Hesitating Performance

An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Philosophy (Art and Design) (2007).

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Contents

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.

Brent Harris 12.3.2007

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Abstract

This research project participates in the genre of Performance art. It explores *performativity* in relation to Emmanuel Levinas' formulation of two interlacing modes of language, the ethical *saying* and the ontological, political *said*. The saying is of my originary, ethical relation to the other person that constitutes me, whereas the said is the mode of 'content', knowledge, and ontology. The project suggests that at least two registers of performativity pertain to the saying. One is in Simon Critchley's description of the saying as performative, prior to any decision to perform. In regard to another meaning of performativity, I propose that a political signification of art may be what Levinas calls a "reduction" of the said that 'performs' a showing of the saying. To perform a showing of the saying, would, in a Levinasian engagement, be to make apparent the ultimate interruption by ethics of ontology and politics, thus pointing to a constitutive non-closure of the political like that theorized by Jacques Derrida and by Critchley. Such a non-closure of the political is tentatively linked with critiques of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* such as Claire Bishop's which draw on Jacques Lacan's notion of the subject. Performances explore the notion of the "reduction" of ontology resourced by Derrida's formulation of Levinas' later writing style as involving a *sériature;* serial and heterogeneous interruptions of the said[1]. The project has unfolded in a series of performance pieces, and will conclude with a final performance in March 2007. This exegesis articulates the major provocations for the project, contextualises the project with regard to selected art practices, and documents and discusses the major performance pieces.

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[1] Specifically, the last performance, *Public end,* explored the use of verbal repetition, hesitation, interruption of narrative, nonlinearity, and the performance's retracing of its' pathway around an urban precinct as a mode of reduction inspired by Derrida's notion of *sériature* (September 2007).

Introduction to the Project

Introduction - Performance before a question

This research project participates in the genre of Performance art, and explores performance and performativity. It has unfolded in a series of performance pieces, and will conclude with a final performance in March 2007.

"What is performance?" Perhaps the performance pieces in this project in different ways, repeatedly ask this question. The project asks, "What is performance?", while also attending to and resonating the idea of a prior "yes" to language, to the other person, which would interrupt the mode of questioning.

The *rest* project (2006)

An argument could be made that the project asks "What is performance?", and then says that to ask the question requires the performative mode of "the Saying". There is thus a circularity in this engagement. However, the project explores a showing of the saying in performance pieces.

The Exegesis

The exegesis articulates the major provocations for the project, contextualises the project, and documents and discusses the major performance pieces. Part One of the exegesis outlines the philosophical and critical contexts and provocations. Part Two considers contexts and provocations in art, and Part Three documents four major performance projects. The exegesis is accompanied by a DVD of audio and audiovisual documentation of five performance pieces.

Structure of the Project and Weighting of "Theory" and "Practice"

With regard to assessment, I submit the project as weighted equally between 50% exegesis and 50% practice. However, I note that the majority of the practice component of the research, that is, the series of pieces performed in 2006, articulates within the exegesis in the "Discussion of Performances" section, in the documentation DVD, as well as at times in the "Art Contexts" section. The final part of the practice component will be the final performance on 30 March. This performance will be the next and most current in the series of explorations. I do not consider that it will be a summing up or tying together of the practice component; rather, it will attempt to reveal further research possibilities. I also intend that the documentations of performance works in the DVD are not video or audio pieces in their own right, but video and audio documents of the performances.

Part One: Philosophical Provocations

## Levinas – Interruptions of Ontology

Introduction

In this section I will outline key aspects of the thinking of the contemporary philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), and explore how Levinas' thinking might provoke an exploration of performance and performativity.

Ethics is first philosophy

Levinas is known by his thesis that the first branch of philosophy, its most primordial concern, is "ethics". For Levinas, the ethical relation is an originary, non-cognitive relation of responsibility to the other person in which the "I" is inaugurated.

Levinas' work takes a critical orientation to western philosophy in that, for Levinas, it has consistently attempted to reduce otherness to the same, in a relation of comprehension. In *Ethics as first philosophy* (1984), Levinas puts it as follows "In the realm of truth, being, as the *other* of thought becomes the characteristic *property* of thought as knowledge."   (p. 76). As Diane Moira Duncan points out in *The Pre-Text of Ethics* (2001), Levinas is critical of such egocentrism, and is concerned to elucidate the priority of a relation to an "other" that exceeds comprehension.
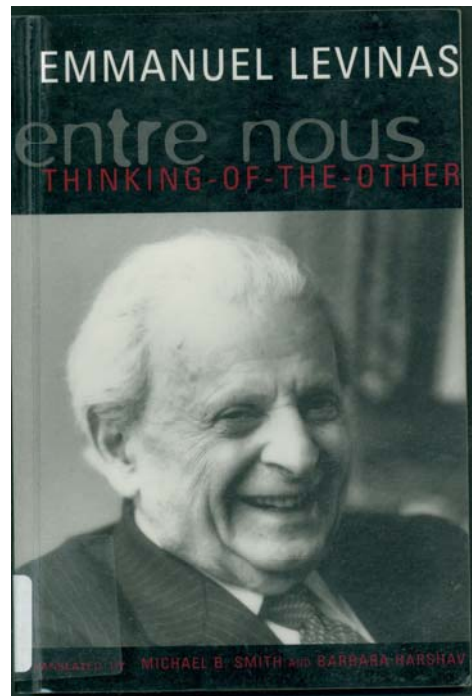
Totality and Infinity

Totality and Infinity (1969) is the title of the first of Levinas' two major books. Levinas takes up the form but not the content of Descartes' notion of infinity (Critchley 2002). For Descartes (1641; 1986), the only way for the mind, which is finite, to have the idea of the infinite perfection of God is for God to exist, and to have caused this idea in the mind. For Levinas, the idea of infinity is an overflowing of intentionality – an overflowing of what the "I" can think. This idea of infinity is produced in the difference or inadequation between "the idea of infinity and the infinity of which it is the idea" (1969 p. 26). Levinas adapts Descartes' formulation and, rather than as a 'proof' for the existence of God, applies it to the relation of the subject to the other person; as Hilary Putnam (2002) explains; "Levinas transforms the argument by substituting the other for God" (p. 42).

In its notion of infinity, Levinas' philosophy makes a departure from Husserlian phenomenology. For Husserl (1982), consciousness is intentional in that thought is always aimed towards objects of consciousness. For Levinas, the subject's relation to the other person is not a relation to an intentional object that may be represented, but a relation to an other who exceeds or overflows the aim of intentionality or the grasp of ontology.

> The relation with infinity cannot, to be sure, be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very *infinition* is produced precisely in this overflowing. The relation with infinity will have to be stated in terms other than those of objective experience; but if experience

precisely means a relation with the absolutely other, that is, with what always overflows thought, the relation with infinity accomplishes experience in the fullest sense of the word. (*Totality and Infinity* p. 25)

In the section entitled "The Breach of Totality" in the first chapter of *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Levinas writes that the distance between the same and the other is part of the "*way of existing*" (p. 35) of the other. That is, the other is produced as other by a distance. This means that the subject, "I", will remain absolutely separated from the other, and that the relation between the two cannot be totalized as in the representation of "a system visible from the outside" (p. 35). Thus the terms 'I' and 'other' cannot be reversed, the relation of the I to the other is asymmetrical. To attempt to represent the other, or my relation with the other, is to totalize, to view the relation of myself to the other as a totality.

Critchley (2002) notes that for Levinas, ontology, the mode of "being", of representation, always forms totalities. Heidegger's fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* (1927), therefore for Levinas, is a denial of the infinity, the transcendence, of the other. To Levinas, the ontological question "what is….", is made possible by a prior affirmation, a "yes" to language such that one can ask "what is…?". Levinas describes the priority of this affirmation, which is a passive opening, a non-cognitive response-ability of me to language and to the other person.

The Face

For Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) the infinity of the other is revealed in "the face"; "The way the other presents himself, *exceeding the idea of the other in me,* we here name face." (p. 50). The face of the other calls my egoism, my naïve spontaneity living from the material world, into question. Crucially, the face is not reducible to a form that would render it to thematization. In *Totality and Infinity,* at the point of the revelation of the face, and its call for response, the ethical relation is "Conversation", (p. 51) an enactment of generosity of the same towards the other.

The subject and The other

In *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Levinas makes a distinction between the otherness of the material world, land and food, what Levinas calls the elements, and the "*absolutely other*" (p. 33). I can consume food and acquire materials, and in this way negate their otherness by absorbing them into me or my possession. I have a relation of need to the elements. By contrast, the relation to the "*absolutely other*" is not one of need but of desire. Levinas reads Plato's notion of desire for the unseen in *Book VII* of *The Republic,* (Plato, trans. Lyndsay, 1935, 1992), as metaphysical desire, which, for Levinas, does not desire a restoration of the self or a return journey to the same, but "a land not of our birth… to which we shall never betake ourselves" (p. 34). That is to say, the ethical relation is not reducible to an economy based in exchange. In response to the face of the other that calls my appropriation of the material world into question, the ethical relation is one of giving material to the other, as Levinas puts it in *Otherwise than Being* (1981), of "snatching the bread from one's [own] mouth" (p. 74).

Because the relation of the subject to the other is not totalizable; not viewable from the outside, I cannot talk about the subject in general, for Levinas, as Critchley (2002) explains; the subject "is *me* and nobody else." (p. 21).

Since for Levinas (1969, 1981), my relation to the other is sensible, not conscious, my conscious relations with people are not ethical in the Levinasian sense. The ethical relation is not a relation to an empirical other. Conscious relations are necessarily ontological, and as I will describe below, are in the mode of "the said". Thus the Levinasian other cannot be an audience member of a performance piece or the reader of an exegesis. However, for Levinas, my relation to an audience member such that there is an "I" that can speak to them and such that I can represent them to myself is made possible by the "anterior" ethical relation. Anything I do with regard to the empirical other is after the

fact of ethics. It is therefore not a *question* of engaging ethically with audience members or readers. However, the ethical relation resonates with performance and performativity, and I will begin to outline some of these resonances with an exploration of the temporality of the "anteriority" of the ethical relation with regard to Levinas' formulation of "the saying" and "the said".

The Saying and The Said

In his second major book, *Otherwise than Being, or, beyond Essence* (1981), Levinas elaborates his notion of an interlacing of two modes of language; "the saying" and "the said". The saying is of the originary, ethical relation to the other, whereas the said is the mode of content, of the message. It is the mode of J.L. Austin's (1962) "constative" propositions, the truth or falsity of which may be ascertained. The said is the necessary mode of understanding and ontology, in which the question "what is…" can be asked. Levinas distinguishes the ethical saying to the "re-presentational", ontological said, with reference to a notion of temporal difference. The said exists in synchronic time, the chronological time of "I think". Critchley (1999) interprets Levinas' synchronic time as the idea of time such that it is spatialized "as a line" (p. 165) running from past to present to future, that consists of a succession of an infinite number of points of presence, or *the* present. On the other hand, the saying is dia-chronous to the said, the saying happens in "an immemorial past, an unrepresentable past that was never present" (1984 p. 84). Critchley (1999) interprets diachrony as "the coming apart of time" (1999, p. 165).

As Levinas puts it in *Diachrony and Representation* (1982):

> From the ego to this interlocutor there is a temporality other than the one that allows itself to be assembled into the presence of the *said* and the *written*, a temporality that is concrete in this "from-me-to-the-other," but which at once congeals into the abstraction of the synchronous in the synthesis "I think" that grasps it thematically (p. 103)

The ethical relation occurs in the time of the absolute passivity of an affirmation, a "yes" to the other prior to understanding. Crucially, the saying, as an affirmation to the other and to language in this "immemorial past", makes the said possible. The temporal aspect of Derrida's notion of *différance* could also be described as diachronic, in that it refers to a ceaseless dividing of the present.

For Levinas in *Otherwise than Being* (1981), to represent, refer to, or try to describe the ethical saying, necessarily betrays the saying, and betrays the otherwise than being. However, as Critchley (1999) points out, it is not possible to abandon the mode of the said, the mode of representation and ontology. However again, as I have said, the said is made possible by the saying; that is, the "yes" to the other. And there is an "overflowing" of the said by the saying, recalling infinity's overflowing of the thought that thinks it:

> Behind every statement of being as being, the saying overflows the very being it thematizes in stating it to the other. It is being which is understood in the – first or last – word, but the saying goes *beyond* the being thematized or totalized. (*Otherwise than Being,* p. 18)

The saying remains in excess of the said (including this said here), and this excess, as Critchley (1999) points out, "interrupts philosophy" (p. 7).

The character of the saying as not pertaining to the binary 'true and false' is also a feature of Austin's (1962) notion of "the performative", which I will describe further in the next section. Although he doesn't make direct reference to Austin, Critchley (1999) understands the saying as performative, including it in his description of the saying:

> It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the Other, it is a verbal or non-verbal ethical performance… it is a performative *doing* that cannot be reduced to a constative description (p. 7)

In whatever sense it is performative, the saying occurs prior to my cognition or decision; it is not a performance I *choose* to do. And, rather than a conscious or unconscious *activity*, it occurs in my absolute passivity. The saying is productive in that it is, in a sense, signification; the process in which meaning comes about.

Reduction

The saying, its betrayal in the said, and its overflowing of the said - my said "at this very moment" - to quote part of the title of Derrida's (1981) essay on Levinas that I will discuss below - *happens*, outside of my volition and rationality. That is, "one *will have been* obliged" (Critchley, p. 127) to interrupt the said. This is analogous to the way that Derrida proposes that "deconstruction takes place" (1988 p. 4), rather than being an activity done by a subject. The saying and Derrida's notion of *différance* both pertain to a diachrony. However - and this is pivotal for my project - "the philosopher's effort", in response to the ethical, 'after the fact', is to uncover the signification of the saying; to write such that the betrayal of the saying by the said is "reduced". This is to write in such a way as to register the diachrony of the saying and the said.

In *Otherwise than Being* (1981)*,* Levinas formulates a "methodological problem" (p. 7), a question of the possibility of the "reduction" of the betrayal of the saying by the said. Levinas asks whether it is possible to "at the same time know" the saying, and free it "of the marks which thematization leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology" (p. 7).[2]

Levinas outlines his notion of reduction:

> A philosopher's effort, and his unnatural position, consists, while showing the hither side, in immediately reducing the eon which triumphs in the said and in the monstrations, and, despite the reduction, retaining an echo of the reduced said in the form of ambiguity, of diachronic expression. For the saying is both an affirmation and a retraction of the said. The reduction could not be effected simply by parentheses which, on the contrary, are an effect of writing. It is the ethical interruption of essence that energizes the interruption. (*Otherwise than Being,* 1981 p. 44)

To Levinas there is thus an intertwining of the saying and the said, which, as Critchley (1999) points out, nonetheless maintain their absolute difference from one another. Levinas' apparent dismissal of "writing" in this passage seems a little contradictory, because, as Critchley (1999) argues, it is the "style" of the prose of *Otherwise than Being* (1981) that *performs* any such reduction. There are (at least) two different but related senses of "writing" at stake here, an 'everyday', empirical writing as words on the page, which includes the way Levinas composes his discourse, his "styles"; and "writing" in Derrida's expanded sense, in which, as I will outline below, consciousness itself is made possible by, or as, "writing". The relation of the saying to Derrida's notion of "writing", and Levinas' style of writing in *Otherwise than Being*, is taken up by Simon Critchley, in his book *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1999). Critchley proposes that "the Saying only shows itself through a *writing* that enacts the contestation of the Said within a permanent economy of betrayal." (p. 260) I suggest that both senses of writing resonate in this claim.

The Third Party

For Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* (1969), "The third party looks at me through the eyes of the Other – language is justice" (p. 213). The "*third party*" is "present at the encounter" with the other (p. 213). In *Otherwise than Being* (1981)*,* with the third party comes the *question* "What do I have to do with justice? (p. 157). That is, there is a necessity for "comparison" between more than one "incomparable" other; in this comparison ontology and the question of justice are born (p. 158). The

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[2] I note that these very marks would re-mark themselves and thus would also be the site of alterity. As I will outline below, Derrida (1981) has argued that every mark iterates or re-marks itself.

priority of the ethical relation with the singular other is thus not a chronological priority, but a temporal priority. The time of justice is necessarily synchronic; synchrony allows comparisons to be made between 'co-present' people. However, for Levinas "the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of two" (1981 p. 159).

In that, for Levinas, my relation to the other *is* a relation to the third (who "looks at me through the eyes of the other"), I and the other are a "we" with respect to this third, and so the community is born. Thus "all discourse" (Levinas 1969, p. 213) is doubled, and so, as Critchley (1999) suggests, the structure of the community is double.

Why Levinas?

Why engage with Levinasian ethics with regard to my performance practice? There are three related responses to this question. One is that for me, a provocation of Levinasian ethics would be in the form of a reminder of alterity that I cannot grasp. This notion of alterity would inform an engagement with the political as a "space" open to the other. One implication of this opening is that while art will always carry political messages, (and outside of a didacticism, hopefully open political *questions)*, intended and unintended by the artist or author, an "ethico-political" (to appropriate a term used by Derrida [1996]), signification of art would perhaps be what Critchley (1999) describes with regard to a question of politics in general as an interruption of ontology, of the message, that is, an interruption of the political.

The second two aspects of this provocation pertain to Levinas' innovation in *Otherwise than Being* (1981) of the formulation of the saying and the said. I am in agreement with Critchley (1999) in that the saying is in some way "performative", particularly in that it does not pertain to a constative message, other than an affirmation made in absolute passivity. Furthermore, as I have outlined, in response to what Levinas (1981) describes as a methodological problem of freeing the saying from the said; he proposes the notion of "reduction" (p. 43). Critchley (1999) argues that the way Levinas does this reduction is itself performative. I propose that, there are thus, in addition to the two registers of writing I discussed above, (at least) two resonances or registers of "the performative" in *Otherwise than Being;* the primordial performativity of the saying, and the performativity of Levinas' textual, methodological response to the saying, which he calls "reduction", and which Derrida (1991) formulates as *"sériature"*.

An artist's (My) effort?

In the following sections I will explore, via Derrida and Critchley, how such a reduction might operate in Levinas' text. Then I will consider how these relations of the saying, the said, and Levinas' "styles", might inform or provoke my performance practice with regard to ethics and politics. I will propose that one of the efforts of an artist (me), may similarly (and this "similarly" will resonate with a question of affiliations or inheritance) be to repeatedly "show" the saying, as interruption of ontology and politics.

Derrida: *différance*, The Undecidable

Introduction

In this section I will outline key aspects of the thought of Jacques Derrida, and articulate links between Derrida and Levinas. My reading of the relation of Derrida and Levinas takes coordinates from Simon Critchley's (1999) *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas,* as well as from Diane Moira Duncan's (2001) *The Pre-Text of Ethics: On Derrida and Levinas.* However, my concern is to articulate the provocation that this body of thought might give to my performance practice.

Différance

In *Différance* (1982), Derrida cautions that to simply ask 'What is *différance*?" (p. 14) would be to presume a fullness of presence that the thought of *différance* would unseal. That is to say, *différance* conditions this account; one cannot examine it from the outside to ask what it is. But *"what is différance?"* In *Différance* (1982)*,* Derrida questions Saussure's notion of the sign as "*secondary* and *provisional*" (p. 9). That is, the idea in Saussurian linguistics, that the sign derives from a thing that is simply present at another place or at another time, and that the sign stands in the place of this presence. Derrida (1982) notes that for Saussure (1966), both parts of the sign, the signified, "the ideal meaning" (p. 10), and the signifier; the "image" or "imprint" (p. 10) of a material phenomenon such as a written or spoken word, are not "positive terms", but are composed only of differences. For Derrida, an element in such a system "is never present in and of itself" (p. 11), but is constituted as part of a chain of other differing and deferring elements. Derrida's proposal is that in addition to the two components of the sign, the real is itself made as a "play" of differences. Derrida (1982) thus proposes an "originary" (p. 9) *différance*, the thought of which would undo notions of simple origin. Derrida argues that even consciousness itself is produced via a "play", or movement of *différance* in that consciousness, as self-presence, involves a "being beside itself of consciousness" (p. 16), a division of presence such that that presence can recognise itself as itself. Derrida thus proposes presence and consciousness provisionally as "effects" (p. 16) of *différance*; provisionally in that the thought of *différance* would *deconstruct* the opposition of cause and effect.

> The same, precisely, is *différance* (with an *a*) as the displaced and equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other. (*Différance* p. 17).

When spoken, *différance* is indistinguishable from the French word *différence* (the difference to which Saussure refers). The above quotation is from a spoken presentation, thus Derrida needed to clarify that it was *différance* "with an *a*" of which he was speaking. That the *a* of *différance* only registers in writing, as Peggy Kamuf (1991) notes, challenges the priority of speech over writing. The movement of *différance* is synonymous with what Derrida describes in *Signature Event Context* (1988), as a repetition of the same that allows it to recognise itself as itself; that allows me to recognise myself as myself; that gives me my identity. This identity is necessarily impure; that a sign, or an authorial signature, can be repeated means it can never be self-identical.

In *Différance* (1982) Derrida describes *différance* as involving a conjunction of spatial difference, (in the sense of the "beside itself" [p. 16] of, for example, consciousness), and temporal deferral and division. The temporal aspect of *différance*, like "the saying" (Levinas 1981), can be described as diachronic; "the coming apart of time" (Critchley 1999, p. 165).

An Expanded Idea of Writing

Derrida has been concerned to locate a deconstruction of an historical prioritisation of speech over writing in western philosophy, whereby writing has been considered to be derivative of speech as presence and the 'original' from which writing derives. In *Signature Event Context* (1988) Derrida

argues for an expanded notion of writing in that speech, experience, and presence are each constituted by "chains of differential marks" (p. 10), and so are writing in a general sense. Derrida's notion of writing undoes the idea of a singular origin of meaning in self-presence; rather he argues that meaning is produced through a "play of traces", or a "writing before the letter, an archi-writing without a present origin, without archi-" (*Différance* p. 15).

An Unconditional Opening

In *Signature Event Context* (1988), Derrida brings the thought of *différance* and "writing" to a question of context in an engagement with the work of the speech-act theorist, J.L. Austin (1962). Austin argues that if we determine the context in which a verbal communication occurs, we are largely able to reduce the uncertainty of this communication. Derrida argues that contexts are never absolutely *saturated*; that is, they can never be completely determined or delimited because the essential iterability and citationality of the sign effects a rupture from every context in which it appears because it always recalls other contexts.

It is with regard to the thought of an unconditional opening that we can perhaps recognise most readily what Simon Critchley (1999) refers to as a "homology" (p. 9) between Derrida and Levinas. Critchley quotes Derrida in the "Afterword" of *Limited Inc.*:

> Now, the very least that can be said of unconditionality (a word I use not by accident to recall the Categorical imperative in its Kantian form) is that it is independent of every determinate context, even of the determination of a context in general. It announces itself as such only in the *opening* of context Not that it is simply present (existent) elsewhere, outside of all context; rather it intervenes in the determination of a context from its very opening, and from an injunction, a law, a responsibility that transcends this or that determination of a given context. Following this, what remains is to articulate this unconditionality with the determinate (Kant would say, hypothetical) conditions of this or that context; and this is the moment of strategies, of rhetorics, of ethics, and of politics. The structure thus described supposes both that there are only contexts, that nothing *exists* outside context, as I have often said, but also that the limit of the frame or the border of the context always entails a clause of *non-closure*. The outside penetrates and thus determines the inside. (Derrida 1988, p. 152-3)

Derrida's proposal of an unconditional opening of context is homologous to what I have outlined above as the non-cognitive, unconditional opening to the other in Levinas' thought. The constitutive character of this opening should be noted; for Levinas, the opening to the other inaugurates the subject. For Derrida, the opening of con-text allows for a determination of context in that this opening is *"différantial"*; the determinants of a context differ from themselves thus enabling them to be recognised as themselves. At the risk of oversimplification, I suggest that perhaps the most recognisable Derridean formulation is the paradox of the general form - to quote *Signature Event Context* (1988) - "the condition of possibility", in this case of signatures, is at the same time, "the condition of their impossibility or the impossibility of their rigorous purity" (p. 20).

A formulation of this type can be recognised in *The Law of Genre* (1992)*,* in which Derrida proposes that it is the recognition of "a common trait" (p. 228) that is necessary for a work to be included in a genre, and that because this common trait always "re-marks" itself, this trait does not properly belong to the genre it designates, but rather:

> It belongs without belonging, and the "without" (or the suffix "-less") which relates belonging to non-belonging appears only in the timeless time of the blink of an eye… without the respite or interval of a blink, nothing would come to light (p. 230)

I suggest that this "blink of an eye"; a momentary blindness or absence, is synonymous with the temporal aspect of *différance*. As a moment, it invokes the diachronic character of time that divides the present and is the condition of possibility for signification. Derrida hypothesises:

> …a text would not *belong* to any genre. Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging… because of the *trait* of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. (p. 230)

Thus Derrida's (1992) formulation does not attempt to do away with or critique the notion of genre. Genre designations remain meaningful in this formulation; however, necessarily they are not closed categories, every genre is contaminated with others. One implication of this notion of genre for my performances is that, aside from any decision on my part, they re-cite traits that participate without belonging to "Performance art" and re-cite traits that participate without belonging to "Performing arts". Such performances thus move across this unsealed genre border, which would be an "always divisible border", as Peggy Kamuf (2002 p. 2) describes Derrida's notion of a border. Furthermore, in my experience, to recognise a movement from one towards another is to recognise a movement between territories, and levels of status or "coolness", as I will discuss below.

The Undecidable

> …it has been necessary to analyse, to set to work, *within* the text of the history of philosophy, as well as within the so-called literary text… certain marks… that *by analogy* (I underline) I have called undecidables
>
> (Derrida *Positions* 2002 p. 42, 43)

In *Positions* (an interview originally published in 1972), Derrida proposes that such "undecidables" cannot be assigned to one or another side of a binary opposition, and that neither does an undecidable make a third term, or offer the possibility of a dialectical synthesis. Such *undecidables* include the hymen (with regard to the fiction of Mallarmé in *The Double Session* (1981), and the *pharmakon* in *Plato's Pharmacy* (1981).

In *Plato's Pharmacy* (1981), Derrida develops at least two issues that resonate with my project; "the undecidable", and filiation or inheritance. Derrida notes that the name for writing in Plato's account of its invention in the *Phaedrus*; "the *pharmakon"*, translates variously as cure, poison, medicine, or drug. For Derrida, the identity of writing and its inventor, demi-god Thoth, are essentially undecidable; in that the positive and negative meanings never entirely separate themselves from one another. Derrida also engages his notion of the *supplement*, with regard to the relation between Thoth, and his father Thamus.

> The figure of Thoth is opposed to its other (father, son, life, speech, origin or orient, etc.), but as that which both supplements and supplants it. Thoth extends or opposes by both repeating or replacing. By the same token, the figure of Thoth takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for. But it thereby opposes *itself,* passes into its other, and this messenger-god is truly a god of the absolute passage between opposites… In distinguishing himself from his opposite, Thoth also imitates it, becomes its sign and representative, obeys it and *conforms* to it, replaces it, by violence if need be. He is thus the father's other, the father, and the subversive movement of replacement. The god of writing is thus at once his father, his son, and himself. He cannot be assigned to a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer… a wild card, one who puts play into play (p. 93).

The word filiation comes from filum; thread or filament. A filial relation is one of a son or daughter to a parent and Derrida's notion of filiation relates both of these meanings to the text as a weave of filial threads. In *Revolutions that as yet have no model: Derrida's Limited Inc.* (1980). Gayatri Spivak relates the unconscious to filiation and links it to Freud's (1950) notion of the oedipal complex.

A text or an art piece has filial relations to their author, whose signature of them cannot simply tie author to text or work, because as Derrida argues in *Signature Event Context,* (1981), signatures, distinctive marks, whether written or oral are always iterative and citational. Questions of filiation are

activated in the performance works *Spatial Test* (2006) and *December Performance* (2006), as I will discuss below.

Deconstruction

In *Letter to a Japanese Friend* (1988), Derrida proposes that, rather than an activity a subject does, "Deconstruction takes place, it is an event… *It deconstructs it-self."* (p. 4). That "deconstruction takes place", or that *différance* plays, is not an alibi for doing nothing, as Derrida suggests in *Without Alibi* (2001). A deconstructive engagement with a "text" would involve a locating or showing of the way: "it deconstructs itself". Such an engagement, for example in *Plato's Pharmacy* (1988), is a questioning of the dominance of the discourse of *logocentrism* that sustains itself through an exclusion or repression of "writing", of alterity. The taking place of deconstruction and the event of ethics for Levinas both occur outside of any decision on my part. As I have described, for the Levinas of *Otherwise than Being* (1981), the task of the philosopher is to allow the ethical saying to be shown. Thus, to put it simply, an alignment, or what Critchley describes as a "homology" (p. 9) can be read between Derrida and Levinas *at least* in terms of an aim of locating an exceeding of logocentrism or ontology.

In *Of Grammatology* (1976), Derrida outlines a deconstructive reading as involving two modes or moments of reading. There is the necessity of a first moment; the "respectful doubling of commentary" (p. 158). Derrida describes the mode of commentary as "an indispensable guardrail" (p. 158) against the possibility of criticism "saying almost anything" (p. 158). However, commentary "has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading" (p. 158). Critchley notes that Derrida clarifies the notion of commentary in *Limited Inc.* (1988), as the supposition of "a relative stability of the dominant interpretation (including the "self"-interpretation) of the text being commented upon." (p. 143). For Derrida, commentary works towards a "minimal consensus" (p. 146) with regard to a text. Before describing the second moment of deconstructive reading, Derrida notes that such a reading "cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it" (p. 158); there is no non-textual reality outside it. The second moment of reading still remains "within" the text in question; it proceeds through a repetition within which the same text signifies otherwise. As Derrida explains in *Of Spirit* (1989):

> …without even using words other than those of the tradition, I follow the path of a repetition which crosses the path of the wholly other. The wholly other announces itself within the most rigorous repetition (p. 113)

Critchley (1999) points out that Derrida often proceeds with such a "double reading around a semantic ambivalence in the usage of a particular word" (p. 27), for example *pharmakon* in *Plato's Pharmacy* (1981) discussed above.

Importantly, deconstruction is *"in deconstruction"*. In a formulation that bears a resemblance to Levinas' (1981) description of the relation of the saying and the said, Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* (1967), "the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work." (p. 24). Earlier, in reference to the Saussurian separation of the sign and signifier, Derrida points out that "Since these concepts are indispensable for unsettling the heritage to which they belong, we should be even less prone to renounce them." (p. 14). That is, as Critchley (1999) puts it, "…the only language available to deconstruction is that of philosophy, or logocentrism." (p. 29).

Derrida's Deconstructive Reading of "The performative"

The term "performative" was coined by J.L. Austin who, in *How To Do Things With Words* (1962) proposed the notion of a "performative utterance" (p. 5). Such an utterance does not "'describe' or 'report'" (p. 5), and does not belong to the mode of correctness; truth or falsity as does what Austin calls a "constative". Rather, in a performative, "the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action" (p. 5). Austin used a number of examples including "'I promise'" (p. 9). For Austin, a

performative is "hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy." (p. 22). Austin suggested that these uses of language are in an intelligible way, not serious, but *"parasitic"* on "normal use" (p. 22) and, as he was concerned with "ordinary" language, he excluded these cases from his analysis.

Above I have outlined Derrida's deconstructive engagement with Austin (1962) in *Signature Event Context* (1988) in relation to the determination of 'context'. In this text Derrida also proposes that every performative, as with the sign in general, is necessarily conditioned and constituted by iteration or *différance,* and that these are also a kind of parasitism. For Derrida the parasitic cases of the performative that Austin describes, such as the words of an actor, while they have a "relative specificity" (p. 18), are "the determined modification of a general citationality–or rather, a general iterability" (p. 17). With regard to the notion of the performative as an *event,* "of speech or by speech" (p. 18), Derrida asks whether a performative could succeed unless it iterated an identifiable model, for opening a meeting for example. That is to say, such an event 'produced' by the irreducibly citational performative, could not simply be a "present and singular emergence" (p. 17). This means that there would not be "an opposition between citational utterances, on the one hand, and singular and original event-utterances on the other." (p. 18). That is to say, events are necessarily citational. One implication of this notion of the performative is that the performative and the event are necessarily iterations of existing power relations and 'structures', (these would be structures open to an exterior). Extending this line of thinking, Lyotard (1988) posits that: "the phrase *The meeting is called to order* is not performative because its addressor is the chairperson of the meeting." (p. 82). That is, in this case the operation of the phrase is a repetition or iteration of an already established order.

In that my performances often foreground their citational moments by repetition and spoken references to works of other artists to whom they owe a debt of filiation, perhaps they operate deconstructively with regard to the binary, "machine" and "event". That is to say that perhaps something new emerges in the use of repetition.

What is an event? In *Without Alibi* (2001)*,* Derrida identifies an apposition of "the other" with "the event". The event is what interrupts the performative (the automatic repetition). This requires us to read 'the performative' in a double or deconstructive way. The performative, rather than a product of my spontaneity, is authorised by an anterior authority, and it is this authorisation of the performative that the *absolute* anteriority of the other interrupts, calls into question. In the section on Levinas I proposed that two registers of performativity operate in *Otherwise than Being* (1981), the performativity of the saying and the performativity of Levinas' methodo*log*ical response to the problem of showing the ethical saying. Perhaps it could be said that the ontological performativity of Austin's performative, or the performative as automatic repetition, is interrupted by the ethical performativity of my response to the other.

Derrida's Reading of the later Levinas

Proposing that Levinas' text carries out a showing of the ethical, Critchley (1999) argues that "Levinasian textuality serves as an *exemplum* for textuality in general." (p. 122). I will give an account, via Critchley's (1999) commentary, of Derrida's essay *At this very Moment in this Work Here I Am* (1991), which engages with Levinas' later writing, particularly *Otherwise than Being* (1981).

The aspect of Derrida's 'commentary', that is, the moment of 'respectful doubling', in Derrida's reading that Critchley focuses on is the repetition of the phrase "at this very moment" (*At this very moment* p. 21, 22; *Otherwise than Being* p. 169, 170). This repetition is an example of the way that Levinas 'performatively' figures the relation of the saying and the said. Derrida (1991) and Critchley (1999) both quote the following passage of *Otherwise than Being:*

> Every contesting and interruption of this power of discourse is at once related and invested by discourse. It thus recommences as soon as one interrupts it…. This discourse will affirm itself to be coherent and one. In relating the interruption of the discourse or my being ravished into the discourse I connect its thread…. Are we not at this very moment in the process of barring the issue that our whole essay attempts, and of encircling our position from all sides? (*Otherwise than Being* p. 169).

In this passage, the "at this very moment", is the ever repeating moment in which a discourse re-links the gaps of ethical interruption by relating that very interruption, by thematizing it. As Derrida puts it "the 'at this very moment' would constitute the enveloping form or web of a text resuming without end all its tears within itself" (p. 21). Derrida draws attention to a repetition, after an interval, of the phrase "at this very moment."

> And I still interrupt the ultimate discourse in which all the discourses are stated, in saying it to one that listens to it, and who is situated outside the said that the discourse says, outside all it includes. That is true of the discussion I am elaborating at this very moment. This reference to an interlocutor permanently breaks through the text that the discourse claims to weave in thematizing and enveloping all things. In totalizing being, discourse qua discourse thus belies the very claim to totalize. (*Otherwise than Being* p. 170)

In my saying to the other, who is transcendent to the said, my said is thus interrupted, "at this very moment". Discussing a similar repetition in Levinas' text *Le Nom de Dieu* (1969), (cited by Derrida, 1991):

> The second 'moment' will have forced the first towards its own condition of possibility… It will have in advance, but after the fact within the serial rhetoric--torn the envelope. (p. 26)

Derrida describes Levinas' text as forming "knotted threads" (p. 27). The knots mend the tears of the said by the interruptions of the saying. Derrida admits that this knotting and interrupting happens in all texts. However, in Levinas' text, there is "perhaps, a supplementary nodal complication, another way of retying without retying." (p. 28). This supplement is a series which "does not retie threads but the interruptions without thread" (p. 29). This series "enchains" together, in many ways, the interruptions. It is necessary that there are many ways of enchaining so that the ethical opening is not itself readily rendered as a theme. Derrida describes this series as a *sériature:*

> a *series,* (a stringed series of enlaced *erasures*), an interrupted series, a *series* of interlaced interruptions, a series of *hiatuses* (gaping mouth, mouth opened out to the cut-off word, or to the gift of the other and to the that I shall henceforth call, in order to formalize in economical fashion and so as not to dissociate what is no longer dissociable within this fabric, *sériature* (Derrida 1981 p. 36)

Critchley (1999) notes the conjunction in *sériature* of the words serie (series) and rature (erasure); the series is "continually placed under erasure by the energy of an ethical interruption" (p 128). Critchley provides a more prosaic description of the way such a *sériature* might operate in Levinas' text:

> …endless repetitions, the ellipses, ambiguities and contradictions, the unexplained and often tangential footnotes, the strange and austere beauty of the prose, the rhapsodic effect of the clause structure in Levinas' extended sentences, the simultaneous didacticism and uncertainty of many of his propositions… (p. 129)

In what way might Levinas' notion of "reduction", or Derrida's notion of *sériature* in response to Levinas' text, be translated from these philosophical con-texts to the con-texts of performance? Exploring this question would call for a consideration of differences between these (unsealed) genres or contexts, and of translation. As Derrida suggests in *Letter to a Japanese Friend* (1988) "the question of deconstruction is also through and through *the* question of translation" (p. 1). Perhaps the fiction of Maurice Blanchot might be said to move between philosophy and literature. As such it may provide resources and a reference point for considering such a political signification of art. I will

explore *The Madness of the Day* (1981), one of Blanchot's texts with regard to this in the "Art Contexts" section.

Deconstruction and Politics: Critchley's Rapprochement of Derrida and Levinas

In the final chapter of *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1999), "A Question of Politics: the future of deconstruction", Critchley asks "what is the relation of the rigorous undecidability of deconstructive reading and the need for political decisions and political critique? (p. 187). Critchley argues that Levinasian ethics is the necessary supplement for the political signification of deconstruction. Critchley returns to his account of Levinas' formulation of the inauguration of justice by the "presence" of the third party in *Otherwise than Being* (1981) and *Totality and Infinity* (1969). That is, as I outlined in my account of Levinasian ethics, the third party inaugurates a necessity for "comparison" between more than one "incomparable" other; in this comparison ontology and the question of justice and politics are born (*Otherwise than Being* p. 158). Critchley notes that "The passage from ethics to politics is synonymous with the move from responsibility to questioning." (p. 220). He points out that this move is also a move to the said and to ontology.

The important provocation of Critchley's formulation for my project is that the space of politics is repeatedly interrupted by the transcendence of the other. As Critchley puts it "any attempt to bring closure to the social is continually denied by the non-totalizable relation to the Other" (p. 238).

> Philosophical critique… is the eternal irony of the community, the fact that the community is legitimized only by calling the legitimacy of the community into question. The just polity is one that can actively maintain its own interruption as that which sustains it. (p. 238)

Critchley proposes, that as the political form characterised by calling itself and its practices into question, democracy is grounded in ethics. Critchley proposes that the temporality of democracy is futural, and that because it is "characterized by incompletion and deferral", it has a *différantial* structure" (p. 240).

Derrida makes a similar argument in "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism" in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (Mouffe, 1996):

> When I speak of democracy to come (la democratie a venir) this does not mean that tomorrow democracy will be realized, and it does not refer to a future democracy, rather it means that there is an engagement with regard to democracy which consists in recognizing the irreducibility of the promise…" (p. 83)

I am suggesting that a political signification of art may be as a locus of the active maintenance of an interruption such as that which Critchley describes above. Furthermore without collapsing the distinctions between art and philosophy, the notions of reduction and *sériature*, as perhaps "performative" showing of the ethical, may constitute a resource and reference point for such a signification of my performances.

Excursus: Lacan and Žižek

Other than Levinas or Derrida, an engagement with the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) offers an additional provocation and a prospective approach to readings of performances in the project. In particular, the subsection "A Question of Relation" in the art contexts section below considers provocations from Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) "relational aesthetics", and two of the critical responses to this idea that I will discuss are informed by Lacanian theory. I will not attempt to read between Lacan, Levinas, and Derrida in any depth here. However, I will cite and agree with my primary supervisor Mark Jackson, that "A direction for future enquiry"[3] would be to explore resonances or relationships between Levinasian desire and Lacan's notion of the *objet a.* I note that there is some similarity between Levinas' notion of the relation to the other, which in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) he describes as a desire for the infinite, aligning it with Plato's notion of desire for the unseen (Plato, *The Republic, Book VII* 1935, 1992), that the other is an enigma who will always elude my grasp; and Lacan's notion of the *objet a*, "a hollow, a void" (Lacan 1977b p. 180) that causes my desire (Grosz 1990), which objects are contingently located in, and which I can never grasp. To explore this resemblance would not be to collapse the differences between these two engagements. Derrida and Lacan have also engaged with one another's work, but I will not explore this exchange here either. Rather, to preface my discussion of art contexts and my performances below, I will briefly sketch a Lacanian view of the subject, and consider a text by the Lacanian theorist Slavoj Žižek.

Like Derrida, Lacan takes Saussurian linguistics as a key point of departure for the development of his theory. Grosz (1990) explains that with regard to Saussurian linguistics, Lacan privileges the signifier over the signified, because every signified is, at bottom, another signifier, ad infinitum. That is, for Lacan (1977a), "no significations can be sustained other than by reference to another signification" (p. 150). In this sense Lacan's renovation of Saussurian linguistics is, like Derrida's notion of *différance,* a 'critique' of the notion of consciousness as self-presence. Lacan takes Saussure's idea that language is a system composed only of differences and that the relationship between signifier and signified is contingent to imply that, as Grosz explains, "the chain of signifiers incessantly slides over the chain of signifieds" (p. 95). In such a system there can be no master signifier. This absence of a master that would affix meaning:

> …signals a *constitutive lack* at the core of language, a lack which marks the absence of a fixed anchoring point, the absence of a solid core of meaning for any term" (Grosz 1990 p. 95)

The Lacanian subject identifies itself in language, is constituted by language, and is a subject *of* language, which is an unfixed system outside of the subject's volition. As there is "a constitutive lack at the core of language", so there is at the core of the subject. Grosz (1990) points out that this is correlative with Lacan's understanding of the child's formation of a bounded identity in the "mirror phase", in which the external visual image the child sees of its body enables it to misrecognise its unorganized and fragmentary impulses and bodily perceptions as a bounded entity. Both these conditions of subjectivity render the subject dependent on identifications with others, in order to sustain an illusory sense of a stable identity.

As I alluded to above, Lacan developed his notion of the *objet a* as "the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied … by any object (Lacan 1977b p. 180). The *objet a* (*a* for autre [other][4]) is, as Grosz explains, "the other to the ego" which is not possible to incorporate or detach from (p. 76). For Lacan (1977b):

> The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it

[3] Personal communication 16 February 2007

[4] Alan Sheridan, translator's note to *Ecrits: A Selection* (Lacan 1977b) p. ix

is lacking. It must therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack. (1977b p. 103)

Modes of the Artificial / Me in General / Me in Performance

In the chapter "Cyberspace, or, the Unbearable Closure of Being" of *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997), Slavoj Žižek proposes a view of the Internet as engendering and indicative of a post-modern subjectivity that adopts "a *phenomenological* attitude" (p. 132) to the computer screen. This involves naively trusting the "play of appearances" (p. 132) on the screen, which entails a foreclosure, or relegation to irrelevancy, of the Real 'behind it'. That is, in terms of Lacan's distinction between the unsymbolizable Real and reality, the screen comes to compose the coordinates of reality and cover over the "digitalized Real" that constitutes it. Žižek proposes the correlation of a pair of illusions with regard to the Internet, "what if one conceives of *'consciousness' itself, the frame through which we perceive the universe, as a kind of 'interface'*…what if real life (RL) itself is just one more IRC [Internet relay chat] channel?'", and the illusion of "full reality outside the virtual universe." (p. 132)

This consideration of the difference between "real life", and a fiction outside or beside it might be productive with regard to the reality and fictionality or artificiality of performance. If I took license to substitute "performance" for "cyberspace" from Žižek's text, my work would seem to be located between, or engaged with a deconstruction of, these two alternatives. That is, my performances operate equivocally with respect to real life, (no characterisation, costuming, etc) and the fictionality of a performance that would be opposed to "full reality" outside it in real life. On the next page of Žižek's text, perhaps I could substitute aspects of my performance practice for "virtual reality" in that it "undermines the difference between 'true' reality and semblance" (p. 133).

Žižek (1997) presents two alternatives with regard to cyberspace personae in the context of Internet games:

> I know I'm not like that… but it's nice, from time to time, to forget one's true self and put on a more satisfying mask
>
> … the screen persona I create for myself can be 'more myself' than my 'real life' persona… in so far as it reveals aspects of myself I would never dare to admit in RL (p. 137)

Žižek (1997) proposes that the third term between "'real life' and 'mere imagination'" (p. 140), is Lacan's symbolic order. He then develops his argument with the idea that cyberspace fills in the gaps between the real and the symbolic order, by making the imaginary over-present. Žižek uses the example of hackers who manipulate the *Star Trek* television series by adding explicit sex scenes between the original content, which is retained unchanged. "The idea, of course, is not simply to ironize or falsify the TV series, but to bring to light its unspoken implications" (p. 151). That is to say, this practice fills in the gaps of the imaginary (what is implied but not materialized) between the symbolic and the real. This kind of practice suspends the symbolic Master (master copy). In the rise of practices such as the above which are a kind of virtual reality, Žižek suggests the paradoxical alignment of "the decline of this function of the Master" (154) with a decline of the dimension of virtuality:

> What is threatened in its rise is the very dimension of virtuality consubstantial with the symbolic order: the universe of VR tends to bring to light, to realize on the textual surface, the underlying fantasy – that is, to fill in the gap which separates the symbolic surface texture from its underlying fantasy, which is merely surmised or indicated in a canonic text (155)

My practice, across different performances, has taken an ironic and experimental approach to Žižek's above proposition, staging attempts to "fill in the gaps" of performance situations by attempting to give supplements or replacements for the imaginary. Of course my performances are not recognisable and well known like canonic texts. However, I attempted to allow for this by stating the obvious in an approach I explained as "overexplanation". These were attempts to make the performance itself or its

situation over-present or repeated by referring to or describing itself, and its environment. I will elaborate other kinds of self-referentiality in the art contexts section.

Part Two: Art Contexts and Provocations

Introduction

In this section I will not attempt an overview or survey. Rather, I will contextualise the project through consideration of a number of art pieces that together are provocations for the current research.

Between Art and Non-Art: The Readymade, Happenings, and Self-Referentiality

The project traces filiation to the work of Marcel Duchamp in regard to its questioning of the boundary between art and life, for example in his "readymades"; everyday objects that became art by being called art and placed in the art context of the gallery. I pick up this filial thread via Amelia Jones (1994), who suggests that Allan Kaprow saw his Happenings as given inspiration by the readymade, in that he saw "the very transitory nature of the readymade's "meaning" as an analogy of the ephemeral effects he defines as constitutive of Happenings" (p. 46). Jones reads the reception of Duchamp in art and art history via, among other critical orientations, a notion of patriarchal filiation which produces Duchamp as 'Father' of Performance and Conceptual art. By way of an alibi, I am simply registering questions of sexual difference at the project's margins, as other potential openings or interruptions. A sense of transitory meaning resonates in Kaprow's (1967) essay, "Pinpointing Happenings", republished in *The Blurring of Art and Life* (1994), where he identifies the fifth of six directions in which Happenings were moving as:

> *Idea* art or literary *Suggestion* when it is written down in its usual form of short notes… They may be enacted but need not be (and often are not). They follow the Duchampian implication that art is what is in the mind of the beholder, who can make art or non-art at will; a thought is as valuable as an action. The mere notion that the world is full of ready-made activities permits one quite seriously to "sign" the whole earth, or any part of it, without actually doing a thing. The responsibility for such quasi-art is thus thrown entirely upon the shoulders of any individual who cares to accept it. (p. 87).

There are many issues raised by this passage, especially given the emergence of post-structuralism since 1967, for example with regard to the signature, or the will or intention of the viewer-artist and the unconscious. Kaprow's above reading of the readymade suggests a thin and always moving threshold between art and life. Kaprow suggests a third term of "quasi art" participating in the relation of art and non-art. One could also call upon Derrida's notion of "the undecidable." Kaprow seems to circumvent author-centred prioritisation of the intention of the artist to determine what art is, not by questioning intention, but by opening the identity of the artist to anyone.

Another direction of Happenings that Kaprow identifies in this essay is the "*Guided Tour* or *Pied Piper* kind of Happening":

> A selected group of people is led through the countryside or around a city, through buildings, backyards, parks, and shops. They observe things, are given instructions, are lectured to, discover things happening to them. In this mode, the intended focus upon a mixture of the commonplace and the fantastic makes the journey a modern equivalent to Dante's spiritual one. The creator of this Happening, more than a mere cicerone, is in effect a Virgil with a message. (p. 86)

As an itinerating performance that also "moves" between the everyday and the 'not-everyday', this kind of Happening is a precedent to *December Performance* (2006)*, and to the planned end of project performance. The current project picks up on Kaprow's focus on "mixture", and engages deconstructively with the boundary between something like "the commonplace" and "the fantastic", but orients itself more to related boundaries; between "performance" and "non-performance", "fiction" and "truth", "artificial" and "real", and "non-serious" and "serious".

One question of the above quote would be to ask how the group of people are "selected" for such a Happening. This question would be of interest with regard to audience members' class, race, gender, and levels of initiation to such a performance; and the hypothesised "conviviality" of Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) notion of relational aesthetics which I will discuss below. As I will also discuss, in several of my performances I have referred to different levels of initiation to the performance among the audience, or the different ways that they have been invited to the performance. However, my interest in this is less in a critical engagement with cultural differences of audience members, than activating these differences that matter as a locus of the repeating or folding of the performance upon itself so that in self-reference it might be recognised as other to itself.

I read "message", the last word of the above quote with regard to Levinas' (1981) formulation of the saying and the said. "Message" would seem to align with the ontological, "constative", said. As I have outlined, the project explores the interruption of this mode by the saying, recognising the impossibility of stepping outside of ontology. That is to say, all performances have many messages and I am not attempting to seek a point of neutrality in my work, which would itself be a totalising gesture, because, as Critchley puts it, "for Levinas, there is no view from nowhere" (Critchley 2002, p. 14). However, the project is researching a showing of the saying, and more generally, a reframing or reflexive engagement with performance. Two methods by which the project attempts to approach such a showing of the saying are repetition, and self-reference. As I have outlined, Derrida's notion of *sériature* involves a highly determinate kind of repetition, and I will relate this to works below. First I will consider issues of self-referentiality.

Performances in the project have often referred to themselves, and so occasionally does the exegesis. Such self-references have included describing of what is happening at the time: "people are arriving from off-campus" (*Spatial Test* 2006), what I am doing: "I'm preparing to drag my collaborator" and retrospectively referring to the performance's process of development: "I approached my collaborator by phone" (*Anticipating Dragging* 2006). I find a reference for self-referentiality, perhaps closer to the retrospective kind, in Robert Morris' *Card File* (1961), and his self-explanatorily titled *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961). Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh (2004) describe these works in their book *Art Since 1900.* Foster et al. read these pieces as participating in "an aesthetic of the supplement" (p. 529) which appropriates the self-referentiality of modernist art and takes it to the point where it challenges the autonomy of the art object. They describe *Card File* as a file that "consists entirely of a box of cards carrying notations of the production of the object itself" (p. 529). These include records of chance occurrences that open the object to "an economic, social, biographical, historical system" (p. 529). The supplementary character that Foster et al. describe in these works can also be read with reference to Derrida's ideas of "cure" and "poison" with regard to his notion of the supplement, although the designation would perhaps depend whether reading in a modernist or post modernist framework. My interest in the idea of the supplement with regard to these works of Morris is that the self-reference begins to question the inside and outside or beginning and ending of the work. For example, a more complex temporality is activated in both these works by the self-references. Furthermore, what are the selves of these pieces such that they can refer to themselves? They would seem to produce themselves in their self-reference, and in that sense the self-references would be performative.

The tape recordings that played inside *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), at least of sounds produced mechanically, did not have a tense, or, they perhaps remained in the present tense. By contrast the events recorded in *Card File* were written retrospectively by Morris, perhaps they were in the past tense? The self-referentiality of *Card File* is perhaps like my and my collaborator's retrospective references during *Anticipating Dragging* (2006) to phone conversations in its development process. I suggest that in both cases such self-reference of the pieces to their processes of development activates a boundary between inclusion and exclusion of the audience or viewer; the limit of availability of the work to the audience. That is, perhaps like the audio-only recordings of performances in the current project, *Box with the Sound of Its own Making* would perhaps open as many questions about the process and contexts of their production as they answered. I will elaborate

this discussion further with regard to *Anticipating Dragging* in the discussion of performances section.

A seemingly self-referential piece is John Baldessari's (1971) video *I Am Making Art.* 'The Video Data Bank' website (n.d., retrieved 01.19.2007) that includes this piece quotes Marcia Tucker (1981), "he moves different parts of his body slightly while saying, after each move, 'I am making art.' The statement, he says, 'hovers between assertion and belief.'" Belief would seem to sit within Austin's (1962) category of the constative, assertion perhaps moving somewhere between constative and performative. The words "I am making art" can be heard as a "performative utterance" in Austin's (1962) sense to the extent that they are read as necessary for the activity to be art, that is, to the extent that the phrase performs rather than describes. If the words are performative, the art would perhaps not be self-referential given that it only becomes art when the phrase is spoken. Or is Baldessari speaking more generally, and the "making art" to which he refers is what he was doing the rest of that day?

Another kind of self-referentiality is apparent in video documentation of Martin Creed's stage performance *Variety Performance* (2006). At the beginning of the performance he says "It's nice to be here, because, I like standing up in front of people, and trying to talk. But it's not nice to be here because; I'm scared that you won't like me. But it's nice to be here, because I like being scared" In this piece another kind of self-reference that also refers to doubling happens when a woman moves beside Creed copying his movements, and then later both the woman and a man copy his movements. In this piece self reference operates in the present tense, as interpretations of what is happening at the time; as such it is more a kind of repetition of the piece. In this, the performances in the project perhaps have more in common with the self-referentiality of Martin Creed's *Variety Performance* (2006)

Foster et al. (2004) suggest of Morris' *Card File* (1961) that the opening of the work into a wider social context via its identity as a record of the process of its production means that "the resultant work is unimportant compared with the complexity with which the process of its making intertwines with a variety of "external" structures." (p. 529). Some resonance can be read between this shift from autonomous object to object as register of activities, to the idea of art as initiator of desirable kinds of sociality in Nicholas Bourriaud's (2002) notion of "relational aesthetics".

The work of Fluxus can also be considered a precedent for aspects of the project with regard to Foster et al's (2004) discussion of Fluxus' engagement with framing, and their nullification of the difference between the frame and the art. For me this link is most apparent with regard to the email invitations of the *rest* project which operate both as frame, invitation, and as part of the work. Foster et al. describe Fluxus as important in picking up the provocation of the readymade and furthering a move towards theatricality:

> the highly diverse projects of the group's members helped bring about the most crucial change by shifting artistic production from the register of the object to registers operating somewhere between theatricality and musicality: if Duchamp had predicted in the mid-sixties that at some point in the near future the entire galaxy of objects would have to be considered as an inexhaustible resource of readymades, Fluxus had already displaced this paradigm with an aesthetic of the universal "event". (p. 460)

Considering Derrida's deconstruction of the performative, Lyotard's logical reversal or confounding of the notion of the performative, and Kaprow's engagement with the readymade as activity, we could consider Austin's performative as a readymade awaiting re-contextualisation. If one reading of Duchamp's readymades were to open consideration of everyday objects, or the everyday as such, then perhaps it provokes a similar engagement with the performative, as everyday, often mass produced repetitions of sociality.

Inside/Outside : Blanchot's 'The Madness of the Day'

In *The Law of Genre* (1992), Derrida discusses the short story *The Madness of the Day* (1981) by Maurice Blanchot. Derrida suggests that this text is exemplary of the notion of the *"genre-clause"* (p. 231), as the "condition for possibility and impossibility for taxonomy" (p. 231). He describes Blanchot's text as "staked precisely on the possibility and impossibility of telling a story" (p. 234).

> It is a *récit* without a theme and without a cause entering in from the outside; yet it is without interiority. It is the *récit* of an impossible *récit* (p. 233).

Taking some inspiration from this formulation, perhaps I could say that self-referentiality in my performances both opens and closes a space of fiction. A performance "without a theme and without a cause entering in from the outside; yet it is without interiority."

Derrida notes that in the third to last paragraph, the narrator tells the reader what he told the characters in the story; "I am not learned; I am not ignorant…", these are also the first words of the story, and then the narrator leaves the repetition and concludes the text, but with this repetition there opens a strange fold in the story and it is uncertain where the narrator may be placed with regard to its inside or outside.

A Question of Relation

Relational Aesthetics

The art critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) has coined the term "relational aesthetics" as an "aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce, or prompt." (p. 112) Bourriaud describes relational art as "an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space." (p. 14). Bourriaud advocates for such work on the basis that it *"tightens the space of relations"* (p. 15). He suggests that such work enables experimentation with kinds of sociality that differ from the narrow range of relations that operate in a context of pervasive global capitalism and the replacement of human interaction with new technologies. Bourriaud suggests that the role of art is "to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist*"* (p. 13). He proposes the art work as "an opening to unlimited discussion" (p. 15). Claire Bishop (2004) points to the open-ended and interactive character of 'relational' work, suggesting that it may "derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the *interpretation* of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art *itself* is argued to be in perpetual flux." (p. 52)

Rirkrit Tiravanija is one of the artists whose work Bourriaud most often refers to in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). Tiravanija has made a number of installations in which he cooks Thai food for the audience. For example, Claire Bishop (2004) describes *Untitled (Still)* (1992), in which Tiravanija moved the contents of the "gallery office and storeroom into the main exhibition space, including the director" (p. 56). Tiravanija set up a makeshift kitchen in the storeroom, "In the gallery he cooked curries for visitors, and the detritus, utensils, and food packets became the art exhibit whenever the artist wasn't there" (p. 56). In *Pad Thai* (1996), "he made available a room of amplified electric guitars and a drumset, allowing visitors to take up the instruments and generate their own music" (p. 57). Bishop notes that Tiravanija often includes "lots of people" among his materials. In a 1996 interview with Ami Barak, Tiravanija places the emphasis not on the food, but on the relationships produced in the work "I always think that the work itself is really a lot more important than the food or even my own person within the framework of the work. I think that it's important that it involves other people and that it can foster relationships."

Foster et al. (2004) identify such works from the 1990s onwards as Bourriaud discusses, including Tiravanija's and Liam Gillick's among others, for which they consider "discursivity and sociability are central concerns… both in its making and in its viewing." (p. 667). They regard such practices as part of a shift in recent work, that at times involves a utopianism, and that "more modestly, these artists aim to fashion passive viewers into temporary communities of active discussants" (p. 666). Foster et al. also note the rise of the internet associated term "interactivity" to describe recent practices (p. 667). They also describe some problems of such work:

> Sometimes radical politics are ascribed to the art by a shaky analogy between an open work and an inclusive society, as if a desultory form might evoke a democratic community, or a non-hierarchical installation predict an egalitarian world. (p. 667)

With regard to Bourriaud's (2002) proposition of art as "an ensemble of units to be re-activated by the beholder-manipulator" (p. 20), Foster et al. (2004) recognise in this the legacy of Duchamp -and I agree in regard to the idea taken up by Kaprow (1967) in the discussion above with regard to agency of the viewer in making the art - but they see in it a danger of illegibility, and ask "when is such "reactivation" too great a burden to place on the viewer?" (p. 667). They suggest that such a staging of Roland Barthes' (1968) "Death of the Author", rather than pointing to "the birth of the reader," has sometimes meant "the befuddlement of the viewer" (p. 667). Foster et al. suggest that illegibility of the work can "return the artist as the primary interpreter of the work." (p. 667). Such a question of the artist's reading of their own work would seem to be particularly pertinent to performances such as mine in the project, in which I speak to the audience about the work, and give certain kinds of

explanations' and narrations of it. I think that in some ways these explanations themselves contribute to a sense of confusion for audience members, particularly if they are unfamiliar with my performances. I suggest that this relates to the idea of doubling or repetition as a mode of alterity. I would suggest that befuddlement or confusion of the audience is not necessarily desirable or undesirable, and that perhaps discrepancies in levels of initiation to the work can be reflexively activated as part of the piece.

Interestingly, in another sense, Foster et al. (2004) suggest a perhaps maternalistic/paternalistic resonance of some relational art, noting that "contemporary exhibitions sometimes feel like remedial work in socialization" (p. 667). They note that Bourriaud "almost suggests" that art is "a compensatory substitute" for the threatening of participation in contemporary life.

In a short piece in *Artforum,* Joe Scanlan (2005) suggests that work which has been aligned with Bourriaud's (2002) relational aesthetics produces an effect of normalising audience behaviour by peer pressure based on a fear of public humiliation. He suggests that "one of the best ways to control human behaviour is to practice relational aesthetics" (p. 123). For Scanlan, relational aesthetics extends the suppressive character of social space into the realm of art, thus limiting art's critical agency.

C-60, A performance-installation I attended in 2000 by Mark Harvey at the George Fraser Gallery in Auckland, seemed to be concerned with, and open onto, similar unease to that which Scanlan (2005) describes. In this performance, the audience were free to move through a two room gallery space and, if memory serves, two performers posed as door people to the inner gallery and made decisions, on seemingly mysterious criteria, as to whom they would let enter. This was perhaps the most "interactive" aspect of the piece, although audience members were in an ambiguous situation in relation to "the action", and had to work out where to stand. The performers played various types of urban cool or uncool including three young 'stylees' with designer hairstyles, a DJ, a ranter, and a burly male bouncer who made gruff announcements about keeping the noise down. The artist statement at the event indicated Harvey's interest in coolness from a Lacanian point of view, as forever sliding and elusive. This example with regard to "coolness" registers the performance event as a 'context' in which power and desire operate. Questions of audience initiation into the art situation, and social phenomena such as coolness seem to be omitted in Bourriaud's (2002) account. Rather, it seems that for Bourriaud, each member of the audience enters with equal status or "gallery 'cred'", and equal ability to participate with the piece and with others, and will do so in a reciprocal and harmonious way.

Walead Beshty (2005) points out that Bourriaud appears not to consider the operation of authority that is inscribed into a designation such as 'artist' or 'curator', does not problematise the privilege of the institution in which relational art is presented, and presents relational art as somehow free from capitalism. For Beshty, the viewer of relational art "continues to be merely the object in the environment acted upon, enticed to engage in a series of banal activities." (para. 8).

The most extensive critical engagement with Bourriaud's (2002) theory of relational aesthetics I have located is from Claire Bishop (2004) who critiques it on the basis that it assumes a unified subject, a community of immanent unity, and that it fails to acknowledge social antagonism. Bishop also takes issue with Bourriaud for assuming that all interactions 'produced' in a relational work are by definition good or democratic. Bishop draws on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985)[5], who, engaging the work of Lacan, understand subjectivity to be, as Bishop describes, "decentred and incomplete." (p. 66).
For Laclau and Mouffe (2001), because the subject is incomplete, it needs to identify with others. They propose "antagonism" as a process necessary for democracy, which happens between incomplete identities in which "the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself" (p. 125). Laclau and Mouffe suggest that antagonism operates at the level of the individual subject,

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[5] I am using the (2001) second edition of this book.

and at the level of society. Bishop quotes Mouffe in the introduction of *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (1996): "As conditions of possibility for the existence of a pluralist democracy, conflicts and antagonisms constitute at the same time the condition of impossibility of its final achievement." (p. 11), Mouffe identifies this formulation as "'the double bind' that deconstruction unveils" (p. 11). That is, the formulation is analogous to Derrida's 'logic' of the supplement, or the 'identity' of the *pharmakon* in *Plato's Pharmacy* (1981). While Bishop focuses on the Lacanian aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's works as critical resources for her discussion of the political signification of relational art, her critique also suggests another avenue for the articulation of a reading between Lacan and Derrida in addition to those alluded to in the "excursus" above.

Bishop (2004) continues:

> …the presence of what is not me renders my identity precarious and vulnerable, and the threat that the other represents transforms my *own* sense of self into something questionable. When played out on a social level, antagonism can be viewed as the limits of society's ability to fully constitute itself. (p. 66)

This prevention of totality by the other - notwithstanding the differences between the psychoanalytic and Levinasian registers - recalls Levinasian ethics. For Laclau and Mouffe, at the level of the individual, it is *my* totality or completeness that is prevented by the presence of the other. Similarly, at the level of the society this formulation recalls Critchley's (1999) proposition of the *différantial* character of democracy; that democracy is by definition not a completable project. This is not to conflate a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity with a Levinasian one; rather, it is to recognise a certain correspondence of two arguments against totality.

Bishop (2004) discusses works of two artists that she suggests operate in a field of antagonism; Santiago Sierra, and Thomas Hirschhorn. Bishop describes a number of Hirschhorn's works, the titles of which are sufficiently instructive; *160cm Line Tattooed on Four People* (2000), *A Person Paid for 360 Continuous Working Hours* (2000), *Ten People Paid to Masturbate* (2000), and *The Wall of a Gallery Pulled Out, Inclined Sixty Degrees from the Ground, and Sustained by Five People, Mexico City* (2000). Sierra emphasises his payment of performers, Bishop points out:

> While Tiravanija celebrates the gift, Sierra knows that there's no such thing as a free meal: everything and everyone has a price. His work can be seen as a grim meditation on the social and political conditions that permit disparities in people's "prices" to emerge (p. 70)

With reference to the work of Laclau and Mouffe[6], Bishop suggests that it is through the demarcation of limits in such works, e.g., the prescription of a specific activity, and the demarcation of a boundary between viewer and performer, that there is the creation of exclusions and from these, antagonism in Laclau and Mouffe's sense. Bishop contrasts this demarcation with the open-ended character of relational art. Bishop also suggests that in that Sierra's work engenders antagonism, it hints that the boundaries of the identities included and excluded by the work are moveable.

In a working paper, Lucy Holmes (2006) writes with a Lacanian orientation in response to Bourriaud's (2002) "relational aesthetics", and proposes a "nonrelational aesthetics". Consistent with my reading above, Holmes understands Bourriaud's proposition of relational art as emphasising "unselfish interdependence and reciprocity between people" (Holmes p. 2). She reads this in Lacanian terms, as "a narcissistic cell which first takes place between mother and child." (p. 2) That is, Holmes suggests that relational art can be interpreted as an attempt by the artist to return to a relationship in which there is no lack. The "narcissistic cell" is "an imaginary relationship where the child attempts to satisfy the mother as the first Other." (p. 2). Holmes explains that in a Lacanian framework, exposure to lack begins for the baby when the mother temporarily leaves in her desire for something other than the baby. The baby then begins to seek something outside the mother to fill the

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[6] With regard to the notion that exclusions engender antagonism, Bishop refers to Laclau's argument in *Emancipation(s)* (1996).

lack produced by her absence. The *objet a* is thus inaugurated as an emptiness that causes desire. As I have outlined, any object can come to occupy the place of the *objet a* but desire can never be fulfilled. Holmes sees the *objet a* as potentially disruptive of power relations:

> The object *a* maintains the movement of desire, providing a space or gap which shatters the illusion that the subject and Other can complete each other and that full satisfaction is possible. (p. 2)

The shattering of the illusion of completion would seem to be the recognition (symbolic representation) of what I desire as in some way contingent, and that I will continue to desire - my desire will simply shift to some other contingent object - rather than remaining caught in the fantasy that this object could fulfil my desire. Holmes proposes a nonrelational aesthetics that would value "subjective disparity" (Lacan 2002 [cited by Holmes 2006]), or disagreement.

It is possible to read congruence and incongruence between Bishop's (2004) notion of the role of antagonism, and Holmes' (2006) proposal for subjective disparity. Interestingly, Holmes interprets relational art as imposing "rigid scenarios" on the viewer based in the artist's "fantasy of full satisfaction", while by contrast Bishop (2004) problematises the open-ended character of relational art. I would suggest (and I think Bishop also implies) that a relational piece may be "open-ended" in that specific interactions or events are not predetermined, while unconsciously, subtly, or covertly limiting disagreement by the inscription of the piece onto proscriptive social codes, perhaps such as "coolness". Bishop points out that Sierra's work meditates on existing power disparities, and perhaps a critical difference of this work as compared to Bourriaud's idea of relational work is that it performs something like what Žižek (1997) writes of as an explicit statement of "the unwritten rule":

> Sometimes, at least – the truly subversive thing is not to disregard the explicit letter of law on behalf of the underlying fantasies, but *to stick to this letter against the fantasy that sustains it.*
>
> (Žižek 1997 p. 29)

Holmes (2006) proposes a nonrelational aesthetics "that dismantles the power relationship where the artist establishes what is good for the viewer" (p. 3). For Bishop (2004) it would seem that the foregrounding of antagonism would require a certain power relationship. Clearly, for disagreement to occur there needs to be some demarcation in the work that the audience can disagree with.

The criticisms of relational aesthetics outlined above each draw attention to issues of difference that Bourriaud (2002) seems to have failed to take into account. All of the above criticisms of relational aesthetics would suggest that "open-endedness" does not mean freedom of behaviour for viewers, as power relations continue to operate, with some being heightened in such work.

Perhaps in addition it would be useful to ask "What is a relation?" For Bourriaud (2002), it appears to be a correspondence between co-present subjects, such that an unproblematic "collective elaboration of meaning" (p. 15) takes place. From this point of view Holmes' (2006) description of a "narcissistic cell" seems fitting. Relational aesthetics would be a kind of representation of the same to itself, but as I have outlined, that already implies difference. In a Derridean register, I would add that subjects, as *"différantial,"* would always "relate-not relate" in conditions of the iteration of meaning.

I do not take as an implication of this discussion the idea that art should guard against audience discomfort and be nice to its audience. Rather, this discussion provides points of reference for a need to make work with a consideration of power relationships between me and the audience, and among the audience. It also locates a potential avenue for further research in the elaboration of a reading between the Lacanian and Derridean-Levinasian understandings of incompleteness as it pertains to both the individual and society.

My performances in the project have often used a deliberate approach of setting up a play between a relational mode and a non-relational mode. As I will discuss, the performances *Spatial Test* (2006)

and The *rest* Project (2006), performed partial appropriations of relational conventions of interactivity, such as leaving a computer and microphone set up in a gallery in *Spatial Test*[7]. This meant that audiences were uncertain as to whether the work asked them to interact with it or not. It was my *intention* that such uncertainty would locate a re-marking of gallery or performance convention, open questions of the proper; appropriate behaviour, and social pressures in the gallery or exhibition context. Perhaps this was a reading performed by audience members with regard to these pieces.

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[7] This approach continued from my honours project in 2005 in which the final piece asked the audience to "precipitate in the piece!", "parcicipate!", or "actiate!"

Part Three: Discussions of Performance Pieces

Introduction

In this section I aim to open readings of the performance projects. *Spatial Test, Anticipating Dragging,* the *rest* project, and *December Performance* are discussed in chronological order with respect to the project. I have included *the next approach* which I performed at Luxembourg Gardens in October 2006 as an additional piece on the DVD to add to the audiovisual breadth of the documentation, but I will concentrate on the major projects in the following discussion.

The length and style of the discussion differs for each performance. For *December performance* I delay consideration of the performance "itself" with a lengthy consideration of the status of the documentation. This may be exemplary of how the structure of the discussion of this piece recalls the discourse of the patient, or client in a psychoanalytic session, where it is a task of the analyst to listen, not simply to what is said, but for what is repeatedly elided, or (perhaps like a serial erasure) serially erased, in the discourse. Perhaps as psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok (1994) suggest "The magic word (i.e., the genuine symbol), the subject's authentic and full creation, remains concealed by the fetish." (p. 153). The structure of the discussion of *December Performance* also reflects the structure of the performance which at times had a purposeful direction, and at times attempted to wander. In general, the performances themselves could be more readily aligned with the saying, and the mode of the exegesis with the said, but in the retrospective discussion of them I am attempting a serial reduction (I don't call it *sériature)* of the said to allow the saying to signify.

Spatial Test

Spatial Test was a performance within the group show *Time Trial : 120mins* at St Paul Street Gallery on Tuesday 30 May 2006, curated and organised by Alex Monteith and Sue Gallagher. This was a show of student works, mainly postgraduate, and included painting, design, object installation, and one other performance. In the other performance, audible on the audio footage, Melissa Durbin activated sound producing devices.

- During the course of the show I walked towards and away from the desk, sometimes performing activities at the desk, sometimes watching the desk, and members of the audience looking at it, from a distance. At certain times I spoke to members of the audience, but for the most part I did not converse with them.

- There was a kind of disjunction in the announcements prosthetized via the microphone to people in the space/site; that repeatedly referred to 'the here and now' – "space", "site" "Time Trial", etc; but were also distancing, disengaging from the audience members. For example, early in the piece, a group of four or five people gathered around the desk. I responded by recording with some enthusiasm "I can feel a gathering in the space…" There was an increase in energy and the performance expanded or pushed out into the ambient space, at the same time a certain distance was maintained by my description of the situation rather than more direct interaction with those gathered. Clearly also, my taking up of the microphone also designated me as "performer" and instituted a separation from the audience. Moments after my expanding description there was a movement of distancing as I retreated away from the site of the announcements.

- "I want to make an invitation in the space the postgraduate site. There's an invitation in the space." These could be heard as a constative statement of fact, a lie, an event within the parentheses of theatre and thus a pretence, perhaps like John Baldessari described his video *I Am Making Art* (1971), as "hovering between assertion and belief", or a "performative utterance". In referring to each other, these two sentences would seem to confer a performative operation prospectively or retrospectively, to the other. Perhaps the second sentence asserts, retrospectively, that the first sentence was a "doing with words", like Austin's (1962) "performative utterance" discussed in the above section, that it did what it said and made an invitation. Perhaps the first sentence tells us that the second sentence will be performative. Or perhaps the invitation happened in the space between the two sentences; there will be an invitation, there is now an invitation.

- The use of the word "invitation" would seem to open a possibility of interaction between "performer" and "audience" and to initiate a "relational" engagement. Or perhaps it simply recalled that the show was itself an invitation to engage with the pieces, or that the invitation "flyer" was in the space. Perhaps what has most potential interest in this remark of "invitation", is the opening of a possibility for someone to make a decision to take up or refuse an invitation, the content of which was not determined in advance and was pointedly lacking. The invitation was one without determinate content other than acceptance or refusal.

- To exaggerate what actually happened in the performance, I will imagine that the making of such an invitation was repeated several more times, a repeated invitation pointedly lacking or suspending determinate reference. How would these invitations be placed with regard to Bourriaud's (2002) "relational aesthetics", and Holmes' (2006) "Nonrelational aesthetics"? Of course these repeated invitations could be annoying, and perhaps

audience members would disregard them, but perhaps at the same time they would call to the dutiful 'in' the audience members to find a way to respond, or lead to their annoyance and rejection of the invitation. Taking up such an invitation could involve almost anything, that is, it would be open-ended in the way Bishop (2004) describes in her critique of Bourriaud's (2002) Relational Aesthetics. Perhaps, therefore, rather than such an invitation allowing "subjective disparity" (Lacan, 2002 [cited by Holmes, 2006]), its' superficial openness that did not reveal exclusions already operating, I could be reinforcing existing power relations as discussed in the previous section, as well as inviting a response I did not like.

It was not clear whether audience members were permitted or invited to use the computer, record themselves on the microphone and so on. In the last half hour of the show, one audience member tentatively began to use the computer mouse. In the suspension of clear cues either for or against audience interaction, the piece would perhaps operate somewhere between a relational and non-relational mode, and in this way activate some of the codes operating in the gallery; "Is it OK to interact?", "What are other people doing, maybe they know". This situation may be considered in terms of my engagement with the computer and desk. While I did not clearly encourage or discourage audience interaction with the 'set-up', I perhaps moved between encouragement and discouragement through my changing proximity and level of active engagement with the equipment. In this way the desk and computer moved between a territory I made for myself and an object to approached and viewed, and I was able to modulate this movement, and accordingly my 'identity' in the space in response to what people were doing. This movement appears different from "relational" works that, on the surface and from my distant vantage point, seem to be more directly concerned with triggering audience interaction, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled, Still* (1992). In this movement between territory and object, or performer and 'blender', may lie further interest in terms of continuity and discontinuity of performance that leads to a more complex view of audience participation and non-participation.

- Perhaps the most apparent prosthetic in *Spatial Test* was the microphone. In general a microphone, especially in public space, and at a public event, associates with some authorisation to speak, in this case perhaps with regard to St Paul Street Gallery, or the School of Art and Design. Such authorisations to speak at the event would have included the designations of performance artist", or simply artist, or invited speaker, or AUT student, etc. The microphone would operate as an authorisation for and amplification of something like a "performative utterance" as discussed in the previous section (Austin, 1962 p. 5). To adopt Lyotard's (1988) reading, the performative utterances, thus authorised by anterior powers, for example the gallery, could not be called "performative", or "event", or new. My speaking through the microphone almost became a heavy-handed parody of a structure such as Žižek's refers of "a judge who, in 'real life', is a weak and corrupt person, but the moment he puts on his insignia of his symbolic mandate, it is the big Other of the symbolic institution which is speaking through him" (p. 150).

But the microphone does not perform what might be the expected function of amplifying my voice as I speak. I stand in the gallery, hold the microphone to my mouth, and speak as if to make a public address, but the volume is the same as if I had been speaking without the microphone, so in that sense, the microphone would appear to operate as a kind of fake, or "prop". Perhaps I am pretending that I'm speaking to the audience with the help of the microphone. Thus there is a kind of failure or castration in this activity, I attempt to appropriate the resources/power of the institution (big Other) but fail, or perhaps the coupling of microphone and voice fails for some contingent reason and will be fixed.

- Of course I know that the microphone is connected to the Macintosh computer, and it enables me to record my unamplified "live" voice on "Soundstudio" and play it back, at a volume greater or lesser than the original, real voice, and at a later time. A kind of echo and anachrony happened when the recordings were played back, the interval of time increasing with every replaying. With the delays, the descriptions, which were mainly in the present tense, produced a dis-course with the present situation, perhaps still partly accurate by coincidence, also perhaps diminished by their anachrony. They bore a kind of testimony to events that might have happened earlier in the evening. This was particularly apparent as one of my more energetic monologues early in the piece, describing people arriving in the space; the energy in the space and so on. There was thus a disjunction with the conditions of the space as the event was gradually quietening down and drawing to a close.

- In the announcements, which were a translation and thus a certain unfaithful doubling of the event, the piece engaged with a boundary between truth and fiction. These responses moved between description and a kind of dramatization of the events. For example "I can feel a gathering around the spatial test", associates a kind of urgency to the prosaic fact of four people congregating around the table.

- The title *Spatial Test* bore a familial relation to the title of the event; *Time Trial : 120mins*. It also referred to the prospective title of the event as Alex Monteith had proposed it some weeks earlier, *Test Site,* and I made reference to this former title in one of my announcements. *Spatial Test* identified itself with *Time Trial : 120mins* in a relation of congruence, similarity, and suggested familiarity. The title also identified it with Spatial Design, the department I am associated with, and that my primary and secondary supervisors are most closely associated with in the School of Art and Design.

To the extent that it consisted of descriptions of what was going on around it, the verbal performance did not have content of its own; it lived off, was "parasitical", to use Austin's (1962) terminology, on the "real" event that was unfolding in the gallery. The parasite participated in the character of introducer of, or guest speaker at, *Time Trial : 120mins.* My announcements conflated or congealed *Spatial Test* with the event as a whole; when I said "event" in my announcements it could be heard as a reference to my piece, or the larger event in which each of the pieces is a constituent part. These associations and conflations of myself/my piece with the event produce *Spatial Test* as a kind of supplement to the event. This recalls Derrida's (1981) writing of the undecidable figure of writing, or the *pharmakon.*

- But since both curators/organisers of the event were women, *Spatial Test* would also have filiation to woman.

On one hand perhaps, in associating and conflating itself with *Time Trial : 120 mins, Spatial Test* was attempting to subsume, incorporate, or capture it, swallow it from inside, and thus become an envelope through which one would have to pass to encounter *Time Trial : 120mins.* That is perhaps, as *pharmakon, Spatial Test* was trying to become its own parent. On the other hand, (in large part) *Spatial Test* drew its name, its possibility to speak, its audience, and the content of what it said, from *Time Trial : 120mins.* Furthermore, *Spatial Test* identified itself with the sense of urgency and precision in the title *Time Trial : 120mins.* That is, it conformed to it by necessity for its own authority. A parasite can kill the host, but then unless it can find another suitable host it will also die.
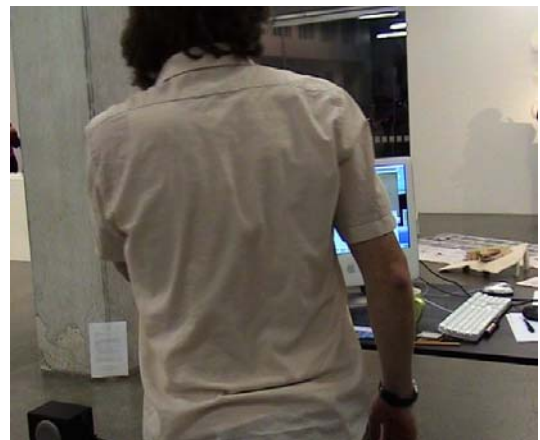
- In the manipulations of sound volume, the performance expanded and contracted with respect to the gallery that "housed it", the "parent" event, and the other pieces. At times *Spatial Test* was not a prominent part of the event, at other times it pushed its spheres of influence out to the walls of the gallery and a little out the main door. In this way, for an audience member, perhaps *Spatial Test* receded into a kind of forgetfulness (and I blended in with the audience), and then emerged again with an increase in volume.

This movement of contraction-expansion recalls the distinction that Lehman & Herdrich (2002) refer to between a container notion of space dominant in the "west" in which we think of objects being contained "in" space, and what they describe as a point-field idea of space, which:

> *defines space as the topological neighbourhood of a given point...* Any such point field is infinite, save it 'comes up against' the field of a competing initial point, while all other points are understood ('located') as in one or other (or indeed both) fields, though each, in its respective but subordinate way, itself establishes a field, and so on recursively. (p. 181)

Lehman and Herdrich (2002) argue that the point-field idea of space is dominant in Samoa, and that this conception allows for flexibility and shifting of boundaries in response to changing relationships between people.

Perhaps *Spatial Test* was in some way responsive to the changing point-fields of *Time Trial : 120mins*. Engaging with a point-field notion of space is inherently to engage with the codes, rules, expectations operating in the space. It would also perhaps align to a Deleuze-Guattarian (1987) reading of the gallery as a space of forces, flows, deterritorializations and reterritorializastions, which the static works would also affect and be affected by.

- Describing what was happening in the gallery was an attempt at "filling in the gaps" (Žižek, 1997, p. 154), not of a canonic narrative as Žižek described, but of the *Time Trial* event. This was an ironic attempt effort to "saturate" the context Derrida (1988). The verbal announcements attempted to translate and fold the context onto itself, and with the exception of the live unamplified announcements, with a delay.

- In its descriptions of *Time Trial : 120 mins, Spatial Test* staged an ironic; that is failed, attempt to fill in a certain kind of gap. That is, it tried to provide answers for a question of "What is happening?" In other words, the piece failed on purpose to 'fill in the gaps', and therefore must be called a feigned attempt rather than a real one.

Anticipating Dragging

Anticipating Dragging was a performance with Kerryn McMurdo presented at the monthly improvisation event *Bare,* organised and curated by Val Smith. In June 2006 it was at Dance Studio Three at Unitec Institute of Technology.

- The piece engaged an explanation or description of the preparations that Kerryn and I made for it, which were the presentation or feigning of a kind of transparency. The piece was attempting to be transparent in a way that would align with Žižek's (1997) notion of modernist transparency, in the sense that the audience was given information that would seemingly allow them to grasp the workings of the piece. For example I explained "I called my collaborator on the telephone and asked her if she wanted to be part of a performance event."

- I said, "Do you want to take over?" to which she replied, "No, not really, that's about it…" Not so much of a struggle for the authority to direct but a withdrawal that leaves a space of directorial low-pressure.

On the other hand, if I don't direct enough, I am derelict in my duty to her, to participate with her in the performance as would be expected within the codes of improvisation; and to the audience, who have gathered to watch the performance. If I do not *take the lead*, perhaps I risk not achieving the exploration I planned to achieve. Similarly, if I withdraw direction too much, or invite more interaction, the performance may be taken over.

In comparison to recent performance projects, the inclusion of another performer contributed to a situation in which I felt that more aspects of my personality/subjectivity became readable to the audience. In this sense I felt less in control, and that unconscious impulses and desires were more readable than in previous performance pieces in which I was the sole performer in relation to an audience. An improvised dialogue raises the context of the psychoanalytic situation. Like in psychoanalysis, my discourse offers itself for unencrypting by "her" and the audience members, such that my desires may be unencrypted-represented back to me.

The performance fails to deliver. The said of the monologue is a kind of refusal of content, yet of course it cannot help but emerge.

I wanted the unexpected future, *my way* "Let's collaborate, (my way)"

In this piece the performers' bodies became more implicated through muscular effort and relations of activity and passivity, in movements towards and away from the audience and eachother.

I was attempting to allow the ethical *saying* to articulate via a doubling of the *fact* of performance whereby the content of the performance – its' *said* - was a self-reflexive retrospective description of preparation for the performance and the production of the performance in the studio with the audience.

The referring by performance to its own production seems to operate in the way of a subtraction of content, or what the performance is about. I desired that this subtraction was a trade-off that would allow the articulation of performance *as such*. However this approach could be seen with regard to Zizek's (1997) writing about cyberspace as a 'filling in of the gaps'. That is, a mode in which the space for the imagination is foreclosed, and the operation of the big other of ideology is ever stronger.

The *rest* project

The *rest* project was a performance installation at the Auckland offices of Creative New Zealand as part of the AUT School of Art and Design Installation Series in 2006. Key components of the project were email invitations, my interactions with the staff at Creative New Zealand, and a performance in the office on the evening of Friday 15 September 2006.

Email Invitations

I made individual email invitations to 2X people, and after most of these had been sent, I sent to group emails. The body of the email was of the form,

To first name surname,

Please find attached an invitation to the 'rest' project and show

Thank you,

Brent Harris

The invitations were sent as PDF attachments, and were convoluted and unworkably long letters of 'invitation'. Each differed from the others to a greater or lesser extent. Examples are given in appendix 1.

- The email invitation was a threshold, an "always divisible border", as Peggy Kamuf (2002, p. 2) describes Derrida's notion of a border. Was it inside or outside the piece? It was intended to operate as a threshold of passage that was to produce a charge in the space.

Foster et al (2004) note that Bourriaud (2002) advocates practices in which the artist may assume a number of roles such as curator, event organiser, publicist, and so on. The 'direct marketing' approach of the *rest* Project and the as-if appropriation of 'public address' in *Spatial Test,* share the adoption of a number of roles by the artist in "relational" art. Foster et al. note that such institutional roles were assumed parodically by "institutional critique" artists Marcel Broodthaers and Michael Asher. Beshty contrasts this critical orientation with "Relational Aesthetics" art in which Beshty suggests that artists "simply adopt these roles, they do not reflexively dismantle them" (para. 8., 2005 http://backissues.textezurkunst.de/). In regard to this I am interested in an undecidability between the seriousness and nonseriousness of the email advertising of The *rest* project.

- I must admit that this email invitation, as much as it is convoluted, repetitive, and ridiculous, does not over-explain or over-contextualise the project.

Reflections on the email invitation

- The shifting of the subject of the sentence among a number of identities, "the project", the *rest* project, and the "artist-student", registers the project's filiation and location with regard to AUT and CNZ.

- Perhaps the email attempts to second guess everything that might happen in the performance, including sending off contingencies by saying that they might arise. The invitations involved a projection of how the person would read the invitation, a kind of paranoia. With regard to

process, the writing of the email invitations became a kind of rehearsal of the performance itself, in that the writing involved a projection or imagining of me or the audience members at the event. The invitations were almost like saying, "this has all been worked out in advance", or they were produced in an obsessive relation to the kind of difference that Derrida (2001) talks about in *Typewriter Ribbon* between the "machine" and the "event". Of course the performance text would and did escape my attempts at prediction.

- The textual voice frequently projects its expectations onto the reader, these are perhaps most explicit in the phrase "as you may be aware".

- In the emails I attempted to begin a one to-one relationship prior to the event. Sending the emails individually was an attempt to relate to each person individually. This set up an unworkable one to one relationship that could not be maintained. In this sense individual emails were a little like a direct-marketing approach, working or playing with the idea that if people are invited individually, they will feel important, and be more likely to come. The email is equivocal in regard to its specificity, i.e., in paragraph five, "I would like to say that there is some variation in the content of email invitations…" Perhaps telling the invitee that the email invitations are similar but different activated questions of what the other invitees were told, how much the other invitees know, and what these differences of information might mean at the "performance proper".

- Many of the invitations explained that: "Part of the intention of this way of inviting potential members of the audience is to initiate the development of an expectation among them."

- By saying that there may be some members of the audience who have not received an email invitation I was trying to refer to different levels of initiation to the project. The *intention* was to try to activate differences between audience members, although the event did not seem to perform this reading.

- In writing such long and so many email invitations I set myself an arduous task. I realised this increasingly the more I wrote. It also became increasingly apparent to me that I had a graded prioritising of people who I wanted to receive the email, which correlated with a hierarchy…

"The Performance Proper"

"Set-up"

- Video projection obliquely from one side of a walk-through space to another, to a corner of the space. If audience members were to proceed through the space from the entry they would need to cross through the beam of the projection. This projection was "*Western Springs Birds Video*" playing on a loop.

- Television monitor playing into a corner opposite the video projection.

- A Macintosh laptop with the programme "sound studio" open, sitting on a table just by the door to an outdoor courtyard.

- An ad-hoc PA system using a microphone connected via a mini-preamp, to two old computer speakers.

Performance Precis

- From 5pm I moved around the office space, performing the following tasks; bringing food and drink out to the audience, one item at a time.

- Recording announcements on the mac laptop and playing them back

- Making announcements on the PA system

- Later in the performance I moved the television monitor to another corner

I tried to activate differences in the levels of initiation of the audience by referring to the email invitations.

In what the email invitations refer to as the "performance proper", as in *Spatial Test,* I often attempted to describe what was happening at the time, "the audience is gathering" etc., or reflections on how I was feeling "I really wanted to disrupt the opening".

In focusing on the task of making announcements on the PA system, recording announcements on the laptop, putting food or drink out, or later in the performance, moving equipment, for the most part I didn't converse with audience members, and maintained a psychological distance from them. Late in the performance I announced that I would shift to a mingle and converse mode.

The audience

Many of the audience were known to me. It seemed as if, for the most part, they were unaffected by my announcements, and were happy to drink, eat, and talk among themselves. Even though with each announcement I addressed the audience directly, the announcements had a kind of pointlessness about them. After hearing a few, it wasn't as if the audience needed to take any great heed of them even though they were made in a serious tone.

Given that most audience members knew at least a few of the other audience members, that there were drinks and food, albeit in scarce supply at the beginning as I brought items out one by one, the event became like how Claire Bishop (2004) described Rirkrit Tiravanija' work as I outlined above. A less successful aspect of The *rest* project resembled Joe Scanlan's (2005) criticism of relational art, that is, contra to my intention to produce a space of negotiation, "the group… ended up exchanging pleasantries or planning dinner". Bishop quotes Liam Gillick: "Gillick is happy for viewers to "just stand with their backs to the work" (Bishop 2004, p. 60). The piece did attract people's attention at different times, but at other times it resembled such a situation.

- The *rest* project tried to make to its audience an equivocal demand or provocation. I was concerned with how to engender an event which invites audience members to feel an undecidability between a sense that they are transgressing the rules set by the piece, and a sense that they are compliant with the piece. To approach this, the project participated in the conventions of an art opening. In this conventional context the piece attempts to make an equivocal request or demand by asking members of the audience to do something that they are already doing, or by describing something that seems readily apparent. Through the placement of the video projections and monitors I was attempting to set up a situation in which the audience members and I were required to negotiate space. This turned out to be almost completely ineffectual.

Perhaps this description was a repetition or folding of the event back on itself. Among the aims in repeating or folding the context was to question and disclose operations of "the proper" of the theatre or gallery. In relation to these aims it would seek to have audience members asking themselves such questions as "What are we supposed to do, is this piece interactive or not, has it started/finished yet, is this part of the performance or not?"

- A reference for this over-explanation is the deadpan character of naming work used by the artist Martin Creed, for example, his installations *Half the Air in a Given Space* (2004)*,* or *EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT* (2006) (http://www.martincreed.com/works/index.html retrieved 10.9.2007)*.* I aimed that over-explanation would operate as a ruse that is repeatedly

exposed as a ruse, and so open questions around the framing of the event, and the kind of artifice operating in the performance.

-        I have aligned repetition with over-explanation in the project. Perhaps repetition engenders a sense for audience members that they should be doing something, or that they haven't got it yet, thus there is a need for the performer to repeat himself.

-        The method of over-explanation attempted to explore an undecidability of the performer's location inside and outside the work – it was considered that explanation would involve a sense of stepping outside the work. To be inside the work would be to be doing the piece itself. "Let me explain" would seem to offer the artist-student the possibility of escape or refuge.

December Performance

Wednesday 13 December 2006, 6-6.45pm. The audience and I moved between different places within, or in the close vicinity of AUT.

Below is the email invitation:

Hi everyone,

I will be doing a performance at AUT on Wednesday 13 December as part of my MPhil research. Meet outside St Paul Street Gallery, at the entrance to the WM building, St Paul Street at 6.00pm. It will be outside so dress for the weather. It would be great to see you there.

Brent

- The email invitation is clearly different in length and tone to the email invitations of The *rest* project. In its familiarity it invokes a family scene, or the sense that I sent it to a group of initiates or insiders. This was only partly true however as I sent it to the New Zealand Dance News Email List, many of the recipients of which I do not know. While less intimidating than sending individual invitations to Elam lecturers as in The *rest* project, I did not know who would arrive. An air of familiarity; that the audience is sympathetic to me as the performer, that I am performing to a group of initiates becomes increasingly apparent through the 45 minutes of the performance. This could be seen as at least in part due to the departure of several of the audience who were less on the "inside" after the first twenty minutes or so.

Documentation

My discussion of the video documentation divides into two related explorations; a questioning of the video recordings produced, and an exploration of the effects of the performance of videoing during the performance.

The Video Document

- The documentation is an "aide memoir". The video images help me to remember the performance. After viewing it, my memory of the performance has become an amalgam of memories of the event "itself" -unmediated by video, and memories of the video images.

- The video is an "outside" view of me, it enables me to see me from a point of view in some way similar to what a member of the audience might have, such that I can imagine myself in the place of a member of the audience. I can play back the video and read myself; try to assess success or failure, recognise tics and habits, assess how my performance is similar or different from other performances.
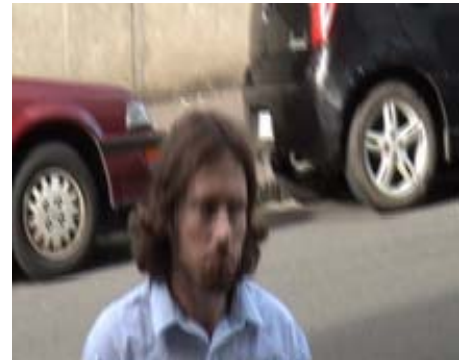
- It is raw footage that may be used for subsequent pieces. It could become a camera-person's work, or a collaboration between me and a camera-person; a work of shared authorship.

- It is a record that can be reproduced and used to contribute to this exegesis, and that I can use to disseminate, promote and market my practice to galleries, other institutions, and festivals. As such it has potential career and economic significance to me. As much as a dissemination of the practice, it is a verification that I actually did do the performance, and that it isn't (only) a work of fiction produced in the exegesis.

- It is a document that I must restrict access to for reasons of the protection of privacy and anonymity. In that the videos record members of the audience I have a responsibility to those people in relation to the future uses of the footage, which has recorded audience members' facial expressions, movements, things said, and so on. I did not consider the possibility of asking members of the audience to sign a release form to give their permission for future uses of the footage, which would be to ask them to give up rights of ownership of their image. This issue highlights questions of whether the audience members were inside or outside of the performance, and where they are to be situated with regard to the positions "audience member", "participant" or "performer".

- They are traces of the camera-people, who themselves are not recorded by their camera, but their movement and camera direction is. The video produced is a record of large and subtle movements, breathing, and vocalisations of the person operating the camera, at the same time as they are visually absent from the scene.

The Performance of Videoing

What were the effects of the cameras "within" the performance? Of course many of such effects begin with recognition of the camera's function of recording or copying - from a certain angle, with a certain object of focus and so on - the unfolding of the "present" event, and making it available in a future, to another audience, even if that audience is only the student-researcher. As a readily visible part of the piece, the cameras affected the production of a context, and produced spatial relations - behind camera/in front of camera, inside of frame/outside of frame, audible to the microphone/inaudible to the microphone. Perhaps, for Massumi (1997), the camera would be like a part-

subject, affecting a set of spatial relations and forces, and arraying audience members and performer as a group of part-objects in a field. One index for the way that people may have been affected by the camera-person would be their location among the following nominations; artist-student, audience, camera-person, and "passer-by". I will outline possible effects of the camera-people below.

- The *camera-people* perform a designation of me as "performer", and of the event as "a performance", particularly for the passer-by. While the audience members and I perform unusual activities within AUT or in public space, that would otherwise be in "everyday" states, the *camera-people* perform what J.L. Austin (1962) might have called an "etiolation" (p. 22) of such strangeness; a kind of bracketing, they are also what Derrida writes of in his introduction to *Without Alibi* (2002) as parentheses; alibis, such that passers-by would be given to think, "There's a camera; it's not so unusual, they're doing a performance", or perhaps "…they're making a video"[7]. To

Austin, to etiolate a performative is to weaken it, to remove it from the "real" and place it in the artificial. As I outlined in the Philosophical Provocations section above, one of his examples of language that is weak or parasitical on everyday language is that spoken by actors in the theatre. The *camera-people* (even if only their operation of a common *handy cam*) made a frame, a theatrical space, around performer and audience, enclosing the event, making it discrete, such that it could be easily contained within an overarching normality, rather than something *really* strange. In this sense, the *camera-people*, as such an alibi, weakened the performance as a "live" piece. Conversely, again from the point of view of the passer-by, the performer-audience framed the *camera-person.* Perhaps the less everyday the event, the more parenthesising and normalisation the event gave to the *camera-*

person. Perhaps this implies that the more the event became merely a group of people standing around or walking along the street, the more strange the camera-people would have become, ("Perhaps they are tourists?")

- For the audience "proper", that is, those who knew the event was a performance, perhaps the *camera-person* periodically entered awareness as a reminder that the event is a "performance" and, by recording me more than anyone else; that I am the "performer", particularly when I simply stand among the group. Perhaps in this way the *camera-person* contributed to the production of a kind of distance between me and the audience even as I moved among them in close spatial proximity in a way analogous to the microphone in *Spatial Test* (2006) as I described above.

- The *camera-person* underscores the academic frames of the piece, saying that it, rather than only happening for itself, or for the audience, has a future significance in relation to research and documentation. Perhaps the *camera-people* "said," "This event is not only for you as the "live" audience or chance passer-by, it also will have a life beyond what you experience here and now," or

"You are the (privileged?) first audience of an event important enough for me to record it." With regard to this academic context, the camera points towards a future in which my and the audience's images will be reviewable and manipulable, by someone outside of the conditions of mutual visibility operating in the event-space, perhaps me as the artist-student-researcher. By way of its relation to the future, the camera would seem in some way to strengthen the event.

- Therefore, in regard to the above, perhaps on one hand the *camera-person* would seem to weaken the event by revealing its artificiality, and on the other hand, to strengthen the event, make it more potent, by giving it an unpredictable future.

- As I watch the footage, it is clear that people relate to the camera in different ways, some turn their faces away, while others seem comfortable, and some play with being on or off camera.

- *Camera-person*: Mark Jackson, a white middle aged man. My primary supervisor; some of those at the performance knew that Mark was my supervisor, some did not. There is the opening of a question of filiation; in which play the terms supervisor-supervisee, father-son. This is another sense in which the *camera-person* parenthesised the performance. Was to video the work to intensify a supervisory gaze? I asked my supervisor to play a role usually not played by someone with the status of supervisor. There is a

sense in which Mark was playing the role of assistant, carrying out my instructions to video. Having my supervisor involved on the margins of the performance is a little close for comfort. Perhaps it would be read that Mark was over involved in the project, without enough distance to supervise effectively. Perhaps it would be read that I was overly reliant on or over identified with my supervisor, and/or the institution.

- *Camera-person:* A female friend, Kerryn McMurdo, someone I have collaborated with on recent projects.

- Cameras: Small "low end" mini DV cameras, evoking a home video as much as an art project.

- In terms of "inside knowledge", or level of initiation or involvement in the event, the *camera-people* would seem to be located between performer and audience. Perhaps there was a gradient of proximity that would be artist-researcher – supervisor – *camera-people* – audience proper – passers by. In the event that we are all seen by a chance passer-by, we all become performers, and the passer-by is our audience. In the case that the *camera-people* were seen to have inside information about the performance, particularly if the audience member knew that Mark is my supervisor, or that Kerryn had been a collaborator on previous performances; the camera-people could thus have provided audience members with cues as to where to look and how to behave.

- The camera-people would be a reminder of the video surveillance that operates in public spaces, including AUT.

-How might such effects have related to other parts of the performance? In considering the hypothesised effects above, I suggest that perhaps the identity of the camera moves between two poles; one of "prop", the other as "proper camera".

The *camera-person*, in performing a *task* would seem to align with the rejection of theatrical artifice (pretence) of such performance works as Chris Burden's *shoot* (1971), in which a friend shot him in the arm (Carlson, 1996). The *camera-person* performs its function of recording the event, in that sense it is not pretending, that is, it is not a prop. Or, it is not *only* a prop.

Itinerary /   Place/Site/Territory   Boundary and Threshold

- The performance made an itinerary between a number of places and spatial signifiers at which it rested for a while, which were within, or not far outside the bounds of the institution: the paved area outside St Paul Street Gallery (which is on the ground floor the WM building, the newest of the two main buildings used by the School of Art and Design), the foyer of the WM building, the lifts and stairs to level two, the postgraduate media studio on level two, back down the lift/stairs through the foyer to where we had met, across to the other side of St Paul Street, some of the way down Lorne Street towards the central city, back the other way "up" St Paul Street, and left back into AUT onto the raised walkway above Hikuwai Plaza. The space between these signifiers is a territory of AUT and of particular departments within it. It is my territory with respect to my designation as an AUT postgraduate student. Members of the audience were differently familiar with the space. I will introduce some prominent signifiers or locales:

> St Paul Street Gallery – My email invitation orients invitees to the performance with regard to this contemporary art gallery that is part of AUT, showing Art and Design work from AUT, from New Zealand and overseas.

St Paul Street and Lorne Street, public spaces in which members of the public encountered the performance

The walkway above Hikuwai Plaza – An institutional vantage point which offers a survey of the plaza below, and the city beyond. With regard to the plaza, it is reminiscent of "the gods" in a theatre in that it provides an elevated view close to the performance space. With regard to De Certeau's (1984) distinction between the panoptic and the itinerary, looking down would engage the strategics of the map rather than the tactics of the itinerary.

Relational and Non-Relational Aesthetics

- I arrive at the paved area from inside the School of Art and Design's new building. As if by way of an alibi for actually starting, I briefly chat with a few of the audience members.

- In *December Performance* we arrive inside the WM building and wait outside the lifts. I have said that we are going to level two. An audience member asks "Can we go up the stairs?" "Oh yeah, level two", some audience members are going to level two by the lift and the lift door has closed, while others are waiting for another lift. One of the group who had started walking up the stairs calls out something (from the video recording I learnt it was "We can't") and they return down the stairs. I say "are the stairs locked?", "Yeah", the person replies. In asking this question, I feel that I have moved with regard to genre. I press the button for the lift and register this change by saying, to those nearby, "Just trying to be matter of fact".

In asking "Is it locked?" I attempt to step outside of the "theatrical" and into "the everyday". I try to say it on the same level, to diminish any sense in which I know what is going to happen. I want to take care of this audience member, careful not to make the group feel as if they had been tricked to attempt the stairs. So I try to drop some kind of artifice or theatricality, and speak plainly to the person whose idea it had been to go up the stairs.

- I am standing in front of the doors to the WM building, having made the announcement that we would "Go inside to have a look at Martin Creed's website," the audience is facing me from further towards the street. Behind me, the doors open from the inside, a woman who I am acquainted with hesitates immediately outside the doors as she appears to realise that there is a performance taking place, and questions how she might make her way out to the street, appearing slightly self-conscious. We make eye contact and I make an apologetic gesture to say that it's okay for her to leave, that I am prepared to accommodate her passing through, or to the side of, the performance. I walk to the side between just in front of the doors that they have just emerged from, and the wall of the gallery so that she would have a clearer exit to the other side without having to walk in the space between me and the audience, to try to deactivate that space with the idea that if I shifted to the side, so would the gaze of the audience. She walked to her right and made her way to the street. Perhaps the arrival through the door of this person who is a passer-by, or passer-through the performance creates another doubling of real/artificial.

- I attempt to monitor my participation in "Brent in general" and "Brent in performance". Sometimes I would not want people to make the mistake of misinterpreting "Brent in Performance" as "Brent in general". That is, if I felt that I was doing something within the context of the performance that would be seen to be rude, annoying, disgusting, I would hope that this was seen with the designation "Brent in Performance". My performances continually run this risk. Perhaps my performances are produced in the compulsion to return to this risk.

Zizek's (1997) conversation with regard to "screen personae" (p. 137) in cyberspace, as discussed above in the Philosophical Provocations section, would seem to be relevant to the idea of the performance as a mask:

> I know I'm not like that… but it's nice, from time to time, to forget one's true self and put on a more satisfying mask (p. 137)

> … the screen persona I create for myself can be 'more myself' than my 'real life' persona… in so far as it reveals aspects of myself I would never dare to admit in RL

Body / Space

- After I have "come clean" about the failure to connect to Martin Creed's website, I get out of my chair and walk to the opposite end of the studio, which is hidden from view by partitions, a few seconds pass, and then I can be heard shouting "50 50 50 50 50 50 50….." Audience members gradually make their way to where they can see me. I continue dancing for a moment as the first few people arrive. Then stop, as if disturbed unexpectedly, then begin similar movements. The dance-vocal section foregrounds a relation of talking with materiality and the body. This had been pre-figured in the gathering on the level two foyer where amongst my preamble to entering the studio, bent my knees "MPhil practice based, *practice-based*" "Practice based".

- As I am packing the laptop up after the dance section, I talk to the audience, not to refer to what is happening but to something other than what I am doing, saying "Otherwise you're sort of putting all your eggs in one basket…" With this aside, I try to send them elsewhere. I talk to the audience as if to make conversation or distract or entertain them while I do this task. There is a different sense of time, which is the time it actually takes to pack up the laptop because, performance or not, I can't leave it in the studio.

- Then I stand among the audience, participating in the genre of "audience", mimicking the audience by standing as-if waiting, or gathering myself and planning what to do next.

- What emerged most prominently in this work was a question of how I might learn of the desire of the audience members, and the effect of my projections of what I thought they wanted. How far can I push them? How much can I tolerate? How long before an impulse of anger breaches the politeness? My next decision will be informed by what I think they are thinking. Later conversations with audience members suggested that what I thought they were feeling was quite different to what they were feeling.

- After leaving the studio WM building we return to "front of house" in front of the gallery where we had first met. Of interest is what sense of repetition this return produces. Clearly, for one thing, some of the sense of expectation has gone; now we are "in" the performance. I stroll around for a minute or so, then continue walking slowly away from the group and cross over St Paul Street, at a certain point I get far enough away that the audience begins to move to follow. It's as if I am not fulfilling my duty as a tour-guide. I continue walking west along St Paul Street towards town, and begin walking down Lorne Street. I check to see if people are following, eventually come back, talk to one of the less mobile members of the audience, and then stroll in the opposite direction along St Paul Street. For a while there is a lack of urgency.

- I had decided that *Anticipating Dragging,* The *rest* project, and *the next approach,* were stingy in their lack of content. It was as if these pieces had eschewed content to the point that their content was to refer to themselves. In an attempt to rectify this, I wrote a story that I would tell as part of *December Performance.*

I began telling the story on the raised walkway. As if to confide in the audience I say "I prepared a story", this recalls *Anticipating Dragging* in which Kerryn and I refer to the process of producing the piece

-After arriving back from the Plaza, I make the acknowledgement "... there's kind of a lot of repetition isn't there, in this story….

- "I'm gonna say that that's enough, actually, so um, yeah, (LAUGHTER)... torturous I don't know if it's torturous for you or me but um (laughter and I laugh) cause I think, if it looks torturous to you, then I start to get a little bit, concerned…"

–Perhaps an effect of the repetitions in the piece are to produce gaps, in the senses of effectuate and reveal, (Levinas, 1961), a gap between the subject and the object. Perhaps as audience members, as time passes, the announcement having been made that they would look at Martin Creed's website, they would expect that the duration between now and the moment in the future that they see the thing to be diminishing, however, the repetition seems to bring us back and reinstitute a gap of time between us and the website. And the audience members would not know when the repetition would end. Perhaps desire to see the website, if there was any, referred to intensified with each repetition, perhaps their desire kept moving elsewhere. Perhaps they identify with me the performer, and want to rescue me from the self-imposed repetition.

Repetition could also be considered as a rhetorical device. Perhaps repetition was a way of keeping a question in play, of heightening a relation to the constative content of what I am saying by drip-feeding it to the audience. There was a drip feeding in the sense that, some repetitions would go a little further than the previous ones, adding a little more information to what had already been said.

- Of course, I may reflect on my own desire, on what entered into conscious awareness, or enters into conscious awareness when I view the video footage, at the same time admitting the alterity of the unconscious. Any attempt to detect the desire of the audience would be guesswork, based on their bodily movements, what people said, facial expressions, laughter, and so on. But this would be a projection and it would remain a guess

But in some way my performance responds to the audience. There is a kind of improvisation in the performance; it is not that I simply carry out a performance that is wholly pre-planned or "set", or even attempt to do so. My engagement moves between remembering a plan, trying to activate my concerns, and checking the audience, attempting to gauge; are they interested, are they bored, frustrated, angry, would they like that, would they mind moving far, how much boredom, frustration, or anger will they tolerate before they leave or express their feelings in some other way, which ones are enjoying it and which ones aren't? And so on. So the desire of the audience individually and collectively is a question for me in the performance, what I imagine it to be affects me, and I respond to this reading and fantasy. Perhaps I am negotiating between two impulses that often seem to be pulling or pushing in different directions, one is to please the audience, this would often mean to provide them with what they came for, a performance, perhaps at times to entertain them; it is gratifying for me to have the audience laugh. Another impulse is to remain faithful to the exploration

of ideas that I have planned to carry out. I try not to give in to the temptation to get the audience on my side. But of course there are many reversals that could take place in this negotiation, to not provide immediate entertainment could be to gratify them and have them on my side and so on. In a sustained pause, there is a certain threshold of impetus that needs to be passed before the pause is broken. Furthermore, as I pointed out with regard to the familiarity of the email invitation, in the second half of the DVD documentation it becomes increasingly apparent to me that I am performing to initiates, mainly friends, and in this sense it becomes a kind of 'family scene', in which audience members may be happy to go along with the performance because of these relationships. There was also a building up of familiarity over the duration of the performance (like Bourriaud's [2002)] "conviviality"?), a sense that we have been through x minutes of this "together".

The question of how much the audience knows about me and about the performance is therefore important to my decision making during the performance. What are the levels of initiation that each member of the audience has? How many of my performances of mine have they seen? Are they "dance" people, "art" people, how familiar are they with questions of performativity, deconstruction, and so on. How much am I similar or different to members of the audience? The audience members, including the *camera-people,* had a range of initiation levels to the project, perhaps this opened the risk and temptation of "in-jokes". Clearly in this context, Derrida's "The Law of Genre" (1992) would provide a reference, with many contradictory engagements with the world and the performance. Also, I can't have been equally disposed toward all members of the audience. This was a group of associates; I cannot say there were not feelings of rivalry. Perhaps I shape my performance to tailor it to certain members of the audience who happen to be there on the night. This would be like the audience priority list that came to be revealed in the email invitation process of The *rest* project.

Conclusion

In this exegesis I have attempted to articulate the main philosophical and artistic provocations for the project, contextualise the project, and document and discuss the major performance pieces. The exegesis, as a practice of recognising, interpreting, describing, explaining, commenting, narrating, arguing, questioning, judging, and deciding - all in *différance* - identifies itself, in *différance*, with the said. As such the main task I have attempted in the exegesis is to give evidence, to show the research. The main task I have given, in part retrospectively, via documentation and the exegesis, to the performance pieces is to perform a showing of the (performative) saying (that I am still describing here as performative), that is, to perform a reduction of the said such as that which Levinas in *Otherwise than Being* (1981) suggests as "a philosopher's effort" (p. 44).

I suggested that this reduction may be a possible ethico-political signification of art. That is, reduction of the said such that the saying is rendered apparent, which is also the interruption of totality by ethics. At first glance, and remembering that I speak as a participant but not a member of the genre "performance artist", performance would seem to be exemplarily placed to carry out such a practice. But this is not necessarily true. It would be like the error that Claire Bishop (2004) attributes to "open-ended", "relational" art, of conflating an empirical practice with a metaphysical condition of possibility. Among its many shortcomings, as I have outlined above, perhaps the notion of "relational aesthetics" is instructive in that it reminds us that art reception is always temporal and unfixed. The project began, as did the exegesis, with a question of "What is performance?" To the extent that it engages with this question the project remains haunted by the designation of the saying as performative, in that a certain circularity is apparent. Partly in response to this, the project has shifted its enquiry to an exploration of how the saying might be shown in a performance practice. But another, perhaps more compelling reason for a shift from a question of "What is performance?", to an exploration of an approach, (a methodography?) to the showing of the saying are the deeper political resonances of such an engagement.

But to return to the task, (and the question?) of the showing of the saying; the reduction that would operate in the performance projects would be a reduction effectuated as a serial interruption or hesitation. This practice of reduction would have a paradoxical relation to the ontological mode of methodology. In that paradox, a methodography is suggested.

I am not saying that all performances of repetition, or all repetitions in my performances, perform a reduction of the said. Neither am I saying that my performance pieces have carried out a *sériature*. For one thing I think *sériature* as a tying together in many different ways of the interruptions of the text, would be too much for me (in the way of a loyal son) to claim "at this moment". However, perhaps my performances have performed a certain reduction of the said.

I also note that this is a non-conclusion in that I will perform another performance piece on March 30 as part of, or prior to, the viva examination. This piece will attempt to further the exploration outlined.
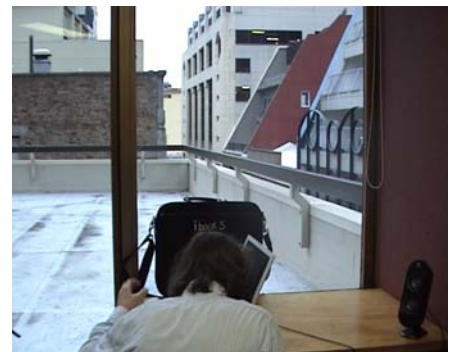
The *rest* project (2006)

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Appendix 1: Documentation of works in video, and audio, see DVD inside cover

Appendix 2: Sample email invitation to the *rest* project

To first name surname,

Invitation

You are invited to the opening of my project *rest* at the Auckland offices of Creative New Zealand, on Friday 15 September 2006. As you may be aware the Creative New Zealand offices are located on the third floor of the Southern Cross Building on the corner of High Street and Victoria Street, Auckland.

Please be aware that it is useful for me to consider that the start of the event proper is at 5.00pm. The project intends that the performance will take place according to a planned and anticipated timeline, but will also allow for and expect contingencies. It is the desire of the artist - student that the event will stop at 6.45pm, and that all members of the audience will have left the site by 7pm. There is therefore anticipated to be a period of fifteen minutes between the end of the performance 'proper' and the time when I hope and expect all members of the audience to have made their way out of the offices. You are welcome to arrive at any time between 5.00pm and 6.45pm, and are also able to leave during this time.

Apart from two email invitations to a group, email invitations to the performance event have been sent individually. The *rest* project does not request you to forward this message to your networks, but of course you may if you feel that this is appropriate.

I would like to say that there is some variation in the content of email invitations. However, those emailed so far have received similar information from me as the artist - student, and each of the invitations are written in a similar tone and with a similar structure. The overwhelming majority of this email invitation is the same as has been sent to a number of potential audience members. Please note that the important information of "when", "where" (site), and "who" has been put in the above section of the email invitation, and that what is below may be less important.

Further, on the issue of the *rest* project's concern for the individual the communal, the email invitations that have been sent have a number of common threads running through them, such that there is a way in which many audience members will receive a commonality of sequences within the context of the email invitation as an initiating part of the project. Part of the intention of this way of inviting potential members of the audience is to initiate the development of an expectation among them. The project is interested in the idea that these expectancies projected by the *rest* project, in particular in its' emailed invitations, may be communicated via a number of means between members of the audience in such a way that this contributes to the successful and non-threatening activation of the Creative New Zealand offices site, and that the "emailings" become a way for the artist's – student's project to draw attention towards itself as a kind of epicentre.

Of course, I would like to say that it is felt to be likely that in the event of the performance proper, there will be people in the audience who have not received either an individual or collective email directly from me as the artist - student, or read an invitation posted to another, but have found out

about the event through word of mouth, or another way. These members of the audience are also very much welcome to the event proper, although they may perhaps be less informed as to the contexts of the project. The way in which the members of the audience might communicate the contextual aspects of the project's concerns to other people is of interest to the artist-student, although the project must set certain limits on the consideration of its effects It is expected by me that if you feel that it is okay for you to come along to the event you will be among a group of 10-40 people attending the event as members of its audience. I would like to say it clearly that it is unknown how many people and audience members will be in the offices site when you cross the threshold between the foyers and the offices site into the offices proper. The offices have a limited capacity for people at any one time; the artist - student provisionally estimates this number to be around 40. There is a possibility that the offices will be full and that you may be faced with a decision as to whether to wait outside, either in the foyer of level three, or return to the ground floor and go away and then come back, or simply leave without coming back to the event. You may be aware that there is also an open air deck space, outside the offices which is expected to be made available to the event. The project may engage with the deck space if it is a fine evening. Of course it is considered likely by me as the artist – student that overcrowding of the offices may not become an issue.

I would like to recall involvement in a recent performance event called *Lazy Susan and Smelly John,* curated by the artist Mark Harvey. This event took place from 5.30-7.30pm on Tuesday 5 May, at St Paul Street Gallery, WM building, AUT. The artist - student would like to associate the *rest* project with *Lazy Susan and Smelly John*, while differentiating the *rest* project from the same event. Some people who are invited to the *rest* project may also have planned to attend *Lazy Susan and Smelly John* as audience members or participating artists. It is anticipated that the *rest* project, as a performance event ten days subsequent to *Lazy Susan and Smelly John,* may have reminded you in some ways of this previous event, in the case that you attended *Lazy Susan and Smelly John* and the *rest* project. This email invitation is attempting to invite you to the latter, and you may comply if you feel that this would be appropriate. The *rest* project considers that there are important and clear contextual differences, and would like to point one of these out to you in this invitation; that *Lazy Susan and Smelly John* is recalled as a group show in an AUT gallery space, while the *rest* project is anticipated to be a show by one AUT artist-student in the CNZ offices site.

The somewhat formal tone of most of this invitation is partly inspired by what the *rest* project is provisionally calling the marketing and publicity approach of cante chiCo. I would like to say that cante chiCo installed and performed the third of five installation projects at the Creative New Zealand Offices by AUT students in 2006. The artist-student would like to acknowledge in this email invitation, a relation of partial inheritance, and my affect of inspiration, to the previous project at the Creative New Zealand offices, the project of cante chiCo, the directors of this project are Aaron Hurley, and Melissa Durbin, who are both affiliated to AUT. What the artist-student provisionally calls "the cante chiCo project" employed the medium of email to engage with members of the audience in what I would like to recall as a mode of proposal, this project reached a kind of culmination in an auction-like event, what cante chiCo called a "bidding war" that took place in the Creative New Zealand offices site on Thursday 31 August. Of course I as the artist – student consider that there are important contextual and other differences between these two separate projects.

If you feel that it is okay to take up this invitation and attend the performance evening of the *rest project* as an audience member, as you are being invited to do, it is provisionally requested by the project that, when you arrive at the Creative New Zealand Offices, you cross the threshold between the level three foyers and the office space proper into the office space proper without unnecessary delay. You are part of a group of invited people who have been invited to follow this restriction. You will be permitted to politely converse with other audience members inside the office site proper. Part of the approach of the project is to regulate the audience flow into the site through this

kind of request, which you are permitted to not follow if you feel that this is appropriate. Further, you are able and permitted to enter and exit the offices at any time between 5.00pm and 6.45pm. However, the project does ask for a certain degree of patience on the evening. In this regard, food and drinks are planned to be served.

Part of the approach of the *rest* project is to explore the possibilities of emphasising certain chosen contexts for the project. One way that the *rest* project approaches the exploration that it also calls framing is through an approach of what it provisionally proposes to call *over-contextualisation* and *over-explanation*. This approach is a part of what the project is attempting, hoping, and anticipating to do in this emailed invitation. The email invitations are considered to be an important aspect of the approaches of *over-contextualisation* and *over-explanation,* which are provisionally considered by me to be closely related to one another. One way that it is intended that *over explanation* will take place is anticipated to be through the project's use of an ad-hoc public address (PA) system. At the time of writing, the artist-student anticipates that he may offer explanations and descriptions of some of the activities in the performance proper that have already taken place, or that are anticipated to happen as part of the performance proper of the *rest* project.

There are several other aspects to the project that it would like to draw attention towards. In the opening performance, it is expected that there will be a videorecording playing on a television monitor. At the time of writing, the video images that have been prepared are based around an exploration of framing figures in the top left corner of the frame with a mini digital video camera that is hand-held. There are three kinds of figures; cars travelling on Great North Road viewed from the Western Springs Park outer fields, an *Auckland City* sign giving information about Western Springs, and seagulls and geese in Western Springs Park. This way of framing is one of the ways in which the rest project attempts to explore issues of framing, or context.

To put it plainly, if you do decide to take up this invitation and are able to come along and be part of the audience at this experimental performance event, you may be reminded of the ideas the project discusses in the above section of this invitation. One way that it is intended that *over explanation* will take place is through the artist-student's use of an ad-hoc public address (PA) system. At the time of writing, the artist-student anticipates that he will offer explanations and descriptions of some of the activities he is performing, has already performed, or plans and hopes to perform as part of the performance proper of the *rest* project.

There are certain other acknowledgements that the project desires to make, and certain of these will be made as part of the performance proper. The project is part of a research project at AUT, and as such, supervisors have been involved. The project wishes to say that it is likely that early drafts of this text have been scrutinised by the supervisors of the project, and a staff member at the Auckland offices of Creative New Zealand has also looked at the invitations as a matter of procedure, however, the final decisions as to its composition have been made by the artist – student.

Please be aware that this email will be retained by the artist-student, **minus your name and email address**, as part of the documentation of this project, that is to say, this email may enter the public domain, most likely within the larger project's exegesis. However, any response by you to this email will not enter the public domain.

Brent Harris

To first name Surname,

Invitation

You are invited to the opening of my project *rest* at the Auckland offices of Creative New Zealand, on Friday 15 September 2006. As you may be aware the Creative New Zealand offices are located on the third floor of the Southern Cross Building on the corner of High Street and Victoria Street, Auckland.

Please be aware that it is useful for me to consider that the start of the event proper is at 5.00pm. The project intends that the performance will take place according to a planned and anticipated timeline, but will also allow for and expect contingencies. It is the desire of the artist - student that the event will stop at 6.45pm, and that all members of the audience will have left the site by 7pm. There is therefore anticipated to be a period of fifteen minutes between the end of the performance 'proper' and the time when I hope and expect all members of the audience to have made their way out of the offices. You are welcome to arrive at any time between 5.00pm and 6.45pm, and are also able to leave during this time.

There is some variation in the content of email invitations for the *rest* project. However, those emailed so far have received similar information from me as the artist - student, and each of the invitations are written in a similar tone and with a similar structure. The overwhelming majority of this email invitation is the same as has been sent to a number of potential audience members. Please note that the important information of "when", "where" (site), and "who" has been put in the above section of the email invitation, and that what is below may be less important.

Further, on the issue of the *rest* project's concern for the individual the communal, the email invitations that have been sent have a number of common threads running through them, such that there is a way in which many audience members will receive a commonality of sequences within the context of the email invitation as an initiating part of the project. Part of the intention of this way of inviting potential members of the audience is to initiate the development of an expectation among them. The project is interested in the idea that these expectancies projected by the *rest* project may be communicated via a number of means between members of the audience in such a way that this contributes to the successful and non-threatening activation of the Creative New Zealand offices site, and that it becomes a way for the artist's – student's project to draw attention towards itself as a kind of epicentre.

Of course, I would like to say that it is likely that in the event of the performance proper, there will be people in the audience who have not received either an individual or collective email directly from me as the artist - student, or read an invitation posted to another, but have found out about the event through word of mouth, or another way. These members of the audience are also very much welcome to the event proper, although they may perhaps be less informed as to the contexts of the project. The way in which the members of the audience might communicate the contextual aspects of the project's concerns to other people is of interest to the artist-student, although the project must set certain limits on the consideration of its effects.

It is expected by me that if you feel that it is okay for you to come along to the event you will be among a group of 10-40 people attending the event as members of its audience. I would like to say it clearly that it is unknown how many people and audience members will be in the offices site when

you cross the threshold between the foyers and the offices site into the offices proper. The offices have a limited capacity for people at any one time; the artist - student provisionally estimates this number to be around 40. There is a possibility that the offices will be full and that you may be faced with a decision as to whether to wait outside, either in the foyer of level three, or return to the ground floor and go away and then come back, or simply leave without coming back to the event. You may be aware that there is also an open air deck space, outside the offices which is expected to be made available to the event. The project may engage with the deck space if it is a fine evening. Of course it is considered likely by me as the artist – student that overcrowding of the offices may not become an issue.

The somewhat formal tone of most of this invitation is part of the approach of the *rest* project. This formality is partly inspired by what the *rest* project is provisionally calling the marketing and publicity approach of cante chiCo. I would like to say to you that cante chiCo installed and performed the third of five installation projects at the Creative New Zealand Offices by AUT students in 2006. The artist-student would like to acknowledge in this email invitation, a relation of partial inheritance, and my affect of inspiration, to the previous project at the Creative New Zealand offices, the project of cante chiCo, the directors of this project are Aaron Hurley, and Melissa Durbin, who are both affiliated to AUT. What the artist-student provisionally calls "the cante chiCo project" employed the medium of email to engage with members of the audience in what I would like to recall as a mode of proposal, this project reached a kind of culmination in an auction-like event, what cante chiCo called a "bidding war" that took place in the Creative New Zealand offices site on Thursday 31 August. Of course I as the artist – student consider that there are important contextual and other differences between these two separate projects.

If you feel that it is okay to take up this invitation and attend the performance evening of the *rest project* as an audience member, as you are being invited to do, it is provisionally requested by the project that, when you arrive at the Creative New Zealand Offices, you cross the threshold between the level three foyers and the office space proper into the office space proper without unnecessary delay. You are part of a group of invited people who have been invited to follow this restriction. You will be permitted to politely converse with other audience members inside the office site proper. Part of the approach of the project is to regulate the audience flow into the site through this kind of request, which you are permitted to not follow if you feel that this is appropriate. Further, you are able and permitted to enter and exit the offices at any time between 5.00pm and 6.45pm. However, the project does ask for a certain degree of patience on the evening. In this regard, food and drinks are planned to be served.

Part of the approach of the *rest* project is to explore the possibilities of emphasising certain chosen contexts for the project. One way that the *rest* project approaches the exploration that it also calls framing is through an approach of what it proposes to call *over-contextualisation* and *over-explanation*. This approach is a part of what the project is attempting, hoping, and anticipating to do in this emailed invitation. The email invitations are considered to be an important aspect of the approaches of *over-contextualisation* and *over-explanation,* which are provisionally considered by me to be closely related to one another. One way that it is intended that *over explanation* will take place is anticipated to be through the project's use of an ad-hoc public address (PA) system. At the time of writing, the artist-student anticipates that he will offer explanations and descriptions of some of the activities in the performance proper that have already taken place, or that are anticipated to happen as part of the performance proper of the *rest* project.

There are several other aspects to the project that it would like to draw attention towards. In the opening performance, it is expected that there will be a videorecording playing on a television monitor. At the time of writing, the video images that have been prepared are based around an exploration of framing figures in the top left corner of the frame with a mini digital video camera that is hand-held. There are three kinds of figures; cars travelling on Great North Road viewed from

the Western Springs Park outer fields, an *Auckland City* sign giving information about Western Springs, and seagulls and geese in Western Springs Park. This way of framing is one of the ways in which the rest project attempts to explore issues of framing, or context.

To put it plainly, if you do decide to take up this invitation and are able to come along and be part of the audience at this experimental performance event, you may be reminded of the ideas the project discusses in the above section of this invitation. One way that it is intended that *over explanation* will take place is through the artist-student's use of an ad-hoc public address (PA) system. At the time of writing, the artist-student anticipates that he will offer explanations and descriptions of some of the activities he is performing, has already performed, or plans and hopes to perform as part of the performance proper of the *rest* project.

There are certain other acknowledgements that the project desires to make, and certain of these will be made as part of the performance proper. The project is part of a research project at AUT, and as such, supervisors have been involved. The project wishes to say that it is likely that early drafts of this text have been scrutinised by the supervisors of the project, and a staff member at the Auckland offices of Creative New Zealand has also looked at the invitations as a matter of procedure, however, the final decisions as to its composition have been made by the artist – student.

Please be aware that this email will be retained by the artist-student, **minus your name and email address**, as part of the documentation of this project, that is to say, this email may enter the public domain, most likely within the larger project's exegesis. However, any response by you to this email will not enter the public domain.

The artist - student says that if it is appropriate, you may distribute this invitation to members of your email and other networks.

Brent Harrris