

Intervention

Intervention

Post Object and Performance Art in
New Zealand in 1970 and beyond



Robert McDougall Art Gallery & Annex
November 9 – December 10, 2000

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Robert McDougall Art Gallery & Annex



University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts



Colloquium 2000



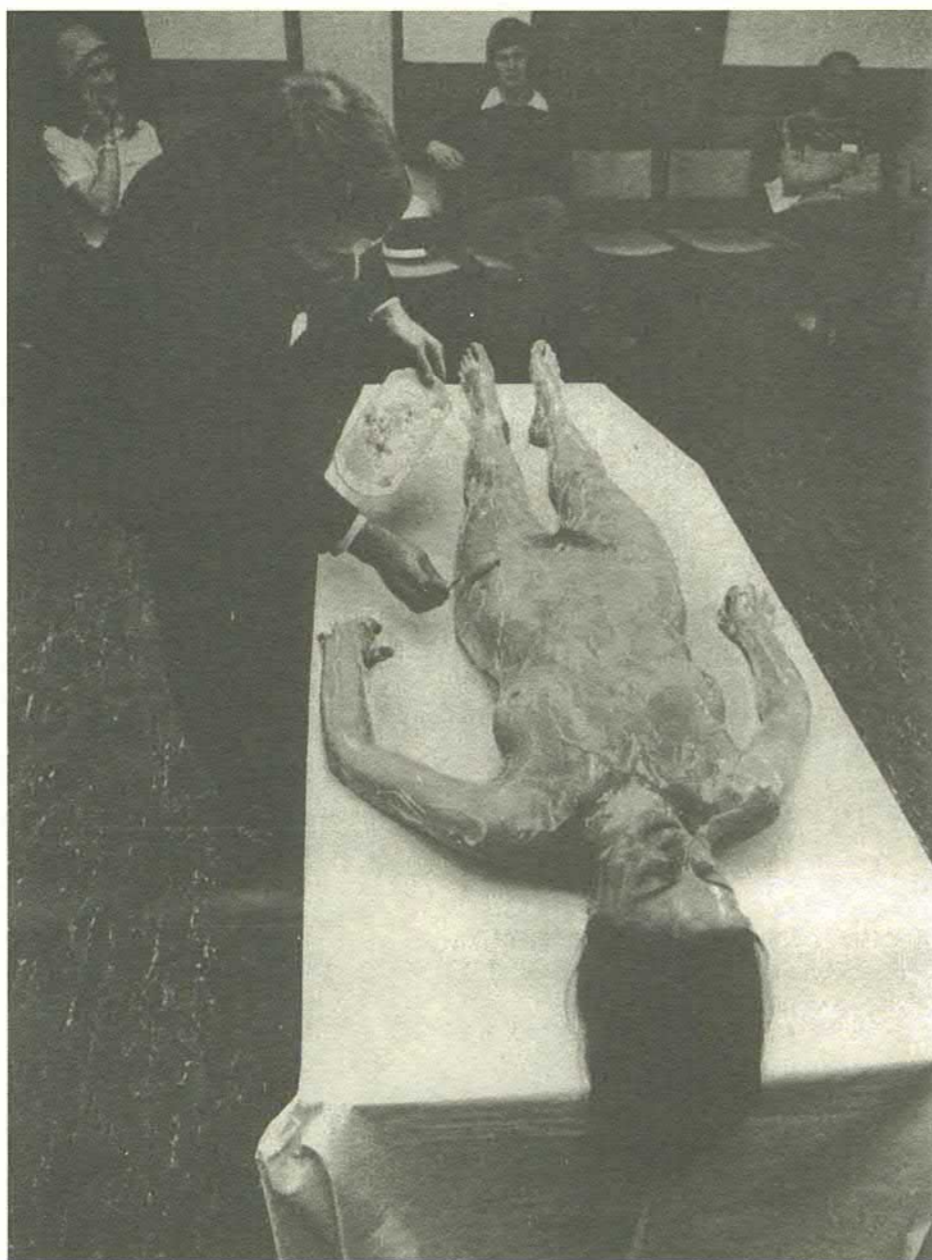
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If time lives in the instant of the act, what comes out of the act is incorporated into the perception of absolute time. There is no distance between the past and the present. When one looks backward, the distant past and the recent past fuse.¹ Lygia Clark, 1965



Buttering Up an Old Friend, 1976

Nicholas Spill

Courtesy of the artist and the E.H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki.

cat 1

The aesthetic climate during the 70s in New Zealand saw the beginning of an intense period of experimental performance, video art and conceptual activity that lasted until the mid-80s. Artists such as Jim Allen, Billy Apple, Bruce Barber, John Cousins, Phil Dadson, Andrew Drummond, Di ffrench, David Mealing and Nick Spill worked with corporeal and political issues and created installations that enabled a fuller exploration of aesthetic practice, process and theory.

It is possible due to the manifold array of material, to realign and re-negotiate the concept of the performance impulse in New Zealand art. To 'flesh out', examine, discover and contextualise the activities of those artists working with and against the mainstream during the 70s and early 80s, *Intervention* provides another starting point, one that reveals an additional view and asks different questions. The collocation of the performative moment is intended to be a fulcrum in the discussion of performance practice in this country. It aims to renovate moments, images, and trace, to be an inflexion of why and how New Zealand performance artists operated within post-object practice. Therefore it is hoped that those issues raised by the content of *Intervention* will initiate further inquiries, activate other exhibitions and new performances, and reveal aspects of memory and trace coterminous to the matrix of 70s performance activity.

The nascent stirrings of post-object practice are there. Jack Body's *Sonic Circus Events* of the early 70s, Jim Allen's *New Zealand Environment # 5* (1969) and *Contact: A Performance in Three parts* (1974), and Leon Narbey's *Real Time* (1970), indicated a sea change in practice, teaching and presentation of the performance concept and content. The new sculptural ethic at Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University was central to the creation of post-object and performance energy. The alternative teaching methods of Allen and the activities generated by his students and visiting artists such as Adrian Hall and Kieran Lyons during the early 70s sought to interrogate existing conventions that reflected the international impetus of Fluxus, Happenings and experimental music. Wystan Curnow's meticulous documentation of performance and sculptural events in Christchurch and Auckland during the 70s, the publication of *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post object Art* in 1976 and Tina Barton's unpublished 1987 M. A thesis, *Post Object Art in New Zealand*, all generated an awareness and dialectic of performance and post object art. However, it is apposite to also extend the emphasis and look closer at the work of such artists as John Cousins, Peter Roche, Andrew Drummond, Di ffrench, David Mealing and the alternative events both private and public that generated the broad dynamic of performance art.

Performances took place during the 70s in a variety of locations, symposiums and spaces such as; Pavillion K, Auckland Show grounds 1974, Australian and New Zealand Post Object Art at the Experimental Art Foundation, 1976, Mildura Triennials, the Wellington Artists Co-Op, 1977/78, F1, the Hansells Sculpture Symposiums and importantly the ANZART forums, initiated in 1981 by Ian Hunter. These events provided collaborative opportunities for New Zealand and Australian artists to question the tenets of late modernism, and how artists achieved this through certain philosophical and aesthetic means are transcribed through the resulting images of performances, installations and conceptual practice exhibited in *Intervention*. Themes particular to performance

¹ Lygia Clark, 'About the Act', (1965) *October*, 69 (Summer 1994), pp 102–104.

art such as political and aesthetic critiques, environmental consciousness, feminism, ritual and body art indicate the diversity of the medium in conveying the mechanisms of action beyond the static object. 'Intervention' as an aesthetic strategy, can interrupt the viewer's normal (modernist) perception of art and draws attention to the ideological or institutional underpinning of a context whether it is the museum or the street. Whether New Zealand performance artists engaged with this strategy consciously or not during the 70s and 80s is unimportant, but the performances and installations of the 70s and 80s reveal a conflation of attitudes toward art making, the commodification of the art object and the institutionalisation of art. Performance is therefore a deeply subversive interpretation of art/life systems that transcribes the relationship between body, gesture, time and space. New Zealand performance art should be examined with regard to its socio-political nature and cross-disciplinary approaches. The turn away from the art object in the 70s reflected a collaborative democratisation and new attitude toward making art. The feminist movement in New Zealand, heightened by the Australian Women's Art Movement, gained momentum in the mid 70s, encouraging women to concentrate not just on the finished object but rather on the process by which a concept could be realised, implemented by a group of people sharing personal histories and working together. The art world's structure was critiqued and analysed by performance artists and a feminist discourse lobbied for reform, arguing for a greater representation and appreciation of women artists. Although performance was an attractive medium for women, and less entrenched in art world hierarchy, it was still a medium largely dominated and promoted by the activity of male artists in New Zealand.

Artists' relationships with institutions were at times congenial; gallery directors and administrators encouraged the presentation of new art forms to the public. At other points in the 70s and early 80s the communication and understanding of directors and arts boards with alternative artists broke down and with it the visibility of, and funding for, more challenging and subversive statements. Political critiques made with the artist's body in a ritualistic context, through installation or in a conceptual manner, exposed the duplicity and complexities of the artist's role in the art world as well as making more overt responses to environmental issues of pollution, repression and exploitation.

Performances can exist in the liminal or littoral zone, a space between a space that defies orthodox understandings of art, life and theatre, "an instant of pure potentiality".² The littoral zone (an area on a beach between the high and low water marks) in performance art is a zone where the 'art world' and 'life worlds' overlap.³ Many New Zealand performance artists such as Bruce Barber, Phil Dadson, John Cousins, Chris Cree Brown, Andrew Drummond, David Mealing and Di ffrench cultivated certain aesthetic responses to the New Zealand psyche through a littoralist approach that incorporated inter-media techniques with an investigation of the body and self in a political context. These interventions generated a consciousness of not only the unlimited possibilities in art but also of an attitude that indeed art could alter the tenor of cultural, political, aesthetic and environmental awareness.

2 Victor Turner *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. NY: PAJ Publ., 1982, p. 44.

3 See Ian Hunter's essay, *Other Ways and Meanings, Public Practices*, South Island Arts Projects, 1994, pp. 21-24 and John Hurrell's, *Gangrenous Encounters: Outside the Littoral Zone, Art Now*, Museum of New Zealand 1994, pp 13-17.

The concentration on the art object (i.e. painting and the solid sculptural totem) as a commodity was to a degree circumvented by the ephemeral impulse of performance art. The residues of performances photographs, video, film, diagrams and sound recordings – exist as an amalgamation of the performative gesture and form the premise of **Intervention**. Paleo Neo the New Zealand Film Archives' major restoration and preservation of the history of video art in New Zealand, particularly from the 70s, has provided **Intervention** with extensive evidence of early inter-media and performance art. The New Zealand Film Archives, along with Phil Dadson's initiative 'The Open Drawer Files' at Elam School of Fine Arts Library, the Hector Library at Te Papa Tongarewa and the generosity of individual artists in sharing their work for **Intervention** denotes a series of indications that have rarely been acknowledged and only now are beginning to be looked at again. This exchange with the indexed body of the artist generates a dialogue with the audience, integral to the understanding of the performance lexicon. Photographs and videos of performances emit limited presentations of the actual event, the imagination of the viewer is activated however and the documentation of performances solicits what Kathy O'Dell describes as a 'haptic and visual' experience, while acknowledging that: "The history of performance art is one that flickers, one that causes the historian to shuttle back and forth between that which is seen and that which has to be imagined – between the visible and the invisible."⁴

The artist's indexed trace of the concept or performance provides a curatorial challenge. As Peter Cape observed the (re)presentation of the event relies on the ability of the 'programmer' to convey the action selectively, beyond "a plethora of words, a ho-hum sheaf of inept photographs, or else a tedious action replay, none of which do very much to catch the essential qualities of what went on."⁵ To (re)present the post-object action in documentary form within a contemporary context and in an institutional setting can only occur at peril to the integrity of the original action. The fugitive moment of performance art now finds itself pinned to a wall, examined from the distance of time, looked at in two dimensional space, replayed on a video monitor or sampled at a listening station – a conflux of events/time past with the present. **Intervention** is perhaps a kind of *déjà vécu* (already experienced or lived through)⁶ historical array that one can interpret and interrupt, can step back out of and then back in – to ask 'what was that?'

Evidence of post-object art located within post-modern discourse, being a phenomenological de-centring and re-definition of self, a deconstruction of art making and rebellious protest against art institutions, is discernable in the work of New Zealand performance artists and critics who had cognition of the international movement that has shaped the global history of performance. Fluxus, Allan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Guy Debord, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Vito Acconci, Mel Bochner, Richard Long, Mary Kelly, Carolee Schneemann and the writers and philosophers Lucy Lippard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty underline much of the antipodean thinking and experimentation with the performative body. Performance provided a way for

4 Kathy O'Dell 'Displacing the Haptic: Performance Art, the Photographic Document, and the 1970s', *Performance Research*, 2: 1 (1997), pp. 73-8.

5 Peter Cape, *Please Touch: A Survey of the Three-Dimensional Arts in New Zealand*, Auckland, Collins, 1980, p.63.

6 Arthur Funkhouser, 'Three Types of Déjà Vu', *Scientific and Medical Network Review*, 57: 1995, pp. 20-22.



Purposeless Work, 1971
Phil Dadson
Courtesy of the artist
cat 2

artists to work in unframed space to test their audiences and themselves and if there is what Robert Leonard describes a "phenomenological bluntness" inherent in New Zealand post-object and performance art, it is because the intentionality of the action threw the performer and the audience into the temporal moment, exposing that which is hidden in ordinary, everyday experience. This growing awareness of latent play, possibility and chance in art coincided with the counter-cultural attitude of lateral exploration and a psychological interrogation of self-identity and the world, an articulation of the 'now-instant'.

In 1971 Phil Dadson conducted a collaborative action that could be considered as heralding in a new era of conceptual art practice in New Zealand. *Purposeless Work* (cat no 2), a ritual on Karekare Beach, saw participants sweep the shoreline with brooms for an unspecified length of time. The simplicity and repetition of the gesture belied the layered conceptual/contextual metaphor that subtracted the object and communed with symbolic/virtual space and time. The gesture of sweeping the coastline evoked a situational sculpture whereby the concept of what one did with an object was investigated rather than the object itself. *Purposeless Work* metaphorically prepared the littoral zone for use in New Zealand performance art, a realm that could draw freely (like the theory of Bricolage)⁷ on a wide range of references, influences and disciplines.

Alternative artists constructed a series of situations and actions away from the commercial gallery environment, activating space with a physical and conceptual interpretation of the land and the urban scape. Another environmental collaborative action, *Earthworks*, occurred in September 1971 and was an "attempt to identify a temporary instant in the continuum of universal ebb and flow". The equinoctial event relays Jim Allen, Leon Narby, Geoff Steven, Bruce Barber et al, each recording detailed information of light and weather conditions, climate, vegetation, people and the planetary relationships of earth in the solar system, all orchestrated to fix a specific instant in time. The resultant video, *Dedicated To Peaceful Celebration Of Planet Earth And Universe 1800 Hours Gmt 23/24 September 1971*, inter-cut with snapshots of people and places documented the event. As Allan Smith wrote, it provided:

"...Some strangely poetic images of figures in black raincoats on a 'darkling plain', chirruping and muttering into recording equipment and taking photographs."⁸

The direct physical response to the New Zealand landscape was a recurring phenomenon in performance activity, particularly employed by Dadson and the group From Scratch. The ongoing ritual *Solar Plexus*, initiated by Dadson in 1970 is still performed in the Mt Eden Crater during each winter solstice. A celebration of the earth's rhythm from dawn to dusk through improvised percussion accompaniment, in which anyone can participate, reflected the new freedom of democratic expression in the arts. Dadson, after studying with Cornelius Cardew's experimental musical group Scratch Orchestra returned to New Zealand and 'incepted' the Scratch Orchestra, Antipodean Twig, (later From Scratch). Dadson collaborated with fellow students, the film

7 Bricolage occurs when significant content and signs within a given discourse are relocated into a different position to convey a different message and a new discourse.

8 Allan Smith, 'Mapping Imperatives: Putting the Land on the Map at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery', *Art New Zealand*, No. 52 1989, p.78.

makers and sculptors Darcy Lange and Leon Narby, and enlisted the talents of Bruce Barber, Lisa McAlpine and Jim Allen in the first Scratch performances. The constitution of the orchestra, based on Cardew's, called for a pooling of resources by the group as a kind of collectivity, with no one soloist or dominant figure. The From Scratch performances are innovative and highly sculptural, transforming ready-made objects into instruments used in sequences of complex and kinaesthetic rhythmical patterns.

Joseph Beuys' expanded idea of democratic creativity is reflected in his concept of "social sculpture" – the notion that all human creativity is malleable and the chaotic fundamentals of life can be shaped to form an enhanced existence. New Zealand artist David Mealing, like Beuys, questioned the validity of the historical art object to convey the cultural truth of a society, and believes that human creativity can hold the key to a reversal of capitalist alienation. Mealing's anarchic action, *Molotov* (1972) (cat 3) was a protest against an international touring exhibition of Mediaeval French art at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1972. The intent was to create a scene on the morning of the first day of the exhibition opening by arriving in a 'get-away car', yelling threats to the awaiting public that a Molotov cocktail was to be thrown into the gallery, and leaving after the action had been completed. Although unsuccessful on the day and now in retrospect rather amusing (the public thought it was an entertaining, harmless street performance and gave them a round of delighted applause), Mealing's action reflected an artistic unease toward the compartmentalisation and commodification of the art object.⁹ Mealing's social conscience abhorred the idea of the artist shut away in an ivory tower to appease the bourgeois notion of the inoffensive artist creating objects to buy and sell. As Mealing wrote: "bourgeois society has a limitless fund of tricks, it shuts up works of art in museums and salons, and turns spectators away from them; it mocks and scorns new ways of seeing, doing and thinking. It buys and sells works of art and justifies their economic value and vice versa, it diffuses it in order to diminish the power of the scandal..."¹⁰

Another action that conveyed Mealing's burgeoning socio-political stance was *Blood the River of Life: A Collective Art and Life Study* that occurred in August 1973 at the Auckland Building Centre. *Blood* was a multi-layered investigation, a political gesture toward the integration of the collective whole in society, a social sculpture, whereby all participants shared a temporal sequence of creativity. Utilising early video technology, available to a minority at the time,¹¹ Mealing set up in collaboration with the Blood Transfusion Service, a closed circuit TV and video monitors in the space provided and relayed pre-recorded images alongside actual donors in real time giving blood. Primarily set up as a service to inform the community of the Transfusion Unit, the project was "to be seen as no more than an extension of our everyday existence"¹². Echoing Beuysian principles of social creativity, *Blood the River of Life* transposed the everyday experience into a creative impulse; Mealing approached the donors lying on beds and informed them that they were "showing unlimited potential creativity".¹³



Molotov, 1972
David Mealing
Courtesy of the artist
cat 3

- 9 *Molotov* also reflected the global climate of student protest, especially in France during 1968. French testing of nuclear weapons in Mururoa, begun in 1966, was an added motive for protest.
- 10 David Mealing, *Blood the River of Life: a collective art and life study*, catalogue, 1973, p. 6.
- 11 Darcy Lange (b.1946) is another figure in the development of video art in New Zealand. Focussing on the social, Lange recorded everyday events in real time, the camera heeding the specific rhythms of a particular workplace or task such as sheep mustering or activities in an English school. Lange studied sculpture at Elam, graduating with a Diploma Fine Arts (Hons). He studied at the Royal College of Art, London (1968–71), graduating with an MA. He began using film and video in 1972 and is considered to be one of the first New Zealand artists to use video for social documentation. Between 1977–80 he made video recordings documenting aspects of the Maori Land Movement. Videos include *Ruatoria Study of Sheep Gathering and a Tangata Whenua Shearing Gang* 1974, *Rural Work Rhythms*, 1975, *Classrooms Observed* 1976 and *Work Rhythms of City & Town*, 1973–74. Lange's video work has recently been readdressed through such exhibitions as *Paleo Neo Video* 1999, New Zealand Film Archives, curated by Lawrence McDonald, and *Action Replay*, 1999 at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.
- 12 David Mealing, *Blood the River of Life: A Collective Art and Life Study*, catalogue, 1973, p. 1.
- 13 David Mealing "Mealing's Bloodbath", *Alternative Cinema*, 3: 31, November, 1973.

II

Increasing exposure to the international movement of performance art through the availability of art magazines, coupled with the new climate of alternative representation, meant the movement gained momentum in mid 70s New Zealand. Jim Allen co-ordinated numerous events and supported the arrival of visiting lecturers and artists, heightening the degree of activity and exchange of ideas. Dematerialisation of the art object and a reawakening of the purpose and potential of ritual in art and life reflected the 70s inclination toward an existentialist interpretation of contemporary living. Artists who employed strategies of sensory deprivation and political commentary in their work through symbolic, temporal gestures explored issues of identity, communication, alienation and perversion of progress. Panoply of performance activity occurring in Auckland during 1973 and 1974 formed the basis for the group exhibition **Four Men in a Boat** at the Auckland City Art Gallery 1974.¹⁴ Kieran Lyons, visiting sculptor at Elam School of Fine Arts during 1974, created *Superimpression*, a monologue that centred on the 'mystique' of technology and big business, Bruce Barber performed *Bucket Action*, Jim Allen, *Contact: A Performance in Three Parts and Dadson Earth/Air ART*. These performances created a stir in the media and public, "people as sculpture" went the hype, "new sculpture where the traditional object is displaced by people in action and where spectators are sometimes integrated into the work".¹⁵ Barber's *Bucket Action* (cat 4) first performed in 1973, saw the artist dressed in a wetsuit to undergo severe sensorial deprivation and disorientation while performing a relatively simple task/action. For 45 minutes the artist masked with a bucket over his head, attempted to relay two fish through ritualised action to buckets situated in a zig-zag pattern along marked tape on the ground. Crawling along the floor and avoiding obstacles, Barber's action was accompanied by electronic whistling and recorded statements/clichés such as "like a fish out of water" and "like water off a duck's back". "His obvious disorientation communicated itself to the audience which sat tensely throughout"¹⁶.

New Zealand performance artists looked toward the work of Brazilian artists and intellectuals such as Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark whose conceptual processes were concerned with environmental and political issues of the *genus loci*, which encompassed the body and self in a sculptural space beyond the pedestal. As Allen writes:

"They rethought the relation between the centre and the periphery, turning it on its head, and they questioned our notions of limits. Clark's work passed from an architecture conceived as a body, that is as a receptacle to be inhabited by man, to the body conceived as architecture as the place of the unique experience, not to be standardised, and remaining open."¹⁷

The 70s performance and conceptual aesthetic that engaged in a closer, interactive communication clearly opened bodily parameters. The art environment or installation such as Allen's *New Zealand Environment # 5* articulated a kinaesthetic experience of space, and like Clark, Allen investigated phenomenological concepts of the visible and invisible. As Clark wrote: "What strikes me in the inside and outside sculpture is that it transforms my perception of myself, of my body. It changes me. I am elastic, formless, without definite physiognomy. Its lungs are

mine. It's the introjection of the cosmos. And at the same time it's my own ego crystallized as an object in space. 'Inside and outside': a living being open to all possible transformations. Its internal space is an affective space."¹⁸

Allen's *Parangole Capes*¹⁹ (cat 5, part two of *Contact*) transcribed the idea of an affective internal space whereby four performers, completely ensconced and tied in layers of fabric, articulated movement actuated by the repression of their bodies. A steel cubed frame in the centre of the gallery space demarcated an area that the performers strove to arrive at, emitting hissing sounds, wriggling, inching, arching, negotiating their way along obstacles into the area. The performers then began to communicate with each other, releasing and untying the fabric with their teeth. Once released from the 'capes' all four hung the fabric around the frame until all open spaces were blocked in, and the cube read as a solid with the performers inside. The hissing sounds of exertion and frustration were replaced with humming, the cube emanating a buoyant vibration of sound.

Martin Mendlesberg, a Canadian sculptor and visiting lecturer in Sculpture at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts between 1973–77, also created a number of interactive environments, primarily out of recycled materials. *Wool and Neon* exhibited at **Eight Young Artists**, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, 1973,²⁰ was based conceptually on the notion of change. "Object-permanence is no longer an essential condition for works of art".²¹ Mendlesberg's subsequent environments *Inflatable Corridor* a large inflatable plastic corridor placed outside the Christchurch Cathedral for the 1975 Christchurch Arts Festival, and *The Plants Within/Within the Animals Within* (1977) displayed a theme of being inside and outside simultaneously and with the idea of being in multiple locations at once.

The artist's body as an imaginative means of articulation, or as an 'architecture of unique experience' is apparent in the work of John Cousins²² and Colleen Anstey, whose rationale centred on developing creative impulses through provisional scenarios of interaction. Cousins' *Preparation for Christmascapade* (1973) (cat 41) was essentially a teaching exercise in physical and philosophical construction and understanding of aesthetic theory. For his students studying musical composition at Canterbury University, *Preparation for Christmascapade's* directives demonstrated how their total integration into the work could solicit a relationship with objects on an organic and intuitive level. The electroacoustic work *Christmascapade* that evolved from this piece relays student discussions, 'chopped up, distorted, looped and otherwise manipulated, a conversation about what constitutes objectivity (that) dissolves into non-verbal sound, slowly dying away'.²³ Cousins' specifically aural work also reflects the premise of being driven by the intrinsic recognition of a given instant. His electroacoustic compositions reference directly our experience of the world, characterised by its use of recorded material and found sounds, especially speech.²⁴

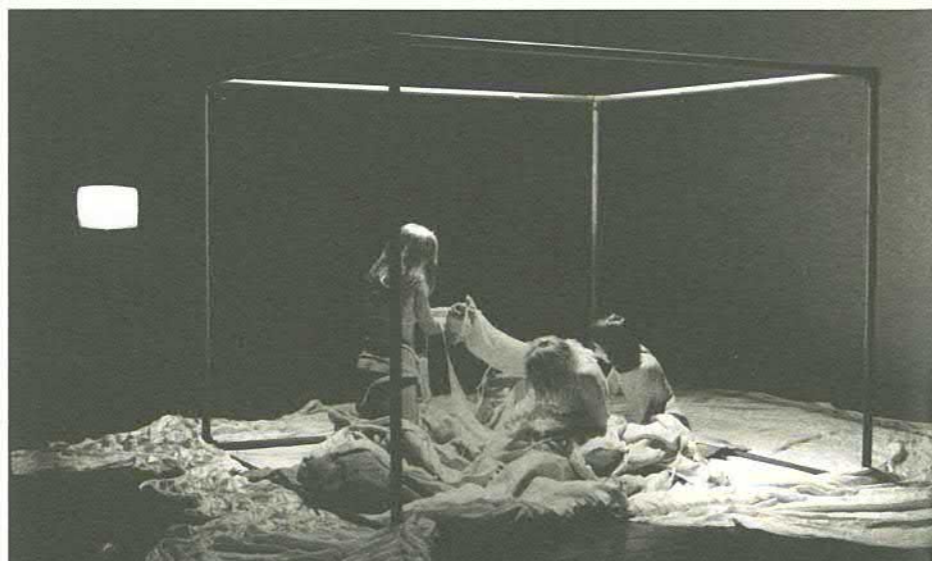
- 19 Created by Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica in 1964/65, the Parangole is a soft, wearable vesture that resembles a cloak or cape, made of layers of material that moves with the body. It necessitates direct bodily participation, requiring that the body moves, walks or dances. The Parangole initiates a relation between "watching" and "wearing", action and inaction, self and sociality, body and environment, forming a cycle of participation in the work that becomes the work.
- 20 Co-ordinated by Ian Hunter **Eight Young Artists' Exhibition** New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Gallery 1973. In 1974 another exhibition co-ordinated by Hunter for the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts **Young Artists Exhibition** included visiting Canadian artist Terry Reid, who performed *The Baked Beans Caper* accompanied by the Victoria University chamber orchestra. The performance consisted of Reid overturning cans of baked beans onto the gallery floor.
- 21 Martin Mendlesberg, **Eight Young Artists, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts**, catalogue, 1973. Mendlesberg's tactile installation consisted of two bales of New Zealand sheep wool and fluorescent strip lighting. The invitation to sense the piece physically was apparently too much of a temptation on opening night for Tony Fomison, who as Ian Hunter recalls "promptly jumped into Marty's wool sculpture and proceeded to make love to his lady friend. The 1970s were really dreadful!" (Ian Hunter, written correspondence February 2000).
- 22 Senior Lecturer in music and Director of the Electroacoustic Music Studios at the University of Canterbury.
- 23 Jonathan Bywater, 'Natural Choices: The Art of John Cousins', *Music in New Zealand*, Winter 1995, p. 16.
- 24 Jonathan Bywater, p. 15.

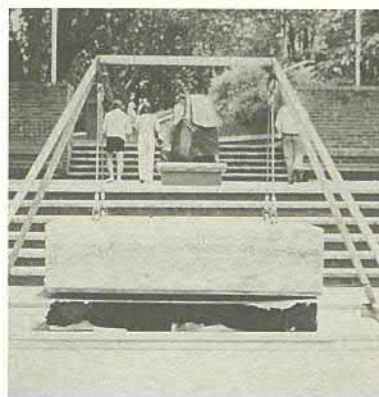
- 14 The subsequent publication *New Art, Some Recent NZ Sculpture & Post object Art 1976*, edited by Jim Allen and Wytan Currow was the first publication to deal with these 'new' sculptural movements of performance and sculpture.
- 15 Geoff Chapple, 'People as Sculpture', *Listener*, May 18, 1974, p.20.
- 16 Geoff Chapple, *Listener*, May 18, 1974, p.20.
- 17 Jim Allen, exhibition notes for **All Seasons**, Kreisler Gallery, New Plymouth, December/January 1999/2000.
- 18 Lygia Clark, 'About the Act', (1965) *October*, 69 (Summer 1994) p.p 102–104.

Parangole Capes, 1974

Jim Allen

Courtesy of the artist and E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki cat 5





Concrete Suspension, 1975

Gray Nicol

Courtesy of the artist and 'open drawer files', Elam School of Fine Arts Library, University of Auckland cat 5

Cousins and Anstey's *Co-Active Play*, (1975–77) which toured New Zealand University campuses was first performed at the Canterbury Society of Arts gallery in 1975. *CAP* made use of simple task, conative and meditative improvisational techniques to reveal the expressive potential of the body-imaginative. The non-verbal and inter-media composition of *CAP* work grew out of Cousins' teaching experience while in the United States during 1972–73. The exploration of physical surroundings, boundaries and finding new possibilities within the immediate environment formed the premise for *CAP* improvisation. Cousins increasingly veered toward installation performances during the mid to late 70s. *Sleep Exposure* (1979) a performance collaboration between Cousins, Anstey, Anna Heinz and Chris Cree-Brown, dealt with the elements of time and cumulative human experience – concepts of inner and outer, physical and metaphysical, using everyday objects as a vehicle for transmission. Cousins' aesthetic articulates the inner life of an artist concerned with processes of realisation through creative activity.

The Auckland City Art Gallery's Project Programme, implemented by Director Ernst Smith, and John Maynard, Exhibitions Officer provided artists with the opportunity to take risks in producing work for the gallery space and gave great scope for experimentation of ideas. Mealing's *Jumble Sale*, Barber's *Stocks and Bonds* and Gray Nicol's *Concrete Suspension* were all part of this programme during 1975. In *Stocks and Bonds* (cat 6) Barber was manacled for three days inside the gallery where he communicated, or "harangued" the audience witnessing his action outside the gallery on closed circuit television via a PA system. The separation of the audience and the artist into two separate hemispheres set up an opposition of ideological assumptions, between the role of the artist/the art world and the inherent voyeuristic tendencies of an audience. *Stocks and Bonds*, meaning 'financial assets and liabilities', and also in the case of the performance, physical restraints, was 'an examination of some of the distinguishing features of the public gallery situation when confronted with an art work that attempts to deny the efficacies of the situation'.²⁵ The medium of performance provided Barber with a means to create an 'operational' critique on art world systems:

- Given 1 The artist as petty offender and/or judge.
 2 The Gallery as churchyard and/or market place.
 NB Are the principals of the gallery egalitarian?
 Are the principles of the work egalitarian?²⁶

The 'petty offender' asserted his assumptions about the gallery system as being one of contemporary idolatry and examined social and economic interaction on a confrontational level. Mealing's *Jumble Sale*, *A Market Place* turned the gallery into a jumble sale that lasted eight days. Over 55 organisations were invited to set up stalls selling goods with proceeds going to charity. The groups had the use of the space free and became 'artists' selling their wares and distributing the profits. *Jumble Sale* actively engaged participants in the construction and success of the meaning and intent. The everyday was brought indoors into the arena of the 'Gallery as churchyard/market place'. Mealing's gesture provoked a questioning of the very nature of art and who it was made for. If art is displayed in the gallery context it assumes a framework of formalist recognition that is related and defined in the structuralist sense to other works of art.²⁷ Mealing's intervention of a 'non-aesthetic' intrusion forced a reconsideration of the broader cultural

25 Bruce Barber, artist slide talk for *Stocks and Bonds*, *A Survey of Contemporary New Zealand Sculpture*. Vol 1, compiled by Ken Adams, Auckland Lynfield College, 1985.
 26 Bruce Barber, *A Survey of Contemporary New Zealand Sculpture*. Vol 1.
 27 Billy Apple's 'alterations' of the given gallery space during 1975 also highlighted like Mealing and Barber aspects of gallery world infrastructures, Apple confronted and exposed on a conceptual level "the gallery as the literal frame of the work, and its management as ideological framing. Frequently his activities would create problems for his hosts and the ensuing arguments and negotiations were assimilated into the work, seen as continuous and ongoing". Tony Green, *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992, p. 158.

dialogue otherwise excluded from the aesthetic sphere. *Concrete Suspension*, another radical performance/installation consisted of Gray Nicol lying supine for 24 hours under a suspended slab of concrete inches away from his body in the sculpture court of the Auckland Art Gallery. (cat 9) This piece demanded great endurance on behalf of the artist. The audience, however, was free to consider the performance for any length of time before walking away. *Concrete Suspension's* oppressive connotation, the suggestion of risk and danger, the artist's body made visible in an enduring and precarious situation, was indicative of 70s body art.²⁸ The body artist explored psychological concepts of identity and crises of the corporeal body, cathartically transcending the fragmentation and alienation inherent in Western society, through shamanistic actions. As Anne Marsh writes:
 "Body art is a convoluted practice: on one hand the artist-as-hero presents a spectacle using his own body, sometimes presenting himself as a kind of shaman who can heal himself or the sick society in which he lives or both; on the other hand the body becomes the object of torture and is abused in an act of would-be liberation."²⁹

New Zealand performance artists such as Peter Roche and Andrew Drummond³⁰ conducted performances that focussed explicitly on the radical exploration of body and self. Drummond after spending time studying abroad in Canada and Scotland and encountering Beuys, turned toward a performative expression, involving ritual and land based work such as *Time/Space Sequence*, *Homage to Callanish* (1975) and *Primitive Arrowhead Redesigned* (1975). On his return to New Zealand, Drummond incorporated more extreme elements of risk and danger into his performances. *Onto Skin* (1977) took place at the Auckland City Art Gallery (as part of the **Young Contemporaries** show), and consisted of Drummond manacled to the floor, to have his accomplice, Nick Spill, pour rubber latex over his back to form another 'skin'. The skin became symbolic in manifold ways. As Greg Burke writes:
 "Skin was used for all its potential association; skin as the primary sense organ, skin as container and body as vessel, the threshold between inner and outer suggestive of the threshold between material and spiritual realities, and the linking of human animal to other species and thereby into a primordial past."³¹

Once cast, a repressive and frightening experience of overwhelming fumes and physical pain distressed the artist. The skin eventually formed and was peeled off leaving Drummond with a lightness and sense of spiritual and physical liberation. It was placed gently over a pile of animal bones and the artist curled into a foetal position on an animal hide as a gesture of refrain and repose. The central theme of the skin has phenomenological implications that link the interiority of the artists' experience with the visible world. The "self imprisoned" state of being manacled to the floor while dangerous fumes threatened to harm him, meant that the artist had to retreat into an interior space, another reality, in order to complete the action.



Stocks and Bonds, 1975

Bruce Barber

Courtesy of the artist and 'open drawer' files, Elam School of Fine Arts Library, University of Auckland cat 6

28 This piece in particular recalls the work of Australian artist Ken Unsworth. His spectacular use of the body during 1975 such as *Five secular settings for sculpture as ritual and Burial piece*, saw the artist suspended and submerged for great lengths of time.
 29 Anne Marsh, *Body and Self: Performance art in Australia 1969–92*, Oxford University Press 1993, p. 101.
 30 Andrew Drummond is Head of Sculpture, School of Fine Arts University of Canterbury.
 31 Greg Burke, 'Andrew Drummond, an Introduction', *AGMANZ Journal*, No 18, 1987/88, p. 16.

III

1976–79 marked another phase in performance activity in New Zealand. Andrew Drummond performed a series of ritualistic actions (*Onto Skin, A Conversation Between Two Animals* and *Suspension/Ascension*) as part of DEAG, The Dynamic Energy Art Group, and took up the position as Education Officer at the National Art Gallery in Wellington. In the same year Nick Spill, became Exhibitions Officer/Curator at the National Art Gallery, the Irish artist Ian Hunter began to generate enterprises for sculptural and performance activity and all three united by goals and ideals initiated, facilitated and fought for the sustenance of alternative modes of expression. Nick Spill's observations and commentary on contemporary art during 1976 revealed concerns about the perceived role of sculpture as being defunct, the artists' dichotomy between making a living by selling objects and being "a pimp to one's culture". "Death of the object – 3 dimensional traditional sculpture had become redundant. Stone, wood and metal representational and non-representational sculptures no longer addressed any valid concerns. Then again how can you survive on sale of documentation of non-object performances, or conceptual pieces that have no material substance?"³²

Spill and Drummond presciently recorded their performances, making artists' books and videos and filing away a plethora of photographs and slides, conscious that the fleeting premise of their actions could be lost all the while negotiating their direction as artists through an ongoing investigation of performance. Spill's work centred on language, wit and irony to convey personal and political messages. Working "in the space between words and images" Spill's two performances *Whipped Cream*, and *Buttering up an Old Friend*, (1976) performed at Wellington Teachers College, were visual and verbal puns, relating 'pure' themes of anger and love through the medium of gesture. *Whipped Cream* (cat 7) documented by Spill, consisted of a semi-naked male performer who filled a large stainless steel tray with cream from a large bucket to then lash the cream with an African ritual bull whip, splattering audience members in the process. *Buttering up an Old Friend* (cat 1) evoked a smooth sensual meditation. Butter, (churned cream) was spread by Spill (wearing a tuxedo) over the naked body of his then wife, Louise. Spill's interplay of visual bodily gestures within a conceptual frame of reference subverted processes of viewing art and engaged the audience in an unexpected manner.

Roche and Buis also subverted processes of audience participation and expectation but through an intense series of performances and installations from 1979–85 that explored in often violent and uncomfortable ways the boundaries between social and psychological conditions of relationship and people in interaction. *Get The Fuck Out, Got To Get Out*. (1979) performed at Auckland University, was an hour long 'improvisation, a continual changing of acceptance and rejection of roles and identities'.

"In some ways our presence in performance can be seen as a prototype, and yet there is also the fact that our audience is never simply an observer, but it is made keenly aware of the fact that it too holds an effective relationship with the work in progress."³³



Whipped Cream, 1976
Nicholas Spill

Courtesy of the artist and the E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki cat 7

1978 could be considered as being the definitive year for New Zealand performance artists. Ian Hunter set up the Wellington Artists Co-Op, Mealing's variance with Manawatu art director Luit Bieringa over the cancellation of his performance/installation *Crucifixion*³⁴, Drummond's own legal debate over the **Platforms** performance *Crucifixion*, and the Mildura Sculpture Triennial provoked an energy in the alternative art scene replete in both controversy and experimentation. Drummond's *Crucifixion* (cat 11) took place at the Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery as part of the group show **Platforms**. Organised by Martin Mendlesberg, Rosemary Johnson and Neil Dawson, three given structures, a square, rectangle or cruciform were offered to the 15 artists taking part. Drummond chose to symbolically explore the nature of the cruciform St Andrew's cross, through a performance that suggested ancient pagan skin sloughing rituals. Inspired by the reading of the tenth station of the cross, where Christ's clothes were torn off before the Crucifixion, Drummond re-enacted the spiritual moment of transcendence. Entering naked into the art gallery space, Drummond lay on the cross wearing a gas mask. A heart-pulse visual display unit recorded on a screen his physical and emotional state while an assistant poured latex onto his body. A simulated heartbeat sounded under the cross while the 'skin' was setting. Casting off the skin Drummond laid the residue on the cross along with ten polaroid photographs recording the performance. Two spectators, incensed by his nudity, complained to the police and charges of indecency were laid. Gallery staff were ordered by the police to remove the offending documentation after the case had been made public, however the law was defied until police subsequently seized the polaroids from the installation. Charges were dismissed after a court hearing five months later, with the judge reserving his decision as the performance was part of an Arts Festival and no undue emphasis was given to Drummond's nudity. Evidence in defence of the performance was given by Hamish Keith (chairman of the QEII Arts Council) and Tom Taylor (lecturer in sculpture at Canterbury University), who described the growing use of the artist's body as a sculpture form. In the age of Larry Flynt's *Hustler* magazine and continuing exploitation of the female body in advertising and daily life, Drummond's performance, described by the judge as "ill-mannered, in bad taste, crude and offensive", highlighted distortions in middle class values. Drummond's semiotic language of the body upturned a number of "master narratives", or binaries inherent in patriarchal culture. As Lita Barrie suggests, Drummond's overlaying of Christian and pagan symbolism inferred "release from the bondages associated with the proper name given under 'the father'".³⁵ Despite experimental practices in vanguard circles, New Zealand's relative isolation from the contemporary art scene in America, Europe and Australia served to cultivate a parochial understanding of current practice. Performance, a thriving activity that had dominated the art scene overseas since the early 60s, was relatively unseen in New Zealand and Drummond's *Crucifixion* was the first 'performance' to hit the headlines on a national level.

Soon after the *Crucifixion* controversy, Drummond performed in the 1978 **Seventh Australian Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Twenty Directions**, a pointing performance. Other New Zealand artists to contribute at the symposium were Phil Dadson and Gray Nicol; their duo *Triad 1* (cat 8) was a cerebral musical composition/performance of Dadson on the piano and Nicol wearing white gloves elegantly manipulating string to produce a long and unwinding melancholic



Triad, 1978

Phil Dadson/Gray Nicol

Courtesy of the artist and 'open drawer' files, Elam School of Fine Arts Library, University of Auckland cat 8

³⁴ Mealing's *Crucifixion* was a project proposal intended for the Manawatu Art Gallery. Its premise was based on issues of race relations, apartheid, New Zealand's sporting ties with South Africa and the eviction in 1978 of Polynesian overstayers. The proposal was 'postponed' at the last minute by the director of the art gallery and the subsequent correspondence outlining the rationale behind the 'postment' and the stance of the artist against censorship in the arts was exhibited as *Getting Cold Feet*, this toured with the **New Zealand Artists in Mildura** show during 1979.

³⁵ Lita Barrie, 'Andrew Drummond: Toward an Allegorical Use of the Body'. *Art New Zealand*, No. 44, 1987, p.65.



Andrew Drummond with Ian Hunter, 1978
 Courtesy of the artist
 cat 9

sound. David Mealing's performance was a socio-political tableau entitled *Wasteland* that effectively commented on the problems of unemployment in the community and included two concurrent and related performances, *Soup Kitchen* and *Breadline*. *Wasteland* was an installation of an ever-increasing mound of twenty-five thousand newspapers – each one representing an unemployed person 'discarded like yesterday's paper', (the newspapers were later recycled after the installation had ended). To highlight his point, Mealing pinned to the wall of the gallery the latest unemployment figures. A videotaped interview with a local unemployed person in Mildura was played during the exhibition and in *Soup Kitchen*, watery soup made from a 1930s depression recipe, was offered to local people. The performance, *Breadline*, caused the most controversy. Mealing dressed in the garb of a street person, proceeded to wolf down bread and drink beer (the "crumbs and crusts" of the dole) in front of an audience, to then 'shatter communion' by throwing the loaf of bread defiantly at the audience 'of religious art believers'. The audience pelted Mealing with the bread he had thrown at them, symbolising the abuse the unemployed are often subjected to. *The Wasteland* project was deemed by critics one of the most successful of the political statements and in the light of the Mildura controversy³⁶ an apposite comment on the 'waste of human resources, and the gulf between those who have work and those who haven't'.³⁷ Nick Spill performed *Artist's Talk* a "serio-comic, mock academic" lecture that juxtaposed art world commentary with slides of performances and found images in an acerbic and sardonic take on art world tactics.

"Before I worked in an art gallery, I used to be under the illusion that artists made Art History. They clearly do not. Art administrators, publishers, critics, editors, collectors, curators and dealers, in short, everyone in the art world except the Artist, make Art History. The Artist just delivers the goods."³⁸ The Mildura experience was documented on video and eventually toured the major galleries in New Zealand in 1979.

New Zealand did not have any one alternate space that focussed on performance and installation until the late 70s. Ian Hunter,³⁹ an Irish born artist and arts administrator who lived in New Zealand from 1973–1983, established several artist run spaces and conferences throughout New Zealand that aimed to forge greater relations between artists from New Zealand and abroad with an underlying desire to engender a collective political stance. These venues and events provided ways for artists to collaborate discuss and identify their struggles in making a living and extending their careers in a culture largely ignorant of the activities of artists. Hunter set up the Wellington Artists Co-Operative in 1978, in a disused New Zealand Wool Board warehouse in Lambton Quay (after the initial venue, the Ngaruanga Meatworks building, was destroyed in 1977). Andrew Drummond performed the pivotal *Ngaruanga Set* at the warehouse, videotaped by Hunter, (cat 9) whereby the artist after spending time in the previous space of the abattoir, devised four private and fugitive performances that suggested "a reintegration with the animal dimension of human experience".⁴⁰ *Twenty Directions in an Enclosure*, *Onto Skin*, *Skin/Body Suspension* and *Like a Bull at a Gate*, were performances that commented on the meatworks as a symbol of the physicality inherent in New Zealand society and integrated feelings and rituals involved in death. Beuys spoke of animals as "fantastic entities and generators for the production of spiritual goods",⁴¹ Drummond through these performances revealed a level of

36 The conservative public in Mildura resented the invasion of artists performing and installing bizarre 'works of art'. The Mildura City Council had issued a warning at a press conference that there was to be "no nudity, pornography or bloodletting, that any behaviour by visiting artists which was not acceptable to locals would not be tolerated". A hostile atmosphere toward experimental art was promoted by the City Councillors in the Press and on television.
 37 David Mealing, artist statement 'Project Programme Proposal, Auckland Art Gallery, *Wasteland* 1977'.
 38 Nick Spill, *Being an Artist in the 70s*, unpublished manuscript, copyright Nick Spill, 2000.
 39 Ian Hunter was also curator and acting director for the National Art Gallery, Wellington in the mid 70s.
 40 Lita Barrie, 'Andrew Drummond, Toward an Allegorical Use of the Body', *Art New Zealand* No 44 1987, p. 65.
 41 Joseph Beuys, 'Coyote' K. Tisdall, *Studio International*, No 19 p. 39, 41

consciousness that spoke of the collective, senseless slaughtering of animals by humankind; as Drummond commented "the statements were made from an animal point of view, human or otherwise"⁴².

Pauline Rhodes, David Mealing, Roche and Buis and visiting Chinese artist Eva Man Wah Yuen⁴³ all created installations and performances at the warehouse, Yuen's *Composition in Chalk and String* explored sculptural and spatial ideas within a network of string linking numbered bolts scattered on the warehouse floor and Mealing conducted *Desolation Row: A Socio-Political Statement*. Barry Thomas, also actively working in and around the Co-Op created *Cabbage Piece*, in Courtney Place, Wellington.⁴⁴

Hunter's own sculptural work at this time was exhibited at the National Art Gallery and consisted of photographic documentation of ephemeral installations and actions. One piece entitled *Cook Strait Sculpture* (1977) depicts Hunter dispatching oil from a light aircraft in Cook Strait. Another piece of documentation exhibited included *Shelf Life*, (1978) an installation/performance at the Victoria University Library. *Shelf Life* consisted of four pine shelves on the walls of the Library exhibition area. A carpenter was employed to construct the shelves and provided the central content of the work. A transcript of an interview with the carpenter and photographs of the process of putting up the shelves was as much a revelation about a physical and mental process as it was a formal statement about the nature of art (with obvious associations with Robert Morris's *Box with sound of its own making*). The development of exhibition opportunities and the visibility of artists in the community began to increase during the late 1970s with Hunter's enthusiasm and energy for artist-organised and artist-oriented events that focused on emerging and neglected areas of the art world. The Artist's Co-Op, active from 1978-1980 was a vital force in the artistic community, it provided work and exhibition space and importantly connections to an international network of similar organisations, that was to be more fully explored during the 1980s.

IV

Ritual, as 'an acting out of collective needs' is evident in the performance work of Andrew Drummond during the 1980s. Ecological and environmental concerns formed the basis for much performance activity during the 70s in Australasia, America and Europe. Performance artists used natural materials of earth, fire and water in shamanistic gestures of healing and regeneration⁴⁵ their focus on the environment either celebrated the natural world or conversely critiqued the advancements of Western society. The Aramoana Smelter issue in Otago New Zealand, being one such threat that Drummond reacted against through *Filter Action*, (cat 10) a ritual performed on the mud flats of Aramoana, a proposed site for an Aluminium smelter. Meaning pathway to the sea, Aramoana (also a Maori burial ground) represented a fragile ecological system under threat by negative human intervention. Drummond constructed a pack for the private

42 Andrew Drummond, 'Technician of the Sacred', *Wystan Curnow, Art New Zealand*, No 11 1978, p. 16.
 43 Yuen also collaborated with Eruera Nia on a number of video documentaries about the Chinese restaurant community in Wellington *A Day in the Life of Michael Chan*. Yuen also created land installations on Kapiti Island in 1978 where she was artist in residence. Pauline Rhodes was taken by Yuen's fleeting Co-Op installation and she later created *Thank you Eva*, 1978 also at the Co-Op.
 44 Planting numerous cabbage plants on a disused site in the inner city, Thomas arranged the plants to spell out the word 'Cabbage', it was subsequently harvested and made into soup, offered free to the public.
 45 One of the many roles Joseph Beuys assigned himself was that of healer, and he often spoke of a vast social wound that needed repair. His art offered both poetic representations of the injury and practical prescriptions for a cure and alludes to healing techniques of all kinds both physical and spiritual. Gauze, bandages, copper, herbs, X rays, homeopathy and the ecstatic, mystical activities of the shaman, who serves as a channel for the flow of energy between the earthly and spiritual realms, were primary ingredients and strategies in his work. These are clearly evident in Drummond's work as well.



Filter Action, 1980
 Andrew Drummond
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photo: N. Spill
 cat 10

performance/ritual that contained alchemical ingredients; kidneys, ground filters made from muslin and small divining rods made from willow. Drummond's ritual of protection and healing began with the artist inserting the willow divining rods into the mud to form a circle and a copper rod placed in the centre. Ground filters of muslin were laid on the mud using an East/West line, chimes were used to signify time and sequence change. Three animal kidneys were used, one was held in Drummond's hand while he walked around the circle, another was placed in his mouth which he then spat into a hole in the mud, and the third was held at a distance from his body (by using string) then dropped into another hole. When the actions were completed one piece of muslin was buried with the kidneys, all the materials were repacked and one willow divining rod left in the centre of the circle. Kidneys provide for the body a filtering of toxins from the system, and in the performance were symbolically overlaid onto Aramoana's tenuous (in)ability to absorb and filter the by-products of industrial expansion/waste. Filter Action although politically motivated was not a political protest, but conveyed an acute need to offer a remedy and protection for an ecosystem under threat by capitalist ignorance and greed.⁴⁶ Another environmental work performed by Drummond in 1980 was *Earth Vein*, performed Lake Mahinerangi, Otago and was a gesture of grace toward the earth, putting back into it what had been taken out, in a location which had been heavily exploited in the extraction of all the significant gold veins. As Drummond stated: "The act of putting back into the earth an element of social and economic significance was a gesture of recognition of not only our exploitative nature but to recognise the balances that must be maintained if a fruitful co-existence is ever to be achieved."⁴⁷

Earth Vein consisted of 500 metres of soft-core copper pipe in 50 metre lengths inserted by Drummond under a disused water race. All aspects of the land installation were documented and published in a limited edition book format. A trench was dug in the bottom of the water race to a depth of five inches and lined with cotton wool at the point where the nine copper pipe ends meet. Stripped willow branches in the form of divining rods 'pinned' the wire down. A number of rituals associated with the insertion of the copper wire were then undertaken. *Action for 9 Stoppages*, and *Filter Action for 2 Entries*; dressed in his white boiler suit with a pack designed to carry and keep beeswax at melting point, Drummond walked the length of the channel and performed *Action for 9 Stoppages*, a ritual to join the connecting lengths of the copper, by "joining, wrapping, sealing and mounding".⁴⁸ *Filter Action for 2 Entries* functioned as receivers for energy. Beeswax was melted over an open fire before coating the copper ends with muslin and beeswax, covering these with earth and a clay slip and pouring the fire's embers over the mound. (cat 28) After completing the rituals Drummond then walked the length of *Vein*. The copper 'vein' combined signification of the body's life transport system with the energy conductor of copper given back to the earth. The alchemical nature of both performances combined the earthly with the spiritual and addressed the issue of exploitation in a universal way. By exploring the interrelationship between the land and humanity, Drummond's filial expose of man's behaviour within the terrain commented not just on a singular moment of protest against despoliation of a certain area, but became eloquent metaphors for a greater energy needed for renewal, "the focus of the earth and the focus of our place on it and the relationship between the two is what I'm doing and it's done through energy."⁴⁹

46 *Toxick*, a performance/installation at the Bosshard Galleries in Dunedin was the main political statement concerning the Aramoana smelter proposal, and was exhibited in video form as part of the group exhibition *Aramoana* at the Wellington City Art Gallery in 1980. Drummond covered the walls of the Bosshard with a length of aluminium foil and ran along the length two plastic tubes full of blood. The gallery windows were blanked out with aluminium fabric blinds and the word *Toxick* was sprawled with red spray paint onto the window. Aluminium ingots were hanging above the foil and 'blood arteries'. A mound of dirt on the floor with three upright willow sticks bound in cotton sealed with beeswax and inserted with slate and plumb lines resembled sentinels, 'crosses or the calculations of surveyors and environmentalists on the grave of Aramoana'. (Jonathan Smart & Hugh Lauder, 'Ideology and Political Art in New Zealand: A Radical View' *Landfall* March 1985, p. 88). A series of images from Paul van Moeseke's report relating government calculations of smelter economics was projected onto a wall; a gas bottle lay at a distance and a metronome counted the passage of time. Drummond entering the gallery dressed in his boiler suit, wrapped tightly with cotton wool around his head and hands and wearing a gas mask, released an orange distress flare into the crowded gallery, to which the asphyxiating fumes emptied the space.

47 Andrew Drummond, *Art Project: Frances Hodgkins Fellow, University of Otago. Overview*, 1980.

48 Andrew Drummond, *Vein*, 1980.

49 Andrew Drummond, interview with David Naulls, 1981.

V

In 1979 a group of seventeen New Zealand artists contributed to events at the Side/FX Gallery, a Sydney based artist run project space. Entitled *Prime Export* the artists provided an alternative component to the elitist stance of the concurrent Sydney Biennale, Peter Roche conducted an extreme body art performance that involved lacerations on his skin with a razor blade and giving himself an enema. (cat 12)

ANZART 1981, inception by Hunter⁵⁰, grew out of the Side/FX, *Prime Export* initiative and this major exchange between New Zealand, Australian and other international artists continued until its unfortunate demise in 1985. The first ANZART programme took place at the Christchurch Arts Centre and included artists, Mike Parr, Bonita Ely, Dom de Clario, Ulay and Marina Abramovic, Claire Fergusson, Phil Dadson, Andrew Drummond, Chris Cree-Brown, Di ffrench and David Mealing. The 1981 ANZART event was the first time in New Zealand that performance and installation came together on an intense level. The exchange between artists generated a sense of experimentation and diversity that created a new performance impetus in New Zealand. Expatriate artist Claire Fergusson performed *Primeval Woman Emerging from the Sludge*, the Dunedin based artist Di ffrench *Fontanel*, European body artists Ulay and Marina Abramovic, *Witnessing*, and Australian performance artist Mike Parr gave a lecture entitled *Artaudian Gnosticism*. There were slide talks, musical concerts, Australian and New Zealand video and audio arts, experimental film and an exhibition of artists' books. Two performances *Fontanel* and *The Message* are described below.

Di ffrench's *Fontanel* (cat 38) performance was a political protest against apartheid at a time when the South African Spring Bok Rugby Tour was dividing the country; ffrench was also influenced by the tyrannical and murderous regime of Idi Amin, which caused the deaths of thousands of Ugandans. French associated the political nightmare of both regimes with a loss of compassion in an increasing world of brutality. The performance ritually emphasised the vulnerability of a civilisation exposed to evil and violence, through a combined use of slides, sculptural clay forms, gauze and ash that were symbolically manipulated by the artist. *Fontanel*, although motivated by the brutality of racism and intolerance, evoked a sense of regeneration, a continuous cycle of civilisation and evolution, time and space, birth and death. Di ffrench conducted several performances from the late 70s until 1985 when she began to concentrate on photographic tableaux based on performative principles of identity. *Fontanel* was one of three performances that were overtly political in nature, *Gut Reaction* (1981), devised after the death of Bobby Sands in Ireland and *The Opinion* (1985) saw the artist activate sculptural material in order to metaphorically express her socio-political beliefs rather than emphasise her body as the repository of meaning in the work.

The Message (cat 11) was a group performance by 'Enactment', and directed by the Polish artist Jacek Grzelecki.⁵¹ *The Message*, described as "apocalyptic", resembled a medieval passion play. Drummond, wearing his white boiler suit, was symbolically 'crucified' within the periphery of a giant wooden wheel, constructed by Grzelecki. The wheel was carried from Cathedral Square to The Great Hall in the Arts Centre, where Drummond was subjected to the wheel's slow



The Message, 1981
The Enactment

Courtesy of Jonathan Smart
cat 11

50 After conducting a study sponsored by the New Zealand Arts Council in 1980, in which he recommended a closer relationship with Australia, Hunter proposed the first of a series of joint projects between the two nations. Hunter was visiting lecturer in Art Theory at the Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1981.

51 Jacek Grzelecki studied painting at the Warsaw Academy of Art during the late 1960s, and moved to Australia in 1973 to teach art in Gippsland.

revolutions. Accompanied by the sounds of early space invader video games and the fascist tirades of Hitler and Mussolini, the performance evoked an atmosphere of doom, both past and impending. Drummond symbolised a Leonardo da Vinci type figure of Vitruvian Man, a centrifugal force in the destiny of humanity and the universe, which presented an image of the world's endless cycles of transition, advance, destruction and corruption.

The inaugural ANZART event, supported by the QEII Arts Council, the Australian Visual Arts Board and the Australia New Zealand Foundation, was an exceptional forum that has remained largely unacknowledged. Numerous events, performances and installations occurred in a multitude of venues and it was intended to be ongoing, promoting large-scale multi-media possibilities and vital exchange with international artists.

Another project initiated by Ian Hunter and implemented by David Mealing, Stuart Griffiths, Barbara Strathdee, Mary Louise Brown and Vivienne Lynn, was the F.1. Sculpture Project,⁵² a five-week festival of installation, performance, seminars and video art held at the Teal Lemonade Factory in Wellington, 1982. The F.1. initiative arose out of a need to address the lack of support and increase exposure for sculptors. A series of workshops provided materials for making sculpture, performance and inter-media presentations, the large-scale space accommodated the diverse work of a greater portion of the artistic community in New Zealand. F.1. promoted an enhanced public understanding of sculpture and the role of sculptors in the New Zealand cultural scene. Lack of funding for the arts was an issue addressed by ANZART and F.1., the "self help" philosophy of the initiatives empowered artists to create relationships with potential sponsors in the business world. Working toward a common objective by pooling resources, time and energy the F.1. Project was a major event and unqualified success in building a premise with which future artists could expand. Some artists to contribute included Greer Twiss, Don Driver, Pauline Rhodes, Stuart Griffiths, Jacqueline Fraser, Andrew Drummond, John Cousins, Jack Body, Chris Cree-Brown and Colleen Anstey. A room was devoted to 10 hours of poetry, sound and songs and evenings of dance and film. International visitors to F.1. included David Kerr from the Experimental Art Foundation and Richard Demarco from Edinburgh. F.1. provided the opportunity to debate feminist issues in the arts and to address the problem of invisibility for women artists. A two-day seminar on women's sculpture advocated the work of New Zealand women sculptors as well as work from the United States, Great Britain, Australia and Italy, compiled by Juliet Batten and Barbara Strathdee and a discussion of feminist goals resulted in the establishment of a National Women Artist's Association. Anstey performed *Performance 24 Hours*, (cat 40) which began with the sun's entry into the space until sundown the next day. The performance coursed the path of sun-light from a window at half hourly intervals. At night the process ended abruptly when Anstey threw a stone, wrapped in a white knotted bandage through a window. A taped interview was then played that relayed the suicide attempt of a woman totally paralysed with multiple sclerosis. Anstey's incorporation of the audio-tape, juxtaposed against the ritual of plotting the ever-transient sun, poignantly evoked the inevitable drawing of life toward death.

There were also experimental installations by Pauline Rhodes, and Jacqueline Fraser that analysed formal, abstract issues of aesthetics, and work by Vivienne Lynn and the Irish artist Rose Ann McCreery that expressed political and social realities of working in a male-dominated culture. Feminist critique during the early 80s had exposed the division in acceptance of work made from a modernist (non-political) stance and that of a feminist impulse. "Most critics in New Zealand avoid or condemn exhibitions of women's art which uses gender difference as a political weapon. The women whose art receives favourable reviews (or in many cases any reviews at all) are those whose work fits the modernist mould, are not feminists, are asexual and apolitical."⁵³

52 This was developed by Hunter as a direct outcome of the 1981 Construction and Process international Biennale which was held in a disused Polish factory, and the solidarity movement Artists and Filmmakers Union, in Poland.

53 Cheryl Sotheran, 'Replacing Women in Art History', *Art New Zealand*, No 26, p. 17.



Action, 1979

Peter Roche

Courtesy of the artist and 'open drawer' files, Elam School of Fine Arts Library, University of Auckland cat 12

Women performance artists in New Zealand integrated installation art, video and photography into their work. Rather than employing specifically body art motifs as seen in the work of Australian, European and American women artists, the tendency was to instead cross-reference disciplines in order to establish and support a feminist and political consciousness.

The 1983 ANZART in Hobart further consolidated overseas connections and a group of New Zealand artists taking part included Di French, Mary Louise Brown, John Cousins, Andrew Drummond, Stuart Griffiths, Colleen Anstey and Roche and Buis. Drummond, John Rose and Steve Turpie performed *Grafting*, a healing ritual for ailing trees in the inner city; French performed *Asters* and Dadson *Jetty*. In 1984 artists affiliated with the previous ANZART forums travelled to Edinburgh to perform as part of a wider contingency of international experimental art. Andrew Drummond and the Group From Scratch participated as did film and video artists Gregor Nicholas and Peter Wells. However only one, woman artist was included in the selection, despite the claims for open democratic processes and visibility of alternative artists.

John Cousins performed the eloquent (seven hours long) *Membrane* (cat 29) at Edinburgh,⁵⁴ which consisted of sculptural components glass perspex, clear polythene and the artists' own body. Two 'complementary expressive systems' i.e. fluid (water and urine) and gas (inhaled and exhaled air) were passed through his body, which served as an "organic transformer of the sound making resource".⁵⁴ The pitched percussion resulting from the artists' urinary cycle passing through sounding reeds and activating sounding drums was random and linked intrinsically to the biological and personal rhythms of the artists' body. The 'pressure dome' to which the sounding reeds were attached was visually arresting and evoked a quietly luminous chamber of hiatus. The English Press, however, did not appreciate the expressive quality of the work and Cousins found himself the centre of a much published tabloid expose critiquing the funding for an artist to travel half way around the world in order to 'pee in front of an audience'. *Membrane's* classical and abstract quality however, provided a catalyst for other performance work.⁵⁶

The 1984 Edinburgh experience as with Hobart, strove to maintain the Trans-Tasman links established in the late 70s with a view to promoting New Zealand art in the broader international scene. Ian Hunter had since withdrawn from the administrative responsibilities and had moved to London, but still supported the event maintaining the importance of artist control and non-institutional planning for the continuing success of the biennial forum.

"In such a small and relatively isolated country like New Zealand there exists a very real danger that mainstream or officially sanctioned art orthodoxies can become too powerfully located in central arts administrative thinking and institutional/cultural planning. So that they inevitably, even unwittingly, squeeze out or effectively suppress those ideas, cultural processes and

54 Previously performed in Dunedin as part of *New Art in Dunedin* (1984).

55 John Cousins, 'Membrane a Description of a Performance', *New Art in Dunedin*, 1984.

56 *Bowed Piece* (1986) in particular combined basic bodily functions (an integration of muscular activity to generate octaves of heart beat) within a sculptural framework.

individuals who don't appear to conform to the accepted norms. In this sense ANZART and artists events should by their very nature, be continually seeking to challenge the assumptions we hold about ourselves as a nation and cultural community, an attitude which is by definition also the essence of a healthy, open and democratic society...⁵⁷

ANZART, 1985 in Auckland was the final event and by far the largest and most complicated. Administration was fraught with no real promotion or organisational expertise to unify the event and the theme, Time-Specific, seemed inappropriate given the artists' emphasis on exploring space and location.⁵⁸ There were however, a plethora of installations, artists' books, performance, sound, forums, artists' talks, exhibitions and evenings of film by more than 30 artists over a two-week period, despite strife and minimal funding. There was a weekend feminist seminar, an Art and Gender forum, and a hui held at the Whaiora Marae in Otara which discussed cultural bias in the arts. Tracey Moffatt's film *Guniwaya Ngigu* documenting the land rights protests at the Brisbane Commonwealth Games elicited much media response, as did much of the Australian film, video and performance work.⁵⁹ In Juliet Batten's *100 Women Project* (cat 33 & 34) issues of collaborative art, questions of hierarchy and democracy, balance between process and product were augmented by the group activity performed on Te Henga Beach. 100 women built sand forms together and performed rituals that built up a combined energy of sharing. The piece was gradually washed away by the tide, witnessed by the 100 women who had taken part. Ecological feminist performance and ritual was criticised during the 70s and 80s as being essentialist, reaffirming the binary opposition of biological determinism.

"Ritual performance that celebrated nature and the biological body was criticised by Marxists and feminists within the artworld. The celebration of biological difference, the desire to return to one's instinctual or ancestral roots, and the heralding of a 'primitive' existence that was free of social repression were all considered to be ineffectual ways of promoting social change. Such critiques were a shift from the concerns of the counter-culture where change was to be implemented through lifestyle and alternative culture(s)."⁶⁰

Batten's feminism defied these criticisms, her work dealt with previously 'taboo' subjects of domesticity, motherhood and the darker side of female sexuality. Batten, inspired by female artists and historians such as Lucy Lippard, and Griselda Pollock began teaching courses on women artists at Auckland University's Continuing Education Department combining practical art exercises, getting the women to explore the content of their own lives, and to work collaboratively. Out of these teaching exercises, art environments such as the *Menstrual Maze* (1983) and numerous sand projects were initiated. Batten was also instrumental in facilitating the Ponsonby Women's Outreach, a gallery environment for women, and has studied and written extensively on the history of women's art.

Although the ANZART idea has ultimately not been kept alive, its invaluable provision for the development of performance art in New Zealand and as an avenue for further risk taking in the arts during the 1980s, (after the demise of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1978), created a nexus of activity beyond commercial enterprises.

In 1985 Di Ffrench performed *The Opinion*,⁶¹ (cat 32) after feeling for some time that a reliance on international critical and judgemental pronouncements obstructed the development of free-thinking in New Zealand. The elements that made up the performance and the way in which they were juxtaposed, presented a visual cipher for blind acceptance, abuse, fragility and erosion of power structures. *The Opinion* concerned itself with the easy manipulation of media to convey truths and half-truths, issues of violence and victimization. A fibreglass 'mechanical mouth', a stack of newspapers, a soundtrack of the incoming tide and a film loop of the 1951 Wellington Labour Party Rally was projected across the objects, towards the wall and over the tall newspaper stack. Ffrench methodically screwed up page after page of paper, throwing it into a fibreglass bowl. The effect was an eerie one especially as smoke slowly began to filter into the performance space and the sound of the incoming tide progressively became louder. "Overwhelming the mechanical structures of the opinion: a battle is fought between the political victims and the power structure, but both ultimately are rendered invisible and ineffectual by the sea and its creeping, choking mists".⁶²

By the time Ffrench performed *The Opinion* the shoreline once swept clear by participants in *Purposeless Work* had become clouded. The zone of performance art by 1985 became defunct as the so-called return to the art object obviated the richness of performance activity. The journey though, from the early 70s to mid 80s, was one that opened discourse beyond formalism, defying a reliance on the finished aesthetic product. Another factor in the waning of post-object art was the degree to which it had converged with the main stream. Once a fringe activity, performance arts' initial underground status, hence its effectiveness as an interventionist strategy, had become commercialised as Bruce Barber observed, "By 1975, the absorption of performance (the theatre of visual art) into other disciplines: film, video, dance, music, theatre, stand-up comedy and the appropriation of techniques and forms from these areas into performance theory, had hastened the institutionalisation of the forms of performance as sub-sections to standardised curricula in centres of higher learning."⁶³

Therefore, ironically, performance art 'lost' due to hybridisation, the essential defining characteristics of its subversive identity and its temporal exploration of body and self. Adrian Hall also comments,

"The gesture is prime – it is the first signal. From this perspective, which extends from the "happenings", actions and events of the sixties, the most difficult mutation which seems to have happened with what is described as "Performance Art" – was in the late seventies, early eighties, that all was permitted under a new semiosis."⁶⁴

Performance discourse in New Zealand has remained static thus far due in part to the manner in which performance has been dissipated into the category of the "too hard basket". Debate and application of theory toward performance practice in New Zealand is open for negotiation. **Action Replay** and **Intervention** are two such exhibitions that have looked at the material disparately existing in archives around the country, and have attempted to readdress the invisibility of post-object work in the accounts of New Zealand art history.

57 Ian Hunter, *Keeping the ANZART Idea Alive*: London, 27 March 1985.

58 See Pamela Zeplin's article 'Eruptions in Volcano City', *Artlink* Vol 5 Nos 3 & 4, August/September 1985, p.p 5-6.

59 There were some performances by Mike Sukolski, Arthur Wicks, Andrew Hayim, Bronte Edwards, Stuart Griffiths and the Japanese artists Junko Wada and Akio Suzuki, as well as an evening of performance video art.

60 Anne Marsh *Body and Self*, p. 151.

61 First performed at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1984, as part of the 1984 Artist's Projects, and later in conjunction with the exhibition *Spare Parts* at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in 1985.

62 Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, 1993, p. 15.

63 Bruce Barber, *Reading Rooms*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1987, p. 106.

64 Adrian Hall *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, catalogue, 1994, p. 31.

As Robert Leonard mused retrospectively, concerning the omission of performance art in the 1992 touring exhibition *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, It simply didn't fit into the kinds of curatorially-driven exhibitions being done, which were all about images, codes of representation: art as iconography plus style.⁶⁵

Intervention is far from a definitive documentation of all activity and personalities involved during the 70s and 80s. Indeed many areas remain open to be further enlivened, especially sonic art and electroacoustic music's place in the history of New Zealand art. The multifarious resonance of performance activity extant in the contemporary New Zealand art scene is another factor to be considered, with younger artists like Daniel Malone engaging in processes of performative behaviour that juxtapose issues of cultural identity in an urban environment.

Ian Hunter, however, identifies the period of the 70s "as the time of the long (white) silence". It would be dangerous then to categorise the time in euphoric terms, as Hunter comments, "There was almost no attempt on our part to open a sustained dialogue or exchange with fellow Maori artists and writers. There were exceptions of course (Ans Westra, Michael King, Tony Fomison), and the Maori Artists and Writers Association was particularly strong at this time. However, I feel this very much as a personal loss and a professional failure on my own part. I think that many of us in the 1970s were too preoccupied with notions of legitimacy in the international art community, and failed to recognise or take up the real challenges and opportunities for cultural dialogue and exchange that awaited us at home. Things may have changed now, but we should not glamorise the period, nor attempt to sanitise the failures of the 70s."⁶⁶

A future comprehension of performance art, recognising the need for a shift in understanding, will enable the performance repertoire of this country to relocate – in meaning, message and position. Thus a resulting parallax of perspective can displace and side-step conventional attitudes toward performance practice, opening parameters within, across and beyond the 'margins'.

65 Robert Leonard, 'Rewind to Fast Forward: interview with Robert Leonard', *the pander*, issue six/seven, March 1999, p.38.

66 Ian Hunter, written correspondence, February 2000.

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by Nicholas Spill
July 2000
Miami Beach, Fl.

Art lovers: be prepared

Dom. 20.11.76



NICHOLAS SPILL

DOMINION REPORTER
MORE than 300 exhibits from 18 countries will be included in the "Art in the mail" exhibition that opens in the National Art Gallery on Wednesday next.

The show may be regarded by some as an opening explosion by 26-year-old Nicholas Spill, who took up his appointment as the gallery's exhibitions officer a fortnight ago.

To oldies who like to stop at the Botticellis in the Uffizi or pick up pebbles on the steps of the Parthenon the art-in-the-mail show may be a startier.

At the beginning of last year, while teaching at Pomare primary school near Palmerston North, Nicholas

planned the present show. He passed on his idea to the Manawatu art gallery's exhibitions officer, Paul Hansen, and they worked on it for 18 months. For openers, Nicholas wrote to more than 3000 artists round the world.

The upshot was that 600 parcels — from everywhere — arrived at Palmerston North.

Nicholas got some support. Hamish Keith, chairman of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, put his enthusiasm and the council's \$3500 sponsorship behind the idea.

Nicholas puts it this way: "Art as a postal activity is a direct communication from one artist to another, a gesture that travels through time and space. The world's

postal service is used as a medium for transmitting art as communication and information."

It also cuts the artist-dealer-buyer cycle. Art in the mail isn't for sale.

Mail art began in the mid-50s, when artists began sending each other things, like odd shoes, painted shoes.

The catalogue for next week's show is a giant brown manilla label. The 300 exhibitors are named, with their addresses. Only 16 are New Zealanders.

Nicholas hopes New Zealand artists will find a greater degree of participation in the open postal network of the world, and broaden their horizons and awareness of the world.

The Secret History of an Unstolen Painting

Twenty three years later, the story of the little painting stolen from the Robert McDougall Gallery can be told; how the artist thieves ripped the painting off the wall, how the curators of an International Exhibit deceived the thieves, and how the painting was returned to the Gallery in Christchurch. The story illustrates three major concerns: (i) curatorial responsibility, to the artist, the institution and the culture; (ii) freedom to choose, for the artist, the curator and the audience; and (iii) the dynamics of censorship and power, who decides who can or cannot see what, and why.

The Artist as Culture Thief

Andrew Drummond and I had been appointed Visual Arts Directors for the N.Z. Students Arts Festival, part time positions that would last three months, through the conclusion of the Festival in Wellington August 20-27, 1977. I worked full time at The National Art Gallery (NAG) as Exhibitions Officer (a rather odd title — not Exhibitions Curator as the rest of the art world named the position). The title was further distorted on my home mortgage, when the Bank named me 'Exhibitionist Officer', a title I would have to live up to. Andrew was the Education Officer, a position previously held by Ian Hunter who was on educational leave at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. We were appointed as a team, an egoless joint mind that could accomplish something like 24 to 30 man hours a day between the two of us, with a little help from our meager NAG resources. At the time my annual exhibitions budget was under NZ\$7,000, so most of our resources were begged, borrowed or nicked.

Our Director, Melvin Day, gave his approval for our temporary positions, thinking out of sight, out of mind. If we did anything mischievous, it would not be his fault, because it was outside the NAG. He liked to be called Pat and our job was to make him look good while also challenging just about everything he stood for. Pat was a solid Art History scholar, a product of the Courtauld Institute of Art at the University of London and a relic of a wonderful but bygone era, the gentleman art history scholar who wore perfect hand tied bowties and told charming and witty anecdotes. In the tiny but brutally politicized world of art politics in Wellington, he was ill served by his many masters, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Academy of Fine Arts and the NAG Council. He also, and this is where I really sympathize with him, had to deal with us, Andrew and Nick, the terrible duo.

The Director of the Students Arts Festival, John Davis, provided us enough funding, but more importantly gave us freedom to do anything we wanted. All we had to do was present him with our plans, which he officially approved. There were no politically motivated Council meetings, no intrusive review committees, no endless "cover your arse" reports, just a couple of casual meetings where our enthusiastic plans were laid out in general terms and received nods of approval from the Director. How simple and elegant and how unlike the real art world. Yet the Student Arts Festival was a huge success. Everything took place as planned and large numbers of students and citizens showed up to enjoy the events.

"Art Lovers..." Article printed in the Dominion, 20.11.76
cat 13

Freedom to choose

We organized several main events and exhibitions:

A Video Store where students would be able to borrow video equipment and record as much video tape as they could use. The results of their taping would be shown at the Store. Gray Nichol and other performance artists performed here as well.

We used the Wellington Settlement Gallery on Willis Street for a series of performances and installations from Art Students. Bruce Barber had a performance there as did Brian McNeil and we were treated to a Neville Purvis Lecture, an illustrated talk on modern New Zealand art. (Neville Purvis was the Kiwi everyman comic persona of Arthur Baysting.)

Elva Bett Gallery hosted a photo/documentary exhibition called **Closed Coal Camp Island** by Yuji Saiga at her gallery on Cuba St.

The national student show, called the '**A4 Show**' and subtitled 'Out Of The Package – Onto The Wall' was an open invitational show with a set format, A4, the paper size, 210 by 297 mm or about 8 inches by 10 inches. We advertised the show to University students throughout New Zealand.

An international postal participation event open to NZ and overseas artists called the **Sign/Symbol Show** was added to the student A4 Show and grew to be the biggest art event of the Festival. We accepted any work as long as it conformed to the correct dimensions. There would be no curatorial selection and no censorship.

I had previously organized an exhibition called **ART IN THE MAIL!** that was launched in Manawatu Art Gallery by Luit Beiringa in 1976 (after 18 months preparation) and went on to tour 10 major galleries in New Zealand, with Arts Council funding. It turned out to be a popular contemporary art show, which probably upset more so called serious art critics than it did the Patricia Bartlett² of the nation; the arbiters of good taste and decency.

The A4 and SIGN/SYMBOL SHOW

Andrew and I designed a mailing to go out to every University in NZ and a large list of national and international artists. We booked a well known art space, the Wellington Settlement Gallery on Willis Street for the show.

The worldwide response, due in part to the earlier and still touring "**ART IN THE MAIL**" show, was overwhelming. We received so much work; we did not have enough wall space. At least a quarter of the show was pornographic by conservative New Zealand standards and had to be partitioned off or stuck in large plastic binders with lots of big warning signs that had the effect of enticing the art lovers to pour over them. Having Patricia Bartlett denounce the show dramatically boosted the attendance.

One day before the deadline for submissions, we received at the NAG a heavy package addressed to the **A4 Show**. We opened up the packing and discovered two students from Christchurch had submitted a custom made padlocked and sealed metal box with instructions that it be unlocked at the show's opening where they would be present to provide a key. The box was 8 inches by 10 inches. We had to show the work as it fulfilled the requirements for entry. What the two students did not know was that I had received a letter from Brian Muir, the director of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, who had discretely informed galleries and dealers that a valuable early 20th Century oil painting had been stolen recently. The painting's dimensions were, in those pre-metric times, 7" x 9". Could this be the painting?

Here was a curator's dilemma; do I respect the wishes of the exhibiting artists or the ethics of a professional curator? Do I help an embarrassed director who could lose his job over the theft, or do I further the artwork of two art students who could be charged with theft? What would the



Photograph of **Suzette**, 1977
Raymond McIntyre, displayed at *Sign Symbol*
exhibition, National Art Gallery
Courtesy of Nicholas Spill
cat 14

painter have thought? I could not ask him, he was dead. Would he have been amused or would he have been outraged? I imagined the artist, Raymond McIntyre, would have thought the heist a hilarious prank, a kick in the pants to a small conservative art scene he had escaped from to arrive in England in 1909. He would have admired the craftsmanship, the precise welding of the metal box that snugly fitted around his painting, and the daring of the heist. Andrew and I talked about the issues involved and we agreed on a plan.

I called a locksmith to come after hours, to the back entrance of the NAG. It took him one minute to pick the lock. When he left, Andrew and I carefully lifted the lid of the box. Inside, safely wrapped in bubble, was the stolen painting, a beautiful miniature oil by a leading ex-patriot New Zealand artist, Raymond McIntyre (1879–1933), *Suzette* (cat 14). We both let out a soft whistle at the art and the woman we held in our hands. Here was a beautiful painting and as far as our fledgling European based art history was concerned, priceless. The piece captured a young woman in a black hat, leaning on a table, her right pinkie in between her sensual lips, her eyes gazing down in a pensive but evocative haze. If you saw her at a bar in London or Paris, you would know she was trouble and now, seventy years later at the National Art Gallery in Wellington, she was our trouble. Behind the hardwood, was an envelope. Inside were a series of Polaroids that told the story of the little oil painting; the painting on the gallery wall, the painting lifted off the wall by a male student dressed in a trench coat, dark glasses and a fedora, the space on the wall where the painting once hung, now a lighter shade of paint, the student walking out of the room in the gallery with the painting under his coat. There was even a Polaroid showing a hand removing the label from the wall. A nice touch and very cheeky. We admired the students' audacity and style. They had "nicked" a beautiful woman. I couldn't fault their taste.

From Brian Muir's letter we knew he had not known the painting was missing until after lunch when he had casually taken an inventory of the works on display. The security guards, who were supposed to keep an eye on the paintings, had not noticed the small dark empty rectangle on the wall, the 8" x 10" negative space. The theft had not been made public.

That night we took the painting to the gallery photographer and had him produce an exact color duplicate. He matched the colors and printed the photograph on paper that closely resembled the texture of the painting and mounted it on a similar piece of hardboard. I encased the new work back in the bubble, sealed the box and squeezed the padlock shut. We had our exhibit safe and sound for the A4 Show.

I called the director, the next morning and he took the next flight up to Wellington. As part of our deal, Brian Muir promised not to prosecute the two students and not to display the painting until after the **A4 Show** closed. He could not have been more grateful or more amused by the strange series of events.

The Opening

The two art students from Christchurch came to the opening of the exhibit with the key. I took the key from them and walked to the back of the gallery where the box opening ceremony was to take place. The metal box was on a small painter's easel. Andrew operated a large video camera on a tripod to record the event. We had set up the gallery so that the two students were kept at a distance from the easel. People were still trying to get in through the front door but the gallery was packed.

With a dramatic flourish more in keeping with P.T. Barnum than a serious art curator, after all I was legally classified as 'Occupation: Exhibitionist', I unlocked the box and carefully held up the painting. From where the two art students stood, they could not see that the painting was a photograph. Initially, they did not realize what had happened. Once I launched into my *Art Rat* speech³, they looked at each other and nodded. It was what they had expected. Not even in the art world do things appear as they should. The thieves had become victims of a switch. The heisters had been heisted. *Suzette* gazed out into the crowd, nonchalant at being a reproduction, she still looked original.

We all had good intentions and these intentions were layered in innocence. They had wanted to make a statement about a painting from a previous generation displayed in a museum setting, as well as demonstrate how easy it was to steal a framed artwork from a respectable museum; the theft of a painting as performance art. They submitted a "Readymade" artwork for the **A4 Show** together with a visual narrative of their heist. I had returned the original to its rightful place, but had added to the performance, and the students' intentions by initially fooling them about the status of "their work". The deception was carried out with a straight face and no explanation, despite our promise to all participating artists that all works submitted would be displayed. (cat 15)

The students had not stolen the painting for capital gain. They planned, they told me later, to return it to the gallery. The repatriation of the artwork would have been another performance and part of their graduate thesis. The painting, though, had now become part of a larger, extended artwork that was, until the exposure of the counterfeit, open-ended. Yes, they did get the photographic reproduction back at the end of the exhibit, even though by entering, they had agreed all works would remain the property of the Students Arts Festival. How they planned to escape prosecution for theft remained vague. They had sent a sealed letter to their lecturer at Ilam, Tom Taylor, to be opened in the event of their arrest, but their 'intent' to engage the painting in an extended performance piece would have been lost on the magistrate presiding over the case. Instead, they graduated from art school with honors.

How had we maneuvered out of such a tricky situation? How could we be loyal to our principles, protect the artist and the art institution and not screw up the art work? How could we turn the event into one of opportunity, with a sense of humor? Andrew and I reviewed the situation at lunch the next day where we analyzed what actually happened with the stolen painting. The students were saved from arrest, the museum kept the theft quiet avoiding a scandal, the director's career was intact, and the piece lived on, at least in spirit, in the **A4 Show**. The perfect color reproduction of the painting and the Polaroid photos, discretely mounted next to the open metal box, told a fascinating story. And seeing the painting in such a raw and anarchic context gave the image a different resonance, a powerful new reference, especially as the photograph perfectly mimicked the actual oil painting.

The show was a big success as hundreds of people came every day to pour over all the art, probably looking for the obscene material. We had a huge sign at the entrance to the show.

WARNING!
This Art exhibit contains material that some people might find obscene, objectionable and in poor taste!

The sign lured them in and was a variation on the sign that had hung outside my "Art in the Hands of Capitalism" piece in Australia. The sign worked even better in New Zealand. In a land of censorship, even the promise of pornography sells.

The video of the opening of the metal case and my *Art Rat* speech was shown at the Video Store. Andrew and I had persuaded the owner of 250 Lambton Quay (formerly Barton Silks) to lend us the store for a couple of weeks. The "Video Store" was temporarily crammed with borrowed video equipment, cameras, tape decks and monitors. We talked three video companies into allowing us unrestricted use of their video equipment. They all said; "That's great, hardly anyone uses the equipment. It was so expensive, go ahead and enjoy yourself". Only black and white reel to reel SONY "videotape" was available back then, the separate video recorder was heavy and the separate camera was bulky. The equipment was expensive, poor in quality and heavy to carry around. We were in complete innocence as to video's eventual ability to transform the way we recorded and viewed the world.

The Artist as thief, the curator as trickster



installation view

Sign Symbol exhibition, National Art Gallery
Courtesy of Nicholas Spill
cat 15

The Video Store

We showed video tapes, installations and performances at the downtown storefront where, because of the store's location, we had a lot of pedestrian traffic. We arranged for students to look after everything and not one tape or piece of equipment was stolen or mislaid, despite our liberal lending policy. Any student could come in and use the equipment and take it out into the streets for videotaping. Several outstanding students, who went on to work at NAG, helped us.

One potential sponsor whom we almost won over was the Police, sort of one Government Agency (we were paid by the Ministry of Internal Affairs) talking to another, the Police Department. The Wellington Police initially agreed to lend us their huge collection of video equipment. In anticipation of a wave of anti apartheid demonstrations, and the planned South African Rugby tour of New Zealand, the Police had bought the latest cameras and powerful telephoto lenses to record and identify the protesting students. That these same longhaired students would use the surveillance gear out of our Video Store, for art's sake, or maybe for spying on the Police, was a frightening irony someone in the Police Department finally figured out. After a couple of friendly meetings with uniformed bureaucrats at the Central Police Station, we were told without any explanation, that the deal was off. There went all the good will we wanted to build with our brothers in blue. Fear and paranoia ruled. The coming technological revolution, where everyone would have access to cheap, portable video camcorders and a more open society it would supposedly generate was still a couple of decades away.

The visits to the Police Headquarters were not in vain. Here was an alternate world, where the Police defined their own reality, like artists, only their version of reality was the legally binding one. Regardless of their artistic sensibility, they could lock you up or commit you to an insane asylum. Whereas an artist could only drive someone they loved to an insane asylum. In one office there were Polaroids of criminals pinned around a big map of New Zealand. Similarly, in my office, I had Polaroid portraits of artists stuck around a map of New Zealand. In a country of a little over 3 million, they knew where every criminal was. Yes, I did know where all the artists were hiding as well. There was no escape. We lived in an Orwellian world, where Big Brother knew what you were going to do, before you did it. Then there were the cannabis pot plants in various stages of maturity on windowsills throughout the police station. There must have been hundreds of them. I walked slowly past every office trying to count the plants. I dared not ask what they were doing with these specimens. There the similarity with my office ended. I had no pot plants.



detail of tape from Video Store,
Sign Symbol exhibition,
National Art Gallery, 1977
Courtesy of Nicholas Spill
cat 16

The *Art in the Mail* show as well as the **A4** and **Sign Symbol** show raised a series of issues regarding censorship and power. Who has the right to choose what we officially call our culture, our art? Who decides what is good and what is worth keeping? Should the government dictate what we can see? What we can think? How we should react? Or should the public be free to form their own opinions, without the deliberate cultural filtering of an expert group, a self appointed class of curators? For all the self indulgent neo-dada collages in the *Sign/Symbol Show*, there were intriguing works, including the political drawings, manifestoes and collages from artists in South America and behind the Iron Curtain. One drawing still haunts me, a design for a solo prison cell at sea, a lone figure suspended on the ocean. Shortly after submitting this piece, the artist disappeared, one of the thousands of students and artists who were killed by the South American military death squads in the 1970's.

Not all art involves life and death, or deception and theft, but there are principles of conduct for the artist, curator and audience regarding the artwork and its place in our culture. The story of the stolen painting that was stolen back to its rightful owner provides a unique illustration of the conflicts and challenges curators and artists have to deal with. Only with honesty and openness can these issues be debated and resolved.

1
The Correspondence Art movement, Global Mail Art, or whatever label you care to ascribe to this phenomenon was an attempt by artists to communicate directly with each other, with no concern about creating great works of art. An evaluation and judgmental process for permanency was never a paramount concern. What was at issue was the act of communicating, privately, one to one, or one to many, through a public communications system, the mail. Anyone who sent these gestures, these small prints, hand drawn pieces, postcards, collages, found images or objects, through the postal system was both an artist and a curator. The gallery structures and curatorial selection processes were bypassed. Traditional critical channels for assessment were not considered. Instead, we had a direct artist to artist connection with no middleman. Every day dozens of art works, envelopes full of collages, poems, found objects from across the globe, objects that in a pre-computerized world looked undeliverable, would find themselves in my mailbox. It was as if an alternate reality existed, where artists communicated without recourse to making a more permanent art that would require curatorial dispensation or critical acknowledgement. Call this naive or idealistic, but the process did work for a number of years during the late 60s and early 70s.

Then along came the show called *Art in The Mail*. The subtitle was "Where Worlds Collide". The real world, the art world and the world of mail art.

Why did this show happen in New Zealand at a leading gallery? Why did its Director Luit Beiringa feel secure in allowing a huge number of artists, a few known but most unknown, participate in such a large egalitarian process where the end result was totally unpredictable? This was an opportunity for new ideas to come to New Zealand, unfiltered by any overseas expert. It was a manifestation of the times, a celebration of openness to new concepts coupled with a ridiculously low budget for the exhibit. International artists who participated included (in no particular order), Anna Banana, Ray Johnson, Carl Andre, Cavellini, Image Bank, Ant Farm, and Fluxus Artists including Ken Friedman and Dick Higgins.

The show opened in Oct 1976 and went on to tour NZ then Australia. I have absolutely no idea what ultimately happened to it. The show toured over 16 galleries in Australia, sponsored by the Australia Gallery Directors Council. By 1979 it could have been in a dump in Darwin or in an archive in Adelaide. What I do know was the extraordinary success it had. It toured through all ten major Art Galleries in New Zealand. Every opening made the front page in the local newspaper. The Chairman of the QE II Arts Council opened the first show in Manawatu. Not to be outdone, the Minister of Internal Affairs opened the show in Wellington. And the critics were gentle, sometimes enthusiastic but almost always open, aware of the enormous attendance the show created. Looking back, the established art world accepted the show for what it was. They did not feel threatened by it, nor did they see

their art future diminished by such temporal gestures. The public thought the show was fun and stimulating in that there were so many ideas, so many different ways of looking at the world. As one art lover was quoted in the Wellington Post, as he entered the exhibit; "Where's the pornography?"

It is very hard now, looking back over two decades, to assess what sort of an impact such a show had on young artists in New Zealand. There were over 370 artists from 20 countries represented in a show where practically everything was accepted and there was no censorship. Only 16 New Zealand artists responded and most were personally invited to do so.

The catalogue, in the shape of a giant shipping label and printed on brown wrapping paper, sold for 40 cents. The press release said: "It is entirely up to the viewer to come to terms with the displayed material. Art like beauty and obscenity is in the mind of the beholder. There is something to offend and enlighten everyone."

The sign outside the show helped draw in more viewers.

* warning *

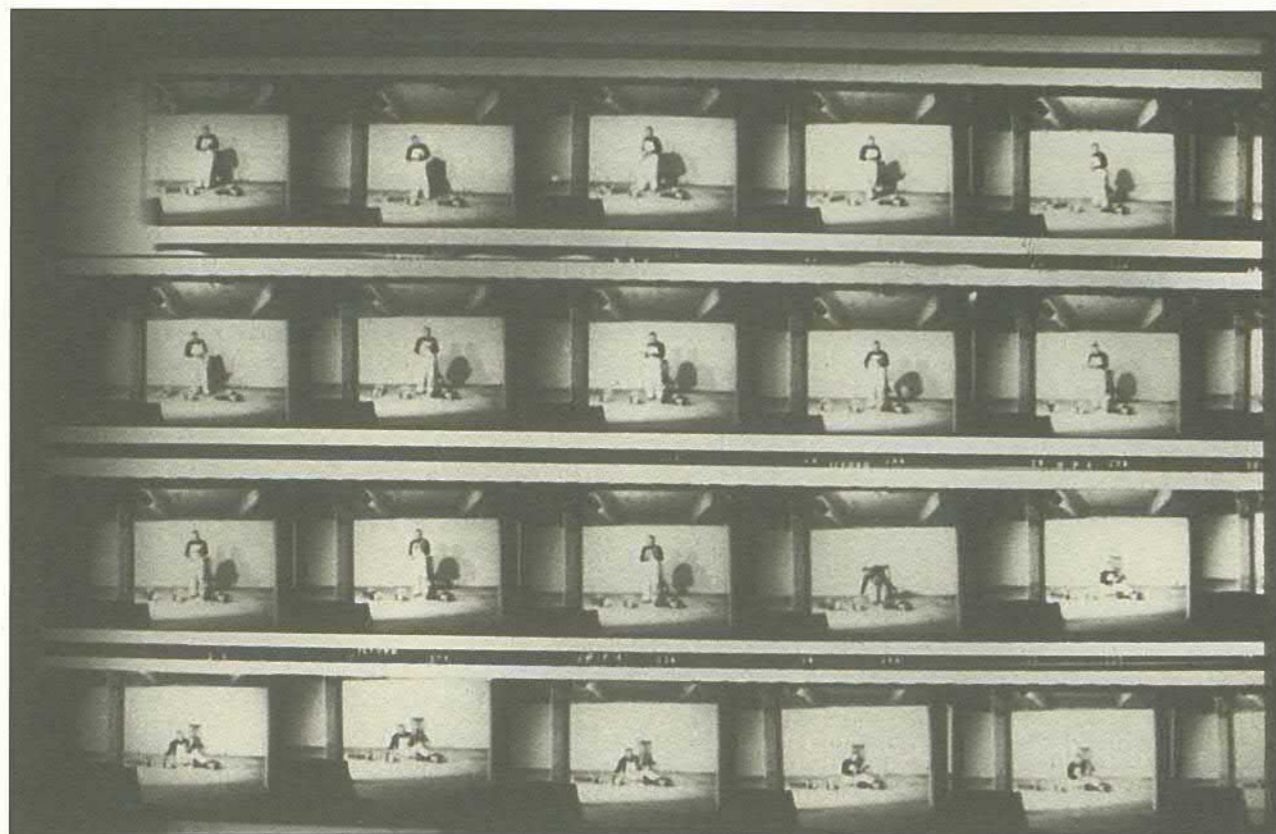
Some of the items in this exhibition MAY OFFEND members of the public.

The organizers of the exhibition have applied no selective principles to the works submitted.

Your decision to participate in the show is YOUR CHOICE

2
Patricia Bartlett, a retired nun, was the "Unofficial Censorship Queen of New Zealand" in the 1970's. To be denounced by her, declared obscene and be labeled a pariah to decent society was a much envied sobriquet for artists. Ms Bartlett was rumored to have the largest collection of pornography in the Southern Hemisphere, a library as extensive as Goebbels' in Nazi Germany.

3
The basis of my *Art Rat* talk was that to survive in the art world, you had to be like a rat; adapt, devour and move on. As an Art Rat you had to be wary of the bait and you could never stop gnawing at the boundaries. There were more parallels but I did not want to overextend the rodent metaphor. We played the *Art Rat* tape at the Video Store. The rapt reception over the talk had more to do with the question: "What was in the box?" rather than any pseudo philosophizing from the speaker.



Poetry for Chainsaws, 1976
Jim Allen, performance (details)
Courtesy of the artist and
Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
cat 17

1. Our appreciation of the world is active, not passive, and art displays an emergent apprehension.
 2. Art is only incidentally and not essentially aesthetic. Art is concerned with every kind of value and not particularly with beauty.
 3. Art interrogates the status quo: it is essentially, and not incidentally, radical.
 4. Art is experimental action: it models possible forms of life and makes them available to public criticism.
- (Statement displayed in foyer of Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1970s)¹

Jim Allen left New Zealand for Australia in 1976 to take up a residency at the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in Adelaide. Here, free of the burdens of administrative and teaching duties associated with his position as Associate Professor and Head of Sculpture at Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland 1968 Allen produced a number of performance and installation works – *Newspaper Piece*, *Poetry for Chainsaws (or Chainsaws)*, *The Elastic-Sided Boot*, *On Planting a Native*, *There are Always Elephants to be Made Drunk* (also presented at the 1976 Biennale of Sydney), and *Sending/Receiving* – outside the general consciousness of New Zealand's burgeoning contemporary art scene. Furthermore, Allen never returned to teaching at Elam. In 1977 he took up the position of founding head of Sydney College of the Arts. Allen's influence as an art educator runs deep in both locations. It is only in New Zealand, however, that his own earlier work and his example as an artist figure is inscribed in the folklore of contemporary art and written with increasing precision into its history, for during his tenure at Sydney College (1977–87) Allen by his own admission made no work.² These EAF works are therefore little acknowledged in the recent art histories of either Australia or New Zealand.³

By working towards these works I hope not only to address this neglect in some small way, but to suggest also the manner in which Allen's work operated within, even exemplified a certain dynamic, multi-lateral movement or exchange between New Zealand and Australian contexts. We might treat this movement in conceptual, material, bodily and metaphorical terms as a form of productive intellectual and cultural energy – a sideways exchange between two sites traditionally figured in colonial, provincial or antipodean frames and yet quite peculiarly foreign to each other in many ways.⁴ In rehearsing some observations regarding the intellectual framework and imperatives underpinning the establishment of the EAF and driving its program, then casting these against particular conditions of the Auckland or New Zealand scene as characterised by Allen himself we might begin to conceive of that space (conceptual and social) of transition or exchange within which Allen's 1976 work developed. Although some basic comparative analysis is useful, and certain impelling agents of difference must be acknowledged, it is most appropriate and productive to think of how Allen's 1976 work simultaneously acted as both departure from and extension of aspects of his earlier work, of how it both problematised and attempted resolution of certain concerns that trace back at least as far as his 1969 exhibition *Small Worlds*.⁵

From Elam...

The late 60s and early 70s saw a radical opening up and proliferation of modes of art investigation and practice in New Zealand, and particularly at this moment in Auckland. Allen recalls first instances of work by Elam sculpture students during the latter part of the 60s beginning to respond to increasingly open forms of inter-disciplinary teaching and manifest a growing interest in propositional forms of environmental and spatial engagement and site-specificity.⁶ Things accelerated following Allen's return from his sabbatical sojourn in Europe, the UK and USA during 1968, both in terms of Allen's own activity and the critical and creative energy abounding in the Elam sculpture department.⁷ A full history of the determining conditions, drives, impulses, relationships and trajectories feeding into the plethora of work emerging from Elam during this early-70s period is an undertaking too large and complex to undertake here, but one which needs tackling at some point if for no other reason than to discriminate myth from actuality and so ascribe agency and responsibility where it's truly due amongst some quite remarkable young artists of the time. For the time being, whilst acknowledging the undoubted importance of Allen to the early development to certain specific artists,⁸ there are three apparently simple but key quantifiable inputs we should particularly note, in part for their relation to the type of environment or context later fostered at the EAF. First, the development of a contemporary art library at Elam that not only ensured student access to the latest in international practices but encouraged an intellectual, investigatory approach to art. Second, the visiting artist program initiated by Allen that brought people such as Steve Furlonger, Adrian Hall, Kieran Lyons, John Panting and Ti Parks to Elam. Third, the instigation of critical response and discussion sessions between staff and students. These sessions were based in part upon similar interview sessions Allen had witnessed at British art schools in 1968, and both fostered and in turn demanded a culture of intellectual rigor, integrity, and trust. Interestingly, this in fact quite structured discourse model not only carried over to situations outside educational contexts (indicating a general emphasis upon critical reflection and discursivity built into the very motive force of much work) but resulted in a number of important published texts such as the discussion regarding Bruce Barber's *Bucket Action* (1973) and the two discussions on Allen's *O-AR* exhibitions (1975).⁹ In a sense group discussion provided an early model for contemporary art writing in New Zealand.¹⁰

This furthermore indicates, of course, how Elam was not the only important site of activity in Auckland at this time. The Barry Lett Galleries provided a crucial location for the public presentation of work, hosting important exhibitions by Allen, and Adrian Hall amongst others. The Auckland City Art Gallery hosted the *Four Men in a Boat* projects by Allen, Bruce Barber, Philip Dadson and Kieran Lyons for the 1974 Auckland Festival, before John Maynard instigated the first set of solo-artist contemporary Project Programme exhibitions there in 1975. And of course numerous activities took place in various public sites around the city and its environs. It's important to note here, however, that none of these sites – commercial, institutional, public – were configured in primarily ideological terms, nor were they successful in fostering much of a public consciousness of this work.¹¹

Allen himself proposed some key characteristic or conditions of the Auckland 'scene' both immediately prior and subsequent to his departure.¹² He claimed that works the equal of any international model were being produced. However, whilst New Zealand artists had a detailed knowledge of overseas practices, they had little actual contact or direct dialogue with a contemporary international art scene. Allen conveyed the impression of a hothouse atmosphere, but one characterised by a fundamental sense of detachment. In an audio recording he made with the EAF and Radio 5UV in Adelaide he spoke about the necessarily alternating roles played by all participants – at one moment the artist or performer, at next the supporting collaborator, the audience, the critic or discussant. The limitations of such a small, compressed community were felt in the manner that periods of extremely close dialogue were inexorably followed by participants spinning off into disparate orbits in search of fresh creative space. What is clear in both this tape recording and the interview with Pauline Barber that preceded it is Allen's increasing awareness of the insustainability of such an impermeable set of conversations occurring within isolated pockets or groups.¹³



Sending/Receiving, 1976
Jim Allen, performance (detail)
Courtesy of the artist and
Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
cat 18

Whilst all this activity of the early 70s was obviously taking place within broader contexts of social and political activism, and particular works were driven by political imperatives (or as applied more acutely to Allen's work were interventionist, challenging or disruptive in form and action rather than content) there appears to have been little sense of an over-arching ideological project being pursued. In fact, one source of the energy of the time appears to have been a sense of inventive possibility of making 'art' itself anew in each work or action (which itself, of course, does bear political implications). And in this in fact we can perceive an individualism underpinning this more apparent sense of communality or collective action.¹⁴ With the work of Philip Dadson (including *Scratch Orchestra* and *From Scratch*) the notable exception, the collective action or activities of the period don't necessarily correlate to a collective ethos or manifesto – an important point given the appearance of collectivity engendered in retrospect by New Art.

What I'm trying to convey here, however loosely, is a sense of the context in which Allen's New Zealand work was undertaken – the tensions in that context between a small community and the energies such intellectual and creative relationships gave rise to, alongside otherwise disparate, quite individual sets of concerns and impulses around which various critical or theoretical interests clustered. The stress here should be that critical issues or trajectories very much emanated from rather than led work.

...to the EAF

It would be deceptive to simply claim the inverse to the above as conditions in Australia at this time, however it is clear that there were more specifically determined organisational frames and networks which provided support as well an ideological impetus to post-object practices. And the EAF was one the most important.

Formed by artists and academics in Adelaide in 1974 with Australia Council support, the EAF provided, in Anne Marsh's words, "a venue and a critical forum within which experimental art could develop", and for founding board member and influential art theorist Donald Brook in particular, "a kind of theoretical laboratory where he could test out his theory of experimental art."¹⁵ Founding director Noel Sheridan brought with him a library of documentation of American and European conceptual and performance work, and under his stewardship the EAF was committed to national and international networking and exchange, including acting as host to the work of a number of important visiting artists and theorists.¹⁶ It's easy to see the appeal of this situation to Allen – the opportunity for new conditions of dialogue within just the form of supportive and internationally engaged context for experimental practice that he had been seeking to establish at Elam. Whilst Adelaide like Auckland contained a very small contemporary or experimental art scene, it was a focal point within far larger Australian and international networks, and furthermore in the form of the EAF had become a site insisting upon the overt intersection of artistic and polemical activity. Crucially, Allen was resident at the EAF during a particularly active moment in its history: performances, screenings, and presentations such as an important lecture by Donald Brook on post object art¹⁷ took place on an almost weekly basis, whilst a major exhibition, *Australian and New Zealand Post Object Art: A Survey* was put on during May.¹⁸

Marsh's discussion of performance art at the EAF during the 70s is useful for imparting a sense of the dynamic creative and intellectual environment Allen was entering in 1976. It also infers something of its compatibility to his own general concerns as well as the manners in which his new work may have set out to negotiate it. Marsh rehearses a discrimination between three modes of performance – body art, ritual performance, and conceptual performance¹⁹ – whilst clearly marking the inter-determinacy of these modes. As she notes, Brook was most interested in conceptual art modes, in art "more inclined to explore intellectual systems than sensory experience,"²⁰ but in his own writing on early performance work by Imants Tillers recognised the crucial meeting of intelligence and imagination that activated the propositional nature of much performance (and certainly that of Allen.)²¹ Allen's work, as we shall see, traverses these

categorisations (although they remain useful tools for its exegesis). Allen's *Contact* (1974), for example, which did pursue concentrated bodily and psychic states (body art), was fundamentally located at a nexus of experiential and intellectual investigation – at the productive intersections of sensory experience and formalised, repeated action structures or patterns. In Allen's performance work the intuitive, pragmatic and intellectual always met in discursive play.

Also of interest is the manner in which Marsh points to a key issue of intellectual conflict fermenting at the EAF: the meeting of Brook's determination for an art of and interventionist within the social – an art of social ethics – and Sheridan's equally determined separation of art from social or political responsibility. There's an oscillation between these poles within Allen's work itself, right from the beginning, with the social coming strongly to the fore in Adelaide works such as *On Planting a Native* (cat 19) and *There are Always Elephants to be Made Drunk*, particularly when compared to his most recent New Zealand works, the *O-AR* exhibitions of 1975. However, as we shall see, all Allen's work was in part based on responses to immediate social situations. The EAF work illuminates this to some degree, but any clear reading of an art of social politics within Allen's work is also complicated by *On Planting a Native* which actually disrupted the masquerade-as-progressive of a politically comfortable response to a contentious issue of the day.

Pursuing *Contact*

Contact (1974) was a performance work in three sections undertaken as part of the **Four Men in a Boat** project at the Auckland City Art Gallery. It was Allen's first important performance work, but marked an extension of rather than rupture with many of the key determining characteristics, questions and impulses of his preceding (and subsequent) installation work: the setting up of a system or structure within which acts of exploration (on part of both artist and spectator) take place, often in terms of physical articulations of space to be moved around and through; the enclosure as a (porous) boundary; the triggering of interaction between dynamic clusters of bodies, space and material forms; the investigation of material occupations and articulations of space as fluid dialogues or ever-changing relations of corporeality; the determinacy of spectatorial presence upon the work; the relation of the individual to the collective or the social; and the cognitive capacity of the sensory body and its relation to linguistic utterances, structures and meaning.

The four environmental structures of *Small Worlds* (1969) functioned, as Christina Barton has noted, as proposed situations "which invited actual or implied participation on the part of the gallery visitor." As such, Barton claims, "they fulfilled Allen's new conception of sculpture as an activity rather than an object..."²² *New Zealand Environment #5* (1969) (cat 35) involved a total enclosure separating viewers from both gallery and normal social environment and immersing them in almost overwhelming sensory stimulus. *Arena* (1970) (cat 23) was a set of barbed wire barriers (or enclosures) running at eye, crotch, and knee levels that posed problems regarding spectatorial apprehension of inside/outside relations.²³ A later work, *O-AR 2* (cat 24) at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1975 involved the division of each of two gallery spaces (side by side to each other) into corridor like spaces with a single, large hanging sheet of plastic: black plastic for one gallery, clear plastic for the other. In one gallery a viewer could see others moving through the space on the other side of the plastic, in the other gallery viewers were hidden from each other. However in both spaces the disturbance of air caused merely by the movement of people on either side of the plastic was enough to cause it to shift, sway and ripple and so the presence of others was conveyed and 'perceived' sensually.

The relation of *Arena* to *O-AR 2* is in a sense emblematic of what was an ongoing dialogue or oscillation in Allen's work. *O-AR 2* was the most experientially subtle and open-ended of Allen's installation work to this point. Its phenomenological exploration of subjectivity differed from that of *Arena* in that it was stripped of obvious social reference other than that of the specific context



On planting a Native, 1976
performed by Jim Allen, performance (detail)
Courtesy of the artist and Experimental
Art Foundation, Adelaide
cat 19

of the institutional gallery. On the other hand *Arena* (exhibited with a work comprising small tent-like structures entitled *Community*) was deeply sourced in the social conditions of lived experience, in part like *New Zealand Environment #5* via the cultural metaphoricity of its utilitarian materials, but more specifically in reference to the alienation engendered by life in state housing environments. *Arena* was an attempt to manifest the barely suppressed aggression and indeed actual conflict experienced living in such an environment, as well as to explore (in both phenomenological and metaphorical terms) the means by which people protect themselves (practically and emotionally) within such environments. Indeed, all Allen's installation works of the period operated in some way as defensive structures (barriers) involved in this exploration of the aggressive (yet on occasion protective) controlling of space (and so relations within space). In wishing to attribute to Allen's work (and working spirit) an exploratory openness Wystan Curnow, writing in the mid 70s, down-played both the aggressiveness of the work and its scope of social reference, preferring to emphasise in the first instance a contained phenomenological encounter, on occasion prompting a further linguistically negotiated reflection upon individual cognition. Curnow's critique promoted a structural reading of Allen's installation work (as, almost paradoxically a self-contained structure for the opening out of sensible perception) rather than one seeking to embed the works' materiality and metaphoricity within a broader world of material and social reference.²⁴

Curnow used the figure of irony (the conscious attribution of a double-experience of positioning within the work's structure) to redeem Allen from the charge of over-determining both *Arena's* phenomenological and metaphoric dimensions through tight social reference: the active passage through the spatial dimensions of the work supposedly resulting in a pacifying enclosing within those dimensions – that which is protective is also restrictive. This allowed Curnow to refute a criticism that might otherwise be made of Allen's enclosures, that they "may seem machines for processing the viewer" and so subvert the viewer's freedoms (which Curnow held dearly).²⁵ Christina Barton has raised similar concerns regarding aspects of Allen's practice, primarily by concentrating upon a distinction between 'environment' and 'installation' works. The former, she has claimed, were involved in the "exploration of spatial and temporal concerns within the bounded confines of a closed situation" rather than in "an open-ended interplay with the phenomenal world."²⁶ The environment was "essentially retroactive in intent." It risked "denying the potential for the participant to enter into a dialectical relation with the work which might, by offering insights into the real environment beyond its confines, provide an opportunity for the viewer to re-examine their own relation to the world at large."²⁷ On the other hand an installation (of which she claimed *Arena* as Allen's first), "rather than generating its own spatial and temporal parameters, functions in relation to the specifics of real space... The spectator, co-existing in this newly charged situation, was therefore, invited to physically and perceptually explore her/his own relation to the dialectical interplay between container and contained."²⁸ Whilst I don't believe that it's quite so easy to distinguish between environment and installation as precise critical models for Allen's practice,²⁹ Barton's critique does place a model of interplay between viewer and work within a broader socio-spatial context that assists in moving analysis beyond Curnow's problem of social reference being treated as by necessity leading to the viewer's over-determination as subject (and does so without Curnow's recourse to the de-centring effects of irony).

Contact might in one sense be construed as having put into actual motion the elements already at play in Allen's installation work. *Contact* was indeed sculpture "as activity" and thus subject to similar models of analysis, particularly with regard to an oscillation between open-ended exploration and overt phenomenological determination within the work's structure. The overall work involved three parts or activities. The first, *Computer Dance*, (cat 37) took place within an area delineated by metal tubing and hanging, weighted nylon and subject to bright, flashing lights. Four pairs of performers operated hand-held emitter/receiver devices connected to audio speakers. A narrow beam of light was sent between the emitter/receiver devices. When the two devices were in alignment (in perfect 'contact') a perfect high-pitched tone was heard from the

speaker (the devices also vibrated slightly to give a greater sense of 'contact' to the performers). In *Parangole Capes* four performers were assisted in dressing in layers of calico and hessian (each performer in a different colour). The final layer completely enclosed them in a sack-like structure. Each of the four then began to move to the centre of a cube-structure in the gallery, articulating strange sounds as explorative (pre-linguistic) communication and testing what movement was left available to them by their garments (or enclosures). Once they had met in the middle (after around an hour) they used their teeth to free each other, hanging their garments or capes over the frame, enclosing themselves in a protective cube. Finally, in *Body Articulation/Imprint* (cat 31) six performers each took up position on a large sheet of polythene over white paper next to a bucket of paint (a different colour for each performer). Each performer smeared paint over their joints and began to move, the colour indicating the movement of their body. They each then covered the rest of the body with paint and made a body imprint on the plastic covered floor (at its peripheries), now recording the movement of their body. Then the performers moved closer to the centre of the proscribed space, formed into pairs, and explored colour changes through dual movement.

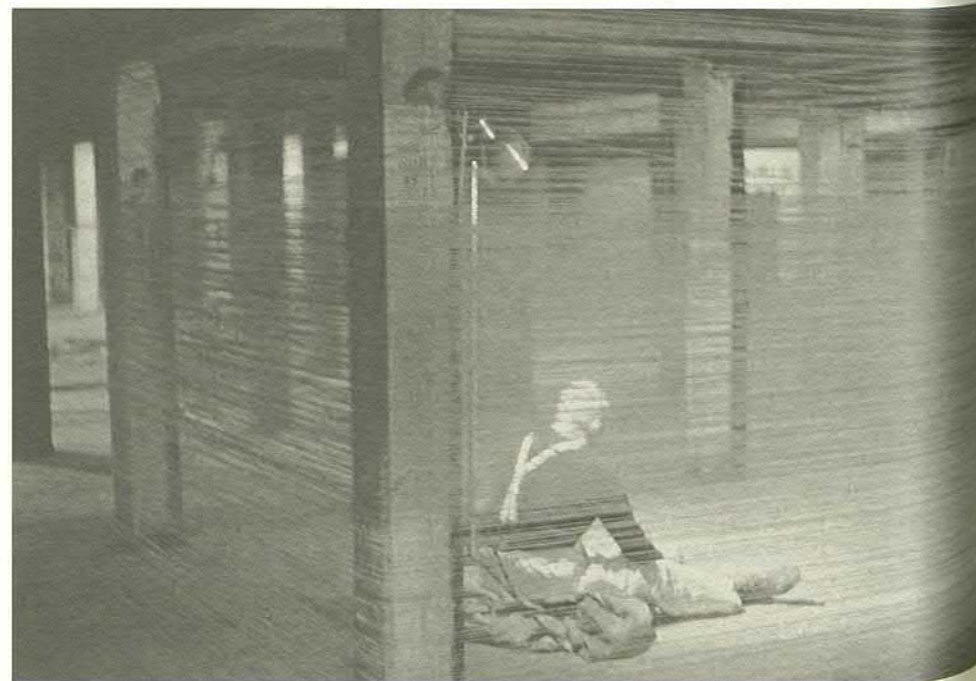
Contact was clearly concerned with seeking some form of transcendence of or release from both societal alienation and individual anxiety through collective action.³⁰ The overall work was, however, highly structured in conception and confined within an institutional space. There was a substantial difference between the structuring and location of this work and that, for example, of Philip Dadson's *Purposeless Work* actions where although given an initial direction and set of parameters (a plot or score) individual performers were presented with a more fluid context and environment for improvisation or autonomous action. Yet neither could *Contact* be too closely equated to other complex, structured gallery-based performance works such as those undertaken by Bruce Barber and Kieran Lyons as the latter two artists generally also assumed the role of (sole or principal) performer within more theatrical or narrative-based situations, thus testing the propositions via their own sensual experience. Barton, I think, was accurate in her criticism of *Contact* as risking over-determination of the limits and conditions of its participants' experiences.³¹ There's a social laboratory sense to the work, an exploration of social dynamics within a controlled field of spectacle.³² Such exploration continued in Allen's EAF performance works but in more direct manners in terms of artist/audience relations and with a more specific focus upon communication acts or vectors as primary means of relation.³³



Sweater, 1976

Kimberley Gray, (performed by Jim Allen), performance (detail)

Courtesy of the artists and experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
cat 20 & 21



There are Always Elephants to be made Drunk, 1976

Jim Allen, installation detail, Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Courtesy of the artist

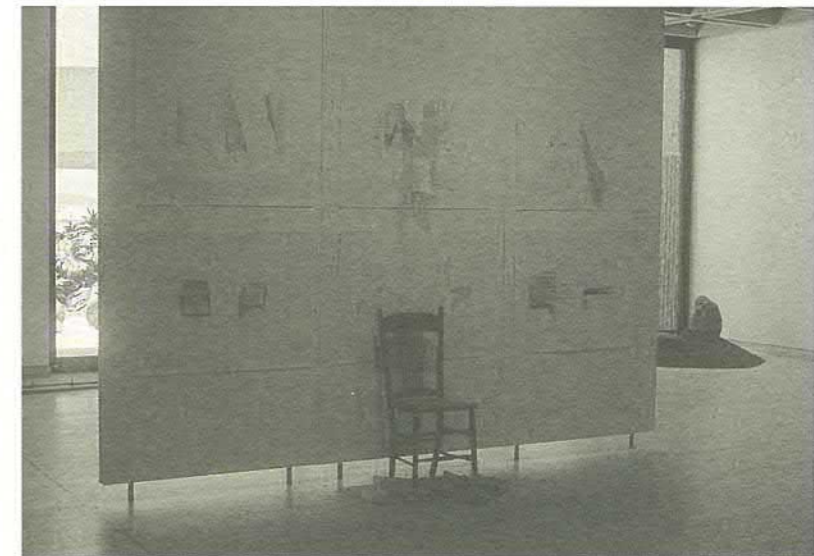
cat 22

Australian Works

In contrast to *Contact*, most of these works produced by Allen at the EAF were of apparently modest scale or undertaking; involved looser, more porous frameworks; and perhaps most significantly were characterised by a focus upon the performative figure of the artist new to Allen's work.³⁴ This location of himself within the work may in part have been motivated by very practical reasons of what was logistically (financially) possible within the framework of his EAF residency, but what emerged across the works was an apparent impulse towards an exploration on the part of Allen of his own embodied experience of the fundamentally phenomenological situations he set up as the limit conditions of these works.

Newspaper Piece was undertaken in April on the same evening as *Poetry for Chainsaws* as well as performances by Leigh Hobba and Richard Tipping.³⁵ Allen sat reading a page of a newspaper. When finished he crumpled it tightly into a ball and discarded it. He then retrieved it, read it again, crumpled and discarded it over again, repeating the process until the page became illegible pulp. In *Poetry for Chainsaws* (cat 17) Allen read Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* against the sound of three chainsaws that he had set running on the floor around him. The piece was prepared so that each chainsaw had exactly enough petrol to operate continuously throughout the reading, but to splutter and fall silent just at the point Allen finished reading the poem. The floor of the EAF was concrete, so not only did this compound the sound of the chainsaws it also meant that they tended to shudder and jolt about dangerously around Allen's feet. A third similar work, *Sending/Receiving* (cat 18), was performed in October also alongside works by Hobba and Tipping. Here Allen had performers call out extracts from literary works *The Third Policeman*, *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Tunc*. Audience members receiving the information called it back to the best of their ability. All three works explicitly addressed themselves at or inserted themselves within problems of communication—gaps in intention and meaning between 'sending' and 'receiving' positions in any singular or set of communicative act(s). Each engaged limit conditions for communication and proposed pressure points where it broke-down irrevocably.

For *The Elastic-Sided Boot* (cat 39), his major contribution to the EAF post object art survey exhibition, Allen issued an 'invitation' in advance to people wishing to "sound-off... make sounds". Participants were asked to selected sound-making objects and leave them in a designated area of the EAF exhibition space several days prior to the performance "thereby identifying themselves with the piece."³⁶ The actual performance took the form of four 15-minute components where participants sat in an area marked off by Allen attempting to communicate with each other solely via their 'sound' objects. These were interspersed with 'rest' periods in which participants could



stand, stretch, walk about and introduce themselves to each other. The area designated by Allen for this piece was 'roped'-off by a strip of 35mm film wrapped around four pillars. The film contained images Allen had taken one day in Adelaide when he happened to be passing by an intersection just as a shooting was taking place down its cross street. A man was apparently trying to hold up a gun shop but was shot by police. It was later treated as suicide). He didn't present these as exhibition 'images' but rather as the physical 'barrier' delineating the space or environment of the work in socially discursive as well as physical terms. In addition he projected on one wall a Super 8 film of a small model he had constructed from Lego components, complete with soundtrack of radio news broadcasts regarding violent acts and disasters. All the debris from that initial performance was subsequently left strewn about in the designated space of the piece for the duration of the exhibition, as trace or material mnemonic of the night's gathering.

Like *Contact*, *The Elastic-Sided Boot* was an attempted critique of the manners in which people are subjected to stress (the social alienation of a modern, mechanistic society) and the means by which they may attempt to relieve this (on one hand via acts of random violence, on the other by means such as those enacted in the performance element of the piece – seeking and being sensitive or responsive to forms of communication and commonality other than those binding the alienating structures of daily life). In this work, however, the processes of interaction and potential outcomes were far less directed by Allen. It was not unlike the type of exercise Allen and colleagues set students at Elam where certain parameters of action were given and general sphere of activity to occur within those parameters indicated, but both motivation and shape of action (and therefore outcome) left up to the participants to develop in the very process of making, acting, and engaging with each other.³⁷

The large text work, *There are Always Elephants to be Made Drunk* (cat 22), installed at the EAF in September and subsequently at the 1976 Biennale of Sydney, utilised press material from this same Adelaide shooting along with text (particularly conversational) fragments sourced in a magazine article dealing with the network of relationships that exist within a single family, especially that between a father and teenage daughter. Allen attempted to map or grid these relationships out in a diagrammatic form, replacing names with numbers, so creating a piece that had the appearance of a mathematical, scientific or perhaps technical calculation. Similar to *O-AR 1* of the previous year in its utilisation of textual fragments in need of cognitive reconstitution on the part of the viewer, this was a difficult piece to apprehend. It set out to test discursive functions and parameters of language acts in both direct, one-to-one vectors and more complex cultural networks. As Allen said of *O-AR 1*, it sought "to create a gap between the definitive statement and the residue of meaning."³⁸ Here issues of communication difficulties and information contamination were dealt with in a very different manner from Allen's performance work. Nevertheless, a similar idea of frissure between transmitted and received utterances and thus dislocations (by and from the social) of cognitive functioning and ultimately meaning were made apparent via Allen's systematic pressuring of information structures.

On Planting a Native (cat 19) was undertaken in response to the removal by the Art Gallery of South Australia of a work by Tony Coleing – an installation of black gnomes – from their front garden/forecourt area, and the subsequent furor regarding both work and its removal. According to Allen, Coleing had consulted local Aboriginal people prior to installing the work, however an Aboriginal writer visiting from Queensland had publicly objected to the piece whereby it became a major issue in the local press leading finally to its removal.³⁹ In response, Allen obtained a small gum tree that he set up in a large box in the EAF. For the performance he, in "the role of someone to care and nurture,"⁴⁰ systematically attacked the tree with a knife, chainsaw, pruning shears, small axe and oxy-acetylene torch, burning and taking it apart piece by piece (including at the end smashing the tub to remove the roots and pruning them). Once the tree was completely taken apart he reconstituted it by taping its components to the wall in a perfectly regular, geometric fashion (vertical trunk, horizontal branches, leaves fanning off the end of the branches in precise patterns). Thus, to use Allen's own deliberately ironic phrasings, the

"poor neglected, unloved, native" was "reconstituted in its best interests"⁴¹ in a (blindly violent) act of cultural ordering and regulating—an act of representation. Throughout the performance Allen spoke to the audience via a megaphone strapped to his chest describing and reflecting upon his actions. *On Planting a Native* posed a generatively ambiguous relationship to its source. On one hand it assumed an ambivalent distance from the act of removing Coleing's work from public display (and the strange mix of interests operating in support of that action ranging from sectors of an indigenous community through to a conservative 'talkback radio' local constituency refusing to see the work as 'art' through to the host institution itself); and on the other re-staged an act of desecration which could itself have been both (and at once) any act of public representation of the European genera 'native' (irrespective of political intent) and the denial or evasion manifested in its censorship.

On Planting a Native was clearly Allen's most culturally interventionist work to this date. Indeed the social as subject emerged in Allen's EAF work in new, more direct, more content-driven manners than previously, and did so coupled with a stronger, more overt communicative imperative. In performance works such as *Newspaper Piece*, *On Planting a Native*, *Poetry for Chainsaws*, and *Sending/Receiving* there was an apparent impulse propulsion outside the body (and indeed consciousness) of the artist/performer. Allen, for example, read or spoke at the audience subjecting their perception to the potentially unstable effects of multiple readings of the same texts, or the discords and discrepancies between word and action (between the act of attacking the tree and its accompanying commentary; between the intent of Ginsberg's emotive, polemical, textual rant against contemporary society and its dispersal amongst a cacophony of

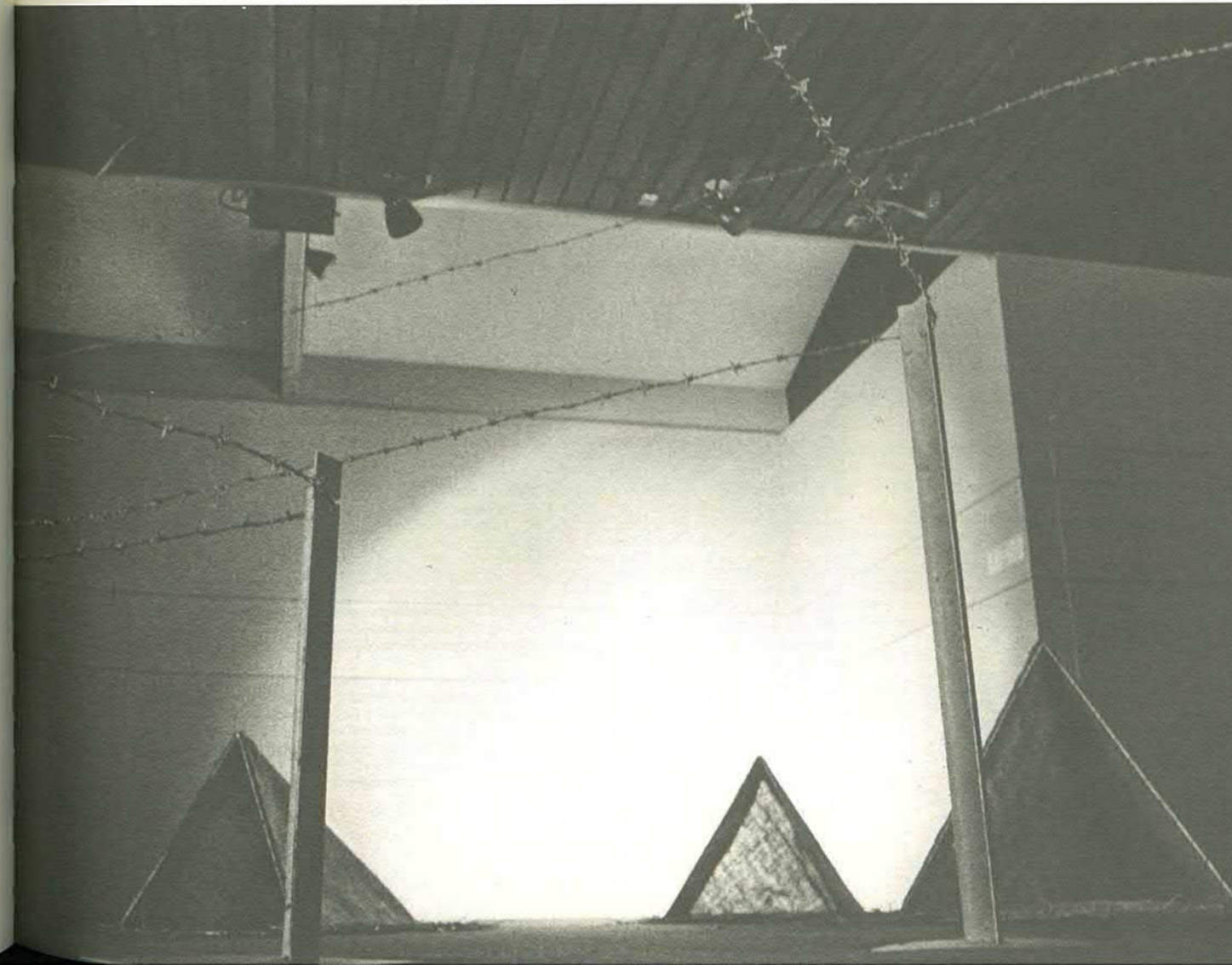
Arena, 1970

Jim Allen, Barbed wire 2 works,

Barry Lett Galleries

Courtesy of the artist

(cat 23)



machine-age noise). But in doing so he also tested or challenged audience tolerance for this communicative act. So whilst in *Poetry for Chainsaws* the act of reading (shouting) must necessarily have constituted an act of both physical aggression and cathartic release on the part of the artist, but also for the audience one of jarring, visceral assault upon both sensory and cognitive faculties. Conversely, in *On Planting a Native* the body of the artist stood in metonymic relation to the body of culture enacting acts of violence (now via order, regulation, and rationality) upon the body of an other – the 'native'.

To conclude then, these EAF works resolve, problematise and extend aspects of Allen's earlier practice inasmuch as each relation is in part synonymous with the other, and necessarily incomplete. If we were to attempt some more concrete summation, it might be to claim that these later works foreground, or expose, the very fundamental trajectories, the tensile structures of Allen's practice: the striving at (and through) the conditions for and instances of communication diffusion, the points at which the clarity of the test-pattern breaks down into static and the vectors along which communication may be re-tuned; the search for the most cogent means of direct, interventionist response to social and material environments; the figuring of pragmatic action, sensory experience, and intellectual reflection within shared frames; and the generative tension between pre-determination and willful intent within the bounds of emotional and cultural convention. There are developments of course, progressions of sorts and shifting concerns and conditions patterning Allen's practice. But I maintain that it's the often discordant migrations back and forth between specific works – between *New Zealand Environment #5*, *Arena*, and *On Planting a Native*; between *Contact* and *The Elastic-Sided Boat*; or *O-AR 1* and *There are Always Elephants to be Made Drunk* to cite but a small few obvious examples – that most ignites their respective agency, and via which we might begin to apprehend something of the sustained complexity and intelligence of Allen's post object work of the period 1969–1976.

Acknowledgement

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- 1 Noel Sheridan (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation*, Adelaide, South Australia (Adelaide: EAF Press, 1979). Cited in Anne Marsh, *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia 1969–1992* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993) 62.
- 2 Letter to author, May 2000.
- 3 Even the most recent and comprehensive text regarding Allen and his work published in New Zealand—Wystan Curnow & Robert Leonard, "Contact" [Interview with Jim Allen], *Art New Zealand* 95 (Winter 2000) 48–55, 99—deals only with Allen's life and work up until his departure for Australia. The key exception in New Zealand art history is Christina Barton's detailing of Allen's Australian work in her unpublished MA thesis, "Post-Object Art in New Zealand 1969–1979: Experiments in Art and Life" (University of Auckland, 1987). Furthermore, prior to the *Action Replay Post Object Art* exhibitions (Artspace, Auckland Art Gallery and Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1998) and the sets of projects occasioning this publication, post-object and performance art of the 1970s has been largely absent from recent survey exhibitions of New Zealand art such as *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992). One of the few references on Allen's work to be found in Australian art-historical writing appears in Marsh's *Body and Self* but this merely takes the form of a cursory, slightly dismissive description of Allen's *Poetry for Chainsaws* as "an angry and potentially violent work." (66) Moreover this reference is unfortunately illustrated with an image of another Allen work undertaken at the EAF in 1976, *On Planting a Native*, mistakenly captioned as *Chainsaws*. Other references to Allen's work in Australia at this time can be found in the EAF publications Stephanie Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF* (1984) and Noel Sheridan and Ian de Gruchy (eds), *EAF '76* (1976), as well as in Julie Ewington's review of the EAF exhibition, "Post-Object Art – Australia and New Zealand – a Survey" in *Arts Melbourne* 1/2 (1976). Unfortunately no reference to Allen's work appears in Nick Waterlow (ed.), *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia* (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales, 1994). An earlier work undertaken by Allen in Australia is detailed in Tom McCullough (ed.), *Sculpturscape '73* (exh. cat.) (Mildura: Mildura Arts Centre, 1973), and *New Zealand Environment #5* discussed in Graeme Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura: The Story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1961–1982* (Mildura: Mildura City Council, 1985). The beginnings of a more comprehensive art-historical project regarding post-object art or conceptualism in both sites can be found in Terry Smith, "Peripheries in Motion: Conceptualism and Conceptual Art in Australia and New Zealand", in Philomena Mariani (ed.), *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (exh. cat.) (New York: The Queens Museum of Art, 1999).
- 4 Of course this dynamic of cross-Tasman traffic or exchange runs right through the post-European contact histories of art in Australia and New Zealand, as most recently noted for example by William McAloon in *Home and Away: Contemporary Australian and New Zealand Art from the Chartwell Collection* (exh. cat.) (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki and David Bateman, 1999) as well as curators Christina Barton, Zara Stanhope and Clare Williamson in their introduction to the exhibition *Close Quarters: Contemporary Art from Australia and New Zealand* (exh. cat.) (Melbourne: Monash University Gallery and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1999). Yet despite this acknowledgement there has been little critical attention paid to the generative, cogent functions of this dynamic in terms of the production and determination of work. Allen is a good place

to start, given his own commitment to this relation not only in terms of educational and organisational activities (the latter subsequently pursued also by Ian Hunter and Nicholas Spill), but his own art practice, as well as the fact his involvement coincides with the beginning of the period (the late sixties/early seventies on) that has seen the most activity in this regard. (And however much this may be in part determined by general cultural, technological and economic globalisation key intellectual and discursive factors functioning in cycles of generation and consequence must be acknowledged.) Key instances of activity here include substantial involvement of New Zealand artists at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, and to a lesser extent the Biennale of Sydney, and the first of the Biennial ANZART events held in Christchurch in 1981. See Wystan Curnow, "Art Spaces: The Sydney Biennale", *Art New Zealand* 13 (1979); Nicholas Spill (ed.), *The Mildura Experience* (Wellington: QEII Arts Council of New Zealand, 1978); Spill (ed.), *New Zealand Sculptors at Mildura* (exh. cat.) (Wellington: QEII Arts Council of New Zealand, 1978); and Spill "Oz-Enz Connections: The Trans Tasman Circuit Rewired", *Action* 12 (1979–80). New Zealand participation in large Australian events such as the Biennale of Sydney and the Asia Pacific Triennials of the 1990s has continued, but perhaps overshadowed in importance by the increasing number of projects undertaken by artists from each site in public and private spaces 'over the water' as well as the now common-place inclusion of work from both locations in numerous group and survey exhibitions.

- 5 Some re-reading of Allen's New Zealand work 1969–75 might in fact be undertaken through this subsequent EAF work. This would certainly supplement the existing material on Allen's work of this period, with the exception of that undertaken by Christina Barton little of it undertaken retrospectively during the 80s and 90s. However, for reasons of space such a project is merely implied in my work here. In addition to the section on *Contact* in Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow (eds), *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-Object Art* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational, 1976), the most useful material pertaining to Allen's work of 1969–75 can be found in: Jim Allen, "Towards an Attitude", in *Five Sculptors* (exh. cat.) (Wellington: New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, 1970); Christina Barton, "The Last Small World: Jim Allen's New Zealand Environment no. 5", *Midwest* 1 (1992), and "Post-Object Art in New Zealand 1969–1979"; Wystan Curnow, "Making it New", *New Zealand Listener* (September 6, 1975), and "Project Programme 1975, Nos. 1–6", *Auckland Art Gallery Quarterly* 62–63 (December 1976); Anthony Green "Aspects of New Zealand Sculpture 8: Recent Developments 1", *Education* 26/8 (1977); and *O-AR: Jim Allen—Recent Work* (published transcript of gallery discussions) (1975).
- 6 Interview with author, July 1999. For a more detailed discussion of aspects of (and background to) Allen's teaching philosophy and approach see Curnow & Leonard, "Contact".
- 7 This sabbatical experience had a significant and lasting impact on Allen's subsequent work as both educator and artist (although he himself would most likely be loath to separate out these roles, each involving similar multi-disciplinary approaches to propositional and explorative modes of activity.) For a more detailed discussion of Allen's sabbatical activity and some of its ramifications on Allen's subsequent work see Curnow & Leonard, "Contact".
- 8 We might note here Bruce Barber, Philip Dadson, Kimberley Gray, Maree Homer, John Lethbridge, Leon Narbey and Roger Peters amongst others.
- 9 The former published in Allen and Curnow (eds), *New Art*, the latter as *O-AR: Jim Allen—Recent Work*.
- 10 The invention of a critical project—a contemporary art criticism in New Zealand—whether perceived as supplementing or emerging from within post-object art at this time is another important history yet to be fully explicated. There is little doubt that if not post-object work itself then certainly the cultural and intellectual conditions from which it emerged also gave occasion for the beginnings of other various language-based critical projects, from art criticism to phenomenological texts to American language-poetry inflected writing of the early 80s. Significantly all appeared together under the same publishing banners in magazines such as *And*, *Parallax*, *Splash*, and *Spleen*.
- 11 In general terms the same community of people provided participants and audience for each activity irrespective of locality. Hence the perceived need for the publication Allen and Wystan Curnow edited, *Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-Object Art*, which drew attention to experimental edges of sculptural activity, including performance. Some odd exceptions in terms of the included (and omitted) artists notwithstanding, it manifested an unswerving, almost belligerent commitment to the task of documenting the very specific actions, energies and ideals of a particular milieu (and moment) on terms laid out by the participants themselves. In keeping both with its subject and the motivating attitudes of its editors *New Art* was partial and selective—as passionate, rigorous or speculative as each of the documented works. It disavowed any claim to an encompassing historical or critical overview and contained little in the way of contextualising narrative. It was an "art", rather than art-critical or historical project. It was, as Allen and Curnow stated in the introduction, "a report on current work." Yet that which is current is merely history in the waiting, and so whilst plainly of its time *New Art* has also accrued the historical character of summation, of an inevitable (albeit unintentional) past-tense statement upon a first phase of post-object art in New Zealand (with the Elam sculpture department under Allen's leadership as its central generating site).
- 12 In Pauline Barber, "The Splinterview 4: Jim Allen", *Spleen* 4 (1976), and Jim Allen, "Experimental Art in New Zealand" (audio recording of radio programme) (Adelaide: Radio SUV, 1976) respectively.
- 13 "I think the dialogue within this country is of a minimal level, it exists between a few people but not much beyond that, and there are other communities and situations where the dialogue is much better, and I think that Australia has some possibility in this direction." In Barber, "The Splinterview 4".
- 14 Allen himself alludes to this, with particular regard to his own working position, in Barber, "The Splinterview 4".
- 15 Marsh, *Body and Self*, 53.
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 In this lecture Brook characterised post object art in general terms as physically tenuous or non-physical, as constituted in human activity, as contextually dependent rather than hermetic or autonomous, as non-hierarchical, ephemeral, and dispersed. See Donald Brook, "Post Object Art in Australia and New Zealand", in Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*. Key points are cited in Marsh, *Body and Self*, 58–59.
- 18 In addition to that of Allen himself this exhibition included, partly thanks to Allen's efforts, work by Bruce Barber/Billy Apple, Kimberley Gray – a performance undertaken by Allen from instructions sent over by Gray – John Lethbridge and David Mealing.
- 19 Body art she claims focuses on the "body and psychological states experienced by the artist." Ritual performance concentrates on the "relationship between the body and environment." Both frequently draw on mythology and the former additionally upon modern psychological theory. Conceptual performance, she writes, "analyses what art is. It tends to be concerned primarily with intellectual ideas about art: art and its theories." Marsh, *Body and Self*, 55.
- 20 *ibid.*, 56.
- 21 *ibid.*, 55.
- 22 Barton, "The Last Small World", 29.
- 23 This describes its first showing at Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, July 1970. In subsequent outdoor showings at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1970 and Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1973 the wire was replaced by rope. Wystan Curnow wrote of this change: "He feared, perhaps, that its aggressiveness could be read too simply. There was, for example, this progression: he who braved the wire and reached the centre was the least threatened of participants, the most protected. Had he now fenced himself in against intruders?" Curnow, "Project Programme 1975", 23.
- 24 The context or moment of Curnow's own writing needs to be noted in this. First, the text in question read back through these works from the occasion of the 1975 *O-AR* exhibitions—exhibitions, as noted, far more open in structure and inviting

of speculative engagement as well as far less aggressive in material form and indeed far less apparently socially determined in terms of materiality. Second, it appears that Curnow's project involved in part an attempt a break with, or at least complicate a culture of quite reductive thinking regarding art's capacity for social criticism as being limited to directly representational and metaphoric references. See Curnow, "Project Programme 1975", 23–25.

- 25 *ibid.*, 23.
26 Barton, "Post-Object Art in New Zealand 1969–1979", 92.
27 *ibid.*, 93.
28 *ibid.*, 99.
29 The distinction (environment/installation) rarely holds in Allen's work in any clear-cut manner. Even the self-contained structure of *NZ Environment #5*, for example, draws strongly upon the cultural allusion of its constituent materials. Is not Barton's definition of 'environments' perhaps more accurately one of 'enclosures'? And indeed, might not works such as *NZ Environment #5* and *Arena* have been better described as such—so imparting a greater sense of reference to social context, or socialisation? Where Barton's distinction may continue to prove of value is in terms of thinking of shifts in practice not within large all-encompassing categories but via very subtle moves back and forth from work to work. 'Environment' and 'installation' assist in identifying such moves. They also offer ciphers for general moves in Allen's practice between investigations first of subject-object relations and second of the interplay of that relation with socio-spatial context and linguistic context. Allen's practice moves about here in dynamic fashion (rather than simple progression) in that the former appears to be the key trajectory of a work such as a *O-AR 1* (1975), four and a half years after *Arena* to which socio-spatial context is crucial (but exploration of subject-object relation at best cursory). It should also be noted that throughout this essay I use 'installation' in a more current manner as a somewhat generic term applied to all of Allen's post-1968 sculptural or materially-based work signalling as it does very general conditions of site-specificity, temporality and contingent discursivity.
30 A model of sorts, Allen has subsequently commented (only partially tongue-in-cheek), informing his instigation of new modes of teaching program at Sydney College of the Arts: Letter to the author, July 2000.
31 See Barton, "Post-Object Art in New Zealand 1969–1979", 169.
32 This despite Allen's concerns that the situation would spin out of control, particularly in terms of collapsing relations between audience and participants. See Curnow and Leonard, "Contact", 54.
33 This set of artist/participant/audience relations is crucial in elucidating speculative shifts in Allen's practice. In *Contact* the audience viewed a space of activity from its edges, primarily by looking in through a gallery doorway. On one hand this placed them within similar floor-bound spatial coordinates to the participants. On the other, the particular room was set apart from their movement through the gallery building so marking it as a detached space of the spectacle. In each of *Newspaper Piece*, *Poetry for Chainsaws*, *Sending/Receiving*, and *On Planting a Native* Allen as performer was positioned before a seated audience in a more traditional theatrical delineation of viewed and viewer, but also in fact a more communally conscious sharing of a singular environment and occasion.
34 *The Elastic-Sided Boot* is a notable exception in this regard. Allen had performed within the work of others in New Zealand and had participated in the Pavilion K performance evenings at Epsom Showgrounds in December 1974, but his own preceding New Zealand work does not otherwise draw attention to the body of the artist as constituent element.
35 It was performed again along with presentation of *There are Always Elephants to be Made Drunk* at the Sydney Biennale, 1976.
36 *The Elastic-Sided Boot*, artist invitation (1976).
37 This establishing of the parameters for task actions of a group nature was also a common structural form or process in the work of Phil Dadson and Bruce Barber during the early seventies. Of course, the element of music within the work, whilst it may be traced back to Allen's professed interest in music and movement as creative endeavour stemming from his experience teaching in schools during the fifties, must be considered also in light of Phil Dadson's work and Allen's participation in Scratch Orchestra (Antipodean Twig) events and performances of the early seventies.
38 *O-AR: Jim Allen—Recent Work*.
39 Interview with author, July 1999.
40 *On Planting a Native*, artist invitation (1976).
41 *ibid.*

O-AR, 1975
Jim Allen, Barbed wire 2 works,
Barry Lett Galleries
Courtesy of the artist
cat 24



by Bruce Barber

Littoral: a term used in geographical discourse that refers to the intermediate and shifting zone between the sea and the land. This zone is subject to change according to geophysical, biological and cultural stimuli. In this essay the term is used allegorically to refer to various practices that operate between the shifting zone(s) of the art world (the system) and the lifeworld.

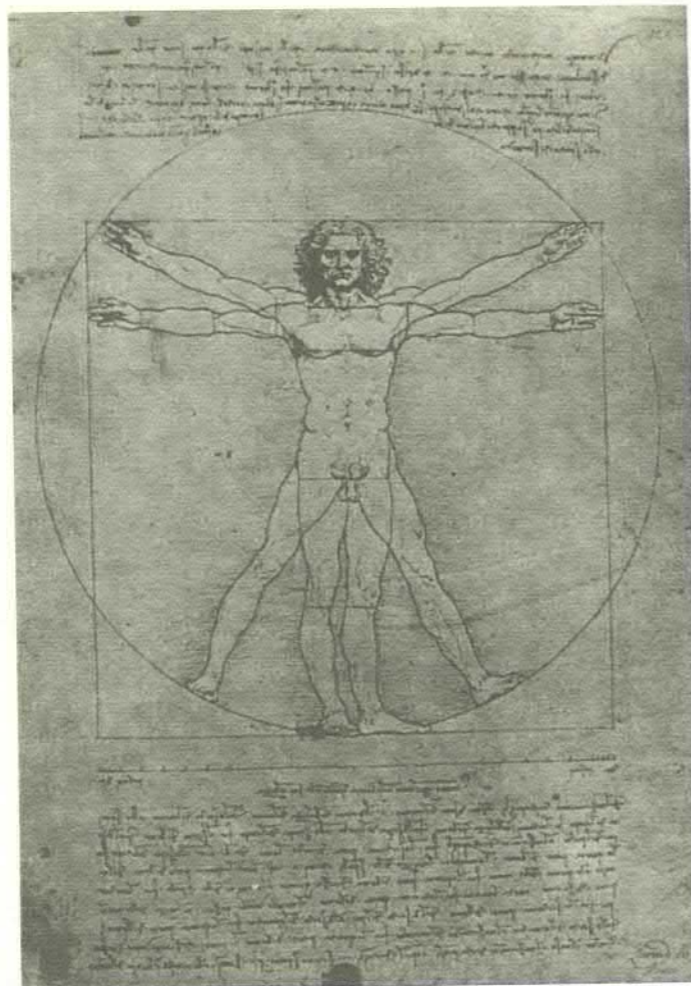
This essay is based on a paper I presented at "Chimera" the littoral art symposium held in Sydney, Australia in 1996.² A subsequent essay, "Littoralist Art Practice and Communicative Action" (1997) was published on a web site as part of my *Squat* installation at the Walter Phillips Art Gallery, Banff Centre during the summer of 1999.³ I have had time to reconsider some of the implications of the theoretical prognoses I articulated in both these earlier texts. This essay represents an affirmation of some of the positions I held then, but is also an affirmation of some of the *tendenzkunst* characteristics of work associated with some examples of donative art practice. I began "The Art of Giving" (1996) paper with a somewhat polemical quote that engaged the political economy of giving from *The Gift: Forms of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1924) a classical text on the subject by the French social anthropologist Marcel Mauss.⁴ I argued that if the 1980s were a time of taking, quoting, appropriating, and expropriation, during the 1990's a new mode of cultural practice – the donative – had surfaced to take its place. Perhaps my idealism at the time had been fueled by the work of some younger artists and cultural groups⁵ who were not weighed down in their practice by the legacies of the historical avant-garde(s), the edifice of Greenbergian modernism, or the aesthetic vicissitudes of postmodernism. These were artists whose work, I thought, evidenced a fresh take on community involvement, social responsibility and political praxis. They were engaged in collaborative, infra and extra-institutional, socially progressive endeavours aimed at generating social (and cultural) change.

In this context I wish to continue some of the thinking contained in these earlier essays with a practical reconsideration of the political efficacy of *intervention*, one of the keywords of this symposium, *exemplary* and *communicative* actions within an *operative* frame of cultural production. I will consider the cultural implications of giving within an economy that privileges other forms of economic exchange, notably those that reinforce systems of privilege obtained through the conventional manipulation of power. Here, I will invoke the theoretical work of German philosopher Jurgen Habermas on communicative action, as both a function of, and prelude to, giving acknowledging the warnings about the gift and reciprocity articulated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his *Logic of Practice* (1994).

...one is liable to forget the effect produced by the circular circulation in which symbolic added value is generated, namely the legitimation of the arbitrary, when the circulation covers an asymmetrical relationship" (Bourdieu 1994:100).

I will discuss five examples of operative art practice that in different ways involve the act and art of giving, four contemporary and two historical. The first example is a performance/action by the Chinese artist Yin Xiaofeng, followed by the *Blood Campaign* of Canadian/Hungarian artist Istvan Kantor (a.k.a. Monty Cantsin). I will contrast these two examples with other donative works – more firmly within the so-called littoralist camp – two from the mid 1970's, *Jumble Sale: A Market Place* (1975), and *Blood The River of Life* (1974), produced by the New Zealand artist David Mealing, that deserve to be properly located in their historical context as clear antecedents of littoral art practice in the 1990's, and a quarter century later, another blood project, *Circulation* (2000), produced by the New York based group REPOhistory. The discussion will continue with *Bloom 98*, an Eco Green Project undertaken by artists working with Vivid, Birmingham's Centre for Media arts and finally "Free Food" (not a project title), events sponsored and produced by artists and their collaborators working in Halifax, Canada, who wish to remain anonymous.

Blood the river of life



**A Collective Art and Life Study
Building Centre 73 David Mealing**

Blood the River of Life: *An Art and Life Study*, 1974
David Mealing
cat 25

I hope that it will become evident throughout that I am implicitly criticising cultural work that capitulates to Bourdieu's paradigm of an asymmetrical relationship and does not recognise the legitimisation of the arbitrary, contingent and the exigent, that are at the core of any asymmetrical relationship.

The "logic of practice" is implicit within Bourdieu's description of the social habitus – "a system of structured (and) structuring dispositions, [the *habitus*] which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions" (Bourdieu, 1990:53). In this context the habitus can be read axiomatically as an art system, reproducing itself conservatively according to its normative structured dispositions yet containing within its most progressive (value added) practices the possibility of redemption and liberation.

In 1998 an Agence France-press photograph of Chinese performance artist Yin Xiaofeng appeared in dozens of newspapers and magazines around the world, showing him tossing (gifting) seven earthenware pots containing the ashes of burnt books from a balcony window in the south west Szechuan province of Chengdu. The photograph was captioned with the title "OUT WITH THE OLD ART IN CHINA", implying that "out with the old" was indeed "IN WITH THE NEW." The caption suggested that Yin was the first artist that Chinese authorities have ever given permission to do this kind of "conceptual performance". The newspaper article did not indicate which books were being ritualistically burnt. Neither did it reveal if Yin's quasi liberatory, iconoclastic, yet still, in my view, somewhat totalitarian act – reminiscent of Nazi book burning ceremonies and Fahrenheit 351 – would have been read differently if the books had been Mao's *Little Red book*, Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, Greenberg's *Art and Culture* or copies of Joyce's *Ulysses*, any of which would have elicited different readings of his performance.

My second example is provided by the bloody actions of Neoist group founding member Istvan Kantor. Since 1979 Kantor has been performing ritualistic blood actions in major galleries throughout Europe and North America, among them: The Ludwig Museum, Koln, MOMA and the Metropolitan in New York City, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Musee d'art Contemporain in Montreal. The artist's *modus operandi* in this body of work consists of donating (gifting) his blood in the form of an X mark to a suitable museum collection. After choosing the institutional recipient for his 'gift', Kantor enters the gallery and splashes vials of his blood in a large X fashion on the wall, usually between two key works of art in the gallery collection. This action often results in his arrest or forced ejection from the gallery, with his return forever banned. Notwithstanding his declamation in the Neoism Manifesto (1979) that "Neoism has no Manifesto", Kantor's "neoist research project", in typical avant-garde style, is accompanied by a press release, a letter of intent and/or manifesto. The artist's "GIFT to Rauschenberg" (1991) for example, is described in a letter thus:

Dear Mr Rauschenberg,

I made (a) beautiful gift for you in the form of a blood-X, using my own dark and cold blood splashed on a white wall surrounded by your early works at the Ludwig museum, in Koln, where presently you have a powerful retrospective.

Would you please leave GIFT on the wall, to be listed and signed as your own work, an additional piece to *Erased de Kooning* (1953) and *Elemental Sculpture* (1953), until it becomes meaningless and obsolete.

Revolutionary art is a gob of bloody spit in the face of art history, a kick in the arse to the art world, a tribute to the beauty of vandalism: the ultimate act of creation is, of necessity criminal.

My greatest regards,

signed,
Monty Cantsin.

According to an earlier 'manifesto', titled provocatively "Sweet Blood of a Dead Pigeon" (Jan 30 1991), "the function of the blood campaign is to subvert culture, to question the very validity of established culture that is always corrupted by profit and controlled by censorship, to question the order of priorities, especially the fact that property always seems to have priority over people's lives and needs". This is followed by the broadside: "Resistance is our business." Kantor is also responsible for coining the term "ANACHRO", for Creative Anachronism, subtending the notion that we are living within an anachronistic age that demands an anarchic response.

Kantor's blood actions are preceded by the work of many other artists who have used body fluids as their raw material for various types of performance actions. David Mealing, an artist working in New Zealand in the 1970s, produced a very powerful gallery intervention, or "social sculpture", to use a term popularised by Joseph Beuys, by turning the Auckland Building Society into a temporary blood bank, replete with nurses, beds, needles, tubes, blood collection bottles, refrigeration equipment and a recuperation area for donors, where they could receive tea and biscuits. Titled *Blood the River of Life*, this event ranks as a prototypical littoral work some twenty years before its time. With the assistance of the local Red Cross blood donor clinic, Mealing's gallery intervention introduced blood as a political agent into the public sphere ten years before HIV and Aids made blood the troublesome product of State managed and independent collection agencies and signal subjects for a rich group of cultural work from artists around the world.⁶ Mealing's *Jumble Sale* (December 6th–10th), another antecedent of contemporary littoral art practice, creatively interfaced between the public and private spheres in a somewhat less provocative but similarly intelligent manner. For this 'installation' the artist secured support from members of the public, used clothing shops and other donors to model this situation on the conventional school jumble sale, garage sale or church bazaar where visitors may swap or purchase cheap clothing and exercise their good will toward a deserving cause. In poster advertisements for both events, Mealing refrained from promoting his own name, therefore subordinating his position as author of the event to the spontaneous, exigencies of everyday life.

The New York city based group REPOhistory engages its participants in a variety of ways through street signage, handbills, and computer technology. As with many littoral projects the viewer becomes less a consumer than a critical reader, an active participant in the construction of meaning and ultimately the assignment of value for the work.

Formed in 1989, REPOhistory⁷, consists of a changing group of artists, writers and others⁸ who have developed a forum for developing public art projects based on the reconstitution of hidden histories. Their published goal is "to retrieve and relocate absent historical narratives at specific locations in the New York City area through counter-monuments, actions, and events". According to their literature this work "is informed by a multicultural re-reading of history, which focuses on issues of race, gender, class and sexuality." And like their sister littoral groups REPHistory has chosen to create public art in attempt to expand the audience for art by operating outside of the institutional confines of the museum and gallery structure and directly within the public sphere. *Circulation's* multilayered website actively solicits the attention of its readers by directing him/her to various links and soliciting participation in the virtual transmission of personalised postcards representing various critical, political perspectives on the circulation of blood within New York City.

Bloom 98 is described as a "Quintessentially British" Ecoart project with the intention of "transcending monetary and class values"⁹. The brochure describes this as an engaged community art project, enacted through a collaborative initiative by a large number of artists. **Bloom 98** was a contemporary Live Arts event on Allotments of land provided by local government for community activities. Under the direction of artist and director Harry Palmer, the Uplands allotment Association, Birmingham and Basingstoke, assembled the assistance of approximately 20 artists (gardeners and others) who collaborated with each other and members of their respective allotment communities to produce creative garden projects. The gardens improved formerly vacant lots and industrial land providing their communities with flowers and vegetables on a continuing basis.

My final example is provided by artists members of the so-called Free Food group who organise spontaneous meals at a certain place and time for passersby in the streets of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Several weeks before the event the collaborators meet to produce cheap posters and handbills, gather the necessary food materials, cooking utensils, dishes and cutlery. A day before the meal, they take over one of their kitchens and cook huge pots of very good, elegant vegetarian food for free distribution the following day. The meal usually takes place at a very public location in the city with a high traffic volume such as the public library. Four such events have taken place and the organisers have managed to feed hundreds of homeless individuals, itinerants, students or those passersby who just want a good meal. Some donate money for the privilege, which enables the group to subsidize their activity. Some restaurants within the city have also donated materials, kitchen utensils as well as vegetables and other foodstuffs for the events. The project is similar to the successful Hungry Bowls initiative sponsored by the Ceramics department of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. The price of a ticket, usually between \$10 and \$15, provides the purchaser with a nourishing bowl of soup and bread and afterwards they keep the bowl made especially for the purpose. Proceeds from the event held near Christmas each year go to Food Bank and other service agencies.¹⁰

With respect to the history and criticism of performance genres within modernist art, each of these examples engage the central problematics – the first two, arguably more than the others – of oppositional and/or subversive art practice. In different ways each event reproduces some of the least desirable features of what, for want of a better phrase, I will call the enactment of protest. If I have some criticisms of each of these works, my aim in this context is not to subvert them or deny their relative efficacy as political art works but rather to enrich the categories of oppositional artwork. I will now explore the terms and conditions of oppositional as distinct from operative practice, and the political efficacy of strategic (exemplary), interventionist, instrumental and communicative actions.

The actions of Yin and Kantor can be described as strategic actions, the others as interventionist/ instrumental, but not quite communicative, in the best Habermasian sense of this term. As an agitational form of protest, strategic (exemplary) actions were criticised by many groups who participated in the events of May 68, in Paris, Nanterre, and other so-called countercultural demonstrations in various urban contexts throughout the 1960's, not only for their implicit absence of theory, but also their anarcho-individualistic, heroic and spectacular character. Advocates argued that the exemplary action has a symbolic use value that is only fully understood after the event – usually as a result of mediation (framing) through the media – and that its spontaneous “unprogrammed” character encourages the “fusion of various political tendencies” that otherwise would not coalesce as collective protest. Yin's action, for example, has been framed as an act of individualised creative freedom, albeit state sanctioned, applauded by the free West. Kantor's Blood Campaign ‘gifts’, conflating as they do, art and crime, are guerilla acts of cultural sabotage worthy of the Futurists. Yet both these exemplary subversive actions encourage the reproduction of the “vicious cycle of provocation-repression”¹¹, ironically identified to those engaged in this form of social protest, as a mark of success. Like the union tactic of the “wildcat strike” (the-illegal strike), the repression precipitated by such actions is usually so severe that it blocks the formation of *all* other types of *legitimate* protest. Furthermore, these subversive actions often serve to reproduce the very mechanisms of authority at which they are aimed.

By way of contrast, interventions (instrumental actions), allow a range of critical and/or resistant strategies to be attempted without (usually) precipitating a crisis or “culture war” of the kind evident recently in the US, Canada and elsewhere. In the form of an *interruption* or *mediative* action.¹⁵ A cultural intervention within a context characterised, for example, by its resistance to change, may encourage several positions (and responses) to be adopted by those engaged in the enactment or performance of social protest, *as well as those at which it is aimed*. The major problem is that the intervention may simply *remain* at the level of theory, instead of engendering (and engineering) an authentic state of praxis on the part of those participating.

The origin of the use of the term intervention in the discourse of art can be traced to the writings of Karl Marx, specifically the famous “11th Thesis on Feuerbach” (1845), in which he argued that “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change it*.” Almost a century later Bertolt Brecht paraphrased Marx with: “The theatre became an

affair for philosophers, but only for those philosophers as wished not just to explain the world, but also to change it.”¹³ In his famous essay “The Author as Producer”¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, Brecht's contemporary, extolled the virtues of the operative artist, providing as his example the communist author Sergei Tretyakov “whose mission was not to simply report but to struggle; not to play the spectator but to *intervene actively*” (Benjamin, W 1969: 223; emphasis added). Benjamin's prognosis for the political project of the photographer was similar “What we should demand of the photographer is the text that would wrench his (sic) work from modish commerce and give it some revolutionary useful values.” Benjamin's concept of the operative artist “intervening actively” implies both the subordination of any impulse to aestheticise and the ordination of critical agency. In other words it could be characterised as a post-aesthetic strategy, one which nonetheless could contain those values nominally subsumed under several aesthetic ideologies.

In the late 1950's the International Situationists (I.S) endorsed Brecht's and Benjamin's operative/interventional projects for artists committed to social change. In the very first issue of the I.S. review outlining the situationist project, they endorsed the fundamental importance of intervention as a post-theoretical and practical aspect of their critique of the (Debordian) society of the spectacle.

The constructed situation is bound to be collective both in its inception and development. However it seems that at least during an initial experimental period, responsibility must fall on one particular individual. This individual must, so to speak, be the ‘director’ of the situation. For example, in terms of one particular situationist project – revolving around the meeting of several friends one evening – one would expect (a) an initial period of research by the team, (b) the election of a director responsible for the co-ordinating the basic elements for the construction of the decor etc., and for working out a number of interventions, all of them unaware of all the details planned by the others), (c) the actual people living the situation who have taken part in the whole project both theoretically and practically, and (d) a few passive spectators not knowing what the hell is going on should be reduced to action¹⁵

If exemplary actions, are without theory; interventions attempt to put theory into action, to wed theory to practice. Both are intrinsically related to one another, as was understood clearly by those who participated in the occupations, sit-ins, teach ins, theatrical agit-prop events and other forms of protest evident during the 1960's. However, the intentions and ultimately the “audience” response are different.

The exemplary action consists, instead of intervening in an overall way, in acting in a much more concentrated way on exemplary objectives, on a few key objectives that will play a determining role in the continuation of the struggle.¹⁶

Fig.3 General Characteristics of Actions

Exemplary/Strategic Action	Intervention/ Instrumental Action
Anarchic/individualistic action	collective/collaborative or participatory in form
spontaneous	planned
dynamic/direct/focused action	exhibits less dynamism/indirect
absence of theory	theory laden/movement toward praxis
induces repression/confrontation	integrative, mediative/ interruptive/provocative
cathartic	non-cathartic attempts to lessen
provocative	provocation/encourage dialogue
dialectical	usually undialectical
theatrical	performative
spectacular	non-spectacular
projective	reflective

The table of oppositions above represents the general differences between two types of political action [performance], configured as acts of protest or resistance. Depending upon the circumstances and the type of event, intervention can become an exemplary action, and thus devolve into a form of political posturing, closely implicated in extreme versions of behaviour characterised by violence, anarchic rejection or destructive nihilism.

The meaning of these distinctions becomes patently clear, of course, when we consider the use of the terms direct/strategic action and intervention in either the power vocabularies of the State and special interest (terrorist) groups. Intervention as indirect action is usually precipitous, and as historical events have testified, intervention as a euphemism for neo-colonial incursion can lead to forms of local resistance that will eventually lead to armed struggle and ultimately war. Intervention as (strategic interruption), particularly when it is used by a group attempting to counter or resist the power exhibited by another group, that is in control, is very different from the interventions used by a controlling group attempting to reinforce its control. When employed as political rhetoric by the state, intervention is usually synonymous with incursion, an action that will reproduce/reform, or transform already existing or previously extant power relations. C.I.A. incursions (interventions) in Chile in the early 70s, Nicaragua, Bermuda and elsewhere in Central America, as well as more recently Russian intervention in Chechnya and its other republics, attest to the major differences between the two. Interventionist strategies employed by the left attempt to interrupt the passive consumption of the dominant ideologies and contest the hegemony of the state, whereas the interventionist strategies used by the right tend to reproduce them, thus exercising or maintaining their control.¹⁷

Communicative action is very different from direct action or intervention, although it may seem to employ some of the characteristics of both. Jurgen Habermas, who has arguably done more than anyone to theorise various forms of political action within the public sphere, distinguishes between strategic, instrumental and communicative actions. The distinction, he argues, between actions that are oriented toward *success* and those toward *understanding* is crucial.

In *strategic actions* one actor seeks to influence the behaviour of another by means of the threat of sanctions or the prospect of gratification in order to cause the interaction to continue as the first actor desires, Whereas

in a *communicative action* one actor seeks rationally to motivate another by relying on the illocutionary binding/bonding effect (*Bindungseffekt*) of the offer contained in the speech act (Habermas, 1990:58).

He distinguishes between openly strategic actions and those that are covertly strategic; the first involves the systematic distortion of an event and unconscious deception on the part of the participants, the second involving various types of conscious deception, is manipulative and therefore inherently propagandistic. In another passage Habermas asserts that:

communicative actions (occur) when social interactions are co-ordinated not through the egocentric calculations of success of every individual but through co-operative *achievements of understanding* among participants. (Habermas in Thompson and Held 1982:264) (emphasis added)

He argues that art has an important place as a critical mediating agent in what he terms "the decolonising process"; How art could, or should mediate decolonisation is less clear in his work. If science, philosophy and art are thoroughly institutionalised and therefore subjected to increasing ideological incursion by what he terms "the legitimating practices of the state", how can any one 'sphere'— such as art — become the privileged site for communicative action? The question then, he wrote in 1983 "is how to overcome the isolation of science, morals and art and their respective expert cultures" (1983,90:19), and return them to the public sphere.

Habermas has consistently affirmed that art, along with philosophy, law, politics and economics, are important sites for mediation, communicative rationality and pragmatic action. He is somewhat ambivalent however about the extent to which this can occur in an institution that the forces of an increasingly technocratic and bureaucratic modernity have rendered into increasing autonomy from the life world. As a Kantian, he has remained somewhat resolute in his defence of the separation of pure and practical reason from aesthetic judgement.

In modern societies, the spheres of science, morality, and law have crystalized around these forms of argumentation (instrumental reason). The corresponding cultural systems of action administer problem solving capacities in a way similar to that in which the enterprises of art and literature administer capacities for world disclosure. (Habermas, 1987:207).

It is clear from this last statement, which he employed in his extended critique of Derrida's purported collapsing of the genre distinction between literature and philosophy, that while he views art and culture generally as an important focus for theoretical attention, he maintains a boundary between forms of communicative action that can occur within the spheres of political, legal or philosophical discourse, and those that can occur within the domain of art and literature.

For Habermas art remains at the level of representation, distanced from the material reality and "spatio-temporal structures" of the life world, and as such, can not be considered as ideal a site as is language — or rather speech — for the deployment of communicative action.

At an early stage in the development of his communication theory, Habermas recognised the inherent problematic of communicative actions that do not offer the possibility of their own (dialectical) transformation. While his system/lifeworld paradigm could adequately describe the instrumental logic behind the progressive development of administrative bureaucratisation and the economic forces driving the conflict(s) between the system and the lifeworld,¹⁸ communicative actions, wrongly used, could have, as his intellectual mentor Walter Benjamin himself understood, wholly undesirable consequences.

With his Frankfurt School mentors, Habermas does recognise a important place for art as a critical mediating agent in the decolonising process; however, how art could, or should mediate is less clear. "The issue now", he writes in 1983 "is how to overcome the isolation of science, morals and art and their respective expert cultures" (1983,90:19), and return them to the public sphere. By the early 1980's it seemed as if Habermas was beginning to heed Marx's injunction in his Theses on Feuerbach. And by this time he had fully articulated the restrictions wrought upon life world activities by the hegemony of expert cultures and their rarefied exclusive esoteric languages. However Habermas' own work as a philosopher still remained somewhat distanced from that very life world which he so wished to protect.

I agree, somewhat, with Terry Eagleton's prognosis that as an academic Habermas is "aloofly remote from the sphere of political action" but that his work as an intellectual represents a "political strike for the life-world against administrative rationality." Eagleton however, also generously admits that:

...art itself is for Habermas one crucial place where the jeopardized resources of moral and affective life may be crystalized; and in the critical discussion of such art, a kind of shadowy public sphere may be re-established, and so mediating between the separate Kantian spheres of the cognitive, moral and aesthetic. (Eagleton, 1990:402)

Some will argue that each example of the art of giving discussed at the beginning of this paper can be framed as either liberal altruism, or as leftist *tendenzkunst* — and perhaps both. Like Marx's criticism of this "wretched offal of socialist literature" The *tendenzkunst* argument insists that while evidencing the 'correct political tendency' the work remains still at the level of representation, merely acting out the forms of cultural politics without providing the important political substance that would engender real change. Armed with the legacy of Marx, Engels, Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukacs et. al., many on the left would argue that the artist/intellectual should align him/herself with the appropriate progressive or revolutionary forces within society and their representative social groups and political parties. Like Marx and Engel's critiques of Ferdinand Lasalle, each giving example could be criticised for evidencing the correct political tendency but lacking the correct engagement with its object of concern, which would necessitate an adoption of the appropriate (time honoured), and normative political strategies for social change.

Mealing's work, REPOhistory and The Free Food examples insist that giving can be used 'strategically' to further a number of identifiable life world and humanitarian goals, as well as provide some critical intervention into the ideological fabric of our culture. The **Bloom 98** example attempts to develop "new working relationships between like thinking artists. As Harry Palmer suggests "it is hoped this project will celebrate the adversities, break down the solitary conventions and demonstrate new ways of collaboration."

Claude Levi Strauss argued that "The automatic laws of the cycle of reciprocity are the unconscious principle of the obligation to give, the obligation to return a gift and the obligation to receive" (1987:43) But as Bourdieu demonstrates in his critique of Levi-Strauss's structural logic of the (Maussian) law of reciprocity, in reality "the gift may remain unreciprocated" (98). For Yin

and Kantor, and to a lesser extent perhaps, Mealing, the New York, Basingstoke, Birmingham and Halifax artists, this realisation would necessitate that the givers themselves become the first targets of conscientization. But each cultural intervention, exemplary or not, engages "a logic of practice" that encourages an infinite variety of exchanges or gifts, challenges, *ripostes*, reciprocations, and repressions to occur. These examples of operative art practice have the capacity to creatively engage their public in conscientization and in this sense alone provide service of some social and cultural value. But in accordance with Bourdieu's wry observation on the politics of giving and receiving these examples acknowledge also:

The simple possibility that things might proceed otherwise than as laid down by the 'mechanical laws' of the 'cycle of reciprocity' (and that this) is sufficient to change the whole experience of practice and, by the same token its logic.(99)

In contrast to Mauss and Levi-Strauss' insistence on laws and structure in the cycle of reciprocity, of obligation and exchange, Bourdieu's logic of practice privileges individual agency, in all its unpredictability and contrariness, as the primary component of a generative model of giving (and understanding). Perhaps this logic of practice, like that promoted by Habermas himself "provides an alternative to money and power as a basis for societal integration." (Calhoun 1992:31) And without an acknowledgement of individual agency within communicative action, that is of the potential for *contrariety* – the act of giving, the gift of food, the gift of labour, the gift of blood, and of life itself, would seem valueless.

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- 1 This paper continues some of the arguments engaged in four of my earlier essays: "Performance for Instruction and Performance for Pleasure" (1980), "Notes toward an Adequate Interventionist [performance] practice" (1985), "The Art of Giving" (1994) and "Littoralist Art Practice and Communicative Action" (1998).
- 2 Published in *FUSE* Vol 19 No 2 Winter 1996
- 3 see Parkin, Andrew and Van der Platt, Medina (eds) *Essays on Habermas* (forthcoming).
- 4 "The theme of the gift, of freedom and obligation in the gift, of generosity and self-interest in giving, reappear in our own society like the resurrection of a dominant motif long forgotten." (Mauss, 1924, 1967:66).
- 5 Group Material, Artlink, Wochenklausur Group, Dogs of Heaven, Cultural Transmissions Network, Burobert, Grupo Escombros, Hirsch Farm project, Platform, Progetto Cuspide, Projects Environment, Protoplast, TEA, Terra Cultural Research Society, REPOhistory.
- 6 A *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) report August 1, 2000 suggests that with the purported reduction of HIV and AIDS cases in the west, the production of artwork, literature, theatre and performance based on these themes has diminished.
- 7 This far REPOHistory has produced six large public art projects. Their goals are "to raise questions about the construction of history, to provide multiple viewpoints that encourage viewers to think critically, to explore how histories and their interpretations affect us today, and to engage with specific communities in order to facilitate their efforts to construct their own public histories."
- 8 Current Members Neill Bogan, Jim Costanzo, Tom Klem, Janet Koenig, Lisa Maya Knauer, Cynthia Liesenfeld, Chris Neville, Jayne Pagnucco, Leela Ramotar, Greg Shollette & George Spencer
- 9 Palmer, Harry : catalogue/poster statement 1998
- 10 Hungry Bowls is based on the Empty Bowls Project (1990) originated by artists Lisa Blackburn, and John Hartom of Franklin, Michigan. Their project has been used as a model for many similar philanthropic littoral projects around the world.
- 11 Bolton, Richard *Culture Wars Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* New York: The New Press 1992
- 12 see Barber, B, Guilbaut, S and O'Brian *Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power and the State* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996 and Bolton, R., *Culture Wars*: 1992
- 13 Brecht, B., "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" in Willett, S., *Brecht on Theatre 1933-1947* (1936)pp 71-72

- 14 addressed to the antifascist league meeting in Paris, 1936.
- 15 I.S. No 1 1958:13 for another discussion of this quote see Barber, B "Notes toward an Adequate Interventionist [Performance] Practice" in *ACT* Vol 1 No. 1 New York; *Inter* (French version) No 46 Summer 1990 Quebec. Also in Barber, B. *Reading Rooms Halifax*, Eyelevel Gallery publications 1992.
- 16 See also Barber and Guilbaut, S. "Performance and Social and cultural Intervention: Interviews with Martha Rosler *Parachute*. I have previously discussed the differences between direct (exemplary) actions and intervention as a critical strategy by contrasting the art actions of the Guerilla Art Action Group (G.A.A.G.) to that of Adrian Piper, a black feminist artist/philosopher.
- 17 See B Barber "Towards an adequate Interventionist [Performance] practice" *Reading Rooms*, Halifax: Eyelevel Gallery, 1993.
- 18 As Habermas argued in *Legitimation Crisis* (1975) the system has penetrated deeply into the lifeworld, progressively reorganising its practices in accord with its own rationalising, systematising and bureaucratic logic. The instrumentalising of human activity, he posited, destroys the possibilities of democratic participation in social interaction and political decision making.

i think its interesting that the 70s performance stuff in nz is having something of a revival. must be funny trying to cast your mind back to it all

Kyla McFarlane, e-mail, 24 May.



Dialogue, 1973
Bruce Barber
Courtesy of Prof. Tony Green

Dialogue, 1973

Bruce Barber

Courtesy of Prof. Tony Green

Yes, something of a revival. Actually not a revived activity along the lines of the 70s, so much as a long-overdue curatorial attention. Thirty years on, it is being drafted into art history. That would have been a matter for fear and probably for loathing in the 1970s. The institutional process of historicising and museumising was then regarded as a kind of death. So even if the art still has its uses, either as model or as something to be shredded, it has that shadow hanging over it.

There was the series of shows **Action Replay: Post Object Art**. Casting my mind back to the last of the series at the New Gallery of the Auckland City Art Gallery, I recall that I wrote that there was a vitrine "containing a heap of pamphlets, magazines, videos, ephemera and catalogues, piled higgledy-piggledy, [that] truly represented the unsorted state of this period's history" (*ART AsiaPacific*, 23, 1999, "Action replay" pp44-45).

Of course, I did hesitate over writing "period's" history, as if I could seriously believe in the sentences of history having punctuation marks. But I note that Wystan Curnow has shown that there is a use for the deliberately arbitrary and artificial effect of decisive time-slices, a decade in this case, not a minute before or after. And I recall that he countered the grand **100 years of New Zealand Landscape Painting** show at the ACAG with a little show of four years of **New Zealand Landscape for Artspace** at the George Fraser Gallery. And during the time of the **Action Replay** show he kept repeating the phrase "an unwritten chapter of New Zealand art history". So history is writing that comes in chapters in books? Rather than reflecting the inevitable destiny of nations, it first of all reflects a positioning of a text in a market.

This performance stuff is as yet not properly dressed to make its entrance into the printed public annals. So far the publication of New Zealand art history writing is still largely stuck on New Zealand painting – or on sculpture, which sometimes deliberately excludes performance. Hence reference in the existing chapters of New Zealand art history books to the artists and works that might interest us here is somewhat limited. They do sometimes appear, but only when deemed to be making sculptures. Nor would it be a great improvement to simply tack "performance" onto the end of a book about sculpture, because Post-Object art is decisively not about making sculptural objects. It requires a big shift in attention. That is precisely its novelty; that is what has been so little acknowledged; that is the place at which critical intelligence needs to begin. I am content to adopt its own two names for itself: the New Art of the *New Art* book, edited by Wystan Curnow and Jim Allen, 1975, calls it "Post-Object Art". The question about what it is comes down to what it is in its particular occurrences, its singularities. The starting point for a list of these is the *New Art* book. That list has then to be scrutinised, because it is unclear just how the work of Greer Twiss and Don Driver fits in. If it does fit, the question arises how far this New Art extends to projects like Richard Killeen's painting for instance or to Alan Loney's poetry – both Killeen and Loney were included in the art event at F.1. in Wellington. There will also be work that was not included in the book. Of course, the work in the book stands at the beginning. A second book a decade later would usefully have included work by Billy Apple, Nick Spill, Andrew Drummond, Peter Roche and Linda Buis. Considering the activity of New Zealand artists at Mildura and at ANZART events, there would be many others. Inevitably questions of inclusion and exclusion come back to the questions about what is going on in these

works that allow them to be linked to the issues raised by "Post-Object" art. Thinking of what is to be done: at the simplest archival level, this is a time for rediscovering documents, reassembling them in some kind of order, calling for reminiscences, memoirs and interviews, while the participants are still lively. There will be, as ever, in operations of this kind, some squabbling, some sorting out claims to priority of invention, some disagreements. There are already useful starting points: especially Wystan Curnow's "Exhibitions of Sculpture" (*Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, 4, 1976, pp 33-39 & 7, 1979, pp 34-40). It would be timely to flesh those out with some detail discussion. These are lists it should be noted of "sculpture" exhibitions and events, which include performances and installations. It should be possible to go beyond Robert Leonard's vitrine containing an unsorted heap of ephemera.

What is this art about? There is no modernist manifesto, no incorporated society, few direct proposals that can serve as guides. Consequently the works themselves need close attention. Given the expressions of concerns that do exist: how far do these artworks serve as criticism of the systems in which art is embedded, the systems of public museums and private ownership, of criticism and history; how do they apply themselves to new technology; how do they deal with an audience, not conceived of as passive, but as active and participant in the construction and meaning of a work; how do they attempt to overcome mediation, in the name of immediacy in time, space and attempt to ensure the presence of the artist; how do they model new social relations? These are some of the questions that come to mind.

I notice that Jim Allen is given to talking about this art as "conceptual", in the recent video-tape he made with Alice Carstensen for instance, *Jim Allen Post Objective*. Wystan Curnow uses the word too and so do I, but the term is a very loose one. Terry Smith is offering to extend it over our Post-Object art. Further, that art can be included in a global conceptual art. But I am in no hurry to take shelter under "conceptual", a term that is as unlikely to get a consensus for definition as "post-modernism" or indeed "art", especially if it defers asking questions of the works.

It has some rather different meanings among artists that call themselves conceptual, from Henry Flynt III's early coinage of the term – for an art that illustrated concepts – to the disputes among New York and British artists in the 1960s and 70s (see Charles Harrison's *Essays on Art & Language*, Blackwell, Oxford & Cambridge Mass. 1991). Jim Allen too has distinctions in mind when he remarks "Well, I certainly had difficulty warming to Lawrence Weiner for example, but I never had any problems with Hans Haacke" (*Art New Zealand*, 95, winter 2000, 205, "Contact", p 52).

Notwithstanding any serious debate over arts issues, the word is now bandied about in the press without any specially clear meaning, just one of those terms that confers status. For instance, twenty-four listings in the Auckland phone book use "concept" or its derivatives. My favourite is the TV ad in which Sam Rielly declares: "Now that's a Concept door!" Awesome! And Jaguar cars have collared another once useful phrase in their slogan: "the art of performance". Cool! Sure, much that happened was generated in the "Sculpture Departments" of Elam and Ilam. But the departmental titles were simply left over from another sense of what art was supposed to be about, hence its particular insistence in New Zealand on calling itself Post-Object art. This distinction reflects on the local rigidity of institutional structures as much as on the nature of the activity. As Christina Barton realised long ago, whatever its actual underlying political agendas, unlike much overseas art, it sounded no clear political note.

It is more appropriate to think of this art as indifferent to sculpture. It is also indifferent to traditions and histories of painting, photography, video, film, dance, music, literature and theatre. In practice, it was also more than indifferent to much traditional discourse about art. It could be positively hostile to criticism and to history, since they were usually suspected, often rightly, of being based on traditional aesthetics. Furthermore, this is an art which valued thinking over craft; of propositions and articulation of artist and work over self-expression; and process over product. The critic was thought of as simply getting in the way of the critical intentions of the work. The

artwork as in Art & Language formulations was intended to contain its own theoretical and critical statements. The form of the *New Art* book was for this reason intended to promote the artist's self-presentations, without intermediary critical voices. All except one artist, Don Driver, took advantage of this.

"Something of a revival" is here and now more manifest with a four day symposium, overseas visitors, an exhibition and essays. I suppose Post-Object art in New Zealand is now heading for a big vitrine in a museum. Will it be a curiosity in a corner somewhere? It needs a space of its own where an appropriate relation of discourse to the art can be attempted. But I would also insist that that should only be a temporary arrangement, until it becomes clearer how it may produce a perspective for discourse on all the arts. The effort that is needed now should aim at shifting the centre of attention from painting – or any of the other arts that are defined by media – to the (loosely-speaking) "conceptual". This will take some doing, since the market here has dreadingly and perhaps predictably favoured illustrated books about painting with little regard for what kind of text goes into them. It is a condition of this kind of publication that it should spare its readership as much thought about issues as possible.

Casting my mind back? I am not a camera or a tape-recorder. I am surely not recording instrument, just as surely as I is not a consciousness without an unconscious. There are documents for me to re-read, with all that implies of re-thinking. Of course, I have kept legends going, tales I tell myself about what I saw and heard. How I felt is overlaid by how I feel now, about how things relate, how in retrospect the thoughts of those days.

The theory, seems to have had cogency for its moment, but not forever. Strikingly that theory was linked to what appears now as a structuralist approach through cybernetics and semiotics. From the start this allowed operations that displaced aesthetics, especially idealist aesthetics, in favour of action and a politics, looking for the means to change institutions felt to be repressive. Artists in particular were concerned, not with changing traditions of style and content but trying to change the social institutions that control the arts.

At this particular juncture I can say that I have long been aware of the pragmatic style of Jim Allen. Theory is certainly not absent from his thinking, but he has always been someone to get things done, to plan and carry out operations "a tireless facilitator".

I recall a phrase that stands out from discussions of the 1970s, "problem-solving". I associate this with the talk that went on between Elam and the Architecture School, and particularly Gordon Smith. In a recent interview, Allen has mentioned a connection with cybernetics: seeing Jasja Reichardt's exhibition at the ICA, "Cybernetic Serendipity" which "addressed the cross-pollination of art and science". between scientific thought and art. There was some hope for a bridging between the "two cultures", as C.P. Snow had called them.

I was prompted by this to ask Allen on the phone about cybernetics. He told me there were articles in the art magazine *Leonardo* that he had read. He had also gone to see Roy Ascott, distinguished in the 1960s, as now, as a pioneer in reformulating art school programmes through cybernetics. Subsequently, Allen told me, he worked with the architects in the University of Auckland – he mentioned Vernon Brown. He was particularly taken with the possibilities of problem-solving in teaching practice. And this has no doubt a particular bearing on the exacting process of group-discussion at Elam; it has a bearing on group sculptural projects, such as the Bledisloe Place installation of 1971; and it has a bearing on the hour-long weekly interviews with students on their individual projects. I was invited to sit in on these very interesting sessions from time to time. I recall that they were insistently demanding, not only of clarity of thinking about the social processes they involved, but also about the logistics of their work in hand. Later, as Allen told me, at the Sydney College of the Arts, he was able to put "problem-solving" at the centre of his teaching programme, with group-teaching, and working the first year students, as he said, pretty hard. All this was at the service of a mission. It was to liberate creative activity. In the early 1970s he lent me the extraordinary book by Elwyn Richardson *In the early world*. This is an

account of what Richardson accomplished as head-master of a school at Oruaiti, through enthusiastic work with pottery with the whole school. In interview in *Art New Zealand*, Allen remarked: "One day Elwyn and I were watching kids in the playground and thought it would be fantastic if we could bring the imaginative play and creative energy happening spontaneously there into the classroom". (op.cit. *Contact*, p 48).

The practical experience has its connections with the prophetic manifesto-style of Roy Ascott's writing: "If we are to keep art schools let them be structured as homeostatic organisms, living, adaptive instruments for generating creative thought and action".

Ascott also makes a distinction between "hot" art and "cool" art that has echoes in New Zealand in the 1970s: hot art is "densely stacked with information, highly organised and rigidly determined. Hot art work admits of very little feedback in the system artifact/observer". In cool art, "the bits are loosely stacked, of uncertain order, not clearly connected, ambiguous, entropic. Then the system allows the observer to participate, projecting his own sense of order or significance into the work, or setting up resonances by quite unpredicted interaction with it". The terms of this discussion by Ascott in 1967 come close to those that are relevant to Post Object art with its ambitions for social change through art as "a form of behaviour". (from "Behaviours and Futuribles" (1967) *Control 5*, 1970, in K. Stiles and P. Selz. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, University of California, 1996, pp 489-490). This plainly propels artists out of the studio. It moves them away from the provision of luxury objects for the upper and middle classes and from representations of their ideals in public monuments. It propels them into the social sciences, where structuralism, cybernetics and semiotics were current, launching art as a means of engaging in social change.

What can be said about an artwork that cannot be identified with an object, whose existence is now tenuous if not unreclaimable? It does not leave a score or a printed text to be read and to be performed but a tape recording – video or sound – photographs, statements about intent or about materials and site? This is one of the problems faced by a critic-historian. It is as if the seemingly replete images of painting and sculpture, there to be read in their entirety and more or less as they presented themselves when made, were suddenly reduced to faded photographs or a tattered engraving and a brief description by an author long dead.

There is no way in which one can ever embrace the whole of any seemingly replete work, but the remnants, such as the three photos & a scrap of type-written statement of Bruce Barber's "*Dialogue*" leave one asking all manner of questions about what is no longer visible or audible. The text is as follows: "Dialogue. Talking to myself from the past into the present; a record for the future. A solo performance for performer, tape recorders, walkie-talkies and megaphone. Duration: Indeterminate. Material: Random thoughts and exact technical data pertaining to the process and use of equipment. Bruce Barber. Jan 1973

This like much Post-Object art was intensely bound up with the presence of the artist making the work. But here there does not appear to be the usual participatory audience. The audience is in the future. The work is tied to a phenomenological presentation, to an identification of the event with the physical conditions of its performance. It evokes a neutral consciousness supposedly bare of preconceptions and thus prepared for its full reception. Residues like photographs and tapes are secondary and unsatisfactory because the experience of being there is missing. In Barber's type-script, there is mention of a tape-recording, but he did not give me one with the photos.

The tape was evidently a kind of verbal text produced in this process, much as in his later work the *Whittler's Soliloquy*, where the whittler was in seclusion, held captive in a tall triangular box, producing meditative text, "talking to himself". In the Mt Eden performance, it was Wystan Curnow who was asked by Barber to be a part of the work, writing a running commentary on the proceedings, subsequently published in the *New Art* book. Critics and historians of

New Zealand literature have so far not taken notice of these texts, because nobody has yet claimed them, as perhaps they should, as poems.

The text clearly indicates that the photos are to be read as representing the presence of the artist in the work. In the first there, is a clean almost empty space. As context, it is bare of any cues as to the meaning of what is to take place, except for the three small pieces of equipment. The walkie-talkies and the tape recorder are there on the floor. The room however is not quite as empty as it may at first appear, somewhere in the room there is a camera and presumably a photographer operating it. In the other two photographs, the unseen photographer is at work again, though it is not impossible the photographs were taken by Barber using a time-delay on the camera. In any case, there is an observer-function in there, a recording agency documenting the work for the audience of the future. It was sensible of Barber to give these documents of the work to an art historian.

Into this seemingly pure emptiness, the artist enters to appear in the other two photos. In the middle photo, this figure is seen as if speaking into a megaphone (actually a loud-hailer) towards his walkie-talkie. In the lower one he is in a different place, in a new instant of the present time that is mentioned in the type-script, much as new frame in strip-cartoon usually indicates that time has moved on. Present time and presence are not without problems in this set-up. The left leg of the artist figure in the middle photo is transparent. The door can be seen through it. The photo is not like a pure blink of an eye, but a significant elapsed duration. In the lower photograph the figure is blurred, as if it had moved. This too shows a significant elapsing of time.

The artist is speaking to himself, marking the difference between his natural voice and the mediated voice coming through the megaphone. Then he marks the difference in time by means of the walkie-talkies. The mediated megaphone voice speaks close to the transmitting walkie-talkie and this sound is separated in space as far as possible, by the length of the diagonal of the room, from the receiving walkie-talkie. The sounds are also minutely separated in time. But what does he mean by talking to himself from the past into the present. This has always confused me. And what sort of conceptions of time and event does this imply?

I do not think this aspect of the work will stand close scrutiny. However, the important thing is that the artwork is a "situation" in which such issues can be fore-grounded. That the solutions should be open to question later is inevitable and not inappropriate, addressed as it is to some future. In the present time, reading Gilles Deleuze *Logique du Sens*, (Les Editions de Minuit, 1969) I find on time and events the following: "We have seen that the past, the present and the future, were not at all three parts of the same temporality, but they formed two readings of time, each complete and excluding the other: on one hand, the present, always limited, which measures the action of bodies as causes, and the state of their admixtures in depth (Chronos); on the other hand the past and the future essentially unlimited, which collect on the surface incorporeal events in as much as they are effects (Aion)" (p 77, my translation).

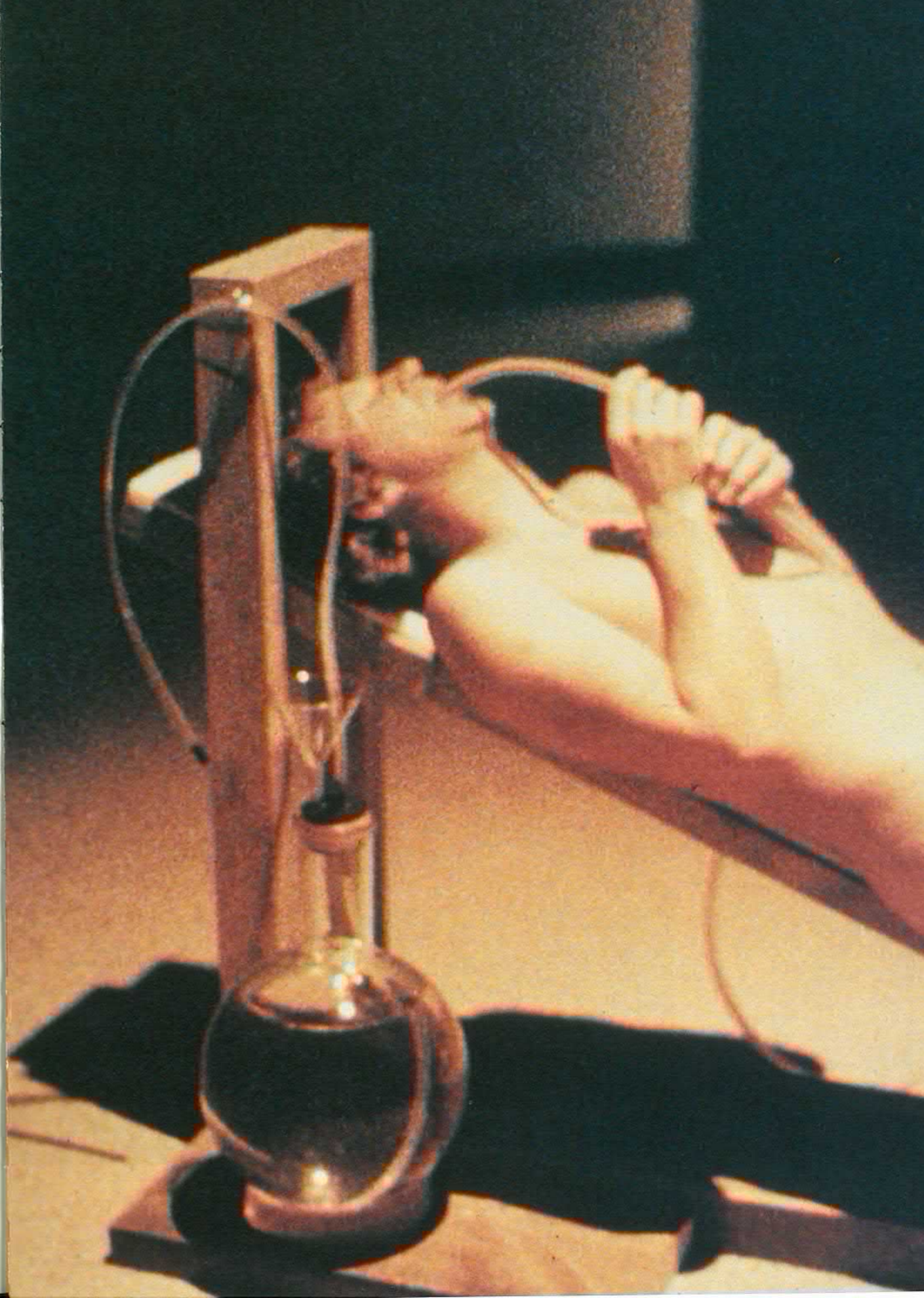
Bucket Action, 1974
Bruce Barber
Courtesy of the artist and 'open drawer file', Elam
School of Fine Arts Library, University of Auckland
cat 27





Earth Vein, 1980
Andrew Drummond
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: N Spill
cat 28

Membrane, 1984
John Cousins
Courtesy of the artist
cat 29





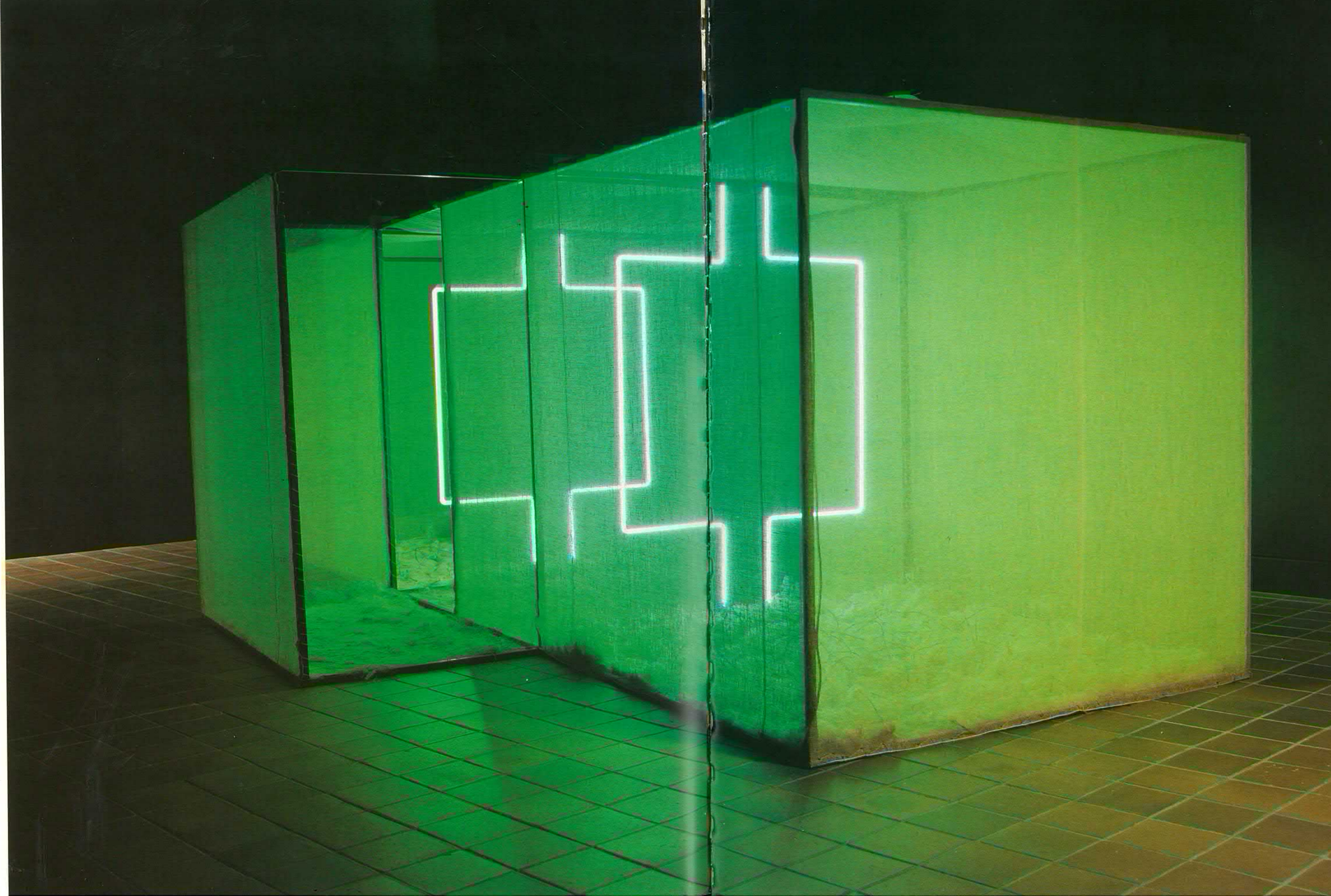
Crucifixion, 1978
Andrew Drummond
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Paul Johns
cat 13

Body Articulation, 1974
Jim Allen
Courtesy of E.H.McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki
cat 31





Te Henga: 100 Women Project, 1985
Juliet Batten
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Gil Mathewson
cat 34



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Small Worlds: NZ Environments #5, 1969
Jim Allen
Courtesy of the artist
cat 35

Triad IV Tasman/Pacific Part 2 Quarry
Performance, ANZART, 1981
Phil Dadson
Courtesy of the artist and 'open drawer' file, Elam School of
Fine Arts Library, University of Auckland
cat 36





Computer Dance, 1974

Jim Allen

Courtesy of E.H.McCormick Research Library, Auckland

Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki

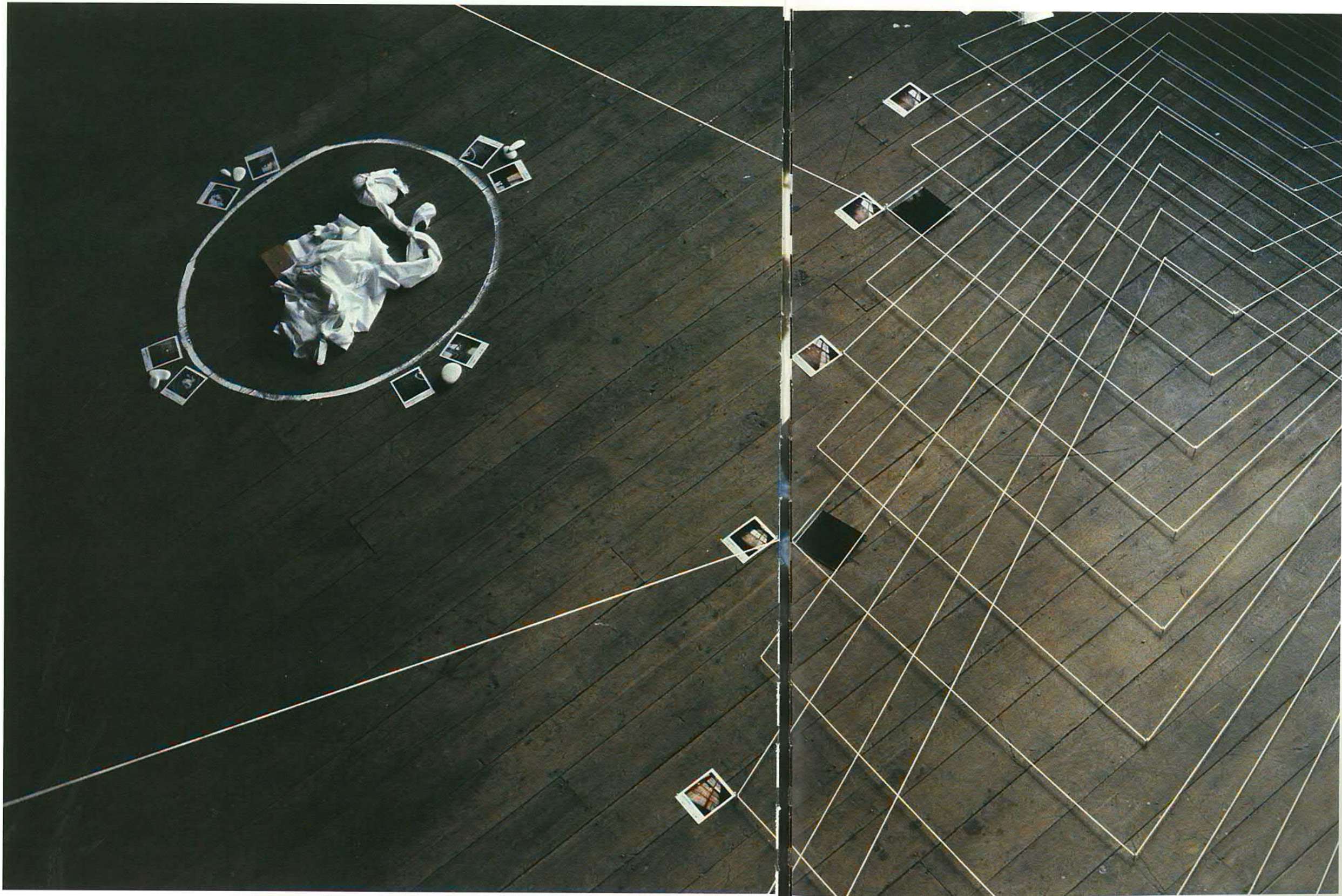
cat 37



Fontanel, 1981
Di ffrench
Courtesy of the Estate of the artist
cat 38



The Elastic Sided Boot, 1976
Jim Allen, performance/installation (detail)
Courtesy of the artist and Experimental
Art Foundation, Adelaide
cat 39



24 Hour Performance Piece, 1982
Colleen Anstey
Courtesy of the artist
cat 40

Preparation for Christmassmusic, 1973
John Cousins
Courtesy of the artist
cat 41



About The Writers

- Jennifer Hay** Jennifer Hay is Assistant Curator at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery and has a post-graduate degree in Art History from the University of Canterbury. Her research has centred on performance art from the 1970s, in particular the work of David Mealing, Andrew Drummond and Di ffrench.
- Nicholas Spill** Nicholas Spill arrived in New Zealand from England in 1962, graduating from Auckland University in 1973 with a double major in English Literature and Art History. From 1976–1978 Spill was Exhibitions Officer at the National Art Gallery of New Zealand. He was awarded a research grant from the QEII Arts Council in 1979. Spill has taught Drama and Movement, and has performed in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, his work is included in the Auckland Art Gallery, the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa and MOMA, New York. He is currently living in Miami where he writes stories and poetry.
- Blair French** Blair French is a New Zealand writer and curator based in Sydney. He is editor of *Photo Files: An Australian Photographer Reader* (Sydney: Power Publications and Australian Centre for Photography, 1999) and has written extensively on contemporary Australian and New Zealand art including recent texts on the work of Gordon Bennett, Shane Cotton, Dale Frank, Gavin Hipkins, Rosemary Laing, Tracey Moffatt and Jacky Redgate. Having previously worked in public galleries in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom he is presently writing a doctoral thesis at the University of Sydney on the photographic image in contemporary Australian art.
- Bruce Barber** Bruce Barber is Professor, Media Arts & Visual Culture Studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design and Teaching Fellow, Contemporary Studies, University of Kings College Halifax, Nova Scotia. Barber's work is included in various private and public collections in New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Poland and the U.S. He is a writer, critic and editor for numerous international books and journals on performance art and theory such as *Essays on [Performance] and Cultural Politicisation*, Toronto, Coachhouse Press 1983, *Reading Rooms* Halifax, Eye Level Publications, 1992.
- Prof. Tony Green** Tony Green is Emeritus Professor of Art History, University of Auckland, and founding editor of *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*. He has just published: "Nicolas Poussin paints the Seven Sacraments twice". Paravail, Lancaster, 2000. He is currently writing another book: "Poussin's Humour".

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