Barr

Popular productions displays the billboard *great, beautiful, wonderful wide world of marlene cubewell and william brightly rands* in *Changing signs*, a billboard project curated for Artspace, Auckland, by Derrick Cherrie. The billboard depicts merit gröting reclining on Peter McLeavey's chaise longue, an early blonding project undertaken in 1992.

AUGUST

P mule, blanche ready-made and l budd exhibit in *Group show* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington. The exhibition is reviewed by Philip Matthews who notes that, 'Finally, we have to ask: can you be original? l (budd), with typical ambiguity, answers the question with a question. "what is originality? That's the question I'm interested in. I would hesitate at an answer".'

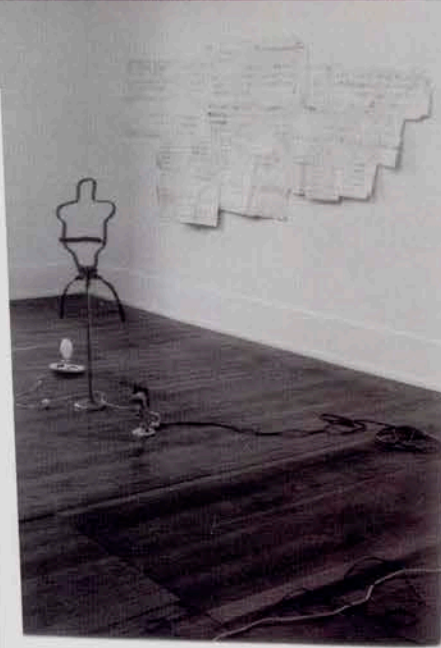
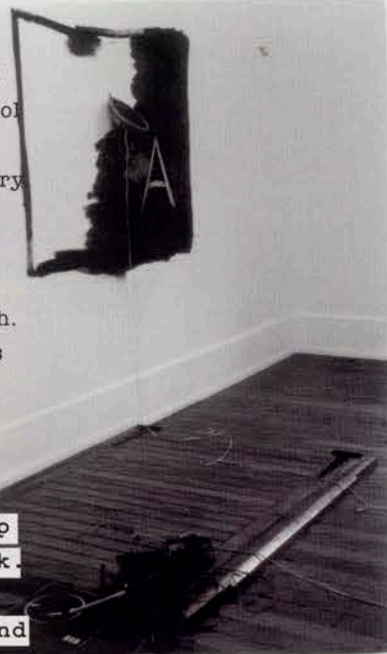
Blanche ready-made collaborates with musician p void and

exhibits *epicene sound works fig 1* at the School of Fine Arts Gallery, University of Canterbury. *epicene sound works fig 2* is installed at the Jonathan Jenson Gallery in Christchurch. P mule writes, 'It is precisely this "noisiness" of presentational strategies that form the backdrop to blanche's work. Of course her sculptures can and do exist outside the exhibition space, but outside it they appear mute.'

Blanche ready-made is awarded a Visual Art Fellowship by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

Popular productions presents *epicéne* with Schubert's *Standchen* performed by p void. The 16mm film is conceived and produced by minerva betts and eduard salmon. The premiere is held at the Clock Tower Theatre at the Christchurch Arts Centre. Regrettably, eduard salmon is

blanche ready-made and p.void *epicene sound works fig.1 and 2*, 1993 (installation details) Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch



overseas and unable to attend the premiere.

a gallery in Berlin, Germany.

SEPTEMBER

L budd travels to Poland to install work for *Construction in process*

IV: My home is your home at The International Artists' Museum in Lodz.

L budd works on heating system installations in Lodz, Poland.

NOVEMBER

L budd is funded for study at the Goethe Institut in Berlin, Germany.

L budd copies a St Joan d'Arc poster in a photo booth at the Zoolischer Garten in Berlin, Germany.

P mule's installation *seed* is on view at the National Mutual Admiration Society Gallery in Wellington.

DECEMBER

P mule announces an intention to open

1994

MARCH

Buddholdings purchases German books in Berlin for use in artworks. Budd writes to p mule (Berlin, 10:30 A.M.) 'at this particular time of the evening I have never been in a similar situation.'

L budd reads Derrida in Berlin, Germany.

Buddholdings (northern branch) participates in a *New work* exhibition at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

APRIL

Lionel b, p mule and merit gröting travel to Mexico, Belize and the United States (including the island of Maui in Hawaii) to gain further understanding of the modalities of the unconscious.

l budd, *construction in process IV: my home is your home*, 1993 (installation details) Lodz, Poland



Buddholdings sends a suitcase of artworks to the Jonathan Smart Gallery in Christchurch, Wellington for the *budd in berlin* exhibition.

NOVEMBER

A visit with the artists is published by Pataphysics. The publication is an extended interview with 1 budd and other members of the group budd et al. by Sylvere Lotringer.

JUNE

The blanche ready-made members rent temporary studio facilities in Thorndike, Maine, United States.

The *there you have it: budd in berlin* exhibition, presented by Cubism, opens at the National Mutual Admiration Society Gallery in Wellington. Visitors are advised to 'Be there or be square'.

DECEMBER

budd wiser: direct from the usa, works from the budd group, are exhibited at Teststrip Gallery in Auckland. L budd returns to New Zealand.

JULY

The budd group exhibits *budd abroad: world news* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

MARCH

Budd special projects division in association with George Hubbard installs *yeah budd* at the CBD Gallery in Sydney, Australia.

AUGUST

Buddholdings presents *bridging matter: the artist re-calling mallarmé and the spoken word*

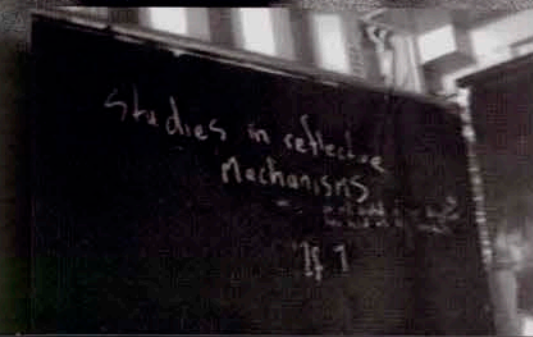
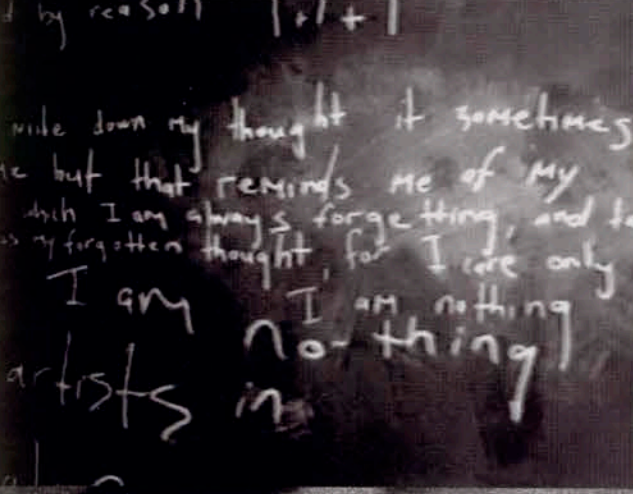
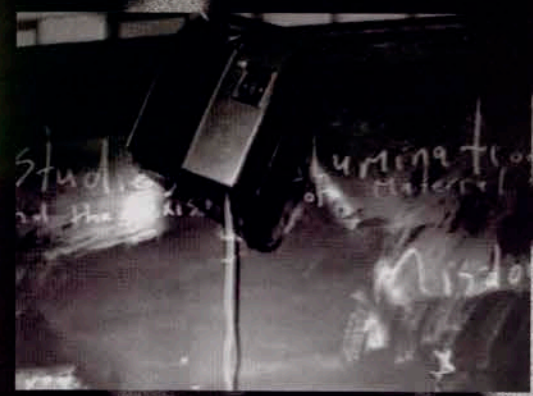
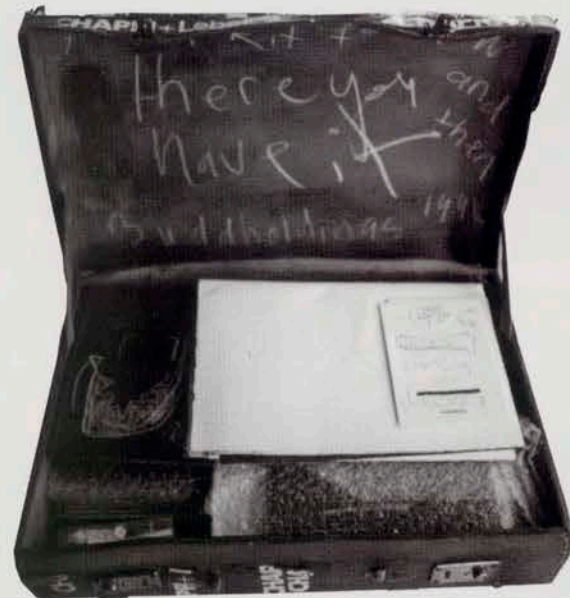
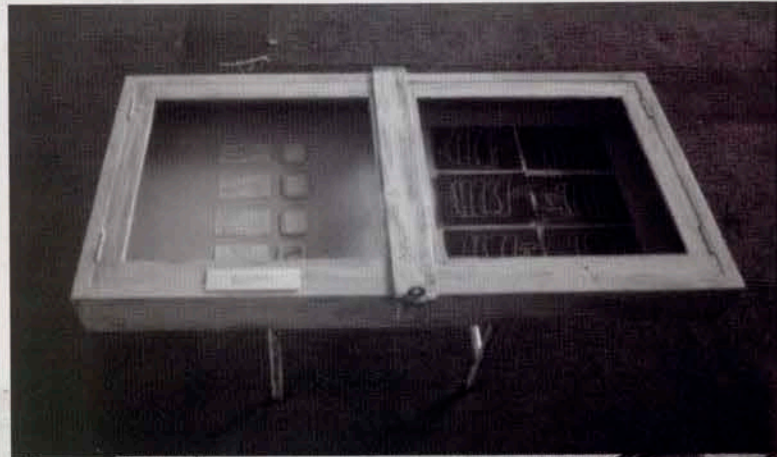
Budd special projects division participates in the exhibition *Recent*

background image: buddholdings, *bridging matter: the artists recalling mallarmé and the spoken word*, 1994 (installation detail)

buddholdings, *there you have it: budd in berlin*, 1994 (installation detail) National Mutual Bldg, Wellington collection Helene Quilter

blanche ready-made trust's studio in Thorndike Maine, United States, 1994

1 budd, *there you have it: budd in berlin*, 1994 (exhibition as delivered from Berlin)



sculptecture: horribly desirable at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

96: art across the oceans, at the South Australia Maritime Museum, in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival 1996.

MAY

Budd special projects division in association with George Hubbard presents *Play it again budd* with p void at Artspace in Auckland.

MAY

L budd travels to Copenhagen, Denmark, to install *untitled b for Container 96: Art across the oceans*.

JULY

L budd et al. exhibit *the artists in conversation with themselves* at 23A Gallery in Auckland.

JULY

L budd et al. exhibit *studies of illumination* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington. A new 1 budd catalogue is launched at the opening.

1996

Popular productions screens *the wanting heart* as part of *Interdigitate*, Aotea Centre in Auckland.

Merit grötting, p mule, 1 budd, blanche ready-made and c j [arthur] craig and sons exhibit *group show* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

MARCH

L budd installs *new work* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

AUGUST

L budd and G Treadgold install *critical mass* at the Teststrip Gallery in Auckland.

L budd travels to Adelaide for a preparatory installation *untitled a for Container*

1 budd, *untitled*, 1996 (installation details) *Container '96: Art across the oceans* Australia Maritime Museum, Adelaide

Lionel b, in collaboration with G Treadgold and Eugene Hansen, installs *te kore* at 23A Gallery in Auckland. T. J. McNamara, *New Zealand Herald* art critic, perceptively reviews *te kore* as the 'Exhibition from hell... broad, smooth, easy, inoffensive down to Hell... this is Duchamp's ready-mades gone crazy and without any philosophical or artistic point'. He also grimly continued to describe the exhibition as 'inoffensive... larded with politically correct Maori tags'.

L budd and G Treadgold install *the visible that was at Jonathan Smart Gallery* in Christchurch.

SEPTEMBER

B schindler, art activist, joins et al. from Berlin, Germany, for an extended period as technical and sound assistant for the group.

1997

P mule is photographed for shooting gallery in *Monica reviews art 'On vacation'*, summer 1997.

L budd installs *blind works* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

L budd et al. present the *voice of the silence* at the New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery. The catalogue contains an extended interview between l budd and florian merkel.

L budd curates an exhibition of lionel b's work *the unity of appearance* at The Physics Room in Christchurch. The decibel levels of the audio work require the exhibition to open outside trading hours owing to retailers' concerns.

L budd produces the video work *lionel's reminiscences on penis envy and land issues* for Peter Robinson's Kastle Gallery in Christchurch.

l budd, *the voice of the silence*, 1997, (installation detail)
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki



M walls and lionel b present *of actual things* at the Jonathan Smart Gallery in Christchurch.

L budd pascal's *Journal of New Zealand Art* cover page is published in David Carson's book *2ndsight*.

1998

L budd installs and exhibits *locker #149 for Verbatim in Fragments—out of the dark*, Theatre Arts Design in Wellington.

Buddholdings as l budd et al. opens new premises on the corner of East Street and Karangahape Road, Auckland.

P mule releases *metal folding picnic table*, in an edition of two hundred, engraved with the caption

'each of you in secret has kissed my filthy ass'.

Lionel b exhibits in *lift space*, High Street Gallery in Christchurch.

AFTER OCTOBER

Blanche ready-made trust meets with René Block to co-ordinate an l budd installation at the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany.

L budd et al. install *studies for existence* at the Ivan Anthony Gallery in Auckland.

Lionel b travels to Australia to install work for *Close quarters: contemporary art from Australia and New Zealand*, a touring New Zealand/Australian

exhibition opening at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne.

Minerva betts's photograph of a colander from the blanche ready-made trust is exhibited in *Folklore: The New Zealanders* at Artspace in Auckland.

1999

JANUARY

L budd et al. travel to Germany to install

l budd, *Locker #149*, 1999
studio, Auckland

work at the TOI TOI TOI exhibition at the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany.

three decibels of tolerance for a working day without ear muffs.



FEBRUARY

Lionel b installs in L budd installs new work the *Matters of logic* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

Lionel b installs in exhibition at the Ramp Gallery in Hamilton.

APRIL

Lionel b is interviewed by Florian M. The interview is published in the catalogue of the exhibition at the George Fraser Gallery in Auckland, *The body inscribed* curated by Sandra Chesterman and Carole Shephard.

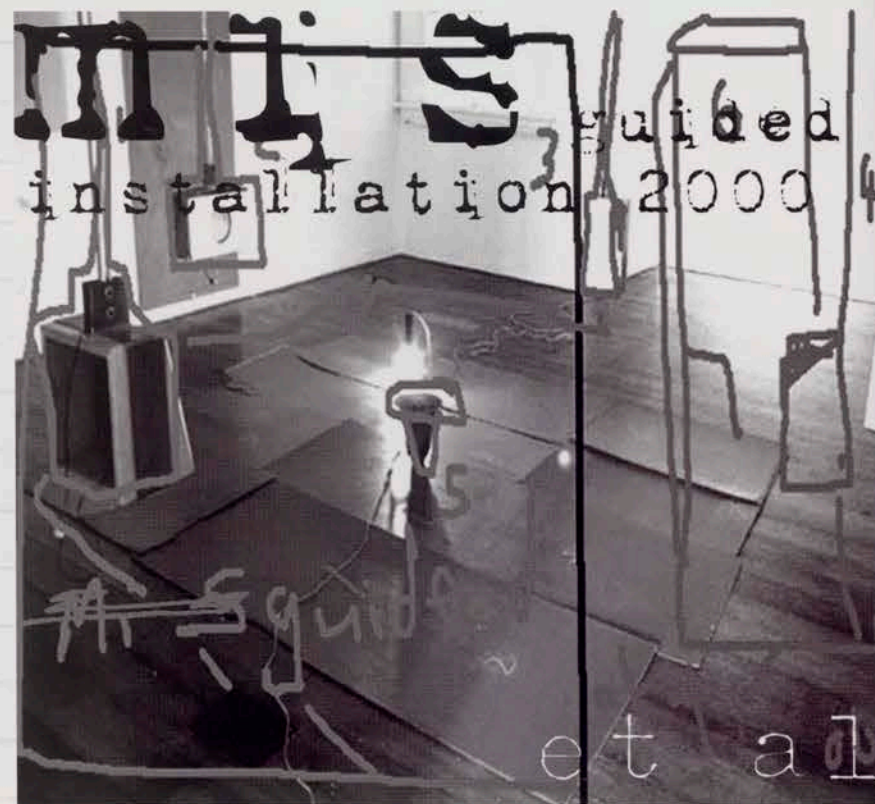
SEPTEMBER

Budd and Malone present *undisclosed things* at the Ivan Anthony Gallery in Auckland. L budd is assisted by m painter (US) and t-robb (AUS).



L budd re-installs *studies for existence* in Auckland Art Gallery's tower stairwell for the exhibition TOI TOI TOI. Permission is granted by the Historic Places Trust for the use of the stairwell previously closed for public egress. Sound levels in the installation are monitored by the Auckland City Council and found to be within

L budd et al. exhibit a new iteration of *great, beautiful, wonderful wide world marlene cubewell and william brightly rands* at the Artspace, Auckland, exhibition *Who do I think I am*. The work includes a Marcel Duchamp voice-over



top images : l budd and d malone *undisclosed things*, 1999 (installation details) Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland

lower image : l budd, *misguided*, 1999 (installation detail) Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington collection Te Papa Tongarewa text overlay by et al.

discussing contemporary art practice.

Popular productions presents *epicene* (excerpt) 1999 and *studies 1999* in re-WORKED, a video exhibition at the Film Centre in Wellington.

L budd exhibits *here - there in Fear and beauty* at the Suter Gallery in Nelson.

'l budd has produced many versions of an uncomfortable sublime,' curator Allan Smith notes in the catalogue.

NOVEMBER

L budd et al. install *misguided* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

DECEMBER

L budd installs *studies for existence* at the Jonathan Smart Gallery in Christchurch.

Lionel b is invited by the Auckland Art Gallery to re-install *studies for existence fig. 1* as part

of the *Close quarters: Contemporary art from Australia and New Zealand* exhibition (tour concludes Auckland Art Gallery January 2000).

Lionel b installs *studies for existence fig. 2*, a site-specific variant of *fig. 1* (installed at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne, Australia in 1998)

2000

JANUARY

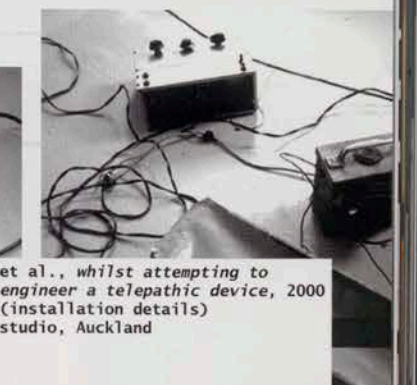
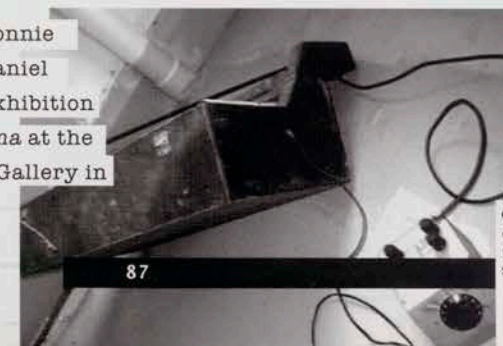
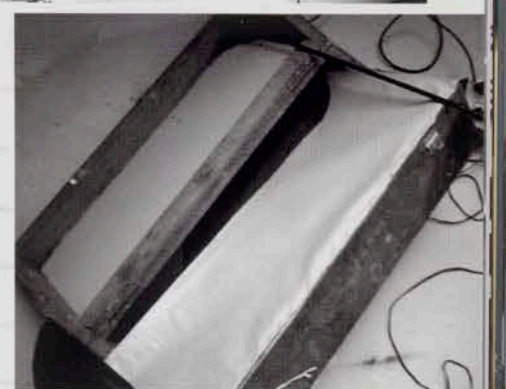
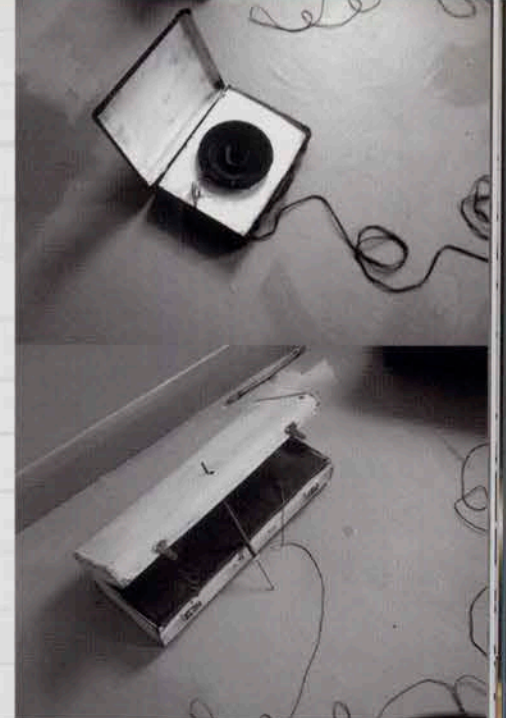
P mule investigates U.S. farming operatives and models for thought reform, returning in February of the same year.

MARCH

Et al. install *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic exchange* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

AUGUST ONWARDS

Lionel b joins Ronnie van Hout and Daniel Malone in the exhibition *Spaghetti dharma* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.



et al., *whilst attempting to engineer a telepathic device*, 2000 (installation details) studio, Auckland

Et al. install *bad dreams* is marked upon a door: "Enter Here" the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington.

Et al. install *simultaneous invalidations, first attempt* in *In glorious dreams* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth

Et al. technical and sound advisor b schindler is detained by the New Zealand Immigration Service. With no grounds for appeal, b schindler is extradited within six days.

L budd et al. exhibit *view, the artist in conversation and sticky label* in *Alive: Still life into the twenty-first century* at the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington.

P mule designs and programs animation software for *o studies*, the project takes mule six months.

MAY

Doctor p mule is appointed to the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland.

JULY

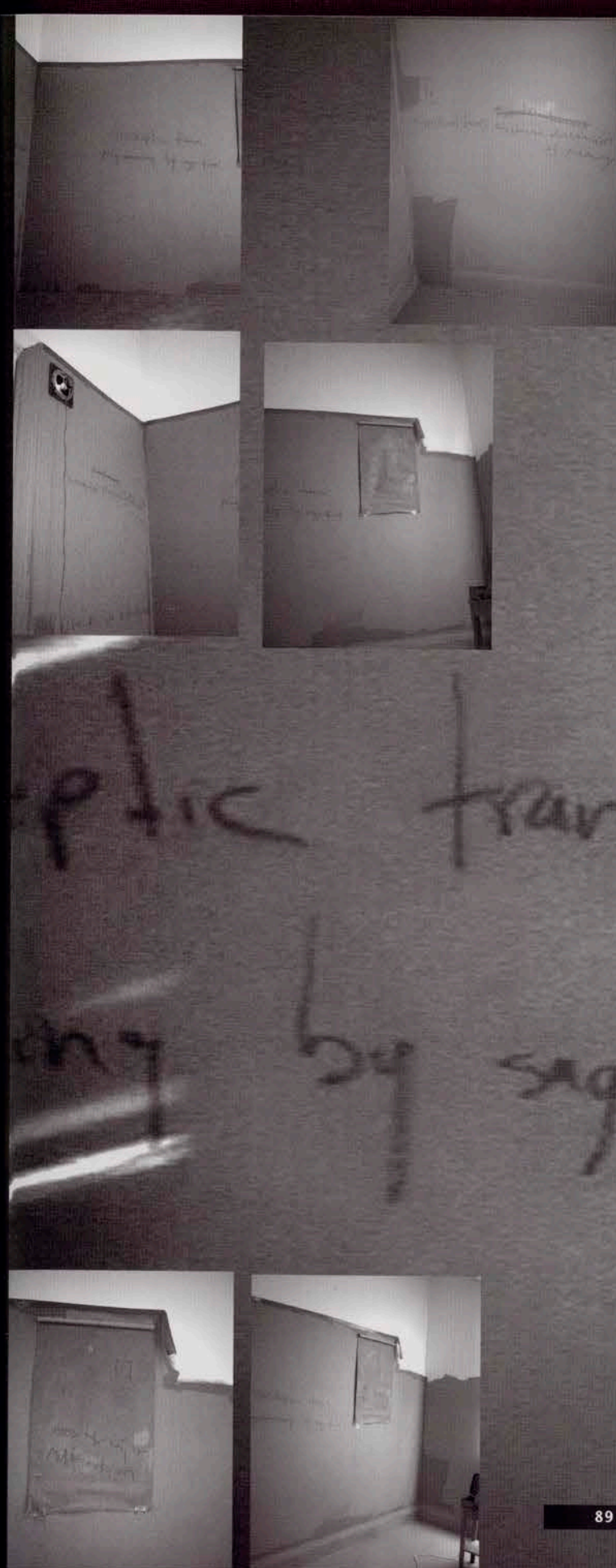
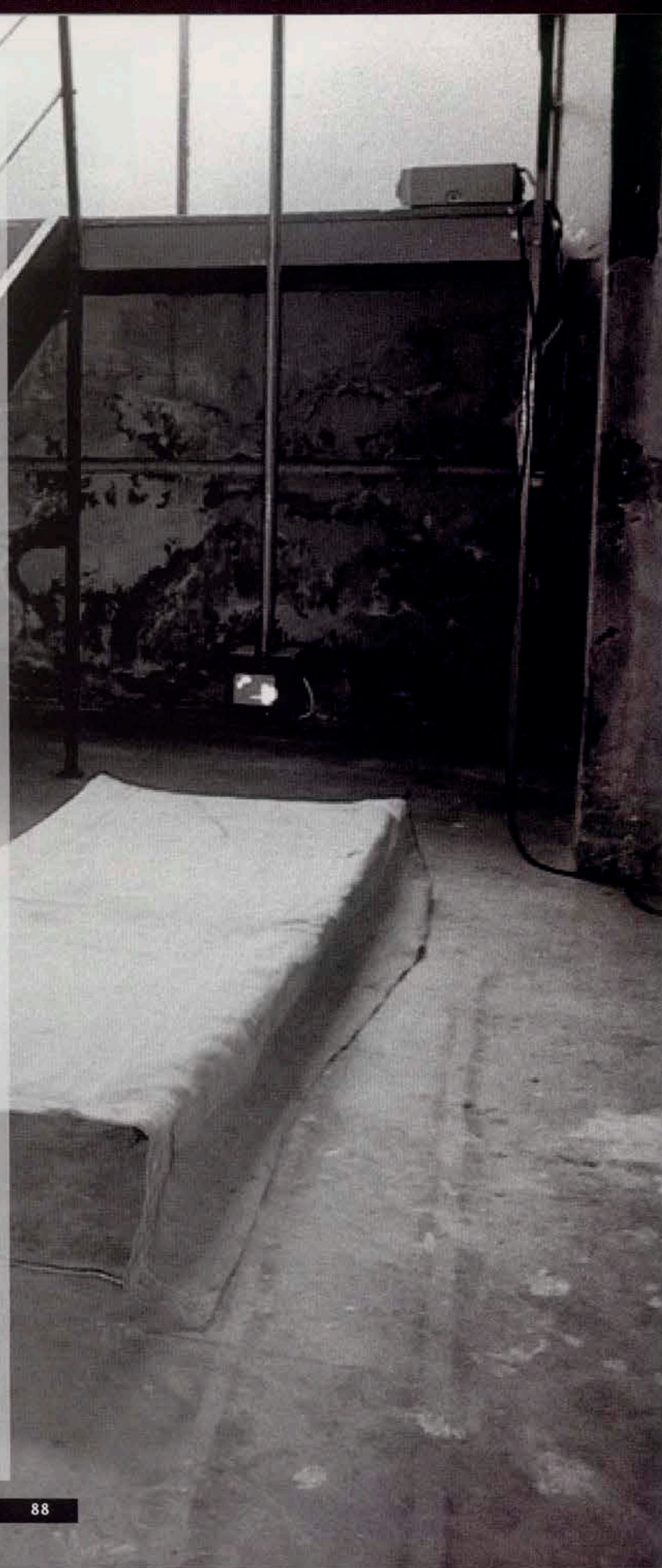
Et al. travel to Christchurch to reconfigure *simultaneous invalidations, second attempt* in an installation presented by the Jonathan

2001

FEBRUARY

Et al. install *simultaneous invalidations, second attempt* at Artspace in Auckland. Artist Ian John Hutchinson notes in *Log Illustrated* that the installation can be read as a 'partial description of a some-place. For all newcomers, who must come, a way

et al., *simultaneous invalidations: second attempt, 2001* (installation detail) Annexe basement, Christchurch Arts Centre



Smart Gallery and the University of Canterbury Department of Theatre and Film.

2002

JANUARY

Et al. members install *o studies* at Starkwhite in Auckland.

AUGUST

L budd exhibits *a rose is a rose is a rose* in *Botanica* at the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington.

P mule consults with the NZDF to initiate ongoing collaboration on thought reform project work (TRPW).

Et al. are included in the exhibition *High anxiety* at the Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington.

MAY

Et al. are included in *The big bang theory: Recent Chartwell acquisitions* at the New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery in Auckland. Et al. is quoted as saying '... "someone asked how long will it take" O said "no time at all" '.

SEPTEMBER

Et al. install *pseudonym project artichoke* at the Ivan Anthony Gallery in Auckland.

NOVEMBER

Et al. works featured in the exhibition *Good work* at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery include *sticky label* and *forgive descartes*. The exhibition travels to the City Gallery in Wellington.

JUNE

Lionel b consults for the blanche ready-made trust in the European Union including Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Berlin, Germany, to develop a future programme.

et al., *pseudonym artichoke project, 2001* (installation details) Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland

Approaches to re-education
 The 4 e's
 1. coercion
 2. extortion
 3. therapy
 4. re-equilibration

Et al. members end their affiliation with the Ivan Anthony Gallery in Auckland.

Et al. members relocate premises to Achilles House, on the corner of Customs Street and Commerce Street, Auckland.

2003

JANUARY

Et al. install *serial_reform_713L* as trial run at Starkwhite in Auckland for five days to assess software performance before moving south.

Et al. travel to Christchurch to install *serial_reform_713L* as part of a two part collaborative exchange project *The wanderer* curated by Mark Kremer (Amsterdam)

and Ewen McDonald (Sydney) at the School of Fine Arts Gallery, University of Canterbury.

MAY

Et al. exhibit *o studies* in the exhibition *Arcadia* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth

JULY

Et al. exhibit works in *abnormal mass delusions?* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth. The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *arguments for immortality*.

SEPTEMBER

Et al. works are featured in *Nine lives: The Chartwell exhibition 2003* at the New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery curated by Robert Leonard

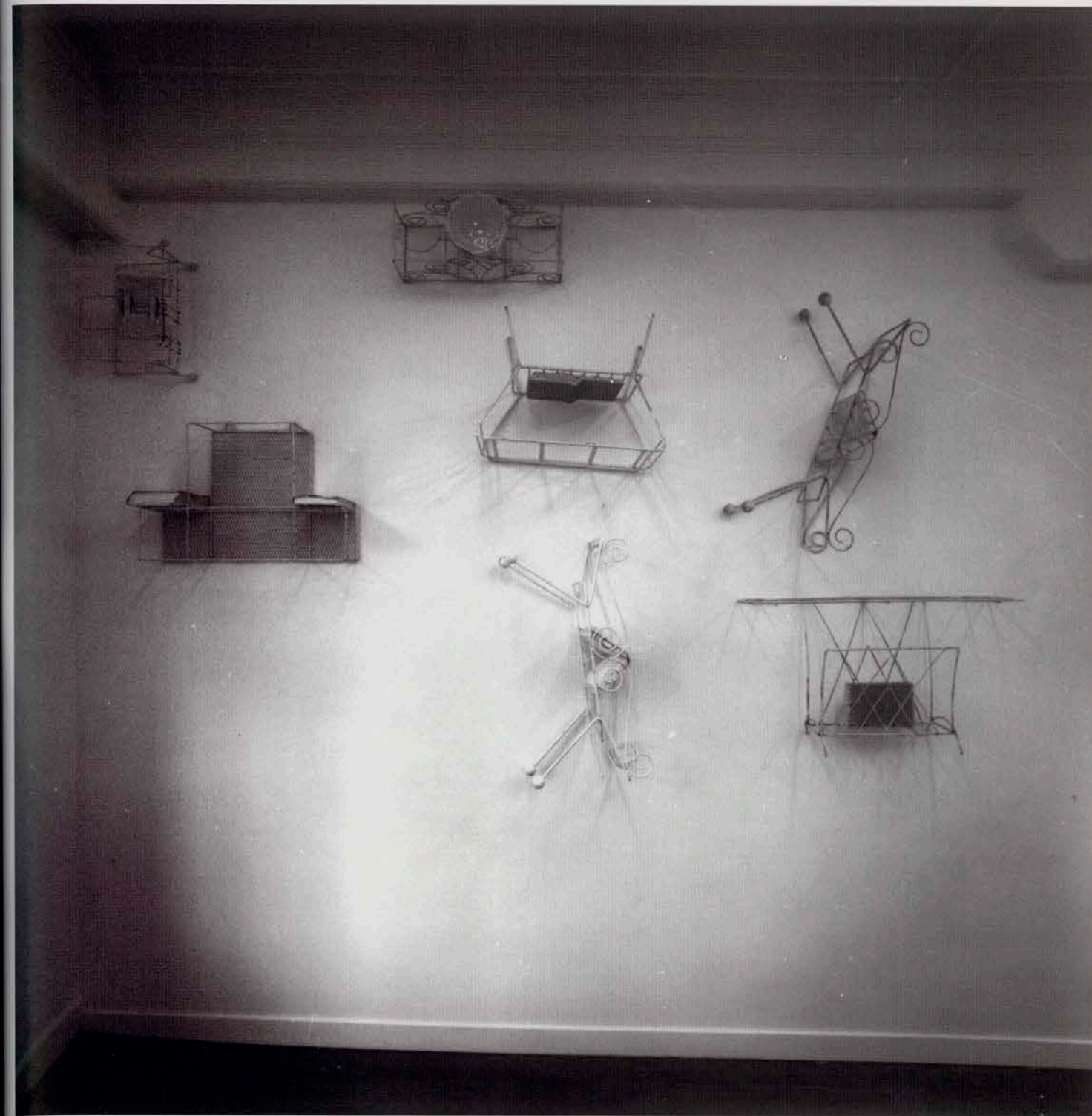
et al., *serial_reform_713L*, 2003 (detail), studio, Auckland

PLATES



0092

et al., *simultaneous invalidations: second attempt*, 2001, (installation detail), Christchurch Arts Centre



c j [arthur] craig and sons, *modern arrangements*, 1991, collection blanche ready-made trust
Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland

0093

OST EXCITING UNIQUE FILMS OF THE YEAR" THE WORLD'S FINEST AT A CINEMA NEAR YOU FROM NOV 13

Direction, Artspace and Q&A Arts Council for Popular Productions

ene Cubewell // and William Brightly



de,
AT, beautiful, wonderful world

Blanche Ready-Made

Like many post-Minimalist sculptors who emerged in the '70s, *Blanche* takes abstract forms as a point of departure, creating sculptures rich with metaphoric associations and symbolic content. ~~Her~~ works do not adhere to laws or formulas that dictate formal perfection, but rather to the exquisite imperfection of nature. At the same time, they are not abstracted from nature, but renatured abstractions. The power of *R-M's* sculpture comes from its participation in the world, and

its relatedness to the environment in which it is seen.

~~The artist's work in the early 70s... that transformed... into 70s and... make smaller void... powerful despite... few... has expanded vocabulary to include *Maggots*. As a result, color and surface texture have become more important in recent sculptures, making them more subtly compelling and accessible.~~

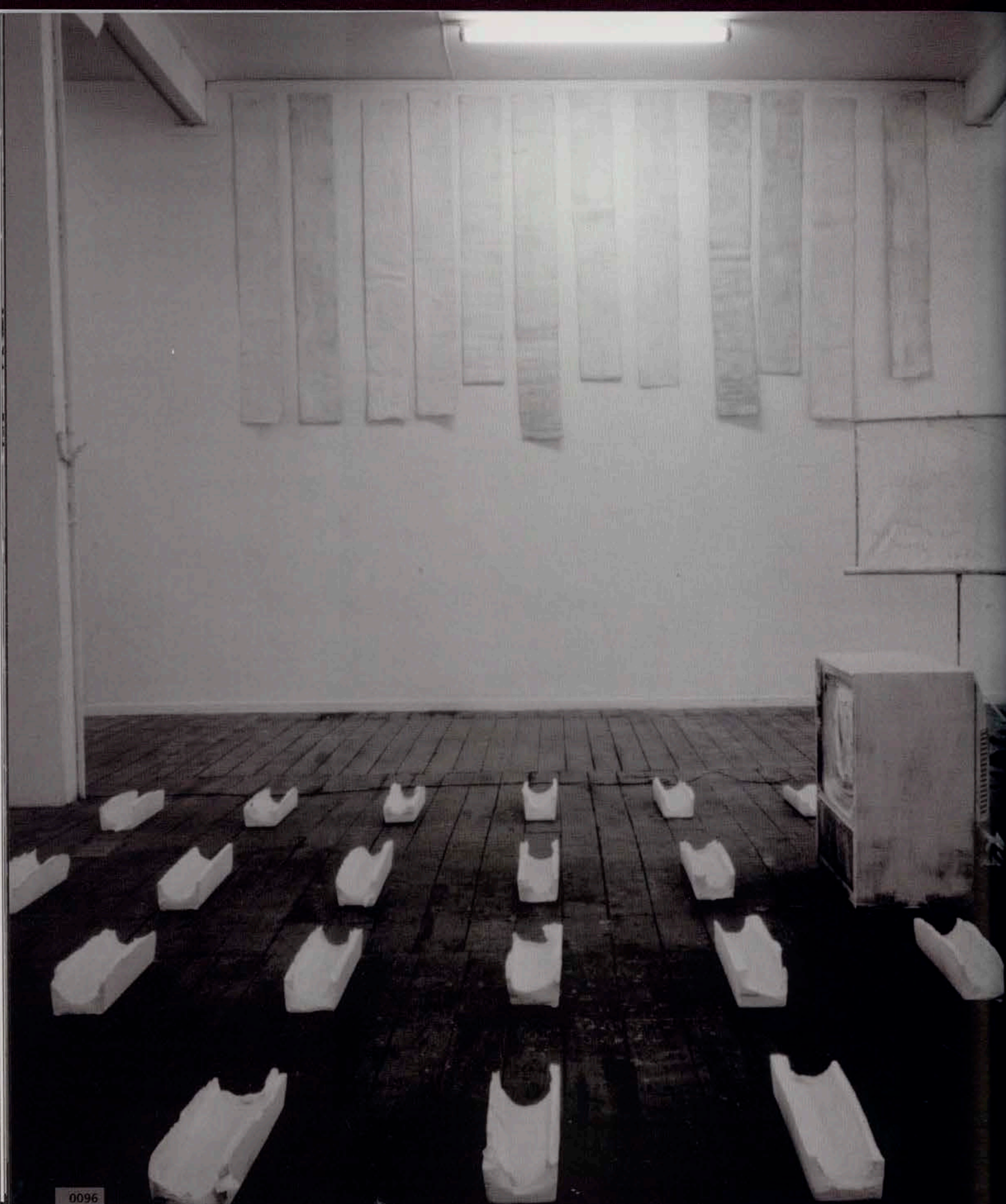
The current show presents *Maggots* ~~in both indoor and outdoor settings. It ably demonstrates a refinement of ability to make sculptures that interact with both~~

nor pure abstractions ~~hover~~ somewhere most impressive of those in which the surface of the *Pink & White* is as important as the *Maggot* has allowed both to evolve naturally, thus

~~Despite Minimalism, these objects exude a quiet~~

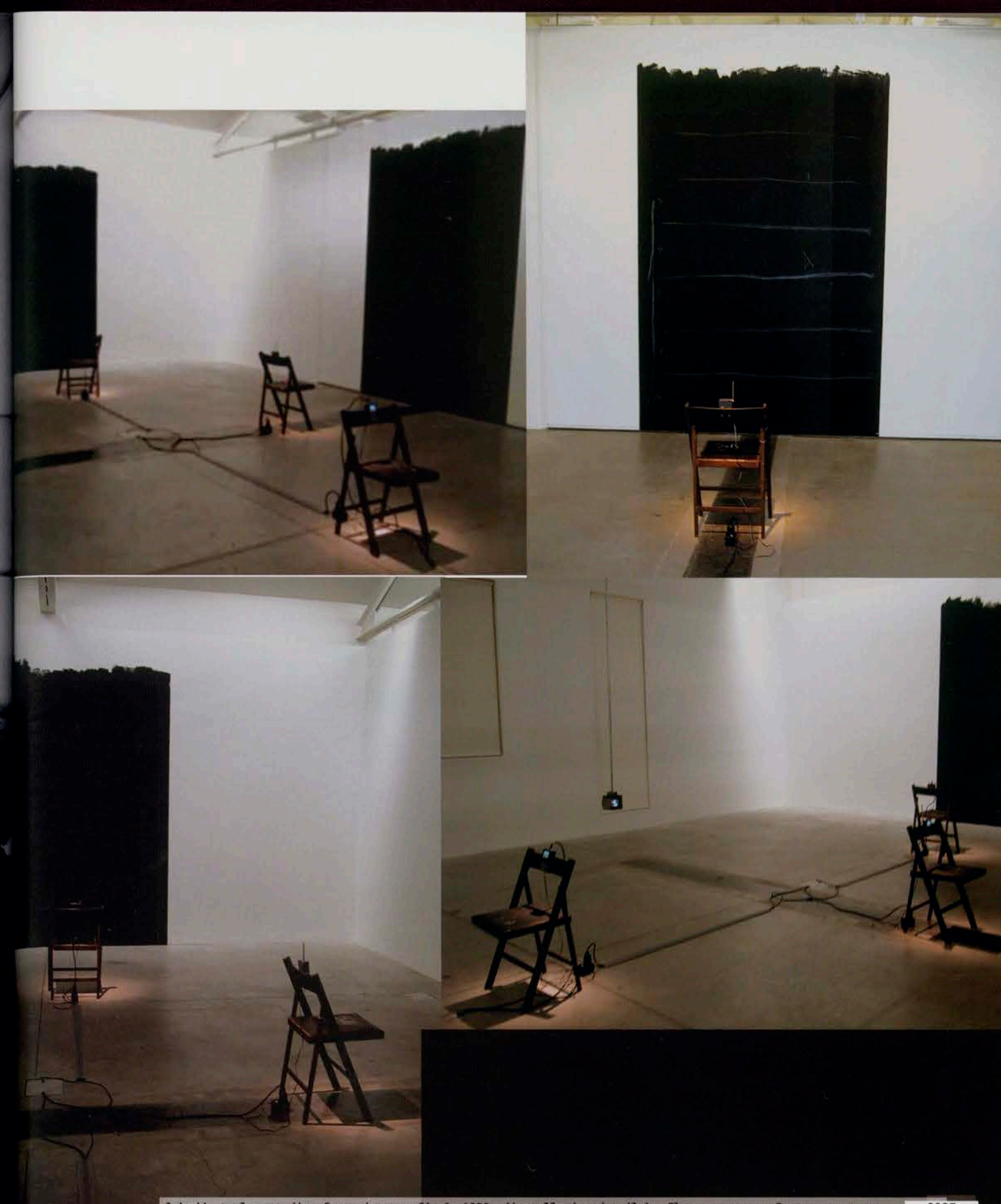
The eight larger *Maggot* (all 1983) that occupy the grounds are the most. Each one is engaged with its surroundings, with a sense of disruption. The *Maggot* to frame these sculptures has been revealed and re-revealed. *Pink* relates to a nearby placement and

~~While *Blanche's* effect here the color~~



0096

merit grötting and Deborah Smith, *smith and grötting*, 1992, (installation detail), Artspace, Auckland



1 budd et al., *studies for existence fig 1*, 1998, (installation details), *Close quarters: Contemporary art from Australia and New Zealand*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

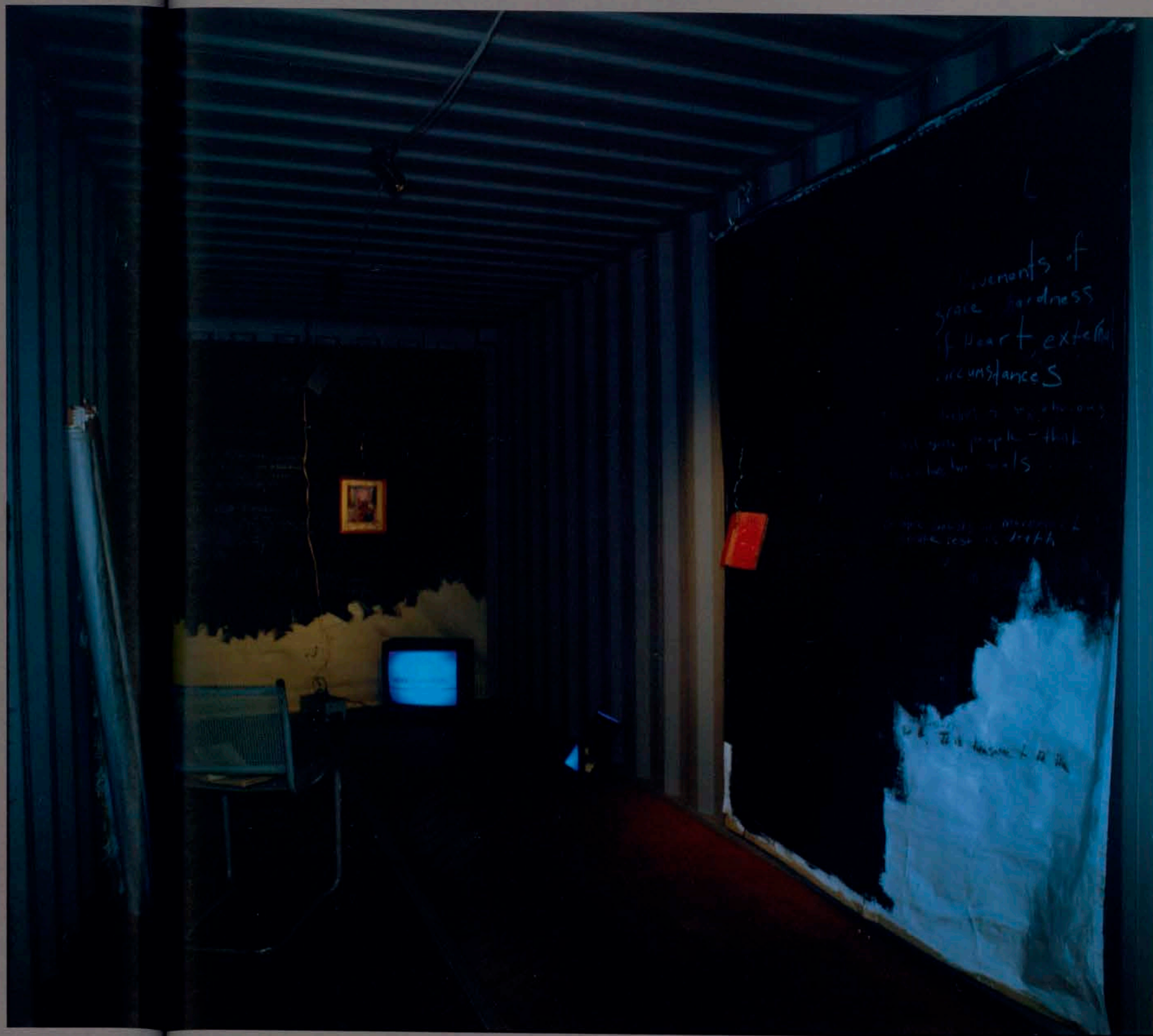
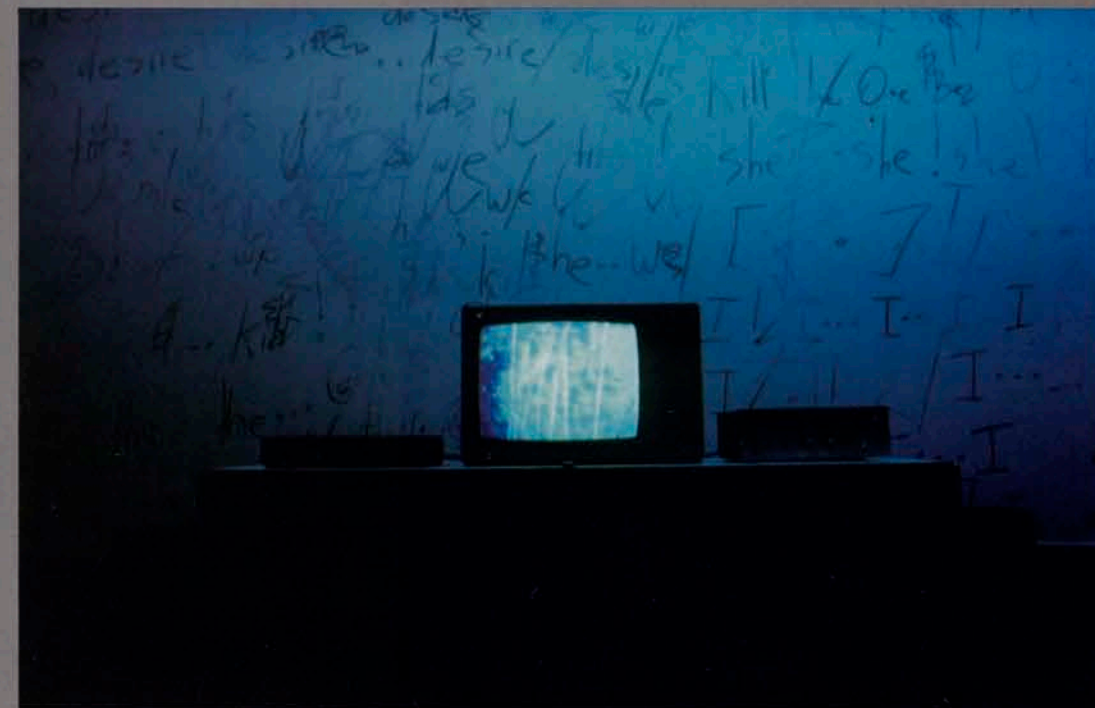
0097



0098 This page and opposite top left: I budd et al., *studies for existence fig. 2*, 1998, (installation detail)
TOI TOI TOI: Three generations of artists from New Zealand, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 1999, photographer: Jennifer French, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

I budd, *the voice of the silence*, 1997, (installation details), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
photography: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki





00102

et al., *simultaneous invalidations: second attempt*, 2001, (installation detail), Artspace, Auckland
lillian budd, *source (origin and exclusion)*, 1987, (installation detail)
Sex and Sign, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

lillian budd, *untitled b*, 1996, (installation detail)
Container 96: Art across the oceans, Langelie Quay, Copenhagen, Denmark

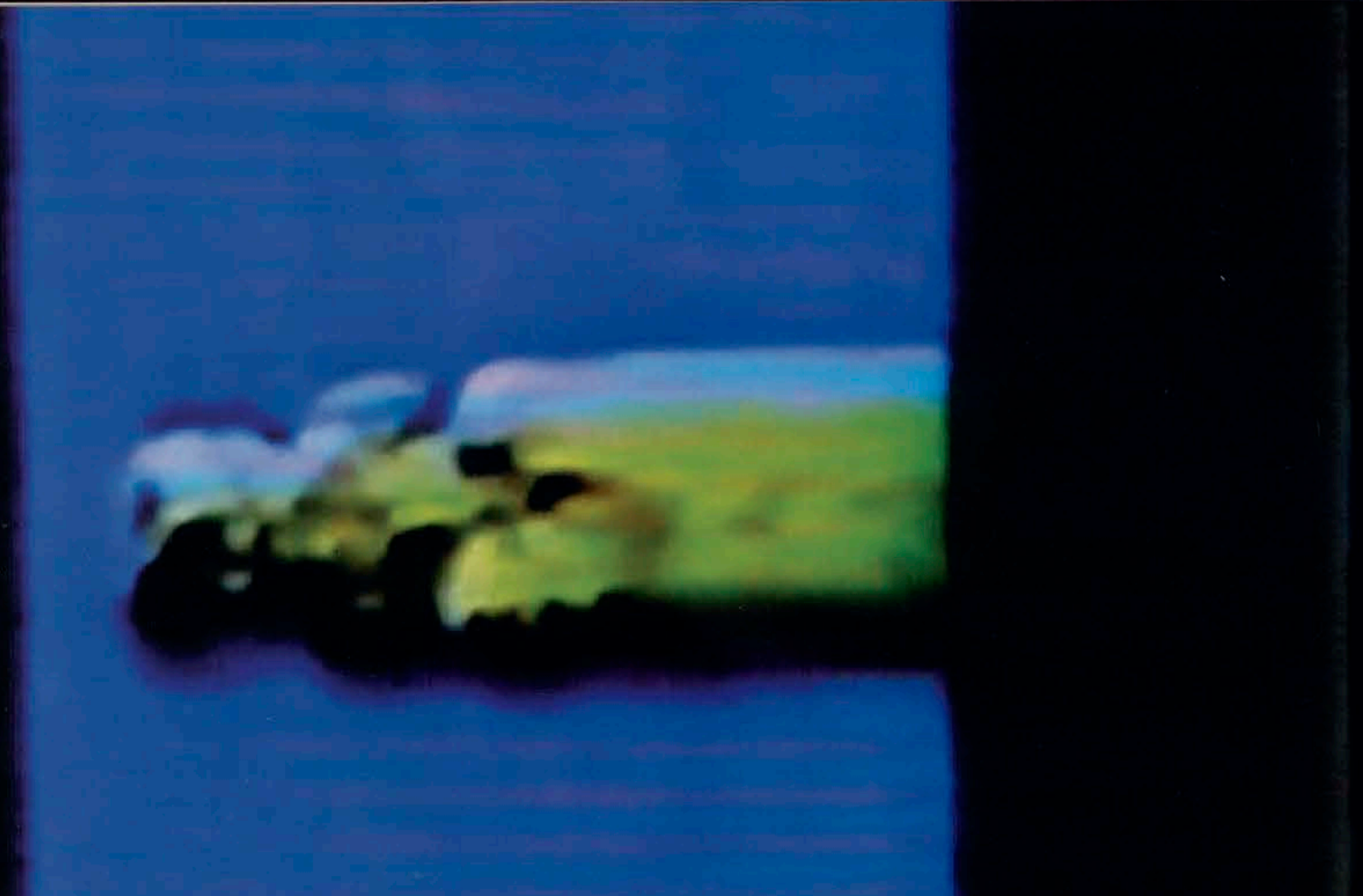
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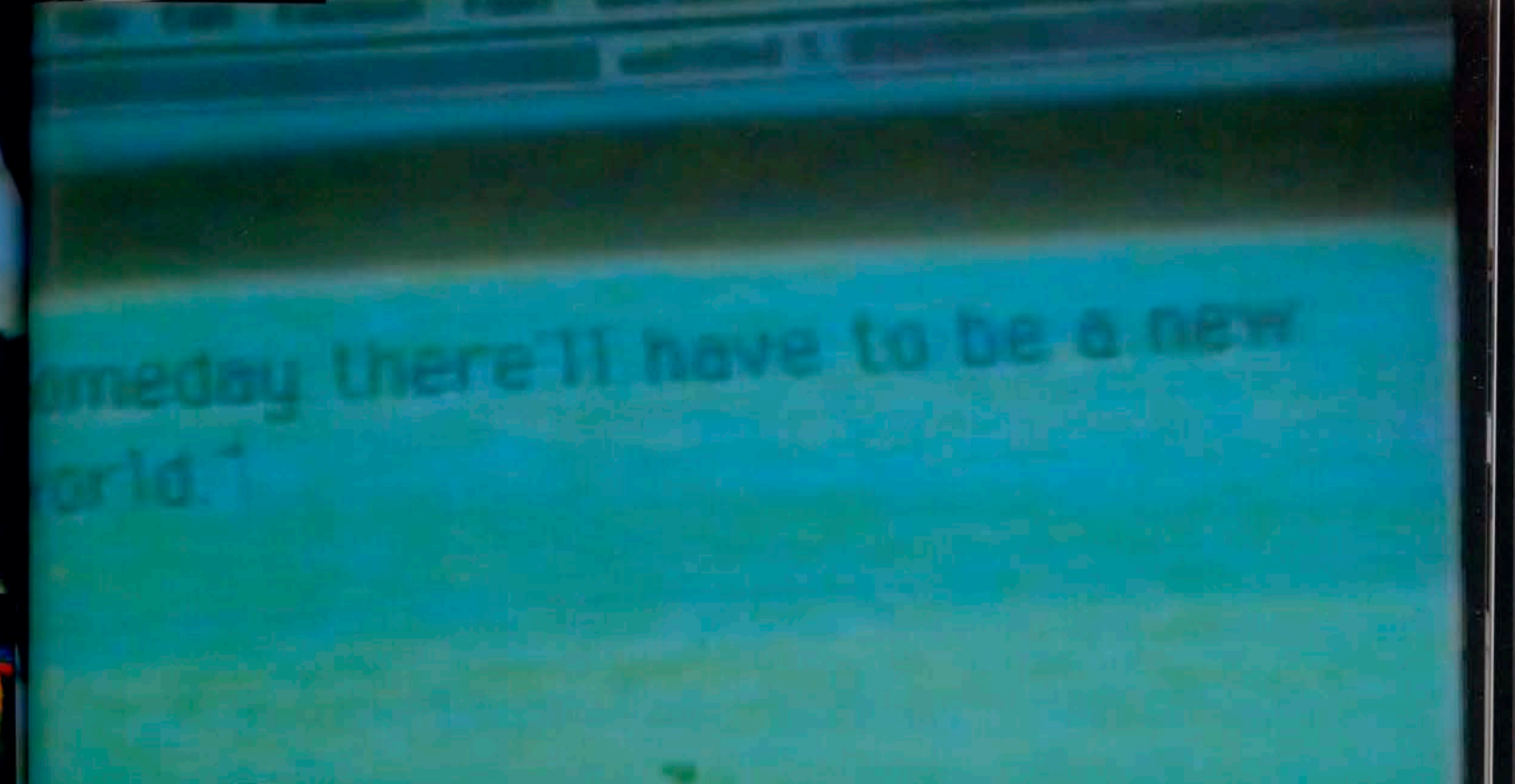
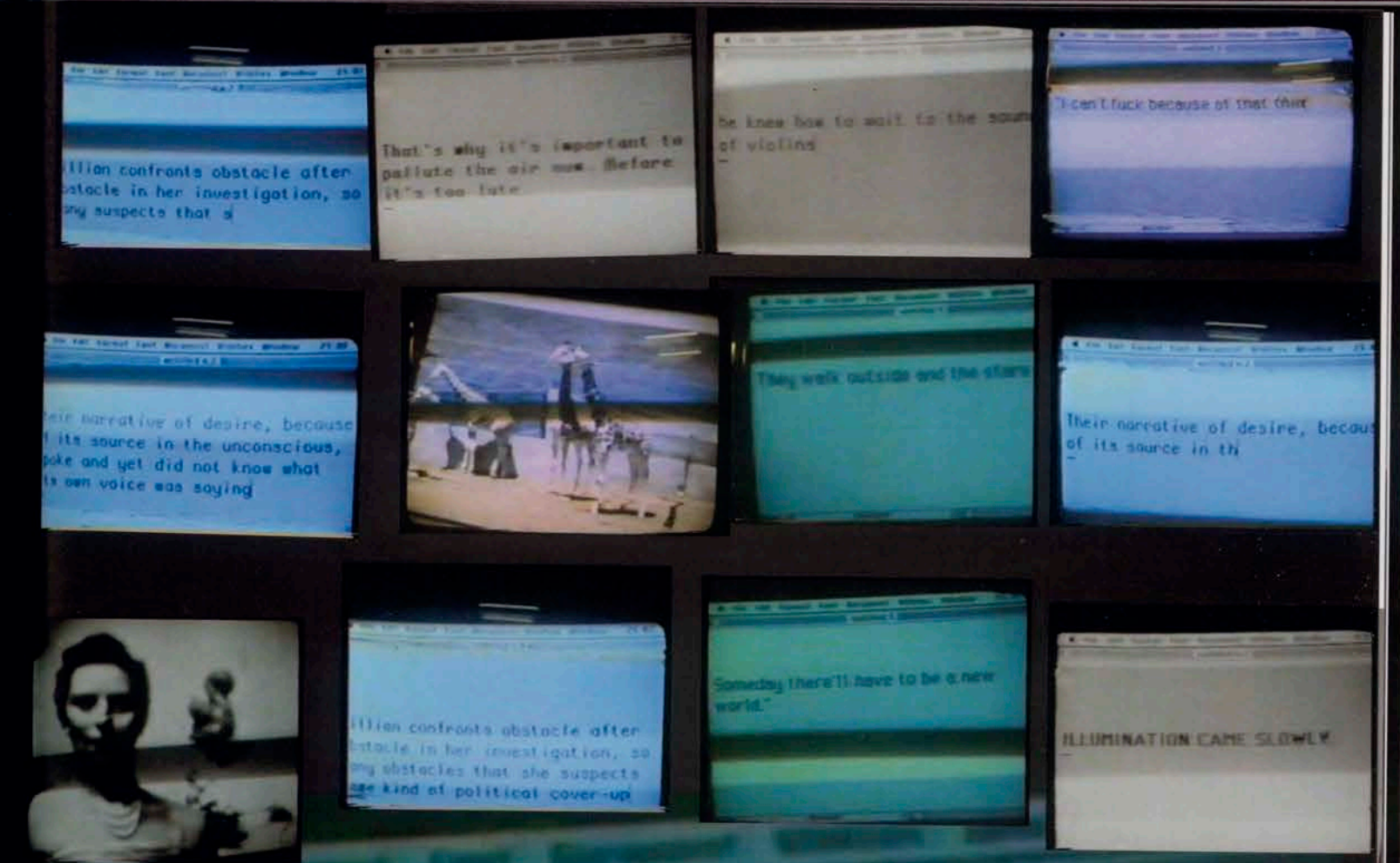
00104

et al., *simultaneous invalidations: second attempt*, 2001 (installation details)
Christchurch Arts Centre

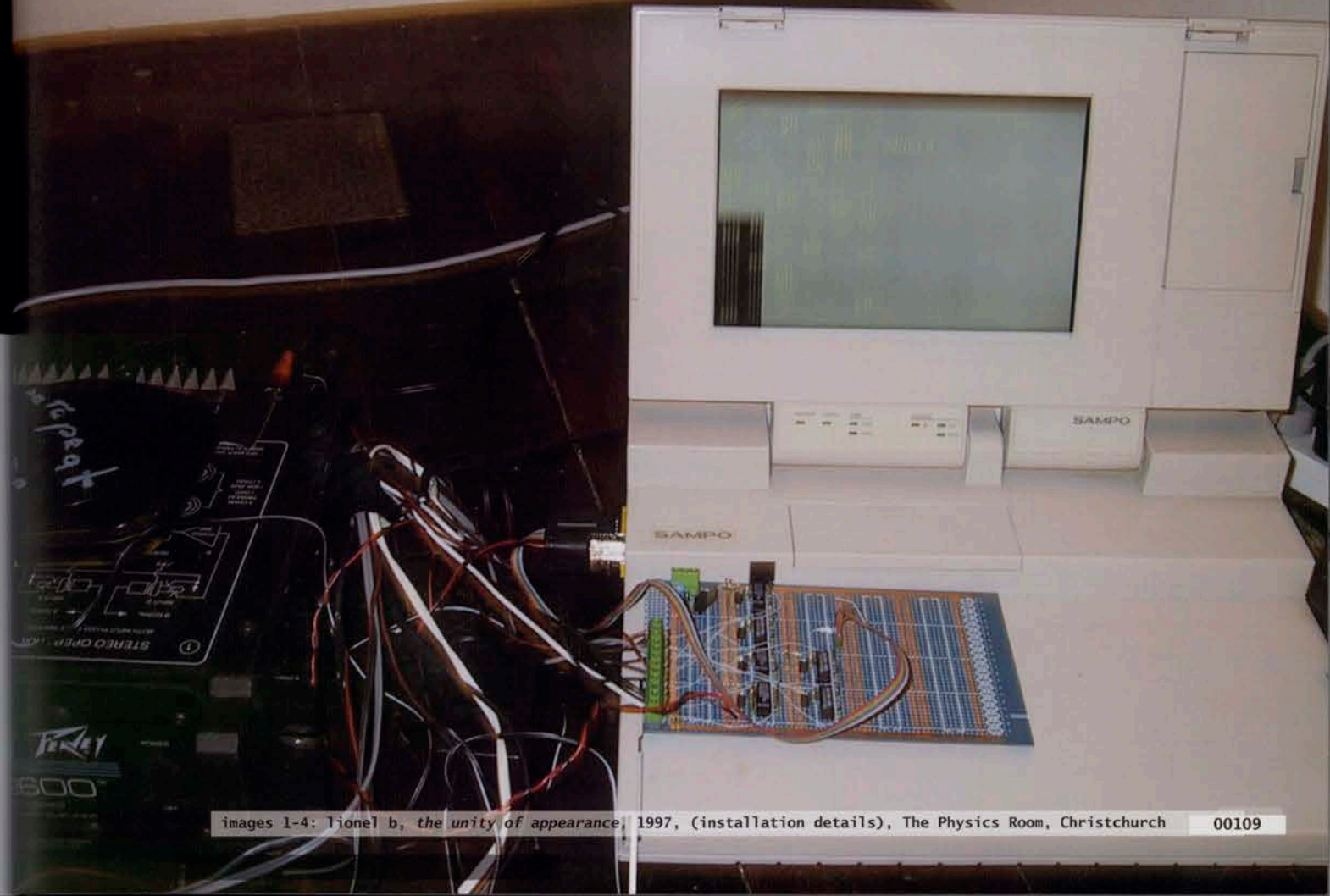
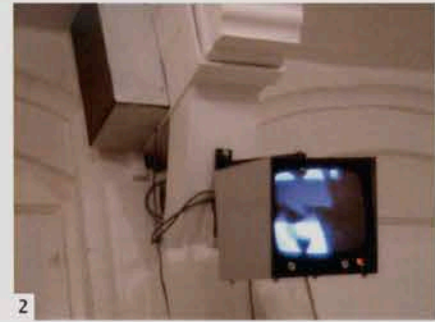
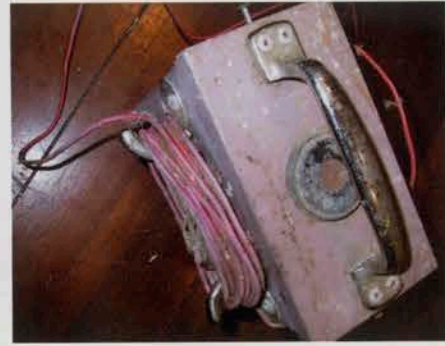
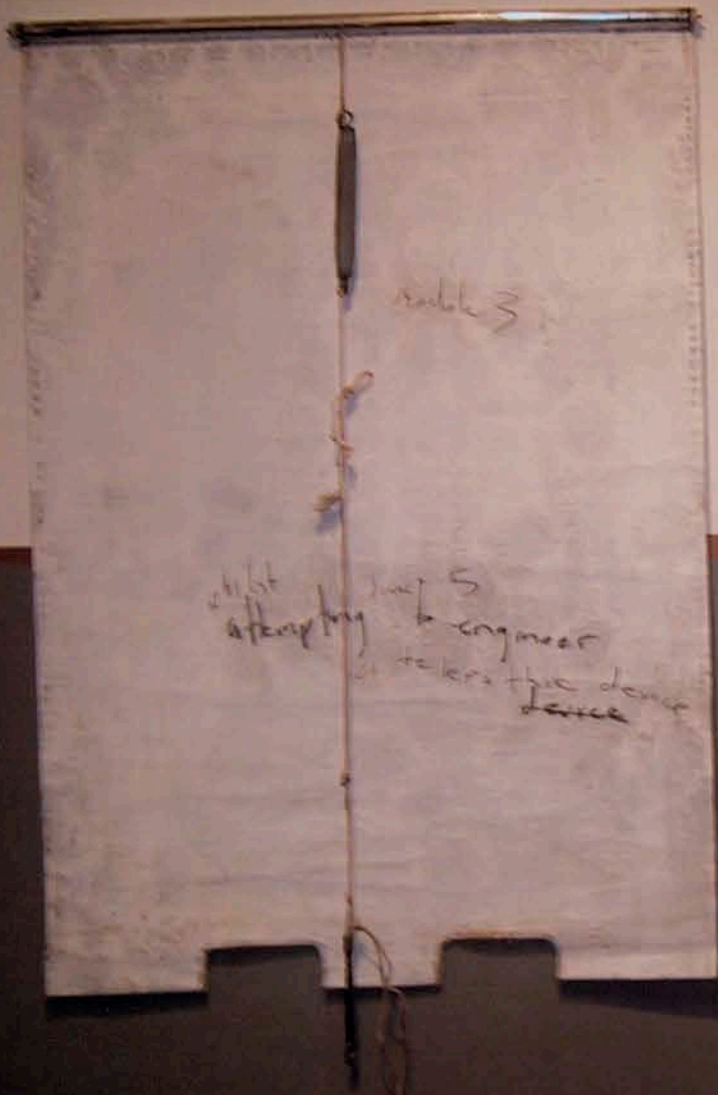
00105

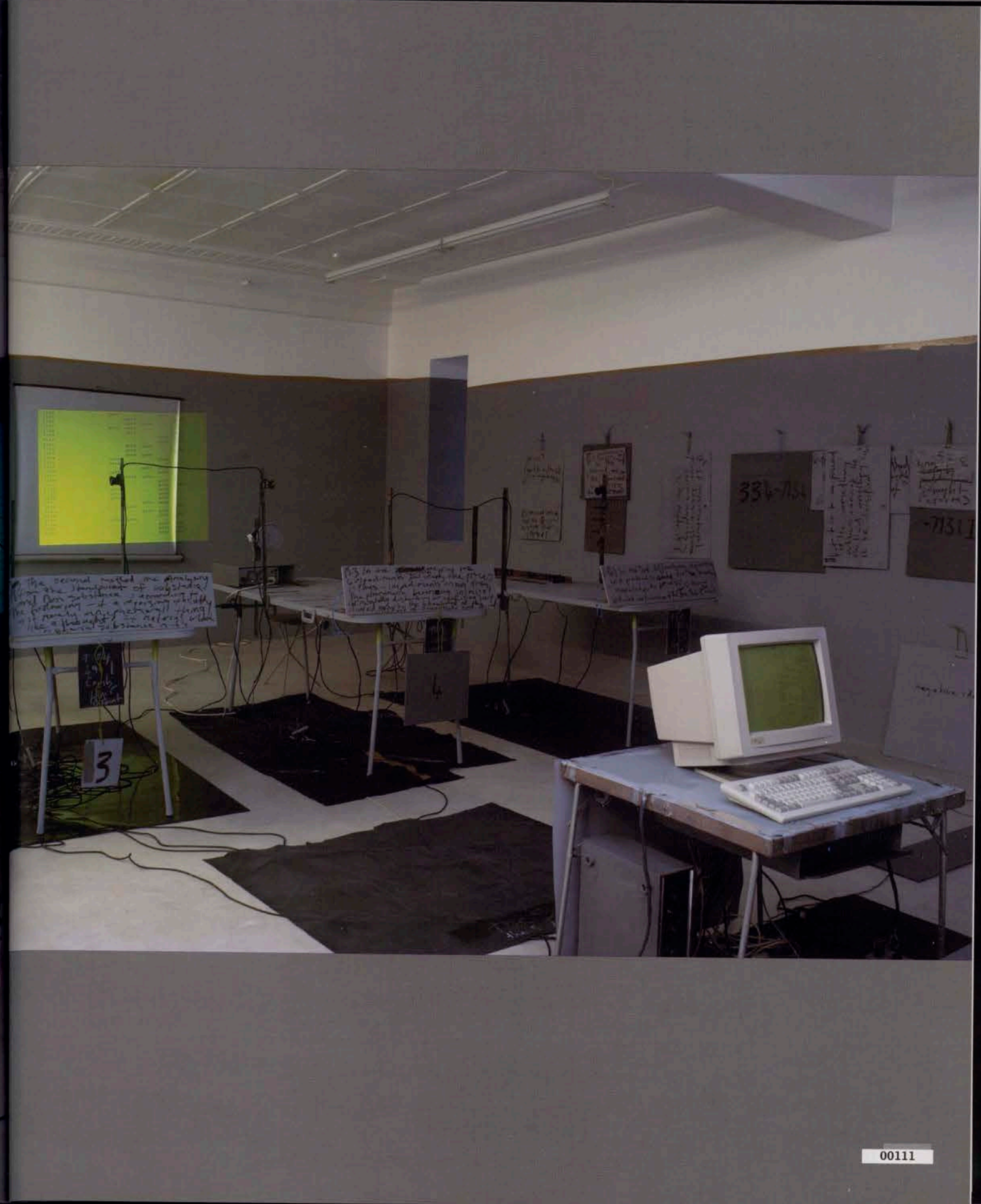


00106 | budd, *untitled (lionel's reminiscences on penis envy and land issues)*, 1998 (screen stills), collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

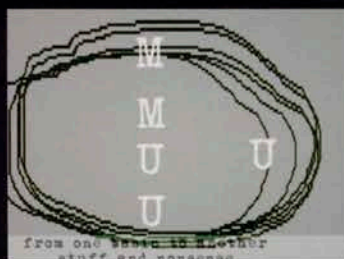
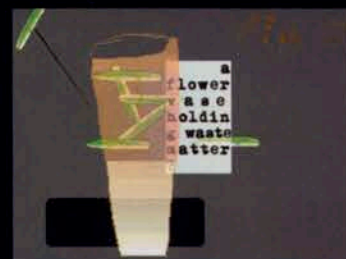
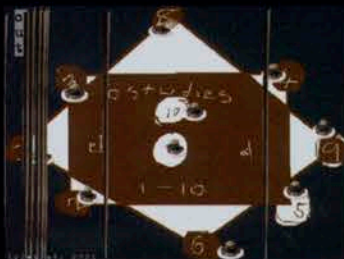


popular productions, *utopia: a discreet investigation*, 1993, (16mm screen stills) 00107





o studies
someone asked
"how long
will it take"
O said "no
time at all"



COMPENDIUM

Sylvère Lotringer: You seem to be an artist with multiple personalities. Who are they?

The various personalities range from l budd, lillian budd, c j [arthur] craig and sons, marlene cubewell, roland welles, merit grötting, minerva betts and blanche ready-made.

And you also have one called m tweedie?

Mt was dropped quite a while ago.

Oh yes? Who are all these people?

They aren't continuously involved in making art, but they contribute on occasion.

So, they are occasional artists, like 'Sunday artists'?

I guess you could say that.

Where are they coming from? I've heard you're circumspect about telling your own biography, but maybe you could give me a little synopsis of each one of them?

Well, l budd has a literary career. She's got various business cards, including the books she writes.

She has a multiple personality too?

Yes. She initially came on the scene as a write. She was concerned with modern arrangements and what constituted originality. She wrote *the complete book*.

What is the complete book?

Lillian wasn't really definite about that. She actually wrote a book called *april snow*.

I see. So you could say that the second character is a fiction of the first.

Yes.

And what was the fiction about?

Well, she didn't actually get past the binding of the front cover.

So, lillian is a fictional character but you took the fiction away-or she did.

Yes.

Is it important that she was a woman?

Well, when she was lillian she was a woman, but at some point her literary career became more commercial and turned into buddholdings-which had a more organisational feel to it and less gender-it was genderless.

So she switched genders.

Yes, she switched genders and also operated under budd shoop. L budd doesn't necessarily mean lillian budd. And buddholdings was like an organisation-operators-within the country.

And these operators are separated from you?

Yes.

How old is lillian?

She actually never told me how old she was.

How do you imagine her?

I hadn't imagined any sort of image-I only knew her through a sort of correspondence.

Do you have people in mind when you think of her?

Well, lillian budd was the sort of person who would write a book called *april snow*, so it was perhaps a literary poetic study.

So she was a poet?

Her book tended to be poetic-with a name like that.

But she never wrote it-or published it.

No, it was looking at what was originality-do you have to publish to make a book. The questions of what is originality were mainly established by men.

That's modernism.

Yes. That was what l budd was concerned about looking at-the production of originality.

Was she critical of it?

Yes, obviously. But l budd wasn't attempting to provide any answers, just suggesting possibilities.

To raise questions about it.

The question 'What constitutes originality?' didn't necessarily have to be answered.

She never found out.

No.

Do you think it could be found like a found object?

That's a question that blanche ready-made was looking at more fully.

Oh, so blanche is someone else?

Yes.

Tell me more about blanche. Who was she?

Blanche magdalene ready-made was looking at the Duchampian tradition of art making, and involved with found objects. The idea of blanche being a ready-made herself, that she was quite obviously a ready-made identity, a constructed identity-

She was a found identity-Duchamp himself kept playing with genders... He was Rose Sélavy. So you went from Rose to blanche?

With merit grötting in between, and marlene cubewell, and also p mule. But b r-m was directly thinking about Rose Sélavy, because of the idea of the ready-mades and of using found objects in artworks.

So one is a writer who doesn't write; the other is an artist who just finds-

Who finds objects. R-m doesn't make sculpture but finds it.

So the idea is: 'What is a writer who doesn't write; what is an artist who doesn't create an object?' The whole question is about originality.

Yes. What was involved in creating that period is a rich field

for discussion at this point in time.

Between whom? Do you mean all these people-blanche and lillian and-

Yes, blanche and buddholdings and-

So it's like a big crowd there? [laughs] Who are the others? Who created them-or did you find them ready-made?

Well, merit grötting wasn't particularly involved in this country's cultural investment-she wasn't influenced by the 1950s period here-which was the problem that l budd had to confront. New Zealand critics assumed that budd's literary career was just a sentimental attachment to her childhood-whereas grötting was actually not associated with New Zealand-

Or her own childhood-

Her own childhood was European, so she wasn't a New Zealander; she came over here in 1991-92. It was merit grötting who was involved in setting up an exhibition at a Wellington dealer's gallery and looking at the mythic structures involved in dealer/private institutions. Her name was associated with the painting of a chaise, white, which caused the exhibition to be cancelled.

But let's backtrack a little bit: who are the other characters? Do they have a childhood?

Most of them just seem to have an adulthood. A child-rushed-adulthood. Their biographical details are left unknown because the less you know about an identity the less you can construct or categorise a person.

So it's not really a schizophrenic situation. You don't absorb various personalities, you really try to blanche them-

Make them work into particular constructs. That's the advantage of working with a group; that they can actually work in different areas rather than just the investing of one identity. Are you the group leader? Or are you just one of the groupies?

I'm just one of the groupies.

What other areas do they cover? I mean, there's a name that sounds like a business company-

Yes, c j craig and sons was set up for the production of wrought iron furniture. It was an art production.

More mass market orientated?

Yes, but, not particularly successful-so it went into receivership and was taken over by buddholdings. The name was only used quite briefly. Marketing it proved difficult.

They went bankrupt?

Yes, they went bankrupt. They left their wrought iron furniture with buddholdings-who has been marketing it ever since. Merit grötting on the other hand, worked from an atelier-she had an investment in history-constructing history around her name. So it was not even necessary that she be alive, rather it was the group identity that was constructing and activating history around the work of that artist.

Do they have actual spaces?

The spaces are adaptable; they often work from the same space-

Mental space?

Mental space.

So it's conceptual art all through?

Apart from the storage of artworks. There has to be some practicality involved.

You just curate for them-

Yes. P mule was another person operating within the group. P mule is particularly useful within the group because-

She came later?

You see, P mule has never been identified as anything beyond p mule-so it's a particularly functional genderless name-also a mule being an end of the line species-it's a horse and a donkey.

The idea of an end of the line-does it define what art is about-or the function of art?

P mule is the end of the line quite literally.

No project; no progeny.

Yes, and whether a mule is a male or a female I've never actually found out.

It's a genderless thing. I guess none of your characters have children.

No, none of them have had children.

Don't you have some yourself?

No, no. [pause] So blanche, although she's got a name-

So these people are your children-are they your equals?

No, no these are not my children, definitely not-they're equals. Also, the confusing thing with blanche is that although it is an effeminate sounding name, in actual fact blanche is just an image of-

A white image?

No, you can actually see it-a photocopied image which has a very make or androgynous appearance. So whether b r-m is actually female is questionable.

Have you always been attracted to the idea of genderlessness?

I think so because gender can create definitions and constrictions. A genderless identity can play with the meaning of male and female and with a male history-move between the whole cultural phenomena.

Do you think we could get the whole culture to be like a mule? In a genderless kind of state?

Yes, that could be interesting. It might clarify things-or destroy things.

Clarify what? Destroy what?

That's another question that may never be answered, or doesn't need to be answered.

But it asks questions to gender, and also to procreation. Do you think art is going to replace biodecay? If you could create and multiply without going through sexuality, wouldn't that be an answer?

True, that could be the answer for our race, or for society in general.

Where do you find your names?

The names often are ready-mades in themselves—lillian budd did in fact write a book called *april snow*. She was actually a real 'identity.'

Have you read that book?

No, I haven't read it. I was merely interested in looking at works that had floral references, like l budd and *april snow*.

Why flowers?

It just seemed to be a phenomenon of a period, perhaps the 1960s, that when looking for books with a particular type face at second-hand shops, they were the sort of names that were used.

Flower People?

It's probably the utopian quality to it.

And that other name, blanche?

B r-m was really a comment on what merit grötting was doing in terms of blinding artworks.

Merit is a system of rewards in the art world. Rewarding originality?

Yes, rewarding originality and creating an atelier—

What do you mean by atelier? Like a painter's atelier, with disciples?

Yes, with disciples and a system of historicising a production of art-making, so that statements could be released from the atelier for merit grötting and artworks could be found there.

Artists could be found or art?

Artworks, which, because they were released from the atelier and named as being produced by merit grötting, had a certain authenticity to them.

An original?

It was like authenticating originality, but also, in actual fact, again, questioning originality because there was no way of knowing; it was creating a structure only.

Are you trying to make difference between originality and singularity? Originality as in being recognised by the art world, being recognised as a value? I guess you don't mind the singularity, but you mind the value, the merit that has been given to it?

Yes, the merit. The production wasn't seen as being an original production, there was no merit in it. It wasn't about, 'Hey, I'm the first one to do it!' It wasn't about that. It was a comment about what originality is: an investment in a system where an artist must be seen to be producing something completely new, completely different.

So it was also an attempt to divorce the production of art from some sort of a personal history. Do you see art as divorced from any sort of subjective implications?

I think there are a lot of people involved in art who want to make work about themselves—they want biography, they want history, they want information—so it's like preventing, or challenging people who attempt to historicize an identity. Once you know when a person is born then you can construct information about them—

Make up a narrative—

Yes.

Do you have any problems with your own narratives? [pause] Do you have any narratives of your own?
I personally enjoy a good narrative. On the other hand to confuse a narrative, or to deny a narrative, is equally challenging.

But couldn't you just make the narrative more explicit so that it's even more divorced from your own work—instead of trying to cover it up? [pause] I mean, I haven't even asked if you were born in New Zealand—were you born in New Zealand?

I think one of the artists in the group was born in New Zealand, obviously there is some loyalty to the country here.

[laughs] So you are a New Zealand artist—

Yes.

You're home grown—

Home grown.

Were you born genderless, or is it something that grew up with you?

Which identity are you talking to?

I'm talking to m tweedie. Who is she anyway?

I think she was brought up in a gendered positions which is probably why mt's interested in the issues.

Did she react against being defined in a genderly fashion?

[pause] Obviously—

Was that before she became an artist? Or is it art that brought up thus gender problem?

The politics of the last twenty years have brought up issues of gender representation, that may have affected her.

In society, or in the art world?

In society and in the art world, well particularly in theoretical issues of—

So she was born out of theory?

Born out of theory, yes.

What kind of theory?

[pause] Well, there was the Freudian theory of women suffering from penis envy which has always been a—

A problem for men—

For men or women, I'm not sure—

And you could not identify with that?

No, I couldn't identify with that. [pause] And operating in an isolated country the written word is a good way to access information. It's easier to read a book than to see a Duchampian urinal. They're not found here, they visit the country. I think a Duchampian urinal came to New Zealand in the '60s and again in the '80s, but hasn't been sighted since. Whereas you can see plenty of pictures of them.

So, basically you exploded into a group and you were given all these genders, or this genderlessness that you didn't have before. So was art a certain way of being reborn of your own

works?

Reborn sounds very utopian.

Not just with a new identity but several; more choices. You didn't—or she didn't—have much of a choice before.

Yes, a new identity. That's right. It opened up the opportunities and choices.

What could her life have been before? What happened to her? [pause] I'm talking about m tweedie.

This is verging on therapy I think.

No no no—just raising questions.

Of course I was not accepting anything—not accepting the status quo—about identity, or sexes. I was discussing and questioning and looking at reasons and perhaps never finding answers—

Why didn't she start twenty years earlier?

Probably she was involved in being able to read—getting back to Lacan here.

I wasn't talking about you, I was talking about m tweedie. What happened that made this kind of move possible that was impossible before her life?

I honestly don't know.

She never told you?

No.

There's no clear cut of departure?

No—

Not even the decision to become an artist?

Well no, because that decision can be too sincere, the only interesting information I've ever—

What's wrong about being sincere?

Sincerity tends to position you.

But, first of all, is sincerity possible? [laughs] That's assuming a lot.

Is sincerity possible—perhaps it's not. Perhaps it's a perk on the '90s to be insincere. Sincerely insincere.

Insincerely yours—[laughs] So you didn't want to be sincere. Is there anything threatening about being sincere?

[pause] I don't think insincerity is threatening.

Has merylyn been in psychoanalysis—ever? Or part of a men's group?

[pause] Men's consciousness raising?

Right. Males do that a lot.

P mule was, or b r-m, I'm not quite sure.

You never thought of writing their biographies?

It could be another artwork or another literary concept, but none of the group have been prepared to undertake it—perhaps there is a sense of tedium involved here. It's easier to create another identity, that's the more exciting part, or finding

another ready-made person, than actually trying to remember the past. It's like a backwards slide—a biography.

Wasn't tweedie a ready-made person?

[pause] Well, exactly.

Why couldn't you use her? What's wrong with that?

Use her to make a biography of everyone else?

Yes, well, biographies are lies anyway, so why not elaborate on lies?

A biography is a lie about the past, whereas I think everyone in the group has been interested in lying about the now and the future. The past seems worth commenting on but not investing in.

You seem to react a lot against psychoanalysis—

In the sense that psychoanalysis is a looking at the past.

Both as a gendered position, and putting an emphasis on childhood—didn't you start your career with a study on Dora?

Yes.

Could you tell me more about that? Are you Dora too, or is Dora one of your names?

Well mt did write a thesis on her and attributed it to her mother.

Was the mother hysterical, and the daughter just an appendage of her?

It was about confusing identities again as to who Dora was.

Didn't Dora have some problems with her throat or something like that?

[pause] Yes, Dora was seen as an hysteric. She had undergone treatment with Freud, and Freud had written notes about that. And then subsequently there had been a lot of feminist theoreticians who had taken Dora as a case study of what she was. Or who she was—and that was interesting.

Tell me more.

In the sense of a woman's identity—sexual identity, and how it was constructed.

By Freud?

Yes. The initial Freudian readings have subsequently been challenged by numerous people.

What did you think of their readings? Were you convinced by them?

No I didn't think I was particularly convinced by any of them. But then, I don't think that I've been looking for answers in that sort of literal sense.

Would you say that all these various names or figments of personality that you have created are like symptoms of someone's hysteria? Or of someone to come?

Well no, because with hysteria you're getting back into a gendered position. Hysteria has been seen as a woman's problem, so-called, because that's what men have been able to define as hysterical. So, to say that the group was involved, or that these were expression of a group hysteria, would place the whole group back in a gendered position.

Yes, but in a sense, hysteria was a way for women to express themselves. If the body was the focus of male attention at least they could then speak with their bodies. But don't you think that it has become a genderless now? Everyone is hysterical at this point. [laughs]

Well to a certain extent, but I think that's still seen as a particularly feminist position in New Zealand-hysteria.

So by creating genderless, wombless kind of creatures, you manage to blanch out hysteria?

Blanche out hysteria, and also represent, or work with ready-made people who don't have huge emotional problems.

Was that something helpful to m tweedie, for instance, to work with people who don't have huge emotional problems for a change? [laughs]

Perhaps there has not been enough of group therapy amongst the various personalities to define what everyone's psychosomatic problems are.

What was the main thesis of your thesis? Did you—did you come to any conclusions?

I didn't come to any conclusions. It was a matter of combining Freud's often quite explicit sexual readings of Dora with pulp fiction, the romantic magazines you can buy that talk about the various sexual problems, or lovers—
So basically you got sick of sexual readings—is that it?

[Pause] It was combining the two—it was a collage of takes.

Your dissertation was a collage. So it was an art-piece in a sense.

Yes, it became an art-piece.

Did they pass you? [Laughs]

Yes, I passed them. It had a false theoretical beginning and a list of reference books at the end, including popular magazines, and images of kitchen appliances and hands. So it was an artwork but it had theoretical underpinnings as a pretext.

It was like a parody of theory. [Pause]

Yes. At the beginning there was a section of Freud's writings rearranged so that none of it made sense. It was footnoted from about one to forty, and then the supposed meanings for the footnotes were presented.

So in a sense you were doing with Freud what other feminist critics were doing expect that you weren't doing it in a priggish fashion.

None of the group has seen themselves as academic or theoreticians. We weren't looking at theory as clinical knowledge or understanding. It was more of a poetic take.

So it was not a deconstruction; it was a total displacement of the problematic.

Displacement, yes. I think the best theoretical books are the ones you can't understand at all—so that you can just read it as poetry.

Is that your general attitude towards theory?

Theory as poetry.

The poetry of theory. Was that your first artwork—or m tweedie's first artwork?

No, no, it wasn't the first artwork.

What was the first—was there a first?

There were earlier works in the sense of using photography and multiple identities.

Did you make yourself up, or was it like some action you were involved in—

It was like a Francis Bacon-esque involvement. It was a small-time performance work.

So were the performances by women?

Mainly women.

Did you make yourself up as a man?

[pause] Frequently.

How did m tweedie feel in that other gender before they all got dissolved?

Well, again it was not about how mt felt as a man, but looking at the displacement of an identity by a mechanical apparatus.

And did she learn anything from that?

The pictures taken were [pause] an emotional exploration of identity, and perhaps the answers were found in a conceptual understanding, or a reading of identity.

So theory came to give some sort of support to it?

Theory-as-a-prop.

What interested you at that point? Was it Lacan's mirror stage? After all you were playing with images. Were you trying to fuck up the mirror?

[pause] Cracking the mirror—I think so, yes.

In Freudian terms that's called psychotic. Were you aware of that?

Psychotic does sound much more interested than hysteric, I must admit. Hysteria has no solution; it's like a state that there's no way out of.

Yes. It's substituting signs, but the identity isn't threatened. You like taking risks, but not personally.

The idea of risk has got a certain kind of investment of growth—

It's going back to originality?

Yes, back to originality. I'm not interested in that challenge.

You wouldn't want to be a heroic woman, just for a change?

No, no. It's a self-indulgent attitude—being a hero, or being heroic.

You never propped up any of your characters as heroic?

No, no. I see this as being indulgent—

Well, what's wrong with someone else being indulgent?

Well, true. That could be—but I don't like that either. I prefer, or the group prefers, to be working from the margins rather than from a glorified central position.

Are your found objects also a reflection, as way of raising question about originality—the fact that they were found?

Yes, they do.

In what way? What kind of objects did you first find?

The objects that we starting using were books, and they were always very accessible—not so much the content, but the type face, and the titles and the names. The group was only able to be involved in art production in a pretty low-budget fashion, so there was a lot of second-hand shopping, looking for works. That's where the wrought iron came in. It was about looking at the ways of being involved in certain sculptural objects, but not wanting to make it—

You found wrought iron on the street?

Yes. Wrought iron in the form of pot-plant stands and magazine racks.

The way they looked, did you care about that? Whether they looked beautiful or startling?

Well, I think the wrought iron furniture so far has had limited consumer appeal. They're not seen as original works of art.

As opposed to what?

To the collage works that have been done by buddholdings.

What kind of collage works?

Photocopied texts on wallpaper coated with epoxy resin. They have generally been seen as more aesthetically beautiful—'easier' art items to have in one's home.

Works that imply some gallery system that you have access to.

Yes, the public gallery system and dealer system.

And how long ago was that?

I guess since the '70s, on and off.

When in the '70s,

[pause] Late '70s, oh no well, the art production was probably linked with the 1980s; 1984 onwards.

Does the group keep an account of all these dates? Do you have a general logging system?

No, I think the more confusing the dates the better. Because again, the dates provide clarification of identities, and a lineage, and a sequence.

Then they could be interpreted in some way or another.

[pause] But you can always put the wrong date, so that you're denying authority.

Is that what you are doing?

Yes, often the dates are wrong.

Well, that's a problem for curators.

[pause] Yes.

Do you have an official historian, someone who you can refer to?

No, no. An historian is about the past, about linking up production and value systems, so that is of no interest.

So you're kind of connected to the mid-'70s when there was an attempt to take art out of the distribution system altogether. There was no saleable art in the '70s, because artists were trying not to put up anything against the wall, they were involving immaterial—

Like Fluxus.

Right. So do you feel close to that?

No, the group is still interested in the notion of aesthetics.

An aesthetic without originality?

Yes.

What could that be? What you're doing?

Well, I guess, whatever you do [pause]...

...Becomes art?

[pause] Yes, becomes art anyway.

So it's like the gesture of presenting something, or doing something that's art and not so much how original it is, or how much it fits into some personal itinerary? Art as an instant gesture?

[pause] Not quite as instant as the Fluxus movement. It was also very performance orientated.

And you're not?

No, I'm not.

The group is not?

The group is not.

Is that something the group is working on?

I think to be involved as a performance artists there is again a sense of investment in originality and shamanism—a Beuysian ideal.

And that's too male?

Definitely, and it would take a large group to confuse a performance identity.

So do you think that the Duchampian gesture is something you can pick up and renew?

[pause] Again that sort of feels like seeing a sense of importance in what one is doing. To align with a Duchampian gesture is to align oneself with one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. So I wouldn't want to say that the group is trying to make a Duchampian gesture, but [pause]

But the group was affected by Duchamp.

Yes, the group was certainly affected.

Or disaffected.

That's right. Or reacts to.

So as with Duchamp, there's sense of saturation of all the cultural values, and interpretations and systems.

And even of Duchamp! History caught up with him in the end and turned all his production into original ready-mades, which was what he was challenging in the first place. I think you often

can become exhausted by the historicising process that moves so fast behind art.

It may be more amusing to precede the historical process—have you ever through of that?

Actually start historicising the production? [pause] P mule is providing an historic construct, or articulating values.

Tell me again what p mule is doing?

p mule is writing the review of the work.

Oh, let us talk about that. So p mule is really the historian, or the anti-historian.

Yes, but only in the sense the p mule historicizes.

Or, she does?

No, it's not a she.

Oh, right. It does. So, who are these people?

Actual artists.

And is it a good reviewer?

Yes, p mule is a complimentary reviewer. The language p mule uses combines serious art critical analysis with alternations to the text, blatant alterations.

So the texts come from somewhere else—they're not original texts?

P mule edits found text to create a different context for the review—it becomes the review of another artist's work.

Whose name?

Who is named.

It is a comment on the group too, at the same time?

P mule hasn't done an analysis of the group as a whole, but of individuals.

Was there ever a group show?

No, but you begin to wonder whether you need to actually make the work, because the art criticism, or the review can exist without the art. [pause] So, p mule is in fact challenging the rest of the group: does the group need to exist?

There are reviews about art that doesn't exist?

The review is an authoritative reading, so it cannot be ignored. But it can be a completely useless, or inappropriate reading, especially with installation work, after the exhibition comes down. Then the only thing that really exists long-term is the review.

It's like postmodernism—a review of works that don't even have to be made—

[pause] That's the interesting thing, isn't it, the review can come first.

Actually art reviews are not really reviews, they are just productions of values for the work, and proof of the artists' originality. So cutting it off from the actual object that it is supposed to comment on, you reveal it for what it is.

The whole issue is that no matter how hard you try to protect an artwork even if it is a ready-made, there is still the need

to invest in it a sense of originality. So when the artwork doesn't actually exist those questions of aesthetic and originals don't exist either—they can't be pinned down—only the review.

So is m tweedie such an artwork herself?

Ultimately, perhaps, the identity of mt should no longer exist.

You mean that she should be expelled from the group—wouldn't that be the ultimate gesture?

That's right. [pause]

It's like the surrealists: Breton never expelled himself. [laughs]

Yes, perhaps I ought to have a manifesto: We denounce mt!

Yes: merylyn tweedie misbehaved—she wanted to be too original—out! [laughs]

[pause] Her basic intention was always to be a hero.

An enigmatic figure in New Zealand video art, Lionel budd installs his work in a space originally designated as a lift shaft, though never used as one. budd's choice of space reflects his perennial interest in things neglected, discarded, non-functional. His centre piece is an old black and white surveillance monitor suspended at head height from a galvanised pipe. On the screen plays bumpy, degraded, looped footage of a woman's head. This image is, paradoxically, both recorded and live: it comes from a surveillance camera upstairs trained on a video monitor playing a recorded tape. The soundtrack—Verdi's Requiem—with its eerie disembodied vocals, is heard over a crappy speaker and sounds distorted, as though degenerated through repeated re-recording. Thus they took to their voices exemplifies budd's preference for noise over signal, and a pleasure taken in that which exceeds a clear logic. In an interview the artist explains: 'It is important to break habits, to break expectations, to break common ways of thinking. If you look at religious rituals in traditional societies—fire walking for example—they are often connected with some direct kind of physical effect on the body. They are physical experiences that push you to the limits'.

Interview with Lionel budd and Bob Leonard

Lionel budd: ... Exactly!

Bob Leonard: Is that really important?

Yes! And when I finally started working with the medium, which again seems almost entirely intellectual, but is in fact a very physical medium, I realised that I was relating more to my voices than to my intuition.

So what changes when other people enter that space?

Some lady once came up to me in one of the lectures I gave in Christchurch. She introduced me to her husband, and he said that in one of my pieces... he held her hand when it was dark, and she was a little frightened, and he put his arm around her, and then they started kissing, and then they got married three months later! Functional art you know!

But all this becomes very physiological...

So... it is important to break habits, to break expectations, to break common ways of thinking. If you look at religious rituals in traditional societies—fire walking for example—they are often connected with some direct kind of physical effect on the body. They are physical experiences that push you to the limits, and the change is not that you're suddenly able to walk on fire, but rather, your inner being is changed, your inner self is changed.

So there is a connection between the physical, and the internal, metaphysical psychological dimension?

Exactly!

Has this piece changed in its process of evolution, or are you very near where you started in your original proposal?

No, I've actually moved away from the proposal quite a bit. I don't think in spirit, but in form, yes. And that's kind of a wonderful thing about the creative process. It's about change.

A process after my own heart!

Bob...!

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florian merkel: Are you trying to articulate the silence of the minimal cube?

l budd: Of course I think there are other kinds of silence different from the silence of formal certainty. Silences, for example, that can encourage subjective response.

...

In *voice*, the space is being allowed to carry the silence to reaffirm the space that lives through the viewer. We want to make the space fruitful for the mind.

Are we talking about some sort of mystical minimalism here?

Maybe... these are rather vague terms, like the unknowingness of a process. Some artists can 'rehearse' in their studio before they go into the gallery—we can't. Our question is, rather than being engaged with acting in the world, is it possible for us to express consciousness with no object but itself?

I assume you mean being contained in the body and its feelings...?

Well no...

Are you sure? You must at least have a notebook.

Ok! Sometimes we use a notebook.

I thought as much. OK. So there must be some kind of... it might not be a sketch but you must have measurements written down. At some stage you must have taken a Holland blind and cut it to the right size and said "This is the right size." I'm not convinced that your work is completely arbitrary or intuitive.

Admittedly we do like certain numbers. Those are the numbers that sometimes determine for example, the number of lock-grooves and the size of objects such as the blinds. If the piece is about something that is very distant to us, then numbers like seventeen, thirty-five and twenty-one sound perfect because they are the numbers that we never use for anything expect for a piece that is very uncomfortable. In terms of the height, it's really determined by how it looks installed in the actual space. Sometimes we will discuss this and decide "well, eight or nine inches really doesn't work, it just doesn't look right." Then we have to increase or decrease the dimensions.

It all has to do with a kind of dialogue. Why do you think you are going more and more in this direction? Before you were a group of people

activating a white space and now you are moving towards a more spectacular use of the place. Do you simply prefer it, or does the occasion create the situation for making the work?

At one point we thought about making it an outdoor sculpture. I expect we were thinking that outdoor sculpture was usually big and durable. But then that seemed rather dull, because, after all, it is already very nice outside with trees and grass. In the end we felt we didn't want to put something there and change it all. So we thought maybe we'd make something which fell apart after a while—like plaster that would disintegrate. We made a piece which was a plastercast. The idea was to put it in a cardboard box under a tree. Our hope was that after a few years the box would break open and the grass would grow over it, and cover it. It would cease to exist.

There is something scary about that, isn't there?

Yes, the works themselves enter the world as witnesses to this process. But we still really like the essentialising tendency of modernism because it is a way of feeling more alive. The problem with it was that it all got channelled into finding an objective formal language. We propose instead an absolute subjectivity allowing existence to become the material, subject and generating principle of artmaking. This is an essentialising process but turned towards internal balance and survival; towards intrinsic value.

There are, of course, plenty of white spaces where you can create or repeat your own ideas or formulas. Maybe this is the ultimate doorway towards anxiety?

I don't think that, either. There is a kind of collective madness that is taking us towards a terminal point, but there is also a feeling that this bodily existence is not dependent on a white space so-to-speak, as if that is the only level of existence. But we don't know what the next thing is either, after that. All we are trying to do is concretise the uncertainty, and to isolate some point of contact between that and this: between consciousness and matter.

So... are you wanting me to feel what you feel?

Well, no... *voice* for example, brings together two works, *the sounds of the silence* and *the voice of silence* as a series of eight Holland blinds which we made between April and May of this year. They are works that

evoke the deep space of the interior of the body. In this work for the first time we have kept the blinds very dear to us to indicate the eyes looking within. That is our hope, anyway, our hope that its held breath conveys a feeling of the parameters that the voices inhabit and that you feel included in them. The blinds [our first] try to express voices as gravity made conscious and gravity as the attraction that binds us together as separate Beings.

...unknowing and uncertainty, rather than knowing?

What we hope *voice* does is to test the notion of sight as a fixed place with the idea that nothing is fixed. Our work has been characterised as trying to carry on the traditions of the utopian, but none of us are sure about that. We think what it tries to do is talk about some base in the confusing world by confronting it.

So, would it be fair to say that transcendent or utopian reading of the works are too prescriptive?

Yes, we have always thought that this is too easy because it suggests that through the work there is an image of release and we feel it's more like... the opposite. For us this is the real challenge of the work. How do you make a material object out there, separate from you? How do you make an object amongst other objects, that can somehow carry the feeling of Being—for the viewer? An object that somehow manages to make a connections with it?

In this case I guess what we can see is a confrontation between the movement of the viewer and the silence of the space, which in some way is an irreconcilable difference...

Exactly!

...but also there is an implicit invitation for the viewer to sense their own bodily reactions through this moment of silence.

Yes. Absolutely, yes... and that may well be the moment we have been waiting for!

This interview has been edited from a number of conversations held between the artist, l budd, and art critic Florian merkel. The first of these discussions took place in Berlin late in 1993 and the last in June of 1997. Materials from around eight conversations has been combined to present material that both artist and critic think relevant to the installation the voice of the silence or voice.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AS *JOURNAL D'UN VOYAGE UTOPIQUE: merit grötting AND RITA ANGUS IN CONVERSATION, MIDWEST 1*, pp13-15

It has been said that had l budd not existed, someone would have had to invent her. That aside, the life of merit grötting, herself an intimate of budd and other established New Zealand and international artists, weaves itself so tightly into the budd, mee, welles mythology that to take account of budd's work without its inclusion would be foolhardy. This interview is the result of a number of meetings. No real attempt has been made to ensure either chronology or geographic accuracy.

Rita Angus: How strange that the two of us went to the same art school and yet our careers have been so different.

merit grötting: Yes, although as the barriers between artistic media dissolve, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not irrelevant, to classify an artist as painter or sculptor don't you think, Rita?

Certainly I would agree, but I have always felt that, like me, you too endeavour to express yourself through a simplicity of line and colour.

Quite. After all it is by exploring their possibilities that we arrive at our world of multiple associations. There is intellectual stimulus there if you need or want it. But you must make the effort.

That is so true. I have always been convinced that appreciation of works of art required organised effort and systematic study. Art appreciation can no more be absorbed by aimlessly wandering in galleries than can surgery be learned by casual visits to a hospital.

And we must be grateful to all those who with their collaboration [laughs] have made this possible Rita.

Merit, I do hope you won't think me presumptuous in asking why, in a country of such unique light and rich colour values, you mute your work with its milky skein of white acrylic.

Unpredictable, disturbing, 'formally rigorous but emotionally messy', is how some critics describe my work, particularly in regard to a certain repression of formalism, But I don't know, Rita...

What I could have done with photography if we had known each other a little earlier. Don't you think that would have been a grand thing?

Yes, yes. You know Rita I have always seen works of art as flat. We naturally perceive things as representations [long pause] of the real thing.

You enjoy Spain so much yet I don't seem to fit in here at all. It seems strange to be at odds over Spain.

But then how can art, in an age characterised by constant replacement of images and values with new images and values, be at odds with itself?

Yes indeed. Do you know I finished *A goddess of mercy the year poor Frances died*. Did you ever meet her?

Hmm...

I wish now I'd never mentioned the word medieval. Such a strange word to be picked up on. I saw the same problem in *Pleasures and dangers*.

Aah, yes... [laughs] *Pleasures and dangers!* But let's move away, move on.

Oh, I do so love New Zealand. You know my heart is buried there, as indeed I hope to be. Although at present I can't even think of returning.

It has to do with time I think. You see in my opinion the ideal artists looks towards the future and the past at the same time. We think about the things that have happened or those things that we wish to happen. Between them perhaps is a resting place for the mind, a pale room softened with whitewash. You see, for me, there is no essential difference between the art of the past and the art of the present.

Such an effort to look modern don't you think?

Yes, yes, exactly! And that's why aesthetic experience and work deeply rooted in everyday life, the minute attention to details and incident, are so important these days.

I just adore wrought iron. It seems so obvious as subject matter somehow, now that you've shown the way. But goodness me, how did you ever come to it?

They are to a large extent the outcome of 'found emotions' re-encountered in objects like the magazine rack, for example. Such untempered, how can I put it, striving for the ideal form brings up the myriad problems of formalism [laughs]... unfortunately. What I have done though is to insist that this specific form is the best cultural vehicle, as it were, for the ideas and feeling it is intended to express.

I just like to paint with the seasons, but I don't expect they affect your work at all.

No, sex, death, violence excite me more, along with the material significance of the object. This expectation of having one's hopes dashed—which is a critical part of the avant-garde's seduction/abandonment pattern—is in the end, more of a sociocultural problem than an aesthetic one.

Yes well, as we've both always said, the first duty of an artist is to find beauty in everyday life.

Come come, Rita. Surely the essential question for the contemporary artist is, where do you start? There was no emphasis on art in my family, but there was no discouragement of the fact that I wanted to be an artist. I spent a lot of time alone drawing.

But would you like to add anything?

Yes, two things Rita. The second concerns the painted surfaces. The surfaces are just painted. Sometimes people think they are laboured to get exactly the right surface. They are not. The intention is to just paint them, not in any particular way. The paint base is white; then I paint them [laughs] normally.

So simple.

And, forgive me, so complex... No?

l budd: Ironically there is really only one way, one correct way, to assemble the vast majority of our work. For its true aesthetic value to show through that is.

Jim Barr: Could any one else assemble it for you?

Possibly, with a couple of pages of instructions.

Mary Barr: And how about sending them to us?

I could send you instructions on how to make more of them. I'm thinking I should get into making mass produced iron furniture. I've got three variations on how to make book racks, TV swivel stand and a corner table.

It's an excellent idea.

There is also a very nice swivel chair. And there's a particularly nice dining table.

Where does all this useful information come from?

Modern wrought iron furniture by Ned Frisbee.

Is this why your work has become overwrought recently? It seems at odds with the obvious references in this series of work to Rita Angus' painting *Cass*.

Hm? Yes well it was a consideration I must admit, but I think Rita Angus can look after herself. As to *Modern wrought iron furniture*, that was published in 1959—the year Angus returned from London coincidentally and, as I quoted earlier it claims "the 14 projects shown in this book have been made by many boys." It also suggests that students be "encouraged to modify their designs to enrich their learning experience." And it occurred to us that it would be a very good idea for the viewer to do so as well.

Do you see that as a new direction?

Enriching people's viewing experiences?

Hm.

Completely.

Do you think you have enriched any in the past?

Well you can only try.

Can you think of anyone specific who has been enriched by one of your artworks?

Oh yes. Mind you there aren't many. I think Neil Dawson was.

And what happened at the moment he was being enriched?

He just said 'thank you very much' and said he had learnt a lot from it. The sort of quickness of our production had quite an effect on him. He was left floored.

Speaking of floors. Is flowing gold (not in exhibition) the first of your works to be right off the wall?

Well the funny thing was that the shop we went into contained a very aggressive parrot. It was a good shop. We got a lot of works from there. A couple of round tables with frilly bits and four book racks.

Do you think the people in the shop had any idea of the potential of the stuff they were selling you?

No well this is what I was saying to one of the engineers this morning. We realise that there is going to be a great market reception to this new product... So we're just getting ready for mass production, so to speak.

You'll certainly be first on the block. It will be like owning all the orange lino in New Zealand.

Cornering the market. Yes.

Has anyone used this sort of thing before as far as you know?

Well arthur has. And of course, we are also fortunate enough to have Marie Shannon involving herself in the wrought iron arena with her pipe cleaner work. But the books are very hard to find. I mean we seem to spend ages hunting around to find books like *flowing gold* or *watered garden*. It all takes time.

Do you look inside the books?

No it's really not important...

Do you ever read them?

No. We never really get past the title.

The right colour is very important though.

Aesthetics?

Yes, it often boils down to that if you don't watch out.

Do you think there is any future in it?

Sure. So long as we don't run out of local supply. I guess we could always use foreign books, say French books, I suppose, but then no one would understand the humour. Unless they could read French of course.

French people might, but of course there may not be any humour in there for the French seeing you don't know the language yourself.

True. Anyway these are the first works by c j (arthur) craig & sons.

They're very good.

We think so.

Do you regard the works as sculpture?

Definitely. Neil, right from the start, said that my work was very flat and that there was nothing to see from the sides so we have to spend a lot of time trying to make it thicker and getting it off the wall.

Not very successfully.

No. And as you know arthur did go through the sculpture department at Canterbury University so he is a trained sculptor. My main concern with these new works is over the spiral which I'm worried might be read as a fern or koru.

In the furniture?

Yes

I've already heard a few people mention it.

Do you think it is a big problem?

Well we don't want to be seen to be insensitive, or to be seen to be taking off on Gordon Walters work of course.

I think the chances are slight...

But you never know.

Never.

florian merkel: lionel have you ever seen any of your work in a feminist context? Would you place it in that context now??

lionel b: Our whole culture is based on a dualistic, exclusive adversarial approach. Some say the intellect is the superior function, others say we are emotional beings. For me, however, the point has always been to try and connect these two essential elements. To put them in balance, so that one doesn't dominate the other. Also, this basic modality allows us to make many useful analogies.

Perhaps I should have said that I regard studies for existence as a critique of the patriarchal order and its binary ways of knowledge. I have always considered, for instance, that it reflects through every discourse 'the decisive/divisive presence/absence of the phallus.' Do you not agree?

No, how could I? Such an affirmation only blunts the fact that *studies for existence* isn't so much a criticism as a pure form of failure.

There has been more talk of the human body in art recently. What do you understand by the term 'inscribed body'?

Interestingly at *Documenta* I talked with Jan Hoet on this very subject. He said, as we walked through *Documenta* that he got the impression that he had mainly invited artists whose topic is the body. So I ask myself now, 'is this exhibition not a parallel experience, or a Southern hemisphere recap on the *Documenta* theme?'

An interesting idea, certainly it seems to me that the body, or more precisely, the physical experience of art, plays an important role in your work, but I suspect that's not what Jan Hoet meant.

Yes exactly... what is intuitive for me now was so self-conscious when I was 21 years old. You understand that I first started using the video camera as an extension of the body when I was 21? Then, I had to think about where I was pointing it, how I was using it, what the light was, and so on. And this process was not only technical, it also had a direct effect on my work.

So you see artists working with video use this medium because of its ability to emotionally deal with the human condition?

Why yes, certainly. As instruments of time, the material of video, and by tension moving images have, as a part of their nature, the fragility of temporal existence. Images are born, they exist, and in the flick of a switch they die.

Is this an approach that challenges traditional representation?

I personally don't feel that this work needs to be resolutely anything. I accept and respect many forms of creative expression, challenging or otherwise. As frustrating as it may be that someone may only want from art something that is nice to look at on their wall, it remains a valid impulse. I would have to say that it is a lot better, in many respects, than many other responses and so-called actions that consider to challenge established norms.

How did you get to the point where you are making works like this?

I feel I've spent much of my life trying to arrive at the visual by skirting around it. Perhaps out of my mistrust of only working something out in pictures I have a fear of results that look good (that is successful) but don't think well (that is have depth). For me the visual has always come at the end. It is the last step. The final point of making a work is to plunge right into the image. The experience must be total, sudden, springing from all the work that has come before.

So the influences were in this respect?

Music was certainly important, but I would say that the larger phenomenon of sound has the deepest effect on my work as an artist. However, when I think back and try to pinpoint a specific influence, I can't. The whole question of influence is, to me, like a big bowl of Minestrone soup, something which, incidentally, may also be the most accurate model of a human being! You just never know what's going to be an influence—being sick on a long car trip—reading a book on the history of religion.

Lionel, on the work you are submitting for the show, what were the initial responses?

I think most of the feedback we got was that the video was what I might call 'digestible' for the non-art public. After all we had copied the idiom of lay television. But because we mimic real television the question became 'is it art or commercial television?' And, in

terms of authorship, there was the difficulty of collaboration—our own and a third party.

So do you recognise influences here?

Certainly the riddles of Freudian logic suggest three becoming One. And as you know they are formulated for the first time as the question of childhood research: 'Where did I come from?' 'What am I missing?' and so on. Like the psychoanalysts the child's first researches are not only inquiries into the order of things, but also and more precisely, questions addressed to the past.

Certainly. On a more practical note, why have you used these particular materials?

Well, as we were preparing for the exhibition, I'd go over and look at the space—as I did here. It was a big converted classroom building with a bank of lockers off to the side. I kept thinking of making a box and being within a box in the space. Finally it occurred to me that I didn't have to make a box: there were boxes—the lockers—right there. That was a breakthrough! To realise that I didn't have to make the box as well. Now I could use a pre-existing box, go into it and come out and not have to make a box to be in. That's how I started doing performances—it seemed to solve so many problems.

Any other processes you have gone through to get to the making of this work?

Yes. I have always kept very active notebooks. Not notebooks like sketchbooks, which I have never kept, but notebooks like a journal or a kind of a travelogue. It is mapping a course through various readings, quotes, associations, observations, experiments, and ideas for pieces, all jumbled into one. There was an occasional picture but for the most part it was all written down in words, even the visual things.

In fact, as I understand it, all that you have created comes from these books. Is that so, lionel?

Exactly florian. That is so true, and in so many respects.

You should call them Minestrone recipe books.

Why yes! It would be so wonderfully wrong, wouldn't it?

the interviews and more informally in our ongoing

'email' dialogue, I asked artist, Lionel Budd
several questions pertaining to his show recently held at one
the 'rasin theory' of the universe
of Christchurch's more contemporary, non-profit artspace, The Physics Room.

the Permanent a to M,

...Elaborate Description of Lionel...
...He was cleanshaven, nervous and...

At this particularly screechy and seductive installation...
complained knowingly, scorning this high pitched artist, with a melodious voice: In the act, Budd also played Doris Day, we were pushed out and solicited into Budd's theatre-chamber, treated to be constructed as directed by his curators "et al" and by appointment only!
Lionel Budd's exhibition The Unity of Appearance, at The Physics Room (26th September-26th October) is not necessarily a critique of the postmodern mediated world.
"What the pilot sacrificed for his esoteric knowledge was the passenger's passive pleasure of the inevitability of a sunset drifting by." Michael Punt discussing a description by Karl Marx of Mark Twain
"I saw everything as no man had ever seen before... I felt like an explorer in medicine who first views a new and important territory."
Gynaecologist Dr. Sims, a developer of the speculum, 1845

m.walls Looking at how disaster and death, here represented by potent 'b-grade' images, I wonder if you are making almost 'blue' (or indeed green) movies?

Lionel h. We like it more to the image of the inner state and as such must be considered completely accurate and realistic. This is an approach that we are interested in exploring...from within rather than without.

m.walls The images which feature in The Unity of Appearance emanate concerns for media spectacle (they are Popular images and politically loaded), simulation (Budd(re)falsifies found documents. I see that the subjects were framed initially by a photographer on site, or at the happening; perhaps a wildlife photographer who dared not interrupt the action, through his fear of losing a 'good shot,' or an officer who took an afflicted human pleasure in the view. You have reselected and remobilised these static images, containing them not so neatly in a television box and it is reputed that you are now making new stills from this 'video art,' in order, no doubt that more 'art' might arrive anew) and hyperreality, as is of course 1997. How do you savour as we 'surf' towards the mythical millennium?
Lionel h. It is true that we need better bridges, and cars, fax machines, plastic surgery, more Velero and all the rest to prepare for the new millennium so...

m.walls Do you have intentions to disturb the internet, for example?

Lionel h. If some of us are drawn to these themes in our life... the Internet is well suited to expressing these concerns. But the issues go beyond a specific medium and become a reflection of our time.

m.walls What do/would you regard on the internet, for example?

Lionel h. see fig 1.

m.walls Cataclysms of information continue to be a consequential motif in your work and that of

your cohorts (was it Merit Groting in association with Popular Productions who made such overwrought film works, — as, — where the imagery ranged from...to...and your 'female' and somewhat more sensitive, I exclaim, counterpart, Lillian Budd who utilised many types of text, offering handy hints lifted from women's magazines and advice on art theory and...?). This works to establish an almost schizophrenic sensibility, suggesting perhaps an internalised fear of art (Freud's 'penis envy' might even be drawn upon?). Yet at the same time your work is often associated directly with the institutions associated with art practice...

Lionel h. You can think also of the present situation where the penis has a very high accepted truth factor in our society. In other words, most people who look at a penis think of it not necessarily as 'truthful' in terms of content, but accept it unquestionably as something real, something that actually does happen...

m.walls Quite! ...A large piece of canvas, which I suspect was found maybe in a camping ground, somebody's stripy, 1970s, tent, was painted white at the Unity of A...is this a reference to the work of other artist/s to whom you are 'paying homage'?

Lionel h. As frustrating as it may seem that someone may only want from a penis...or art for that matter...to have something they think nice to look at on their wall, this is still a valid impulse...

m.walls Inscribed on the piece we just talked

Internet: fig 1
In the beginning (before time) there was the big bang, 15 billion years ago. The primordial vacuum picture there was devoid of matter, but not really empty — through

We also discussed 'his' modes of art and/or representation, his (re)makings of image/sound, the installation

of artworks into times and spaces and notably, failing to
and the Big bang
deliberate on his feelings for her
theory in two parts

about was the ambiguous wording Fig.1. Many of the post structuralists, such as H. Cixous' writings on Dora, for example, critique early psychoanalytic studies. Do you have any interest in theoretical positionings such as these?
Lionel h. In these enlightened days the West has a frequent obsession with postmodern animation which demarcates us through the dissection of analysis of fragmented imagery and the broken corporeal, instants emanate as commercial 'proclamations' on television, radio and the net. People are swept up in an amplitude of information, both consciously and un/subconsciously. Baudrillard calls this "the ecstasy of communication," "advertising in its new dimension invades everything. ...All the useless information...comes to you from the entire world, like a microscopic pornography of the universe, useless, excessive. ...We live in the ecstasy of communication." His use of "ecstasy" is incongruous. It seems to describe the delirium or informational confusion caused by the circulating, flat images; flat because they only exist on the surface.
m.walls I hardly could have put it better myself... Flat yes flat

m.walls Your images can be 'accessed' on many levels. Is this a designed feature or does it merely coincide with an audience's desire to read 'art' into the work?

Lionel h. If you want to go back to the basic questions of existence... see fig 1

m.walls Well no...not quite. So how much desire

or (male?) drive do you need to have to make 'art'?
Lionel h. All we really hope to understand is the feeling that sometimes art can be the after-results, or a kind of debris, or a certain process which culminates in the act of desiring.
m.walls Earlier this year I had an exhibition, The Voice of the Silence. This moving installation was obviously 'male' in its heroic scale and it was an impressive and professional showing. How important is it that you make big, noisy art?
Lionel h. ...indeed our ongoing interest in the various systems of the cultures of the world involves such a search for noise that is not noise, and this gets into other ways of hearing, an area not yet adequately explored by us as yet.

m.walls Budd, you've really only arrived on the 'art scene' afresh, your show was at Auckland's ostensibly aptly named NEW Gallery. Have you worked in other fields?

Lionel h. (no response, but he...)
m.walls Lionel, The Voice as it is named in the accompanying catalogue, featured some imagery, as did The Unity. Is it causes or causalities which you are greatly moved by or is it the fetish? You are not a 'neo,' are you?

Lionel h. We are interested not so much in the image per se whose source lies in the phenomenal world, but rather the image as artifact, or imprint, or even wholly determined by some inner process.

m.walls So do you have a religious/cosmic inclination?

Lionel h. Well we like realistic renderings... m ponuil

m.walls At this point I would like to question you about actuality. Contrastingly, Lionel your feigning of 'art' and its objectification seems more actual and easier to relate to, than is the real thing, like landscape painting, for example, (which we might have instantly presumed to be 'art' yet your methods could argue otherwise, depending on many variables). Through superabundance, the distinction between the authentic and what is not this blurs, as dissipate any discriminating factors between the signified and the signifier, as the one seems to merge into the other, and they become the same, again...

Lionel h. Yes... And we sometimes think that we have art only to feel good. And everybody wants to feel good. But that's human nature too.

m.walls (interrupting) What is your background in 'art' Lionel?

Lionel h. Well, I want only the stuff on the wall that was nice. Don't we all? Wouldn't want some jerk to come in and make noise that wasn't nice—
Don't we all...

m.walls (blushing)

1 Michael Punt, 'The Elephant, the Spaceship and the Cockatoo: an Archaeology of Digital Photography' in The Photographic Image in Digital Culture, London (Routledge):1995, pp.52

2 Beryl Graham, 'The Panic Button (in which our heroine goes back to the future of pornography)' in The Photographic Image in Digital Culture, London (Routledge):1995, pp.79

It was in a state of minimum energy — through a quantum fluctuation a sort of bubble in this vacuum — there emerged a hot dense seed, smaller than a proton yet containing all the mass and energy of our universe in less than a trillionth of a second this seed cooled and expanded inflating into the size of a grapefruit

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Curators: Jim Barr, Mary Barr, Gregory Burke, et al.

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Assistant Curator and Editor: Christine Doerr

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Notes on the contributors

Jim Barr and Mary Barr

Jim Barr and Mary Barr are co-curators of *abnormal mass delusions?* and co-editors of *arguments for immortality*. They are independent curators and writers and collect contemporary New Zealand and Australian art. A selection of sculpture, video and installations from the collection was shown in Dunedin and Wellington in 2002 as the exhibition *Good Work*.

Gregory Burke

Gregory Burke is co-curator of *abnormal mass delusions?* and co-editor of *arguments for immortality* and is Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. His recent projects and publications include *Extended play: art remixing music*, 2003, *Feature: art, life and cinema*, 2001 and *Drive: power, progress and desire*, 2000. Burke has recently presented solo exhibitions by American artist Sam Durant, in conjunction with a residency at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery; German artist Maix Mayer and New Zealand photographer and artist Fiona Clark.

Tessa Laird

Tessa Laird is a New Zealand art critic recently returned from Los Angeles to Auckland where she is currently a lecturer in Contextual Studies at Manukau Institute of Technology, School of Visual Art. She was a founding editor of *Monica reviews art* and *LOG Illustrated* and has been a contributor to *Art on paper*, *MAKE*, *LIKE*, *Artnet.com*, and a range of art publications.

Ewen McDonald

Ewen McDonald is a New Zealand curator, writer and editor. McDonald is curator of the Allens Arthur Robinson Collection in Sydney and curatorial consultant for SOFA Gallery at the University of Canterbury. Recent projects include Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's *Monument to a Lost Civilization*, Adelaide Festival and the Biennale of Sydney, 2000; *Dark Plain*, Christchurch Arts Festival, 2001 and *Tech/No/Zone* for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, 2002. McDonald is co-curator of the forthcoming Auckland Triennial in 2004.

Gwynneth Porter

Gwynneth Porter is a lecturer and writer based in Auckland. Porter is a member of the organising committee of the itinerant exhibition project, *Cuckoo*. Formerly an editor and contributing editor of the art tabloid *Log Illustrated*, Porter is currently a lecturer in the Contextual Studies Department at Manukau Institute of Technology, School of Visual Art.

Hanna Scott

Hanna Scott is an independent curator and writer based in Auckland. A graduate of Victoria University of Wellington majoring in Art History and Philosophy, Scott has worked as Director of Artspace in Auckland and is currently the Arts Editor for *Pavement* magazine. Recent exhibitions and publications include *Arcadia: the other life of video games* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2003 and *Honestly: new artists* at Artspace, Auckland, 2002.

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

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