

The Unsettled Object

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my two supervisors;

Nancy de Freitas, Associate Professor, School of Art and design, AUT University,

and

Christopher Braddock, Associate Professor, School of Art and Design, AUT University,

for all their invaluable help, advice and support throughout the duration of this project.

Thank you very much.

Abstract

The Unsettled Object is an installational art project that considers the instability of objects in regards to their assembly, classification, and presentation, underpinned by the context of the museum and supported by Michel Foucault's notion of the classificatory grids he discusses in *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (Foucault, 1970)

The artefacts are being fabricated as a response to the corporeal body-on-display; its surfaces, spaces and volumes.

An underlying notion of temporality and mutability is indicated in the processes of making, the objects, material responsiveness and the devices employed in the presentation of the work.

Introduction

The Unsettled Object is a practice based research project, exploring ideas around the object and its presentations; utilizing the museum as a framework from which to examine shifting systems of display and classification.

The institution of the modern museum has become a site of ideological and creative critique for numerous artists, many of whom show a deep understanding of its role as an institution and its curatorial practices. A full discussion of these works lies outside the boundaries of this thesis as my particular interest lies in the sphere of the objects themselves and the mutability of their meanings in the hierarchy of classificational systems.

As a context for the practical work, the museum has been considered as a space that operates as a site that makes evident the meaningful bringing together and ordering of artifacts. It is a space in which artifacts are separated from the everyday, brought into view and re-presented as constructed realities whose unsettled assemblages are primarily dependent on the changing organizing systems that are imposed upon them. I am also considering the environment of the museum and its fluctuating relationship to the visitor as it acts within the dynamics of its social, political and cultural hegemonies.

The work investigates these ideas within a project that opens up my previous practice of object making into the context of an installation and a wider art conversation. The objects themselves address the subject of the body-on-view within the framework of the museum. Their materiality and the processes of making are concerned with material responsiveness to this kind of body.

Section 1. Collecting, Classifying, Displaying

This section positions the unsettled object in respect to the three spheres of engagement it operates in within the museum context that translate onto equivalent sites within the art practice.

Firstly; the unsettled object itself and its recontextualization into a museum object; the place of the body-as-object in the museum and in the practice.

Secondly; the groupings of objects and the character of the superimposed classificatory grids; the device of the table within the practice as a site of display.

Thirdly; the wider, cultural sphere of influence; the museum environment itself and its encounter with the visitor; considerations around the installation and the notion of the beholder-manipulator.

1.1 Collecting: unsettled objects

In which the nature of the collected object itself is discussed.

“The life of Things is in reality many lives”

Phillip Fisher (Carbonell,2004:436)

At the start of his essay, *Art and the Future's Past*, (Carbonell,2004:436-454) Phillip Fisher gives an example of an unsettled object. In this example, a sword, and the possible recontextualizations that this object may have undergone before it enters the museum collection; it's use in battle, a ceremonial/sacred role and its role as loot. It is then incorporated into a new community of objects within a museum where it undergoes a further shift in meaning. Krzysztof Pomian, in his essay *The Collection: Between the Visible and Invisible* (Pomian,1994) defines the collected object as being “either natural or artificial, kept permanently or temporarily out of the economic circuit, afforded special protection in enclosed places adapted specifically for that purpose and put on display.” They are also separated spatially, temporally, materially and culturally (24). Thus, these are objects coming together from separated and disparate worlds with their meanings fundamentally disturbed. Heidegger, as well, reflects on this disconnected nature. Items still retain something of their original worlds in addition to existing in-the-now, being present-at-hand.

In a sense, they become worldless, or between worlds, their meanings suspended in limbo between one time and another. Now, being re-presented, they are assigned a secondary historical significance to their intrinsic, primary historicity (Heidegger, 1962:432). The meanings of these objects are no longer reliable; they have become free to be reordered, as Phillip Fisher asserts, by “a cast of persons, a set off uses.” (Carbonell,2004:437) Consequently, they are discovered sitting together in situations that would have been inconceivable at their time of their making.



Fig.1

Fig.2

Fig.3

Fig.4

Fig.5

1.12 The body on display The body, as object, has held a prominent position within changing taxonomies of display. It's inclusion within the museum collection has resulted in some radical disconnections with its original purpose; for example, a figure of Christ (detail, Figure1), extracted from a 13th century medieval Church, removed from its architectural context together with its supporting crucifix, stripped of its original aura as a devotional and spiritually charged object, it now sits as a sculpture, isolated, in the secondary space of the museum. The reliquy (Figure 2) has undergone a similar translocation of place and meaning. The anatomical models (Figures 3 and 4) were both originally intended as teaching devices for 18th century medical practitioners, now behind glass in The Science Museum, London. In this work, Virgin Mother (2006) (Figure 5) Damien Hirst has critiqued these kinds of museum practices by directly referencing the anatomical teaching model, transposing it into an art object and installing it in the context of the art museum. The concrete, physical body as object-on-display has, therefore, in all these examples, maintained some kind of constancy but its meaning becomes unsettled within the changing contexts of its display. For that reason it became important that the artifacts fabricated for The Unsettled Object inferred a general kind of physical body, a body that is anatomical, a body that is dissectible, that has real relationships between its interior, exterior, spaces and volumes.



Fig.6



Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

The first explorations, therefore, entailed making numerous objects that referenced parts of the body. These were displayed and redisplayed in a number of different traditional and “nostalgic” museum display mechanisms; in cabinets, on trolleys and in vitrines to investigate how these objects might interrelate and produce variable readings (Figures 6-10).

Material responsiveness to the body offered itself as an important and useful device to implicate the corporeal element; a preferential device to illustrating the body itself.

Molesworth’s statement that “there is an inevitable reciprocity between bodies and things and vision and tactility.” (Molesworth,2005:29) implies a useful tool to explore this fluid but slippery relationship. The mind-ful, care-ful choice of materials holds the capacity to facilitate this dialogue.



Fig.11

Fig.12

Fig.13

Fig.14

Fig.15

Fig.16

The latex works of Eva Hesse (Figures 12 and 16) and Louise Bourgeois (Figure 13), the installations of Ernesto Neto (Figures 14 and 15) and the wax reliefs of Lynda Benglis (Figure 11) all embrace a powerful kind of non-representative corporality implied through the employment of such materials. The more obvious visual presence of the body is altered by the additional appeal to touch. Touch becomes the capricious element that unsettles the notion of the art work existing in the purely visual domain.

Ernesto Neto's work is not only evocatively tactile; he also establishes an olfactory element in his hanging works further destabilizing the visual relationship to the work. The waxes' shiny surface and the rubbery substance of the latex in the works of Benglis and Bourgeois generate an ambiguous tension between the tactile and visual, exhibiting a "seductive intertwining of the disturbing and the pleasurable." (20)

These works suggest the instabilities occurring at the boundaries of the body; tackiness, slipperiness, a lack of sharpness at the edges, a deficit of control. We cannot classify or command these abject margins of things, they appear as a residual category that do not conform to our systems. They unsettle at the borders of our hierarchies.

Mary Douglas writes of this dirt, this abjectness, as "matter out of place" which, "implies a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order." (Douglas,2002 (first published 1966):44) (See **Endnote 1**)

This notion of the abject had promise as a destabilizing principle; of the purity, the hard edged-ness and the certainties of taxonomic systems, adding a certain sense of discombobulation and uncertainty to the conversation.



Fig.17



Fig.18

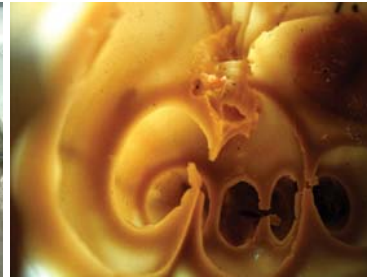


Fig.19

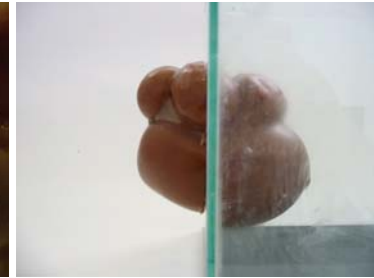


Fig.20

The display/containment devices made of glass and mirror brought to attention other means by which the display could contribute to this instability (Figures 17– 20). Glass can expose-objects-to-view and allow visual access, it can also act as a visual barrier by concealing, distorting, reflecting and being dictatorial in the presentation of objects. This led to explorations into erratic placements of objects within, without and around the “traditional” containers (Figures 21–25).



Fig.21



Fig.22



Fig.23



Fig.24



Fig.25



Fig.26



Fig.27



Fig.28



Fig.29

Into one vitrine, I released expanding foam (Figures 26–29). It mapped itself onto the inside surface as it took on its own form. It accumulated itself in a way that I had not predetermined, it built itself randomly like a natural accretion. It grew itself over time like an organic form. This initiated a turning point in the practice.

Temporality and its inherent instability, the ongoing building up of things over time, the elusiveness of the outcome, now became a central principle of the project as a whole. It provided a convergence of elements in relationship to the theoretical underpinning and in the practice in terms of the processes of making, the approach to the presentation and installation.

(See **Section 2. Material Thinking**, for further progress of the fabricated elements)

1.2 Classifying: unsettled orderings

In which the role of classificatory grids and groupings of objects are discussed.

In *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Foucault,1970) Foucault recognizes an intrinsic ordering of things in themselves onto which culture imposes its own classificatory systems (xx-xxi). The unsettled nature of these superimposed groupings is, therefore, ingrained; they are fundamentally at odds to the natural order and so their position always exhibits a certain precariousness in relation to it. However, he also talks of a “suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate; I mean [he says] the disorder in which fragments of a large possible number of orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry.” (xvii) Here he suggests that superimposed systems of ordering are essential, providing a necessary, if temporary, framework offering some kind of foundation from which to explore ways of thinking about things; a base from which to generate knowledge. Taxonomies are not fixed, they are unstable constructs, temporary forms, as Foucault subsequently discusses. He investigates and uncovers three predominant systems of classifying occurring in Europe from the Early Renaissance to the present. Perhaps predictably, these classificatory frameworks are reflected in the fluctuating cultural positionings of the museum and their transformations over the same period.

Eileen Hooper-Greenhill discusses these parallels in detail in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (Hooper-Greenhill,1992) A pertinent question in regards to **The Unsettled Object** is asked near the beginning of her book “Do existing systems of classification enable some ways of knowing, but prevent others?” (5) I would argue, supported by Foucault’s suspicion, that, the very purpose of a system of ordering, is, to put in place some limits on the relationships between things. Nevertheless, it also presents the opening to explore Foucault’s idea of erratic “glittering” orders.

1.21 The museum and reality Boris Groys writes “It seems to me that the numerous discourses on historical memory and its representation very often overlook the complementary relationship which exists between reality and museums.” The museum is a privileged space, which is “not secondary to "real" history, the contrary is true: "reality" itself is secondary in relation to the museum—the "real" can be defined only in comparison with the museum collection. This means that change in the museum collection brings about change in our perception of reality itself.” (Groys,2002:2) He concludes, “Our image of reality is dependent on our knowledge of the museum.”(2)

Therefore, the museum has an active function within its wider cultural environment; to make visible and bring-into-view the reality of the everyday in which it sits. I would argue that it operates in a parallel fashion, in exposing these realities, to the superimposed, culturally generated, grids of Foucault and their actions on the embedded natural order. Consequently, as the classificatory systems shift, the museum re-presents and re-constructs these new realities.

According to Hooper-Greenhill (Hooper-Greenhill,1992:90) the sixteenth century Cabinets of Curiosity initiated the split into the new categories of *Artificialia* and *Naturalia*, the man made and natural. The *Artificialia*, the art works, have since been treated to the same changing strategies of restructuring and discursive formations, as those things of the natural world that Michel Foucault discusses, and have consequently suffered a similar instability of context. Boris Groys argues:

Even if the material existence of an individual artwork is guaranteed for a certain length of time, the status of this artwork as artwork always depends on the context of its presentation as part of a museum collection. But it is extremely difficult—actually impossible—to stabilize this context over a long period of time. This is, perhaps, the true paradox of the museum: the museum collection serves the preservation of artifacts, but the collection itself is always extremely unstable, constantly changing and in flux. Collecting is an event in time par excellence—even if it is an attempt to escape time. The museum exhibition flows permanently: it is not only growing or progressing, but it is changing itself in many different ways. In this way, by putting already existing artworks into new contexts, changes in the display of an artwork can effect a difference in its reception, without there having been a change in the artwork's visual form.(Groys,2002:10)



Fig.30



Fig.31



Fig.32



Fig.33



Fig.34

1.22 A micro museum The Unsettled Object employs a table as a metaphor for the space of the museum; a kind of micro museum. Figures 30–34 show the initial trials of this table and boxes as a device for presentation.

Akin to the museum this table creates a separate locale that causes objects to become visible from the everyday plethora of stuff. It literally elevates the objects to the level of a working platform and like the museum, this can be treated as a space/place in which the action of bringing objects together can be used as a form of dynamic thinking; as thinking-through-objects as opposed to thinking-about-objects.

The particular objects that are exposed together at any one time are in a state of relational unrest, unsettled, in a state of flux. These changing “landscapes of things” that are assembled and reassembled, are pauses and temporary configurations in a site of ongoing activity.

The objects available to be brought into view on the table/platform are on “standby” in the unlabelled boxes/containers scattered around. They act as standing reserve (see **Endnote 2**), a future in waiting; an excess of parts that require a reordering. What strategy is to be used to bring these objects together? What relationships or juxtapositions could they have? As all strategies are equal on this horizontal plane of reference, associations are constantly open for reinvention. (Further discussion of the boxes in **Section 2. Material Thinking**)



Fig.35



Fig.36

1.23 The Tables of Gabriel Orozco Gabriel Orozco uses his table installations as operational devices. He showed his first *Working Tables* (Figures 35, 36) in 1996 and they have since become a work in progress as he has continued to construct and exhibit them (Molesworth, 2005:223). On these he lays out objects like tools on a work bench that allow him to experiment with different materials in different combinations, exploring the readings. He uses the table as a sort of container for models, sculptural failures that have future potential as well as finished work. Molesworth attests that “the parts on its surface and the spaces in between suggested a fluidity of associations where the parts bear relative associations to the whole.” (233) This operational surface of the table is what remains constant from exhibition to exhibition; a place of transition between places and objects and objects and meanings.

This is the familiar surface of the work table, the place of ongoing activity in the creative process. It also presents as an appropriate kind of locale to act as a site that re-presents a horizontal plane of ordering. It engages with the idea of instability and the issues of the transitional and temporary. It is a dynamic site that foregrounds flux and possibilities with no preconceived or fixed outcomes. It also engages the viewer in their space.

1.3 Displaying: unsettled encounters

In which the encounter between the wider museum/installational environment and the visitor is discussed.

“...a functional transformation as collections, no longer thought of as a means of stimulating the curiosity of the few, are reconstructed as a means for instructing the many.”

(Bennett,1995:39)

It became part of my strategy, in **The Unsettled Object**, to plan ways to physically engage the viewer in the work to result in their becoming active participants in the work, rather than passive spectators.

As Hooper –Greenhill argues, museums and their displays have had an ongoing role as instruments of both explicit and covert propaganda, operating within the wider hierarchical power/knowledge dynamics of the society in which they exist. The viewer has always, therefore, played a significant part in its operations (Hooper–Greenhill,1992:86).

The tables in this installation act as neither plinths nor vitrines as these supports are generally understood as placing the object in an objectified or privileged position in relationship to the viewer. The tables, on the other hand, introduce the possibility of a less stable relationship between the viewer and the work, presenting an openness and a horizontality that engages the viewer in their physical space. This destabilization of the usual hierarchical positioning between the viewer and the work is further undermined by the invitation to touch the work; resulting in the opportunity for an ongoing, physical, two-way “conversation” between the work and the viewer.

1.31 Duchamp's delay and Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics This "conversation" between the work and the viewer relates to Duchamp's notion of *delay*. In his essay *Critique of Modernism*, Thierry de Duve (Martha Buskirk, 1996) asserts that Marcel Duchamp acknowledged the creative process as a two way conversation that does not stop with the artist/author but is concluded by the viewer. There are, he said, "two poles of the creation of art; the artist on one hand and on the other the spectator." (108) He is considering the viewing subject just as responsible in the forming of the work as the artist/author, so the full realization or interpretation of a work is delayed, until completed by the viewing subject.

Here, the viewer's role is not considered as actually physical, but elsewhere, Duchamp deliberately sets the viewer up as a physical participant in work such as the "Small Glass" "*a regarder (l'autres cote du verre) d'un oeil, de pres, pendant presque une heure.*" (1918) Instructions to the viewer are explicit and when followed, then, and only then, will the work be fully, physically revealed; activating and articulating the work over time (115).

In a sense, this "unfinished" art work, sits in a position of fluctuating completeness/incompleteness reflecting the level of viewer participation. Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics extends this kind of idea and talks of an exhibition as an "arena of exchange" (Bourriaud, 2002:17), where the form of the artwork becomes an "ensemble of units to be re-activated by the beholder-manipulator," its form being dynamic and unstable (20). This idea presents a closer articulation of the spatial viewer dynamics of **The Unsettled Object**, perhaps, than Duchamp's *delay*. The objects presented are accessible to be picked up and manipulated, the work to be "re-activated." The spatial form of the work will, therefore, be largely dependant on the interaction and participation of the "beholder-manipulator." My task, as artist, is to present the initial scheme: the viewers will determine the outcome. This unsettles the artist's role as author/completer of the work. **The Unsettled Object** embodies a temporal as well as a spatial unfolding; its structure evolving over the period of the exhibition. It is, as Bourriaud states "a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion." (15) My task, over this period, will be to document the resulting "discussions."

However, **The Unsettled Object** is not overtly about “the inter-human game” that Bourriaud discusses (19), as it does not set out to explore theoretical aspects of social interaction or subjectivity, other than those within the contextual overlay of the museum environment. Although **The Unsettled Object** does aim to keep the conversation open, in a physical sense, between the work and the viewer, it is not primarily about enabling a conversation between the viewing subjects themselves.

1.4 Exhibition Setup.

The particular form that The Unsettled Object will take in the exhibition space is still to be decided; it will unfold, *insitu*, when I initiate the installation of the work. The display tables are to be regarded as site specific objects in regards to their dimensions, scale in relationship to the space and spatial positioning within the gallery. They need to address how the viewer both physically and visually negotiates and engages with the space.

In addition, the surface of the tables will determine how the objects act spatially with one another, as the space surrounding and separating the objects present the possibility to extend the overall dialogue.

Section 2. Material Thinking

Material thinking or thinking through materials places the making process at the heart of exploring and understanding ideas. Materials and processes are actively used in combination with one another so the materiality of the object has an explicit role in the reading of work. (See also **5.1 The Handmade Object and Multiplicity**)



Fig.37



Fig.38



Fig.39



Fig.40



Fig.41

2.1 Material Responsiveness

The fabricated objects required a material responsiveness to the body from the first explorations, but following the turning point in the practice they also needed to embrace the notions of the transitional and temporal. Foregrounding the circumstances of production and retaining the visual evidence of the making contributes to this. Figures 37 to 41 show some of the first production of plaster elements that together with the device of the table formed the new discussion around the presentation of The Unsettled Object. (See also Figures 30–34.)

2.11 Plaster is a thick liquid that takes a form only when confined or when it confronts a surface; it then maps that surface faithfully. Mapping against glass, the perfect, smooth surface and the hard angles imply the boundaries of the vitrine. These artifacts retain the evidence of the ongoing sequence of production especially in the corner pieces formed from the application of successive layers.

Although hard and not particularly tactile, the quality of the surface that formed against the glass during the making procedure can be evocative of the smooth, clean and unblemished. The edges in between these planes are oozing and unstable, belying the plaster's liquid origins, becoming indicative of the seepages that occur at the body's boundaries.



Fig.42

Fig. 43

Fig.44

Fig.45

Fig.46

Fig.47

Using plaster as a “properly sculptural material” (Molesworth,1995:39) challenges the traditional material hierarchies. It is low rather than high in the intellectual hierarchy of materials, traditionally used as a transitional material in the casting process. It carries no associations with preciousness as it has no intrinsic value but it does reinforce the notion of the temporal.

This hierarchical attitude to materials is reflected in Molesworth’s comment of the transformation of Louise Bourgeois’ fragile wood sculptures, *Personages*, a group of objects she made from the early to late 1950s, when cast in bronze. “It was only when Bourgeois cast these fragile wooden objects in the *durable, venerable and properly sculptural material of bronze that the works fully became sculpture.*” (39) (my italics)

The sole use of plaster distanced the bodily aspect of the project, so, for the next cycle of making additional materials and processes were engaged with.

2.12 Foam and toweling both have a tactile presence of softness and yielding. By embodying warmth and being inviting to the touch they echo the corporeal surface (Figures 42–47). Also, these are materials associated with the maintenance of order around the bodies’ boundaries; they keep in check its leakages and discharges. This continues a dialogue with the “abject” but on a more subtle level.

2.13 Colour The latex and wax works of the early explorations were particularly “abject” in their descriptive use of colour;



Fig. 48



Fig. 49

I would argue that by removing the element of colour it creates a kind of visual void, the textures and materials of the work become foregrounded and brought into sharper focus. The red, not blood red, is here being used as a tag, a marker. In the corporeal context it is postulating a biological marker, a metabolic staining or a genetic tag.

2.14 Surface treatments of the table were explored (Figures 43,44,47,48,49). Plastic sheeting was draped to separate the objects from the underlying surface, metaphorically keeping it clean and pure, affording protection against the seepages of the body or the mess of the amateur dissection. In addition, it carries medical connotations of resisting contamination. However, the early, informal draping of the plastic sheet was read as “domestic”, tablecloth-like, so other actions were trialed, including wrapping the surface of the table with foam and plastic (Figure 44). Here the table itself became incorporated, visually, into the “landscape of things” on its surface, hence, laying out foam sheets onto the surface with sharply cut edges was more successful (Figure 43), emphasizing the corporeal aspect of the display but maintaining a visual separation between the objects and their support.

2.15 Cardboard boxes/containers, placed on the floor act as sites of repose and containment for the objects in waiting (Figures 48,49). The labels are left empty; they might potentially be sites of classifying and ordering. In addition, the cardboard box/container reads as a temporary depository; a place of transit either being packed up to go or unpacked to stay.

Furthermore, these containers placed on the floor direct the passage of the viewer through the work. (See also **3.12**)

Section 3. The University of Auckland Window Project

Denying the Transition: from Space to Place (curated by Catherine David)

This installation in the University of Auckland Library Window became a testing ground for the central premise of the project. In addition it also enabled an exploration of the notion of surveillance by using a web camera and a live stream onto the Windows website.

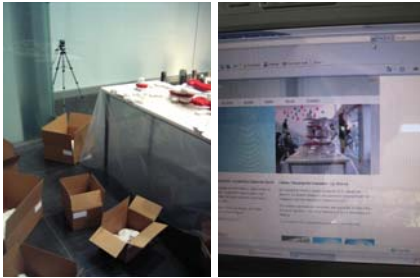


Fig.50

Fig.51

3.1 Surveillance and Purposeful Ambulation

3.11 In their new public form, the museums of the modern era, were regarded as exemplary spaces (Bennett,1995:28). Bennett takes a Foucaultian slant to the spatial strategies imposed on the public by the internal structuring of the architecture and the placement of the display cases, likening them to the disciplinary technologies that emerged in the late seventeenth century. Foucault names this “hierarchical observation.” “The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce the effects of power.”(Foucault,1995:170)

As indicated above, the Library Window environment enabled the direct exploration of this notion of surveillance; the use of the web camera in this public space was quite explicit and none of the footage was recorded. Figure 50 shows the positioning of the web camera in the foyer vitrine and Figure 51 the live stream onto the Windows website. It set up a certain tension within the environment of the exhibition, as the spectators had a sense of being inspected and their movements scrutinized. It may have been a contributory factor to the sporadic engagement with the installation. The fleeting images online also reinforced the transitory nature of the work.



Fig.52



Fig.53



Fig.54



Fig.55

3.12 The visitor to the modern museum, was progressed through the paths and rooms of the museum as an obligatory form of “purposeful ambulation.” to experience The Grand Narrative of Progress. The containers of objects being placed on the floor bring this to mind by directing the viewer’s path.

3.2 The Window Installation

A table was set up in the public foyer of the University of Auckland Library. Numerous plaster elements were left exposed in open boxes as an implied invitation to anyone wishing to sort them and create their own orderings on the table. At regular intervals I visited the site to record the arrangements and rearrangements. Figures 52 to 55 show some of these configurations. The engagement with the work was somewhat sporadic which could perhaps indicate a reluctance to touch it without explicit instructions being provided. This was not unexpected. On reflection, this amount of involvement by the public was quite acceptable in terms of the validating the concept. It is the invitation to change the display as much as the actual changing that has importance.

Section 4. Presentation: documentation and commentary

4.1 Strategies and Systems; production, installation and viewer engagement.

4.11 The objects for the final exhibition were made from a combination of foam, toweling and Dacron, a white synthetic padding material. In addition to the material considerations previously discussed the Dacron was chosen for its obvious lack of preciousness and its tactile and physical accessibility, undermining it as a serious “hands off” sculptural material. Dacron is, in normal use, a largely hidden, interior material, except when exposed and protruding through rents in its covering fabric when it suggests an abjectness; an interior order out of place. As a result the objects presented a certain playfulness, and an easy relationship to their “right to be used”.



Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58



Fig. 59

The two making processes that were focused on to exemplify the gradual building up of the structure over time were those of wrapping and stacking (Figures 56 – 59). Both were engaged with from a formal, strategic point of view. The size of the basic elements from which the wraps and stacks were assembled were considered as divisions of the whole sheet size and the relative scale of the resulting object to the body of the handling subject; how it was necessary for them to be handled, moved and used. This consideration acted to support the tactile element and to encourage the corporeal engagement of the viewer. (See below)

Before the elements were tightly drawn together, the stacks and wraps were initially geometric in their forms. However, when the parts were bound, the soft and pliable nature of the material influenced these quite formal structures to create objects that resonated with the organic shaping of the corporeal. In particular as the stacked layers folded down on each other the top layers gathered into an “orifice” and the objects acquired an interiority (Figures 56,57). I noticed this characteristic was utilized in the some groupings by the participants (Figures 60,61).

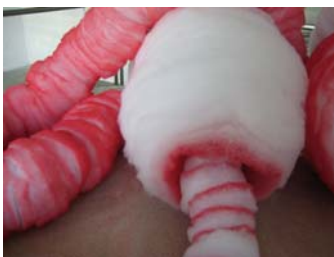


Fig. 60



Fig. 61



Fig. 62



Fig. 63



Fig. 64

In addition I observed that the large, wide objects required two hands to pick them up or engaged the whole body of the participants and the small objects required an isolated use of the hand with a precise grip (Figures 62–64).

The lightness and softness of the objects added to the sense of play as their inherent instability hampered the participants' abilities to stack and group them.

Dacron embodies a thickness that enabled a visual reinforcing of the layer on layer approach during the wrapping and stacking processes. A bright red, not a blood red, was applied to the materials' surface to emphasize the formal strategies employed in the making of these objects. I observed that the use of red brought to attention the objects themselves in the grey, concrete space and also created an interesting juxtaposition between their playful nature in this aggressive environment.

There were a number of characteristics incorporated into the objects that potentially could have formed the foundation for an organizational framework. The most obvious level of division was between the wraps and the stacks but each of these classes of objects had varying embodied features that could work at different levels of a classificatory structure. For example, a number of different kinds of wraps were made; single wraps, double wraps, and so on; simple or complex (folding) wraps; wraps that included toweling and/or foam and had differing external materials (Figures 65–67). In regards to their use by the audience, the wraps were mostly used separately from the stacks. Size was the next most important element that was classified and the external covering of the wraps was also strategically engaged with.



Fig. 65



Fig. 66



Fig. 67

4.12 The installation (Figures 68–71) utilized an architectural space that retained visual evidence of its transition from another function to its present state as a gallery. It presented as an awkward, raw, brutal and unfinished site that possesses a workshop-like atmosphere which complimented the notion of the “working tables”. The temporariness of the scheme was further exaggerated by the positioning of the tables; they were placed to sit at odds with the architectural structure. The tables themselves were sheets of chipboard resting on sawhorses. Again, emphasizing the notion of the transitory and the potentially ongoing nature of the installation; easily uplifted and transported into another site of operation. Two tables were presented in order to undermine the notion of a single, final solution. These were covered in sheets of plastic.



Fig. 68



Fig. 69



Fig. 70



Fig. 71

4.13 Viewer Engagement In the context of this specific exhibition I made the decision to be present in the space throughout the duration of the exhibition. This enabled me to extend the invitation to visitors to engage with the work.

The paired Polaroid documentations on the walls provided evidence of previous persons' interpretations of the objects as well as another layer of potential ordering. They were gradually accumulated over the course of the exhibition.

Participation by individuals was not, ofcourse, compulsory. Involvement was preferred in terms of the viewers' relationship to the work but it was the ongoing, open invitation and potential interaction that was important in terms of the structure of the work as a whole; the possibility for the continuing regrouping of objects and the possibility of change to the spatial environment over time. In this way the interaction had a closer relationship to a relational practice with its inherent instabilities and lack of closure than Duchamp's delay were there is a "completion of the work", however temporary.

The terms of engagement in this specific installation were bound up in the process of initiation, communication, observation, recording and reflection.



Fig. 72



Fig. 73



Fig. 74

4.2 The Photographic Documentation of the Installation.

There were two distinct kinds of documentation of the project as a whole; Polaroid images and digital.

4.21 The Polaroids acted in a different way to the digital documentation. This was a very specific kind of documentation that was intended as a way of providing consistent evidence of the end point of the performative act on the working surfaces; an intrinsic part of the installation which evolved over the time of the exhibition. They were deliberately taken from two predetermined, particular points of view, a strategy that resulted, predictably, in an incomplete or inaccurate view of what actually took place on the tables. As discussed earlier, they acted in a parallel to the way in which any particular strategy of classifying is inevitably blinkered, denying a full articulation of all potential outcomes.

These pairs were temporally taped up and displayed on the walls adjoining the tables allowing the pairs to be repositioned into their own groupings; another layer of organization and another viewing of the objects (Figures 72–74).



Fig.75



Fig.76



Fig.77

4.22 The digital photographs were taken to document in a more comprehensive and descriptive strategy the installation as a whole. They were taken frequently throughout the course of the exhibition as deemed appropriate to record the wide variety of circumstance that arose.

Section 5. Convergence: concluding comments

5.1 The Handmade Object and Multiplicity

The Unsettled Object has required the assembly of multiple objects; not accumulations of found objects or mechanical reproductions, but replications of things by hand; the most fitting way of amassing objects that pertain to the body.

Individual processes are repeated; the ongoing exploration within the permutations of materials, scale and texture produce a seriality; their own temporal, evolutionary hierarchy; their own intrinsic order. Some of them would appear to quite closely reference parts of the body. This convergence of visual form has resulted from different intentions but analogous operations of generation and containment that one finds in the organic form of the body.

This resonates with Foucault's statement that:

Order that is at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another. (Foucault, 1970:xx)

Hand fabrication, unavoidably imperfect, harbors the traces of the human touch and gesture (Molesworth, 1995:19), an inference of the body's involvement in the performative act of making. A certain personalization is also inevitably embedded within their fabrication.

5.2 Shifts and Rifts.

There was a hiatus between the writing of the exegesis and the engagement with making the work for exhibition. This resulted in some anomalies and problematic juxtapositions between the theoretical position and the praxis.

The early work's reliance on the physical structures of museum display containers was discarded in the early stages of the project but the institution of the museum continued as a central focus of the theoretical component at the time of writing the exegesis. However, in the unfolding of the work this focus on the museum underwent an important shift. The emphasis on the museum as institution became less important than the ways in which it could act as a three tier strategy to underpin the concerns of the objects, their ordering and their display. As a result, the final display was not directly referencing the public space of the museum or the grids and structures found within that space. It emphasized, instead, the working "backroom" space where the relationships of objects are still being determined.

The objects themselves were manufactured for the exhibition and they were not pre-tending to possess any previous "historicity" as museum objects embody but to have the potential to acquire their own compressed "history" of juxtapositions and associations as the exhibition proceeded.

The notion of "strategy" became an important axis of consideration throughout the work. An overview of these strategies has been referred to above.

Exciting openings and new questions and directions arise from the experience of participating in this installation.

Endnotes

1. The abject had a strong presence in the early exploratory work for **The Unsettled Object**, particularly in the use of materials and colour. They were overly descriptive in their visual and tactile qualities of repulsion and as a result closed down the possibilities of the readings of the objects.

Therefore, this element of the abject was deliberately pared back in next cycle of investigations and issues of display were fore – fronted and focused on. However, in the later work this discussion around the abject has re-emerged but on another, more subtle level. It is certainly not engaging with any notion of the scatological neither have I chosen to focus on Julie Kristevas’ notion of the abject body. As Molesworth points out (Molesworth,2005:25), it is virtually impossible to dismiss the psychic when making objects pertaining to the body. However, Kristevas’ notion of “The abject is what of the body falls away from it while remaining irreducible to the subject/object and inside/outside oppositions.” as discussed by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: towards a corporeal feminism* (Grosz,1994) resonated less with the overall focus of **The Unsettled Object** than Mary Douglas’ notion of dirt in *Purity and Danger* (Douglas,2002 (first published 1966)) and it’s relationship to ordering, disorder and the disruptions at their boundaries.

Douglas recognizes dirt as matter out of place, the part of the system we cannot control. As a by product it appears as a residual category that doesn’t conform to the systems’ ordering (44). This, she argues, implies a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order (45). She maintains that these rejected things are recognizable but out of place, and so posing a threat to good order, are therefore perceived as dangerous.

2. In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger (Heidegger,1977:17) establishes this notion of standing reserve as a condition of being on standby-by, being immediately at hand for use. The objects are therefore “on call for duty,” waiting, in order that they can be called upon as an active part of what Heidegger calls the “inclusive rubric”. It is this condition of being a standing reserve that assigns the objects an active participatory role in the installation rather than being just things sitting about passively in containers.

Also, in this English translation I find an interesting slippage of possible meanings; the word “ordering” mutates between ordering/classifying and ordering/commanded that resonates well with **The Unsettled Object**.

For example:

Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it might be immediately on call for further ordering. (17)

This, I would argue, could imply some kind of ordering/classifying of the things on standby as well as their ordering/commanded [to be on standby], to enable them to be immediately on call for further ordering/commanding/ classifying.

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