

Exegesis

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1. Title: Superfictions. The Creation of Fictional Situations in International Contemporary Art Practice.

2. Abstract – Research Program

Brief Description

This project builds on a fifteen year investigation into over forty artists around the world who have created a number of visual fictions as art works, mostly in the last two decades of the 20th century. These artists are generally working in isolation from each other and there have only been a handful of international group exhibitions¹ entirely devoted to the field, although the development of such a trend was hinted at in earlier group exhibitions.²

In a (*nouveau*) realist sense, some have taken aspects of 20th century life - the laundromat, the driving school, the scientific research centre, the airline or the museum, and transferred the outward traces of these institutions to the gallery space. Others have focussed in a more conceptual way on organisational structures and made art works based on the way that information is exchanged - from the committee meeting in the board room to the press office or the web-site accessed through satellite. Most of these are ‘closed’ systems representing discrete paradigms. A few, however, take the art world itself as subject matter and these systems tend to be ‘open’ and allow for continuing paradigm shifts and an indefinite development of ideas within the field of contemporary art.

Just as these systems differ from each other, so too do the methodologies of different artists. Several who have been important to this investigation follow narrow

¹*For Real Now*. Hoorn, 1990. Artists included: Guillaume Bijl, Seymour Likely, Res Ingold, Int Fish-Handel Servaas ZN, Maria Kozic and others. *Business Art Business*, Groninger Museum, 1993. Artists included: Banca di Oklahoma SRL, Ingold Airlines, Int Fish-Handel Servaas ZN, Mark Kostabi, Name Diffusion, Philippe Cazal, Premiata Ditta SAS, and Tecnotest SRL. *How Say You*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, and various venues around Australia, 1996. Artists included: Sandra Bridie, Stephen Bush, Greg Creek, Fiona Hall, Peter Hill, Robert Nelson, Kate Reeves.

² *Alibis Centre Pompidou, Paris 1984*. Artists included: **Information Fiction Publicité, Richard Artschwager, Gerard Colin-Thiebaut, Luciano Fabro, Gerard Garouste, Pierre Klossowski, Robert Longo, Carlo-Maria Mariani, Cindy Sherman, Jan Vercruyse, Didier Vermeiren, and William Wegman. *Camouflage* The Scottish Arts Council, various venues, 1988.**

obsessions within closed systems³, others create a variety of inter-related projects⁴, while a third grouping⁵ moves from one clearly defined fictional situation to another. A fourth group of independent practitioners⁶ investigates how we decide what is true or false in any given visual situation. Testing devices set up by these artists often include the medium of photography, video, the postal system, and increasingly web-technology.

Objectives:

The major objective of the research project will be to develop a body of work which, in a disciplined way, investigates how fictional situations have been introduced into contemporary art spaces. These ‘art spaces’ will, at different times, be as self-contained as an art installation, as large as a museum, as chaotic as a city street, as text-and-image based as a dedicated journal, as geographically diverse as an international mailing list or a lecture tour, and as cyber-spatial as a web-site. This body of work will be published in different stages during the candidacy⁷ and different hypotheses (see below) will be addressed within each site.⁸ Because of the additive nature of this project and the number of advance publications throughout

³ Res Ingold, a Swiss artist based in Cologne, is a good example of this tendency, with his single-minded obsession about a fictional airline, *Ingold Airlines*. David Wilson in Los Angeles has built a similarly closed world, *The Museum of Jurassic Technology*.

⁴ The *Seymour Likely* project in Amsterdam; General Idea in Canada. I would also classify my own similarly “additive” fictions within this grouping.

⁵ Guillaume Bijl in Belgium is the exemplar of this tendency and has been creating his *nouveau realiste* fictions longer than anyone else. Rodney Glick in Western Australia and Servaas in Amsterdam have both created a variety of discrete visual fictions.

⁶ Joan Fontcuberta; The Leeds 13; John Tozer

⁷ *The Art Fair Murders*, Auckland City Gallery, 1997; *The Art Fair Murders*, Dialogue No 5, Melbourne, 1997; *The Art Fair Murders*, Edinburgh International Book Festival, 1997; *The Art Fair Murders* Lecture Tour (Australia, Europe, USA), 1999; *The Art Fair Murders*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 2000; Fictions, *Photofile #59*, guest editorship focusing on PhD investigation; *The Art Fair Murders*, Geelong Art Gallery, 2000; *The Art Fair Murders*, Storey Hall Gallery, Melbourne, 2000; *The Art Fair Murders* web-site www.nymoci.com, 1996-2000; *The Art Fair Murders* global mail art interventions, 1996-2000.

⁸ These hypotheses as to how different fictional situations can be introduced into varied sites range from “curating work in” from museum storage areas and the studios of local artists (*The Art Fair Murders*, Auckland, 1997) to staging a kidnapping during a lecture/performance (*The Art Fair Murders*, Oxford, 2000) to examining the teacher-pupil paradigm (*The Art Fair Murders*, Melbourne and Geelong 2000) and the vagaries of the auction house (*The Art Fair Murders*, Melbourne, 2000)

the candidacy, documentation and due consideration of these “events” will be crucial.

The secondary objective of this research (that which locates the above major objective within the background theory) is to examine the recent uses of 'fiction' within international contemporary art practice as evidenced in the work of a group of key international artists working independently and in teams. The contextual part of the exegesis will focus on a maximum of ten such case studies and give a collective overview of their *oeuvre*. It will investigate how their individual projects have contributed to a body of knowledge which now allows them to be classified as a group despite their disparate intentions. This project will take issue with theorists such as Achille Bonito Oliva who has consistently stated that since the advent of what he calls the *Trans Avant-gardia* in 1974 all new art movements will be movements of quotation and that art has no 'future' other than quotation.⁹ My thesis will argue that through creating fictions contemporary art can evolve beyond post-modernism¹⁰ and claim new territory. This hypothesis will be tested through an investigation of recent art movements (particularly those involving fictional situations) which have both avoided and embraced (often simultaneously) the device of quotation and whose existence can, in a Darwinian sense, be equated with 'progress'. The most tenable aspects of modernism and post-modernism may then form a new synthesis and usher in a period of 'synthetic modernism'. That this process is already underway and entering a mature period can be seen in the work of individual artists as diverse David Noonan (Australia); Alexa Wright (England); Stephen Hurrell (Scotland); and Andrea Zittel (USA).

The project will address the following specific research questions:

⁹ In an interview I conducted in 1987, *ALBA* magazine No 7, 18-21, Achille Bonito Oliva states: 'The myth of the future is not part of the *trans-avantgarde*.' And later: 'We can speak of a warm *trans-avantgarde* and a cool *trans-avantgarde*. The former reinstates the manual aspect of painting while the latter takes to itself the instruments of technology or borrows abstract or conceptual idioms. Within both of these the main operative function is *quotation*.'

¹⁰ I realise there are many conflicting views on this, but I am in the camp which sees post-modernism as a historical movement from which the contemporary art world has now moved on.

1. **What is the function and use of fiction as an artistic device in contemporary art practice?**
2. **Who are the main artists using these fictional devices?**
3. **Into how many categories do these fictions fall?**
4. **Will the creation of fictional situations end the hegemony of postmodernism**
5. **Can a new synthesis be reached which unites the most tenable aspects of modernism with the most tenable aspects of postmodernism through fictional situations?**
6. **How do these new uses relate to older, more established practices of camouflage and *trompe l'oeil*?**
7. **How important is 'the organisational structure' as a framing device for these fictions? Structures to be investigated will include 'the commercial art fair'; 'the museum'; 'the committee'; 'the shop'; 'the media'; and 'the teacher-pupil paradigm'.**

Rationale for the program:

In recent years a number of international artists working as individuals and as groups have used visual fictions, henceforth referred to as 'superfictions'¹¹, as a strategy to make us look at the world anew, and as a way of expanding the boundaries of the visual arts. This is a time honoured function of the artist. Little work has been done to define this movement, although some material is available in the form of catalogue essays and journal publications. No book length text has yet been written on this subject and group exhibitions have been scarce.

Historical precedents range from the serious experiments and practical jokes of Leonardo da Vinci (as recorded by Vasari) through the various *trompe l'oeil* created for the stately homes of Europe, the dazzle painting of ships in the first world war, the fictional constructs of Marcel Broodthaers to the many-faceted installations of Guillaume Bijl whose work leads us in to the contemporary rationale for this

¹¹ The term 'superfiction' is useful to distinguish these visual fictions from their better known text-based counterparts in literary fiction. As superfictions have developed over the past two decades the idea of narrative, especially fragmented narrative, has increasingly been introduced. See: Heathcote, Adrian, 'The Rise and Rise of the Superfiction,' *black + white*, 11 (February, 1995), 32-33.

research. This is informed by, amongst others, the work of Res Ingold, Janet Cardiff, SERVAAS, Seymour Likely, Rodney Glick, David Wilson, Charles Green and Lyndell Brown, IRWIN, Patrick Pound, Alexa Wright, and Juan Fontcuberta. Given the importance of illusion to the visual arts, and the tenacity of philosophers, especially critical rationalists, in their search first for verification and later for falsification of given statements, the results of these investigations will primarily be of interest to art practitioners and to visual philosophers.

Rationale for *The Art Fair Murders*:

The rationale of creating a visual fiction from an art fair rather than a museum or a commercial gallery arises because the art world in its totality is represented at art fairs in a way not seen at other events such as biennales or auctions. Buyers, collectors, dealers, curators, critics, artists, and curious members of the general public are all under one roof for an intense few days. The populist and the specialist come together in a spectacle that lends itself to dynamic fictional situations, and a sub-text of this thesis involves an examination of the co-existence of the so-called 'elite', or specialist, alongside the 'populist'. The commercial booths are like stylistic time capsules or barometers for change with one, for example, showing the work of Australian regional landscape painting and its neighbours displaying the latest tendencies from Cologne or classic School of Paris paintings.

Commercial art fairs are a comparatively recent phenomenon. The major ones are annual events. The first was held in Cologne in 1967. By the late 1980s they had grown to a point where there was at least one major art fair happening every month of the year somewhere in the world.¹² What makes them unique, and distinguishes them from museums and international 'blockbuster' events like *documenta* and *The Venice Biennale* is the fact that they are totally driven by commercial forces.

Curation is only involved to the extent that at the major fairs such as Basel and Chicago where there are long waiting lists for galleries to be accepted, there is a vetting procedure based on quality and reputation. Beyond that, gallerists are free

¹² This is an underlying factor in the superfiction *The Art Fair Murders*.

to exhibit whatever work they choose within the booths which they have hired, often for as much as US\$50,000 for six days. In outward appearances these events resemble car shows, home shows, and boat shows all of which generally occur in the same sort of venue, usually large trade halls or convention centres. Most run for less than one week. Millions of dollars of business is conducted and a single art work can often sell several times from gallery to gallery, the price rising each time.¹³ Most, however, are bought by private collectors and these can range in ambition from a local dentist or surgeon through to collectors like Charles Saatchi, Count Panza, or a museum curator adding to a museum's permanent collection. There is an unevenness and inconsistency¹⁴ about the quality of the work which goes from near amateur at the minor fairs to museum quality examples of Picasso, Van Gogh, Sonia Delauney or Andy Warhol at the blue chip events.

This eclectic mix – with delightful opportunities for narrative and fiction – which is produced at commercial art fairs, along with chance juxtapositions of style, form, and content, informs the rationale behind the thesis. Within the exegesis these situations are contextualised against historical and contemporary equivalents. Collectively, they attempt to push at the boundaries of contemporary art practice. The conclusion to the exegesis will evaluate how successful that attempt has been.

¹³ Brian Angel, director of the Los Angeles Art Fair, told me in an interview at the 1989 event that he knew of one painting which had already sold five times from dealer to dealer and this was only the third day of the fair. According to Angel, the dealer would be happy if the public were not admitted at all and the gallerists could be left to deal between each other.

¹⁴ “Inconsistency” and “unevenness” are deliberate tropes fed into the construction of *The Art Fair Murders* and will be addressed under ‘methodology’.

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¹⁵ **Interview conducted jointly with Alan Woods.**

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4. Introduction

The premise for the research program is that over the past two decades¹⁶ there has been an increasing use of fiction and fragmented narrative within contemporary art practice. In a poetic sense, the questions asked by this hypothesis in the preceding abstract could be summarised thus: ‘What happens when illusion slips out of the picture frame and fiction escapes from the pages of the novel?’

This is almost immediately followed by a question of classification: ‘Should the resulting hybrid be classified as a ‘superfiction’, and are there enough commonalities between artists working in this way to regard it as a new art movement?’¹⁷

While this may be seen by some as a small sub-section of installation art, this exegesis will show that it is in fact quite broad – broad enough in fact to be classified into various ‘types’. Historically we must consider the pioneering work of Marcel Duchamp, Orson Welles¹⁸ and particularly Marcel Broodthaers. However, within the contemporary milieu, the parameters of this new tendency (which will be fully investigated in future chapters) can be set through a brief introduction to the work of two senior practitioners of international standing – the Belgian Guillaume Bijl and the Russian Ilya Kabakov.

Guillaume Bijl was born in Antwerp in 1946. He was a self-taught painter whose work was never exhibited, but interestingly he studied theatre and film briefly between 1969-1970. In 1979 he built two installations in Galerij Ruimte Z in Antwerp. The first was a fictional driving school *Driving School Z*.¹⁹ The second was

¹⁶ 1980-2000.

¹⁷ Heathcote, Adrian, ‘The Rise and Rise of the Superfiction,’ *black + white*, 11 (February, 1995), 32-33.

¹⁸ Primarily his radio broadcast of H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*

¹⁹ Hans-Jurgen Schwalm, *Guillaume Bijl – Installationen, Situationen und Kulturtourismus*, Köln: Künstler und Verlag, 1998, 44.

a fictive polling booth called *My Political Involvement Space*. To see how tenaciously he has held to this strategy of re-creating slices of physical reality within gallery spaces we must consider one of his major works from 1996 called *Central Airport Basel*²⁰, a mammoth art work built within Basel Theatre, Switzerland, complete with check-in desks, signage, carpeting, shopping areas and departure boards. Writing in *Flash Art* magazine in 1991 Christophe Schenker gives a concise overview of Bijl's career:

Guillaume Bijl has built a small true-to-life supermarket in the space of the Littmann Gallery. We know it's quite a while since this artist began to work with the single never changing concept of introducing half public space situations into an art context...One wonders if it's Bijl's intention once again to insist on the reality of sign systems, and of the fictional quality of any other definition of the real. Certainly Bijl makes work that finds no base for itself in the tradition of optical, pictorial, or painterly realism. Traditionally, *mimetic realism* grounds itself on the fundamental difference between the means employed for representation and the object that finds itself transformed into represented subject. The supermarket as a real work of art is thus an imitation. Bijl places himself in the near vicinity of the Nouveaux Realistes, of whom Broodthaers purportedly remarked that he didn't like their 'wordiness' and that their objects only projected a rude and simple notion of progress into art.

Only one other group of artists, the Boyle Family²¹, have gone to such lengths to painstakingly represent 'slices' of the world around us *free of narrative content*. Ilya Kabakov, by contrast, has fuelled his visual installations with narrative fiction.

Ilya Kabakov was born in 1933 in Dniepropetrovsk, in Russia. In 1941 he was evacuated with his mother to Samarkand when his father was drafted to the Russian front. By a happy coincidence Leningrad's Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture was likewise evacuated to Samarakand. Kabakov trained there and later moved to the Moscow Art School. In the 1950s, as a movement against

²⁰ Ibid, 50-51

Stalinist socialist realism, various unofficial art groups emerged in different Russian cities. Kabakov was a co-founder of Moscow's main group and active within it until his move to the West in the late 1980s. In his essay "The Movable Cave, or Kabakov's Self-memorials"²² Boris Groys clearly grounds the artist's installations in narrative literature:

The first large installation that Kabakov made in the West was *Ten Characters* (1988, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York). Characteristically, when he asked himself how to show his work in the West, he immediately fell back on the idea of a character, of fictional authorship, which he had developed in the early 1970s in his albums. In New York, works that Kabakov had largely made in Russia were distributed between ten different fictional authors; each was given an imaginary biography and presented as a lonely, solitary, soul practising art in the isolation of a solitary room. Kabakov's installations originate neither in performance nor in post-Minimalist site-specific art, like those by many of his Western colleagues, but in narrative literature, or more precisely in the novelistic tradition.

The above quotes set the parameters for this investigation into superfictions. They go further, however, and describe the point at which my foundation of hypotheses allowed new knowledge to be built upon that foundation. Within the studio component of the thesis *The Art Fair Murders* my fictional recreations of a commercial art fair, a casino, and a hotel bedroom might be seen as referencing Guillaume Bijl. However, the creation of characters, their identities, and linking devices or 'clues' between these static installations draw heavily on fragmented narrative fiction and as such are closer to the *oeuvre* of Ilya Kabakov. It is within the synthesis of these two extremes that the new knowledge generated by this research project is to be found.

The prime concern of this research project is to create a body of work which answers the questions set out in the preceding abstract. Those questions grow from my engagement with, and analysis of, the international contemporary art world

²¹ Mark Boyle and his family re-create in minute detail parts of the planet which they choose by throwing darts in to maps. Using fibreglass casting techniques they copy the earth's surface in 'slices' which are approximately two meters square.

predating 1980 and continuing into the candidature. The three most important artists whose work lies outside the focused parameters of this project but who nevertheless were a strong influence in the early stages of its formulation are Ian Hamilton Finlay, Ian Breakwell, and Ralph Rumney. Each was particularly important in showing ways in which art works can interact with society and within the mass media. Their importance will be considered in

6. Foundation of Hypothesis.

Other than outlining the historical context, and sometimes lack of context, for this project most of the exegesis will address the years 1980-2000. This was a period which, in painting at least, began with the shock of Julian Schnabel's broken plate paintings and ended with the furore of Chris Ofili's elephant dung paintings and the resulting *cause célèbre* of the *Sensation* exhibition in Brooklyn. In a sense the art world might appear to have come full circle in those twenty years with Schnabel and Ofili standing like book-ends to the period. What happened between those two points was far more varied and multifarious than the heavily textured surfaces of those artists would suggest. New figuration²³ was quickly followed by new geometric abstraction²⁴, appropriation art²⁵, deconstruction²⁶, artists working in teams²⁷, installation art²⁸, body art²⁹, art and new technologies³⁰, sound art³¹, and lately a new, emerging, decorative art³². There were of course re-workings and extensions of previous art movements which were not necessarily based on post-modern quotation, such as neo-conceptual art³³ and neo-minimalism³⁴.

²² Boris Groys, David A. Ross and Iwona Blazwick, *Ilya Kabakov*, London: Phaidon, 1998, 54

²³ Anself Kiefer, Stephen Campbell, Eric Fischl, Therese Oulton, David Salle

²⁴ Ross Bleckner, Peter Halley, Jeff Koons, Thomas Locher, John Nixon, Han Schuil, Philip Taaffe

²⁵ Sherrie Levine, The Starn Twins, Imants Tillers

²⁶ Wim Delvoye, Donald Lipski, Rosemarie Trockel, Andrea Zittel

²⁷ Art Club 2000, Ulay and Marina Abramovich, Gilbert and George, IRWIN, Tim Rollins and KOS

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³⁴ Helmut Federle, Gunther Forg, Gerhard Merz

While this thesis deals with the period that saw so many of these new art movements emerge, it does not align itself with any one of them, except tangentially. Installation art and neo-conceptualism might be put forward as two possible exceptions, but neither dominates the ethos of superfictions other than that the work under investigation is generally not concerned with pure painting or sculpture and is ideas based.

As the literature review will show, the tendencies examined here have developed almost invisibly in terms of specialist journals and group exhibitions. If it can be likened to anything, then perhaps it is to the situationist movement in the fifties and sixties which never really entered the art historical canon until the 1989 Pompidou Centre historical survey *On the passage of a few individuals through a brief period of time*. Even then the main similarity is not in form or content but rather in a ‘below the surface’ development.

Theory, sometimes referred to as ‘critical theory’, was also widespread and many-headed during this same period. Feminist theory, queer theory, post-colonial theory, and theories of minority discourse joined with, or fought against, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and the older disciplines of Marxism and psychoanalysis. This thesis is not concerned with any of these theories at a core level. It is, however, very concerned with particular theorists whose writings, in part rather than in whole, cast light on the argument. Rosalind Krauss, amongst others, represents the contemporary end of the spectrum while Walter Benjamin is of great historical interest. Indeed, Krauss quotes Benjamin in her 1999 book *A Voyage on the North Sea – Art in the Age of the Post – Medium Condition*³⁵ in a single sentence that is of great importance to this investigation: ‘Benjamin explained that “to an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.”’³⁶

One additional theoretical area that relates more to the thesis itself than to the broader area of superfictions concern ideas found in the philosophy of science. Of

³⁵ London: Thames and Hudson, 46

³⁶ Many of the devices employed in *The Art Fair Murders* and the earlier *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* aim at media-based outcomes rather than gallery-based outcomes.

particular interest and use have been the writings of Karl Popper³⁷, Thomas Kuhn³⁸, Margaret Masterman³⁹, and Paul Feyerabend⁴⁰.

The methodology for this project evolved over the course of the investigation. In the early stages a traditional sequential approach was adopted, but as the project progressed I had to devise specific methodologies for discrete tasks. Some of these related to web-design, some to global mail-outs, some to the conceptualising of the lecture-performance, and some to the fabrication of a wide range of art objects, ‘props’, and characters.

Chapter 7 will elucidate these various methodologies, but it is important to stress in the introduction that right from the start *The Art Fair Murders* was conceived as an art installation *and* a novel. It was crucial to the integrity of the research that neither became a weak illustration of the other. Both were worked on in tandem and each has evolved from ideas generated by the other. In the conclusion, consideration will be given to the success or failure of this strategy as a workable methodology.

³⁷ Especially his development of sophisticated methodological falsificationism

³⁸ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed, enlarged. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.

³⁹ For her paper ‘The Nature of a Paradigm’ published in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 1970, 59. ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave. In it she outlines 23 quite specific ways in which Kuhn in his 1962 uses the term ‘paradigm’.

⁴⁰ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, Verso, London, 1975.

5. Literature Review

One of the most dispiriting aspects of a thorough literature review is the discovery that many of the facets of the project which one thought unique have already been carried out by others. However, as the investigation grows, this emerges as a very positive aspect of the process and it allowed me to move forward with more confidence into truly uncharted waters.

The biggest problem with this investigation at the level of the literature review is that very little has been published or exhibited by or about the artists in question. This statement needs to be qualified by the rider that while there was very little material available when the investigation began in 1996, in the latter stages of the investigation significant publications in text and in galleries *have* been produced.

This has meant a constant updating of the literature review which in itself has been a rewarding process.

In all stages of the investigation 'library searches' by computer have had a very low success rate.⁴¹ I had to physically work through a range of journals and catalogues covering the decades in question. The following journals and magazines have proved most useful:

- *Artforum* (USA)
- *Artscribe International* (UK)
- *Flash Art* (Italy)
- *Frieze* (UK)
- *Kunstforum* (Germany)
- *Parkett* (Switzerland)
- *Perspektief* (Netherlands)
- *World Art* (Australia)

Field trips to major events:

Asia Pacific Triennials, Brisbane: 1996; 1999

Documentas: 1992; 1997

Melbourne Biennale: 1999

Munster Sculpture Project: 1997

Sydney Biennales: 1992; 1995/1996; 1998; 2000

Venice Biennales: 1993; 1997

International Art Fairs: Basel; Chicago; Cologne; Frankfurt; London; Los Angeles; Melbourne.

⁴¹ Vital information might be found, for example, in an advertisement in *Artforum* which can only be identified by working through the relevant journals by hand.

Field trips to museums and private collections: Count Panza's Collection, Varese; Guggenheim, New York; Guggenheim, SOHO; Guggenheim Bilbao; Los Angeles MOCA; MASS MoCA, North Adams; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; MCA, Sydney; Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pier Arts Centre, Stromness; Pompidou Centre, Paris; San Francisco MOMA; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate Modern; Tate British; Tate Liverpool; Te Papa, Wellington.

Throughout this project it has been crucially important to undertake international field trips. This has allowed the full benefits of 'word of mouth' recommendations to be explored. When, for example, I first met Res Ingold⁴² who 'operates' *Ingold Airlines* as a superfiction, he described the work of SERVAAS and his fictive world of deep sea fishing.⁴³ SERVAAS in turn then lead me to Torch Gallery in Amsterdam⁴⁴ who introduced him to the *Seymour Likely* group.

Concurrent with this a close reading of texts and journals, especially *Artforum* and *Perspektief* brought to light the work of Joan Fontcuberta in Catalonia. Finally, in the very early stages of formulating a hypothesis, a chance meeting with Laurel Paley an artist/critic in Los Angeles⁴⁵ led me into the strange world of David Wilson and his *Museum of Jurassic Technology*⁴⁶.

As has already been stated, few group exhibitions of superfiction artists have been held. The two most important were *For Real Now* and *Business Art Business*.⁴⁷ The former might be seen as a general survey of artists working within fictional structures. The latter concentrated solely on the work of artists who have created

⁴² Cologne Art Fair, November 1989

⁴³ Both artists exhibited together at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 199

⁴⁴ Torch Gallery is directed by Adrian van der Haven who has worked as a gallery dealer for many of the artists in this investigation including myself.

⁴⁵ Los Angeles Art Fair, December 1989

⁴⁶ www.mjt.org

⁴⁷ *For Real Now*. Hoorn, 1990. Artists included: Guillaume Bijl, Seymour Likely, Res Ingold, Int Fish-Handel Servaas ZN, Maria Kozic and others. *Business Art Business*, Groninger Museum, 1993. Artists included: Banca di Oklahoma SRL, Ingold Airlines, Int Fish-Handel Servaas ZN, Mark Kostabi, Name Diffusion, Philippe Cazal, Premiata Ditta SAS, and Tecnotest SRL.

fictional businesses and was accompanied by a suitably bizarre, yet appropriate, catalogue. Inside a large, silver pizza box bearing the name *Business Art Business* was a cluster of very individual catalogues totally unlinked by any unifying size, design, or format. Each catalogue in the pizza box related to one of the art-business groups in the exhibition.

Yet these rare-as-hens-teeth exhibitions referred to above did not arise out of a vacuum. Neither did the methodologies of the artists exhibiting in them. While this thesis is firmly rooted in the international contemporary art world of the last two decades of the 20th century, a huge debt is owed first to Marcel Duchamp and secondly to Marcel Broodthaers. Acknowledgement must also be made to all aspects of the surrealist movement.

Writing in *The Blind Man*⁴⁸ about his creation of the fictional artist Mr Richard Mutt and that artist's submission of a signed urinal to an open sculpture exhibition, Marcel Duchamp observed, 'Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.' The Readymade had arrived.

Between 1968 and 1972 Marcel Broodthaers created a fictional museum called 'The Museum of Modern Art, Eagles Department'. The eagle, for Broodthaers, stood for 'art' and stood for 'idea'. Rosalind Krauss explains the importance of this Belgian poet turned artist to the contemporary art world⁴⁹:

In the *Section de Figures (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present)*, mounted by his fictional museum, Broodthaers famously submitted more than three hundred different eagles to this principle of levelling. In this way, the eagle itself, no longer a figure of nobility, becomes a sign of the figure, the mark – that is – of pure exchange. Yet in this there is a further paradox that Broodthaers himself did not live to see. For the eagle principle, which simultaneously

⁴⁸ New York, 1917

⁴⁹ Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea – Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*, London: Thames and Hudson, 20

implodes the idea of an aesthetic medium and turns everything equally into a readymade that collapses the difference between the aesthetic and the commodified, has allowed the eagle to soar above the rubble and to achieve a hegemony once again. Twenty-five years later, all over the world, in every biennial and at every art fair, the eagle principle functions as the new Academy. Whether it calls itself installation art or institutional critique, the international spread of the mixed media-installation has become ubiquitous. Triumphantly declaring that we now inhabit a post-medium age, the post-medium condition of this form traces its lineage, of course, not so much to Joseph Kosuth, as to Marcel Broodthaers.

While Duchamp and Broodthaers will be referred to only occasionally in this exegesis, their huge importance to this project is acknowledged in spirit on every page.

At the point when I reached the middle of the project's time-line, it became apparent that there were probably many artists creating superfictions who were not coming to light through the standard literature review process. How best to locate them? A period of frustration and brooding was followed by the idea that constructing a lecture tour of Australia, Europe and America would allow me to present the investigation to date in a formal way to a wide mix of audiences. Members of these audiences might suggest other artists or art teams which I could pursue.

From past experience it was evident that such a lecture tour would involve at least one year's preparation to secure bookings, raise funds, and plot the best itinerary. In addition to the lecture circuit this strategy would also allow me to explore book shops and libraries in such key places as the Netherlands, London, and Boston. From this, publications, catalogues, and journals that did not show up in computer searches⁵⁰ might be unearthed – especially non-English examples.

⁵⁰ There were many such cases, and I am convinced that both traditional and web-based library searches cannot be wholly relied upon; each researcher must use the most appropriate tools for their (particular) investigations.

At least two of the case studies recorded below would not have come to light without this lecture tour, and many of the text references, especially from the Netherlands and Belgium, would have been missed.

At this point the literature review articulates on to ‘Foundation of Hypothesis’ and ‘Methodology’. These will be further developed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

6. Foundation of Hypothesis

Stage 1

In *The Penguin Book of Lies*⁵¹ Philip Kerr begins his introductory essay with the following observation:

⁵¹ Philip Kerr, ed, *Penguin Book of Lies*, London: Penguin, 1991, 1.

The Gospel according to St John records the following exchange between Jesus and Pontius Pilate: ‘Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.’ Francis Bacon takes up the story in his essay ‘Of Truth’: ‘What is truth? said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.’

Having considered this exchange, Philip Kerr concludes a few paragraphs later that ‘“What is truth?” is simply not a very interesting way of initiating debate of a complex metaphysical question.’ So where do we begin?

1989 was an important year for this project’s narrative foundation, and for the world as a whole. It is the year in which *The Art Fair Murders*⁵² is notionally set. It was the year of great revolutions in Eastern Europe; the year the Berlin Wall came down; the year of the Tiananmen Square massacre, and the last heady year of the eighties’ art world with all its excesses and absurdities. It was also the year I created his fictional museum *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas*, and it was the year he met many of the artists investigated as part of this thesis. But can we go back further? Why the interest in fictional situations at all? Why the interest in how we ‘read’ visual documents and situations? When I began to ponder these questions my mind jumped back and forth over various events in my life. I remembered how a fellow first year student Stephen French and I invented a fictional student called Jimmy Glenn. This character was signed in to every class, had mail and parcels delivered to the art school in his name, and gradually began to take on a life of his own. I also tried to write essays for what was then known as ‘complementary studies’ in as imaginative a way as possible, on one occasion presenting the essay as documents notionally found inside the briefcase of a member of parliament.

⁵² *The Art Fair Murders*, an additive project, is set in two time zones – 1989, and ‘the eternal present’, ie if it is being worked on in 1996 it is also set in 1996, in 2000 it is also set then, in 2010 it will be set then, and so on.

Then there was a remembered friend from the age of three who was eighteen months older than I. For a ten year period he would lie shamelessly and unnecessarily about anything and everything – invented holidays; expansive farms owned by relatives in distant English counties; what he'd done at school; who he had met...

It became almost like an enjoyable puzzle to try and unravel truth from fiction, compounded by the occasion when the friend quite correctly denied the existence of Father Christmas, only to have this counter-denied by my parents who were otherwise always scrupulously honest with all things. It seemed an uphill task working out what was true and what was false in this world.

There was also an imaginary friend I invented called 'Hessybendydivey', perhaps a conceit of an only child before other siblings arrived.

Later in life, as an art student in Guildford, I was nearly blown up in the IRA pub bombings in that city.⁵³ The way the media, parliament, the local population, and fellow students reacted to that event in so many different ways was a revelation. It also raised the issue of state propaganda, media bias, how the police handle evidence, and how the courts allow certain evidence and not others.

Fifteen years later, again in 1989, the four young people who had been imprisoned for that crime were set free. "There has been a grave miscarriage of justice," the then home secretary Douglas Hurd intoned with unconvincing gravitas.⁵⁴ It turned out later that one woman in the group had been at a rock concert in London on the night of the bombing. This information was dis-allowed as evidence in the trial.

Three other examples should be briefly noted. In the early seventies *The Glass Bead Game* by Hermann Hesse was a big influence, particularly for the way that in this complex fiction it might be necessary, in order to make just one move in 'The Bead Game', for the game player to learn a new language or study an Eastern philosophy. Secondly, during the same period, the war in Vietnam was escalating and one of the biggest casualties was the truth. A generation became inured to the lies of politicians

⁵³ October, 1974

⁵⁴ A video collage of this statement is used as part of this project, both in the lecture/performance and the gallery space. It appears in the Hal Jones installation 'The Fence' referring to the brief period he spent in jail.

and presidents. Twenty five years later, another generation would watch President Clinton as he stared down the camera and lied that “I did not have sex with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.”

Thirdly, in the mid seventies I was an honours candidate at West Surrey College of Art in England. My theory supervisor was John A Walker whose book *Art Since Pop*⁵⁵ had been an enormous influence on my understanding of contemporary art. For my thesis I invented a group of fictional artists called ‘The Avant-Gardians’ and set them several years into the future. My thesis comprised examples of their art works, manifestos, and constructed fictional interviews with members of this group.

•

Between completing art school in the late seventies, and creating the fictive *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* in 1989, I discovered the lives and works of several artists whose methodology would be important to the foundation of this hypothesis in the mid nineteen-nineties. They are: Ian Breakwell, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Ralph Rumney.

The contribution of each to the foundation of the hypothesis will be described briefly in Stage 2.

Stage 2

Ian Breakwell

The late English art critic Peter Fuller gave an insightful introduction to the work of Ian Breakwell in the catalogue *Continuous Diary 1965-1978*⁵⁶ in which he wrote, ‘The Diary has been central to Breakwell’s activity as an artist since 1965. In different years it has acquired different forms; it has sometimes been more regularly pursued than in others; it has always involved the use of both words and images, and there is a sense in which it is as much literature as art.’

As an on-going project *The Diary* has woven through many subsidiary projects such as the films he made with the musician Kevin Coyne⁵⁷ and the residencies he carried out through the pioneering Artists Placement Group and the Mental Health Group (Architects division) at Broadmoor Prison. This led to his “Audio-Visual Reminiscence Aids for Mentally Infirm Elderly People 1978-79.” In this work he and his collaborators⁵⁸ ‘encouraged reminiscence which can be used by the patient, with or without assistance.’⁵⁹

The project consisted of four stages:

1. Research and collection of suitable audio-visual material from existing sound archives, libraries and photographic collections.
2. Selection, editing and assembly of ‘packs’ of presentable material in the form of synchronised tape-slide sequences covering the period 1890-1960.
3. Testing the prototype in the field with selected groups of old people, under the supervision of appropriate medical, nursing or care staff.
4. Report of research findings and recommendations for future development of complete Reminiscence Aid.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Thames and Hudson, Dolphin imprint, London 1976.

⁵⁶ Published by the Scottish Arts Council and Third Eye Centre (Glasgow) Ltd, 1978

⁵⁷ *The Journey*, 1975. *The Institution*, 1978.

⁵⁸ The Reminiscence Aid Project team consisted of: Ian Breakwell (Artist); Hugh Davies (Composer/Musician); Bill Furlong (Audio-Visual Consultant); Mick Kemp (DHSS Architect); Rowan Mathews (Psychologist); Carmel Sammons (Printmaker).

⁵⁹ Ian Breakwell, *Continuous Diary 1965-1978*, Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council and Third Eye Centre Glasgow, 1978, 33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 33.

Though attending lectures given by Ian Breakwell , through time spent in his company, and by interviewing him about his research and practice⁶¹, I began to see first hand how art could escape the frames of the stretcher and the confines of the gallery wall. The work that was most crucial in this regard was “The Walking Man Diary 1976-78.”⁶²

Peter Fuller described it thus⁶³:

In the section of the Diary which Breakwell is currently exhibiting, *The Walking Man*, his method has changed. Instead of collaging together anecdotes and images relating to diverse episodes and incidents, the material all relates to a single image: that of the same, silent, lonely, anonymous wanderer, a man whose head hangs down, and who is apparently, but not certainly, close to the threshold of destitution. Breakwell lives and works in a third-floor flat above what was once a bacon factory in Smithfield, close to the meat market. About three years ago, gazing out of his window, he became aware of the Walking Man in his overcoat, wandering through the streets below, seemingly without a purpose, and almost unaware of what was happening around him. Sometimes Breakwell noticed the man more than once in a day; then he would disappear for weeks or even months on end, only to shamle back seemingly still engaged on his aimlessly determined quest over the same territory. Breakwell never looked for the man, or followed him; but he began to photograph him whenever he saw him tramping across the space visible through his window. Some of the images of the Walking Man in this piece are divided by years. (If you look closely, you can see changes in the Smithfield sky-line). Others are separated only by moments.

I saw the final outcome of this work at the *Angela Flowers Gallery*, in London in 1979. Not only was the content challenging – a blurred image of a walking man in grainy death camp black and white, a fugitive image in both senses of the phrase – but so was the presentation of text and image. It appeared on large blown-up photographic panels that seemed more akin to an advertising agency or a convention centre, but for the abject nature of their content.

⁶¹ unpublished interview 1980.

⁶² It is interesting to compare this work with Sophie Calle’s much later ‘Follow Me’.

Breakwell has very distinctive hand-writing – large, sloping, looping⁶⁴. In *The Walking Man Diary* his writing is juxtaposed across collages of buildings interspersed with torn pages from a desk calendar. A very rhythmic, poetic, chant is established as one reads across the panels. Breakwell constantly informs us of the Walking Man’s movements:

- Yard by yard, where does he go?
- Past the windows filled with cow heads
- Mad as a brush
- Past the windows filled with silver bracelets
- Walking walking walking
- Past the windows filled with objects d’art
- Past the neon sign saying “sell”

Rosalind Krauss ends her book *A Voyage on the North Sea – Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*⁶⁵ by referencing Fredric Jameson who has written about ‘a new life of “post-modern sensation”⁶⁶ in which the perceptual system of late capitalism experiences everything from shopping to all forms of leisure as aesthetic, thereby rendering anything that could be called a properly aesthetic sphere...obsolete.’

Throughout her thesis Krauss successfully argues that Marcel Broodthaers epitomised and pioneered the idea of the artist working free of medium specificity. ‘One description of art within this regime of post-modern sensation is that it mimics just this leeching of the aesthetic out into the social field in general. Within this situation, however, there are a few contemporary artists who have decided not to follow this practice, who have decided, that is, not to engage in the international

⁶³ Ian Breakwell, *Continuous Diary 1965-1978*, Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council and Third Eye Centre Glasgow, 1978, 6.

⁶⁴ One interview we was completed by mail. The questions were typed but the answers were returned by Breakwell in his own seductive script.

⁶⁵ London: Thames and Hudson, 56.

⁶⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, op. cit., 110-12.

fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital.’

Krauss posits James Coleman and William Kentridge as two artists who have embraced this idea, and to them I would add the Swiss duo Fischli and Weiss. But alongside Marcel Broodthaers I would also add Ian Breakwell as a precursor to this contemporary tendency. Here is what he wrote about his own methodology in 1976:

My work over the last ten years has been in various media simultaneously: collages, visual texts, drawings, photo-collage, events, theatre performances, film, film performances, tapes, installations, environments, video, objects, photo-text sequences, film/slide projection sequences with sound, photo-assemblages, writing and reading of prose texts. I have used whatever medium or media seemed necessary for each statement I wished to make, and certain themes consistently recur.

The investigation of the relationship between word and image runs like a thread through all this work, as does the concept of personal time, the surreality of mundane “reality” and the use of humour in various shades through to black.

Ian Hamilton Finlay

If the work of Ian Breakwell showed how art could move in to the streets and in to society’s institutions for its raw subject matter, the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay extended this tendency through the introduction of narrative, drama, and history. He allowed courts of law to become sites of artistic expression. He created fictional organisations and structures, notably the ‘Saint-Just Vigilantes’.

Ian Hamilton Finlay was born in Nassau in the Bahamas in 1925, and grew up in Scotland. In addition to being an artist he is also a writer and poet.⁶⁷

For many years he lived and worked in a tiny moor land cottage with his wife Sue in what can only kindly be described as abject poverty. At great personal cost he converted the cottage and garden into a neo-classical art work. His problems – which he turned into art works – began when the Hamilton Rates Authority

⁶⁷ One of Finlay’s best known short stories ‘The Money’ recounts how an artist struggling in poverty, not unlike Finlay himself, sells a painting for a small amount of money and then enters a moral dilemma as to whether he can legitimately claim social security. In the end he turns down ‘the money’.

discovered he had sold an art work from his studio.⁶⁸ They decreed that he must be rated as a commercial gallery, an action which would have crippled him financially, and so one of his many ‘wars’ began.

It was at this point that I became involved with the situation, being commissioned to cover the unfolding of events for *Artmonthly* magazine in London over three separate issues.⁶⁹

Two related points should be made at this juncture. The first is that Finlay suffers from what he terms a ‘nervous condition’ which has confined him to ‘Little Sparta’, his house and garden, for many years. The second, which has direct bearing on this project, is that because of his isolation and inability to travel Finlay uses the postal system to great effect. At one level his work is a mail art project, but this is only a part of his entire output.⁷⁰

Over the coming years I would have contact with Finlay mostly by telephone, sometimes in person, and frequently by mail. The main focus of his real battles and fictional support systems formed the backbone for an interview in *Studio International*⁷¹

I began by asking Finlay how Little Sparta came in to being?

As a building, the garden temple began as a cow-byre which we converted into a gallery and then, over a period, into a garden temple, or as we at first described it ‘Canova-type temple’ – referring to the temple built by the Italian neo-classicist. This was not to equate our garden temple with Canova’s temple but to explain it by means of a precedent: a building which housed works of art but which did not present itself specifically as an ‘art gallery’.

It should be noted that Little Sparta is situated in one of the most remote parts of southern Scotland, south of the Glasgow-Edinburgh corridor. Not only does Finlay not leave his property but it is extremely difficult for first time visitors to find and

⁶⁸ He already had works in several major European collections at this stage including *Starlit Waters* in the *Tate Gallery*, London.

⁶⁹ Peter Hill, *Artmonthly*, London Mar 1983, Hamilton Finlay versus Hamilton Rates; Apr 1983, Ian Hamilton Finlay and the Bum Bailif; June 1983, Hamilton Finlay - US Troops may parachute in.

⁷⁰ It is interesting to speculate what use Finlay might make of the internet in future ‘wars’.

⁷¹ Peter Hill, ‘Spartan defence – Ian Hamilton Finlay in conversation with Peter Hill,’ *Studio International*, Vol 196, No 1004, 1984, 59-61.

locate Little Sparta. It is against this backdrop that one must imagine his various ‘Wars’. Finlay offers the following as background to the dispute:

Our battle is not with the Hamilton Rates Authorities but with Strathclyde Region, of which the Hamilton authority is a minor detachment, taking its orders from above. The dispute began when the Region withdrew the discretionary rates relief on our building, initially justifying this on the grounds that we had no Scottish Arts Council grant, and were unknown: ‘No-one here has heard of you.’ Subsequently, the dispute became a War, a term I use to acknowledge the ‘limitless’ aspect of what has been happening, the absence of law (legality) as a fixed point in the Region’s thinking, the use of force, the refusal of discussion by the Region’s bureaucrats.

‘The use of force’ that Finlay refers to relates to one of the first battles of Little Sparta when the Sheriff Officer (bailiff) Alexander ‘Sandy’ Walker was ordered to break into Finlay’s home and remove art works to the value of the rates allegedly owed to the authority. Finlay and his supporters were prepared, and had littered the surrounding moor land with military props. Patrick Eyres describes the scene on that fateful day⁷²

around ‘Checkpoint Sandy’: “YOU ARE NOW ENTERING LITTLE SPARTA warns the red and white counterweight barrier reminiscent of the Berlin Wall. The checkpoint is covered by a camouflaged Mk. 1V Panzer hull down to enfilade. Minefields stretch as far as the eye can see. Two flags rustle in the morning air. The Red Cross locates the Casualty Clearing Station and offers safety to neutrals...’ At this point it is necessary to take a closer look at Finlay’s fictive organisation (made up of very real people prepared to take equally real actions on Finlay’s behalf), the Saint-Just Vigilantes. They reference the terror of the French Revolution, and it is worth noting at this point that Finlay’s next battle will be with the French. Here he describes their debut:

Appropriately, their first appearance was in a demonstration which took place outside the SAC HQ in the autumn of 1982.

⁷² February 4th, 1983.

Now, Saint-Just has been called ‘a thinker of actions’ and action is in fact the basis of the S-JVs: they have discovered themselves (their identity) in action; their leaders have emerged in the course of action: there is no list of members, and there is no list of rules saying what an S-JV is. Yet, the S-JVs are undoubtedly an organisation in so far as it is the role of an organisation to have aims and to have the capacity to carry them out in a deliberate way.

Before going on to comment on this fictive organisation the Saint-Just Vigilantes and their subsequent actions, Finlay makes one further comment about the Battle. ‘One could describe the Battle as allegorical – that is, as a dramatic allegory of the fact that ideas were in conflict; but one cannot describe as merely allegorical an event in which the presence of the *actual* was more obvious than the presence of the *idea*.’

It is this dichotomy between the ‘idea’ and the ‘actual’ which informs all categories of superfiction.

The Saint-Just Vigilantes began as an entirely imaginary organisation, invoked in the prose commentary on one of my pieces in this exhibition – in collaboration with Ian Appleton – ‘The Third Reich Revisited.’⁷³...In one of the sequences, the ‘scenario’ assumes an Iranian-type revolution, leading to a process known as ‘Desecularisation’; the Scottish Arts Council HQ, and Charlotte Square itself, are thrown (as it were) to the corrective forces of the Imperialist Ecology – in short, they are taken over by pine trees and foxgloves; but the verbal commentary explains that the original sacking of the SAC was accomplished by the ‘ayatollah Aesthetes’ and the ‘Saint-Just Vigilantes’ (two groups it is clear with a decent dislike of democratic-pluralist state-aided art). Subsequently, it was decided – who knows exactly how – that the Saint-Just Vigilantes should have an actual existence.⁷⁴

As you know the Saint-Just Vigilantes have removed two stone reliefs of mine, from the Scottish Arts Councils public collection, and the names of the guilty (in the Little Spartan War) are being added to these, as well as an inscription. This inscription reads ‘EVENTS ARE A DISCOURSE’...the War

⁷³ The Third Reich Revisited. The complete version of this exhibition was shown at the Southampton Civic Art Gallery in 1984. The original showing was at the Tarta Gallery, Edinburgh, in 1982.

⁷⁴ This comment is worth bearing in mind when the work of later artists is examined and the question keeps arising as to ‘should superfictions be encouraged to become “real” rather than fictive structures?’

is simply the mode of utterance of a barbaric society which won't speak to itself.

Observing the actions of Finlay and the S-JVs gave me an insight into how fiction and art might be *used* rather than presented or staged. The very basic foundations for a hypothesis were now being laid and brooded upon even although the commencement of the thesis was still a long way away. At this time the I was also participating in numerous 'mail art' projects around the world. However, few people were using the postal system as successfully as Finlay, in terms of using it as a conduit to send small, mostly printed⁷⁵, art works or objects around the world.⁷⁶ Ian Hamilton Finlay's next battle - with France - was too long and too protracted to appropriately fully recount here. Suffice to say, Finlay won a commission to create a sculpture to commemorate the French bicentenary. Various factions and organisations within France⁷⁷ accused Finlay of having nazi sympathies. They did this on the strength of a sculpture he made in which the word 'OSSO', meaning bone, was carved. The 'SS' in the middle of the word was photographed and reproduced without its neighbours and the inference (presented rather than drawn) was that it stood for the double lightning flashes of the *Waffen SS*. As Edinburgh-based writer Ralph Hughes remarked at the time⁷⁸, "It is easy to imagine how, in a few generations time, the phrase 'a bone of contention' might be traced back to the current controversy surrounding the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay...Certainly the *tête de bois* that came up with the equation of Osso=Nazi displayed a perverse rigidity which personally I find annoying because I was just beginning to get to grips with the notion of the authorless text."

⁷⁵ Usually by *The Wild Hawthorn Press*.

⁷⁶ Examples of these, and letters to me from Finlay were exhibited in the Auckland chapter of *The Art Fair Murders*, 1997. This included a signed request by the assembled SJV to the United Nations calling for UN peace keeping troops to be parachuted into Little Sparta. See: Peter Hill, *Artmonthly*, London, June 1983, Hamilton Finlay - US Troops may parachute in.

⁷⁷ Notably, *Art Press* magazine; the radio station *Europe 1*; and *Galleries* magazine.

⁷⁸ Ralph Hughes, *Alba* magazine, No 9, 1988, 22.

Finlay's Saint-Just Vigilantes started operating at an international level⁷⁹ and the debate became ever-more heated as this final piece of evidence shows. It is a letter sent to Yves Hayat, editor of *Galleries* magazine by Sue Finlay⁸⁰, a copy of which Sue also sent to me for publication in *Alba*⁸¹ magazine.

You disgust me! You utterly disgust me!...you have published in your magazine the foul deceits of *Art Press* without even making any attempt to investigate, without contacting us at all. You publish extracts from letters, from a correspondence, which was between artists, which stretched over many years, without context, mistranslated – and you don't even bother to come to the press conference and take the opportunity of hearing our replies to the foul allegations. An opportunity given to all Paris. You don't bother to lift the phone and ask us what is going on. Instead you deliberately join the Parisian MOB who seek to promote their own ends by HOUNDING us and making us into scapegoats. In short you join the WITCH HUNT. Your behaviour is quite recognizable to all who have witnessed recent French history. Paris is a foul sewer. Your office is a cesspool. You are unscrupulous, deceitful and perfidious. You will be hearing from our lawyer. Bastard!

Ralph Rumney

The third artist to place alongside Ian Breakwell and Ian Hamilton Finlay as being pivotal in constructing the early foundations for this thesis is Ralph Rumney, founder member of the Situationist International. Some have disputed his right to this claim on the grounds that when the movement was formed in Cosio d'Arroscia in 1957, Rumney did not appear in any of the group photographs. Typically for him – and quite appropriately for this thesis – the reason that he did not appear in them was *because he took them*.

⁷⁹ Ian Hamilton Finlay's sculpture *Adorno's Hut* was exhibited in Rene Block's 1990 Sydney Biennale *The Readymade Boomerang*. Constructed of timber and metal it was surrounded by framed mottos penned by Finlay and referencing his 'War' with France, such as 'The French Attaché is Papier-Mache'.

⁸⁰ Now no longer partner to, nor collaborator with, Ian Hamilton Finlay.

⁸¹ *Alba* magazine, No 9, 1988, 23.

His description of that day is quite simple, ‘(We) seven or eight people sat down at a café table in Cosio d’Arroscia and tried to, and succeeded, in creating a movement that said art is about politics, art is about changing the world, otherwise it is about nothing. It is not about producing artefacts, it’s about doing things.’⁸²

The Situationist International evolved from a synthesis of various pan-European art movements and revolutionary philosophies including the College of Pataphysics; COBRA; the Lettriste Movement; the Lettriste International (LI); the International Movement For An Imaginary Bauhaus (IMIB); Asger Jorn’s Institute for Comparative Vandalism; Group Spur; and Ralph Rumney’s Psycho-geographical Society. Its key members included Guy Debord, Ralph Rumney, Michele Bernstein⁸³, Alexander Trochi, Asger Jorn, Isidore Isou, Gianfranco Sanguinetti, Raoul Vaneigem and Wolman. However, it was always a loose alliance of people and movements and many others were involved. Guy Debord is now regarded as the leader of the group, although it is debatable whether such an anarchistic conglomeration could ever allow itself to be ‘lead’.

Ralph Rumney continues to divide his life between London and the South of France⁸⁴. Much of his long and varied life is important to the foundation of this thesis, so a very brief overview is appropriate.

Rumney was born in England in the nineteen-thirties, son of the vicar of Wakefield. He trained as a painter. In the nineteen-fifties he moved ‘to Paris instead of New York...I just knew that the right thing was over there, not in New York...There was this post-surrealist school that occurred in New York, but in Paris, in Milan, there were people like Fontana, Manzoni, Yves Klein, Christo. Set that against the New York school and I do not think I made the wrong choice.’⁸⁵

⁸² Interview with Peter Hill and Alan Woods, *Transcript* magazine, Issue 2, Summer 1995, 55-64.

⁸³ At different times Michelle Bernstein was married to both Guy Debord and Ralph Rumney.

⁸⁴ As of time of writing, August, 2000.

⁸⁵ Interview with Peter Hill and Alan Woods, *Transcript* magazine, Issue 2, Summer 1995, 55-64.

In the nineteen-fifties he founded the Psycho-geographical Society in England. He was co-founder of the Situationist International with Guy Debord⁸⁶. He was a member of the Lettrist Movement and in the late nineteen-eighties was a founder member of a still little-known group the Banalists⁸⁷.

Rumney's first wife was Pegeen Guggenheim, daughter of Peggy Guggenheim. In an interview which I jointly conducted with Alan Woods⁸⁸, Ralph Rumney gave the following extraordinary answer to the question 'Why did you stop painting in the late nineteen-sixties?'

What happened was rather complex. My wife committed suicide. The children were at school in Paris, I had an apartment in Venice. I was working there. I had a lot of commissions. I was supporting the whole family. Being married to Peggy Guggenheim's daughter believe me was no bowl of cherries – four children, she (my wife) did not have any money, she had \$300 a month, it went nowhere near what we had to produce. Peggy had me expelled from Venice. She destroyed my career, my working practice – this is just my side of the story, my understanding of it; Peggy isn't here to give her side. Pegeen was so shattered by this – and she had made other attempts on her life – and she made a further attempt the night I got back to Paris. I can think of about fifteen occasions when I had saved her life, she had been suicidal for thirteen years before I knew her. On this occasion I was so exhausted – I'd been in a Venice police station for two days – I did not spot the signs, I failed to take any action, I did nothing to stop it, I didn't even notice it was going on. Peggy immediately started civil proceedings against me for murder. I was under a kind of house arrest in Paris – I was allowed to go in and out of the house and so on. I was followed everywhere. My phone was tapped. I wasn't allowed to get in contact with any of my earning activities which were all in Italy, so I starved, more or less. I used to have to go and see friends, and say look, I've got minor priorities, I need the *Herald Tribune* every day, I need two packets of cigarettes, as a luxury some wine, and possibly a sandwich. I subsisted for a year like that.

⁸⁶ Debord and Rumney are the two individuals credited with founding the movement in the Situationist time-line that forms part of the catalogue to the 1989 Pompidou Centre exhibition *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Period of Time: about the Situationist International 1957-1972*

⁸⁷ This group would meet once a year in a disused railway station in the centre of France.

⁸⁸ Interview with Peter Hill and Alan Woods, *Transcript* magazine, Issue 2, Summer 1995, 55-64

Much of the next phase of Rumney's life was spent in Paris where he had a nightly radio program that gave him the freedom to interview whoever he wished⁸⁹. He was in Paris during the student uprisings of '68, and the Situationist International was a strong influence on those events. In later years he spent time on a small Italian island near Tunis (at this point returning to painting, some of which were purchased in the nineties by London's *Tate Gallery*), and later still divided his time between London and the south of France. When I first befriended him in 1988 he had reached this stage of his life. He had no income and no sales of work. He chose to live in Brixton because this part of London had such a high unemployment rate that claimants were only required to 'sign on' once every three months rather than every fortnight. This allowed him to hitch-hike to the south of France in the cold winter months, returning to Brixton three months later. His views on art and artists have remained fairly constant throughout his deliberately obscure career:

My reference as an artist is back to the original graffiti artists in the caverns. I feel closer to the people who write on tube trains. Altamira and graffiti in New York are more important than quite a lot of other things. I think the fact that someone feels obliged to make his mark, or leave his mark...there is this extraordinary pretentious thing about something that any artist does – it has always been said, Ovid says it – that one is trying to make one's mark upon posterity as well, trying to leave a trace, a record, some sign that I have been here, and the man who covers his hand with red clay and sticks it on the wall, you know, red ochre and bang, in some dark underground cavern, and that is discovered three thousand years later, is making a very serious artistic statement, *I was here*; yes, because death bothers me. I am trying to raise a flag in the future saying I was here...I think the trick, as far as possible, is to be sort of anonymous within this society. You know, to sort of vanish.⁹⁰

This notion of vanishing, of being somewhere one moment and not the next, fits well with the two aspects of the Situationist movement which partly inspired the foundation of this hypothesis; that of the *dérive* and that of the *détournement*.

⁸⁹ For Ralph Rumney, and for myself, 'the interview' has always been a type of art work.

The *dérive* was best described by Guy Debord in the second issue of the journal *Internationale Situationniste*⁹¹: ‘Among the various situationist methods is the *dérive* (literally: “drifting”), a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances. The *dérive* entails playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psycho-geographical effects which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the “journey” and the “stroll”.’

Ralph Rumney was famously expelled from the Situationist movement by Guy Debord in the late fifties, ostensibly for handing in his psychogeographical report on Venice (to all intents and purposes a *dérive*) a few days late.⁹²

In his essay “The Situationist Legacy”⁹³ Alastair Bonnett gives a good account of Rumney’s Venice *dérive* which also serves as an introduction to the theory of psychogeography:

The practical activity that emerged from the SI’s psychogeographical theories ranges from seemingly inconsequential rambles around European cities to relatively rigorous and well-documented experiments. An interesting example of the more relaxed approach is the Venice based *dérive* carried out in 1957 by the English situationist Ralph Rumney. In the photo-essay that emerged from this trip, Rumney explains how he followed a line through ‘the zones of main psychogeographical interest’ in Venice such as the ‘sinister’ zone of the Arsenale and ‘beautiful ambiances’ of the Ghetto Vecchio.

Rumney goes on to mention, albeit very briefly, how people’s ‘play patterns’ are affected by these zones and how this information may assist in the ‘creation of situationist cities’

The notion of the *détournement* can be introduced to us by an adjoining quote to the above which centres on the ideas of A. Khatib⁹⁴

Khatib’s psychogeographical study of the ‘zones of ambience’ of Les Halles in Paris provided us with more

⁹⁰ Interview with Tom Vague, first published in *Vague* #22.

⁹¹ Paris: December, 1958.

⁹² This was Rumney’s second expulsion from a group. As a teenager he was expelled from the Communist party over his stance on the Korean war.

⁹³ *Variant* magazine #9, Glasgow, 1991.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

substantial conclusions.⁹⁵ The ambiances of this environment are drawn by Khatib into a plan for the transformation of the area which would establish a new and perpetually changing landscape consisting of different and individually stimulating situations, designed for and by those who use them for the purposes of play and provocation. Khatib is particularly keen to construct a giant labyrinth out of the existing buildings on the site.

In the late 1960s such subversive/constructive suggestions were increasingly directly articulated on the streets of Paris through street riots/carnivals and graffiti such as *Under the pavement – the beach*. Indeed, the art critic Robert Hewison, after arguing that the SI played an influential role in the failed revolution on May 1968, has recently suggested it was a period in which *cars, trees and café tables were ‘detourned’ into barricades...a month long dérive that rediscovered the revolutionary psychogeography of the city.*⁹⁶

The *détournement* can then be likened to the actions of the *bricoleur*, or in Australian terms the methods of the ‘boundary rider’, the name given to Anthony Bond’s 1992 Sydney Biennale⁹⁷.

Guy Debord defined *détournement* in the *Internationale Situationiste*, No 3⁹⁸ when he said ‘the re-use of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble, has been a constantly present tendency of the contemporary avant-garde both before and since the establishment of the SI. The two fundamental laws of *détournement* are the loss of importance of each *detourned* autonomous element – which may go so far as to lose its original sense completely – and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect.’

The idea that art could be a process of navigation *through* a city and *around* the neural networks of another’s (companion’s) mind, and that the raw material of art

⁹⁵ A. Khatib ‘Essai de description psychogeographique des Halles’ *Internationale Situationiste*, No 2, Paris: 1958. The complete run of *Internationale Situationiste* was reprinted in one volume in 1975 by Editions Champ-Libre, Paris.

⁹⁶ Robert Hewison, *Future Tense: A New Art For the Nineties*. London: Methuen, 1989, 28.

⁹⁷ In the catalogue Bond writes about how the boundary riders, Australian cowboys patrolling the perimeter fences of vast farming estates, would find multiple uses for single objects, such as the belt buckle that becomes a bottle opener, and so forth.

⁹⁸ Paris: December, 1959

objects (should they need to be made) are to be found ‘readymade’ within these labyrinths, was a key building block in the hypothesis’ foundation.⁹⁹

Given the nature of this project, it is perhaps fitting to close this section with the words of the art writer Alan Woods:

‘There is a fictional equivalent of the *dérive*. The wanderings of the American private eye through the mean streets of the city, noticing public power.’¹⁰⁰

Stage 3

In 1989 the I created a fictional museum in New York called *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas* (MOCI). Notionally, it was the biggest new museum in the world. It even had its own billionaire benefactors in Alice and Abner ‘Bucky’ Cameron¹⁰¹ who had made their billions through the Cameron oil fields in Alaska. At that point the I was unaware of Broodthaers great project ‘The Museum of Modern Art – Department of the Eagles.’ When I was informed about it a year or so later I almost gave up my own project *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas*. However, on reflection, I progressed the project, realising that while there were commonalities and overlaps there were sufficient differences built in from the inception. MOCI, like other superfictions, did not arise from a vacuum. Over the preceding decade I had been reflecting on the work of Ian Breakwell, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Ralph Rumney, as mentioned in Stage 2. Whichever tangent I started to explore always seemed to lead along paths marked ‘fiction’. At this

⁹⁹ Later, this realisation would be expanded beyond the city to a global level and beyond physical space to the structural space of organisations, postal systems and, eventually, cyberspace.

¹⁰⁰ *Transcript* magazine, Issue 2, Summer 1995, 55-64

¹⁰¹ The Camerons were modelled more than a little on the Getty and Hammer families, and the glories and absurdities that such near-limitless wealth can produce.

point I was publishing and editing an international art magazine¹⁰² from the Talbot Rice Art Centre in Scotland. Even the real interviews I made with real artists made me think of fictions and how fictional interviews and manifestos, similar to the ones he invented as an Honours student, could get closer to the ‘real’ truth about the contemporary art world than the so-called ‘truthful’ interviews.

Between 1984 and 1987 – with hindsight *partly* because I was involved in publishing a real magazine – I deliberated about creating a fictional art magazine as an art work. It would contain images and text – *my favourite combination of ideas*, it would progress and critique the careers of different fictional artists and it would address Walter Benjamin’s observation that ‘to an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.’¹⁰³

The biggest stumbling block, and it was one that held the project up for nearly two years, was that I was encountering more than enough problems trying to run a real contemporary art magazine and finding sponsorship to keep it afloat let alone trying to create a fictional one – a problem compounded by the fact that I knew if I took this path I would want the fictional magazine to ‘look’ as visually sumptuous as, say, *Artforum*, *Artscribe*, or *Flash Art*. This would be impossible. The project was shelved. However, the brooding continued for almost two years. The question was, how could art and fiction be combined into an art work that would ‘mirror’ the real world of late 20th century contemporary art?¹⁰⁴

Every day, in the office of *Alba* magazine, I was at this time receiving press releases from museums and galleries all over the world. Some were photocopied in grainy black and white, others were very slick, well designed, colour printed and several pages in length, arriving in thermographically printed envelopes. Yet no matter how expensive these press releases were to produce they cost only a fraction of what a fictitious magazine would cost. Suddenly it hit me that I could create a fictitious museum and bring it to life through fictive press releases in which the whole art world could be mirrored. And so *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas* was

¹⁰² *Alba* magazine which was half Scottish and half international in content.

¹⁰³ Many of the devices employed in *The Art Fair Murders* and the earlier *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* aim at media-based outcomes rather than gallery-based outcomes.

born. Yet this fictional museum really camouflaged the *real* superfiction – the press office. What I had really invented was a fictional media source, a network that was driven by the global postal system and, five years later, by the internet. How this superfiction evolved and later splintered into many different projects including *The Art Fair Murders* will be fully explained in 7. Description of Research Methodology.

However, a brief thumbnail sketch would be appropriate at this point.

Press releases were produced at quarterly intervals. Some found their way into journals and newspapers, often with accompanying images. In a sense, this was the ideal outcome of text and image appearing together in print rather than objects hanging and sitting in galleries, although that too was important.

Throughout the early nineties various exhibitions were held in museums and commercial art galleries, not with a view to selling work but as ‘photo-opportunities’ to document the work of various fictional artists – documentation that would eventually find its way in to print. At one stage I began to build fictional art fairs within museums (notionally, at first, within the Museum of Contemporary Ideas, thus giving New York its first major commercial art fair). Signage and packaging as artworks were always integral to these exhibitions and various devices were explored at some venues such as ‘curating in’ paintings and sculptures from museum storage areas and the studios of local artists, two normally ‘invisible’ zones.

By the mid nineties I was exploring different ways of extending the project. As the installations increasingly grew to look like film sets, and as the individual art works became ‘props’ to be photographed – ie, sculptures were constructed not as sculptures but as objects or ‘situations’ designed to be photographed from a certain angle, and then reproduced – I began to think increasingly of narrative structures. What if there was a body discovered within the fictional art fair? Would it be possible to simultaneously build an art fair and write a novel so that neither was a weak ‘illustration’ of the other but both evolved together? Was anyone else working with similar ideas? What methodologies might be adopted?

¹⁰⁴ And by extension mirror it in a way that would include not just artists but collectors, dealers, auction houses, art fairs, biennales, and museums.

It was at this point that I decided to undertake a doctorate.

Stage 4

Commencement of PhD. In the mid-nineties I commenced my PhD. There was, of course, an extended period leading up to it when I thought intensely about various hypotheses, about the size, scope and focus of the project, and about the personal commitment to such a large task. Many of these doubts, challenges and hopes were addressed in the writing and re-writing of the proposal. Eventually the proposal reached a stage where the thesis and exegesis grew from it naturally.

How this transformation happened will be the focus of 7. Description of Research Methodology

7. Description of Research Methodology and Terminology

The only prior knowledge that needs to be added to this chapter is the fact that when I created The Museum of Contemporary Ideas in Scotland in 1989 I took the decision that for the next ten years, 1990 – 2000, I would not make art works as objects for sale and would not engage actively in the commercial art world. While occasionally exhibiting in commercial galleries, and even more rarely selling art works, I deliberately supported my art practice through journalism, art criticism, university lecturing, artist grants and scholarships. This allowed a range of ideas to be explored without necessarily having to produce physical outcomes. It also allowed ‘props’ to be made as art works with the intention that they be photographed and reproduced rather than sold and collected.

A decade was seen as a period long enough to take various life altering decisions. For example, if the sale of works was not a constraint then I could live anywhere on the planet with no need to worry about the transportation of physical objects etc.

Since a large part of the project was a mail art project, again works could be posted from any country to all other countries. I also wanted to live in a centre of excellence for visual art production and also in a city with a high quality of life. For these reasons, and after much deliberation that oscillated between Canada, Germany, New York, Australia, and Japan, I decided to live in Hobart, Tasmania, which for me soon became one of the planet's most special places. This agenda also allowed me to undertake a doctorate by project, my art school of choice being RMIT University in Melbourne.

The Creation of a Superfiction

In 1996 I prepared two advertisements for the *London Review of Books* which I faxed to the UK from Tasmania.

The first one appeared on December 14th 1995, on page 27, and looked like this:

Over the next two months there was zero response to this advertisement.

The second advertisement appeared in the March 7th edition, 1996, page 23. It was identical except for the following additions: Internet auction from \$500,000. Fax Peter Hill in Tasmania on:

Responses to the second advertisement came from all over the world – Rome, New York, Tokyo, London – from literary agents, publishers, and the media.

This strategy of running two similar but crucially different advertisements was deliberate. From its inception¹⁰⁵ *The Art Fair Murders* was intended to critique both the world of contemporary art and the world of literary fiction. As a visual artist and a ‘heroic amateur’ I examined the world of literary fiction around this time, in search of controversy. What I found was that there was a huge fuss being made over the English writer Martin Amis receiving an advance of £500,000 for his book *The Information*. Yet at the same time there was nothing but praise for Nicholas Evans who was awarded almost six times that amount for his first novel (with film rights)

¹⁰⁵ I see the art work/doctoral project beginning with the placing of the first advertisement, although there was a period of over a year leading up to it during which the hypothesis was formulating.

The Horse Whisperers. The latter was seen by many as pure entertainment, not literary fiction, so high fees were accepted as part of the deal.

I chose the sum of \$500,000 in order to ‘mirror’ the world of publishing within one of its leading journals – *The London Review of Books*, and to test the hypothesis that the mention of money and an internet auction would create a difference in response. In fact, it created a very big difference.

Between the time of placing the first advertisement and its appearance, I began to write the novel. I also scanned the first few chapters on to my web-site. Again, using a ‘heroic amateur’ strategy, I decided to write the novel backwards, starting with the sort of ‘blurb’ one finds on the back of an airport novel and never written by an author but by someone in the marketing department of the publishing house. This became the template for the book and the art installation, and was also ‘détourned’ into an advertisement (overleaf) in *Artmonthly Australia*, in the summer issue, which ran from December 1995 to March 1996:

When the second advertisement appeared many of the responses came from the media, particularly in London, and several interviews by phone, fax, and e:mail followed, particularly from *The Times* and *The Independent*. (see Appendix A for a selection of these responses).

Concurrently, the web site was being developed under the umbrella of *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas* which can be found at www.nymoci.com. When the visitor reaches the home page they are faced with a museum elevator which has fourteen floors. On each floor there is a separate project.¹⁰⁶ When the visitor clicks on *The Art Fair Murders* they are faced with five choices. By clicking on *The Making of the Art Fair Murders* one can see all the information, advertisements, correspondence,

¹⁰⁶ In addition to *The Art Fair Murders*, the other floors that are of significance to the doctoral project are: *The Encyclopaedia of Superfictions*, *The International Portrait Gallery*, and *The Press Office*.

and scribbled notes that marked the early days of the project and its subsequent development. This information is part of my visual diary.

Terminology and Figures of Speech Used to Describe the Research Methodology

The 'Additive' Nature of the Project

This project is part of an on-going investigation into superfictions. One part is concerned with collecting new knowledge about other artists around the world who have created similar fictions. The other part is an additive accumulation of the my own art projects, with new ones growing from previous ones. They in turn will be 'detourned' into other projects. The additive nature of the project is closely linked with process and the way in which an individual image can be moved through various media, including 'the media'. For example, in 1988 I took a photograph of the Viennese Aktionist Hermann Nitsch at the 1988 Australian Bicentenary Biennale¹⁰⁷. Two years later, one of the artist's fictional groups, Aloha, who supposedly come from Queensland, used the image to make a comment on the extremes of museum merchandising.¹⁰⁸ The image was placed inside a cheap shower curtain pack and re-photographed as 'The Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain'. This was 'inspired' after coming across Andy Warhol shower curtains and Lichtenstein shower curtains in the shop of the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, and wondering what the 'logical extreme' of this sort of product would be? (For 'logical extremism' see below).

Prints of this Nitsch shower curtain image were then used in *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* press releases, photocopied in black and white and very much

¹⁰⁷ Curated by Nick Waterlow

¹⁰⁸ I collect museum merchandising and quotes by writers on the subject. The following is from Adrian Searle in *The Guardian Weekly*, August 25, 1996, p27 and was reproduced as part of *The Art Fair Murders* catalogue in Auckland: 'Before I even managed to get to the Edinburgh Festival's keynote exhibition, Velazqueth in Seville, I collided with one of the most banal merchandising stands I'd ever encountered. It is a Fortnum and Mason style display of *Velazquezabilia*: jars of Velazquez-label designer marmalade; Velazqueth fridge magnets; Velazquez own-brand Spanish plonk and kitchen aprons; and Velazquez artisanal brown jugs and nests of rustic ceramic bowls (just like in the paintings); and, for all I know (I was reeling by this time), Velazquez flavoured novelty condoms.'

reduced in scale. Large format images of the shower curtain were then sent to magazines around the world with a press release that announced that Aloha had won the \$100,000 *Cameron Oil* prize for a readymade and a funded year in a loft studio in New York. *Kunstforum* magazine in Cologne printed the story¹⁰⁹ and reproduced the image twice; once on the contents page below an image of Jan Hoet and again in the news section. Under the title ‘Nitsch-Duschvorhang’ it read:

Das australische Künstlerkollektiv “Aloha” wurde mit dem “Cameron Prize for Contemporary Art 1992” ausgezeichnet, den das New Yorker “Museum of Contemporary Ideas” auslobte. 100,000 Dollar Preisgeld und ein einjähriger New York-Aufenthalt handelte sich “Aloha” mit dem Beitrag “The Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain” ein. Das viel mal viel Fuss grosse Cibachrome-Bild mit Nitsch-Motiv ist mit einer vergoldeten Stange versehen und wird in einer Auflage von 100 Stück für jeweils 1000 dollars angeboten. – als “echter” Duschvorhang. Die Künstler verstehen diese Arbeit als “Kommentar zur krassen Kommerzialität und zum gleichzeitigen Mangel an ästhetischer Sensibilität bei den meisten Objekten, die in Museum Shops verkauft werden.

The Australian television program ‘Inside Edition’¹¹⁰ picked the story up at this point and made a ten minute documentary about it with reporter Christopher Zinn,¹¹¹ and interviews with Nick Waterlow, Edmond Capon, and Leon Parossion. As the nineties progressed the shower curtain became a large cibachrome print, then later had a real shower curtain added to it as a framing device, and later still had fake blood running down the sides of the curtain with obvious references to Hitchcock’s *Psycho*.

Reproductions of it appeared in a range of magazines including *Good Weekend*, *Art and Australia*, and *Black and White*. Again, it should be stressed that this image, like many I fabricated, was primarily built for reproduction rather than exhibition. It was a prop.

¹⁰⁹ *Kunstforum* No 117, 1993, 6 and 420.

¹¹⁰ Channel Ten, Sydney.

¹¹¹ This involved three days of filming and an almost complete misunderstanding about the nature of this project. I allowed the program makers to ‘hijack’ the project and twist it into the sort of story/narrative that they wanted. From this point onwards I started to welcome his work being misunderstood and in some cases to encourage it. The whole process of watching how the program was ‘constructed’ was fascinating and very revealing about the media in general.

This image was then détourned into *The Art Fair Murders* in which Aloha, who appeared in the first 1988 MOCI press release, now appear as characters in the novel and as the makers of art works in the installation. However, in some versions of this superfiction, the image of Nitsch is supposedly taken by the art collective *Made in Palestine* whose entire output of work can be viewed on the web site on the floor marked ‘International Portrait Gallery’.¹¹² This is one of many deliberate inconsistencies (see below) built into the project which attempts to highlight the plasticity of creative possibilities.

Between 1997 and 1999 the Hayward Gallery in London toured the Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain to 17 venues in the UK¹¹³ in an international exhibition called ‘Networking’. The entire exhibition was purchased by the South Bank Centre, London.

By May 2000 the portrait of Hermann Nitsch had come full circle and was used on the cover of *Artmonthly Australia*¹¹⁴ in relation to the actual 1988 Biennale. This is one example of many¹¹⁵ occurrences of an image or a character growing and changing from project to project. However, this PhD by project focuses on a specific slice of the on-going fiction between 1995-2000.

Superfictions

Superfictions is a term I coined to describe the use of fiction and narrative within contemporary visual art practice. Such a term was needed to distinguish the practice from pure literary fiction in one camp and installation art in another. The term has since been used by a number of critics and theorists including Dr Rex

¹¹² www.nymoci.com

¹¹³ Venues included: Spacex Gallery, Exeter; Duff House, Banff; Waterfront Hall Gallery, Belfast; Newcastle College, Newcastle.

¹¹⁴ Which I guest-edited .

¹¹⁵ Others would include the group *Film Pilgrims* and the character Herb Sherman.

Butler in Queensland who has taught a course on superfictions, and Dr Adrian Heathcote who in his essay ‘The Rise and Rise of Superfictions’¹¹⁶ wrote:

...from the very beginning of our species, fictions have been threatening to break out of their confines. Myths after all are fictions that infuse themselves into the texture of everyday life, stiffening it against the formlessness and ambiguity of experience...we all owe more than we care to admit to the fictions we imbibe. They are our oldest intoxicants, our most frequently used consciousness-changing drug.

Peter Hill, like the eccentric and mysterious American Seymour Likely and Switzerland’s Res Ingold, creator of the fictional Ingold Airlines, is the fiction’s friend. He is also their Lenin, their liberator – a maker of Superfictions...Peter Hill releases these Borges-like phantasmagoria (some of which were recently on display at the Art Gallery of NSW) from the rim of the known world. From Tasmania, in fact, a suitable place from which to exert an Archimedean leverage on the centre of the Art World’s consciousness. His skill lies in using the self-reflexive nature of modern art to criticise the contemporary art scene and, simultaneously, produce works that are accordant with it.

Splitting the Eleven

For a number of years I had problems explaining and articulating my methodology. Attempts to do this always seemed to use the words ‘aiming at’. Certain invented artists¹¹⁷ were ‘aiming at’ one audience – perhaps museum curators, while others were aiming at commercial sales to hotels and casinos¹¹⁸, artist run spaces¹¹⁹ or the media¹²⁰. At the same time I was financing the project by writing for the mainstream press and specialist journals – again ‘aiming at’ specific markets. These markets would range from the *QANTAS* in-flight magazine to *Art and Text*, the *Bulletin/Newsweek*, or *The London Review of Books*. The more the words ‘aiming at’ crept into descriptions of the project the more the I began to think about the game of darts and how professional players will constantly aim at one tiny area of the

¹¹⁶ *Black and White* magazine, No 11, 32-33.

¹¹⁷ Hal Jones

¹¹⁸ Herb Sherman

¹¹⁹ Made in Palestine

¹²⁰ Aloha

dartboard, the high scoring treble twenty. If the treble twenty was the equivalent of the professional artist aiming for museum sales, what were the equivalents to the other types of artist mentioned above, especially the really ‘quirky’ ones? At this point I remembered a rule from my student days when darts were played in the pubs of Dundee. If a player’s score in the game 301 reduced to the number 111, then that player got one chance at ‘splitting the eleven’ or throwing a single dart into the space between the number eleven, which appears at about nine o’ clock on the face of the dartboard, to win the game outright.

I use this term to help describe the way my different fictional artists are aimed at different sectors of society and to show how sometimes the quirky off-beat moves can be more fun than the sombre, repetitious, slaying of the triple twenty.

Heroic Amateurism

The term heroic amateurism has been coined in conjunction with ‘splitting the eleven’ to explain the creative boost that can be given when an individual enters a whole new area at the highest level and who subsequently risks falling flat on their faces, and/or injecting new life into a different discipline . I first coined it through observing, and in some cases interviewing, various neo-expressionist painters in the early 1980s including Jorg Immendorff, Stephen Campbell, and Bruce McLean. These were artists who very much learned to paint figuratively in public. Many came from backgrounds in performance art, conceptual art, or formalist painting. What they had in common was the fact that they entered this new arena with huge ambition, in the case of Campbell painting one canvas per week, three meters by three meters. And if you chart the work of Jorg Immendorff from the mid-seventies to the present you see a deliberately ‘bad’ and ‘fast’ painter becoming enormously sophisticated without losing the rough edge of his earlier work.

I link the notion of heroic amateurism to Rosalind Krauss’ idea of ‘the post-medium condition’.¹²¹ Equivalents can also be found in the world of writing. In his quaintly

¹²¹ Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea – Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*, London: Thames and Hudson

titled *You'll Have Had Your Hole*¹²², Irvine Welsh - author of *Trainspotting* - writes in his introduction:

It's very difficult to examine your own motivation in undertaking any piece of creative writing. In the case of my new play, however, I decided upon medium before content, electing to write a play, simply because I'd never written one before. It seemed a logical step¹²³; I'd done novels, novellas, stories, songs and poems; I'd adapted and produced original screenplays and developed *Headstate*, a performance piece with Boilerhouse Theatre Company. The conventional stage-play seemed the next thing to tackle.

Artists can enter new disciplines and bring with them both skills and a certain inquisitive creative outlook, and energy. Through the deliberate creation of 'superfictions' this can be extended into quite diverse areas of human activity¹²⁴ from fictive businesses to assumed identities; in other words, not only can it be non-medium specific but it can enter *any* area of human activity. In future superfictions I might, for example, create a television games show; a cult; a large architectural project; an art school, and so on. It might also be interesting to do 'a reverse Charles Saatchi' and create a fictional advertising agency as an art work. Further blending of the real and the fictive will occur when the methodology of superfictions addresses a real life project¹²⁵.

Synthetic Modernism

Synthetic Modernism arose out of a feeling of frustration in the early eighties with the terms 'modernism' and 'post-modernism'. Critics like Achille Bonito Oliva, who was more influential in the eighties than some will now admit, claimed that all art from now on would be movements of quotation. I wrote a series of articles on 'synthetic modernism', which grew from reflections on 'synthetic cubism' and

¹²² Irvine Welsh, *You'll Have Had Your Hole*, London: Methuen, 1998, v.

¹²³ see: logical extremism, below.

¹²⁴ see case studies, below

¹²⁵ Such as a Guggenheim Museum in Geelong

attempted to show that a synthesis might exist of the most tenable aspects of modernism and post-modernism. Rather than existing like two opposing football teams they could work together. Importantly, artists could again look to the future with the same creative enthusiasm as the past. The superfiction is just one of several ways in which synthetic modernism is manifested¹²⁶

Logical Extremism

A term used to describe the natural tendency of art movements to move towards extremes, to push ideas further, and then further again. This might happen in formal terms, with minimalism or with reductive theories in paintings. Or it might occur in terms of idea and content, with artists such as Andres Serrano, Tracey Emin, or Orlan.

One group of artists in the first MOCI press release were called ‘The Logical Extremists’.

Dérive

A situationist term for ‘drifting’, especially through cities and often in company. I have attempted to translate this term to cover movement across the whole planet and the lecture-performance component of this exegesis is part of that process, with airports, transit lounges, bus terminals, motels, and jetlag taking the place of crowded boulevards, cafes, and metro systems. In the eleven years since founding the *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* nine global dérives have been undertaken and documented.¹²⁷ These ‘field trips’ have provided important information for the scripting of *The Art Fair Murders*.

Détournement

¹²⁶ Others would include Telstra satellite phone cards decorated in aboriginal dot motifs, or the I.M. Pei ‘pyramid’ in the Louvre.

¹²⁷ See: ‘The International Portrait Gallery’ on my web-site www.nymoci.com These photographs, all taken by meself, are supposedly taken by the art collective Made in Palestine.

Another situationist term that is similar to notions of the readymade or the *bricolage*. Outdoor chairs from French cafes, for example, were détourned into barricades during the student riots in 1968.¹²⁸

Camouflage

The use of camouflage can be seen in the works of Guillaume Bijl and Res Ingold¹²⁹ when they make work that so resembles its surroundings that it almost disappears or goes unnoticed.¹³⁰

Trompe l'oeil

The notion of 'fooling the eye' and sometimes by extension the other senses, is evident in a whole range of superfictions from my own press releases and the detailed business plans for *Ingold Airlines*, to Janet Cardiff's audio tapes which mimic the sound of on-coming traffic.

Metonymy

In many superfictions a small part of an implied larger event, organisation or structure represents the whole. The existence of *Cameron Oil* pens stands for the whole company as do the press releases for *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas*, and the beer coasters in *Plato's Cave* which represent the whole bar. The Seymour Likely group produce film posters and within them they take on the starring roles. The films themselves, however, do not exist. The posters help to create and maintain a fragmented narrative while the content of the images address notions of art and identity. Similarly, my fictive group Film Pilgrims, who supposedly make

¹²⁸ See also: 'Inconsistencies', below.

¹²⁹ Ingold also uses the opposite animal behaviourist term 'display' depending on where his work is situated.

¹³⁰ See also, *Camouflage* The Scottish Arts Council, various venues, 1988.

films that can only be viewed in single cinemas around the world, usually in (so-called) remote places such as Nova Scotia or Southern India, have their work¹³¹ represented only by posters and cinema hand-outs. A deliberate ‘inconsistency’ (see below) was to have this image also form part of the main cinema poster for *The Art Fair Murders*.

Oxymoron

Many superfictions are oxymorons such as David Wilson’s *Museum of Jurassic Technology*¹³² in Los Angeles. Some of the props used in *The Art Fair Murders*’ installations are oxymorons, such as the umbrella tables which one finds inside large convention centres and trades halls where of course there is no danger of rain.

Found Photographs

The use of ‘found’ photographs within this project parallels the use of ‘found’ objects in sculpture. In most cases the photographs become part of the performance-lecture (see above) and help with the development of the narrative. Types of photographs used include: signage¹³³; architecture¹³⁴; and people¹³⁵.

¹³¹ See: *The After Sex Cigarette*, a filmed ballet about gender issues, image reproduced in *Wolkenkratzer* magazine, May, 1989.

¹³¹ Irvine Welsh, *You’ll Have Had Your Hole*, London: Methuen, 1998, v.

¹³² www.nymoci.com

¹³³ These can be found on the web-site under ‘The Museum of Signage’.

¹³⁴ Slides of real buildings found in different cities around the world as ‘détourned’ into fictional institutions.

¹³⁵ These fall into two main categories:

1. Photographs of strangers who then become characters in the fiction, eg, Alice and Abner Bucky Cameron. The images used to represent these characters may change over time (see inconsistencies).
2. Portraits of real people in the art world (artists, curators, dealers) notionally photographed by the fictional collective *Made in Palestine/Made in Israel*. These can be found on the web-site under ‘International Portrait Gallery’.

Inconsistencies

For many years I have been building deliberate inconsistencies into my work. These may relate to something as simple as the date of a work, or its dimensions¹³⁶.

Sometimes the same work is attributed to different artists depending on whether it is referred to in the text of the novel or the walls of a museum. At other times things are made to look deliberately ‘wrong’. In the October 2000 exhibition at RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, the large abstract canvases of Hal Jones were presented in one gallery which had been transformed to look like the booth of a commercial art fair. I measured the space and then had the stretchers constructed to look too big for the space in which they would be hung. This in fact mirrors what does often happen at real art fairs when blue chip galleries turn up with major works that look too cramped for the booth in which they are hung.

I also détourn typographical errors into art works. If a sign writer makes a mistake, or a proof reader at a printing house misses a typographical error, these are sometimes – but not always – retained if they seem ‘appropriate’.

As with several aspects of my work I have found that with these inconsistencies Marcel Broodthaers got there before me. The following quote from Rosalind Krauss’ *A Voyage on the North Sea – Art in the post-medium condition*¹³⁷ illustrates this point:

Yet if Broodthaers can be seen to be moving within the poststructuralist circle of theory, we must also remember his deep ambivalence about theory itself. We must recall the statement from *Interfunktionen* in which theories are reduced to, or perhaps revealed as, nothing more than ‘advertising for the order under which (they are) produced.’ According to this condemnation, any theory, even if it is issued as a critique of the culture industry, will end up only as a form of promotion for that very industry. In this way, the ultimate master of *détournement* turns out to be capitalism itself, which can appropriate and reprogram

¹³⁶ In 1989 *Artscribe International* used an image of a KLM jumbo jet called ‘Leonardo da Vinci’ on its masthead as part of a series of art works reproduced in that spot in every issue. I took the photograph at Schiphol airport. It was printed under my own name although later it would be attributed to the Queensland art collective Aloha. The dimensions of the image were, however, false as they hinted at a cibachrome image far wider than it was then technically possible to make.

¹³⁷ London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, 34.

anything to serve its own ends. Thus, if Broodthaers did not live to see the absolute confirmation of his entirely pessimistic ‘View’, he had nonetheless predicted both the eventual complicity between theory and the culture industry and the ultimate absorption of ‘institutional critique’ by exactly the institutions of global marketing on which such ‘critique’ depends for its success and its support.

This leads us, however, to another story. For if capitalism is the master of *détournement*, absorbing every avant-garde protest in its path and turning it to its own account, Broodthaers – by some ultimate turn of the screw – was in a strange kind of mimetic relationship to this. To put it simply, there is a way in which he conducted a form of *détournement* on himself.

Acknowledging this in the press release issued during the 1972 Documenta, where the final sections of his Museum (now renamed the ‘Museum of Old Master Art (Art Ancien), 20th Century Gallery: Eagles Department’) were installed, namely the sections of promotion and public relations, Broodthaers speaks of the ‘contradictory interviews’ he had given on the subject of his museum fictions.¹³⁸ Indeed, Broodthaers’s best critics have been alert to the peculiar inconsistencies that mine both the artist’s explanations of his work and the unfolding of the work itself. Benjamin Buchloh has written, for example: ‘If anything, it would be his persistent sense of contradictions that could be called the most prominent feature in Broodthaers’s thoughts and statements and, of course, his work.’¹³⁹

The Press Office and the Press Release

The Press Office is part of most large institutions from museums and art fairs to casinos, hotels, and multi-national businesses. When building fictional art fair installations, especially in museums, I often construct fictional press offices which attempt to mirror real press offices at biennales, art fairs, or museums. Often the bigger the event the worse the press office. In recent years there has been an improvement but for a long time the press office at the Venice Biennale was the worst of them all. Hundreds of the world’s arts

¹³⁸ Press release for ‘Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Sections d’Art Moderne et Publicité’ (Kassel, 1972), reprinted in *Marcel Broodthaers, exh. Cat.* (Paris: Jeu de Paume, 1991), 227.

¹³⁹ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ‘Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde,’ *op. cit.*, 52.

journalists would queue in 35 degree heat for hours, waiting for accreditation. There would be notices saying ‘No phones, faxes or e-mail available.’ I have documented these real events¹⁴⁰ and curate them in to my installations. These situations also comment on ‘life behind the scenes in the museum.’ Everything on public view in museums is thought out to the last millimetre and the most fine tuned lighting and humidity conditions. However, ‘behind the scenes’ and in individual offices and staff rest areas there is often a conglomeration of ‘stuff’ and an interesting selection of art works and reproductions on the walls.

All of my superfictions have been driven by The Press Release and by extension the imaginary Press Office as a method of disseminating ideas and placing images and text alongside each other in published form.

A Mixture of Methodologies

Occasionally I mix different methodologies. On several occasions I took aspects of ‘Splitting the Eleven’ and ‘Inconsistencies’ and applied them to different magazine editors. Rather than ‘aiming at’ a precise target I deliberately ‘attempted to miss’ the target. Articles written in the first person were sent to editors known only to print stories in the third person, while jargon-ridden articles and reviews were sent to mainstream magazines and the popular press. All were rejected, or rewritten by angry editors.¹⁴¹

The Deliberate Cliché

¹⁴⁰ In ‘The International Portrait Gallery’ on www.nymoci.com there is a photograph of Joseph Kosuth, supposedly taken by Made in Palestine which shows Kosuth trying to push his way past Italian guards at the Venice Biennale because this is the room where mail to participating artists is also located.

¹⁴¹ Publications ranged from *The Bulletin/Newsweek* to *Asian Art News* and *World Art*.

While working on the narrative content and the plot for the novel/installation, I decided to take two deliberate clichés – one from the world of literary or pulp fiction, the other from the contemporary art world – to test whether something fresh might grow from a synthesis of the two. From the world of publishing and film I took the idea of the serial killer, and from contemporary art the use of the mannequin in mid-nineties art practice.¹⁴²

The Architecture of the Project

As the project developed it seemed to grow naturally around the number ‘twelve’. Twelve art fairs, twelve months, twelve chapters, twelve cities, and twelve murders. The device of having the killer(s) leave clues in the form of art-world postcards next to the victims would develop, much later, into the text version of the project appearing not as a published book but as a series of clues sent through the mail.¹⁴³ (See Appendix B)

Translation as Art Work

I have used ‘signage’ as art work for many years. At this stage in the project I wanted to introduce language, or more specifically ‘translation’ as raw material for art making, also allowing for more chance typographical errors to occur and be retained. The title *The Art Fair Murders* was translated into German and French as, respectively, *Die Kunstmesseemorde* and *Meurtres au Salon d’Art*. These were printed on one side of an A5 postcard, and on the reverse a brief description of the novel and the announcement of the internet auction.¹⁴⁴ (See Appendix D) A miniature version of the postcard translation was produced as stickers for the outside of envelopes and at a later stage as different-sized labels for a range of paint cans.

¹⁴² As evidenced in the work of artists as diverse as Cindy Sherman, the Chapman Brothers, and Paul McCarthy.

¹⁴³ This grew out of the MOMA Oxford project in the final year of the doctorate.

The Mail Art Project and the Internet

I increasingly found that the internet works best in conjunction with the traditional postal services. The arrival of the world wide web gave me the opportunity of expanding my on-going mail art works into new technologies. Since the late 1980s I have built up a number of quite discrete mailing lists which, when combined, would be as large as that of any real museum or global arts organisation. (See Appendix C for example of the mailing list especially constructed for this project)

Using *The Willings Press Guide*, *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* (UK), *Writer's Market*(USA), and *The Australian Writer's Marketplace*, I compiled various mailing lists specifically for this project. These related to the world of publishing, literary agents, and news agencies such as *Reuters* and *Associated Press*.¹⁴⁵

Another mailing list includes all of the world's leading art magazines, and by in turn consulting them - *Flash Art*, *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *C*, *Parkett*, *Art and Australia*, *Asian Art News*, and *Galleries* etc – I was able to compile listings of major galleries and dealers around the world. The summer issue of *Art in America* was particularly helpful in compiling listings of museums and contemporary art spaces. *Flash Art Diary* and its web-site was used to make mailing lists of individual artists, curators, and critics. Care is taken when mailing out items to choose visually interesting stamps from whichever country the mail-out originates.

For this particular project *The Art Fair Murders*, I compiled a smaller, more focused, mailing list of 144 individuals, institutions, commercial art fairs, magazines, publishing houses, literary agents, curators and media outlets around the world. (see Appendix C).

¹⁴⁴ The auction never happened and was never intended to happen, but responses were scanned into the web site.

¹⁴⁵ One mailing list contains over twenty-five news agencies around the world including one which covers the whole of China which means that in theory a single stamp can transport information and ideas to a quarter of the earth's population. In an interview with the Dutch art team Seymour Likely I was told that a single image sent to *Reuters* of an artwork involving black and white China pigs was printed in newspapers all over the world.

From year to year the mailing list must be updated, and every so often items are ‘returned to sender’. These are all kept, and at a future date, when sufficient are collected, will be scanned into the web-site under the heading ‘Dead Letter Box’.

The Web Site

I see web sites – like catalogues, magazines, and journals – as the ideally suited for this project¹⁴⁶, combining as they do text with image. Only a small part of the www.nymoci.com relates directly to this doctoral thesis. A copy of the web-site is contained within the durable visual record as a CD. For aspects relevant to this project, visitors should enter the site and take the museum elevator to the floor marked ‘The Art Fair Murders’. All five options within it should be explored. Also of relevance are the floors marked ‘Encyclopaedia of Superfictions’ and ‘International Portrait Gallery’.

It should be noted that while I have generated all the ideas and content for the site, I have employed various technicians to undertake the technical aspects, scanning, and much of the design work.. Particular credit should be given to Robin Pettard and Bill Hart at the University of Tasmania.

Pens Mightier than Swords

For each new superfiction that I undertake I mark its arrival with the production of a new pen. The first one that was commissioned for *The Art Fair Murders* carried the name of the project and the web address. However, the latter was too long to read clearly so in future pens this was changed to the words ‘Superfiction 4’.

There is also a *Cameron Oil* pen which has helped introduce a new methodology to the project. During the MOMA Oxford series of events, a *Cameron Oil* pen was mailed to all people with the surname ‘Cameron’ in the Oxford phone book and Yellow Pages. They were all invited to attend the opening and closing events and

¹⁴⁶ This is not to detract from the necessity of actual, as opposed to virtual, exhibitions.

lectures. This may be used again in future *Art Fair Murder* projects as it is a good way of reaching a random audience.

Populism versus Specialisation

Various methodologies are being devised to extend the project in ways that reach out to the populist at one extreme and the elitist, or specialist, at the other¹⁴⁷. In the MOMA Oxford project a trail of murder mysteries was laid through the city market. *Art Fair Murder* cans of paint were placed in twelve shop windows. Clues and a map were printed in brochure form and participants left from the museum and had to navigate their way around the inner city. This action referenced both the *dérive* and the type of popular seaside holiday activity where competitions are set up that encourage participants to look in traders' windows. Participants were invited, on their return to the gallery, to swap their own pen or chewed biro for a *Cameron Oil* pen. This sort of activity might be extended in future projects to involve corporate sponsorship and prizes. The former to finance the more 'difficult' aspects of the project, the latter to encourage greater participation of members of the public who may not normally visit museums and galleries.

The Hoax *versus* Sophisticated Methodological Falsificationism

Continuing from the above, the project tests the spectator and the media through the inclusion of two devices. At one extreme, the populist extreme, is the notion of the hoax, a concept that seems to be universally understood and often enjoyed. At the other extreme, specialisation, comes the testing mechanism from the philosophy of science known as 'sophisticated methodological falsificationism.' This is attributed to Karl Popper but notions of falsificationism and verificationism are prevalent in this field.

¹⁴⁷ See below: The Hoax *versus* Sophisticated Methodological Falsificationism

Popper has summarised this testing mechanism by stating that ‘One can sight white swans any number of times but one will never be able to say “all swans are white.” However, the single sighting of a black swan *does* allow one to say “not all swans are white.”’ Popper also puts forward Einstein as a good example of a scientist who regularly outlined how his discoveries might be falsified. “What impressed me most,” Popper writes¹⁴⁸, ‘was Einstein’s own clear statement that he would regard his theory as untenable if it should fail in certain tests. Thus he wrote, for example, “If the redshift of spectral lines due to the gravitational potential should not exist, then the general theory of relativity will be untenable.”¹⁴⁹

The Lecture- Performance

Throughout the duration of the project The Lecture-Performance has been a core aspect of *The Art Fair Murders* and has also been a method of finding new knowledge about other practitioners in the field. A complete version of the lecture-performance is included within the exegesis (see page 68).

Clues

One of the biggest challenges of the project, and one which until the final stages looked like failing badly, was to find a way in which all the aspects of fiction associated with ‘the novel’ could be presented in a way which had an outcome other than a bound book in which text was presented in sequential order. It was only when I began to brood upon the ‘mail art’ aspect of the project that it occurred to me that the final outcome of the novel could be a series of clues posted out to people and organisations around the world. The architectonic nature of the novel allowed each of the twelve chapters to be worked on simultaneously and each chapter begins

¹⁴⁸ Karl Popper, *Unended Quest – An Intellectual Autobiography*, London: Routledge, 1992 (new edition), 38.

¹⁴⁹ Albert Einstein, *Über die spezielle und die allgemeine Relativitätstheorie*, Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1917, 77. Einstein also said, ‘ There could be no fairer destiny for any physical theory than that it should point the way to a more comprehensive theory , in which it lives on as a limiting case.’ This in

with a different quote about the world of publishing – from the populist to the specialist¹⁵⁰.

After various experiments a suitable format was reached. Each clue would be on a single sheet of A4 paper with the word ‘CLUE’ printed in the top left-hand corner (see overleaf) Three quarters of the way down the page the words ‘The Art Fair Murders – a story told in fragments’ was positioned. The novel was originally designed to start with Chapter Twelve, the final chapter, then go into the prologue, then continue from Chapters One through to Eleven before ending with a different version of Chapter Twelve as the Epilogue. It was decided to retain this sequence for the ‘mail-outs’ and to keep running it in that order continuously. Each clue will thus only contain a few paragraphs from a specific chapter but that chapter (and all others) will be returned to in a cyclical fashion. Finally, underneath the words, ‘The Art Fair Murders – a story told in fragments’, there will be just enough room left to insert different quotes about the world of publishing. In other words, the clues above the line critique the world of contemporary art, and the quotes below the line critique the world of literary and pulp fiction. (See Appendix B) for a full cycle of clues and quotes).

It was decided that each mail-out of clues would be sent to 144 (12x12) individuals and organisations around the world. These include

- Artists
- Art Magazines
- Art Schools
- Commercial Dealers
- International Art Fairs
- Literary Agents

fact being the fate of Newtonian mechanics in relation to Einstein’s theories of relativity, ie Newtonian mechanics still managed to get humankind to the moon.

¹⁵⁰ From Celia Brayfield on ‘How to write a bestseller’ to Jack Kerouac talking about the mental strain of ‘writing *The Subterraneans*: ‘Writing the Subs in three nights was really a fantastic athletic feat as well as mental, you shoulda seen me after I was done... I was pale as a sheet and had lost fifteen pounds and looked strange in the mirror.’

- **Literary Magazines and Festivals**
- **Mainstream Magazines, Radio, and Television**
- **Museum Curators**
- **Newspapers and Press Agencies**
- **Publishing Houses**
- **Writers**

These mail-outs will be financed by myself; by museums and galleries hosting *The Art Fair Murders*; and through grants and donations.

Character Development

As the project has developed and the installation and novel have fed upon each other, so the characters and their art works have grown in an ‘additive’ way. There have been numerous failures and ‘dead ends’, but gradually discrete ‘personalities’ as well as art works have emerged.

In the first ‘Clue’¹⁵¹ we are introduced to the main artists and art teams when Milco Zeemann, the ‘viewpoint character’, is in his hotel room in Los Angeles on the eve of that city’s commercial art fair. He reads the invitation card to the world’s biggest art prize which will be presented at the fair:

‘The 1989 *Cameron Oil Prize*,’ it announced. ‘\$100,000 will be awarded to the most promising international artist’ It was a six horse race. Most were fashionable art teams except for himself and Hal Jones, an American Neo Geo painter. There was *Aloha* from Australia; *Nouvelle Kunst Faction* (NKF) from Belgium – some of them were old mates; *Made in Palestine* from Brooklyn; and *The Triplet Twins* from Tokyo.

A facsimile of the invitation card was included with the first clue in the first mail-out.

¹⁵¹ One of twelve clues mailed out globally to 144 individuals and institutions.

These artists and art teams have been included in some or all of *The Art Fair Murders* installations. In the RMIT Gallery and Geelong Art Gallery installations, particular reference is made to Hal Jones (see text above from invitation card) and to a Texas artist now living in Queensland, Herb Sherman. There is a fifteen year age difference between the two artists.

An old and bitter rivalry divides the two men. In the late sixties, Hal had been a nineteen year old student of Sherman's in Texas' main art academy. Hal annoyed the hell out of Herb on account of his nicknaming him 'Mr Zippy', a term that referred to the miles of masking tape the teacher used in his gaudy geometrical abstractions, most of which sold to hotel chains and casinos across America. Hal was a far better painter than Herb but it didn't stop the older man failing the younger one in his final year. He also seduced Hal's girlfriend Lisa Garcia-Lopez, dumping her a few weeks later for a divorced faculty member. This so enflamed young Hal that he trashed Sherman's studio, thus depriving several Las Vegas casinos of their eagerly awaited art works. The judge was sympathetic, but said he still had to order a custodial sentence. Hal Jones received thirty days on a South Texas work farm and spent all of them painting the seemingly endless perimeter fence. It was this formative period in his life which lead to his major series of colour field paintings called 'The Fence', begun almost a decade later after a brief flirtation with neo-expressionism. Each canvas is nine feet by nine feet, the exact measurement of the prison cell he shared with three other felons. The surface of the canvases are modelled in order to rupture the picture plane and to reference building sites, industrial fabrication, and chance discrepancies.

By a strange irony it was his prison record that prevented Hal from being drafted to Vietnam, while the older artist served three terms of duty before settling in Queensland Australia, a state he fell in love with during a period of R and R in 1972, prior to the fall of Saigon.

Each artist uses a distinctive framing device. Herb Sherman favours expensive heavy frames, often with a gilt slip, and a gold name plate that also gives the title of the work. His casino paintings are named after card games: Chemin de Fer; Sweepstake Hearts; Razzle-Dazzle Cinch; The Wild Widow; Mexico Conquian;

Rouge et Noir; American Skat; Chinese Fan Tan; and California Jack. His hotel paintings are often named after bays, harbours, and beaches – Double Bay; Bay of Islands; Corio Bay; Seventy Mile Beach; and The Port of Amsterdam.

Hal Jones never frames his paintings in the true sense of the word. While they appear to be non-referential there is always the underlying sub-text of the prison farm, the fence, and the cell. They are often reductive works with contrasting or complementary underpainting. They deal with close tonal values and reference Ad Reinhardt, Joseph Albers, Brice Marden, and a new generation of abstract painters of whom Jones is counted a leading member. In others he leaves the canvas at the early stage of raw timber and glued canvas, referencing the installations of Mary Miss. He introduces narrative into his work by ‘framing’ his paintings with a single strip of timber laid along the top edge. Sometimes this timber strip has rusty nails hammered into it; sometimes broken glass embedded in candle wax; sometimes razor wire. Squares or rectangles of glass partially cover one corner of each canvas, introducing reflections and movement through the spatial relationship of the spectator(s) to the work. This is also a pun on the word reflection, a term the judge used in handing down his sentence to the young art student.

In 1989, the year of *The Art Fair Murders*, Hal Jones is thirty-nine years old; Herb Sherman is fifty-four. Over the past few years I have occasionally brought Herb Sherman to life in the pages of various art magazines.¹⁵² I also spent about as much time in casinos around Australia researching Herb Sherman’s paintings as I did in state and international galleries researching the work of Hal Jones.

The installation at RMIT Gallery in October 2000 comprises one gallery that has been turned into an art fair booth exhibiting mostly, but not exclusively, the work of Hal Jones. The second gallery has been converted into a casino with a roulette table and in it are featured the works of Herb Sherman. A cleaner’s trolley also inhabits

¹⁵² The first time was in the introduction to an essay in *Artmonthly Australia*, Nov 1995, ‘Mrs Aristotle’s Teeth.’

the space of the fictive gaming room, giving a clue to the time of day. The legs of a body extend from behind a screen. Another murder has been committed.¹⁵³

The concurrent Geelong Art Gallery exhibition also shows a fictive art fair with the work of Hal Jones. Part of the gallery is turned into a hotel reception area and bedroom, both of which are hung with the works of Herb Sherman. There is a body in the bedroom, there has been another murder.

Both venues also show works by : Milco Zeeman; Aloha; Made in Palestine; The Triplet Twins; Nouvelle Kunst Faction; and Art Against Astrology.

Herb Sherman is the only suspect in *The Art Fair Murders* known to have killed, albeit in Vietnam. Hal Jones is the only suspect known to have served a jail term. Both are frequent visitors to international art fairs around the globe.

The relationship between Sherman and Jones addresses the question posed in the abstract relating to the teacher/pupil paradigm¹⁵⁴. Its other purpose is to address what Rosalind Krauss calls ‘Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition.’¹⁵⁵

Fragmented Narrative

Narrative and narratology have been important to this project from its inception. However, it is equally important that the narrative is fragmented and must be ‘built’ within the head of the spectator. Such fragmentation is apparent in the work of a range of contemporary artists from Cindy Sherman’s untitled ‘Film Stills’ to Ilya Kabakov’s extended narratives and the sound works of Janet Cardiff. These

¹⁵³ This is how it is planned that both galleries will appear during the run of the installation. On the opening night, however, there *may* be a real game of roulette in progress and there *may* be two celebrities (or models) on duty at the real art fair booth.

¹⁵⁴ In the real art world there have been a number of interesting teacher-student relationships from the early Renaissance to the present day, particularly through the unofficial New York ‘studio assistant’ partnerships such as Zvi Goldstein and Ashley Bickerton. In the UK there was also a ‘chain of disciplic succession’ from Henry Moore through Antony Caro to Tony Cragg with each pupil overturning the dominant paradigm of the older generation.

¹⁵⁵ Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea – Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition*, London: Thames and Hudson.

fragmented narratives are further confused through another 'détournement' by the introduction of 'inconsistencies' (see above).

8. Performance-Lecture

Throughout the period of the candidacy, 38 lectures were given on superfictions in general, and *The Art Fair Murders* in particular, in museums, galleries and universities in Australia, New Zealand, Europe and the USA. This activity forms an integral part of the thesis. No two lectures were the same. Each was used to test different aspects of the project. The form of the lecture changed as well as the

content. Sometimes the I was bearded, sometimes clean shaven. Sometimes the lecture was delivered as a formal paper, sometimes extemporised, sometimes a blend of the two. Sometimes alcohol was drunk before the lecture - usually not at all.

Towards the end of the candidacy the format of the lecture had developed a performance aspect which culminated in me being ‘kidnapped’ from the podium during my final lecture (of five) at *The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford*.¹⁵⁶

Throughout the exegesis it has been important to stress that this is an ‘additive’ project. Just as elements from previous projects have been ‘détourned’ into this project in a situationist sense, so the project will continue and develop beyond the doctorate.¹⁵⁷ In future lecture-performances the I hope to address specific groups within the community such as detectives, nurses, lawyers, Rotarians, prisoners, traffic wardens, construction workers, school children etc.¹⁵⁸ Similarly I will experiment with hiring actors to impersonate me, both at the lecture-performances and during media interviews. These strategies, however, do not lie within the stated aims of the doctoral project and are mentioned only to underscore once again the importance of the project’s additive nature.

It is appropriate that one version of the performance-lecture be included at this point in the exegesis. In fact, it is a collage of several different versions of the lecture and has been deliberately constructed to contain information not included elsewhere in the exegesis.¹⁵⁹

I view the lecture-performance as a core part of the thesis, ie as part of my artistic production. It is also closely aligned to several parts of the exegesis. It functions as part of the literature review, being a way of discovering new knowledge about artists working in the field of superfictions. It gives another overview of how the

¹⁵⁶ May, 2000

¹⁵⁷ But only in the sense that a landscape painter, for example, exploring ‘the sublime’ within the landscape tradition would continue to develop her or his research beyond the doctoral submission.

¹⁵⁸ This was experimented with at MOMA Oxford in May 2000. I mailed out a Cameron Oil pen to every Cameron in the Oxford phone book inviting them to attend the opening lecture. One Cameron who came taught English as a foreign language in a language school above the covered market where many of *The Art Fair Murder* clues were disguised. As a result of this, the I gave a version of my lecture-performance to a group of mainly Spanish and French business people in the language school on Tuesday 23rd May, 2000.

¹⁵⁹ There is unavoidably some repetition but this has been kept to a minimum.

hypotheses were formed. It describes the methodology I used , as described more formally in 7. Description of Research Methodology.

Lastly, through the story-telling narrative of the performance-lecture, it gives flesh to the formal CV included as part of the durable visual record.

In order to retain the flow of a spoken presentation, footnotes have been kept to a minimum and wherever possible incorporated into the narrative.

Throughout the transcript, each slide is flagged and numbered. A complete, and numbered, set of lecture slides is included as part of the durable visual record.

True Lies and Superfictions

Lecture opens with video clip of Bill Clinton staring down the camera and categorically stating “I did not have sex with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.” This sound-bite is edited so that it is repeated three times in quick succession...

I’ve called this lecture *True Lies and Superfictions – from Guillaume Bijl to the Leeds 13*. It is part of the research I have been doing for a PhD by project at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. My thesis will be an art installation and it will be accompanied by a 20,000 - 40,000 word exegesis, or written component. The PhD itself is part of a longer investigation I have been making over the past fifteen years into what I call “superfictions”.

So, returning to the video clip we have just watched. How do we know when the President of the United States is lying to us? How do we know when journalists and editors are being economical with the truth in pursuit of a good story? How do we read visual data, including works of art? And what happens when fiction escapes from the pages of a novel and illusion slips out of the frame of a painting? These are some of the questions I will be posing today, and they are questions I ask myself all the time. My only answer to date, perhaps the rather obvious one, that we must become increasingly sophisticated in our interpretation, or ‘reading’, of text and image.

Slide 1 Take this image for example. It is by the Spanish duo Juan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguero. We see a strange, centaur-like creature shaking hands with someone wearing a white Nero jacket. It is a poetic image. We know it is a fiction immediately. But it is an image that can be enjoyed for its own sake through the willing suspension of disbelief. We enter into this world created by the artist, Fontcuberta, and the taxidermist he employs, Formiguero. They have created the world of a fictive zoologist Dr Peter Ameisenhaufen who supposedly died in a car crash in the far north of Scotland in the 1950s. One of my students tells me Ameisenhaufen means “anthill” in German. Using fabricated photographs, diary entries, journals and constructed animals which Ameisenhaufen was supposed to have created, Fontcuberta spins a web-like narrative that is part visual, and part text-based. The Dutch magazine *Perspektief* in July 1989 (and 1989 will recur throughout this lecture) reported how “Ameisenhaufen’s assistant Dr Jiminez captured a young *Hermafrotaurus autositarius*. Full grown animals had already been previously observed. The fact that this goat-like species of animal ate flesh was less characteristic than its sexual behaviour. As a pseudohermaphrodite the eight-footed, four-eared, one-headed creature lives purely monogamously. It only makes sounds when the female half, which is constantly on heat, stimulates the lazy male half to ensure reproduction in a manner that is remarkably gymnastic.”

Like many contemporary artists Joan Fontcuberta’s work has developed through a series of quite discrete but related projects. Underpinning them all is his on-going enquiry into the veracity, or lack of it, in the photographic image – and of course our interpretation of those images. “We believe the photographs of the footsteps on the moon,” he says, “ even though all the space expeditions could be an enormous montage. On the contrary, we don’t believe the photos of UFOs; we say they are faked and shrug them off.”

Many of the artists I am investigating for my doctoral research “use” photography for their own ends, rather than see themselves as being photographers through any intrinsic love of the craft. In a similar way they also “use” elements of graphic

design, scenography, sculptural deconstruction, marketing, web-design, signage, and media manipulation. Photography, and by extension video and computer generated imagery, are the disciplines most often pirated in the creation of superfictions. The outcome of much of this work is a sculptural situation or installation that appeals mostly to the visual sensibility, and a good example of this can be seen in the work of Guillaume Bijl who I will come to in a moment. Other superfictions *additionally* rely on narrative and sometimes even plot in their construction, so in my research I have also become concerned with one of the fastest growing fields in the humanities, that of “narratology”. If anyone is interested in following this lead further I can highly recommend a book published by Longman called *Narratology* and edited by Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia Landa which leads us from Roland Barthes’ “Structural Analysis of Narratives” through “Narratology and Film” and upto the post-structural narratologists such as Teresa de Lauretis’ “Desire in Narrative” and Peter Brooks’ “Reading for the Plot”. While this book is very much locked in to text, or at its most experimental text-and-film, there are a number of solo and group exhibitions which have occurred in the past twelve months that take the visual arts into “the real world” through the devices of narrative and plot. I am thinking of the interventions of the English art collective The Leeds 13, the set-piece scenographies of the Melbourne collective DAMP, the group exhibition “Sleuth” at London’s Barbican, and Helen Cardiff’s project for *Artangel* in London where, in a project called *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*, 1999, Cardiff invited gallery visitors to swap some form of identification for a gallery head-set. She then sent them out on to the streets of London. The starting point is the Whitechapel Library. She allows a fragmented narrative to unfold and uses the audio equivalent of *trompe l’oeil* – a screeching car approaching at speed behind you, when no car exists except for the *real* traffic – to scare the bejesus out of you. Cardiff’s photographs exist in the space of the catalogue and are also used to accompany magazine and newspaper reviews (*see Flash Art*, November-December, 1999 and *Artforum* December, 1999). In one image the artist poses, gun in hand and parallel to her dark glasses, listening intently. Reviewing the project in *Artforum* Rachel Withers writes: ‘Charged, intimate, even frightening scenarios are unfurled

in the first person, in the private space between one's ears: "I'm blindfolded, my hands tied behind me. I walk naked across the floor. I can feel his eyes watching my body." However, one consumes these not in the 'safe' space of a darkened cinema, but in the street, in broad daylight. Cardiff's script is studded with linguistic shifters ('you', 'I', 'we', 'they'). In this way it continues the strategies of '80s feminist textual practices, expanding the tradition (as in recent work by Jenny Holzer) with a powerful revelation of the desire both in, and of, the text.'

Precursors to these projects would include the work of artists such as Martin Kippenberger and his 'Piss-Crutch Actions'

Now, I should say at this point that that when one presents one's PhD research it is important to not only outline the parameters of one's enquiry but also to state the areas that one is *not* investigating and the grey areas inbetween, on the boundaries, that are at best tangential. The core of my research deals with the period from 1980 to 2000. It is global rather than national in its reach, but it does not deal with all the major theories that proliferated at that time. Many of the artists with whom I am concerned rejected the dominant theories of the day, while others favoured a synthesis – and this, of course, is how art develops. While I enjoy reading a range of theory from Marxism and feminism through to deconstruction and situationist theory, and while I enjoy a broad cross section of visual art from El Greco to Damien Hirst, I must confess that mostly I keep returning to *some* of the writings of *some* philosophers of science when I am writing about superfictions. I will return to this later in the lecture, but will initially mention Karl Popper's paper "The Myth of the Framework", Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and perhaps most useful of all Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* and the same author's *Science in a Free Society*.

But some of the best writers on the subject, not surprisingly, are the artists themselves.

In an essay called “Truths, Fictions, Virtuality” that will appear in *Photofile #59* (April 2000)¹⁶⁰ which I have been invited to guest edit on the subject of my PhD topic, Joan Fontcuberta, whose slide is still on the screen, writes:

‘Why do we call photography ‘photography’? Because Fox Talbot couldn’t speak Greek. Or at least, not well enough. That is, in any case, the claim advanced by Vilem Flusser regarding the distinguished inventor of the term. The prefix ‘photo’ comes from *phos*, which means light, but it would have been more accurate to say *phaos*. This would have brought us closer to *phaiein* and *phonein*, terms which should translate into the verb ‘to appear’ rather than to ‘to shine’, and which give birth to such words as phantom, fantasy or phenomenon. This lexicography refers by extension, to ghosts, illusions and other apparitions. ‘Photography’ therefore literally means ‘apparent writing’. Consciously or unconsciously, photographers have been bent on transforming their medium into a genuine ‘writing of appearances’.’

In this essay Fontcuberta ranges through numerous topics from media manipulation and government propaganda to hoaxes and perceptual testing mechanisms:

‘The news market is based on a protocol of confidence, to which technology contributes by conveying likelihood. Diogenes used a lamp to seek out the truth; today, the pursuit of truth is waged with cameras. The paradox is that Diogenes’ lamp flashed light on objects, whereas in the case of the camera, the light is swallowed. The camera does not necessarily enlighten our understanding; it must, as Flusser suggested, confront lightness and darkness, with ghosts and appearances. Contrary to what we have historically been taught, photography has more to do with fiction than facts. *Fictio* is the participle of *ingere* which means “to invent”. All of photography, without exception, is pure invention.’

I think it is worth repeating that last line before we go on to investigate further slides. ‘*All of photography, without exception, is pure invention.*’

¹⁶⁰ Copy included in Durable Visual Record

So, if Fontcuberta's image of the gryphon is a "poetic fiction" - and I would maintain it is - in which we willingly, and conspiratorially, suspend our disbelief, then this - *Slide 2* - is what I call a "realist fiction". What are we looking at? Some kind of supermarket, at first glance. Row after row of familiar packets of breakfast cereal and tins of pet food. But there's something about the space it is set in - the polished wooden floors, the sugar-white walls, the track lighting, that makes us think something is wrong. It looks like an art gallery. But who would go to the trouble of re-creating a supermarket within an art gallery? Those that know his work will immediately reply, Guillaume Bijl and know him to have also constructed *doppelgangers* of laundromats, driving schools, camping equipment shops and dry cleaning outlets in galleries, museums, and at commercial art fairs.

In a recent book on the work of Guillaume Bijl - published by Wienand in 1999 - Hans Theys gives us a good introduction to the range of his work. I was particularly excited to find this quote because in my research at RMIT I am trying to break 'superfictions' into a number of different categories. Here we see in the work of one single artist several distinct categories already existing:

Guillaume Bijl has subdivided his oeuvre in four groups. The first category of works is called the 'Transformation Installations', which he describes as 'a reality in unreality'. With this 'unreality' he refers to (a) pamphlet he wrote in 1979 in which the government proposes to shut down art spaces on account of their 'unfunctionality' and to have them converted into useful, public institutions. The first work of this group was a driving school. It was followed by a fitness-centre, an auction hall, a supermarket, etc. Bijl calls them critical, archaeological tales which have been brought into vision by distance-creating alienation. The second group of works Bijl calls the 'situation installations', which he describes as an 'unreality in reality'. The situation installations are usually interventions in reality in response to an art manifestation. In fact, they mock our expectation patterns: they mock the kind of things we do or do not find obvious. In this way, stuffed birds were set up at different sites in the city of Kassel during Documenta 1X. One year later, on both sides of a Dutch-German border crossing, a sign was put down with the inscription: 'No naturism', while in a nearby customs house some pictures of naturists were

hung up. Another intervention consisted in the placement of some bicycles and a notice with the inscription ‘No bicycles’ at the airport of Montréal. The third group is formed by the ‘sorry-installations’. These are absurd assemblages in which Bijl ‘messes about’ with respect to his own form. One of the first sorry installations was the placing of a fake horse in a carton (horse box) on the property of a farm. The fourth group consists of compositions that nearly always bear the name: ‘Composition Trouvé’. They are reconstructions of ‘a number of objects found in reality’. They are present-day archaeological still lifes that are related to the big installations as sketches are related to big paintings.

There is enough substance in this quote to form the foundation for a full investigation into the work of Bijl alone. Suffice it to say, what I find particularly interesting to my own investigation are the twin notions of camouflage and *trompe l’oeil* in Bijl’s work; also the hint of narrative, especially in the first category with the story about the government decree on shutting down art spaces to make way for driving schools etc.

Reviewing the installation from which this slide of a supermarket comes, Christopher Schenker commented in *Flash Art* in 1991:

Certainly Bijl makes work that finds no base for itself in the tradition of optical, pictorial, or painterly realism. Traditionally, *mimetic realism* grounds itself on the fundamental difference between the means employed for representation and the object that finds itself transformed into represented subject.

The supermarket as a real work of art is thus an imitation. Bijl places himself in the near vicinity of the Nouveaux Réalistes, of whom Broodthaers purportedly remarked that he didn’t like their ‘wordiness’ and that their objects only projected a rude and simple notion of progress into art.

Mention of that name “Broodthaers” moves me along with excitement and eagerness to my next slide – *slide 3* - taken from the catalogue of the 1990 Sydney Biennale, *The Readymade Boomerang*, curated by René Block. It is of Marcel Broodthaers and from its title *A Dream with Cream* you can probably tell that he was a poet turned artist. It is one of my favourite images from the 20th century. Let’s be generous, from any century. In her catalogue essay for that Sydney Biennale

which she called “Taken in a moment of optical confusion” Anne Marie Freybourg discusses the use of film and photography by Marcel Broodthaers alongside their use by Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and the Canadian Michael Snow. She talks about how Broodthaers investigates reality through a conceptual plan that reflects on language and on cultural production. Describing an exhibition at MTL Gallery in Brussels (1970) she says that in it Broodthaers examined ‘The manifold overlappings of picture, object, language, and reality...he had the text of the invitation written on the gallery window. Prior to this he had filmed the street through the window and had documented the change from day to night. During the exhibition this film was projected directly onto the window.’

Broodthaers’ great project was for a Museum of Modern Art - Department of the Eagles, and when I first learned about this I almost gave up my own project – *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas* which at that time, the late eighties, I was just formulating. As you will see I continued with it and attempted to take it along different paths. I used a different methodology and my aims and outcomes also differed.

I think this would be a good point in my lecture to say a few words about my own research methodology – and I hope that doesn’t sound too possessive. We all have access to shared research methodologies, some of which might hinge on the traditional library search – and for visual artists and designers working on PhD’s by project that would also, crucially, include exhibition, catalogue, copyright, web, and patent searches. But at some point in the process you have to ask yourself, in addition to this shared methodology, what is it that is quite specific about the new knowledge I need to find and/or create for my own project? One candidate might be researching, say, ‘The spiritual and the sublime in the landscape tradition of Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), William Blake (1757-1827) and the Shoreham Ancients.’ It might be very important for them to travel to London and carry out research in the Victoria and Albert Museum, looking especially at letters and other correspondence between different members of the group. Much will already have been written on the subject but private correspondence and also private collections could yield much

new knowledge on the topic. Someone else might be relating their own contemporary decorative painting back to the Vienna Sezession (1898-1903) of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. They might find it helpful to look at correspondence between Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Scotland and Klimt in Vienna and relate both back to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. In my own research I am looking at an extremely new tendency that has evolved over the past 20 years and continues to grow. Most of the artists I am investigating have been out of art school for less than a decade – some are still studying. So far I have only been able to find two curated group exhibitions of this type of work – ‘For Real Now’ in 1990 and ‘Business Art Business’ in 1994, both in the Netherlands. This does not mean that there are no historical precedents for the type of work I am investigating. Marcel Duchamp and Marcel Broodthaers both bequeathed much to this younger generation of artists, and there are a few notable senior artists with vast and important bodies of work. Six who immediately spring to mind are Guillaume Bijl in Belgium, SERVAAS in the Netherlands, Ian Hamilton Finlay in Scotland, Ian Breakwell in England, Ralph Rumney in France, and Ilya Kabakov, now based in New York.

So, I did my library searches. I consulted *artbibliographie moderne* and *Art Index*. I consulted my supervisors and my colleagues in the art world. I “Asked Jeeves” as well as other search engines. But I still had anxieties. I felt that there were artists “out there”, for want of a better phrase, that would be crucially important to my research and who had slipped through all the standard nets. I tried to recall how I had heard of many of the artists who I was already looking at – Seymour Likely in Amsterdam, Res Ingold in Cologne, David Wilson in Los Angeles – and I realised it had either been through travelling and making studio visits on the advice of friends in different cities around the world, or through giving lectures like this one and being approached by members of the audience afterwards and asked if I had heard of so-and-so who has a studio down the road or in a nearby town. I decided to go on an extensive lecture tour and planned it so that it would allow me to additionally visit specialist book shops and libraries in the Netherlands and Belgium where I

knew much contemporary and historical material could only be found. Had I not done this I would not now have valuable information on, for example, Alexa Wright in London who has been working with amputees and recreating their phantom limbs through computer generated imagery; nor would I have come across Karen Rhymer in Chicago who, writing as Eve Rhymer, has written a romantic novel called *Love* in which all the words appear alphabetically through hitting the appropriate key on her computer. The first three pages are “A”s of various sorts, but as you “read” through it, the usage and repeat usage of certain words does construct a certain disjointed and fragmented narrative within the mind of the reader. Those are two examples of many, but if anyone here today can help me in my research I have a notebook and pen on the table beside me and would welcome any comments and details of artists I should contact, after the lecture.

I’d now like to say a few more words about photography and the old adage that “photography never lies.” *Slide 4* At century’s end it would appear that mostly photography lies through its teeth, as can be seen from the morphing techniques used to change Edward Heath into Harold Wilson, and so on through various British Prime Ministers...Jim Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher, and John Major on the cover of this copy of *Artmonthly* from London, May 1991. If you have seen the Woody Allan film *Zelig* you will know that this type of fabrication is not limited to still images.

And what about this image? *Slide 5* Does anyone recognise what this is? At face value it looks like a black and white reproduction of a Mark Rothko painting. We see two bands of grey, each of a different tonal value, divided by a darker, almost black, line. This image shows that the camera can lie by taking out as well as adding in. It is typical of the sort of images I have been collecting as part of my research and is in fact a reproduction of one of Degas’ paintings of ballerinas practising at the bar. However, because it has been printed in an Iranian school text book the human figures have been air-brushed out. But you can still see the bar itself – the black line in the middle - and if you look carefully you can see that the shadows of

the dancers remain on the floor. As a point of information, I have re-photographed it from a black and white image which appeared in the Higher Education pages of *The Australian* newspaper a few years ago.

I will now describe the evolution of my own work. And it is important to say at the outset that mine is an “additive” project. Over the past three decades we have all become familiar with the reductive principles that lie behind much minimalist work, and it should be remembered that the term minimalism refers to a certain quality rather than a specific quantity. In short, much minimalist work is physically very solid, although that is by no means a prerequisite. So what do I mean by saying my work is “additive”? At its most basic it means that one project grows out of the former project and will contribute to the next project, like a snake continually shedding its skin but retaining and refining its patterning. In my own case it means that some elements in my work – “The Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain” is a good example, or my fictive group Film Pilgrims – grow from project to project, are recycled and reinvented, and importantly the narrative history of the piece is changed – even from one lecture to another, since ‘inconsistencies’ are also an important element in my fictions. Such “additive” projects are not uncommon in recent contemporary art practice – Seymour Lively group in the Netherlands is a good example as is IRWIN group in Slovenia, Patrick Pound a New Zealand artist based in Melbourne, and Rodney Glick in Australia. I will come to them later. But one of the most interesting and longest running is the work of the Canadian art collective (or group) *General Idea*. Sadly, AA Bronson is the only member of the trio still alive and I was fortunate to be able to interview him about the additive nature of their work at the Basel Art Fair in 1993 - *Slide 6* I began by asking him if he felt they had remained true to their original vision, or plan?

“I don't think there was anything we would call an original vision as such back in '68,” he told me. “And we didn't actually use the name General Idea until 1970 when we used it for a particular project. Later we established a program for ourselves that would last us until 1984. When that date came around we had to decide whether we would continue to work together or whether we would stop. Our

original intention was to close the project in 1984.” After exploring the Orwellian nature of the questions which this answer begged, we went on to discuss the evolution of the (Miss) General Idea Pavilion and the groups on-going publication *File* magazine whose title is a deliberate anagram of *Life* magazine.

‘File Magazine started in 1972,” Bronson told me “And we really saw it as a microcosm of the world of art publishing and the critical response to the artist. It was produced as an artist project but veiled in the guise of a more objective venue for our ideas. Initially, it was modelled after *Life Magazine* and of course uses the same letters in its title. We were interested in *Life Magazine* because they were the first magazine to create news rather than just report it. They would take fairly mundane events and turn them through the photo-story process in to news stories. They had a regular section for years called 'Life Goes to a Party' where they would go to a very ordinary party at someone's suburban home in the mid-West and use it almost like visiting African natives or something, it was quite odd. So we were interested in the fact that *Life* was cognisant of their ability of creating news. We modelled ourselves after that because we wanted to create an illusion of an art scene which in reality didn't exist. Over the next ten years or so through *File* we built up a whole mythical world, and only the tip of that iceberg existed in reality.’

So how, I wondered, did this group take its collective decisions, and was it this very process that necessitated it being an “additive” project?

“Our decision-making has historically been done just through talking. The three of us have lived together for years and we would just sit around the table and talk. The projects would then gradually emerge out of those group discussions. The other very important thing is that our projects tend to be additive. We tend to build on old projects and take fragments of old ideas and turn them in to new projects. We are quite happy to be self-referential. Through time, and through this additive process, the whole world of *General Idea* has been built. Over the years there has been a kind of *General Idea- speak* that has emerged. We have such a group language now of how we talk to each other that it feels as if any one of us could sit down and work on a project individually and represent the group entirely. We seem to think in unison - consciously and subconsciously.”

I have never been good working in groups. I love playing in groups, and arguing and debating and enthusing in groups. But to me that is always the backdrop to the solitary life in the studio and the study or the library and the gallery. It is not surprising then that my work, even my additive work, is in some ways the antithesis of General Idea – or IRWIN, Seymour Likely, DAMP, The Leeds 13.

So while my own practice is perhaps the obverse of these groups (although sharing many of their passions), it *is* similar in structure and methodology to other lone individuals such as Patrick Pound in Melbourne and Ian Hamilton Finlay in Scotland – although not sharing some of *their* passions.

Throughout the 90's Patrick Pound has been working on a systematic parody of the modern artist's mania with curricula vitae. He calls this ongoing project *c.v. a work in progress*. Pound has paid to have himself made International Man of the Year. He's bought his way into the World Who's Who of Intellectuals, Five Hundred Leaders of Influence, the International Dictionary of Biography, the Asia Pacific Who's Who and Five Thousand Personalities of the World, and, most recently, The First Five Hundred At The Millennium. He has a research fellowship coin, a Man of Achievement Certificate, a bookmark, a silver medal for 20th century achievement, an international key of success and so on. He is an honorary board member of the International Biographical Association. He has also been made a Fellow of the International Biographical Association giving him the right to use the letters F.I.B.A. after his name. Further, Pound has confused this vanity system by embellishing his particular entries in these published volumes. In each of them he has tampered with the truth. Amongst other fabrications his biography includes the setting up of F.A.F. in 1992 dedicated to the uncovering of fakes and forgeries in the arts. Where his photo appears he has substituted a picture of Lester Gaba a 1950's soap carver of art masterpieces. This has even been stamped as legitimate on his Fellowship documentation from the International Biographical Institute. Pound turns the system of the c.v. into a work of art. The sales pitches of these awards are themselves now a collection, an archive for Pound to exhibit as *Pitches at an Exhibition*.

Pound's fictional identities began in the early eighties with fake letters to the editor in New Zealand newspapers. On one occasion he succeeded in having 14 of these letters published in two days. They were all regarding a music review. In 1991 Pound wrote an apparently rather highbrow piece for a book published by Victoria University in New Zealand complete with a set of faked footnotes. Since 1989 Pound has written on and around his artwork under a collection of pseudonyms. Beginning with a fake interview in his catalogue 'Fragments and Fakes' he has employed these deceits which both operate as serious criticism and parody its mannerisms albeit with affection. Indeed Pound has an affection for affectation. He also says he does this simply to save money. Pound's pseudonyms include: Thomas Watling (Australia's first professional artist – a deported forger), Monica Smith (Monica being a pun on moniker), Dr. Gerry Ford (Ford, Gerry –forgery), the curator Ian Smith Jnr (Ian Smith Jnr being the son of Ian Smith, that is Smith's son Ian, curator; that is Smithsonian curator). For some of these fictional writers Pound has lifted photographs of other, real, authors. The photograph of Ian Smith Jnr is actually of Lee Catterall who wrote 'The Great Dali Art Fraud and other deceptions'. The photo of Ray Fox is that of Michael Heyward the author of 'The Ern Malley Affair'. The name of Ray Fox being an allusion to Reynard the fox the trickster of medieval manuscripts. More of Pound's assumed names to look out for are Anthony Trompe (A. Trompe –a trick), and Simon Dermott (the specialist in museum security and tracing, detecting and exposing forgeries of the film 'How To Steal A Million').

I would now like to put my own work in to context alongside the artists and fictions which we have already looked at.

Slide 7 Ten years ago, in August of 1989, I created a fictional museum in New York called *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas*. It existed only through its press office and rather than exhibit this work in a gallery I sent out fictive press releases around the world to news agencies like *Reuters* and *Associated Press*, to galleries, museum directors and friends, describing the pioneering work of what was supposedly the world's biggest contemporary space for exploring art and ideas. Notionally it is

located on New York's Park Avenue. I did not do this as a hoax or as a way of "taking the piss" out of the art world. I did it partly out of curiosity and partly as a way of creating a mirror image of the art world, to reflect the high seriousness and absurdity that occurs when art meets money and ambition.

I wanted "the look" of the press release to be a little old and dated. This was partly due to my changing perception of New York as a city. As a child growing up in Glasgow I had visualised New York as a modern city of the future, perhaps a little like the present day Singapore with gleaming skyscrapers competing to reach the blue skies above. When I first visited the city as an adult in 1983 to review Stephen Campbell's double headed shows at Barbara Toll's and John Weber's galleries for *Artscribe* magazine I was amazed to find myself back in what felt like the 1930s – *Slide 8* - with Art Deco skyscrapers, diners and delis that were straight out of an Edward Hopper retrospective, and steam rising from beneath the city streets. Even the Pan Am jet I arrived on had seen better days. The arm rest was broken, the headphones didn't work, the carpeting was threadbare. But I loved it all at the same time. *Slide 9* So I wanted the look of the press release to be a "last days if empire" look. At the bottom, reversed out in black and white, is the museum's mission statement and list of staff members.

Dr Sunday Anderson is the director, Hideki Kazuhito is the Professor of Ideas, Ivan Vertov is the executive archivist, Sally Anne Shaw is in charge of press and media, the education program is run by Don and Charlie Scottsdale, while off-planet research is overseen by an ex-graffiti artist Cindy Boltzman whose street tag used to be *K log W*. There are 15 additional department heads who can be contacted through the Department of Public Information.

And the mission statement reads: "The Museum's presentation of art and ideas is the most comprehensive in the world offering an unrivalled view across the visual arts, the philosophy of science, architecture, technology, performing arts and off-planet systems. *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas* is a bequest to the people of New York thru the Alice and Abner "Bucky" Cameron Foundation. It was also

their wish that the European centre locate in Dundee, Scotland, home of “Bucky” Cameron’s grandparents whose wealth from the local jute industry financed both their son and their grandson’s activities in the multi-national oil and artificial intelligence industries.”

There are not many known photographs of the Camerons, like many billionaires they are reclusive. This one - *Slide 10* - is of Alice and Abner at the Cologne Art Fair. This one - *Slide 11* - is of “Bucky” Cameron on his ranch in Phoenix, Arizona.. And here they are - *Slide 12* - in front of their recently purchased Lichtenstein canvas in their Park Avenue penthouse.

At the top of the press release *Slide 13* you can just make out the faint map of a city with a “Riverside Drive” running across the page. If you glance at it you may think it is New York, but in fact it is Riverside Drive in Dundee, with the Dundee art school – Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art - deliberately placed next to the words in red “contemporary ideas.”

In the main body of the press release – and the first one ran to seven pages – I tried to plan out how I would run a huge museum and what innovations I would make. Over time these press releases have become a little bit like a traditional sketchbook, a place where I can put ideas down quickly and return to them later.¹⁶¹ The device is also similar to that used by young architects who may have to wait years before they get a shot at a real commission. They can still draw up plans for buildings that they hope may one day be built. There are plenty of books available about plans for unbuilt buildings. Even the great Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh left plans and a model for an opera house, and I will never understand why my home city of Glasgow when they built a new opera house down the road from the school of art did not adapt his building to their ends with state of the art acoustics.

¹⁶¹ By the early 90s my web-site, www.nymoci.com , had taken over this role

So this first press release reflects and critiques what was happening in the art world in 1989. At that time exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris and *Bilderstreit* in Cologne were being mounted after years and years of planning. By contrast, I introduced a gallery space in the museum which would respond immediately to political and cultural events through a think-tank of curators, journalists, economists and philosophers, thus bringing the tensions of the news room and the pressures of the press office to the presentation of art and ideas. I even tried to build in the bad grammar and syntax one finds in the press releases of (usually) very large institutions. Here is an example of part of the first press release, announcing a new gallery space within the museum.

Said museum director Dr Sunday Anderson: '*The Changing Room* aims to challenge accepted ways of curating as was done in very different ways by Jan Hoet's *Chambres d'Amis* and Hubert Winter's *Skulpturen Republik*. Slide 14 - The program commences with an exhibition called *To Get Rich is Glorious* -

This exhibition centers on *propaganda* and takes its title from a statement made by Deng Xiaoping in the early eighties – *To Get Rich is Glorious*. By contrast, his June 9th speech which melded economic liberalism with political orthodoxy, and made five days after the Tienanmien Square massacre spoke of "Plain Living" and set out a seventy year program to promote the new philosophy.'

Slide 15 - And so in various press releases I responded to everything from the fall of the Berlin Wall – as it was happening - to the then growing tendency for artists to work in teams and sprinkled real artists such as IRWIN, Gilbert and George and Jane and Louise Wilson in with groups I had invented myself such as *Nouvelle Kunst Faction* from Belgium, *Art Against Astrology* from London – *Slide 16* - here is one of their paintings called "The Strange Attractors", and a group of East Village Artists called *Made in Palestine* (a fictional name for a fictional state, some might

argue) who take photographs of members of the art world at work and at play and presented them as large scale cibachrome prints.¹⁶²

Slide 17 – Here is Nicholas Logisdal at the Cologne Art Fair – *Slide 18* - here is Ashley Bickerton and Mark Quinn relaxing at the Sydney Biennale and – *Slide 19* - here is John Armleder and Sylvie Fleury at the Venice Biennale with the Australian artist Hany Armanious behind John’s shoulder, and again in Venice – *Slide 20* - Joseph Kosuth in the dark glasses trying to get into the press office which is also where exhibiting artists have to pick up their mail from home.

Slide 21 Various other exhibitions and invented artists are described in the first press release from the invented group film pilgrims whose art-house movies can only be seen in single cinemas around the world thus giving film the sense of pilgrimage that has always been associated with single masterpieces to – *Slide 22* – a survey of the photographs of Ralf Kapper. Kapper, who grew up in Los Angeles, had Dutch grandparents who owned a barber’s shop in Rotterdam. Kapper was a war photographer in Cambodia and never completely recovered from what he saw there. He spent most of the seventies working as a photographer in *Disneyworld* and only commented that he had seen so many children die in south east Asia that he wanted to be surrounded by children having fun. The circumstances of his disappearance are unclear. All that was found on the beach was his shoe – *Slide 23* – and this is one of the last images found in his camera – *Slide 24*. The exhibition contrasts his war images with those he took at Disneyland, plus a number like this of light entering darkened rooms which were only discovered after his death.

Now, for want of a name to give to these fictive situations I have become involved with I have called them “superfictions”, partly as a way of distinguishing them from narrative, text-based fictions - *Slide 25* - and later in the lecture I will come to my most recent “superfiction” which is a novel and an art installation both of which are called *The Art Fair Murders*. I mention it at this point because all of the characters, museum staff, and groups of artists and individuals mentioned in the first press

¹⁶² All of these artists groups which appeared in the first 1989 press release now become characters and make art works within the novel and installation *The Art Fair Murders*, through the additive

release from 1989 are characters within the novel and the installation that is being constructed as part of my PhD investigation. These range from Alice and Abner “Bucky” Cameron through to Ralf Kapper and K log W.

Slide 26 Each time I create a new superfiction I mark its arrival with the production of a new pen, and as you can see there are pens for *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas; Cameron Oil; The Art Fair Murders;* and next year’s, 2001, superfiction which will be called *Rival Cities* and will look at historical rivalries between different cities such as Cologne and Dusseldorf; Glasgow and Edinburgh; and Sydney and Melbourne as well as smaller rivalries such as Suva and Nadi in Fiji or Stromness and Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands of Scotland.

So, this is a project that works at various levels – partly through the media, partly through galleries and museums, through lectures such as this, through my web site - *Slide 27-* and it also operates as a mail art or postal project. This would be a typical mail out which normally includes a press release and a pen – the pens are gifts to friends in the art world. The stamps on the envelopes seek to capture that childhood surprise, like the first snow flakes of winter, when an envelope drops through the letter box from a distant land. And in many ways I must admit that I find the complexities of the postal system and its labyrinthine reach more impressive than the internet.

Slide 28 – Splitting the Eleven At this point I’d like to say a little bit about the terminology that I use in my work. I’ve always felt that if you were going to be an artist you should have the fun of inventing art movements and technical terms - why leave it to journalists, critics and advertising moguls? Look at the mess they made of such brand identification as Impressionism, Cubism, and New Neurotic Realism. This is a promotional card featuring a photograph of James Lee Byars at the Venice Biennale, and notionally taken by the art collective Made in Palestine. It

nature of the on-going project.

relates to a book of my collected writings which will span the period from 1981 to 2001. It is called *Splitting the Eleven, Art, Darts and Travel* and it will be one third global, one third Scottish and one third Australian in content often with overlaps where New York or Cologne artists, for example show in Sydney or Edinburgh, or Glasgow or Melbourne artists show in Los Angeles or Tokyo. Why it is important to mention here is because the novel and installation I am working on *The Art Fair Murders* covers roughly the same period, and the deeper I get in to both projects the more I feel I can better describe the period through fiction than through “fact”, through the novel and installation than through the ‘real’ collected writings’. So, my invented terms ‘Splitting the Eleven’; ‘superfictions’; ‘logical extremism’; and ‘heroic amateurism’ join with the accepted figures of speech and descriptive nouns: oxymoron; metonymy; camouflage; trompe l’oeil; doppelganger; and nom de plume¹⁶³

The Museum of Contemporary Ideas was my first superfiction and not long after the first press release was sent out I visited the Cologne Art Fair. It was November 1989, and as a group of us from Scotland plunged into the Cologne art world, that same weekend in Berlin the wall was coming down.¹⁶⁴ Inside the vast trades hall where the art fair was being held I bumped into Dr Wolfgang Max Faust who I knew from the days when we both wrote for *Artscribe* magazine. He was now publishing a Frankfurt magazine called *Wolkenkratzer*, which I believe means ‘Skyscraper’, and I asked him if he’d received one of my press releases? I don’t know who was more surprised next – him to learn that the museum was a fiction, or me to be told that he had printed an article about it¹⁶⁵ – *Slide 29* – beautifully translating the press release into German, describing Alice and Abner “Bucky” Cameron, and the works of all my fictive artists. He told me he was delighted and had no idea that it didn’t exist but then urged me “for God’s sake don’t tell anyone here about it. Since publication this has been widely discussed across Germany and Austria as the biggest new museum in the world and next week

¹⁶³ In 8. Description of Research Methodology, a full description of these terms will be given.

¹⁶⁴ This fact is fictionalised within *The Art Fair Murders*, Chapter Eleven, November, Cologne.

I have to chair a meeting of German curators and industrialists to see if Frankfurt can build a museum to rival your one in New York.”

Now once again the notion of “the hoax” raises its head. But I prefer to see it as an example of how through fiction and imagination you can make things happen in reality quicker and more effectively than you can through the so called normal bureaucratic channels. One day I may invent, say, a fictional school of art and design as if ‘money was no object’ and use that as a blueprint to explore aspects of art education. Or perhaps a fictional games show or soap opera.

Slide 30 It was at the same Cologne Art Fair in 1989 that I first met and interviewed Res Ingold. Up until that point I had believed myself to be working pretty much in isolation in terms of creating fictional situations and organisations. A friend in Dusseldorf Alf Lohr had once told me about a Swiss artist called Res Ingold who lived in Cologne and ran a fictive airline called *Ingold Airlines*. When I was strolling around the art fair and came to the stand of the famous Torch Gallery from Amsterdam I saw what looked like an airline booth mixed in amongst all the art galleries. Several months earlier at the Frankfurt Art Fair I had come across a dry cleaning booth and genuinely thought it had been left over from the previous week’s trade fair. Only years later did I see it reproduced as an art work by Guillaume Bijl.¹⁶⁶ A similar feeling *might* have been engendered by the Ingold Airlines booth but for the fact it was manned and elements of humour had been brought into the presentation. This type of installation relates both to camouflage and to the animal behaviourist idea of ‘display’. When Ingold builds his airline booth within a commercial art fair it stands out from everything around it – the paintings and the sculptures – like an animal display. When he constructs the exact same booth within a real air fair – as he occasionally does – it sinks in to its surroundings as if

¹⁶⁵ Written by Gabriella Knapstein.

¹⁶⁶ Hans-Jurgen Schwalm, *Guillaume Bijl – Installationen, Situationen und Kulturtourismus*, Köln: Kunstler und Verlag, 1998, 71.

camouflaged. The self same art work can be read in entirely different ways simply because of its context and surroundings.

All of these thoughts came later. For the moment, I knew I had found my man, and there he was dressed in a dark business suit as chief executive officer of *Ingold Airlines*. We immediately hit it off and discovered we had a number of things in common, not least the fact that his business plans and my press releases were printed in black, white, and red. “Security, Competence, and Flexibility” is the slogan of Ingold Airlines, according to its latest business plan, and with the introduction of its new super jumbo Boeing 747 – 400 Ingold airlines is the first airline company in the world to introduce a new cabin system...from flight to flight the equipment is chosen according to the individual needs and wishes of the passengers. These in-flight facilities include: Lounge; Secretary; Conference; Fitness; Cosmetics; Media; Playland; Cargo Floral; and Animal Service.

Slide 31 As you can see Res goes to enormous lengths to get a good image. Here we see some cargo on the landing strip on the Furka Pass, located in one of the most impressive Alpine landscapes. It was mostly American tourists who took advantage of the Paris – Geneva – Furka route, with an open final destination.

And so it was that Res Ingold introduced me to Servaas and his wonderful world of deep sea fishing. *Slide 32* I could almost give a separate lecture on the work of each of the artists I am going to show you, so this is of necessity just a very brief sample. Servaas’ signature colour is orange – *Slide 33* - and he has invented a whole range of accessories to enhance your haddock and chips, such as this device for breathing cod gas.

Slide 34 The Stedleijk Museum in Amsterdam gave Res Ingold and Servaas a double-headed show and here you can see the catalogue with Servaas dressed up in his fishing gear, and Res in his business suit beside him. I’ve actually seen Servaas dressed like that behind the Torch Gallery desk at the Basel Art Fair in Switzerland.

Come to think of it the idea of deep sea fishing in Switzerland is an oxymoron, like many superfixions, and the oxymoron and the metonym are two figures of speech which are useful in describing this kind of work. *Slide 35* The oxymoron usually brings two concepts together in an impossible situation and is currently being over-used by curators just about everywhere on the planet. *Naturally Artificial* was an exhibition in the Nordic Pavilion at the 1997 Venice Biennale. Recently in Melbourne there was a survey exhibition of contemporary Korean art called *The Slowness of Speed*. But if I were to mention a book called *Dutch Mountains* or David Wilson's wonderful *Museum of Jurassic Technology* in California – I'm sure you get the idea. Metonymy, on the other hand usually implies one part of something standing for the whole, as in "to sail before the mast" or to be locked up "behind bars" where the mast stands for the whole ship and the bars the whole prison. In this sense my Cameron Oil pens are sculptural metonyms, the pens representing the whole oil company. *Slide 36* Or when I use signage, often on the side of packing crates, to hint at what *might* be present.

Slide 37 In the early nineties I became aware of an artist called Seymour Likely, and saw examples of his work in various art magazines, especially *Flash Art*. I felt that something was wrong but wasn't quite sure what it was. On one of my visits to Amsterdam I was told that three Dutch artists had invented a fictional American artist called Seymour Likely and they were exhibiting his work around Europe. On my next visit another friend told me they had expanded the Seymour Likely project in all sorts of bizarre and interesting directions *Slide 38* and had recently persuaded a Dutch brewery to give them a bar in the centre of Amsterdam between the red light district and the Royal Palace. I tracked them down and had a few beers with them. This is one member of the group sitting outside the *Seymour Likely Lounge*. They also sponsored a Dutch basketball team designing their strip, and more recently they moved in to films – *Slide 39* – But they only produce the film poster, they don't make the actual film so again the poster is a metonym for something that remains a complete fiction inside the head of the spectator. The three characters at the bottom of the poster are the three artists who comprise Seymour Likely. *Slide*

40 In a sense these fictional films inhabit a space somewhere inbetween Cindy Sherman and Charlie White. Here is a couple of Charlie White's constructed images from the October issue of *Flash Art*.

Slide 41 One of my favourite works of Seymour Likely is this floor piece called *Never Marry a Railway Worker*, which is made up of blank pages of a book with a cover printed to resemble a Gideon's Bible and laid out on the floor like a Carl Andre floor piece. The reference to "never marrying a railway worker" also nods in the direction of Andre who once was a railway worker and in a bizarre legal case was accused and acquitted of murdering his wife.

Slide 43 As you can imagine the realm of the superfiction is ideal for entering the worlds of the conspiracy theory, bogus spiritual leaders and dodgy philosophers. *X-Files* meet L. Ron Hubbard, that sort of thing. So it was no surprise when I discovered Rodney Glick doing a Masters degree at the Centre for the Arts in Hobart, Tasmania, which along with RMIT is pioneering studio based PhDs. It was here that Rodney Glick and David Solomon invented "Klusian Philosophy" which outlines the 9 steps to moral and physical enlightenment as set forth by Jose Palermo and the college of disciples. Each year on a certain date Klus would reveal another step until the time came when he was due to travel to the United Nations and reveal the final, ultimate step. On the way to America he disappeared and the world never knew his ultimate wisdom. Then several years later a gardener working in a garden in Jerusalem came across Klus wandering amongst the shrubs. "He passed on the last step to the gardener – "Start again" before disappearing once again. Rodney Glick, who now runs an international artists program in the desert of Western Australia, has since created a number of fictions, including getting a professional bookbinder to unbind copies of the *Venice Biennale* and *documenta* and insert his own work in it before rebinding it. **Slide 44** I was recently contacted by one of Rodney's own master's students Eve-Anne O'Regan who for her final submission created a fictional cosmetics company called *Baby Face* and launched it in Perth, Western Australia, subverting marketing, packaging, modelling, and graphic design to her own artistic ends.

Slide 45 In semi-tropical Queensland an artist called Luke Roberts has an alter-ego called “Pope Alice” - *Slide 46* - while Lyndell Brown and Charles Green who are now based in Sydney, fictionalise the history of painting and the growth of the city in works such as this, called *The Mirror*.

In America Fred Wilson – *Slide 47* – has made some remarkable installations that interrogate the place of the African American in African art history. I’ve only recently become acquainted with his work but this is obviously a comment on the one job African Americans mostly frequently find themselves doing in the white man’s cultural mausoleum – that of the cleaner.

Slide 48 And of course Martin Kippenberger, who I got to know over several remarkable occasions before his untimely death, embraced fiction in many of his projects not least his entrances to subways which were supposed to girdle the earth. There was one at the last *documenta*, one in Canada, and one somewhere on a Greek island. This one is from Kassel and he also built an air vent as part of the Munster Sculpture Project.

Slide 49 At the same *documenta*, 1997, the English artist Adam Page, who now lives in Dresden, built an Executive Box which I suppose fictionalised corporate hospitality but also acted as a real meeting place for artists and dealers. If you wanted to use it you left a deposit and were given a key to enter it. Once inside there were phones, TV monitors and seating.

Slide 50 Then there is the work of The Leeds 13 who first came to prominence when the London tabloids reported that they had squandered university research money on a holiday in the Mediterranean. In fact they fabricated all the photographs on a rather chilly beach in Scarborough, returned the research money and had a rather bizarre week living in hiding in Leeds when they were supposed to be overseas. I recommend their Web-site – just go to a search engine and key in the Leeds 13. It also covers their last project which was their honours examination and which caused outcry in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* because rather than submit 13 discrete bodies of work they built a group installation made up of artworks by well-known artists such as Henry Moore, Damien Hirst and Rodin. For

several years I have been building fictional art fair installations within museums, as I will show in a moment, and used them to “curate in” work from museum storage areas and from the studios of local artists in whichever city I am exhibiting. So I was very interested in this aspect of their project and have been communicating with them by e-mail.

Slide 51 If these artists – and group exhibitions such as *For Real Now* and *Business Art Business* - represent the main territory that I am exploring, my research also includes current examples from the world of film – *Slide 52* - such as the Blair Witch Project, much of the work of Orson Welles – *Slide 53* - but especially his radio version of *War of the Worlds* which when it was broadcast the comparatively recent invention of radio had much of America believing that Martians had in fact invaded earth – and *Slide 54* books such as *Intellectual Imposteurs* written by two American physicists who managed to get a completely bogus, jargon-littered paper published in a critical theory magazine, *as if it was real*.¹⁶⁷

Slide 55 But I will close this section with a quote from Juan Fontcuberta and an image of one of his constructed creatures:

‘We believe the photographs of the footsteps on the moon,’ he says, “even though all the space expeditions could be an enormous montage. On the contrary,” he continues, “we don’t believe the photos of UFOs; we say they are faked and shrug them off.’

OK, this slide - *Slide 56* - is in here just to remind me to mention that my *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* has had a web-site for about six years now and it has a very easy address to remember which is www.nymoci.com All you need to do is remember the middle bit which stands for New York Museum of Contemporary Ideas – nymoci, all in lower case. www.nymoci.com

¹⁶⁷ Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures*, London: Profile Books, 1998, 199 Appendix A: ‘Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity. It is also worth noting that in Appendix C, 241, the authors state that ‘it is in the nature of a parody to conceal the author’s true views’.

Slide 57 When you go in to the site on the home page you are faced with the museum elevator or lift and you can take this to any of fifteen different floors. On each floor there is a project - some complete, others under construction. Down in the basement you can visit the museum's new bar called *Plato's Cave* where the logo on the beer coasters is *Linking Drinking with Thinking* – the text on the reverse in gold is the first paragraphs of the story *Wolkenkratzer* magazine did about the museum.

Slide 58 On another floor I have built an *Encyclopaedia of Superfictions* which has hundreds of entries, including one for *Cameron Oil*, and I am increasingly getting queries from real oil companies and commodities brokers about the organisation. Eventually I want to have different sponsors sponsoring different projects on each floor and when I was *British Council* “Link” artist-in-residence in Auckland two years ago *Montana Wines*, a fine new Zealand drop, put \$20,000 into my exhibition at the Auckland City Gallery.

Slide 59 This next image came about when the students from Albury Wadonga – twin towns on either side of the border between New South Wales and Victoria – asked me to open their degree show for the and selected the prize winners. Except they wanted me to pretend that I had flown in from a Northern Winter in New York, and so in 90 degree heat I flew in wearing a heavy overcoat. What I didn't realise was that they had told the local newspaper and radio station and the mayor, all of whom turned up at the airport with the entire art school. Fortunately the mayor was a Glaswegian who had retained his sense of humour. I later curated in the work of four of the students to a museum show I had in Sydney – they were the only four students who been *hadn't* awarded a prize for their degree shows.

Slide 60 Some of my invented groups have also taken on a life of their own, especially *Aloha* who supposedly come from Brisbane in semi-tropical Southern Queensland. They make what Marcel Duchamp called “assisted readymades” – in their case each object has to pass through an airport departure lounge and be tagged with travel labels before being exhibited on the gallery wall. I'm told this readymade, a child sized tartan ironing board, is supposed to represent the oppression of women, children, and Scotland as a nation in the one icon. *Slide 61*

This work dates from nine years ago but just last year I found life was imitating art in an exhibition in northern Queensland which took place on an airport luggage carousel.

Slide 62 Group *Aloha* famously smuggled their little ironing board into Rene Block's Sydney Biennale and photographed it next to forty different art works including those by Richard Wentworth - *Slide 63* - and Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Adorno's Hut*.

Aloha – Slide 64 – also make works which comment on the crassness of museum merchandising such as the *Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain*. Nitsch is an artist for whom I have an enormous respect and I took this photograph of him at the 1988 Sydney Biennale, later slipping it inside a readymade shower curtain from my local supermarket. It is supposed to comment on the sort of things – Andy Warhol Shower Curtains, Michelangelo's David Boxer Shorts and Damien Hirst miniature sharks in miniature tanks that we are surrounded by only seconds after enjoying the company of the original art works in the gallery. The museum shop is for me where the sublime meets the ridiculous, and of course I always visit them.

So why do I do all these things? Shouldn't I get a proper job? I have no answer other than I've always been interested in art and fiction. As young art students in Dundee in 1971 with a friend Stephen French we invented an imaginary student and signed him in to all the classes, often getting letters and parcels delivered to him. Later, at West Surrey College of Art for my thesis I invented six artists – rather badly called the Avant-Guardians – and set them ten years into the future. I fabricated interviews with them and documented their conceptual and minimal art works.

Slide 65 And somewhere in the middle of all that I got a job as a lighthouse keeper working on three uninhabited islands off the West Coast of Scotland. I've just finished a book of memoirs about that period in 1973, when we watched the Watergate hearings live on television, beamed down to our lighthouse from the satellites spinning overhead. The book grew out of an essay in the *London Review of Books* which began:

“I was 19 when I was interviewed for the job of relief keeper by the Commissioners of the Northern Lights in the New Town of Edinburgh. *Slide 66* My hair hung well below my shoulders, I had a great set of Captain Beefheart records and I walked about with a permanent grin on my face as I had recently, finally, lost my virginity. I rolled my own cigarettes, was a member of Amnesty International and had just read Kerouac’s *Desolation Angels*. In short I was eminently suitable for the job.”

I mention this because that summer was one of the best periods in my life, and it was followed about a fourteen months later by one of the worst. When I was working on Ailsa Craig, halfway between Glasgow and Belfast, two photography students from Guildford in Surrey arrived in a fishing boat to do a project about the bird colony on the island and about the daily routine of us lighthouse keepers.

I had recently parted company with Dundee art school and was looking for a new posting. I applied to Guildford, even though I wasn’t quite sure where it was – about forty miles south of London. I’d only been there a few weeks and had chosen *exactly* the wrong time to give up smoking – *Slide 67* - because that was when I was almost blown up in the Guildford pub bombings.

It affected me more than I can explain. I thought it was thunder when I heard the first bomb go off as I walked along Guildford High Street. Odd, I thought, because it was a clear night. Later, I heard the screams of the dying and the injured, I tried to help, I remember seeing hardened police officers sitting in the gutters weeping...and strangely I felt very calm. It wasn’t until later that the shaking started, and the nightmares. But still, there was something I was suppressing, and I suppressed it for days, turning into months, turning in to years. Five years later, in a silent scream in the middle of the night I remembered that I had been about to walk into the pub about half an hour before it exploded, I had my hand on the door and the door half open. And the reason I didn’t go in? I remembered that I’d tried that pub a week before and felt uneasy in it because it seemed to be full of skinheads and my hair was still down past my shoulders. In fact, they were off duty soldiers based at the nearby barracks of Aldershot and Woking which is why they were targeted by the IRA. And yet the horror and injustice did not stop there. Four innocent

people were convicted of the bombing – I was often stopped and searched myself, my soft Scottish accent being mistaken for an Irish one.

And so those are the two bookends of my life – the lighthouse and the Guildford pub bombings, against which I measure all else.

I finished my art school training, moved back to Glasgow in the early eighties and was involved in the beginnings of *Transmission Gallery*. I lived in Paris for a year at the Cité Internationale des Arts and seeing that most artists there came from countries which had their own governments and their own art magazines I wrote to all of Scotland's gallery directors and asked if I started an art magazine would they advertise in it? *Slide 68* That was the beginning of Alba magazine which I published and edited for six years. I made a lot of mistakes with it, not least through youthful idealism, but since then I've worked for about forty different magazines around the world and guest-edited others and with hindsight I know that Alba was bound to fail because it relied too heavily on advertising revenue. The final straw was when Glasgow went into its historic year as European City of Culture. We had planned a special issue to celebrate this and hoped for advertising from not just galleries but concerts halls and theatres and so forth. I'll never forget the day I went in to my office at the Talbot Rice Art Centre, just after the New Year holiday it was one of the worst days in my life. There were two advertisements for the whole issue – one from Monika Spruth in Cologne, the other from the Crawford Art Centre in St Andrews. I had expected a stack of advertisements ready to go to the printers. Perplexed I phoned around and found out that all the advertising budget had been handed to Saatchi and Saatchi in London. I phoned them immediately only to be told by a rather bored sounding young man that they were only going to advertise in the major glossies like the Observer colour supplement and the Sunday Times. Later that day I sent my resignation to Sandy Moffat and Lindsay Gordon. I was already booked to fly to Australia where I had been planning a special Pacific Rim edition of Alba and already had most of the articles commissioned from New Zealand across to the Canadian Pacific. I hoped by resigning that someone else could take it over and succeed where I had failed. I now know that such a magazine needs far more funding and more than a staff of one if it is going to survive for any

length of time. It should also not have to rely so heavily on the vagaries of advertising. An art magazine can do a lot for a nation, especially one as small as Scotland – but it needs to be funded more like an average sized public gallery rather than at 2000 pounds per issue which is what our subsidy was. My heart would love to see ALBA going again and my head can think of nothing more stressful, but I'd be happy to pass on my advice for what it's worth to anyone who might be considering such a rash move.

Slide 69 I now want to finish by looking at my current superfiction which attempts to pull together of all what I have so far spoken about into one project. It is called *The Art Fair Murders* and it is both a novel and an art installation. *Slide 70*

There are at least twelve major art fairs around the world – one a month – and three times as many smaller ones. January it's Miami, February Arco in Madrid, through May Chicago, June Basel, November Cologne and December January. These events are usually held in huge impersonal trades halls which the week before were probably holding computer shows or car shows and the following week will be holding a boat show. It is all about money, and galleries pay thousands of dollars to rent a small booth for five or six days. Cologne is the oldest art fair dating back to 1967, while Basel in Switzerland is the largest. The two most romantic are Chicago in the old Navy Piers and Melbourne in the old Australian parliament which resembles the original Crystal Palace in London.

I started this project five years ago and wanted to deliberately take a cliché from the world of literary and pulp fiction and a cliché from the art world and see if I could combine them into something fresh. So I took the idea of the serial killer from pulp fiction and the overuse of the mannequin from contemporary installation art.

In the novel and the art installation I speculate on what would happen if a serial killer was loose in the art world committing one murder in each major art fair city – so there are twelve chapters, twelve murders, twelve months, and twelve art fairs.

If you go into my web-site and click on the museum floor that is called *The Art Fair Murders* you can then take several options including one called “The Making of the Art Fair Murders.” Into this part of the site I have scanned in all the back-up material to do with this project from ideas scribbled on the backs of envelopes to the faxes from publishers and newspaper comment from papers as different as the Times of London and the Hobart Mercury – or maybe not so different as they are both owned by Rupert Murdoch.

This section of the site was partly a response to an article in *The London Review of Books*, 6 June 1996, by Frank Kermode where he says: “The time is almost past when writers provided the curious, concerned as much with process as with product, with drafts showing corrections, by one or more hands and interestingly rejected alternative readings. Poems are still drafted, of course, and corrections are made, but they won’t show up in computer files.”

I disagree, I think computers will make the process of writing richer and more complex.

You can also find some of the early, badly corrected chapters of the novel on the web-site. What is there bears little resemblance to the way the still unfinished novel reads now, four years later.

Each time the installation is presented is different from the previous occasions. Fictional art fairs are built. Carpeting and umbrella tables are used to demarcate the space within the museum or gallery and works are “curated” in from the museum storage are and from local artists in the city. So each time it looks different and it also changes on a daily basis as work is notionally sold and new works hung in their place.

The novel is a book within a book. It is set in 1989 but is supposedly being written in what I call ‘the eternal present’ – 1996, 2000, 2007 and so on for as long as the project lasts, by an ex-Goldsmiths graduate called Jacko who is working as a taxi driver in Aberdeen, Scotland, having been sacked from his job as an art

transporter. He uses his own art world rhyming slang a list of which can also be visited on the web-site but here are a few examples:

Fra Fillipo Lippi for Hippy

Michelangelo Buanarotti for grotty

Damien Hirst for First, as in First Class Honours

Donatello for Mellow

Tony Cragg for Shag

And so on...

To give you some idea of the different stylistic devices used in *The Art Fair Murders* I will read you two short extracts from the novel.¹⁶⁸

The first extract is from Chapter Twelve, December, Los Angeles which is in fact the first chapter in the book and is set in December 1989 on the eve of the art fair's gala opening:

Chapter Twelve December Los Angeles

The size of Los Angeles threatens the imagination. From the Mojave Desert in the east to the warm waters of the Pacific at Venice Beach, single highways longer than some European countries are broad, crossed the page from one side to the other. Milco Zeemann stared at the map of the city spread across his hotel floor. He inspected every detail with the curiosity of a surgeon discovering an ever more complex arterial system pumped by a mega-heart that was guaranteed to last at least a thousand years. He read out the names like a mantra - Glendale, Pasadena, Burbank, Anaheim, Santa Ana. He lit a Marlboro, and turned up the volume on MTV to better enjoy a rap re-mix of Talking Heads' *Psycho Killer*. He was only

¹⁶⁸ During a period of intense activity preparing for the Oxford project I completely changed the format that the book, or narrative, would take. Instead of being bound in sequential form it would be mailed out as 'clues' to 100 people around the world. Each clue would occupy a single sheet of A4 paper. This will be examined further in, 8. Description of Research Methodology.

seventeen when the original version came out in '74. Now he was thirty-two and the planet's clock had ticked around to 1989. Time was passing too quickly. Time to move his career along, get some more museum shows, sell to the right collectors, get more sales in Switzerland. But that would happen. He appreciated it was difficult marketing conceptual art. For the third time in less than an hour he pulled the gold rimmed invitation card from the inside pocket of his rental suit.

'The 1989 *Cameron Oil Prize*,' it announced. '\$100,000 will be awarded to the most promising international artist' It was a six horse race. Most were fashionable art teams except for himself and Hal Jones, an American Neo Geo painter. There was *Aloha* from Australia; *Nouvelle Kunst Faction* from Belgium – some of them were old mates; *Made in Palestine* from Brooklyn; and *The Triplet Twins* from Tokyo. He stood a chance.

The Art Fair Murders, page 1

At a later stage these extracts became 'clues', mailed out globally as part of the mail art section of the project. Each clue is accompanied by a quote on 'writing techniques' from the banal to the well-informed. Here is one example:

The beginning of a book is its make-or-break zone. Apart from being the traditional place to start a story, the beginning is also the section of a book most read by people who are thinking about buying it, and the section of the book in which most people give up reading if the story does not give them what they expect. A book is judged on its beginning.

Celia Brayfield *Bestseller - Secrets of Successful Writing*

The second quote positions Jacko the taxi driver and would-be author of *The Art Fair Murders* in the 'eternal present', in this case early 2000. He is still working on his novel.

Prologue: The Aberdeen Writers' Club

“What’s with all these wee scooters flashing along like silver darlings?” Zoran asked Jacko over their all-day-breakfasts at Sweaty Betty’s, down on the promenade at Aberdeen beach. Jacko’s mini cab was parked near the sea wall. The purvey was magic.

“Ah don’t know big man, they seemed to have arrived with the new millennium” Jacko replied. “I think they call them ‘razors’”.

“Close shaves, mair like,” Zoran laughed, and it was a loud, jackdaw laugh.

“True enough. Saw a wee nyaff nearly flattened by an inarticualte lorry up on Garthdee Road. Zipped out in front of ma cab into the path of a *Christian Salvesen* juggernaut. Just yesterday. But look, Zoran, I need to ask your advice about my book, *The Art Fair Murders*. I’ve been writing it for nearly five years and I still haven’t worked out who did it. Pretty pathetic, eh? Plenty of motives and plenty of suspects, but I keep changing my mind as to whether there is one serial killer or perhaps a group of artists doing it together like an art work. Charlie Manson meets the IRWIN group, that sort of thing.”

“You’ve lost me pal. And I think you’re about to lose your taxi ...”

“Shit!” Jacko cried. They weren’t much more than eight or nine. One kid was already behind the wheel bashing it with a can of *Carlsberg*. The other trying to scale the windscreen. They looked like dwarf commandos, dressed in survival gear and expensive running shoes, nicked from the *Athlete’s Foot* on Union Street. “Time to shoot the crow.”

The Art Fair Murders, page 40

This clue is again followed by a quote, and I have tried to match the quotes to the spirit of the extract:

Conan Doyle knuckled down. His method of working out a plot was simple and the same as that employed by any other detective writer before or since. He invented the crime and its solution, plotted the outline and course of detection, then, constructing the characters within it, sat down and wrote it, concealing the solution until the climax.

Martin Booth *The Doctor, The Detective, and Arthur Conan Doyle*

During this 1999 lecture tour I will be doing some research in most of the cities mentioned in the book – Chicago, Cologne, London, Amsterdam, Melbourne in preparation for a major re-write when I return home.

I am also working on a video collage, clearing copyright and finding clips to use. If there is time I will finish with a quick preview of the video to date.

At this point in the lecture I screen a video collage which has been constructed over a period of time and which will continue to be added to. It includes excerpts from television programs which have been made about my various superfictions as well as videos which I have directed.. Sometimes these video selections are shown at different points throughout the lecture, sometimes not at all.

The video collage ends with selections from news programs made in 1989, and these relate to The Art Fair Murders and include the Tienanmien Square Massacre and the release of the Guildford Four. The video ends with celebrations on the Berlin Wall and its subsequent, impromptu, destruction.

On Saturday 27th May, 2000, I concluded my MOMA, Oxford, project by giving one version of his Art Fair Murders lecture. Unknown to the audience three local art students were hiding within a walk-in cupboard behind the podium. When I reached the end of the lecture and announced that he would now switch on the video, this was the cue for the students to burst out of the cupboard, knocking over a wall of Art Fair Murders paint cans, and kidnapping me. I was then dragged out of the lecture room and driven off at high speed in a getaway car.

This point represented the end of the Oxford project and the end of the doctoral experimentation. From May until October 2000, I was occupied in writing up my exegesis and preparing for my final presentations in Geelong and Melbourne.

9. Case Studies

This brief overview of the field is primarily intended to set the parameters of the investigation and to locate the project alongside a range of artists working with similar concerns. It also serves to separate background theory from focal theory. Some of these artists specialise totally in constructing superfictions; others are of interest for perhaps one or two discrete works within a larger range of work which might not deal with fictions at all. A number of distinguished artists do not appear in the list because the parameters of their work are similar to those of another artist already represented¹⁶⁹. On my web-site I have a floor called The Encyclopaedia of Superfictions to which I add details of artists I encounter who run fictional projects. The following section is an expanded version of key encyclopaedia listings which locate the field of research. A complementary selection, concentrating on the veracity of photographic imagery, was presented within Photofile #59.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ I have used Res Ingold as an example of an artist who has created a fictional business enterprise, and have thus excluded many of the other ground breaking artists in this area such as Servaas; Banco di Oklahoma; Tecnotest SRL; Name Diffusion; Eve Anne O'Regan and others. I regard the projects created by each of these artists as highly as I do that of Res Ingold.

¹⁷⁰ Copy included within the durable visual record.

The artists are not listed alphabetically but in the order in which I came across them and their work.

At various points in this exegesis I have stressed the importance of the works of Guillaume Bijl and Ilya Kabakov to my research. The former represents what might be described as a clinical ‘nouveau realisme’, the latter a warmer ‘narrative installation art’.

Like Duchamp and Broodthaers, Bijl and Kabakov set the parameters for much of this investigation. The artists profiled in the case studies below oscillate between the methodologies of Bijl and Kabakov. For example, the first case study is of Res Ingold whose work is far closer to Bijl than Kabakov. The last case study, of Janet Cardiff, is informed by a narrative structure that more closely echoes Kabakov.

Res Ingold

I first heard about Res Ingold’s fictional airline in the best possible way - through a friend of a friend. It was little more than a rumour at first, and the year was 1988. At this time I was attempting to create my own fictional Museum of Contemporary Ideas. In November 1989 I attended the Cologne Art Fair. The dominant paradigm in the contemporary international art world at this time was *neo geo*¹⁷¹ lead by a group of artists who had been heralded in through Dan Cameron’s 1986 exhibition ‘Art and its Double’ in Madrid and subsequent sales to the Saatchi Collection in London.¹⁷² The Cologne Art Fair in 1989 reflected this change in aesthetics and commodity values. Neo-expressionism was less visible than ever before in the art fair booths, yet the major exhibition opening in the city was by Anselm Kiefer – however not his paintings but his lead aircraft for which collectors and critics queued around a city block in heavy rain to see. Two years earlier ‘deconstruction’ had been ushered in at *documenta 11X*, and there were increasing signs of this tendency at commercial art fairs around the world. Walking around Cologne’s vast trades hall, amidst all these different views of late 20th century art, I came across what appeared to be an airline booth. It was, in fact, an art installation by Res Ingold. It looked so incongruous, as did the artist in his black business suit, and it

¹⁷¹ This is not a term many people liked. It stood for ‘new geometric abstraction’ yet that hardly fitted the range of artists, in any accurate sense, who it purportedly described. One view of it (and there were several) is that it was an art movement of quotation, following on from neo-expressionism and harking back to Mondrian and van Doesbourg in the same way that neo-expressionism had quoted Beckman and others.

reminded me of a dry cleaning booth I had seen six months earlier at Frankfurt's first art fair. I later discovered that this had not been left over from a dry cleaning convention, as I had incorrectly presumed at the time, but it was also an art work, this time by Guillaume Bijl.¹⁷³

Res Ingold and I eagerly began discussing our different projects and I was able to show him the article on my *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* by Gabriella Knapstein in *Wolkenkratzer* magazine. Just as I had used press releases printed in black and red on white as a kind of visual metonymy to stand for the museum as a whole, so he used black, white and red business reports to represent *Ingold Airlines*. The business report (Geschäftsbericht) which he gave me that day is twenty pages in length and a mix of black and white photographs, spot colour (red) and text in German and English. *Ingold Airlines* has a distinctive logo, used throughout, which mimics a plane about to take off.¹⁷⁴

Inside, it begins 'The business report replaces the earlier Rank-Xerox series, Ingold in July, the October report and Rouleur's Best!'. Two years later he sent me the 1991 Business Report¹⁷⁵ which is an updated version. A cursory glance at either report, especially if encountered out of an art world environment, would make the viewer think that it was indeed a fairly dull looking business report for a fledgling airline. Closer inspection shows visual humour, parody, punning and bizarre juxtapositions. As I do in my work, Res deliberately sets out to sabotage the illusion of veracity, even as he is creating it. There is an extensive (sometimes subtle, often blatant) use of signage in Ingold Airlines publicity material from logos on the side of freight containers marooned on a mountain top, to images of an airline logo on a champagne glass.

Since that day in 1989 his work has been widely published and exhibited. There was even an *Ingold Airlines* VIP jet used by Jan Hoet in *Documenta IX* to fly visitors from Berlin to Kassel. What I was most curious to know when I interviewed him at

¹⁷² These artists included Peter Halley, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Jeff Koons, Ros Bleckner, Ashley Bickerton, and Haim Steinbach

¹⁷³ Hans-Jurgen Schwalm, *Guillaume Bijl – Installationen, Situationen und Kulturtourismus*, Köln: Kunstler und Verlag, 1998, 71, top image of three.

¹⁷⁴ On the front of the report he inscribed 'For Peter + ready for take-off! Res Ingold, 17/11/89.

¹⁷⁵ ISBN 90-73920-02-7

Cologne was why he had built this incredible fiction around an imaginary airline. I knew my own reasons for creating a contemporary museum – I was immersed in the world of contemporary art and I wanted to create a fiction which mirrored my main passion in life. It wasn't so different for Res who explained: 'As a child I always had a fantasy about running my own airline. I have an uncle, Hans Ingold, who when I was young, owned and operated several light aircraft. So it is pure fantasy for me. I know that I am not a businessman and could never run my own airline. But through fiction and art I can make my dreams come true. And sometimes life imitates art. I became involved in an art project in northern Scandinavia in a small community which could only be reached by bus or private car. After making my art presentations there, money was found to build an air-strip. So it is a fantasy that can make things happen in reality.'¹⁷⁶

This anecdote is picked up in the 1991 Business Report on page 11:

Minimal Airport, Pajala, Lapland: As a basis for a north Scandinavian regional air company operation, INGOLD AIRLINES is already in negotiation about the construction of a small airstrip in Pajala. Pajala is situated north of the polar circle near the Finnish border and is presently only approachable with bus or private vehicle. The nearest train stations and airports are within 150 to 200km..Construction of an air landing strip exceed quite considerably the community budget of Pajala. In cooperation with foreign investors a small year round operational airstrip is being constructed in several phases.

Other artists to be placed within the area of 'business superfictions' include: Banca di Oklahoma SRL (Italy); Int. Fish-Handel SERVAAS (Netherlands); Name Diffusion (Italy); Philippe Cazal (France); Premiata Ditta (Italy); Tecnotest SRL (Italy), and Eve Anne O'Regan (Australia).

Joan Fontcuberta

¹⁷⁶ Unpublished interview, Res Ingold and Peter Hill, Cologne, 17/11/89.

I first came across the work of Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera in the Dutch photography magazine *Perspektief*¹⁷⁷ in 1989. Their work featured on the cover and there was an extensive article inside, pages 34-45. At first it appeared that this was a team of two artists who had created a fictional zoologist called Dr Peter Ameisenhaufen and who used taxidermy to create the strange, and hitherto unknown, creatures which he supposedly had discovered before he died in a car crash in Scotland in the early 20th century. On closer examination it turned out that Pere Formiguera was the professional taxidermist who the Catalan artist Joan Fontcuberta employed for this one project.

Eleven years later when I was invited to guest edit *Photofile* #59 on the topic of fictions in photography, I was delighted to be able to make contact with Joan Fontcuberta and to print a fascinating article by him on the subject of truth and lies in photography.

Between his strange zoological creations in the late nineteen-eighties and his more recent projects with photographic emulsions and images from art history, Fontcuberta has been rigorous in his pursuit of how we 'read' photographic images, and perhaps more so in examining how we are presented with photographic images, whether it be by NASA, Reuters, *News International*, or through the work of various artist photographers. It is appropriate to quote one section at length from his *Photofile* article in order to embrace the range of ideas included in this part of the territory. Many of these ideas form a bridge between traditional wet photography and scenography to the new computer generated manipulations of artists such as Alexa Wright (see below).

The news market is based on a protocol of confidence, to which technology contributes by conveying likelihood. Diogenes used a lamp to seek out the truth; today, the pursuit of truth is waged with cameras. The paradox is that Diogenes' lamp flashed light on objects, whereas in the case of the camera, the light is swallowed. The camera does not necessarily enlighten our understanding; it must, as Flusser suggested, confront lightness and darkness, with ghosts and appearances. Contrary to what we have historically been

¹⁷⁷ No 36, July, August, September.

taught, photography has more to do with fiction than facts. *Fictio* is the participle of *fingere* which means “to invent”. All of photography, without exception, is pure invention.

IN SEARCH OF LOST IDENTITY

Let us imagine that we are surrounded by a few of Rembrandt's masterpieces. We select an emblematic painting; the famous work entitled *The Blinding of Samson*, which relates the story of Dalila's cutting of Samson's hair, the latter's loss of his magic powers, and the puncturing of his eyes by the Philistines. We are dazzled by the force of Rembrandt's composition, the assurance of his touch, the expressiveness of colors ...Everything incites us to relive the pathos of the event: the triumphant satisfaction of the traitress Dalila holding the scissors in her hand, the hero's stupor as he is immobilized by the thugs, the dagger bending to tear out his eyes...

But there is one bothersome detail. We find it strange that Rembrandt should have painted Samson with Asian features. It is even more bizarre to see Dalila, and all the soldiers, represented as Japanese. Even more extraordinary and disturbing is the fact that all of them, men and women alike, are the same person: they have inherited the face of a single man, photographer Yasumasa Morimota. The latter repeatedly and obsessively performed similar substitutions, placing his own face over those of the characters represented in famous works of art. In doing so, he sought to corrupt the Western pictorial tradition, a memory of images which we are accustomed to perceive as generic and universal, but which, in fact, represent one of many options, the dominant one.

Let us now observe another sequence, this time not of works of art, but artists' portraits. Scene in a café near Montparnasse. With the rebel, anti-conformist look artists feel obliged to project when they pose before the camera, we see Breton, Eluard, Peret, Aragon, Man Ray, Ernst, Dali, an unknown artist and Picabia. And now a photograph of the group belonging to Andy Warhol's Factory. The caption identifies them, from left to right, as Nico, Gerard, Maureen Tucker, Danny Williams, Sterling in the back row, Stephen Shore, Andy, Lou Reed, an unknown artist and John Cale. In the following photograph, a group of celebrities poses during the inauguration of an art exhibit in a major New York museum. Indetectibly, an anonymous figure appears in the list.

We discover that the series of photographs reflects the itinerary of this century's artistic events and their protagonists. Oddly, each picture contains an unidentified character, and what is even more bizarre is that the character in question is always the same, staring back at us with his chubby-cheeked face, his moustache and a jerky

look in his eyes. It is not *an* unknown artist but *the* unknown artist. What we obviously have is an artistic project in which graphic documents are manipulated, and in which the *unknown* artist repeatedly places his own face near those of perfectly well-known artistic greats. Only in the end do we discover that the unknown artist is Warren Neidich (frankly, we would have preferred that, in honor of his pseudonym, he remain anonymous throughout).

But these mystifications do not only affect the world of art. The news and the graphic press also lend themselves to such practices. Consider, for example, the famous snapshot of John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas. The president, standing in his impressive convertible, smiles wholeheartedly at the enthusiastic crowd assembled to bid him welcome. Inside the car, between the president and the mayor of the city, another elegant character waves his hand with the assurance of a politician campaigning for votes. Who is he? If we examine the original image, he doesn't appear. What we have here is a stowaway of history. He can also be seen in the company of soldiers building a barricade, like a second-rate actor standing next to Frank Zappa. His name is Matthias Wahner, who, in the series *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* ("The man without qualities"), anticipates the effects of intervening in visual memory, which would later be popularised by the movie *Forrest Gump*. The title makes an ironic reference to the novel by Robert Musil, which describes a character who never stands out and can go completely unnoticed. Apparently, like Wahner himself travelling through the flashes of history.

One final example: front page of the newspaper *La Vanguardia*. The news of the day leaves us flabbergasted; the famous tennis player Monica Seles has been stabbed by a crazy spectator. The photograph illustrating the event shows us the pained expression on the athlete's face as the security forces arrest the aggressor. Whereas both the title and the caption underneath it mention Monica Seles, however, the facial features do not coincide with those of the Monica Seles we know. The same thing occurs repeatedly in the illustrations of other events. We are confronted with the same face, that of Laura Baigorri, who used retouching and digital photomontage to make herself a protagonist in the crucial events of recent photo-journalism. In the closing image of the series, the text announces a visit by the king of Spain to the athletic facilities of the town of Banyoles, and tells of his friendly conversation with Olympic volunteers. The smiling monarch shakes the hand of a volunteer: we expect Laura Baigorri to represent the character once again. But are we in the presence of a new equivocation? No. Baigorri was really an Olympic volunteer, and this photograph was indeed published in the press. For once, whether you believe it or not, the snapshot is authentic.

David Wilson and *The Museum of Jurassic Technology*

It was at the Los Angeles Art Fair in December 1989, one month after meeting Res Ingold at the Cologne Art Fair, that I first heard about David Wilson and his Museum of Jurassic Technology. Over the course of a few days I met a number of Californian artists and critics who were very generous in showing me the city, its art world, and enquiring after my own work. I told one arts critic about my fictional museum and also about Res Ingold’s airline. Straight away she asked me if I had heard about David Wilson’s *Museum of Jurassic Technology*. I was not sure whether she meant a real ‘bricks and mortar’ museum or one that was a total fiction and the conversation had veered off in other directions before I could find out. However, I felt I had come across one of the first examples I would find of the superfiction as oxymoron.

In my motel that evening I looked up the *Yellow Pages* and found the MJT, as it is known, listed right next to the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

It would be almost a decade, however, before I would actually manage to visit it and meet its creator, David Wilson. However, over that decade I would hear snippets of news about it and occasionally read longer essays and magazine articles. The most interesting, and poetically written, was by Ralph Rugoff, visual culture critic for *LA Weekly*. I came across it in his book of collected essays *Circus Americanus*.¹⁷⁸ Ralph Rugoff describes its physical setting perfectly as “a deeply romantic place – it turns your world upside down...few museums in the world actually flirt with their visitors, and when you encounter such a place, it’s very easy to fall in love – not with a given collection, but with the romance of its display. Situated on Venice Boulevard between a realty office and an In-N-Out Burger, the *Museum of Jurassic Technology* projects an understated dignity at odds with its surroundings, as well as with the monumental architecture favoured by most cultural institutions.”

¹⁷⁸ *Circus Americanus*, Verso, London, 1995, 97

When I finally made my visit in 1999 (during a stay at CALARTS as part of my research lecture tour) I was so overwhelmed by my surroundings and the weird cultural and museological juxtapositions that I had to leave the maze-like building several times and drink in the banality of the surrounding signage before plunging back into some kind of Tardas time warp.

As Rugoff explains:

For all its kinship to a mausoleum, the MJT is equipped with the kind of state-of-the-art display technology proper to a contemporary natural history museum. Visitor-activated exhibits, multi-media dioramas and other audio-visual presentations chart out an eclectic terrain ranging from a model of Noah's Ark to exhibits on esoteric South American bats and questionable geological phenomena. Traditional glass-and-wood vitrines shelter an array of preserved insects animal bones, and technological artefacts like the antiquated Boules of Conundrum, a brass mechanism for producing manmade gems.

As you make your way through its shadowy halls, a vaguely disturbing thought arises like a faint scratching at a back window of the mind: while this *is* supposedly a Museum of Jurassic Technology, there are few displays which actually make reference to either the geographic Jurassic (the area of the lower Nile) or the prehistoric time period. Yet the museum's varied subjects are approached with reassuringly meticulous scholarship. Boorishly academic panels of text legitimize even the quirkiest exhibits, and the voice narrating the audio components is a familiar one: pedantic, slightly pompous, logical and devoid of ambiguity. It's a Voice of Authority, and the moment you hear it you feel you can believe everything you're being told, even when – as in a jungle diorama depicting the self-destructive compulsion of the Cameroonian stink ant – 'nature' is presented as a metaphor or parable rather than an object of scientific study. With this flawless delivery, the museum enacts its stated mission of leading viewers 'from familiar objects toward the unfamiliar...guided along, as it were, a chain of flowers into the mystery of life.

Rugoff compares experiencing the MJT to a Borges fable. It reminded me, as I navigated my way past a room dedicated to Trailer Park homicides and then past vitrines of micro-miniature carvings – Snow White and the Seven Dwarves on the head of a pin – it reminded me as much of the scenes from 'eternity' in Flann

O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*.¹⁷⁹ And as if to give a final body blow to my jet-lagged system, when I arrived at the MJT shop with its bat-motif plates and its Renaissance drawing machines, there was a stack of copies of *The Third Policeman*, next to other texts by David Wilson.

After a quick reality check on the In-N-Out Burger and its dusty forecourt palms, I went back in to experience the 'Delani and Sonnabend Hall' which tells the story of the classical singer Madalena Delani who is inflicted with Korsakoff syndrome and thus has no short term memory, and her relationship with a scientist specialising in memory loss, called Geoffrey Sonnabend. Rugoff takes up the story:

Briefly, Sonnabend held that memory is an illusion and that forgetting, rather than recollection, is the unavoidable outcome of all experience. In other words we are essentially amnesiacs, and what we call 'memory' is nothing more than an imaginary act scaffolded around fragments of lived experience. It is merely a buffer, Sonnabend maintained, against 'the intolerable knowledge of the irreversible passage of time and the irretrievability of its moments and events.

Rather than clarify this radical premise, the diagrams suggest models for Constructivist architecture projects. 'Planes of experience' penetrate 'cones of obsolescence,' while directional arrows indicate 'obverse' and 'perverse' experience boundaries, as well as 'attitudes' and 'altitudes' of experience. Here, as elsewhere in the museum, the language of science and humanist enquiry appears absurdly poetic; its peculiar madness is embraced as a distinctive voice, though not a definitive one.

My questions on leaving this wonderfully strange part of California were similar to Ralph Rugoff's, and like him my mind was reeling: 'Is this a real museum or a simulation of one? A science museum or an art installation? And how do you categorize an exhibit like the 'Delani and Sonnabend Hall'? As a tribute to cognitive dissonance? By breaking down the categories that structure our 'normal'

¹⁷⁹ O'Brien, Flann (pseudonym of Brian O'Nolan) (1911-66), Irish novelist and journalist. He gained recognition as a novelist with his first book *At Swim Two Birds* (1939), an exploration of Irish life combining naturalism and farce, employing an experimental narrative structure much influenced by James Joyce. Writing under the name of Myles na Gopaleen, O'Brien contributed a satirical column to the *Irish Times* for nearly twenty years.

From: *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

perception the MJT assumes a power the art world has largely abdicated. Indeed, a demystification continues to be the order of the day, nothing is so unfashionable in art as the idea of mystery. Nowadays, many artists seek to replace that missing weight by attaching their work to weighty subjects: political critiques, issues of race and gender, ecological apocalypse. But in a world dominated by disinformation – spread by everyone from the CIA to the TV networks – the MJT’s labyrinth of confusion offers a far more accurate, and more entertaining, reflection of contemporary experience.’

The Museum of Jurassic Technology can be visited at www.mjt.org

Xu Bing

I first met Xu Bing at the Venice Biennale of 1993. It was curated by Achille Bonito Oliva and its overall title was *The Cardinal Points of Art*. The thesis Oliva was putting forward was that of ‘cultural nomadism’ and he actively encouraged national pavilions to host other nations who did not have their own pavilions in Venice¹⁸⁰.

In one section of the exhibition called *Passage to the East*, in the grounds of the Giardini the works of the Gutai Group, the Lettrist Group, and Yoko Ono were displayed alongside those of Shigeo Kubota and a selection of new Chinese artists (mostly painters) that included Xu Bing, Fang Lijun, Liu Wei, Yu Hong, Feng Mengbo, Wang Guangyi, Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, Yu Youhan, Ding Yi, Wang Ziwei, Li Shan, Sun Liang, and Sung Haidong. I interviewed Achille Bonito Oliva for *Asian Art News*¹⁸¹ and especially concentrated on the works of the Chinese artists and of Xu Bing. The following is a brief extract and relates to the fictional calligraphy which Xu Bing has invented – a calligraphy that looks ‘as if’ it is a real Chinese script but which can, with close attention, be read as Western English:

¹⁸⁰ Nam June Paik from Korea was hosted by the German pavilion whose own artist was Gerhard Richter. Joseph Kosuth was invited to exhibit in the Hungarian pavilion.

¹⁸¹ Volume 3, No 4, August 1993, Hong Kong, 58-65.

Biennales in the past have concentrated on the old frontiers, particularly the historic avant-gardes of Europe and America. I set out in search of new frontiers and found them in China. I also found them in Japan and Africa. I have united these old frontiers with the new under a kind of cosmic dome, and for this reason I have given the overall title of the Biennale the name *The Cardinal Points of Art*. Throughout this curtain of unification runs the important thread of what I call cultural nomadism. The artists are all individuals, of course, but if I had to mention an emerging style, I would call it a form of conceptual realism informed by Pop Art. They have transformed Mao Zedong into a happy character. Their work criticises, but it also celebrates. Other artists, such as Xu Bing, subvert the cultural canons of both East and West and invent a new language for art which is also fictional.

It would be six years until my next meeting with Xu Bing, but in the interim period I followed his career closely through the pages of numerous international art magazines. His fictional calligraphy kept re-inventing itself as his project became increasingly ambitious. The second meeting took place in 1999 in Brisbane at the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Queensland Art Gallery. Xu Bing, who now lives in New York but is constantly travelling and exhibiting, was included in the ‘Crossing Borders’ section of the exhibition and catalogue¹⁸² which were collectively titled *Beyond the Future*. Xu Bing was included in this category with other ‘globally mobile’ artists including: Cai Guo Qiang, Chen Zhen, Ah Xian, Choi Jae Eun, Vong Phaophanit, and Simryn Gill

One of Xu Bing’s contributions to the triennial was a classroom in which visitors could learn his fictive calligraphy. This work is called *New English Calligraphy* and to aid gallery visitors, he produced exercise books with gridded pages which allowed his symbols to be copied. Brushes and inks were provided. Each time I visited all of the seats at the desks were occupied by entranced visitors of mixed ages from pre-school to elderly.

In the catalogue essay entitled ‘Frighten Heaven and Make the Spirits Cry’, Yao Souchou¹⁸³ references Derrida’s grammatology which he compares to Xu Bing’s ‘insight of culture as performativity’. He says that, ‘Xu Bing’s move has been to

¹⁸² ISBN 1-876509-66-X

¹⁸³ Department of Anthropology, the University of Sydney.

enact the dialectic of the promises of text. And this enactment takes Chinese viewers back to the first moment of (self)discovery: the tedium and delight of writing, the discipline and reward of mastering the “art of text” (*shu fa*) and, imperceptibly, the emergence of a sensibility in which words and texts assume a primary importance.” Yao Souchou states that Xu Bing’s project is ‘no pouting gesture of postcolonial “resistance”’ and ends by drawing parallels with other cultures. ‘Just as in the Hebraic myth in which the Tower of Babel has to be struck down to warn men of their vanity, the Chinese legend of *Cang Jie* tells of cries from Heaven when he created writing and drawing. What these stories tell is the truth about words and speech as singular forces of empowerment and secular independence.’

Stephen Hurrel

Stephen Hurrel is included here for three reasons. Firstly, he created a fiction in collaboration with the media. Secondly, he has recently become interested in notions of narrative presented through slide-performances. Thirdly, he is typical of a number of artists who perhaps create only one or two superfictions within an art career that involves other issues and mediums – in his case art in public places; soundscapes; billboard projects; and neon light installations.

As part of my doctoral research I interviewed him in 1998 for a catalogue summing up his period as Scottish artist-in-residence in Australia called *in transit*¹⁸⁴ This residency was shared between The Canberra School of Art and the University of Tasmania’s Centre for the Arts.

Here is a brief extract from that interview:

Peter Hill: I’d now like to talk about the project you worked on in Germany which also dealt with notions of identity set within the modern city. It was an exchange project between three Glasgow artists and three Munich artists. How did that come about?

¹⁸⁴ ISBN : 0 85901 768 0

Stephen Hurrell: This was put together by Dave McMillan in Glasgow and Sabine Kammerl in Munich who had met through the Royal College of Art. Dave had been very active in initiating artist-run projects such as *Windfall* and *Intermedia* for Glasgow. The organisation *Breathe* took the project on as they were experienced in twinning events between different cities. So, three artists came across from Munich to Glasgow and created temporary art works which integrated into the fabric of the city and used the various networks of the city. It was a bit like a treasure hunt and if you wanted to take part in it you were given maps of the city and had to get keys for buildings or bank vaults and go through various institutionalised rituals.

PH: And what did you do in Munich?

SH: Peter McCaughey, Fiona Wright and myself each applied separately through an open submission. But it turned out we had each proposed ideas that dealt with the media systems of a city, in particular cinemas, magazines, and television. My work involved interrupting the normal flow of a live television broadcast. And I wanted to do it with a general news and current affairs programme rather than an arts programme. Every so often a male and a female would appear on the screen as if they were talking by video-phone. The idea was that their private conversation had somehow dropped into the wrong frequency and was being picked up within the same transmission signal as the live broadcast. I needed a male and a female actor so I used Peter and Fiona and then dubbed the dialogues into German.

PH: And the television company agreed to go along with this?

SH: They did. But the viewers at home were not warned about it in advance. The presenter was very good and played along with the whole thing, looking very puzzled and apologising to viewers for the interruptions.

PH: What did the others do?

SH: Peter's proposal involved creating a cinema trailer for a non-existent film called *No Way Back* which was also the name of the whole project. Each of us worked the title into our interventions somewhere. Peter's 72-second trailer, which 'starred' the three of us, was intercut with genuine trailers at six different cinemas around Munich. Fiona's piece involved re-inventing herself as a completely new character, in this case a soap star. She invented the soap program and her own personal history and biography. Then she arrived in Munich with a new persona. She appeared in two city guides which were about like *Time Out*, in this role as another character. So in a sense we camouflaged ourselves into the media systems of the city in such a way that a lot of people didn't realise that what they were looking at was art.

I also asked Stephen about a 'doppelganger' project he had been working on whilst in Australia

SH: My first project was the *doppelganger* piece, and it's the first time I've used writing as a main component. It evolved over the first few months in Australia and resulted in a slide monologue-piece. This piece has to do with the experience of arriving in another country and having the feeling that you are about to bump into someone you know...and then coming across people who remind you of people you *do* know. I developed that ideas into a narrative which involved coming across someone who looks like me. It is a combination of fact and fiction that goes off at tangents to explore the nature of perception in relation to photography, video, and digital imagery. It was part story telling and part visual theory, with humour being an important aspect.

Other artists who might be considered within this section, and who have been described within the performance-lecture are: Martin Kippenberger; Seymour Likely; Alexa Wright; Janet Cardiff; Rodney Glick; and Eve-Anne O'Regan.

DAMP

DAMP¹⁸⁵ is a collaborative art group based in Melbourne and are representative of a trend of young artists working in large teams and ‘playing’ with the media – creating art out of media structures. The Leeds 13 in England are known for similar interventions¹⁸⁶, working both with and against the media. DAMP have been working together since 1995. They meet once a week in twelve week blocks, usually in the TCB studios in Port Phillip Arcade. Established with Geoff Lowe, DAMP has developed into an independent collective with an extensive membership. Peter Timms gave a good introduction to their work in *The Age*, when he wrote: “Apparently things got a bit out of hand at 200 Gertrude Street a week or so back. During an exhibition opening, when the gallery was packed with people, a young couple started arguing. It was unpleasant, but at first didn’t cause too much disruption, apart from the odd disapproving look. Then the dispute got louder and more insistent and one or two others became involved. A young man had a glass of wine thrown in his face, then the shoving started. Glasses and bottles were knocked over and smashed, and a girl was pushed through the wall. The installation work in the front gallery, by a group of artists calling themselves DAMP, was almost completely wrecked. Only gradually did people start to realise that DAMP’s installation was not being destroyed but created.” A selection of other projects by DAMP include:

Bacteria: A three minute video coordinated by Kym Maxwell and played on the big outdoor screen in Swanston Street, Melbourne. It featured the group playing tiggly in a city lane at night and incorporated live music and sound mixing.

We’re All Water: DAMP re-wrote this Yoko Ono song to include the lyrics, “There may not be much difference between Pauline Hanson and Jimmy Hendrix if you saw them spew”. People were invited to the CCP at a specific time; details of the event were not specified. On arrival people were asked to put on red T-shirts. The room was filled with 120 people all looking the same. Accompanied by an electric guitar DAMP delivered their song of difference three times at full volume.

¹⁸⁵ This section is drawn from a variety of sources including my compilation of photofictions in *Photofile #59* and from various press releases relating to the group.

Documentation of the performance featured in the exhibition “Habitat”, as part of the Melbourne Scotland Cultural Exchange.

Cheersquad, Victorian College of the Arts, 1997. DAMP produced a series of chants and tableaux for a depressed art school. This was documented on video and has yet to be exhibited publicly.

Clothing Exchange, Grey Area Art Space. Melbourne, 1997. One wall in the space featured forty items of clothing belonging to DAMP members. Pinned to each item was a brief description of what that item had come to mean to its owner. The group exchanged their clothes for a Polaroid of the new owner wearing them. All clothes were exchanged during the course of the exhibition. The show comprised the polaroids and the empty coat hangers. Another seminal work by DAMP *Kabluey in Kensington* was described in *LIKE*, No 4, by Andrew McQualter in which he wrote: “*Kabluey in Kensington* was an exhibition of large scale works based on imaginative constructions of ‘the afterlife’. These scenes were conceived, acted out, and photographed by participants in a workshop conducted by DAMP with a group from Kensington Community School. DAMP’s examination of the nature of the art work and artistic identity is marked by the sceptical viewpoint of the outsider.”

We’re all Water and *Ideal Lives* were included in *Everybody Knows* at Spazio d’Art Contemporanea, Milan. *Bacteria* and *Punchline* videos were screened alongside the exhibition “Brand New Master Copy” at UKS Gallery, Oslo, Norway in February 2000. DAMP was established in 1995 by ten fine art students working with artist Geoff Lowe. DAMP has since developed into an independent collaborative art group. Current members include Helen Anderson, Ben Armstrong, Martin Burns, Bruce Craig, Simone Ewenson, George Huon, James Lynch, Daniel Noonan, Sharon Goodwin, Blair Trethowan, and Kylie Wilkinson.

Alexa Wright

My performance-lecture tour eventually took me to Edinburgh, and there I came across the work of Alexa Wright. She was just completing a fellowship in

¹⁸⁶ See *Photofile #59, The Encyclopaedia of Photofictions* – The Leeds 13

Photography and Digital Media at Napier University.¹⁸⁷ The outcome of this fellowship was an exhibition called 'I' in which Alexa, through computer manipulation of imagery, placed her head on the clothed and naked bodies of various people with disabilities. I attended a forum about this project entitled *Whose Disability?* in which Alexa and several of her 'models' defended the ethics of what she was doing against a small but vocal number of visitors to the exhibition¹⁸⁸ who thought the fictions¹⁸⁹ she had created were taking advantage of her subjects. All had been photographed against the Scottish-baroque splendour of the interiors of Hospitalfields House near Arbroath, just north of Dundee.

The catalogue essay comprised a three-way interview between Alexa and two of her models – Catherine Long and Sonia Barnes. Below is one comment from each:

Alexa Wright: Principally, the work is intended to prompt people to question their reactions to disability; as an extension of this it is about trying to identify an attitude which can be applied to everyone: we are all judging each other by appearance all the time. Sometimes these judgements can be disabling even to non-disabled people.

Catherine Long: I was interested in your motives for doing this initially. I thought it must be something personal that was moving you to do it. I expected you to have had some experience of disability on a personal level. I had a reluctance when I thought: This is a non-disabled person representing disability. How can you see through the eyes of a disabled person? But this isn't just you trying to represent us: we are playing a part in it. This will be the interesting thing. If people are outraged by the images, it will be something in them that has a problem with the images. It is not about the images themselves. That is what I will challenge: what is it that you can't handle? What is it that you don't want to see? I think that it is exciting to

¹⁸⁷ Department of Photography, Film and Television.

¹⁸⁸ Held at Portfolio Gallery, 43 Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh from 16 October – 13 November 1999.

¹⁸⁹ New Zealand curator Andrew Bogle once planned an exhibition called *Bodyfictions* which never happened because of lack of funding. Alexa Wright's work would have fitted perfectly within Bogle's curatorial thesis.

challenge people's fears. Sometimes people with disabilities are seen as not having the right or the intelligence to make up their own minds.

Sonia Barnes: Physical difference does make a difference in the way in which you are treated, although people try not to show it. At work I talk to customers on the phone and I get to know them by name, but when they come in to my office and I see them face to face, I can see them thinking 'Oh, this wasn't the person I imagined. How do I portray myself to her?' But they won't say anything because I'm doing business with them and they want something from me, so they have to be polite, which I don't really like. You either like me or you don't. I am the same person that I was on the phone.

Alexa Wright has used virtual reality and digital manipulation for a number of years to examine the relationship between body and self. During the forum debate¹⁹⁰ she described a project she was commissioned to research by the Wellcome Trust. She worked with two scientists to investigate the phenomenon of phantom limbs in amputees. She photographed her subjects in their home environments over a period of weeks and months. One man, for example, had his arm amputated above the elbow but could still feel his hand, *but nothing between the wrist and the stump of his arm*. Through computer manipulation Alexa gave him his hand which sat on the table like a small island, completely cut off from the rest of his body. Some time later all he could feel was one finger and the wedding ring upon it – *but he felt it growing alone out of the stump of his arm*. Alexa also recreated this stage of his recovery from the operation. After the debate Alexa kindly gave me a slide of this image from her carousel and I was able to add it to my on-going lecture tour.

Janet Cardiff

In a project called *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*, 1999 and commissioned by London's Artangel organisation, the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff invited gallery

¹⁹⁰ Held in the Edinburgh Festival Theatre, Nicholson Street, Edinburgh, Saturday 30 October, 2pm.

visitors to swap some form of identification, such as a credit card or driver's licence, for a gallery head-set. She then sent them out on to the streets of London. The starting point for what might be called this 'assisted *dérive*' was the Whitechapel Library. In this work she allows a fragmented narrative to unfold and uses the audio equivalent of *trompe l'oeil* – a screeching car approaching at speed behind you, when no car exists except for the *real* traffic – to scare the bejesus out of you. Cardiff's photographs exist in the catalogue, and to accompany the reviews.¹⁹¹ In one image the artist poses, gun in hand and parallel to her dark glasses, listening intently. Reviewing the project in *Artforum* Rachel Withers writes: 'Charged, intimate, even frightening scenarios are unfurled in the first person, in the private space between one's ears: "I'm blindfolded, my hands tied behind me. I walk naked across the floor. I can feel his eyes watching my body.'" However, one consumes these not in the 'safe' space of a darkened cinema, but in the street in broad daylight. Cardiff's script is studded with linguistic shifters ('you', 'I', 'we', 'they'). In this way it continues the strategies of '80s feminist textual practices, expanding the tradition (as in recent work by Jenny Holzer) with a powerful revelation of the desire both in, and of, the text.'"

The catalogue¹⁹² for this project contains a CD Rom which reproduces the audio text of (*case study b*) and an essay by Kitty Scott.¹⁹³

For me, the start of the essay places Janet Cardiff quite comfortably within Rosalind Krauss' concept of 'the Post-Medium Condition':

Janet Cardiff is an artist whose work has no name.: she is not a painter, sculptor, or an installation artist. While 'the work' of her practice might be compared to that of a movie or theatre director, a screenwriter, novelist, radio producer, composer, performance artist, and a recording engineer, ultimately she does something different. As an artist she hovers somewhere in the interstices of these disciplines, borrowing from them, but never fully inhabiting any one of them. Her current projects, those which she is well-known for and has been producing since the early 1990s are most succinctly described as audio-walks. However, when Cardiff

¹⁹¹ Review pages of: *Flash Art*, November-December, 1999 and *Artforum* December, 1999.

¹⁹² ISBN 1-902201-07-8

¹⁹³ Vancouver, 1999.

rose to international prominence, she was better known in Canada for her installations.

Both bodies of her art work are constructed to transmit stories with an open-ended or linear trajectory. Cardiff writes the scripts for these narratives. They read like a hybrid genre derived from popular science fiction, murder mysteries, thrillers, and *film noir* by authors like Philip K. Dick, Tricia Sullivan and Raymond Chandler. When dramatized by Cardiff, the narratives have a cinematic quality. Cardiff readily cites the influence of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982); Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958); Anatole Litvak's *Sorry Wrong Number* (1948); and David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1996) and *Eraserhead* (1977). But the stories also have a self-reflexive and poetic character as found in the literary novels of Paul Auster, Jorge Luis Borges, Marguerite Duras, and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

Janet Cardiff is the artist whose work, in relation to this doctorate, I have most recently encountered and initially only through reviews of, and the catalogue to, *The Missing Voice (case study b)*. However, when I was in Oxford in May 2000 for my project at the Museum of Modern Art, I was able to make a day visit to London to see the new Tate Gallery at Bankside. Here, by chance, I came upon another work by Janet Cardiff which had recently been purchased for the Tate Gallery Collection. It consisted of a wooden model of a cinema auditorium into which spectators could peer as if from the projection box. The whole installation was no bigger than a family car. There were three sets of (deliberately) old and heavy headphones which limited the number who could participate fully. A drama unfolded on the screen, while on the headphones the viewer (listener) heard both the movie dialogue and also overheard the whispered conversation between two women who, one quickly works out, are notionally seated within the cinema watching the film. A simultaneous climax, revolving around a gun shot, is reached on screen and within the fictive cinema.

10. Presentation and Evaluation of Research Findings

There have been early, mid-term, and mature presentations of different aspects of this project. The whole project is a reflection of these accumulated publications rather than any single, or final, presentation. While there were commonalities between the various publications, each publication investigated specific aspects of the project. Thus, an important contribution might have been made in an early publication which was not evident in a later one but which *is* represented in the durable visual record.

My research findings and their evaluation¹⁹⁴ are presented below with brief details relating to venues and curators.

¹⁹⁴ Where appropriate. I have concentrated on evaluating the major publications and the lecture-performance tour.

Shared Commonalities Within Different Presentations

I experimented with very different mediums throughout the project, and the outcomes of that experimentation were contained within quite diverse ‘host’ organisations and structures. These hosts ranged from exhibition spaces and journals to lecture theatres, web-sites, the media, and the global postal system. What they had in common, in a formal sense, was a shared integration of text and image in which neither was a servant of the other but both were equal partners in a creative relationship. What they had in common in terms of content was an on-going fiction – in some senses a fantasy - called *The Art Fair Murders* which *did* serve as a vehicle for investigating new uses for fiction in the contemporary visual arts.

Specific Situations Investigated in Each Presentation:

Auckland Art Gallery

***The Art Fair Murders* was presented in The New Gallery (Toi O T_maki) of the Auckland Art Gallery between March 29 and June 22, 1997. It was curated by Andrew Bogle and presented as ‘An International Artist Project, organised by the Auckland Art Gallery and supported by the British Council under the aegis of its 50th anniversary in New Zealand.’ I was the British Council ‘Link’ artist-in-residence for the month leading up to the exhibition which allowed new work to be fabricated and selected. A catalogue was produced and is included as part of the durable visual record.¹⁹⁵**

This exhibition deliberately focused on what I regard as two ‘invisible’ areas of any city’s art community:

¹⁹⁵ ISBN: 0 86463 219 3

- The work in ‘storage’ in the city’s main art gallery. Often work enters here and seems to disappear forever.¹⁹⁶ With the assistance of curator Andrew Bogle the I ‘curated in’ to the fictive art fair major works by Andy Warhol¹⁹⁷, Alan Davie, William Wegman, Jorg Immendorff, and Roy Lichtenstein. Chance relationships were encouraged. For example, when the I found David Hockney’s etching of himself and Picasso at a table he remarked it would have been good if the gallery also had the original Picasso on which Hockney had based his work. Andrew Bogle immediately produced that print from another drawer and so the two works hung together in one of the fictive art fair booths.
- In most cities it is common to hear local artists complain, sometimes with justification, that their work never gets shown in their city’s main art gallery or museum. In Auckland, I decided to ‘curate in’ the work of local artists to the installation to hang alongside the work from the storage area and the work made by my fictional artists and art teams.¹⁹⁸ The pressure of installation made it difficult to visit as many studios as was originally planned and much of the work was loaned by gallery staff who were themselves talented local artists.¹⁹⁹

The two strategies mentioned above were married to a third which helped maintain the superfiction. The project has several sub-texts to it and one of these examines and contrasts curatorial rigour associated with museums against the commercial anarchy found at art fairs. In museums work will often hang in the same place for

¹⁹⁶ I once visited the storage area of a regional Australian art gallery and discovered a large John Bellany painting – beautifully painted, very valuable. The curator denied he had any such work and was quite perplexed to discover that he did. He had no idea how it came to be at the back of one of his storage racks.

¹⁹⁷ This work was one of his famous ‘soup cans’ which most visitors and some staff believed was a poster I had purchased in Auckland

¹⁹⁸ This is a strategy the I had used previously, for example, at The Art Gallery of New South Wales he curated in the work of final year students from the art school at Albury Wadonga to the gallery’s project space, alongside his own fictions. However, this predated the current project.

¹⁹⁹ Many of these artists would, in fact, find it easier to have their work shown in New York, Glasgow, or Melbourne than in their home city, and this is a universal problem which this aspect of the project seeks to highlight. Some galleries in some cities tackle this ‘problem’ creatively by holding an annual juried Open Exhibition.

months or years at a time. In art fairs, usually running for less than a week, when one work is sold it is often replaced with another, underscoring the commercial nature of the event. Some galleries at art fairs are selling work of museum quality, and these might range from Sonia Delauney to Susan Rothenberg or Peter Halley. Some hang their work with all the precision and ‘space’ of a world class museum curator. However, there is an unevenness about many art fairs which can sink to almost amateur levels at the lesser ones, and in those one often finds work crammed in as tightly as possible to make use of every square inch of wall space like a bad ‘academy’ hang²⁰⁰. One wall of the Auckland exhibition was given over to this type of hang, and it was arranged with the gallery’s curators that work would be removed and replaced on a regular basis. This aspect of the project could have been managed better (by me) and will be returned to in future presentations.

One murder was disguised within the installation, that of a body trapped under a crate. It was cordoned off with police tape. Hanging next to it was a print by Richard Serra, referencing a recent death when an installer was crushed beneath a falling sculpture by that artist.

Negotiations with curators, sponsors, and artists are an important part of this project. In Auckland, this ranged from working with the artist Billy Apple to include one of his art works in the fictional art fair alongside works by Jorg Immendorff and Joseph Beuys, and working with the major sponsors *Montana* wines which lead to the production of the catalogue.

The Auckland Catalogue

The catalogue was a core element in this presentation of the project. Like the website the content and layout were conceived by me and developed by a curatorial and design team. (special thanks to: John Mciver; Andrew Bogle; Patrick Badger; JJ Voss; and Inhouse Design).

²⁰⁰ When the London Art Fair was held at Olympia the upper balcony used to be notorious for this.

For the first time the catalogue allowed text and (full colour) image to come together in exactly the way the I had always wanted but had never had the funds to realise. The use of a grid structure allowed fragments of text and image to co-exist side by side without being ‘over designed’.

Evaluation of Auckland Project: Even although there was a three week lead-in to this project while I worked as artist-in-residence in Auckland, in retrospect this was not long enough to coordinate everything which I wanted to achieve. Originally the exhibition was to have occurred in the smaller upstairs project space, then a few weeks before leaving for Auckland I was offered a large part of the downstairs gallery instead. This meant re-thinking the exhibition and as I was not ‘on site’ to do this much of it had to be improvised once I arrived. However, I always see that sort of thing as a creative challenge and sometimes it can lead to successes as well as failures. In this case it allowed me to ‘curate in’ much more work from the museum storage area than I had intended. Where the project failed was in my coordination of the work of local artists and the gallery’s ability to change works on a daily basis. For me as an artist the single most successful aspect of the exhibition was the catalogue. Funding for this through sponsorship by *Montana* wines came at the eleventh hour and much of my time in the final week leading up to the opening was spent designing, selecting images, and proof-reading the catalogue. The exhibition also succeeded in supplying me with a reservoir of images (based around constructed props) which have since been used many times in the press and media, particularly the image of the body trapped under the crate.

Two other areas could have been better managed. After leaving Auckland I heard from a number of sources that the computers in the exhibition area were not always switched on, or they were on but there was no link possible to my web-site. Others found it difficult to navigate the maze of booths set up in the gallery. This was due to the physical space. By contrast the Geelong exhibition (September 2000) has been designed in a more open way allowing visitors to scan the three key areas from the one spot – the hotel reception desk; the hotel bedroom; the commercial art fair.

Dialogue – West Space

The journal *Dialogue* produced by Melbourne’s West Space artists’ space commissioned a ‘fragment’ from *The Art Fair Murders*.²⁰¹ I saw this as an extension of the above catalogue and both publications were worked on simultaneously.

How Say You

How Say You was a group exhibition²⁰² curated by Kevin Murray which opened at The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, and toured to venues in Brisbane, Hobart, and Adelaide. I constructed one chapter from *The Art Fair Murders*: Chapter Five May Chicago. Fragments from this chapter appeared in the catalogue²⁰³ and *The Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain* was displayed in the gallery alongside other ‘evidence’.

The Lecture-Performance Tour

The lecture-performance tour took place between 24 September 1999 and 2 December 1999. Prior to those dates, one year of research, planning, and fund-raising had gone in to it. Such a long lead-in time was necessary because both venues and funding bodies plan their programs so far in advance.

I gave presentations of his research findings in the following institutions:

24 September: Sydney College of the Arts

25 September: College of Fine Arts, Sydney

7 October: Contemporary Art Services Tasmania

13 October: Deakin University, Geelong

29 October: Glasgow School of Art

²⁰¹ March 1997, ISSN 13263404.

²⁰² Other artists were: Sandra Bridie; Stephen Bush; Barbara Campbell; Greg Creek; Lan H. Foil; Robert Nelson; and Kate Reeves.

²⁰³ ISBN 0 947220 52 6

- 1 November:** Edinburgh College of Art
- 3 November:** Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee
- 12 November:** Architectural Association, London
- 16 November:** Chelsea School of Art London
- 17 November:** Oxford Brookes University (morning)
- 17 November:** Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (evening)
- 29 November:** MASS MoCA, Massachusetts
- 2 December:** CALARTS, Los Angeles

The tour was financed by: The Australia Council; RMIT University; Contemporary Art Services Tasmania; and through lecture fees and the sale of merchandise.²⁰⁴

No two lectures-performances were identical, and this allowed the me to present the full range of his research and to record comments, criticisms, and suggestions that arose from those presentations. At several venues videos were made of the lecture-performance and these will eventually be collaged together and détourned into the installation-exhibition.²⁰⁵

Other projects arose out of the lecture tour such as *The Art Fair Murders* project at MOMA Oxford six months later.

Evaluation of the Lecture-Performance Tour: This aspect of my information gathering and the opportunity it gave me to present my research findings succeeded better than I had hoped. However, I think I was too ambitious in trying to cover Australia, Europe, and coast-to coast America over a two month period. By the time I reached Los Angeles for my final lecture at CALARTS I was exhausted. Rather than completing such a marathon tour at the end of my research I would have better

²⁰⁴ Funds from the above sources raised \$7,120 and the total cost of the tour, including promotional material, was \$8,435. I closed the shortfall through articles and reviews written about exhibitions and museums visited overseas.

²⁰⁵ This is projected beyond the doctorate as part of the on-going project. I plan to collect several more videos before making the final edit. However, an early publication of the video will form part of the submission within the Durable Visual Record.

served my investigations by making a series of short lecture tours throughout my candidacy. What I have learned from this is that in future when I make a similar tour I will choose one region - perhaps Canada and North America or Scandinavia and the Netherlands – and spend two or three months on a more focussed itinerary. The ideal situation would be to secure a residency within the region and use that as a base for delivering the Lecture-Performance.

The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford

As a result of delivering the performance-lecture at The Museum of Modern Art in Oxford on 17 November 1999, the I was invited to construct an ‘Oxford Chapter’ in May 2000 as part of the museum’s MOMA-2000 program which was funded by the Arts Council of England’s New Audiences Initiative and the Southern Arts Regional Lottery Fund²⁰⁶. The brief for MOMA 2000 was ‘to commission international artists to work with diverse public groups in and around Oxford. Our principal aim is to generate excitement and enjoyment of different forms of contemporary art.’

I tested various new components of the project in Oxford. Some of these were more successful than others and there will be evaluated in the next chapter.

Before leaving Australia for Europe, the I located the addresses of everyone in the Oxford telephone directory with the surname ‘Cameron’, thus referencing Alice and Abner ‘Bucky’ Cameron, billionaire founders of the Museum of Contemporary Ideas and characters within the superfiction *The Art Fair Murders*. Each Cameron was sent a *Cameron Oil* pen along with an invitation to attend the opening press conference of *The Art Fair Murders*. Originally it was planned that at the close of this press conference, on the first day of the project, I would be ‘kidnapped’ from the podium and driven off to Heathrow airport by his abductors, later turning up in Stockholm²⁰⁷. This part of the project failed badly due to technical reasons.

However, the trip to Stockholm did occur and some basic research was done there

²⁰⁶ Total funding for the project was \$15,000 which included materials and transport; publicity; and artist’s fee.

²⁰⁷ Stockholm was chosen as a venue because David Elliott, the previous director of MOMA Oxford, is now director of the Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

for future projects²⁰⁸. The kidnapping did in fact go ahead as part of the closing lecture, and was photographed and captured on video. I fabricated an Incident Room within the museum and as the project unfolded it was documented and presented as ‘evidence towards a crime and an art work.’

Over the course of the project I gave lectures to different groups throughout the Oxford community, including a group of language students²⁰⁹. This particular lecture-performance was an important development because it arose out of one of the Oxfordshire Camerons accepting the invitation to the first press conference in the incident room and subsequently inviting me to give a lecture in the language school which coincidentally and conveniently was situated directly above the covered market. It transpired that the project itself became a very useful one for the students to engage with, as searching for the clues (going on a *dérive*) and identifying different kinds of shops and food stalls (see below) helped to develop their language skills.²¹⁰

In an attempt to further merge the populist with the specialist, I laid ‘a murder mystery trail’ from MOMA through the streets of Oxford to the covered market in the centre of the city. This venue was chosen because business there was on the decline due to large shopping centres opening nearby and a re-routing of the traditional traffic flow. The local traders were thus keen to take part in any event that might bring them more trade. Clues, in the form of *Art Fair Murder* paint cans were placed in the windows, or market stalls, of twelve shop-keepers and traders. These twelve cans represented the twelve cities, murders, months, and art fairs contained within the project. Visitors to the gallery received a map of the city and had to locate the venues and ask the stall holders for clues. Twelve different clues were left in batches of fifty with each trader. At the end of the project, the participants could return their completed answers to the Incident Room and were invited to complete the first paragraphs of each chapter. They could then swap their

²⁰⁸ I discovered five ‘Camerons’ in the Stockholm telephone directory including one Olaf Cameron.

²⁰⁹ Mostly Spanish and French business people.

²¹⁰ In future projects I will expand these chance encounters and also give lectures to a quite varied (but focused) cross section of the community, eg traffic wardens; nurses; detectives; young offenders; people in aged care; plus a range of university departments from forensic science to modern languages and media studies.

own pen for either a *Cameron Oil* pen or an *Art Fair Murders* pen. More time would have been useful to fine tune the various aspects of the Oxford Chapter. It did, however, offer a good foundation for future development of aspects of ‘art in the city’ linked to notions of ‘the assisted *dérive*’.

Evaluation of MOMA 2000: **The biggest success of this component of my investigation was being able to use the streets of a city and all the chance encounters and situations that provides, as the basis for a project. Additionally, to have an ‘Incident Room’ within MOMA gave the fluid aspects of the project a physical base to return to. Failures included it being the wettest May in Oxford on record which was neither conducive for an outdoor project nor for visitors journeying in to the gallery. I also could have used a longer lead-in period to the project in order to plan things properly. I would like to thank Ian Cole, curator of the project, for the immense hard work he put in to it. The project culminated with me being ‘kidnapped’ from the lecture podium and whisked away in a get-away car. This event was similar to the body under the crate in Auckland in that its importance is more as a piece of documentary ‘evidence’ on film and video which will be ‘détourned’ into future projects.**

Photofile #59

Shortly before commencing the above mentioned lecture-performance tour I was invited by Alastair Foster, Director of the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney, to present his research findings as a specially guest-edited edition of *Photofile* magazine²¹¹. This was eagerly accepted as it gave the best opportunity yet, since the publication of the Auckland catalogue, to align text with image in a professional and sympathetic format.

This ‘project within a project’ involved commissioning all the articles, interviews, and reviews; researching and writing some of them; discussing content (text and image) with the authors; liaising with the designer and with Alastair Foster; and

²¹¹ Fictions #59: ISSN

proof reading every word in the magazine (approximately 40,000 words, including advertisements, plus images).

Evaluation of Photofile #59: **This publication was extremely rewarding to produce and I must again thank Alasdair Foster at the ACP for inviting me to commission all of the articles and to write some of them. Alongside the Auckland catalogue and the web-site this publication allowed me to aim for my ideal (democratic) mix of text and image. It also allowed me to make contact with Joan Fontcuberta. There was no negative aspect to this part of the project other than the large amount of time it consumed for a brief but intense period.**

Geelong Art Gallery and RMIT Gallery, Melbourne

The exhibitions at these two venues overlapped and were the final presentations before examination. In the weeks before these exhibitions opened, and during the run of the shows, clues were mailed out globally using the specially designed mailing list (see Appendix B). Each one was accompanied by a small limited edition art work relating to the text or narrative contained within the clue. For example:

Clue 1 contained a gold-edged invitation card to an art prize which was referred to in the clue.

Clue 2 contained a taxi driver's business card referring to 'Jacko' the notional author of *The Art Fair Murders*.

Clue 3 contained a pen with text printed on it that referred to a project in the text called 'Rival Cities'.

In the invitation card (reproduced below), I tried to set the scene for both exhibitions. It serves as a 'map' to the territory that has been constructed.

The *Cameron Oil* Prize 1989

ALICE AND Abner ‘Bucky’ Cameron INVITE YOU TO THE LAUNCH OF THE Inaugural \$100,000 *Cameron Oil* Prize, to be announced at the Gala Opening of the Los Angeles Art Fair.

Dress: Art Attire or formal

Finalists:

Milco Zeemann (Netherlands) Aloha (Australia)

Made in Palestine (USA) The Triplet Twins (Japan)

***NKF* - Nouvelle Kunst Faction (Belgium) Hal Jones (USA)**

Cameron Oil - Drilling for a killing!

By looking at it we know immediately that the project is set in the year 1989. We also know that it relates to the Los Angeles Art Fair²¹² in December of that year, and that yet again Alice and Abner ‘Bucky’ Cameron are involved. And we are introduced to the characters whose work is exhibited within both exhibitions.²¹³ The construction of these characters is fluid and can change from exhibition to exhibition. Some are more important than others. A brief outline of these characters is given below.

Hal Jones, Herb Sherman, and Aloha

The life and works of Hal Jones and Herb Sherman have been outlined earlier in the exegesis. However, as they are two of the main fictional creations within this publication it is appropriate to outline their persona again.

In the Geelong Art Gallery, half the space is constructed to look like a commercial art fair during the media preview when some galleries are still setting up and there

²¹² Yet some of the clues point to the Chicago Art Fair of that year – one of several deliberate inconsistencies built into the work.

²¹³ There are, however, additional characters not in the running for the prize such as Herb Sherman and the art team AAA (Art Against Astrology) and police sergeant Wiszniewski.

are crates everywhere waiting to be unpacked. Some of the work is already on the walls of the booths; other work is waiting to be hung. The other half of the gallery has been constructed to mimic a hotel reception area (with clocks placed behind the reception desk indicating the time in six cities around the world). Opposite, a hotel bedroom has been constructed. There is a blood-soaked shower curtain on the double bed and police tape cordoning off the area. On the bedroom wall (specially constructed for the installation) hangs a painting by Herb Sherman called *Corio Bay*. On the reverse of this same wall *The Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain* is about to be hung within the booth of Torch Gallery from Amsterdam. The wall divides the fictive hotel from the fictive art fair. Herb Sherman used to be the teacher of Hal Jones back in the days when they both lived in Texas. A large, reductive work by Hal Jones is about to be hung on the wall adjacent to the Torch Gallery booth. It is 10 feet by 10 feet which is supposedly the size of the prison cell he shared with three other felons after being convicted of trashing Herb Sherman's studio. This was done in the heat of the moment after Sherman seduced Jones' girlfriend Lisa Garcia-Lopez then dumped her for a divorced faculty member.

In the RMIT Gallery installation half the space is similarly a commercial art fair set in 1989, the other half is a casino. The main booth of the art fair space is Blue Chip Gallery²¹⁴ from Tokyo and it is showing three large canvases by Hal Jones. There is another deliberate inconsistency here in that these are each nine feet by nine feet, again supposedly the size of his cell. All these paintings come from his series called *The Fence* and reference the perimeter fence which, as part of a chain gang he had to paint every day – each day the colour alternating from one to the other so the guards knew it was finished. This also references the painterly device of underpainting and overpainting which Hal Jones uses in these works. Sometimes he exhibits work still in the process of being constructed although he regards them as 'finished'. One of the three canvases in the Blue Chip Gallery booth is of this type and references artists such as Mary Miss (in her use of 'raw materials') as the others reference a range of painters from Michael Moon to Gary Hume. In the opposite space in RMIT gallery a casino has been constructed and in here we again

²¹⁴ A fictive gallery as opposed to Torch, Amsterdam, which is real.

encounter the work of Herb Sherman with his multi-coloured, gilt framed abstracts. A game of roulette is in progress. As we look closer we see another crime has been committed. There has been another murder.

Herb Sherman is the only suspect known to have killed albeit during his time in Vietnam. Hal Jones is the only suspect known to have spent time in jail. Aloha's blood-soaked shower curtain suddenly make them suspects when a New York dealer is stabbed in his hotel shower.

The main narrative in these two exhibitions centres upon the works of Hal Jones, Herb Sherman, and the group Aloha. Other artists whose work helps to 'frame' these scenes include:

Milco Zeemann

Milco Zeemann is the viewpoint character in *The Art Fair Murders*. He has won a prize from the ever-generous Dutch Ministry of Culture which allows him, indeed expects him, to visit every commercial art fair in the world in 1989 as part of its professional development program. He is therefore a key suspect in the case having been present at every fair where a homicide has been committed. Milco Zeemann is a neo-conceptualist and one of his projects involves tape recording the conversations of taxi drivers as he discovers new cities around the globe. He then transfers the transcribed text to gallery walls.²¹⁵ His other main project is *Rival Cities*, and Milco's contribution to these exhibitions is the *Rival Cities* pen mailed out with Clue 3.

Made in Palestine

Made in Palestine are an art team from Brooklyn. One is of Jewish descent, the other Palestinian. Neither are religious and both have worked happily together since meeting at the Pratt Institute almost a decade ago in the late seventies. As a

²¹⁵ By one of these strange coincidences, four years after inventing Milco and posting his taxi project on the web, I visited the 11th Sydney Biennale *Everyday*, curated by Jonathan Watkins and discovered a Thai artist Navin Rawanchaikul was working on a similar project. He presented a real Sydney taxi which included the driver's narrative fed through speakers and also a picture book with text and images relating to his drives through Sydney. Navin Rawanchaikul shows with Navin Gallery, Bangkok.

comment on global conflict and how it can be resolved at a personal level they change the name of their group every year. One year they are known as ‘Made in Palestine’; the next as ‘Made in Israel’. Both have received death threats in recent years. Perhaps they will be victims in future chapters. In their work they photograph the art world at work and at play, exhibiting their photographs (or ‘snaps’ as they are happy to call them) as cibachrome prints and light boxes. They travel the world constantly and are seen at every art fair, biennale, and documenta. Often they adopted different disguises to get close to their subjects. Their project as a whole is called *International Portrait Gallery* and it can be visited on www.nymoci.com

The Triplet Twins

The two triplet twins make art. Their third (identical) twin runs a florist shop in Osaka, although the triplets (or ‘The Trips’ as they have been dubbed by the London tabloids) originally come from Tokyo. They work across media – video, photograph, installation, performance. Their work in the Geelong Art Gallery is called ‘Self Portrait’ and comprises three framed photographs. The two outer images of the electric fire represent the two sisters who make art. The more decoratively kitsch central image is a tribute to their sister.

NKF (Nouvelle Kunst Faction)

The Belgium art team NKF (Nouvelle Kunst Faction) flirt with language, image, and art world structures. Their most recent ‘game’ as they call their projects is with the multi-national auction houses – Sotheby’s, Christie’s, Phillips’. Throughout the eighties they purchased prints, paintings and photographs by a range of cutting edge contemporary artists and auctioned them in lots of three. For example, in the RMIT Gallery, in the Blue Chip Gallery booth (on the one wall not occupied by Hal Jones), they present a signed print by Joseph Beuys alongside ones by Bruce McLean and RB Kitaj – teasingly entitled *Have you heard the one about the Scotsman, the German, and the American?*

The serious side of their prankster project involves a critique of commercial auction houses. How do you put a price (or a reserve) on such an art work. Are these limited edition prints, or is it a unique, single, work of art now that all three have been framed together? As the arrangement of images has been signed by the three members of NKF does it become a new, discrete art work? The international art press have covered acres of newsprint debating these issues.

Finally, as a way of underscoring how this project in its totality attempts to critique the rigour of museum curation alongside the commercial anarchy of art fairs, it is hoped that two leading museum directors can be persuaded to sit behind the desk of the notional Blue Chip Gallery (inside RMIT Gallery) on the opening night of October 5th.

Evaluation of Geelong Art Gallery and RMIT Gallery Melbourne: It is still too early to give a proper evaluation of these two presentations. As I type this, both exhibitions are being prepared. Much of the current work has involved negotiations with a major hotel group²¹⁶ and Crown casino through mediators at both gallery venues. As I write, there is a union dispute at the warehouse storing all the hotel furnishings. One union won't allow another to remove the pieces from storage. Additionally, Crown casino, after initially agreeing to help construct a roulette table to help 'frame' Herb Sherman's paintings, now inform us that it would be illegal to allow one out of the casino. I am currently investigating setting up one large or several small green baize card tables within the gallery and employing audio clues to set the scene. These clues ranged from taped Christmas music by Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra to audio tapes of gaming machines in action. I am particularly keen to use 'out-of-season' elements, such as Christmas decorations, in order to help place the fictive installation at a certain time of year.

As part of the evaluation process it is intended that slides of both installations will be included within the durable visual record. The images will, in turn, feed in to future projects, catalogues, lectures, and media kits.

²¹⁶ Four Points Sheraton

Finally, in evaluating the success and failure of the work of Hal Jones in both exhibitions it should be made clear that I was experimenting with two different modes of fabrication to test which would be most successful for future development. The single piece in Geelong was 10 feet by 10 feet in size and was constructed from four separate canvases bolted together. The three works at RMIT Gallery were 9 feet by 9 feet and each was fabricated from two canvases 9 feet by 4.5 feet which required bolting only down the central spine. The RMIT canvases used glass as a reflexing device over part of the canvases; the Geelong work did not. The RMIT construction, at the time of writing, appears to be the more successful.

At Geelong it was stated that the size of Hal Jones' prison cell was 10 feet by 10 feet; at RMIT 9 feet by 9 feet. This is a small but deliberate inconsistency built into the project.

Global Mail-out

The global mail-out has been referred to before. Briefly, throughout this project there have been many mail-outs; some related to specific exhibitions, others not. In the earlier ones there was something of a scatter-gun approach to who was on the list. A more disciplined methodology was devised for the final stages of the project. Twelve groups of people (literary agents, commercial dealers, the media, real art fairs etc) were selected and twelve individuals within each group were added to the list (see Appendix C). Address labels were always photocopied but sometimes they were typed, sometimes hand-written. If possible, specific stamps were selected to decorate the envelopes. Slides of these envelopes are sometimes used in the lecture-performance or exhibited in galleries as cibachromes.

In addition to this tightly focused group of 144 individuals, additional clues and invitations are sent out. If the exhibition is, for example, in Oxford, press and media in the London/Oxford vicinity are added to it. If in Australia, local and national media are included.

Over the years people move, addresses change and envelopes are often ‘returned to sender’. I have kept all of these and they have formed a new archive within the museum ‘the dead letter box’.

The Web-Site

The web-site www.nymoci.com predates this project and only part of the site is relevant to it. A CD Rom of the site as it exists in October 2000 has been burnt which will ‘freeze’ the site for the benefit of the RMIT University Durable Visual Record. The site will expand beyond the doctorate, but for the benefit of the PhD it should be regarded as that which is contained within the DVR.

Relevant areas to visit within the web-site:

The home page of www.nymoci.com resembles a museum elevator with fourteen floors (including Basement and Ground). The floors that are relevant to this project are:

Floor 7: International Portrait Gallery, showing the work of Made in Palestine.

Floor 9: The Art Fair Murders

Floor 11: Encyclopaedia of Superfictions

Once you arrive on each floor there are usually multiple choices which you can make. For example, probably the most pertinent floor is **Floor 9: The Art Fair Murders**. The choices here are:

- **Sample of Art Transporter’s Rhyming Slang**
- **Summary of Chapters**
- **Chapter Five May Chicago**
- **Prologue – the Aberdeen Writers’ Club**
- **The Making of The Art Fair Murders**

Some of the text in the above sections gives a snapshot of how the project looked four or five years ago. Some is more recent. The section which gives the best overall

feel of how the project was conceived is the bottom option **The Making of the Art Fair Murders**. A print out of this section is included in (Appendix D) , along with selections of responses to the web-site.

The Failure of the Virtual Over the Real

In concluding my evaluation of the project in its entirety I can point to one area of failure (or great surprise) that stands out for me. At the commencement of the investigation I thought that I could construct fictional ‘events’ and have them reported with text and image in the media without having an actual (real) event occurring. On the several times that I have attempted this, press and media interest was scarce. The three main successes were the 1989 press release that was published in *Wolkenkratzer* the 1992 Aloha *Hermann Nitsch Shower Curtain* in *Kunstforum*, and the 1996 advertisements for *The Art Fair Murders* in *The London Review of Books*. I now conclude that it is better to have an actual event – exhibition, performance, lecture, press conference – which the media can attend. With reality as a starting point, projects (superfictions) can then take on a fantasy life of their own.

11. Conclusion

I will conclude this exegesis by addressing the specific research questions raised in the proposal and the abstract:

1. What is the function and use of fiction as an artistic device in contemporary art practice?

This project has shown that an increasing number of artists world-wide are introducing fictional situations into their work. Notions of function and progress within the visual arts are always difficult to quantify and often rely on an understanding of how art movements evolve through a rejection, as much as an extension, of what preceded them. Introducing fictional situations – from the *nouveau realisme* of Guillaume Bijl to the narratology of Ilya Kabakov and Janet Cardiff – has expanded the language of art making free of medium specificity as evidenced in the parameters set by the preceding case studies. This includes the use of new technologies, as in the work of Alexa Wright, and a closer scrutiny of old technologies, such as wet photography, in the research of Joan Fontcuberta. While Fontcuberta is concerned with notions of veracity associated with the mass-

produced image, others such as Res Ingold see fiction as a form of fantasy or wish-fulfilment, made tangible through the creation of his fictive airline.

2. Who are the artists working in this emerging field?

This question articulates cleanly on to the last. Within the 8 case studies I attempted to put forward each artist as being indicative of a certain type of superfiction.

Those artists are: Res Ingold; Joan Fontcuberta; David Wilson; Xu Bing; Stephen Hurrel; DAMP; Alexa Wright; and Janet Cardiff. Additionally, Guillaume Bijl and Ilya Kabakov should be considered as the two extremes of this type of work, and also as senior practitioners in the field.

3. Into how many categories do these fictions fall, and can they be said to divide into 'open' and 'closed' systems?

At the commencement of this investigation I would have been unable to draw up the list of artists who feature as my Case Studies. A few I knew well, several not at all, and some I knew of but did not then realise their paradigmatic importance. At the conclusion of the project I feel confident about presenting several different categories of superfiction along with several artists or art teams in each category.

These are:

- **Nouveau realisme: Guillaume Bijl; Res Ingold**
- **Art and business: Res Ingold; SERVAAS; Seymour Likely; Eve-Anne O'Regan; Banco di Oklohoma**
- **Art and philosophy: Rodney Glick and David Solomon; David Wilson and the Museum of Jurassic Technology**
- **Art and media manipulation: The Leeds 13; DAMP; Stephen Hurrel**
- **Art, veracity, and propaganda: Joan Fontcuberta; Xu Bing**
- **Art and narratology: Ilya Kabakov; Janet Cardiff**
- **Art and new technologies: Alexa Wright; Stephen Hurrel; Raymond Rohner**

None of the above artists are locked rigidly with a single category. I have placed them within the one that seems most appropriate to their on-going projects; a few feature in more than one category. Similarly, I could place elements of my own work within each of the above categories. However, Art and Narratology; Art and Media Manipulation; and Art and New Technologies would, for me, be the most central to this project. Additionally, I would answer the question ‘What new areas has your own work entered that differs from the above?’ by saying that this project as a whole – which has at its heart *The Art Fair Murders* - critiques both the art world and the publishing world, that it investigates the mechanics of change within these two areas, and that, in a poetic sense, it turns art and publishing into a superfiction. Some of the superfictions investigated, such as the Seymour Likely project, have turned out to be ‘open’ systems that can expand and develop in several directions. Others, such as Res Ingold’s *Airline* is a closed system focussing on a single theme.

4. Will the creation of fictional situations end the hegemony of post-modernism?

On reflection, this was a rather ambitious question to even contemplate as one part of a separate investigation. As the project developed this was one of several questions which grew less important as others became more urgent. However, it can be concluded that through fiction artists are at least able to look towards a creative future – even one of their own invention – *in addition to* quoting from the past.

5. Can a new synthesis be reached which unites the most tenable aspects of modernism with the most tenable aspects of postmodernism through fictional situations?

As with question 4, this question became less important as the investigation proceeded. However, some form of ‘synthetic modernism’ was shown to be possible and to be growing through a greater interaction between art, architecture and design. As this question faded in importance and relevance another, initially

unstated but implicit question, grew in its place. It was, ‘How important is narrative to the fictional situations being created by visual artists?’, and I would answer it thus:

The research I carried out for the Case Studies and for other aspects of this research revealed that many contemporary artists now regard the type of fictive situations under investigation as central to their practice. This includes those who perhaps create only one or two superfictions in a career which mostly centres on other types of work, ie, within those individual projects fictional situations are central. In both these cases an increasing use of narrative is entering the work – most notably perhaps in the installations and audio walks of Janet Cardiff but also in the story-telling lectures of Stephen Hurrell and the narrative fictions of Ilya Kabakov and others.

Certain types of art appear to move forward and attract new practitioners when *possibilities* become evident. These possibilities might relate to the term logical extremism described under ‘methodology and terminology’ or they might relate to an opening up of the imagination. While there is informed and misinformed views in a range of publications from the popular press to academic journals as to what is and is not art²¹⁷ most commentators are in agreement that this thing ‘which may or may not be art’ is regularly moving into new areas of human experience, new technologies, and new subject matter. Within the time-frame of this project – approximately 1995-2000, many of the artists under investigation – notably Kabakov, Bijl, Ingold, and Fontcuberta - have moved from fringe positions within the art world to a more central position. However, even the most optimistic champion of superfictions could not claim it represents the dominant paradigm of contemporary art practice. In their wake, many younger, emerging artists – including many beginning art students – are seeing opportunities for turning fiction into art.

²¹⁷ An old order academic such as Gombrich, for example, will rail against Marcel Duchamp almost as much as a tabloid newspaper journalist – although in a far more scholarly way.

6. How do these new uses relate to older, more established practices of camouflage and *trompe l'oeil*?

Many of the artists investigated for this project use devices that not only ‘trick the eye’ – Guillaume Bijl, Res Ingold, Rodney Glick, Seymour Likely - but also ‘trick the ear’ – Janet Cardiff – or subvert several senses, as in the broadcasts of Stephen Hurrell, the maze-like installation of David Wilson’s Museum of Jurassic Technology, and the media games played by The Leeds 13.

There are historical precedents for this which can be traced from ancient Greece, through the Renaissance and into the modern world. However, as this investigation progressed I found these precedents to be less important than I had at first anticipated. Through interviewing many of the artists involved in creating superfictions I found few placed much importance on these factors in terms of the development of their work. Joan Fontcuberta probably emerged as the one artist for whom historical precedents were vital to his contemporary practice.

7. How important is the ‘organisational structure’ as a framing device for these fictions? Primary structures to be investigated in the thesis will include ‘the commercial art fair’; ‘the museum’; ‘the auction house’; ‘the hotel’; ‘the casino’; ‘the teacher-pupil paradigm’; ‘the media’. Secondary structures, which became especially evident in the writing up of the exegesis, included ‘the laundromat’; ‘the airline’; ‘the neo-situationist *dérive*’ and other superfictions created by those artists whose work is presented as case studies.

The primary structures mentioned above have all been addressed under Presentation and Evaluation of Research Findings, and my conclusion is that such primary framing devices have been crucial to the successful outcome of the thesis. They set up discrete fictions – often back-to back²¹⁸ – and great care has to be taken in planning not only how they will work in a narrative sense but also in how

²¹⁸ For example, the hotel bedroom scene and the art fair booth within the Geelong Art Gallery.

spectators – moving around the installations – will interact with the art objects, the props, and the gallery space.

Secondary structures have been addressed throughout the exegesis and range from Guillaume's Bijl's fictive laundromat to Ralph Rumney's dérives through Venice. The organisational structure as a convincing framing device is extremely important in the former case. However, in the case of the situationist dérive the whole philosophy behind this activity is very much unstructured and anarchic, and would be the exception to the general rule of setting up a convincing structure or superfiction. An artist such as Janet Cardiff oscillates between the two. She sets up a 'game' or 'situation' using the city streets and the latest new technology in CD Roms and headsets. She then places the spectator (as participant) within the living city so that chance can interact with a planned methodology or script.

The conclusions here relate to the specific questions asked in the proposal. Parallel conclusions are implicit within the work exhibited in RMIT Gallery and Geelong Art Gallery. These were presented and evaluated in the previous chapter .

In conclusion, this investigation has shown that there is a significant use of fictional devices within contemporary visual art practice. It has shown that the field is diverse enough to be split into specific sub-sets, or different types of superfiction. And finally, from a close reading of the current research being conducted internationally, it can be concluded that the movement has not yet peaked and is indeed still growing.

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Australia

September, 2000

12. Appendices:

A: The Making of *The Art Fair Murders*

B: Clues

C: Global Mailing List

13. Bibliography

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