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essays by Franz Ehmann and Jane Eckett

august 1 - 20 1997

**SOApBOX** gallery

95 brunswick street fortitude valley 4006  
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We see we judge.

White house, white cube, white box, white trash, white heat, white noise, white hope, white wash, white lies, white Australia policy, white bread, white race, white sugar, white death, white history, white garden, white hysteria, white land, white man, white air, white rain, white march, .....

Almost everything that passes before our eyes is judged without the slightest regret or regard for choice, freedom, value and quality.

It is noise that blinds us, that negates what is in front of us. The action of blindness is endemic.

In retrospect we learn of the blind spots in history, the political blunders of the elected leaders and the recurring denials to rectify the wrong doings of previous generations. White wash at its best.

I love to provoke, to hint at the blind spot of vision, seeing, looking and believing. To coin a phrase "*seeing is believing*" but do we understand what it is we are looking at?

As John Howard puts it '*we are in the mood to look at anything that is fair and reasonable.*' But who decides what is fair and what is reasonable?

Borrowing from Italo Calvino's "*La Poubelle Agréée*" (trash bin): *It was no doubt his obedience to Christian precepts which brought my friend to accept this rule quite happily. And me? I would like to be able to say, with Nietzsche, "I love my destiny," but I can't do that until I have explained for myself the reasons that lead me to love it. Carrying out the poubelle agréée is not something I do without thinking, but something that needs to be thought about and that awakens the special satisfaction I get from thinking.* 1

Taking out the garbage is a cathartic experience, we rid ourselves of things that have outlived their usefulness. For some of us we do this with ease while others wallow in the 'white trash' of white wing paranoia.

The noise of the wheels that keep the trash bin mobile is audible once a week in the neighborhood. One wheelie bin on the footpath is the signal, our memory is jolted and street after street will repeat the ritual.

I wonder on which day the trash of Parliament House hits the footpath? Or do they incinerate their dross? The cleanest trash in Australia.

#### Sociableness

(The vision of white land: burned out, washed up, mediocre, visionless and blind.)

Louwrien Wijers: *Do you believe in democracy?*

Joseph Beuys: *Yes, democracy as a member, as an organic member of the social body is a very necessary thing. Because the problem is how people can be free and at the same time equal. Really, every creativity is different, every ability is different, a different ability or a different geniality, to stress more the positive points. Geniality means more the positive points of different abilities, but at the same time everybody has to be equal, but not in points of freedom - equal freedom portions - no, equality means equal law for everybody.*<sup>2</sup>

The few words that are on this page are fragments, separate organs and each piece is searching for a connection to another. Each word replaces or displaces meaning and understanding, only to reconnect and interrelate with another substructure which then again replaces the substructure for a mega structure and so forth. *"Transient forms sparkle in and out of existence, creating a never-ending forever newly created reality."*<sup>3</sup>

Freedom is created reality and an energy, but by itself it is worthless. Joseph Beuys argues that, "..., creativity means the science of freedom, or how self-determination, self-administration, self-government, self-responsibility, related to the point of freedom. That is the most important science, for instance for the art."<sup>4</sup>

Consciousness and awareness and enlightenment equals freedom and every part has infinite possibilities. All of these possibilities exist in the now, therefore nowness is the only consistent form apart from impermanence. *All that is solid melts into air.*

#### Consciousness

Beginning where the end has no end but a beginning. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Each work of art in this exhibition is independent. We should consider, that each artist worked from a simple brief and understand that each piece is not only related but interrelated.

One cannot exist without the other and each fragment, concept or thought is happily at home in each other. Sameness becomes difference and difference becomes otherness. The subject of this exhibition is then in reality summed up in these words: think, understand, feel, taste, cry, laugh, touch, hear, listen, forget - remember, smell, hate, love, blush, kiss, lick and heal.

Franz Ehmann



VIOLIN

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<sup>1</sup> The road to San Giovanni, Italo Calvino  
Vintage 1994, p.101

<sup>2</sup> + 4 Writing as Sculpture, Louwrien Wijers  
Academy Editions 1996, p.14

<sup>3</sup> The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Sogyal  
Rinpoche, Rider UK 1992

**Laura Bechly<sub>1</sub>**

TENSILE TESTING OF WELDED SKIN

**Sebastian di Mauro<sub>11</sub>**

RESIDING IN BODYFLUIDS

**Rosz Craig<sub>2</sub>**

THE RESULT WAS AGAIN CONFUSION

**Brad Nunn<sub>12</sub>**

CHILLER

**Karee Dahl<sub>3</sub>**

GATE KEEPERS

**Caitlin Reid<sub>13</sub>**

THOUGHTS ARE LIKE MAGNETS

**Nameer Davis<sub>4</sub>**

SUR-NAME...ER...DAVIS

**Charles Robb<sub>14</sub>**

A COMFORTABLE, MORE RELAXED  
AUSTRALIA

**Neil Degney<sub>5</sub>**

ANTIPODEAN RITUAL

**Jenny Sawley<sub>15</sub>**

HUG ME BUG ME

**KT Doyle<sub>6</sub>**

INNOCENCE

**Sarah Stutchbury<sub>16</sub>**

COLOUR IS WHERE WORDS FLAIL USELESSLY  
AGAINST EACH OTHER, HE THOUGHT

**Glen Henderson<sub>7</sub>**

THE SUBSTANCE OUT OF WHICH THE  
UNIVERSE IS MADE

**Carli Traill<sub>17</sub>**

MUTATE

**Anna Jackson<sub>8</sub>**

THE SIGHT OF BLOOD NO LONGER EXCITES  
ME

**Paul Wrigley<sub>18</sub>**

PHILOSOPHERSTONED

**Wanita Jones<sub>9</sub>**

PINK ON THE INSIDE

**Karen Laird<sub>10</sub>**

WHITE AUSTRALIA

## Prophets of meaning and the seduction of surfaces

White walls, white pages ... This page will only ever be white for me; by the time you read this, many other letters will follow one another in shifting combination, desecrating the pristine expanse with words which are then beyond my control - subject to your interpretation. How exciting, to imagine that time (your time), when I am permitted to once again open my eyes and exhale in relief. Until then, I will try to loosen my grip, watch the blood reluctantly permeate my white knuckles, and hope that my thoughts will soon overtake that sluggish flow.

The three rooms you have just encountered are but recently converted; potent with the promise of exhibitions to come and the acrid smell of fresh paint. The residue of their history has been neatly swept aside, and past finger-prints and fly-marks on the walls white-washed away forever. It is appropriate that this second installment - a rejoinder to 'Das Objekt' held at Whitebox Gallery last year - should be staged in a new space, paralleling the temporal progression inherent in this two-part exhibition. As children who have gazed on an art work in admiration of its fidelity to nature, its colour, or its emotive appeal, we must now contemplate the subject: that idea which infuses, indeed constitutes the superficial appearance of the object.

The subject is the conception of a sensually experienced, desired or imagined object. It is not some entity brooding deep within the object. Rather, it already exists within our memories. (In the words of Aristotle, "The mind never thinks without a mental picture"). Thus we are not required to don X-ray vision glasses to become the new breed of aesthetes or VPIs (viewers with privileged insight). Instead, we are encouraged to consider the necessity of both the subject-object and the object-object, in constituting any tangible, cultural product.

The temporal division of the two exhibitions would suggest that there is a definitive split between the object and the subject. In the first exhibition, an attempt was made to study the art-works present only in terms of objects-of-fact: solid articles occupying the same space as the viewer, which of course is that space which is contained within the gallery walls (the hollow cube). The challenge was thus to ignore the symbolic function of the works, which is to imagine the unimaginable. It

effectively involves the role-playing of a state of complete naivete (which brings to mind such loaded, white cliches as 'blank canvas', 'untrodden snow', or a child's starched, white pinafore). This was a very post modern project, in that it focused entirely on surfaces, rejecting the use of depth and tricky perspectives. Yet the iconographic dimension of each work perversely highlighted the language-based content of visual forms. Thus 'Das Objekt' preempted 'Das Subjekt'; instinctively, we see that the division between the two is an impossible one.

But is that to say that we perceive the two (object and subject) simultaneously? If we are unable to subtract the subject from the object (note that we could not speak of this in the reverse - conceptual art is premised upon subtracting the commodified object from an idea; eg. a spoken word is formless and yet conveys meaning), does this mean that we can not see the appearance of an object without linking it to some 'mental picture'? The second question answers the first: in linking an imagined image to a visually encountered object, there is a time-lapse, just as there is a spatial gap between two metal links in a chain.

In the actual creation of an artwork however, the conceptual progression from object to subject is somewhat more tenuous. Despite Aristotle's contention that the ultimate cause in shaping an object is a preliminary idea or at very least, an abstract schema, we now suspect that it would be ludicrous to assume an artist had any motivated grande plan. The objective methodology of a Hans Haacke survey, or the communion with chance and elements extrinsic to the art-work in an Richard Serra molten lead corner piece, are antithetic to the notion of deliberation and motivation in art. At some stage, the artist's work is conceived of merely as lead or a bundle of blank survey forms; the final shape of the object is undetermined - governed only by a certain entropy, the energy of transformation inherent to the material.

Focusing on the subject alone is traditionally regarded as a politically dangerous project (again, think of Haacke's written and photographic expose of the ownership of New York slum tenements by MoMA sponsors). However, the heavy reliance on the subjective produces a headier brew than mere political dissonance. As every viewer experiences the work in a different way, the artist effectively creates an anarchic situation, where the only

universal in the art-work except the individuality of the viewers' experience. Such extreme subjectivity verges on the romantic or the mystic, and causes us to stand in awe of the APIs (artists with privileged insight).

I for one, have little wish to be thus beholden to the prophets. On the other hand, it would perhaps be a regression to regard the gallery as some sort of *Wunderkammer* (a 'cabinet of curiosities'), given over to the quasi-idolatrous worship of *das object*; prostrating oneself before a collection of objects which can be both possessed and - terrifyingly - lost<sup>1</sup>. This is not to advocate the anemic 'middle-ground' policy. Objects will always possess their patina of desire, just as subjects must by definition, remain elusive, indefinite, and 'unfindable'. Half close your eyes and differences become distinguishable (hopefully not extinguishable). White on white on white on white ... who is to say where the subject resides - on the wall, in the object, behind the object, in my mind's eye, in your memory? Subject yourself.

Jane Eckett



**CARTHUSIAN**

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<sup>1</sup> The potential for loss that is inherent in any object, is discussed by Janis Jefferies, 'objects in conversation', *Object*, no.1, 1997, pp.37-38.