

Anthony Bond.

Whose intellectual property ? some ethical and practical issues relating to ephemeral works in museums and public places. In two parts.

The first part deals with the curatorial responsibility for documenting and sometimes recreating work as a kind of collaboration with the artist.

The second looks at the collaboration of an artist with an audience which participates or possibly becomes subject matter when the work is documented.

The comments I will make do not refer to all contemporary art but can be taken to relate to all conceptually oriented art since 1912. This was when Picasso introduced a piece of patterned oil cloth into a painting thereby creating meaning within and beyond the function of representation. Pierre Restany on Monday cited 1913 and Duchamp's bicycle wheel as the turning point. I believe that the period 1912 to 1913 is an extraordinary moment in which both these artists made revolutionary discoveries. Certainly it was Duchamp who pressed the process forward after 1913.

In either case it is a certain restructuring of the relations between art and life - between symbol and index that is at stake. It is the origin of conceptual art in as much as the form, materials and processes are subordinated to or contingent upon the goal of producing content which has specific effect in the world.

Over the last decade at The Art Gallery of New South Wales we have successfully resolved a variety of objections that have been raised to the collecting of installation and ephemeral art. These objections sometimes threatened to derail our collection programme in relation to this most significant and singularly 20th Century art form. This success has been achieved in part by persuasive art historical argument but more truthfully I must acknowledge that it has depended upon successive acts of faith on the part of my Director.

Issues were raised such as the traditional expectation that art is work, the work of the artist, art work etc. The shift which has occurred for much contemporary art has been away from work produced by an artist towards an idea of working with the world or in the world. Such work may not have material form at all. I trust that this will become clearer as we progress.

At a practical level it must be admitted that storage and conservation are legitimate problems for all museums and finding suitable storage solutions for some installations can be problematic as we have heard already in this conference. In Sydney we have found that most of these problems are manageable provided there is the will. Conservation staff and curators must collaborate effectively in consultation with the artist.

Conservators must be prepared to accept that contemporary objects may not have absolute and permanent qualities but may indeed change. The nature of acceptable change however is contingent upon the ideas that gave rise to the work. Part of its meaning may be dependent on the limits and effects of nature and time. In some cases change is an inherent part of the work. Take for example the Dieter Roth chocolate covered gnome in the collection of the City of Stuttgart, this work was recently unsealed to adjust the object which had shifted in transit. When air contacted the object it oxidised becoming white which is incredibly beautiful. As with Duchamp's acceptance of the shattered Large Glass, I am sure Dieter Roth has gratefully accepted the benefits of chance.

In other cases however, the works do not have a material presence between exhibitions, existing only as a sheet of instructions or a certificate. This equates with Boltanski's idea of the artwork as "score" which Robert Fleck introduced in his talk this morning. While this solves the storage problem it is sometimes hard to persuade institutions of the relevance of investing considerable financial resources in a work which consists solely as intellectual property.

[SLIDE 1. Weiner Polaris close up] Lawrence Weiner's wall text for example came to me as a note on a postcard with a cross reference to a type face. Our workshop then painted this under my direction. Lawrence came later to give it his blessing.

[SLIDE 2. Ken Unsworth Adieu] 1985 and:

[SLIDE 3. Mike Parr O OH OOTHOP In the wings of the oedipal, theatre.].
both of these works in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales can be constructed entirely by workshop staff following the artist's written instructions. They consist of rooms of give proportions and certain interventions specified by the artist. In Unsworth's piece for example the room is almost entirely filled to mid thigh level by a white cube from around which white light emanates. There is a window in one wall with a black curtain which blows in the wind from a hidden fan. There is the sound of marching feet and a military band.

[SLIDE 4. Unsworth Suspended Stone Circle] This is basically a traditional sculpture suspended from the architecture but can have different sites. When it was acquired however it was only an idea. The artist and I subsequently went out and collected the stones from a river bed and re - created the piece. It had previously been installed at FIAC in Paris in 1985 but the materials were not retained since the work is primarily a concept in spite of its substantial physical presence once constructed.

Resolving these issues has entailed the development of practical and philosophical positions and gaining broad staff acceptance for them. I will not go into detail here because there are other more interesting questions which arise that are more aesthetic and ethical than institutional.

The most interesting of these is the relationship of curator to artist. Installation needs to be handled with judgment. I believe that all good installations are to some extent site specific, those which are not, seldom find the resistance which finally gives the work its form. From my perspective conceptual art is a fundamentally realist project which finds its resistance in the world and in the contact between the artist and the viewer.

Different spaces will therefore sometimes require new specifications to achieve the required presence. Some installations come with a template for construction but sometimes that is impractical and a statement of ethos from the artist is all that is provided. This has to be interpreted by the Curator and this will inevitably be a subjective process.

[SLIDE 5 Tony Cragg New Stones Newtons Tones]

Arrange the fragments in colour bands, the bands should not be hard edged or straight but have the feel of spectrum patterns in an oil slick. The edge of the rectangle should be crisply geometric but the pieces which form the edge should have a random orientation to the edge. Tony Cragg 1984 describing New Stones Newton's Tones. (The British Show installation.)

This instruction is highly subjective so that it is possible to be continuously tweaking the installation and never be completely satisfied.

[SLIDE 6. Richard Long Slate Cairn 1977] In spite of detailed instructions some crews will align the edges of the stones like a dry stone wall and this kills the nature/culture tension which is so critical to the meaning of Long's art.

[SLIDE 7 . Giulio Paolini L'Altra Figura] This work is well known and seems simple enough yet interpretation can be dramatically affected by the arrangement of the fragments. There are two identical busts on separate columns facing each other as in a mirror. The distance between them is not specified because of the need to adjust the installation for specific circumstances. The tension between them however is critical if the mirroring effect is to be achieved.

The fragments of the third cast lie on the ground between them. They must look as if they fell naturally. However there are two thematic readings which are mutually supportive but also require a degree of tension to be maintained between them.

If we think of the work in terms of Narcissus and the mirror effect, the fragments on the ground are like the image of the loved object in the water which will always be destroyed by the touch of the would be lover. In this case the one installing will tend to arrange the pieces to suggest the image broken by the concentric ripples in the pool. If we are content with the more obvious reference to Icarus and his fall following his approach to Apollo and therefore to forbidden knowledge, then the installation will simply seek to suggest the impact of that fall.

personally I try to get it somewhere in between so that both options co-exist. Both in their way are perfect myths for a critical if poetic reflection on the problems of representation. The responsibility these choices place on the curator is considerable because we are in some senses entering a collaborative project with the artist. The question that needs to be considered is what will happen to this collaboration over time since curators at museums come and go? One leading artist has left instructions in his will naming me as the sole arbiter of his installations after his death. While this trust is gratifying it is a terrifying burden and since I am not immortal myself I imagine I should be training a replacement in my turn.

In the mean time There are everyday problems for museums such as barriers, plinths and secure placements which protect the work but often contradict its ethos . Take for example an Yves Klein under glass! what does it mean? it certainly ceases to be an object among others in the world as he intended. It is not even possible for the blue void to function phenomenologically. I concede that uncovered they may lose their lustre in time but should we lock them away like Lascaux just to know that they once existed?

Perhaps we should discuss the unthinkable and consider remaking them in replica form for exhibition again like Lascaux.

The aura of the artist may be lost this way but the aura of the work for the viewer may be regained. This suggestion will probably be seen as sacrilege in relation to Klein whose conceptualism has become virtually supernatural in the eyes of many people. However for many contemporary artists the art work as score has become a matter of daily fact.

The greatest problem in museum environments for art that I see today comes from architects and designers who have very strong views about art and architecture which is often absolutely at odds with the basic assumptions of contemporary practice.

In my experience the prevailing wish of artists is to realise their art in the world and to make it function actively in real space. When the frame was abandoned it was not a bohemian gesture

but a philosophical point of departure. While I have not time to argue this in detail everyone here will be aware of the issues. In essence the “unframed” work of art is placed in context, it seeks to reinforce or modify our perception of the space we also occupy.

We have all seen galleries which are a designer’s fantasy but impossible for art. Even refurbished old buildings which are traditionally the best sites for modern art have had features such as arches, windows and pillars boarded over with gyproc, often with elegant panels that fail to reach the floor or ceiling. This insanity is perpetrated so that we can appreciate that there is another building underneath. This kind of theatricality works absolutely against the prevailing ethic of contemporary art.

It is possible for the artist to reflect upon such overdetermined sites and upon the relative sterility of even the best museum spaces eg; [SLIDE 8. Weiner with Miyajima] This and That put here and there out of site of Polaris is placed above the escalator which leads you down to the international contemporary space at our Museum. First installed for the Biennial of Sydney, It is a perfectly ironic reflection of its placement and context.

For other artists the street has become the site of art again. When I say again I am thinking about a medium term memory in which Tatlin created banners and revolutionary architecture. I also think of long term memory and of ancient rituals shared by communities often as cathartic and bonding experiences.

Anne Graham is an artist in Sydney who sometimes works with communities and combines installation with interactive performance in public sites within the city. She also makes pieces for museum and gallery exhibition and these often relate to the street actions directly as relics and photographs or indirectly as when they are the by product of research into the history of communities. While this may sound like social science the nature of the experience is far more personal and the resulting installations are often very aesthetically charged. I should declare that I have been a regular participant and assistant in these projects.

The street actions usually consist of soft architectural interventions in specific sites with interesting histories of informal occupation.

[SLIDE 9 - 11 Wulla Mulla]

She uses calico, illuminated by kerosene lamps to create very beautiful temporary spaces in the city where she serves food to passers by and shows films projected against the calico. This feminisation/ humanisation of sometimes very alienated parts of the inner city leads to many encounters.

The encounters are not obviously framed as art works yet Anne sees them as the main object of the work. This work took place over six weeks in the same site appearing each day and disappearing completely at midnight. The homeless people living in the park became regulars and acted as Anne’s support staff. At night they became hosts to the smart visitors lured by the unusual.

[SLIDE 12-14 Street Light] This work moved to a new site each night wherever it went there had to be water, toilets and some shelter so there always turned out to be an illicit / informal community in occupation, it was someone’s beat. [SLIDE 15-16 Nuns Pool], [SLIDE 17-19 Canberra]

Anne negotiated her presence successfully on each occasion becoming a part of the strange life of the street. No one knew it was art. If they had known it may have been alienating for them.

Would documentation of these interactions be the artist's property to display as art? [SLIDE 20 - 23. Hypothetically Public] This work involved research for a hypothetical public work in a ruined winery which had been left as an island of chaos in the middle of a highly determined housing estate. Anne interviewed many of the local inhabitants to gain some consensus about their desires for the space. The results of this research led her to propose subtle adjustable interventions in the existing spaces while leaving most of the site as a lurky place for the children to be wild in.

[SLIDE 24 - 31, Sweat] This was a performance on the streets of New York's Lower East side. This was actually a form of research in an ongoing project about the rag trade and women's labour in particular. The performance produced garments which became part of an installation called Doing Time. The information she gained by relating directly to people through her machine was of a different order than anything she might have achieved as a social worker.

Another aspect of her work entails making portraits of individuals which are built up using objects supplied by the "sitter". They are collected during interviews with the sitter over a period of time. These portraits may take the form of vitrines or installations and may include photographs of the sitter or their private space. Her principle is that the objects we collect, use and discard are significant extensions of our character.

What is the authorial relation of the subject to object in such cases? I suggest that this can only be judged on a case by case basis and that the quality of exchange and the accuracy of communication between artist and participant is critical. To attempt it is to risk infringement of ethical boundaries yet to avoid life in art seems to me to be an act of indifference or cowardice.