

I see

The materialisation of words

what

in contemporary art

you're

edited by Henry Rogers

saying

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Introduction

Word and image; text and texture; letter and line. There are so many levels on which writing and art come together, so many ways in which they interact, so much to be said about this interface that it is difficult to know where to start and when to stop. Sometimes the connections are very loose, as in texts which are illustrated or simply adorned by imagery, or images supported by text: the essays in a catalogue accompanying an exhibition, the titles — present even for ‘untitled’ works — which, according to convention, are printed on small white cards and mounted discreetly on the gallery wall. More complex and interactive conjunctions come with comics and graphic novels, illuminated manuscripts, and the best of children’s illustrated books. There are rare but compelling examples of adult illustrated prose such as that produced by WG Sebald, whose use of photographs as indeterminately fictional documents parallels the dream-like nature of his texts, or Tom Phillip’s glorious *Humument*, which brings text and images into a unique and dense relationship, or much older experimental publications such as Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*.

The modernist interest in artists’ notebooks and manifestos gave a new role and prominence to artists’ writings, elevating them to the level of the art work itself. Art criticism and theory spawned their own genres, sometimes of simple commentary, sometimes of striking value in their own right: Klee’s *Angelus Novus* is both the occasion for Walter Benjamin’s exploration of the very idea of an ‘angel of history’, and also a painting transformed by this critique. Cubist painters experimented with the use of newspapers, tickets, and other everyday items in painting, and with their

collages and photomontages, as well as their experiments with typographic poetry, the Dadaists really began to integrate images and text. The drawings of Adolf Wölfli, the ‘outsider’ artist — actually a true insider, locked up as he was for much of his life — who covered the backs of his drawings with wild writings and filling every space of his images, in what is said to have been his horror vacui, with words, sentences, sometimes long, spiralling texts, demonstrate the power of more intense interactions between the image and the word. Works like René Magritte’s *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* or Roy Lichtenstein’s *Whaam*, and those of artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer make the connection undeniable.

When Paul Klee wrote of drawing as ‘taking a line for a walk’, he might just as easily have been describing the work of the poet as that of the artist. Indeed Klee’s work is an interesting example of an artist using letter-like formations without regard for writing itself: an audience unfamiliar with the Western alphabet might assume that his forests and cities are populated by words. But artists who use words — as Klee also did from time to time — which carry all the meaning and resonance of language in their works are clearly doing something else. They are, at their most interesting, using text as a dense kind of image, an image which has a richer, or at least very different, function and effect than, say, the patch of colour next to it. A painting which uses words has an additional string to its bow, an extra means with which to communicate, something which detractors might even feel allows it to cheat by taking a short cut and making an unmediated appeal to its audience. But why not use whatever materials are to hand? A text which relies on the use of italics or capital letters rather than using the words themselves might also be said to be cutting corners to produce its emphatic effects. But all writing is inescapably visual, and the contemporary sophistication

of advertising and graphic design has left no doubt about the power of fonts and colours, even handwritten styles, to shape the impact of a text. What happens to a poem by William Blake when, stripped of its colours and images, it appears in the Baskerville print of a cheap paperback, or can be shifted between fonts on a screen?

The use of writing, whether hard, impossible, or easy to read, is now a common feature of contemporary art. It was, in fact, the prevalence of textual material in so many of Ikon’s recent shows that prompted us to explore this theme. The notebooks, sketches, and texts scrawled on the wall of the gallery — and even its toilets — by Nedko Solakov; the postcards and dated boxes painted with such precision by On Kawara; the almost legible masking tape writings stuck with such abandon on the wall by Matias Faldbakken: as artists become increasingly free and bold in their use of materials, media, and themes, it seems that word and image, text and texture, letter and line, are coming together as never before — at least, that is, in the context of Western art and languages. Elsewhere, they have never been so far apart: Chinese script, itself composed of pictograms rather than letters in the western sense, has always been incorporated into traditional Chinese painting, and the Islamic desire to avoid representational forms has given a complexity to calligraphy which has long blurred distinction between letters and images in Arabic, Farsi, and Urdu. Artists like He An, whose Mandarin text ran across the top of a Birmingham car park, or Shahzia Sikander, with her abstract lines dovetailing into Thai and Urdu scripts, or Shuruq Harb, whose *Book of Signatures* brought Arabic into the gallery, have put some very different relations between image and text on show at Ikon too.

Those who cannot read the script, whether because of their own linguistic ignorance or the deliberate use of

illegibility by the artist, may of course miss out on swathes of meaning and affect. But such loss can also be a privilege. Scripts which are scrambled, obscured, incomplete, or simply unknown to their audience can give writing a chance to break free of the imperatives of meaning. And even at its most legible, the presence of any writing in visual art is less about communication than the decontextualisation of text, a deterritorialisation which both reduces and elevates writing to the status of drawing: a matter of taking lines for a walk.

Sadie Plant
Birmingham, 2012

The words I thought I saw

Henry Rogers

I I have pondered for some time the demand of this undertaking, how to begin this essay and whether or not it will be an essay at all. There have been many failed beginnings, many optimistic gestures filled with good intentions that have stalled directly after the first words have been written, and while the sentence with all its attending sentiments qualifies as a beginning it also simultaneously testifies to the first error, for the words I describe as written have in fact been typed. A generous reader may well regard such an error as nothing more than a momentary conflation of verbs, while another less generous in their disposition may demand that time is taken to consider the nature of this error more carefully, for it is 'in error' that what is written becomes ~~written~~.¹ Here there is clearly no easing us into the way of words for what this writing demands is that we move on as we look back, as if in a rear view mirror, scrutinising what has been left behind. This reflection takes time for what once presented itself to us, what was once in front of our eyes, is now behind us and while familiar it is also strange. Perhaps this is where words become precarious. At various points the words as they appear have not even achieved the coherence of a sentence although they occasionally muster a phrase or two which may or may not have significance. Such gestures may in themselves testify to an interesting turn of phrase, one that makes me think differently, but the demand is always a demand that there will be more, more words, more words of significance in the making of sense. After all there is surely always more to be said in the pursuit of meaning and the happiness of the meaningful. As I leave this thought that here at least lies behind the making of

sense, there also lies in art and writing a material concern, a substantial gesture a gesture brimming with possibilities. This is, shall we say, my Barthes-esque point of departure, a turn that is also a twist.

2 As I begin again to write I look around the room I am sitting in, the kitchen of my partner's Edinburgh home on the top floor of a nineteenth century tenement, a flat which according to the title deeds was once owned by the Duchess of Argyll as her 'bolthole' at the height of her notoriety. I am sitting at the kitchen table staring at the virtual page on the screen of my laptop. It is winter now and the daylight is rather pale, the sun is shallow in the sky. I was going to say I am sitting here in silence gathering my thoughts, mustering the energy to write but that would be a fabrication, a fictional meditative claim to truth which, in revealing it as such, I will now forgo. If I consider what is happening it is less a matter of gathering up my own thoughts in relationship to the thoughts of others than it is a matter that some thoughts appear to impress themselves upon me. Of course this is why these words may not form an essay, a thought which in itself fills me simultaneously with a sense of foreboding and some degree of excitement. The impressing of thought upon the subject is such a curious thing because in some sense the subject becomes but a conduit through which thoughts are channelled into form. Partly thought, partly thought out, partly thought through, partly the product of the subject's agency but not fully so. Nevertheless, what exactly are these thoughts that are impressing upon me? What am I giving myself up to? And, what does it matter if the words that take up position on the page refuse to be marshalled?

At this precise moment I can hear gulls as they scavenge in the street below while in the room I can hear the seconds pass in the two clocks on the kitchen wall, clocks chosen for

their resemblance to those used by Felix Gonzalez-Torres in his exquisite work *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*.² This homage to Gonzalez-Torres is reasonably convincing and of course the ticking of these clocks is ever so out of sync, a poignant testament to the ways in which love changes as we live our lives with one another. For the moment, for these moments, this has caught my attention for every splitting tick of these ticking clocks yields yet another wound as my thoughts are pushed towards the realisation that the gap between them is increasing. Logic tells me that this must be, that there is a slippage taking place even if it does so imperceptibly. But if I look instead of listen I can clearly see on the faces of the clocks the extent to which they have grown apart, the extent to which the passing of time is amplified, and the effect this has had on the temporality of the day. But more importantly for me is that in trying to set this scene, in trying to describe it, there immediately emerges a tension between both the act of writing, attempting to say what we see and the experience of seeing. I am writing-typing these words, I am looking at them, reading them, making sense of them, editing them, reorganising them, adding to them, back spacing, removing, punctuating and all presumably to some effect. But what is also clear is that in conflating the writing of words with the typing of words this in itself is not neutral, perhaps something else to consider.

Nevertheless, when I turn to the clocks on the wall I think I see all that they are. I see them. Perhaps this is too bold a claim, certainly philosophically so, and as such contestable for sure but I see them as part of my daily experience, I see their material quality, their surface, I experience it, and I understand their alluded to meaning, their significance. I think of Félix and Ross and then of William and me. But their time, the clocks' time, cannot be trusted for what they offer is a metaphorical engagement with time. The actual time they

attest to have an amplified duration in the sense that there is a movement from what is credibly in time as we experience it to the inevitable and significant slowing of time as the batteries run low. This and the disparity between the two lay bare the precarious and treacherous nature of time's passing and the poignancy of a love that is no longer in time. Nevertheless, the love that slips is not necessarily a love that falters but a love that deepens in the fullness of time.

3 What I am trying to get to here is the way that the lexical and the visual create certain sophisticated registers of demarcation when we encounter them as art. We are invited again and again to shift from one form of engagement to the other or rather in many instances the shifting demanded is so fleeting that we hardly notice that which is happening at all. Perhaps this is because it has become so common place in art, in its heritage and contexts so much so that we are happy to mistake its condition. Perhaps what we are dealing with here is a scenario in which the textual is somehow fraudulent somehow not what it appears to be. As that which stands in for the image or as that which is understood as image itself where visual representation is impossible or problematised.

This transports me back to a small book I first read many years ago, an essay in fact, titled, 'This is not a pipe', by Michel Foucault in which he reflects upon the work of the same title by Magritte as a means of exploring the complexity of what he describes in one section as Magritte's 'unravelling calligram'.³ For Foucault Magritte's painting is a calligram which is also tautological in that it 'aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name, to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read.'⁴ Foucault's text is an exploration of Magritte's desire to disturb traditional bonds

of language and image, in fact the text, *ceci n'est pas une pipe*, in the painting of the same name is for Foucault 'the image of text' and not as it may be mistaken as the thing [the text] in itself. The attempt, should there be one, to stabilise the various linguistic and pictorial signs is problematised in the double calligraphic operation that in this instance involves a polarisation in which a '*not yet to say*' is pitted against a '*no longer to represent*'.⁵ The viewer is caught in this calligraphic trap but as Foucault reminds us,

... the represented pipe is drawn by the same hand and with the same pen as the letters of the text: it extends the writing more than it illustrates it or fills its void. We might imagine it brimming with small, chaotic letters, graphic signs reduced to fragments and dispersed over the entire surface of the image. A figure in the shape of writing. The invisible, preliminary calligraphic operation intertwined the writing and the drawing: and when Magritte restored things to their own places, he took care that the shape would preserve the patience of writing and that the text remains always only a drawing of a representation.⁶

Foucault understands fully the 'inextricable tangle of words and images' and reminds us that, 'In a painting, words are of the same cloth as images. Rather one sees images and words differently in a painting.'⁷

Looking at the top of this virtual page, that will itself paradoxically take on a material form in this publication, I am reminded by the name of the document, Faldbakken, of the initial motivation for this paper which also provides us with a way of moving forward. Faldbakken also understands

fully the ‘inextricable tangle of words and images’ but there is arguably an equally strong concern with the idea of the word as somehow calligraphic, an emergent image, that which is somehow concerned with temporality and a dislocation of time. As such the work is somehow concerned both with memory and recollection. This turns me to the gulls again for while I have heard them, I have not actually looked out of the window. I sit here with my laptop listening. I know they are there and I feel their presence. I see them in my mind’s eye, I have a mental image of them tearing at a piece of bread, or a discarded poke of salty chips, squawking at each other, perhaps fearing that there is not enough for both of them. But why do I say both? I listen again. There seems to be two, only two voices that reverberate in the dialogical relation being forged here between unravelling thoughts. What this evokes in me is not only memory and recollection or rather the experience of remembering an experience in which images press upon me, images that are the amalgamation of all the various encounters with gulls I have had in my life thus far. From summer holidays by the coast as a child and my later fascination with Hitchcock’s film *The Birds*, to an adult life in cities for cities are sites of scavenging and very much so not only for gulls. Of course these moments, these memories, these images that press upon me may be more akin to Proust than to Foucault, more Proustian in nature, their violent involuntary pressing into thought, their almost need to ‘be thought’ — as if they themselves are somehow knowing and self aware — push and pull this writing and these chains of signification. But what is shared between these two trains of thought is that both are marked by instability in which barely formed things with little shape or identity things that cannot easily be named articulate a calligraphic cusp. We might dare to imagine here that recollection and memory also hold something comparable to a double calligraphic operation.

In the preface of his text, *Proustian Space*, Georges Poulet notes,

To the bad juxtaposition, to the intellectual space condemned by Bergson, there is opposed a good juxtaposition, an aesthetic space, where, in ordering themselves, moments and places form the work of art ...⁸

While here the ‘good juxtaposition’ may refer to aspects the work of Faldbakken we must also momentarily recall that for Proust memory is somewhat treacherous for the dislocation experienced by the subject opens the subject up to a space-time beyond the limitations and familiar territory of daily life. Daily life in Proust’s work is for Poulet a life measured by the limitations of a ‘shrunk life span’ where nothing has changed. For the subject, for their experience of memory, memory of the past manifests confusedly and therefore as Poulet suggests ‘there remains a task to be accomplished’. The task Poulet speaks of is that of ‘localisation’ for as he tells us while ‘the mind localises a remembered image in duration, it localises it in space’, to which he adds, ‘*to find again the lost place is then, if not the same thing, at least something very similar to recovering lost time*’.⁹ Arguably in this instance the expansive experience of ‘being lost’, of being involuntarily lost in a confluence of space-time leads us to the complexity of the work of Faldbakken, of the passing from ‘external perception to reminiscence, from tangible reality to imaginary space, or from objective verity to that of art’.¹⁰ It is here in this moment of writing that his work presses upon me.

4 Within the context of this publication and with regard to Faldbakken's work while I am drawn to works such as *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* (2008), the series of works such as *Untitled (MDF #6) — Aluminium electrical tape on grey MDF*, *Untitled (Canvas #18)* (2008) and *Brown Abstract #4* (2009) it is the work xxxxxxxx in particular that repeatedly demands 'to be thought', demands its presence in mind. And while there is a protracted consideration of Faldbakken's work in the *Shocked into Abstraction* catalogue that explores all of the nuanced complexity of his work I will resist repeating what has already been said.¹¹ Suffice that the interdisciplinary nature of the work presents us with a strategy 'formulated in opposition to society's norms and conventions', perhaps a response to artistic life and practice in the time of 'a post medium condition'. Interestingly though in her essay, *Critique of the World as Signature Style*, Andrea Kroksnes recounts that Faldbakken describes his work as being concerned with the 'anti' which she asserts to be 'an insistence on negativity' but the 'anti' also refers to that which is outside of something e.g. the anti-chamber, that which is outside yet somehow connected. This potentially leads us to another understanding of Faldbakken's activity, one in which the gestures, actions and performing of a practice bears witness to the nascent becoming of words. Structurally the residue of these gestures and actions, say the adhering of brown packing tape on the wall — *Brown Abstract #4* (2009) — press upon us the sense of something that is trying to achieve some form of articulation that is more than the articulation made. There is a tension in works such as *Untitled (MDF #6) — Aluminium electrical tape on grey MDF*, *Untitled (Canvas #18)* (2008) and works in which that which is articulated is in fact always on the cusp of readability, of being encountered in the dual registers of visual materiality and linguistic comprehension. When I look

at these works I find myself trying to feel them, the words [?] with my tongue, I try to mouth them, to utter some sort of form, to encourage them to become that which is recognisable, rather than to be held in the process of becoming. Of course they are in their material presence complete they articulate the cusp of the see-say [see-saw]. Perhaps this is what it means to speak the image. This would suggest that it is less a matter of fraudulence [as I perhaps mischievously suggested at the outset of this writing], of a betrayal to linguistic structure, but rather that what Faldbakken does in making such gestures is to force an articulation that remains unsettled, an articulation that is on the very edge of textual and visual comprehension.

5 Recollection is a dangerous form of seduction. In a way there is something comparable, although formally distinct, between xxxxxx and *Untitled (Book Sculpture)* (2008) [described as 'Books torn out of library shelves' and as being of variable dimensions] for in looking at the documentary photograph of the latter as installed in the Deichmanske Library, Oslo I imagine the violence of the artist tearing the books from the shelves, in my mind I imagine him enacting the work, making it happen, but the truth is that I have no access to the enactment other than that which the photographic record directs me to. The evidence is untrustworthy and the memory I have is of course false, a memory that is not my own, a memory that is second hand in a photograph, in a book, in an altogether other location. This thought makes me wary for the work of Faldbakken that 'needs to be thought' [by me] no longer exists, it is only a memory. It was made as a site specific work, for Ikon Gallery in 2009. As I write I have no photographic record of it but it seems to demand my attention, at least periodically. It was made from silver spray-paint [so I recall], it resembled the blocked in outline of some textual graffiti [so I recall],

it partially covered the windows, and window frames, the windowsill, wall and floor [so I recall]. If I close my eyes three years on I can still see it, or so I think. I try to recall it, to bring it forth. I imagine I can sense its presence, smell the paint and the feeling it evoked, its poetry and its pathos. Like the gulls it seems to be part of me, part of my thought-experience.

[Pause]

And here I am, looking at this last paragraph again for endings are as precarious as beginnings. I could of course simply direct the reader to the image that accompanies this text as a way of coming to some sort of conclusion, and if not a conclusion at the very least some credible place to leave such thoughts behind. But we may well take heed of Foucault's warning of the danger that will ensue if the experience of reader and viewer becomes conflated. For Foucault 'shape dissipates' when text speaks to the 'gazing subject', to the viewer, and conversely, we might surmise that such a simple redirection of the reader to an image, to simply reverse the subjects' positions, to request that a reader, even momentarily becomes a viewer, is to endanger that which is being read. But then again perhaps it simply leads to the words I thought I saw.

I
The strikethrough in this instance is used to place the word 'written' both visually and conceptually under erasure.

2
The work referred to here was produced by Gonzalez-Torres in 1991. As I recall it is in the pairing of such familiar mass produced objects that Gonzalez-Torres challenges the widespread call for censorship in the USA and he asserts that by not giving specific meaning to such commercially produced things, he is simply making evidence 'potential poetic associations and possibilities for personification'.

3
Michel Foucault, *This is not a pipe*, a translation of *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (Berkley University Press, 1983).

4
Ibid., p. 21.

5
Ibid., p. 25. For example, in any claim to state that 'this is a pipe' Foucault counters it with, 'This is not a pipe, but a drawing of a pipe,' 'This is not a pipe but a sentence saying that this is not a pipe,' 'The sentence "this is not a pipe" is not a pipe,' 'In the sentence "this is not a pipe", this is not a pipe: the painting, written sentence, drawing of a pipe — all this is not a pipe.' Interestingly in a sentence preceding this he seems to evoke the possibility of a stabilisation of 'a unique space' by rhythmically pushing us forward in the sentence, 'from 'painting to image, from image to text, from text to voice, a sort of imaginary pointer indicates, shows, fixes, locates ...' but this is to ignore that this calligram is also a trap.

6
Ibid., p. 23.

7
Ibid., p. 39.

8
Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*, (The John Hopkins University Press Ltd London, 1977), p. 4.

9
Ibid., p. 16.

10
Ibid., p. 21.

11
Audun Eckhoff and Jonathan Watkins, *Shocked into Abstraction*, exhibition catalogue, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; The National Museum, Oslo.

Advertising Nature: The Ecosophy of Hamish Fulton¹

Jim Mooney

Walking lies at the heart of Hamish Fulton's practice as an artist. Previously he has stated 'If I do not walk, I cannot make a work of art', has emphatically declared 'No walk, no work!' and explained that he is more interested in the experience (of walking) than the object. Fulton has also gone on record as saying he hopes the displayed work might stimulate viewers to form their own impressions from the material presented in galleries:

My art is about specific places and particular events that are not present in the gallery. The given information is very minimal. My hope is that the viewer will create a feeling, an impression in his or her own mind, based on whatever my art can provide.²

Fulton makes plain that he is 'an artist who walks not a walker who makes art'.³ This poses a dilemma for the viewer to negotiate and begs the question: To what extent can the viewer engage with or experience the walk through the work presented in the gallery? Obviously the work refers to the walk, references the walk, points to the walk, to some extent *represents* the walk, but crucially is *not* the walk. Fulton has roundly and repeatedly asserted that he is a walking artist and that the walk is the art. If we accept this statement, (and why shouldn't we?), it raises the perturbing question: What is the status of the material presented in the gallery or museum? Fulton is candid about the range of elements of the work/walk

that are not made available to the visitor to exhibitions of his work, indeed, in interviews, he offers tantalising glimpses and sensual evocations of the experiences generated by the walks; experiential dimensions necessarily missing from the gallery context. It would therefore appear that there is an acknowledged (on Fulton's part) even deliberate, wilful gap, lacuna or *béance* that is purposefully, perhaps necessarily, introduced between the work that is the walk and the visual material presented in the gallery.

GAP/Béance

In a review of Fulton's Sonnabend Gallery show for *Artforum* as far back as 1978, Hal Foster comments on the *emptiness* of Fulton's photographs and contends that they appear inadequate representations of the 'herculean' journeys undertaken by the artist. He rightly believes that the images do not follow in the tradition of English Romantics as there is: 'an absence of God, man, Fulton, imagination', and as such, they appear to be 'documents of pre-history'.⁴ This emptiness is not simply a condition of the work, but rather it serves to point out a corresponding emptiness in the viewer, highlighting, if you like, a mutual 'lack'. This mirroring of emptiness has the potential to awaken a certain kind of restlessness in the viewer, a restlessness that has the capacity to arouse and instigate the troubling, endless cycle, structure and function of desire.⁵ The acknowledgement of this gap/*béance* would appear to be fundamental in recognising the 'lack' that initiates this process of desire, in ways very similar to the techniques of commercial advertising, a process that depends on the identification of a perceived lack, a gap that will be filled through the purchase of the product being promoted. The visual material, predominantly photographs and texts introduce notions of nature into the gallery space,

a hallowed space of culture most usually located within extensive conurbations. These presentations function as a kind of aesthetic shibboleth that points to a distant place, another kind of place; the place of wild nature void of human presence. So, the gap that is made visible in the gallery context is the gap/*béance* between our contemporary cultural concerns and our relatively impoverished relationship with the natural world. In fact the French term *béance* was used by Jaques Lacan to signify various conditions but, importantly, and for my purposes here:

In the early 1950's the term comes to refer to the fundamental rupture between man and nature, which is due to the fact that 'in man the imaginary relation has deviated, in so far as that is where the gap is produced whereby death makes itself felt. The gap between man and nature is evident in the mirror stage.'⁶

A simple illustration of this gap is Lacan's assertion that human beings are 'subjects of language' and Fulton's axiomatic observation that 'There are no words in Nature'.

It is commonly recognised that a precondition of art, indeed, a defining feature is its transformative potential. A pressing question arises for the gallery goer and this is: Where is evidence of transformation to be found in Fulton's work? Clearly, for the artist/walker, the transformation lies in the walks themselves. In interviews, he talks eloquently and in praising terms about the euphoric, energising and inspiring experiences induced by the walks themselves. This is the case to such an extent that he has commented:

I like the saying ‘the best things in life are free’. But I also recognise that time is money. To put this another way, it would be interesting to make more expeditions and less exhibitions.⁷

Nevertheless, despite these qualifications, Fulton is clearly striving to establish a significant relationship between nature, the walks/works and the photographs, texts and other material presented in the gallery. In interview, he has stated:

What I’m engaged in feels extremely difficult. I don’t mean the walking — I mean, linking — art — to — walking. The bringing together of two entirely separate activities. I’m not even sure if there’s an audience for this kind of thing.⁸

In a 1999 feature article for *Art Monthly*, entitled ‘Back to the Land’ the Scottish Professor of Philosophy and champion of Fulton, John Haldane, advocates a return to landscape in art and writes that:

One of the most striking, yet largely unremarked, features of contemporary British art is its neglect of landscape.⁹

Haldane recognises the presence on the cultural scene of practitioners of what he calls ‘nature craft’, Andy Goldsworthy and Chris Drury among others. He also acknowledges David Nash and Peter Randall-Page, artists that have a greater following outside the professional art context. Tania Kovats is also cited, and although her work references landscape, Haldane rightly contends that she is indubitably more concerned with ‘urban cultural commentary’ and the

topographical models she deploys explore ‘ideas and images of utopian nature and idealised femininity’ and do not represent an interest in nature itself. Consequently, he asserts that Kovats’ position ‘confirms rather than disrupts the general pattern of neglect’ of the landscape in contemporary British art. Further into this article Haldane contrasts this situation with the interest in nature and the landscape that preoccupied certain British Avant Garde artists in the ’60s and ’70s, most notably Richard Long and Hamish Fulton. Haldane reviews an exhibition of Fulton’s work held at the Crawford Arts Centre at the University of St Andrews (the University where he teaches) and calls for a major British retrospective claiming:

Such a show might help stimulate new thinking about art and the land; it might even encourage a rising generation to rediscover or reinvent landscape art.¹⁰

In another article on Fulton, ‘Images after the fact’, written for *Modern Painters* in 1998, John Haldane endorses Fulton’s artistic principle that the walk is the artwork and that the photographs and texts that appear in galleries are not the art, nor even the representation of it, but ‘signs or pointers’ to Fulton’s experience.¹¹ He establishes a parallel between Fulton’s practice and the status of religious icons, as both are emblems of something actual.

Text/Image

Interestingly, Haldane reads Fulton’s increasing use of text over image as a corollary to Fulton’s desire to distance himself from the role of maker of images. He considers the use of text as a device to disrupt the pictorial effect of the image through overprinting with words, and that this logically leads

to a phase where images are dispensed with altogether. The words deployed in the image/text pieces are distillations of the experience of the walk, e.g., WARM DEAD BIRD. These distillations are not particularly poetic or expressive communications, rather they function as reports; condensed telegraphic reports that convey in a rather dead pan, factual manner, events that occur during the walks or details about the walks themselves, e.g., duration, location, climate. Fulton is very revealing and matter of fact about the function of the texts. He has explained that: 'The texts are facts for the walker and fiction for everyone else'. It is instructive to track the evolution of the use of text in relation to image over the trajectory of Fulton's career. In early works the text tends to run along the bottom of the image in a fairly conventional way, as titles, labels or captions or function as do the subtitles in a film, assiduously avoiding interference with the image. While supplying additional, usually factual information, the text is effectively maintained in a subordinate relation to the image. In many of these early text/image works the relationship is simply tautological a photograph of a boulder carries the word BOULDER writ large The text gradually evolves, becoming more and more equal to the image, sometimes in an affirmative way by respecting the 'topography' of the image, for example, columns of superimposed text would conform to the contours of the image, reaching the skyline of a mountain range, but not going beyond. In other works the text would run along the top and bottom of the image, still assuming a subservient role, showing considerable deference to the image. Increasingly, the text would disrupt or interfere with the visual apprehension of the image, appearing as curtains or screens of words that contest the primacy of the image. Occasionally, these words function to telescope facts and events into a kind of heterotopia redolent of the time-line pieces produced by Felix Gonzalez-

Torres in the '90s. Ultimately text would overtake and displace the image, break free from the image entirely and would stand-alone assuming enormous dimensions in the gallery space, often resembling billboards. These 'billboards' are not advertising the usual fare, but advertising nature instead. Fulton openly acknowledges and embraces this relation to the visual language and strategies of advertising:

I like advertising and design seems liberating. My real ambition here would be not to advertise cars (until the advent of fuel-cell technology) but small birds, wild flowers, clean rivers, the smell of balsam ... From contradiction comes Energy. And the Energy that is required today is Spiritual Energy.¹²

He conspicuously deploys and exploits the power of the language of advertising often inverting/subverting dominant global logos from the ubiquitous golden arches 'M' of McDonald's, turned upside down to create the letter 'W' promoting the act of walking or the rearrangement of THE NORTH FACE logo extricating the word 'art' and, in the process, advocating a geographical re-orientation:

F A C E
N O R T H
T H E

Through these playful, sleight of hand, gestures the visual language of advertising is appropriated in the service of nature, in particular wilderness nature. In this way, Fulton implicates global multinational corporations with his concerns for the environment in a non-bombastic/non-didactic manner.

Fulton's extravagant and, in some ways, radical use of text certainly fuelled detractors. Reviewing Fulton's 1993 Annelly Juda exhibition, the critic Martin Gayford states that Fulton's work 'comes perilously close to Richard Long without the (arguably) interesting bit — the stones'. Discussing Fulton's text-based wall works, he demolishes the work, asserting: 'In my opinion this stuff is not art, and certainly not literature'.¹³

Scottish Influences

Living in the Far North of Scotland as I do, my curiosity is drawn to the Scottish influences, some of them formative, some drawn from writers, historical and contemporary, and others from the many walks Fulton has made and occasionally repeated in the Scottish landscape, particularly in the Cairngorms. I appreciate the landscape of Highland Scotland in ways that are mostly unaccountable save to say that this appreciation matches that of the Highlands of Peru where I have often travelled and feel equally, strangely, at home and admit that perhaps this atavistic, attachment has something to do with pioneering environmentalist, John Muir's dictum that:

Going to the mountain is going home.¹⁴

Muir is a Scots born pioneering environmentalist, someone Fulton often cites and is but one of a remarkable range of Scottish points of reference that includes contemporary writers like Jim Crumley.¹⁵ In a 1995 interview with Richard Shiff, Fulton was asked to pinpoint determining factors that have led to his current practice, Fulton responded:

In the Summer when I was seven years old, I climbed to the top of Goat Fell, a small mountain on the island of Arran in Scotland. I remember

struggling up the path in thick cloud with my family. On reaching the top, the weather cleared and we were given an all round view. At school I could not understand anything, every subject seemed impossible. But up here on Goat Fell there were no rules — the wind blew as it pleased. I remember feeling good. Events like that sent me on the way to making the art I create today.¹⁶

Significantly, it was following a long walk of 1,022 miles that lasted 47 days undertaken in 1973, from Duncansby Head (the true most northerly point on the Scottish mainland) to Land's End, Fulton decided to 'only make art resulting from the experience of individual walks'. Fulton has made many walks in Scotland and has a particular affection for the 'Cairngorms', or Am Monadh Ruadh, meaning the red-hill range, the most extensive area of subarctic landscape in the British Isles. Before setting out on yet another walk in the Cairngorms in 2010, Fulton led a group walk in the Aberdeenshire town of Huntly. 33 people walk in single file and silence around the streets each person maintains a distance of approximately two metres from the walker in front. Importantly, Fulton claims 'the experience was meditative and communal'.¹⁷

However, for me the most interesting Scottish connection would be the consonance I perceive between the practices of Hamish Fulton and Kenneth White.¹⁸ White instituted the International Institute of Geopoetics in 1989. He coined the neologism to open up a theory-practice space intended to appeal across a wide range of disciplines and practices. There are now many centres affiliated to the institute, including the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics. There are many enticing and curious points of convergence between White and Fulton, from the long walks they make, to an interest in the work

of the seventeenth century Japanese haiku master, Matsuo Basho. Not only do they exhibit a common sensibility to the landscape and ecological issues, but they also share an evident care for wild nature that influences and determines their environmental ethics, or ecosophy.

Leave no Trace

For many years Fulton's walk/work was criticized for its apparent renunciation of the social and political. His predominantly solitary walks, (although he has made walks with Richard Long, and from time to time, has undertaken group walks) were seen as an ascetic exercises in endurance that were interpreted as forms of meditative communion with nature that largely excluded wider concerns and somehow placed his practice outside historical/political time. In a review of Fulton's 1971 show at Situation, London, Guy Brett makes the following assessment:

The images suggest to Brett 'an attitude of defence, a retreat from reality' Fulton's work is characterized with Richard Long's as being 'pervaded by the desire to immure himself in places where time slows down and stops.'¹⁹

What has emerged in recent years, given the greatly increased general understanding of environmental issues and awareness of the negative impact of global warming on nature, is that Fulton's work has assumed a new, ethical/political, relevance. Although the work skillfully avoids over simplistic or didactic propagandizing, it does seek to increase our sensitivity to the natural environment through its advocacy of wild nature, its raw power and unalloyed beauty. Throughout his career, Fulton has been influenced

by North American thinkers and environmentalists such as the pioneering Rachel Carson;²⁰ Henry Thoreau; John Muir; the poet and nature writer, Gary Snyder;²¹ Wallace Stegner's *Wilderness Letter*; and American Indian commentators such as Luther Standing Bear.²² A guiding principle that has profoundly influenced Fulton's way of relating to the landscape is the North American Indian ethic of 'Leave no trace'. This explains, in part, Fulton's reluctance, unlike Richard Long, to create and leave behind scars, patterns or other artistic traces or interventions on the land. Indeed, his work represents a symbolic gesture of respect for nature. In endeavouring to share his deeply respectful relationship to nature, the exhibitions of work serve to intensify our interest in the natural environment. Once again, John Haldane writes:

Long's works 'are not landscape constructions brought indoors, but indoor pieces to be appreciated for the further connections they make between man and nature.'²³

In these 'further connections' made 'between man and nature', we find Fulton striving to reduce the gap/*béance* that his work helpfully brings to our attention, the gap that perilously exists between contemporary man and nature. His gallery presentations serve to highlight the potential for a productive recognition of the imbrication of art and nature. In this important way, his practice promotes or advertises the interests and rights of nature and the ethical demand of our relation and responsibility to the natural world. These are matters that stir and implicate the development of an ecological consciousness, matters we ought to bear in mind in our 'concernful dealings' with the natural world, matters of increasingly pressing contemporary urgency.

1
The term 'ecosophy' was coined from the merging of the words 'ecology' and 'philosophy' by the Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer Arne Naess, who also gave the world deep ecology. 'Shallow ecology, he believed, meant thinking the big ecological problems could be resolved within industrial capitalist society.' Obituary: Walter Schwarz', *The Guardian*, 15 January 2009, p. 49.

2
Notes from Hamish Fulton, *Walking Journey* pamphlet accompanying Tate Britain exhibition 14 March to 4 June 2002.

3
Mountain Time Human Time, commissioned by Deveron Arts, Edizioni Charta, Milano, 2010, p. 39.

4
Hal Foster, 'Hamish Fulton', *Artforum*, February 1978, pp. 67–68.

5
For a fuller exploration of this theme see Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image*, Routledge, London, 1996.

6
Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p. 71.

7
'Specific places and particular events', Hamish Fulton interviewed by Ben Tufnell, *Walking Journey*, Tate Gallery catalogue, 2002, p. 110.

8
Hamish Fulton, *Mountain Time Human Time*, p. 39.

9
John Haldane, 'Back to the Land', *Art Monthly* #227, 1999, p. 7.

10
Ibid. p. 10.

11
John Haldane, 'Images After the Fact', *Modern Painters*, volume 11 #3, Autumn 1998, pp. 92–95.

12
John K. Grande, *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2004, p. 138.

13
Martin Gayford, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1993, cited in *Walking Journey*, p. 123.

14
John Muir, born Dunbar, Scotland, 1838. Fulton talks of Muir as follows: 'John Muir (1838–1914 travelled widely in the US and wrote extensively and polemically on the subject of wilderness. He was one of the first to put forward the idea of National Parks. Reading his work today, much of what he said is so inspiring, but is also very disturbing because so much has changed since the time of his writing'. Interview with Ben Tufnell, *Walking Journey*, Tate Gallery catalogue, 2002, p. 106.

15
Jim Crumley, author of *The Last Wolf* and *A High and Lonely Place* and contributor to *Mountain Time Human Time* with the essay commissioned by Fulton, 'The Thing To Be Known'.

16
Interview with Richard Shiff, *Art in the Landscape*, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, 2000, p. 130.

17
Mountain Time Human Time, walk equi-spaced in silence round and round, clockwise for two hours, Saturday 17 April 2010, p. 43.

18
Kenneth White is a highly acclaimed Scottish born world-renowned poet, writer, Sorbonne Professor of Poetics and self-declared citizen of the world.

19
Guy Brett, 'Hamish Fulton's Optical Equations', *Times*, 15 June, 1971. Cited in the catalogue for Fulton's Tate Gallery exhibition *Walking Journey* in 2002.

20
In *Silent Spring*, 1962, Rachel Carson charts the effect of insecticides and pesticides on songbird populations in the USA between 1958 and 1962.

21
Gary Snyder is a US poet and nature writer whose lifetime's work has been responsible for the promotion of an ecological consciousness.

22
In 1962 Fulton reads and is inspired by works on American Indians including *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933) by Luther Standing Bear.

23
John Haldane, 'An Uncertain Criticism', letters page, *Modern Painters*, volume 11, Autumn 1998, p. 128.

Collisions, Slippages and Getting Lost

Jacqueline Taylor

I remember quite clearly when I first saw Clare Rojas' exhibition, *We They, We They*, at Ikon Gallery just over two years ago and the experience remains vivid to this day. The exhibition consisted of work shown in all three spaces of the first floor gallery, a selection of work shown in the Tower Room and a performance by Rojas' folk singer alter-ego, Peggy Honeywell on the opening night. The writing presented here is an account of my experience. It is a descriptive response to the exhibition which elucidates and celebrates ideas explored by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva in what has been described by others as *l'écriture féminine*; a practice of writing that sought to re-think phallogocentric structures in language and find an alternative space for marginalized subjectivities. Arguably in its examination of notions of femininity, gender and sexuality, Rojas' work explores a visual language for women which challenge stereotypical representations of the sexes. The process of writing itself has reflexively generated further meanings and in doing so has allowed me to identify particular elements of the work as being analogous to *l'écriture féminine* and as such capable of subverting dominant structures in the Western art-historical canon.

Collisions: on the tongue of an elderly woman

As I entered the first gallery space I was met with an abundance of colours, shapes, patterns and figures. At first, I was not quite sure how I felt at all and then *boom* it hit me so quickly and unexpectedly that it took me a few minutes to compose myself. I stood still and looked around. I was subsumed by a spatiality of painterliness. Paintings on a mass of wooden

panels had been over-painted and cut-up, re-used and re-worked to fit the architecture of the space. They had been pieced together directly onto the walls, transformed from individual painting-objects to a painting-installation which covered the entire walls of the space. It seemed to be made in a constant state of becoming, where the installation had evolved and unfolded performatively through the patching together of different paintings to create the large patchwork quilt walls that surrounded me. This process of becoming implied a space of transformations and transitions in which meanings were shaped through the practice of making. It was not just a journey towards a state of being, but the movement of being and appeared to be in a continual state of unfinishedness and flux; a *swelling* that challenged the limits of a singular and fixed patriarchal logic (Irigaray, 1985:229).

I realised that I was within a narrative; within a space of collisions where different materialities had collided to create a new material space. This gathering of multiple materialities reflected a sense of intertextuality, in which different systems of signs had been transposed onto one another to produce meaning (Kristeva, 1993:112). The different signifying systems in Rojas' work were not static or complete but plural and shifting. They collided and overlapped to create a complex interrelation between processes of making and the engagement with the paint itself, one that I had to navigate my way through.

I walked up to one of the walls and examined it closely. It enticed me. It said, 'touch me and run your fingers across my skin!' I wanted to, I really did. But, there was somebody else wandering around the space. Maybe later I told myself. After all, my transgressing fingers had touched Picassos, Twomblys, Miros and even Giacomettis. I wanted them to touch a Rojas too, but the black figure of the invigilator moved through the space with me as if his movements were mine.

And then, I noticed that he had turned away from me and for a fleeting moment I brushed the side of my hand across the wall. I smiled because I had encountered the materiality and physicality of the work; the smooth layers of paint and the hardness of the wooden surface, a momentary pleasurable experience or *jouissance* perhaps.¹

I stepped back and looked at the wall. I noticed that there were seams within the paintings where the edges of the wooden panels met one another, subtle fissures and schisms that broke up the surface of the wall and made it stutter. These webs of cracks were borderlines between different materialities: a subtle matrix of breaks layered across and overlapping the gathering of different painterly narratives. This patching together of multiple paintings seemed to transcend the normative structures of painting and challenge the very limits of painting itself. The work appeared to exist on the peripheries of different visual languages, referencing folk art, graffiti, Modernism and domestic crafts such as quilt-making which created slight collisions that altered meaning in a productive mimesis (Robinson, 2005:39). It was a space of encounter between and moving across borderlines, displacing limits and oppositions.

It wasn't possible to view all of the painting-installation in one go, for it surrounded me. Instead, I had to physically move through the space and navigate my way through the work, peering high up above me and down towards the floor, twisting to look behind me and to the sides. It was almost as if I was dancing. This was a space in which the painterly occupied my peripheries, stretching right into the margins of my sight. However, when I moved to look at these margins, they shifted, becoming something else.

The different pictorial narratives merged and blurred creating subtle slippages and ruptures. There were no

beginnings and there were no ends just a continuous circularity that created turbulences which disturbed and excited itself as it ceaselessly became and came undone (Lomax, 2005:12). Points of meaning were spun out through whirlwinds that transgressed and confused any linearity of reading. These whirlwinds were sites of resistance not fully compatible with the ruling Symbolic and had the potential to fracture and disrupt and phallographic order (Irigaray, 1985:106).

Fantastical figures and creatures were scattered across these surfaces in a multitude of interior and exterior landscapes that had been patched together; an intertextual collage of different scenes merging and shifting endlessly within the space. Stories within stories interweaved, overlapped and intersected with each other. The multiplicity of different narratives in the work enabled ideas to be re-worked and repeated in multiple forms, re-defining and re-thinking language to create new ways of working and creating meaning. This multiplicity had the possibility to un-think the unifying and regulating homogenous authority of Western discourse (Cixous, 1976:882).

I turned and looked at one end of the space. Figures sat alone in stark domestic interiors framed by brightly coloured patterns. They morphed with the architectural forms that surrounded them into abstract conglomerations of pattern. The figures represented in the work were predominantly women, re-presenting the female body as an active subject and disrupting traditional representations of women as passive objects of pleasure. These female figures looked tired and weary and seemed to have a sense of strangeness to them, one that alluded to traces of histories and a darker otherworldliness. The paths of some of these figures crossed each other in strange and imaginary scenes; small bearded

beings slowly marched along the elongated and erect tongue of an elderly woman and into her mouth, while bizarre and mythical monkey-like creatures met a lonely female figure crossing a bridge. And, three women stood together holding hands whilst black and red fluids surged out of their mouths and out of their eyes, bleeding upwards towards the sky.

Intense bright and rich colours interweaved these figures and the spaces they inhabited. They appeared throughout the space in sections of bold and abstract patterns, punctuated by blocks of solitary bright colours in-between. The colours and shapes contrasted vividly with each other in an eclectic and dazzling assemblage and grabbed my attention. They tantalized me, luring me towards their surface. These shapes and patterns were interspersed with smaller areas that were tightly packed with more intricate patterns, patched together in a rather seducing fashion. They appeared to be contained within sections of the work but looked as if they wanted to overflow their boundaries, seeping and trickling into the figures that lived between them.

Slippages: a jumble of little eyes

I walked out of this space and into an adjoining room. There was a bench in the centre, so, I sat down. I took a moment to consider this space; it seemed to be a pause, or, a space within the overall narrative of the work in the between of stories, characters and processes of making. These moments of in-betweenness seemed to create subtle shifts which opened up spaces for manoeuvring and re-positioning. There was a long rectangular painting in front of me, almost stretching the whole length of the gallery wall. It was the only piece of work in the space, framed by the blankness of the other walls and of what was not there. At first I felt disorientated and then I realized that I was within a sort of shift, an experiential

slippage from being within Rojas's work to being in front of it and that I had encountered the work in a different way.

The painting contained a great *mélange* of colours and patterns juxtaposed tightly together. At one end of the piece they were arranged in small triangular sections that neatly fitted together like a grid and gradually merged into a strange gathering of overlapping circles becoming something other. The abstract mass of shapes and colours appeared to be contained within the edges of the piece: within a borderline. But, as I got up and looked more closely, I saw that in fact it contained a multitude of borderlines. The painting had been constructed from a huge mass of triangular and circular shaped pieces of wood, directly placed onto the wall; growing and evolving through the process of making. Small segments of paintings had been slotted and fitted together like a jigsaw; cut-up, mixed together and then re-assembled, piece by piece. The edges of these different shapes had been gathered together in a multiplicity of edges to form the perimeter of the painting. This perimeter was not straight; there were deviations and detours where part of the painting had been constructed around a large beam that protruded out of the centre of the wall, but also where the edges of the individual segments of paintings collided and overlapped.

Snippets of scenes had been fitted together in this intertextual process of patching; little faces curiously peered over the edge of strange pink and blue striped amorphous forms and little bits of foliage seemed to grow out of odd displaced shapes that were juxtaposed together. The work appeared to be positioned on the borderline between abstraction and figuration through the patching together of multiple sections in which only parts of figures were represented. They seemed to fracture dominant modes of specularization and referred to a sense of otherness. The vast maze of abstract shapes and

colours was mediated with bits of bodies and creatures and traces of what was once representable. It was a magnificent jumble of little eyes and feet and leaves and other peculiar things scattered throughout the abstract shapes. They appeared in such abundance that they seemed to try to resist the uneven and deviating edges and overflow it in a fanciful and rampant excess. The excessive multiplicity and layering of different elements of the work seemed to threaten to overflow its own limits. It alluded to a sense of *jouissance* which tried to explode and exceed itself to disorientate and move beyond fixity and to create an economy of transformation. I peered inside this strange window of making and realized that I was searching, for fragments of characters and stories and for a way to navigate my journey through this complex inter-materiality.

Getting Lost: strange beings appeared and reappeared
I looked to my right, through a large archway and walked into a large space where I was met with an abundance of small painted works. They were hung on all of the walls of the space, at exactly the same height underneath a rather strange black strip of wood. The space was particularly large and I felt particularly small as I stood in the centre of the room and looked at the work which seemed so far away from me. I scanned the space and was drawn to different brightly coloured backgrounds: pinks, blues, reds and hues which contrasted excitedly with each other. I caught glimpses of different spaces and the figures, trees, birds and other curious forms that were framed within them. They invited me closer and I wanted to see them.

I moved closer towards the work and towards the individual frames of materiality that invited me to explore them. As I moved closer I realized there was a row of evenly spaced black wooden pegs attached to the strip of wood. And,

each of the paintings were hung off one of the pegs; suspended by a transparent piece of wire. It looked like a long washing line of little painting-pieces, each one dangling and waiting to be encountered. Each of the paintings tilted slightly forward from the wall. Spread around the space were different nuances of shadows overlapping with the work, reflected off the painting-pieces themselves and also off the transparent wires that held them there: small stutters that fluttered within the space as the light changed.

The paintings were punctuated by different sized gaps in-between them. Some were grouped closely together and others sat on their own. Each of the paintings was slightly different in size and hung both portrait and landscape across the space. Although they were hung in a line, they were not linear at all as the bottom of the paintings formed an uneven line around the space which itself was made up of little breaks and gaps and deviations. The multiple layering and overlapping of different elements in Rojas' work was mediated by spaces and breaks. These gaps appeared within the paintings themselves as well as the physical spaces between different pieces of work and between the different gallery spaces.

I instinctively navigated my way around the space, scanning each of the individual painting-pieces in the same way that I would read a sentence of words on a page. These smaller pieces of work contained within them a large volume of detail; each piece possessing an illustrative painterly construction of intricate fine lines. As I got accustomed to this space, I found myself within another shift: one in which I had to peer closely inside each of the individual works only to do so in order to read them in relation to the other pieces in the space. As I moved closer and further to the different paintings and my proximity to them altered, new spaces of positioning opened up and I encountered the work differently.

The paintings were like large book pages, each with a story of its own but possessing a profound sense of interconnectedness that linked them together within a larger narrative space. I climbed inside the pages and travelled within and across them encountering groups of people and faces interspersed with spaces, patterns and colours and scenes from fabled and mysterious landscapes. The paintings were contained within the borders of their frames but there were borders within the borders within these borders where the edges of the paper sat within the wooden frame and a white frame of blankness sat within the edges of the paper. For a moment, as I wandered through this forest of painterliness, the strangeness of it all began to overwhelm me and I felt lost.

As I came to the far end of the space I discovered that there was a cluster of unframed paintings that were painted on varying thicknesses of wood. And, rather than being organized in a row they were hung beneath one another and next to one another like a large notice board of paintings. These paintings appeared brighter and more vivid than those that were framed. They seemed to possess a different sense of physicality and materiality; one that reflected the constant layering of paint in the process of making and how the paint itself had moved around on the surface of the boards. The paint had a great sense of fluidity and seemed to grow outwards towards the rough unpainted edges of the boards; blurring the boundaries of the different paintings and overlapping each other. This mobility and fluidity seemed to refer to an 'other', always in flux and never congealing or solidifying, but flowing without fixed boundaries to challenge the rigidity of phallogocentric socio-cultural thought (Irigaray, 1985: 107).

Strange beings appeared and reappeared throughout the work in this space, in the same way that they had

throughout the exhibition. A multiplicity of characters and stories were interwoven together; reflecting the winding and interlinking spaces of the gallery itself. My register of reading had continuously shifted throughout the exhibition and meaning had evolved and mutated; being re-shaped as I had encountered different elements of the work and made interconnections between them.

My encounter had taken the form of a non-linear wandering in which I had navigated my way through the work and allowed meaning to emerge, but this meaning had also shaped my own encounter. I had embraced getting lost within the work and the unanticipated detours, collisions and slippages that opened up new spaces and ways of reading; movement had been grasped precisely by letting it slip through my fingers (Lomax, 2005:3). As I stood in this space, I was suddenly aware of the complexity of these multi-layered encounters and of the interconnection of makingness, materiality and all of the spaces in-between. The practice of textuality explored by *l'écriture féminine* and the process of writing about my encounter seemed to have revealed a sophisticated layering of subversive gestures that not only rethought a visual language that challenged phallocentrism but the discourse of painting itself.

¹
Jouissance cannot be fully translated into English. It can loosely be defined as 'bliss' or 'pleasure' and also translates as 'orgasm', connoting sexual pleasure. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, *jouissance* is an essentially phallic and masculine function, however there is also a 'feminine' *jouissance* which only exists as a repressed state as the pleasure of the 'Other'. Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva's explore the articulation of this 'Other' *jouissance* through the practice of *l'écriture féminine*.

Penone's Writings

Jonathan Watkins

I sometimes write things because the work is always a result of a reflection. Mine is therefore an annotation that directs the reading of the work. Sometimes I try to write the reasons why I make a work, not because I want to explain it but in order to create associations of ideas and images resulting in elements to meditate on, develop and better resolve the work itself ...

I use words as part of a reflection that ultimately takes on a different independent value. It arises with the work, sometimes in a work that has already been made. Sometimes it precedes it, even by many years.

Giuseppe Penone, 2008

Giuseppe Penone has been writing poetic texts since he came to light as an artist. Thousands and thousands of words, carefully chosen and put down in elegant sequences, correspond to an extraordinary output of sculptures, drawings, installations, actions and interventions, dating from the late 1960s and ongoing. Usually a kind of free verse, sometimes descriptive, always philosophical, the writings vary in length from a few lines to more expansive articulations. They certainly provide some keys to our understanding of what Penone does, but they are not literary interpretations of a more elliptical visual art; rather they are manifestations of the same set of fundamental propositions. The writings should be considered separately and, at the same time, as being integral to the artist's work overall.

How to account for Penone's writing, his use of writing as a medium as much as for its content, given the essentialist nature of his aesthetic? For an artist who goes with the grain of his material, who resists representation of invented visions, the resort to written words is especially interesting. Penone does not leave his works of art to speak for themselves. This is because, like all works of art, they are dumb, having nothing to say, without an interlocutor. Any dynamic, artistic quality — any quality at all, as stringent scepticism would have it — is derived from their relation to human experience, from what we bring to them. Works of art cannot do anything 'for themselves'. In this respect the activity of the viewer resembles that of the artist, embracing an entity that is otherwise not only dumb, but, according to Penone, also blind and completely self-contained. A text from 1970 is very eloquent on this point:

Through his actions, the sculptor enwraps a
sculpture but when he stops,
When the sculptor's body is no longer the tool but
becomes passive, inert, immobile,
His volume and action, the tools and the
surrounding world are defined.
The closed, sightless, body is defined in space.
And becomes sculpture

When we close our eyes, our contact with the
world is limited to the wrapping of our body.
With them open, the identity of our wrapping
arrives as far as we can see.

Rovesciare I propri occhi (translated *Reverse Your Eyes*),
an art work from the same year, exemplifies these thoughts. It

involves successive photographic slide projections that feature the artist, standing on a tree-lined road, increasingly close-up until the details of his face are clear. We see closer and closer (until we could touch him), his eyes covered with mirrored contact lenses, reflecting the landscape and photographer, counteracting the vector of our gaze — the sensitive corneal surfaces cease to be like windows and become instead convex screens for an image of what exists beyond, 'as far as the eye can see'. Penone presumably is sightless, wrapped up in his body, and we see instead (in reverse) what would be visible for him in normal circumstances.

Sensory perception opens us up to a universe centred on us, necessarily from our point of view. This is not to say that there is no real world, with trees, hills and sky, that could be independent of us, but we can only know that which gets through to our nervous systems in very limited bands of electro-magnetic energy. Penone's writing, like his art work, is a response, not only to that which lies outside of himself, but also to his self-perception, to his being and his behaviour in the world. It is to a large extent reflexive — comprising observations rather than made-up stories — and takes in his artistic activity and thus immediately raises questions as to where the line is drawn between what is man-made and what is natural. With extraordinary rigour Penone observes himself, as a naturalist observes an animal, as his art work aspires to a direct (often 1:1) relationship with its subject matter.

Penone's writing is as analytical as it is poetic. An implication of this stylistic balance is that our world/universe is wonderful enough, and that there is no need for it to be enhanced by any ideas of the divine or transcendental reality. It is more a question of us looking closer and closer at 'everything that surrounds' (zooming in a là *Rovesciare I propri occhi*), and Penone's texts, like his art work, are a means

to that end. There is a meticulousness, a deliberateness that characterises the writing, suggesting a winnowing process whereby the most exact thoughts remain, and we are thus encouraged to engage.

In 1968 Penone devised an action that involved him grasping a tree trunk. The resulting photograph is beautiful, the verticality of the trunk meeting the horizontal line of his arm and hand, as the profile of his serious face occurs above in the top right corner. An image that speaks very much of engagement, it is coupled with a text that is nicely succinct:

The tree, once it loses and consumes every emotional, formal and cultural significance, becomes an expansive element which is full of vitality, which proliferates and grows continuously. To its 'strength' has been added another 'strength': mine. Its reaction is the work.

Subsequently Penone fixed a metallic (steel) cast of his hand in the same place on the tree trunk and left it there. He photographed it ten years later to reveal the weird graft, the thick scar caused by the accommodation of a foreign body, a disclosure of the result of one strength added to another.

Penone's grasp of the trunk could not be more straightforward, more seminal, given his subsequent preoccupation with trees and skin, the latter being the crucial boundary between ourselves and everything else that exists materially. It is, we are often told, the largest organ of the human body, the final frontier where impingement occurs, to and fro, as we navigate our way through the world. Two years later Penone spelt it out:

The skin is a boundary, a border or dividing point, the last point to be able to add, subtract, multiply, cancel everything around us, the last point, container and contained, able to envelop physically vast areas.

Mobility enables man to contain a large quantity of things with his skin in different, continuous periods with contact, impression, consciousness, discovery, grasp, repulsion ... actions which are a continuous development or unrolling of one's skin against other things or on itself.

Around the same time, he conjured up the idea of unrolling skin against 'air, water, earth, rock, walls, trees, dogs, handrails, windows, roads, hair, hats, handles, wings, doors, seats, stairs, clothes, books, eyes, sheep, mushrooms, grass, skin, eyes, sheep, mushrooms, grass, skin ...', a poignant, idiosyncratic combination of natural and man-made things. 'Unrolling' is a kind of mobility that defines us as being equally part of the material world, as the points of feeling on our skin constantly change. We thus get a sense of volume, the real, that applies to us too. Such transaction between a human body and its environment is complicated by the fact that our skin secretes fluid. In an early text, Penone refers to this as 'grease', an organic layer that we leave behind us having touched various objects as we go about our daily business: '... handrails, supports in trams, windows set in doors, / jacket cuffs, armrests, banisters, handles, tables, cushion covers, cutlery ...' and so on. It 'indicates an itinerary, the use, the property, territory, identification, / self-depiction and depiction of one's physical position in the surroundings'.

Penone's forensic inventory of surfaces smeared with human traces is typical, indicative of his close attention to

detail. It conveys the idea we are animals, sophisticated animals maybe, but still animals. Again, rather than diminishing our nature he is asserting that we are inextricably woven into a complex web of (wonderful) life on earth. We are the naked apes.

Many of Penone's art works made during the 1970s involve impressions of his skin, as if it was some kind of printing plate. Magnified images of eyelids then start to become prevalent, their map-like configurations of criss-crossing folds and wrinkles being the basis for large drawings: '... the thicknesses, the furrows and bumps become decipherable as though an infinite quantity of invisible pins were concentrated upon the skin drawn protectively over the eye' (1975). This is the obverse what happens when we close our eyes, when 'our contact with the world is limited to the wrapping of our body'. It is what others would see if looking at our eyes closed, a kind of dermatic topography that corresponds to the actual landscape that is our natural habitat, the kind of landscape that is reflected in the contact lenses of *Rovesciare I propri occhi*.

Eighteen years later Penone emphatically reiterated the idea of closed eyelids, and dwelt further on its implications.

Eyelids closed, the exact definition of the limits and space

Of thought reflect the notion of one's body in space.

Eyelids closed, a definition of the fullness of a sculpture as opposed to the emptiness of seeing

Eyelids closed, cerebral hemisphere, the matter of thought.

Eyelids closed, isolation, isles of seeing.

Eyelids closed, definition of the subsoil, journey through the subsoil, sediment of dust.

Eyelids closed, annotation of space.

Eyelids closed, totality of space.

Eyelids closed, necessary of art.

In the same text Penone also considers the possibility of 'seeing through closed eyelids'. In this vein, a number of his works from the mid-1990s conflate a silhouetted human figure with the carefully plotted lines of eyelids. On paper, suspended from the ceiling, very appropriately they are like translucent curtains and clearly make more allusions to *Rovesciare I propri occhi*, specifically its reflections of the photographer in the landscape.

There are images that occur to us when our eyes are closed. For these, in 1976, Penone envisaged the brain as a kind of cinema:

The condition of dreaming is blindness. One can imagine better with one's eyes closed. Light invades the mind. With eyes open, one absorbs light. With the eyes closed, images from one's mind are projected onto the vault of the cranium, on the wrapping which surrounds us, on the inside of our skin which becomes a border, a division, a definition of the body and a container of our thoughts. The wrapping is important as it is the definition of the individual.

In a later text (1989), corresponding to work involving the casting of a skull, the artist describes the inner surface of the human cranium. It is something that the brain, bursting with neurones, cannot apprehend through its proximity. In order to properly investigate this part of our skeleton 'one must touch it with the hands and see it with one's eyes'. Then we find ourselves in a landscape with 'valleys,

riverbeds, mountains, plains; / a relief map similar to the earth's crust. We possess the landscape which surrounds us with this protective box. It is the landscape within which we think. / It is the landscape which envelopes us.' Through characteristically close scrutiny — 'drawn point by point' — Penone encounters shapes inside our heads that bear strong resemblance to phenomena outside, in landscape, conveyed by sensory perception and then registered by the brain. This is especially significant for an artist constantly drawing our attention to recurring patterns in the natural world, arising from a pervasive obedience to natural laws, governing our corporeality as part of an overall scheme of things.

In 1978 Penone observed that 'Similar processes produce similar contents and forms in matter. / Roads, rivers, trees, hands.' As the cranium resembles landscape, so the veins in marble resemble our circulatory system and so much more

Veins of stone
Pressure in the veins of stone.
The sound of the currents of the sea.
The sea is a sound, the currents of the sea
Are like veins of stone, the skin of the sea is the skin
of marble.
Thought in the mountain peak [...]

The spirals of the waves, of the currents, are like the
meanders
of our intestines, the flow of our liquids.

Five hundred years previously, Leonardo was drawing similar analogies between the movement of water and that of fluids within the human body, between various phenomena in the natural world that might at first glance seem disparate.

His notes, for example, on the resemblance between water turbulence and curls of hair are extraordinary for the leaps of imagination they involve: '[The hair] has two motions — one depends on the weight of the hair, the other on the direction of the curls; thus the water forms whirling eddies, one part following the impetus of the chief current, and the other following the incidental motion and return flow.' Penone, on the whole, is more metaphorical in his writing — dreaming, in a more modern, self-conscious way — but, like Leonardo, he is starting from a position of actual, closely examined experience.

The spiral, embodying a lively combination of energies, is the exclusive subject of an early text by Penone. Lyrically he describes its pervasiveness, its countless manifestations in nature.

The spiralling of the wind,
the spiralling of water draining away, the spiralling
of the sun,
the spiralling of the snake, the spiralling of the
volcano,
the spiralling of a growing plant, the spiralling
of the bolt of lightning which wraps itself in the
spiralling of the tree.

In the same year, 1968, in a procedure very similar to that involving the cast hand, Penone wound galvanised wire tightly around the trunk of a living tree in an upwards spiral, photographed it and then left it. The photograph ten years later shows the wire grown over by the bark in a raised wound 'wound', faithfully following the spiral pattern. There are other works from this time concerned with the incremental growth of trees — also over numbers on metal wedges,

delineated human shapes and so on — that bring home the message of mortality, of time moving on inexorably, but the spiral wire piece is distinct for its abstract epitome of life as we know it. The twist is an expansive, all-embracing line.

Penone's use of photography with trees is important, not just for its provision of documentary evidence — the images made before and after a reaction to his invasive gestures — but also because of the nature of the sensitivity of this medium. The artist is working with living organisms, constantly registering their exposure to environmental conditions. Their skin, their bark, reacts to the changing seasons. The growth and orientation of their trunks and branches are determined by the direction of light — the ultimate cause of Penone's sculptures made through an activity that follows growth rings in sawn lengths of timber — to the extent that the artist refers to a tree, in a text written in 1974, as 'a sculpture of light, / a photograph in three dimensions'. 'It recalls the north planted in its body, / recalls the shadow of those who come close.'

Penone draws our attention to the remarkable fact that trees are 'moulded' by something as fugitive as light. Ethereal substances in the composition of air similarly are sustaining, and necessary for growth, and breathing is something we share with trees, albeit in a reverse cycle between oxygen and carbon dioxide. Thus it is no coincidence that our lungs resemble the shape of trees, with trachea, bronchi and bronchioles succeeding each other in a progressively fine configuration. In an early text, 1968, the artist describes his experience in the midst of trees:

I feel the forest breathing
And hear the slow, inexorable growth of wood;
I match my breathing to that of the green world
around me ...

Nine years later he made a series of photographs that captured the condensation of his breaths in a forest. In each we see a kind of ectoplasmic cloud hanging in the air, the exhalation of a figure just departed from the scene, leaving behind some more carbon dioxide for the trees to thrive on.

It is the foliage that breathes, and so in another work Penone chooses to make an impression on a pile of dry autumn leaves with his breath, *Soffio di fogile* (*Breath of Leaves*, 1979), also bears the imprint of the artist's prostrate body, a concavity conveying the idea that this human being succumbed also to the gravity that caused the leaves to fall. But he was still alive, obviously, breathing:

One must first of all safeguard the wild forest where
the breath
is enclosed in the leaves in a continuous flow before
the thrust
of the wind's logic, leaves which aim to occupy the
hollows of calm, privileged
negatives of the moving form which in its
repetition tends to sculpt itself.
Closed eyelids — a torpid body — they lie down on
the ancient bed;
the nape drowns in the leaves and with mouth open,
the breath sinks in the heap of leaves. Passed over
by the breath, they produce a sound ...

Penone's work is informed by a kind of comparative anatomy that takes in both the animate and inanimate worlds. It deals in likenesses, especially between the human body and natural phenomena, and this tendency is extrapolated into the processes that result finally in artistic expression. The use of photography is conceptually neat, to say the least. Leaves

are a perfect material for tracing the movement of a breath. The tautological act of woodcarving to create a sculpture of the tree that a length of timber once was is a stroke of genius. It is not surprising then that methods of printing and casting, whereby the subject and art object fit like hand in glove — indexically, so to speak — appeal greatly to Penone. In 1980, he explained how bronze casting couldn't be more appropriate, given his interests and philosophical stance:

Bronze casting is an ancient art which has its roots in an animistic conception of reality, The similarities between bronze and plant-life are astonishing and most assuredly have had great importance in the development of the technique of casting. Even today, rods are used to spread the molten metal in different parts of the mould. Bronze is the ideal material for fossilising plant-life. In bronze, plant-life preserves all of its appearance and, if placed in the open, it reacts with the climate, oxidising and thus taking on the same colours as the plants which surround it. Its patina is the synthesis of the landscape.

Since the 1980s, Penone has been casting trees, or parts of trees, in bronze. Another text, written in 2000, describes in more detail the movement of molten bronze through a cast, filling voids by pushing air out through vents. Traditionally, the rods used to make the vents are bits of reeds or tree branches, thus reinforcing the artist's conclusion that 'bronze testifies to the profound tie that exists between its cast and the growth of vegetation'.

By stressing such a likeness between his subject and his means of representation, Penone raises intriguing questions concerning his motivation. Why make bronze trees, or parts of trees, cast from the real thing that acquire a tree-like colour? Why locate a bronze tree in a landscape so that at first glance it is confused with everything that surrounds? An answer is found in the writing, when the artist refers to fossilising plant-life. The bronze tree is still-born, will never grow, will never sprout leaves and breathe, while the life-cycle for its growing, breathing counterparts goes on until they die and disintegrate. The sculpture is another kind of three-dimensional photograph, a snap-shot of the way a tree once was, like the petrified remains of Herculaneum.

A bronze tree stands in a forest and is distinct, formally, for the small changes that the artist makes, as well as for its enduring bronze-ness. Its likeness to the real world points outwards, encouraging us to look more closely at Penone's sources of inspiration, making us think twice about resorting to art. There are a number of his works entitled *Essere fiume* (*Being a River*, 1981–1995), that are the logical conclusion of such an interrogation of the world, radically unpretentious. For each, using mechanical masonry equipment, the artist sculpts a piece of rock quarried from a mountain to duplicate a river stone found below, meticulously reproducing the smooth contours that manifest thousands of years of water erosion. When finished he exhibits this sculpture alongside its subject, like an identical twin. Without plinths or any other enhancing device, the stones sit on the floor seemingly in an attitude of no-nonsense.

The text corresponding to *Essere fiume*, written in 1980, is likewise straightforward, but also it articulates some profound truths arising from contemplation of the processes that delivered the stones. Above everything, it conveys the

difference made by imaginative engagement. Penone describes the course of a river from the mountains, where it is youthful with 'clean, polished, hard teeth', until it arrives at a lazy old age, where 'ever more rounded and smoothed stones give way to the gravel, sand and fertile muds of the delta':

The river transports the mountain and is the vehicle of the mountain. The blows and buffets to the largest rocks and violent changes caused by the river to them by the smallest stones and the sliding of water into thin cracks detach pieces of rock and hew out a form which a continuous working with small and hard blows, grinding with sand, sharp collisions, the slow squeezing of great pressure ...

According to the artist, the sculpting of the second stone is an accelerated equivalent of the river's action.

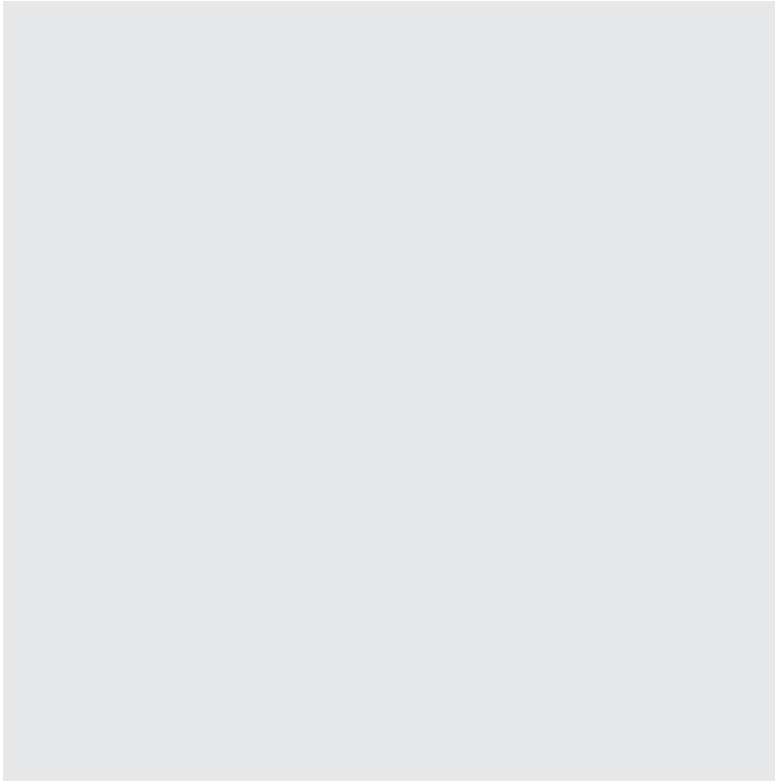
It is not possible to think of stone or work it in a manner which differs from that of the river. The blows of the chisel, the scoop, the gradine, the drill, abrasive stones and sandpaper are tools of the river.

He then considers the implications of the process of the sculpting of the second stone.

To extract a stone sculpted by the river, to travel upstream and discover the exact point from which the stone came and extract another piece of rock from the mountain and duplicate exactly the stone taken from the river is to be the river; producing a stone of stone is perfect sculpture, it re-enters nature and its cosmic heritage, a pure creation; the

naturalness of the good sculpture imparts a cosmic value to it.

Essere fiume is one of the most challenging works of art ever made, challenging especially (incidentally) the institution of art. Penone can refer to the production of the second stone as a 'perfect sculpture' without fear of incurring derision because he effectively resisted any temptation to formal invention. It's not a question of personal modesty, or some kind of Pre-Raphaelite worship, or esoteric apprehension, or avant-garde counteraction. Rather, he picks up a river stone and conveys his conviction that it is sufficient by copying it exactly. The copy is involved in a work of art, but, equally, it 're-enters nature'. The river invoked is a metaphor for the inexorable passage of time, changing everything, and art as we know it is not immune. Like a rock that winds up as indistinguishable gravel, sand and mud of the delta, art will be undone one day. Penone's writing, in between the lines at least, lets us know that he knows this.



Fiona Banner
*Full stops: Slipstream, Nuptial, Palatino, Times,
Gill Sans Condensed, New Century Schoolbook*
(1998/1999)

Full Stop

Pen Dalton

The artist Fiona Banner in her series of sculptures of full stops, sought to bring this insignificant mark to conscious attention. She did this by taking them out of their flimsy paper context and remediating them into monumental sculptures in pure white polystyrene, bronze or ceramic. The resulting clearly defined sculptures evoke Euclidean classical forms; their smoothness reiterates the clarity, restraint and taut boundaries of minimalist sculpture. Her action upon the full stop elevated the humble ubiquitous graphic mark into in the discursive lineage of Fine Art. The manifest hyperbolic titles — taken from the font family from which each full stop is derived — suggest that each form contains its own recursive history: Slipstream, Nuptial, Palatino, Times, Gill Sans Condensed, New Century Schoolbook — deflect interpretation away from the semiotic to a concrete visual response.

It could be said that these sculptures — with their clearly defined outlines and immanent appeal, reiterate the longstanding Lessing/modernist arguments supporting the necessity for clear and distinct genre and gender boundaries.¹ Such visual binary metaphors it has been argued, predispose the viewer to regard other non-art conceptual entities as distinct and oppositional: male/female, black/white, mind/body, image/text and so on.² When the small printed full stop is enlarged, smoothed and concretised, it shifts from its position small and insignificant into to the static monolithic authority of the symbolic.

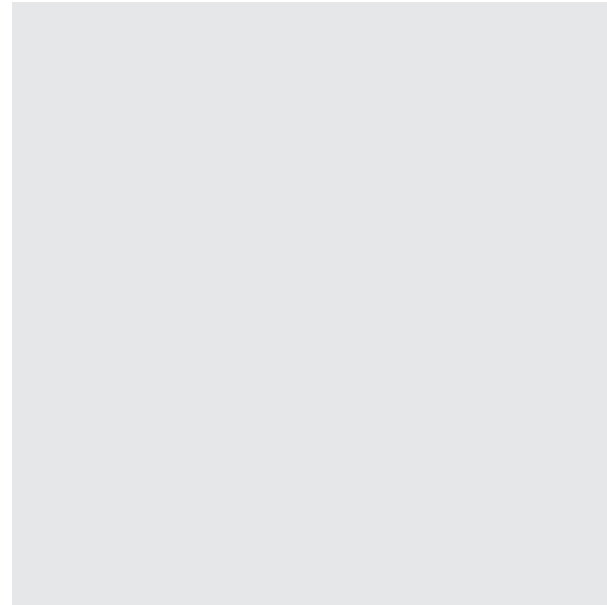
Such enhancement and valorisation is very much the legitimate act of the authorial artist. It has become part of a conventional practice of those socially committed to seek

out what is overlooked, unseen, ignored; to render visible; to give ‘voice’. Non-art practices such as printed type are lifted out of their contexts and re-presented through the prism of established fine art conventions and are thus transformed into the discourses of fine art/art history. In manipulating materials, the outcomes that emerge are the result of the artist’s inductive imagination and are authored in their sole name. In the process however they can lose the emotional force of the subtle semiotic. As visual metaphors they privilege the monolithic eschewing the values of the small and insignificant.

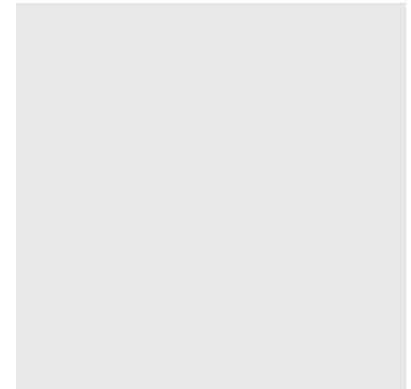
Ethical practice

This article did not set out to be a critical appreciation of Banner’s distinguished body of work but employed Banner’s full stop series as a useful demonstration of the way that art can trigger new ideas; Banner’s work provided me with conceptual clues.³ I was drawn to it moreover because Banner’s full stops coincided with my own research object — also the full stop.

The approach I adopted extends my reflections on Banner’s drawings and Galton’s work and can be traced back theoretically to feminist linguistics. Taking its clue from Luce Irigaray, it adopts a somewhat passive relation to objects and materials. Instead of understanding the artist as sole author actively shaping according to conscious determination, this research method required that the artist attend, watch and ‘listen’ to what inert ‘others’ have to say. It is ethical in that its subject — in this case text — remains in its context; it takes heed of texts’ specific qualities through close examination and empathy with its own materiality as text. My concern was to look at the full stop as a printed mark, to consider its relationship to the substrate to find out what are its specific



Fiona Banner
Full stop (1998)
Drawing



Francis Galton
Composite family portrait (c. 1887)

characteristics to help realise the ‘full-stop-ness’ of the image so that it can then offer those relational qualities back to fine art discourse. The results of such an approach may not claim Art status, but can reveal what an ‘other’ object — such as a full stop — might offer to the enrichment of the discourses of fine art without itself being distorted from its semiotic function.

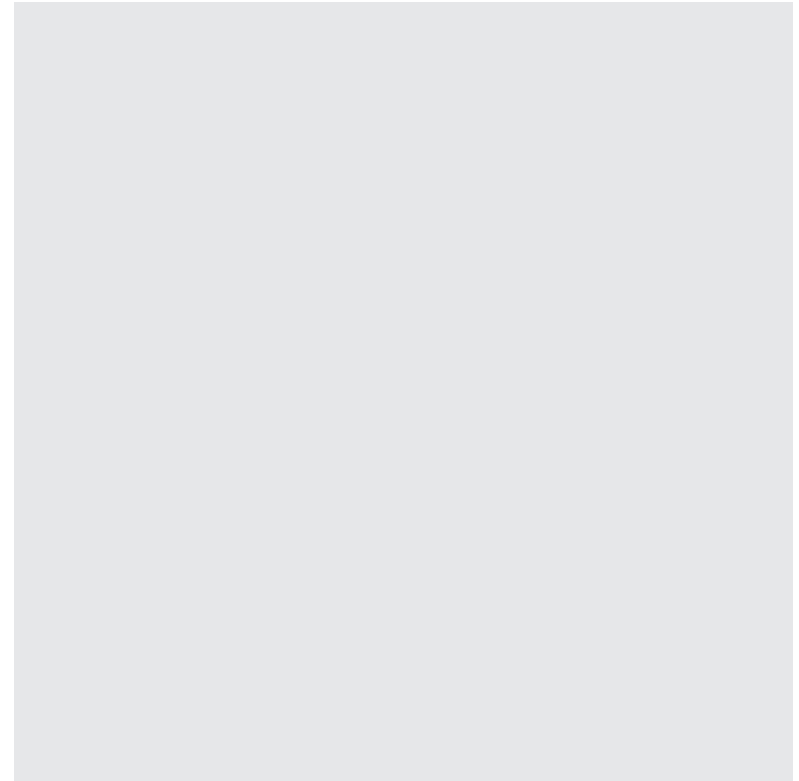
Getting closer

I chose the medium of printing because it had emotional resonance for me. I decided to examine the texts, handwritten and printed that my father had produced perhaps to learn something about our relationship as well as relationships in art.

On leaving the hospital where he died I was handed a brown paper bag containing his few possessions: a long service medal for work in the print, the familiar tobacco tin containing his last roll-up — and a diary. My father had been uneducated, an undemonstrative, reserved man and I learned to know him by attending to non-verbal signs. I listened for the inarticulate and unspoken; I learned to watch him, to read his manner, his facial expressions, to attend to his gait and tone of voice and I recognised his love for me through the things he made. It is this approach that I brought to research and artmaking. I pored over his diary looking for some thoughts about his feelings for me. But this diary was not of the Proust or Virginia Woolf ilk, there were no memories recorded or emotions displayed. It was the kind that opened ‘a page to a week’ and in it he had briefly entered overtime, betting accounts, the names of horses, the days he pruned his roses and occasionally my name: ‘Penny’.

The impossible copy

I tried to faithfully copy a page of his diary, letting his words and handwriting speak for themselves and chose black printers ink on white newsprint — the materials he had used.



Pen Dalton
Diary (2003)
Mixed print mediums on wall

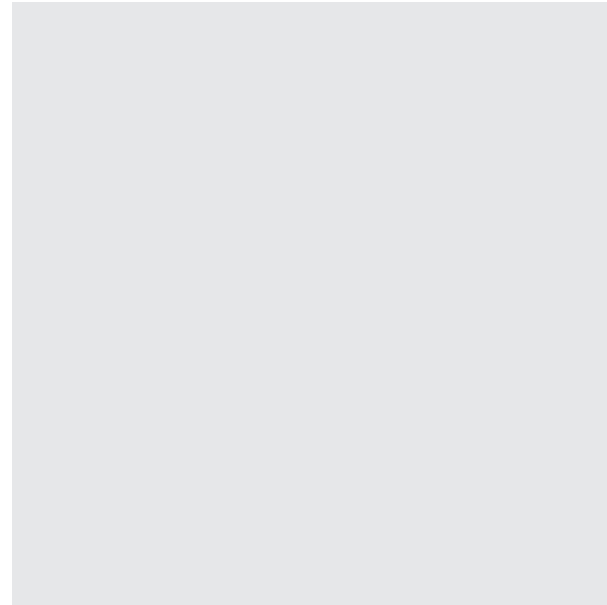
Family relations

My father had worked in the London newspaper industry casting hot lead to make the type that was used to print *The Sunday Times*. When I was a child, he brought home typefaces, oil based inks and newsprint for me to play with. I arranged the orthographic symbols — the little commas, dashes, Is, Xs, Os and dots into patterns arbitrarily mixing text and punctuation. The impression of the ink on the paper re-iterated the impression my father made on me. The glossy black ink resembled his Brylcreemed hair, the black dots were like the bristles on his chin that raked my cheek when he kissed me goodnight. The binary processes of relief printing, the indexical labour involved in pressing, the particular resistant qualities of newsprint, the smell — of his cigarettes, of ink and solvents in the shed where we worked in the quiet intimacy of making — all have benignly paternal associations. I became a printer. Handling the material dualities of print, the repetitive to and fro movements, the preference for exact copies and limited editions all seemed to mimic the narratives of primogeniture; they concretised my thoughts about my place in the family as a little girl.

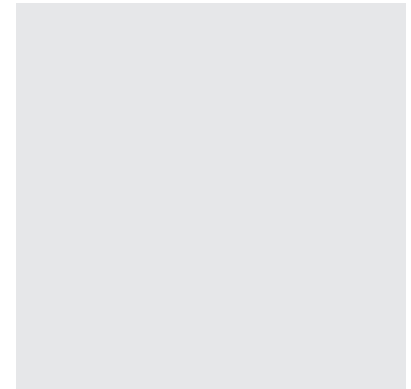
Printing has associations with family and relationships. Different designs of orthographic symbols have always been given family names. We readily accept the practice — unscientific though it is — because it perfectly aligns with our commonsense notion of a family: a large number of differently related people who have similar features. The family analogy often springs to mind when we discuss relationships since it is a basic humanly shared metaphor of hierarchy and order.

Liminal space

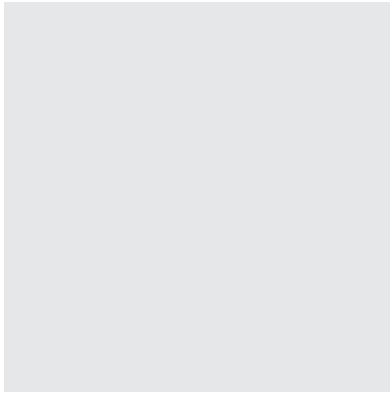
When enlarging any full stop no image appeared the same, even from the same font family. There is no perfect



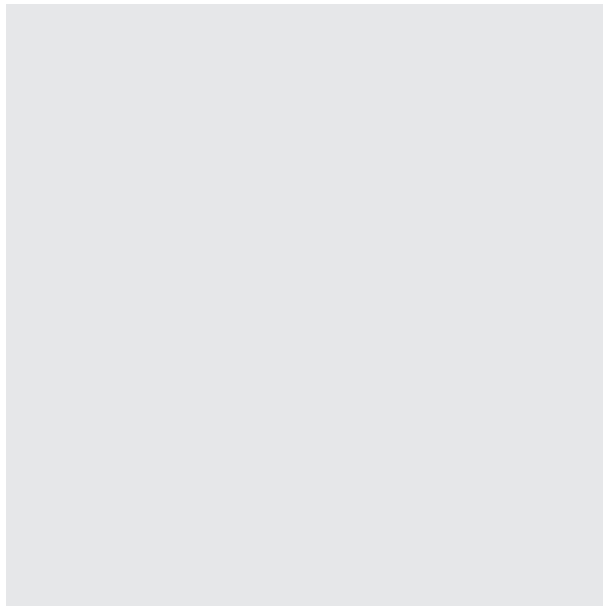
Pen Dalton
Composite image Times family full stop
(2007)



Pen Dalton
Times letterpress full stop c. 1807
(2007)



Pen Dalton
Lucida Italic Flare (2007)
 Digital file



Pen Dalton
Lucida Italic Flare (2007)
 Digital file

generic family font as Banner's sculptures would suggest. Inconsistencies always emerge which have different technological and material bases: The variables can be caused by different printing machines, inks and substrates, the shadow of the slight impression of the force of the metal type on the soft paper. Margins around the full stop can be produced as the result of squashing out of ink from beneath the typeface. Irregularities in typesetting produce slight deformities in the stereotypes. Different levels of absorption of the body of the substrate caused by ambient weather conditions create areas of undulation. Digital printing has reduced errors in printing by controlling ink flow but irregularities creep in: enlargement can produce jagged bitmapped edges; a slight loss of focus and sub-limity — literally a limen: an edge, a margin of light like a solar flare; a border, a vignetted shading, an area of indeterminacy between the solid core of the printed dot the plain substrate; an area that is neither full stop nor substrate. A glowing diffusion or blur can also be caused by the refractive glare produced by the printing process itself, or the misalignment of colours.

Cognitive metaphors

A full stop is a specifically two-dimensional impression, an indexical mark sometimes inextricably saturated within its substrate forming one inseparable bond. Any metaphorical truth about the stable relations of binary opposition and uncomplicated dominant/subordinate relations between image and text, black and white are muddled as substrate and text shift in their myriad relationships according to ambient context, material demands or bodily intervention. Practice with materials, engaging with real stuff suggests the vulnerability of imaginary binary metaphors. Practice can reveal the vast possibilities that lie between polar oppositions.

By attending to the specifically material binary relations in printing I was led to consider that my father was not as dominant as I'd remembered, nor was I totally without power as a daughter. We had more in common than we had differences. The collapse of ink into substrate and the appearance of substrate through the body of ink, the presence of ambiguous margins and undulating tonal forms suggest the range of possibilities and potentials that lie between polar entities, and how easily ink and substrate, signs and signifiers, male female can dissolve into or become their opposites.

1

Lessing, G. (1766) *Laocoon; An Essay Upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, translated by E. Frothingham, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York. See also Greenberg, C. (1940) 'Toward a newer Laocoon' in *Partisan Review*, #7, July – August, reprinted in Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (eds.) (1992) *Art in Theory: 1900–1990*, pp.554–559; Wellbery, D. (1984) *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and the Age of Reason*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

2

Specifically argued in Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994) 'The politics of genre: space and time in Lessing's Laocoon', in *Representations*, #6 (Spring 1984, pp.98–115, nb pp.108–109).

3

More fully argued in Dalton, P. (2008), *Family and other relations: a thesis examining the extent to which family relationships shape the relations of art*, Plymouth University, <http://ethos.bl.uk/>

4

Ginzburg, C. (2004) 'Family resemblances and family trees: two cognitive metaphors', in *Critical Enquiry*, #30 (Spring, pp.537–556). With due consideration and disregard of Galton's eugenic aims, references are given to the influence that Galton's experiments had on the thinking of Sigmund Freud, anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and Wittgenstein — which inspired the family resemblances theory of art.

5

Ginzburg op cit. p.551.

6

Irigaray, L. (2002) *The Way of Love*, Continuum Books. New York.

7

Kiss: when a wet print leaves its mark on a clean piece of paper. Hickey: an unwanted mark in the margin of the print (also lovebite). Bleeding: when ink with too much solvent is absorbed beyond the boundaries of the printed area.

8

See Banner's Christmas print *Mother and child* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/gallery/2009/dec/14/artists-christmas-nativity-scenes#/?picture=356878541&index=4>

Jonathan Watkins in conversation with Sadie Plant and Henry Rogers

27 January 2012

HR

Do you have a deliberate curatorial strategy to show work by artists using text?

JW

Not really. It's a thread that's pulled through the fabric of Ikon's artistic programme, a reflection of current practice.

SP

Do you think that is a relatively new trend?

JW

The use of text now arises out of the Conceptualism of the '60s and '70s. Writing became much more important then. It was suppressed to some extent during the '80s by the emergence of Trans-avant-garde and its brand of romanticism, translated into a painterly figurative style that was pervasive then.

HR

It bought into a fallacy of expression didn't it? There was an economic impulse as well ...

JW

You couldn't sell Conceptualism and performance like oil paintings, and certainly we had a lot of them being made here in the 1980s. Often very brown and boring ...

HR

The very international nature of Ikon's programme must be considered. What happens when your audience can't read Arabic or some other unfamiliar language? How does that affect their encounter with the work?

JW

Well sometimes it's an inability to read what's written that is the point. For example, a large neon piece by Chinese artist He An above the Moat Lane car park, in Birmingham's city centre, declared itself in a very dramatic way, but it was unreadable for most people walking past. He An's secret, it was an extract from a personal love story, there for all the world to see if it could read Chinese.

Similarly Matias Faldbakken and Ceal Floyer are both artists interested in how we use words in ways that don't make them clearer. Faldbakken overuses words to such an extent they are unreadable, and we become blind to any message they might communicate. Text thus becomes a symbol for the ambiguity and redundancy of language. Another artist we've worked with who is very interesting in this respect is Shuruq Harb, a Palestinian, who asked people called Mohammed to write down their names. They were often as illegible as they were loaded. The medium was the message.

SP

You could say the same thing about any kind of visual metaphor, carrying a certain amount of closed meaning ...

JW

Certainly text is metaphorical but it is something else as well isn't it? It's privileged as a means of communication because it goes into books. Every word reminds you of every word

you have ever read, pulling you back to the time when you learnt to read, the time you spent in kindergarten and that's why On Kawara's work is so interesting. When he puts his paintings in kindergartens, to be encountered by four and five year olds, they are all about a crucial stage of psychological development, when we start using words without knowing really what they mean.

HR

How about context and translation? Some things travel well and we read them easily in a particular way, while other things don't, but have great resonance in their original context. This is the point of Surrealism and artists like Magritte whose word for pipe is a painting of the word, not the word itself. There is always misrecognition if we are not careful enough when we think about what we are looking at.

JW

It's like going back to childhood, when we learn that 'p' is for 'pipe'. This is not a 'pipe' and not simply writing but it is a painting of writing, not just the pipe we should concentrate on but also the writing.

HR

That's why I was thinking about the way things accrue meaning. He An's love story is inaccessible but accrues meaning through its emphatic visual statement, through its emphatic presence.

JW

Likewise Mathias Faldbakken's [???]. It is a very intense work, spelling out the names of people he wants to kill, but the letters are replaced by Xs, little crosses. We know something

is going on, and that it means a lot to somebody and that's precisely why he's making making it impossible to read.

Faldbakken subscribes to a slack aesthetic, and it first appears that he couldn't care less, but in fact he is a writer who is telling us that he dwells on things too much. Another work in our show [??] involved him spraying a word directly onto a wall, and then superimposing the same word over and over and over, until any legibility was obliterated. Sometimes Faldbakken makes something with writing that is erased, leaving a trace of the process and us to wonder what it was that meant so much it had to be taken away.

HR

Often it seems that the gesture he makes is trying to become a word. There is a point where it is almost a word but it's not quite, always on the edge of becoming legible as you look at it.

SP

It's like a sort of visual stuttering ...

JW

He's more or less saying we can't communicate, not really, with meaning transmitted and then directly received. Wittgenstein is someone to take into account in this respect. I've never brought him to the surface in Ikon's programme but often our exhibitions exemplify his observations.

SP

Very true, especially with artists like On Kawara.

HR

Another thing is the way that language, as text, happens within an artistic programme. There are catalogue essays,

with consideration of exhibited work and its context, labelling that corresponds to a process of indexing, and educational and marketing texts; in all, a wide range of kinds of writing meant to make things more accessible. I wonder do all these words open things up in our artistic experience or reduce it because they are directional — at once useful, necessary, and problematic?

SP

And how conventional it all is, even to the extent that labels sometimes are inscribed with the title 'Untitled'. Why is that?

JW

Well 'Untitled' often means something in the same way that obliterating a word for Faldbakken has meaning. When artists say their work is untitled usually it is very meant. And then sometimes artists insist on having no text in their shows ... But certainly I am often struck by the irony of the fact that I deal with words very much. Words, words, words. I'm writing all the time!

SP

Writing associated with visual arts seems so static and formalised, despite the freedom in the art work itself, often so interesting and so challenging.

JW

I am more positive, and believe that our writing in the art world need not be too prescriptive or directional, closing down possible meanings. Our writing need not be telling people how to think, but rather setting off trains of thought.

And labels? People usually go to these little combinations of words first — I often do — and then jump into the art,

an actual or metaphorical space that has been provided for them. I don't think that such an order of things, whereby words go first, is necessarily a problem. Rather it is a question of realising precisely what it is we are doing ... certainly not believing, in a romantic way, that artists and/or curators can provide pure visual experience.

HR

In this vein, artists who use text in their work — calligraphy, typeface and so on — are especially pertinent. Are they aware of the implications?

JW

I think that artists on the whole are very deliberate, even in their use of the gratuitous automatic brushstroke, are so are caught in self-consciousness. When artists use text I think they are thinking about it very much in the way we are now, understanding that language, written or otherwise, is not simply a conduit for unmediated meaning.

Artists can be so interesting and idiosyncratic about language. Hamish Fulton writes about his work very smartly, poetically. Walking precedes an artistic output so full of words — for our exhibition, written directly onto gallery walls — that betray his self-consciousness with respect to the nature and use of words. He is preoccupied, for example, with seven letter words, almost as if they have numerological significance — from Tenzing to Duchamp, Messner to Cameron! Maybe it's not a word so much as the number of letters that spell it out that means something ...

On Kawara likewise is an artist who works with words, while being obsessed with numbers.

SP

Often it comes around to a talismanic, magical use of words, the special potential of language ...

JW

'The Word that was God' is an idea that resurfaces perhaps in words that are art ...

MadeIn, a group of Chinese artists showing recently at Ikon, took on the persona of a Middle Eastern equivalent and used both Arabic and English text in cartoon style collages. They had been required to censor the collages previously, due to sensitive religious references, but when we showed them, MadeIn didn't say 'Oh look, here we are in the free world, so let's remove the patches of black that make the words unreadable.' They wanted us to read the meaning of the censored words.

HR

Do you think that art work is a form of visual communication? And to what extent does text effect purely visual language?

JW

From our point of view certainly art is a way of communicating less literally — or more laterally — with an understanding of the value of ambiguity and gestures rich in meanings that are not necessarily intended by the artist. We're certainly not in the business of presenting something that comes out of silence and requires silence in the encounter, and for this reason visual arts is distinct from performance, where noise — verbalised language — from the audience is usually frowned upon. Usually we encourage people to be talking, articulating their ideas, in the presence of what we present. We're operating in an area that is very free, often embracing

other art forms, incorporating them into what we are doing. This applies to writing as much as anything else.

HR

Returning to Faldbakken, [xxxxxxx - title of work needed], shown at Ikon, threw me away from the idea of art as an act of communication. It was more an intensified moment that we were forced into, that we experienced without recourse to any comprehension of the words from which it was derived. We were on the cusp of legibility, encountered in a graffiti motif, uncomfortable in a place of strangeness.

JW

Significantly Faldbakken, more than any of the other artists we've shown at Ikon, is a serious writer, equally famous for his writing as he is for his art work. He makes reference to street culture but probably he is the one who sits in a room in quiet solitude more than anybody getting the words out. Writing as an activity could not be less dramatic, less visually interesting ...

SP

Nedko Solakov, at Ikon in 2011, uses text to generate humour. Do you think art like his risks slipping into entertainment, and away from something more profound?

JW

Well, we've recently collaborated with the Birmingham Comedy Festival — with a video in which artist Dean Kelland impersonates Harold H Corbett in *Steptoe and Son* — and this fits in very much with the observation being made earlier about visual arts being remarkably free and accommodating. Many a true word is spoken in jest, as they say, and where

does one draw the line between not being serious enough and artistic profundity?

Solakov's exhibition was yet more evidence of Ikon bringing text into the heart of Ikon's activity, unashamedly, not as if we were afraid that such humour and narrative would undermine our reputation. Quite the opposite, in fact! Basically we are saying that 'art can be like this as well, or it could be musical, or film, or it could be somebody (like John Smith, ???) sitting looking at you, or it could be food' ...

SP

Solakov's work pervaded the entire building. Have you ever shown more classically visual material in the toilets?

JW

Yes we had paintings by Amikam Toren in the toilets eight years ago, and interestingly they too had writing in them, cut-out stencilled texts. Like Solakov (and Faldbakken), Toren was playing off the idea of graffiti. Graffiti happens in toilets, a source of material that was as ready-made for him as the urinal that was Duchamp's Fountain. Canadian artist Ron Terada — renowned for the use of words as well as readymades in his work - designed the illuminated 'IKON' sign that illuminates the entrance to our building on Brindleyplace.

SP

The word itself is iconic ...

JW

Which suits us perfectly! Before when visitors walked into the building they were confronted by a rather politically correct sign — not designed by an artist, as far as I know — that said

‘Welcome’ in many different languages, that corresponded to officially recognised ethnic communities in the city. It was an invidious gesture of course, because many other ethnic groups arrived, especially as refugees, didn’t see their language amongst all the others and so didn’t feel so welcome. Less is definitely more for a welcome sign

And then we have *Miss Her*, a neon piece by Savage in Café Ikon, again inspired by graffiti, and ??? by Catalan artist Ignasi Aballí a very stringent conceptualist work that evokes landscape through words on the glass wall in reception. Signage is often words, and so he is playing off the idea of the word as a sign outside of exhibition spaces, painting a mental picture with written words ...

HR

It’s difficult to distinguish between textual and visual languages, often because if something is not spoken it is inscribed and therefore visual. We are dealing with visual languages, or things within different registers of the visual ...

In relation to the old welcome sign, there is a kind of multiculturalism that encourages distinct notions of what cultural groups are, and we are now in a place which is much more about crossing boundaries, creating new configurations that enable us to think differently. This should not be confused with earlier nineteenth and early twentieth century paradigms whereby exoticised visual cultures were absorbed, and thus difference lost its potency. Internationalism now doesn’t trade in difference in the same way.

SP

It’s about power relations not being so clear these days. If you see a kid in India with English written on a t-shirt that is misspelt, or something that is completely misunderstood —

something like ‘boys on board skates’ instead of ‘skateboards’ — we still might feel slightly smug, but then how often in the west do we see people wearing clothes decorated with calligraphy, having no idea what it means.

HR

Getting things ‘wrong’ and misreading is sometimes really interesting.

JW

A lot of art work involving text shown at Ikon has implied an idea of transgression, doing something wrong. The idea of the authority of written words is often invoked to be undermined, and so too a hierarchy of written words. If something is scrawled on a wall as graffiti then it is not supposed to be as important as the sign at the front door of an institution. And what could be less respectful of an established order than cutting words — taken from graffiti — into an oil painting that is then hung in a toilet?



It took me a long
time to make
this beautiful
arte povera piece
in the sink
(I've used
the best sand paper)

I'm very
superstitious

In general, I'm a nice
middle-aged man
with a wife and
two children

Where are
you an?









Paradise Circus



STARTING FOR 15 MINUTES
WITH THE SOUND OF BELLS FROM
TORRE DE MIGUELETE VALENCIA CATHEDRAL
AND TORRE DE SANTA CATALINA
VALENCIA SPAIN 9 JANUARY 2008


GERONIMO
FOR 16 DAYS CAMPING FOR 16 NIGHTS
THE AVAILABILITY OF WATER DURING A DROUGHT YEAR
2 3 4 5 6 7 8
THE HEADWATERS OF THE GILA RIVER
ELAND OF GERONIMO
WORLD'S FIRST DESIGNATED WILDERNESS AREA
OME LAND
MEXICO U.S.A. WANING MOON OF MAY 2006
0 11 12 13 14 15 16

THIS IS NOT LAND ART



A GUIDED MOUNTAINEERING EXPEDITION
TO THE SUMMIT OF DENALI AT 6194 METRES
VIA THE WEST BUTTRESS ROUTE ALASKA USA MAY-JUNE 2004

SEVEN
ONE DAY WALKS
ON HIKOSAN
OUT AND BACK
ENDING
AT THE TIME
OF THE FIRST
FULL MOON
OF MARCH 1999
KYUSHU
JAPAN



SEVEN
DAYS WALKING
SEVEN
NIGHTS CAMPING
ENDING
AT THE TIME
OF THE SECOND
FULL MOON
OF MARCH 1999
CAIRNGORM MOUNTAINS
SCOTLAND

NO TALKING FOR SEVEN DAYS

WALKING FOR SEVEN DAYS IN A WOOD
CAIRNGORMS SCOTLAND
FEBRUARY FULL MOON 1988



Image credits

Acknowledgements

This book has been inspired by the work of artists presented at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, over the past decade or so that is either text based or involves the use of text within the context of the gallery, not only within the white cube space but also the incidental spaces of the building as well as work presented in off-site projects in the city. While the archive testifies to the diversity of the work shown and Ikon's commitment to presenting work of international standing from numerous geographical and cultural locations one of the most interesting aspects of this work is that, being temporary in nature, much of it no longer exists except in photographic documentation and the memory of visitors who were privileged enough to view it.

I want to thank colleagues in the School of Art, especially John Butler, for his tireless support, and colleagues in the Centre for Fine Art Research, especially Johnny Golding who is now directing our research focus, and the Research Office at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design who have supported the project, for this book builds on the research that has been a significant concern to the activities of many researchers in the centre itself. For a long time I have been working with Masters and PhD students and I also owe them a debt of gratitude for in working with them in their negotiation of practice-led research and the tricky matter of the fold between making and writing they have repeatedly risen to the challenge and attended to the matter of making and writing that is at hand. Their and my, sometimes bewilderment and enthusiasm have spurred me on and it is clear that this is a symbiotic relationship, a dialogue over time.

Of course this book would not have been possible without the hard work of the contributors: Jim Mooney, Pen Dalton and Jacqueline Taylor and I want to thank them all for

taking the time to respond to the brief, as artists themselves concerned with the matter of making and writing their contributions are personal, and yet critical responses that forge a reflective dialogue with artists' work. This is the joy of art for in the absence of the artist the work speaks to us on their behalf. I also want to extend a special thank you to Sadie Plant who has been a fantastic colleague since we first met in 2008. Sadie's contribution to the Art Based Masters Programme in the School of Art has been immensely valued as has her selfless engagement with the project. Since meeting she has indeed become a good friend.

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I would also like to thank all of the artists for allowing us to print the images of their work, for the work they have made and for the thought their work has provoked, in some instances for their bravery in the face of oppression, for holding true to their politics and for finding ways to speak of the unspeakable.

And, finally I would like to thank my partner William, not necessarily for putting up with my artistic fixations, but more importantly for simply being who he is.

Henry Rogers

Contributors

Pen Dalton is an artist and art critic who works from a studio in Walthamstow, North East London. For many years she ran a screen printing workshop producing pamphlets, posters, publicity and agitprop materials, some of which are in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection. She has subsequently worked in university art courses running a print department and teaching critical theory in relation to subjectivity and identity. She has lectured on these subjects in Europe and the US as well as in university, gallery and conference venues in the UK. She has produced research in the form of artworks, educational texts, scholarly articles, reviews and art criticism. Pen's father was a printer in the London newspaper industry and she continues to have an emotional investment in research through printing and text. Her current work formally deploys the 'in-between' techniques of half-tone pattern and dots: devices that analogically bridge the visual gap between binary oppositions.

Jim Mooney is an artist and writer who lives in Sutherland, Scotland. He taught in the Painting Department of the Royal College of Art for 20 years where he was Senior Research Tutor until 2009, he was also Reader in Theory and Practice of Fine Art at Middlesex University until 2011. Research interests include painting, ethics, queer theory and geopoetics. Publications include 'Wild Esculents', *Mutual Dependencies*, (Artwords, London, 2011); 'Painting: Poignancy and Ethics', *Thinking Through Art*, (Routledge, 2005); 'Stabat Mater: Algeria Unveiled', *Images of Thought*, (Salvo, London, 2000); 'Queer Pickings: The Art of Lari Pittman', *Reverberations*, (Jan van Eyck Editions, Maastricht, 2000); 'Without Destination: The Gift of Felix Gonzalez-Torres', (ARTicle Press, UCE, 2006); 'Libidinal Temporalities', Michael Curran monograph, (Film and Video Umbrella 'Minigraph Series', 2003). Currently, he is undertaking research into the Peruvian political philosopher Jose Carlos Mariategui. His doctoral thesis completed at the RCA in 1999 was titled *Praxis-Ethics-Erotics (Towards an Eroticization of Thought: a Matter of Praxis)*.

Sadie Plant graduated from the University of Manchester with a PhD in Philosophy in 1989,

and taught Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham before founding the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick. She left academia in 1997, and since then has been writing, travelling, and speaking at events around the world; at the same time, her focus changed from situationist to cyber-technology. Among her books are *Writing on Drugs* (2001), *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (1997), *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1992).

Henry Rogers graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1989. He is an artist and writer currently working and living in Birmingham, UK. He received the Mark Rothko Memorial Trust Award in 1990 to live and work in the USA after which he exhibited extensively in the UK and Europe. In 2001 he was an Abbey Fellow at the British School at Rome and since 1997 he has been senior academic lecturer at Birmingham City University where he holds the directorship of the Art Based Masters Programme with specific responsibility for MA Fine Art. In 2008 he envisioned the unique MA Queer Studies in Arts and Culture course and negotiated its validation in the university. To date it remains the only award with Queer in the title to be validated by a university internationally. His research is concerned with art based practice and writing with a particular focus on Queer Studies. He co-curated (with Yvonne Hindle) *The Nature of Things* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2004 and his previous publications include *Making a Scene: Performing Culture into Politics* (ARTicle Press, 2000); *Art Becomes You!* (ARTicle Press 2006); and *The Art of Queering in Art* (ARTicle Press 2008).

Jacqueline Taylor is an AHRC funded PhD student at the Centre of Fine Art Research at the Birmingham Institute of Art & Design, Birmingham City University. Her research is titled 'writing//painting; *l'écriture féminine* and difference in the making' and examines *l'écriture féminine* in relation to contemporary painting practice and 'art-writing'. She regularly exhibits her work and has most recently taken part in The Reading writing residency at Untitled Gallery, Manchester and was a speaker at the *Beyond Text: Making and*

Unmaking Text Across Performance Practices and Theories conference at the Centre for Creative Collaboration, London as part of the AHRC's 'Beyond Text' programme.

Jonathan Watkins has been Director of Ikon Gallery since 1999. Previously he worked as Curator of the Serpentine Gallery and Director of Chisenhale Gallery. His tenure at the Chisenhale Gallery saw a rise in its international profile, with a number of its artists moving on to win the Turner Prize. He was Artistic Director of the Biennale of Sydney in 1998 and has worked internationally in Beijing, Venice, Turin, Milan, Shanghai, Sharjah and Palestine. He was also on the curatorial team for *Facts of Life: Contemporary Japanese Art* (Hayward Gallery, London 2001). Watkins is a prolific writer on contemporary art, his recent essays focusing on the work of artists such as Giuseppe Penone, Martin Creed, Yang Zhenzhong, and Noguchi Rika. He was the author of the Phaidon monograph on Japanese artist On Kawara.

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