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Field of study: Independent *Rt Tactics

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Title: What's in a name? SnackArt and The Ekphrastic Agency.

Abstract: This paper tackles the logical consequences of the flawed dialogue and systems of the art world. Adopting neo Fluxus strategies the term 'art' is replaced with '*Rt' freeing the way to developing Independent *Rt Tactics as an alternative to artworks. Such tactics, or I*T's, display reconfigured and reworked Fluxus characteristics. These are identified as *Pasquinade*, *Karnivale*, *Ludic*, *Boycotten*, *Xenia* and *Sousveillance*, and become my strategies to identify *Rt and I*T's. I then offer my own two independent *Rt tactics, 'SnackArt' and 'The Ekphrastic Agency', for consideration as a reconfigured dialogue with an audience.

Keywords: *Rt, tactics, failure, play, gift, agency

Independent *Rt Tactics - An intimate reassessment in which many failures make light work.

In 2003 I embarked an intimate reassessment of my art practice, or in institutional speak, a PhD. The outcome was a near total rejection of the artworld, and a substitution of the very foundation of dialogue, words, with my own terminology and neologism, *Rt. The outcome was also to rid myself of the practicing art. Also as result of this researchⁱ and concerns with the dimensions of my own practice, I disappeared as an artist and reappeared as an Independent *Rt tactician creating ‘*SnackArt* – a vending machine which is both an exhibition space and a means of selling low calorie, high intellect artwork by a range of artists, and ‘The Ekphrastic Agency’ – a free, mobile art customisation service, which demonstrates my movement away from the production of more stuff’. A complicated failure to embrace my discipline and a personally successful reconfiguring of my practice. (Figures 1 & 2).

I begin to explain my reorientation using “Figure 51ⁱⁱ *Rt- Pronunciation and application guide.” This construct enables the substitution of the word art with the term *Rt. The development, use and personal practice will be addressed in this article.

***Rt- Pronunciation and application guide**

R is long as in ‘aarrgghh’ written in uppercase,

T is short as in ‘tisk tisk’ therefore in lowercase.

The resultant sound should resemble the sound of the vague and desultory term ‘art’.

*Rt then can easily be made more specific by adding a letters in front to form

Uses of *Rt-

It may be possible to continue this vein making up more specific and 'correct' descriptions of what is proffered as 'Art'. e.g.

M*Rt – art made with a market value in mind. Made by respected artists to plump up a show and increase turn over for the gallery. This enables the gallery to charge more for more M*Rt in the next show.

C*Rt- craft-like offerings, may include anything where the means overpowers the meaning.

Bry*Rt – Bryon Bay art, fish, palms, sold at market stalls has a cross over with m*Rt but with a small 'm'.

H*Rt – art made from the heart, not necessarily implying the derogatory.

Sh*Rt – most obviously derogatory.

Figure 51 gave me distance and a language of critique toward an artworld which had not provided me with a satisfying relationship, neither in my artmaking, nor often enough in my role as audience.

Finding 'Independent *Rt Tactics'

My artistic disappearance transpired as I became aware of 'pataphysics' ⁱⁱⁱ and developed further as I was drawn into the orbit of Fluxus, and in particular the pedagogical underpinnings of this art movement. It became apparent that I need a new value system as well as a new dialogue. A focus on artworks with a primary impetus for developing alternative social models of practice in opposition to current institutional positions, and in finding criteria with which to value such art practices was necessary. Fluxus attitude was traced back to Dada and forwards through Conceptual Art to focus on a re-blossoming in diverse contemporary 'microtopian' art practices which I called 'Independent *Rt Tactics'.

The Fluxus spirit sees artmaking as filled with opportunities for failure rather than numbing access to sameness. Using the analogy of evolution's propensity for as many dead ends as necessary to achieve a few successful mutations, Fluxus practices pose the idea of a healthy art world as one where there is always room for "mistakes and transgressions". These are not tied to approaches which are result-oriented sustaining conflict and debate rather than an imposed consensus of order.

By analysing the strategies of 'pataphysics, Fluxus, and subsequent forms such as Mail Art and zines, I generated a set of categories to identify, navigate and describe Independent *Rt Tactics. The range of I*Ts currently in use by artists are creative, varied and always fluid. Such practices, in varying degrees are: *attentive*, which enables self-management and personal control; *aware* of our current management by the agencies of power such as the market and the state; *resistant* to bureaucratic fragmentation and compartmentalising; *engaged* in life, in unpredictable and spontaneous ways which form links not prescribed or controlled by any one homogenising agent; *quixotic*, chimerical in nature, benevolent and honourable in intent, intrepid in spirit; and *festive* – daft, left field, foolish, funny, brave, unaffected and revelatory. I proposed I*Ts should always be ready to bite the hand that feeds, resist the seductive praise of the artworld and mock the ambitious. Independent *Rt Tactics are, in general, characterised by their location outside galleries, their aim is to connect to community and their intention to offer social criticism, particularly of spectatorship in all its guises.

These identifying markers are based on, and reworked from, Fluxus strategies, as described, but not prescribed, by Ken Friedman ^{iv} and which are- Globalism, Unity of Art and Life, Intermedia, Experimentalism, Chance, Playfulness, Simplicity, Implicativeness, Specificity, Presence in time and Musicality.

Strategies for identifying I*Ts

The range of I*Ts currently in use by artists are creative, varied and always fluid. In order to allow analysis and comparison, I have sought to find commonality across these tactics. Consequently I am using six categories to achieve this – *Pasquinade*, *Karnivale*, *Ludic*, *Boycottens*, *Xenia* and *Sousveillance* –. These reworked categories signal a new hybridity so that the vast, chaotic and diverse range of I*Ts become navigable. No one work is purely indicative of its category; this would be both impossible and inadequate.

PASQUINADE – creating alternative, substitute structures to highlight inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and pretensions

Pasquinade is a strategy which encompasses the qualities and tactics of détournement and the qualities and characteristics of Superfictions, as described by Peter Hill, but which must be public, performative and participatory.

The practice of *détournement* is a term created by the Situationists to explain and even promote activities that have more recently come to be called “adbusting”, “subvertising” and various other forms of culture-jamming, in short those activities that undermine the status quo. To *détourner* is to hijack, undermine and re-value products of the culture industry past and present^v. The *détournement* is then inserted into ‘The Spectacle’ to work as a critique and reminder to resist as well as an antidote to the prepacked and pre-digested. Also, since the 1970s, appropriation – or eclecticism as it was termed then – has been a staple of art practice. These borrowings of elements from art history or popular culture were incorporated into existing forms of art. Borrowing pre-existing images, a mainly visual appropriation, developed into a borrowing of pre-existing art related forms and then to a form of appropriation where non-artforms were “inhabited” to produce art.

This imaginative inhabitation is found in what Peter Hill has described as *superfictions*^{vi} such as the use of personas, or the adoption and/or creation of bureaucracies, institutions, and other organisational structures or places of exchange; for example the appropriation of a business system, a “laundromat”, a “driving school”, a “scientific research centre”, an “airline” or a “museum”^{vii}.

Where a *superfiction* is not actively participatory I have not considered it as using the strategy of *Pasquinade*. A *Pasquinade* relies as much on humour and its physical place of manifestation as it does on simulacrum. The term *Pasquinade* refers to a lampoon that imitates somebody’s style in a humorous way and is traditionally written and posted in a public place (which can be the internet). Often ephemerality is an element of a *Pasquinade*.

KARNIVALE – articulating what is not general not permissible or normal, and finding a voice by using alternative methods to speak out against alienation

Gone are real Mardi Gras, Christmas and Easter and gone are most communal forms of social release. These have been recuperated, and replaced with cleverly crafted simulations that have been inserted so stealthily that most people seem unaware of their replacement^{viii}.

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is overseen by a committee, funded by sponsors, participation is exclusive, and the event, which is popularly perceived as one parade on one evening, is permitted at the discretion of the city council. Christmas is now really Xmas, when carols in the park are orchestrated, managed and sponsored by a TV network to boost sales in a

non-ratings period and Easter accoutrements and foodstuffs are sold as early as February to maximise sales.

In today's society the roles of the carnival have been co-opted by the Spectacle. Excess is normalised and effortless in the world of the Spectacle. However, these indulgences are often unsatisfactory and empty. Repeated regularly, these "take-away" objects and experiences offered in a plethora of perverted alternatives do not provide lasting or real social meaning nor provide a form of communal release but insidiously fuel alienation. In today's world, postmodern sarcasm and irony have been promoted, resulting in the honesty and irrationality of carnivalesque action seeming less convincing as subversion and its power to affirm appearing naive. Carnavalesque in contemporary life has been debased further by its equation with pure amusement. For Eco the "... carnivalization of life" is the result of the availability and ability to watch endless movies and television "to the point of losing track of what is news and what is supposed to be funny".^{ix}

The carnivalesque power to change cannot compete with billion dollar advertising of global corporate enterprises, David M. Boje feels "Carnival may not appear rational to its homogenous voice, the carnivalesque is now manifested through disparate, often marginal, voices."^x

Artists using tactics which are carnivalesque engage in presenting ways to cope with and provide a balance to an anomic society. Articulation of what is not normally permissible by artists who find a voice by using alternative methods to speak out against alienation are artwork, art practices and art tactics that I classify as *Karnivale*.

LUDIC ('pataphysical) – options for navigating reality and for looking at the familiar in an unfamiliar way

On the website of the Ludic Society is this definition by Westecott and Jahn-Sudmann

Ludics tantalisingly offers a new approach to understanding play through the process of play itself. Here we find play used as a conceptual catalyst for theoretical thought.

In drawing on the 'pataphysical, it presents a parody of scientific and philosophical conceptions, or a science of emerging solutions, that functions as playfulness itself.^{xi}

One way of seeing organised play is in games. Games are multi-dimensional, serving as a source of self-expression, entertainment and for transmitting and practising the values of the

society, so are often deceptively more serious than they look. Games often test and mask serious strategies. Games can provide new rituals aimed to rouse complacent consumers. In 'pataphysical terms, organised absurdities can be referred to as games and, as Asger Jorn pronounces, "The game is the Pataphysical overture to the world".^{xiii} Often games prove a successful way of making ridiculous the infractions of power. For adults, play is necessary for maintaining healthy attitudes in the face of a complex and contradictory world, and to remind us to share.

Jim Wolfreys states we can best understand the effect of an individual if we consider their actions as strategies in a game "neither wholly unconscious nor simply the result of rational calculation".^{xiii} He goes on to say games require permanent invention on the part of the player to adapt to infinitely variable situations. Although the player does what the game demands of him, this does not mean that individuals are slaves to rules, since these can be manipulated to the player's advantage, bent and subverted to suit his needs. The player's freedom to invent and to improvise allows for the production of an infinite number of moves made possible by the game, and is subject to the same limits as the game.^{xiv}

A *Ludic* work would have instructions and a sequence for the player to follow. An element of absurdity is also a characteristic, either overt in the actions or script, or embedded in the philosophical terrain the game uncovers for the player. I am also using the term "game" very loosely.

We are by nature ludic.

SOUSVEILLANCE – presence, absences, intrusions and actions to defuse terrorism

A most troubling action taken by the U.S. government in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, was the passing of the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act gives the Justice Department drastically expanded authority to carry out surveillance of its citizens. As Mary Schmidt Campbell states,

The Patriot Act radically expands government authority to conduct surveillance of its citizens to gain access to records of their lives from a range of institutions ... Add fear to the harrowing of civil liberties and the muting of dissent, and the public has been given a rationale for giving up their rights and privileges.^{xv}

In Australia this was mirrored in John Howard's 2005 anti-terrorist laws which put an end to checks and balances on feeling secure about our basic social principles such as freedom of

speech and association, freedom from detention without charge and the accountability of police and other government institutions of control.

Aggressive surveillance since 2001 has played a significant role in isolating and silencing dissenters. Turning the tables on this type of activity even before 2001 was a fertile area for oppositional practice by artists, as this type of terrorism must be resisted. The surveillance of surveillance is called *sousveillance* or watching from below. It is a reverse tactic of vigilant monitoring of the authorities by informal means or the *détournement* of surveillance. As descriptive of a tactic, it is used by Steve Mann^{xvi}, professor at the University of Toronto, to describe recording of events by participants, such as rallies and protests, using available technology such as phones and digital cameras. One noticed outcome of *sousveillance* is the discomfort of such activities for the perpetrators of surveillance. *Sousveillance* raises many legal and ethical issues for both parties. One result can be seen in the footage a private citizen, George Holliday, who from his Lake View Terrace apartment near the intersection of Foothill Blvd and Osborne St, videoed police officers arresting Rodney King on March 3, 1991. This footage, which was declined by the police then offered to the television station KTLA, Los Angeles, became a media sensation and significantly highlighted the issues of private and public surveillance. These issues have moved us closer and closer to the replacement, or co-option depending on your viewpoint, of surveillance with “personal *sousveillance*” or “*coveillance*”^{xvii}. *Sousveillance* requires recorded data be communicated. Current forums for sharing this type of data include YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. But it should be noted that publishing on these open systems can aid both parties.

BOYCOTTEN*^{xviii} – *Voluntary Abstinence

Using the tactic of *Boycotten* to resist and refuse, these art tactics make critical commentaries, reveal the possible and do it without asking permission. Uses of such tactics claim a degree of autonomy for the artist and may enable the artist to remain a “social irritant”.

Boycotten characteristics are evident in the refusal to seek permission, the refusal to use systems which are faulty or elitist; this is often manifested in guerrilla actions. This guerrilla conduct when employed by artists results in artwork which is often illicit in action and placement and therefore the perpetrator remains anonymous to the general public. Little importance is attached to the permanence of this type of artwork, and the ego of the artists is far less important than the re-enfranchisement of the creative act to everyday life and the

creation of communication engendering dialogue. Street-based guerrilla work has a strong historical link with graffiti practices, where the environment itself affects the credibility and integrity of the work.

The forms of Boycotten strategies are varied. Neo-Fluxus street performances, Invisible Theatre^{xix}, B.U.G.A.U.P., The Billboard Liberation Front, Arthur Stace, Keith Haring, various forms of street art – reverse graffiti, stickers, wheat pasting, stencils, posters are part of the form but not all street art is a Boycott.

XENIA – reactions to commodification

Xenia is a Greek word for the concept of hospitality. Norman Bryson classifies two types of Xenia in relationship to still life painting which he calls Xenia I and Xenia II and thus identifies at least two types of hospitality. The first still life depicts foods untouched by culture, gifts of nature available to all, but collected and offered to an honoured guest, no strings attached. The second category included the cultivated and cooked. These food stuffs involve much time, labour and expenditure on the part of the host and are offered to the guest with the implication of indebtedness which will later be reciprocated in some form. However the notion of generosity is complex encompassing reciprocity, customs of gift giving and the cost of free objects and services.

In relation to artmaking, Artists who choose to use the idea of gift giving as an artform choose to do so as a reaction against commodification. Often the artist engages in “gift giving” as an anticommodity gesture, as gift giving makes a connection and a bond, vacant from objects bought and sold^{xx}. Francis McIlveen discusses the core of “free” art work.

For most of art history, the tangible object has been the locus of the work of art. It still forms an ineluctable association in the minds of viewers. However, in exchange-based art, the object holds a special paradoxical power – The artwork is only activated by giving the art object away^{xxi}.

Free art may be consciously produced as a taster for a potential paying audience much the same way a giveaway of a commodity builds goodwill in a prospective customer. This is most visually obvious in “street art”. Where once the street was a place of unloved and unvalued graffiti, it is often now a place of “street art”; a free gallery in which to debut and draw attention to your artwork and ideas in the hope of luring both a gallery and a purchasing

clientele. This is not a criticism, as using the street is entrepreneurial, especially for artists on a budget or to raise the profile of artists unable to join the ranks of a gallery stable. Here is not the place for a thesis on street art, its genesis and its variety, but as it forms a large part of the tactic of Xenia it needs mention as whoever sees this work is immediately an audience, a recipient. Shana Agid in a catalogue essay for the exhibition *You Can Have it All* at the Salvation Gallery in New York in 2007⁴⁶⁷ calls “free” art “a gesture of resistance or conversation”^{xxii}.

I*Ts ‘defrag’

I feel that the smaller non-affiliated nature of most I*Ts serve to “defrag” a world fragmented by capitalism by having a basis of connectable concerns. They operate in small ways to lay down a network that can encourage hope and remind us the diversity is not individualism and that the world is not separate to everyday life and everyday life is not separate to culture. I*Ts can provide reflections of our real lives and experiences, not our mediated ones.

I argue that the diverse artworks that can be classified as Independent *Rt Tactics come closest to effectively addressing issues of a depleted dialogue of intimacy. I feel such works are connected by ideas and actions marked by a growing consensus, evident also among a variety of theorists, that contemporary art is failing us, and that art as a culturally managed commodity has lost sight of its main functions, wonder and mystery. In the face of quite a significant failure of art we might do well to ask Sean Cubitt’s question,

How are we to retain some humanity in the face of what confronts us^{xxiii}?

We are still struggling to find an answer in the wake of the fragmentation effected by capitalism. I feel that resistance, be it “art without political intervention”^{xxiv} as a form of passive resistance, or “art with political intervention”^{xxv} as active resistance, is a necessary task for culture makers. In this task we might be most usefully guided by such practices as I*Ts. I see this type of work as ephemerality manifesting solidarity.

SnackArt, 2006 – 2012

SnackArt: low calorie, high intellect takes the form of vending machines which exhibit and sell art works. The work sold is by a wide range of artists, is only restricted by the slot size, delivery method of the machines and the price point capacity.

With *SnackArt* I voiced my growing concerns over the 'privileged' status of the world of art by avoiding the gallery system in favour of less exclusive methods of exhibiting and selling work. Audiences who have heard about, seen and experienced this project have welcomed the interaction and lack of formality in viewing and purchasing art.

While the machine, and my own items for sale within the machine, describes a point in my journey toward disappearance as an artist, I do not place such conceptual restrictions on the work of others interested in joining this project. In a communal, supportive and non-artworld spirit I try hard not to reject anyone's contributions. Although I often think I know which artworks will be more popular i.e. salable, I am often incorrect in my assessment. I do not censor anyone I have agreed to accept for exhibiting/selling. This means the works in the machine by other artists may not reflect the content of this thesis and while not 'fat', may have varying caloric content.

The uncontestable refusal of The College of Fine Art to locate a machine on the campus forced me to find an alternative. This came in the form of the *Periodic Pending Machine*. Made of cardboard with a discarded real vending machine front perspex panel it was operated by getting inside and listening to the customer. I was determined to place an 'art vending machine' at The College of Fine Art and with some sense of triumph the *Periodic Pending Machine* appeared at the 2005 graduate show. (Figures 3, 4, & 5.)

However, I wanted a more permanent presence for the vending artwork. I had been in dialogue with a local vending machine owner operator, Paul Long, who was willing to give my scheme some consideration. Long's main requirement for the supply of a machine to me was increased sales of his products. I approached him with the idea if he would he give me space in one of his food machines, I could place the machine into a location usually prohibited to him. I suggested this may suit both parties. Further, as the consumer of snacks unwittingly becomes the audience for artwork so his snack food transmogrifies into the realm of art, making the food snacks desirable in two ways. His response was amused skepticism. The cohabitation option seemed a fortuitous solution.

The opportunity for such a placement came in 2006 at Liverpool Museum while it was cohabited with Casula Powerhouse. Since the 'real' vending machine would have art and snack in cohabitation the project was renamed *Snack Art* at this time.

Physical description of SnackArt

Initially there was a fully functioning vending machine, which I refer to as the Flagship SnackArt Machine was located at Casula Powerhouse / Liverpool Museum from 2006 to 2010 and then Reverse Garbage, Addison Road, Marrickville from 2010 to 2012. Figure 6 & 7.

Then a Perambulating SnackArt Machine and a Periodic SnackArt Machine were created to meet a request by Sandra Ferman to have a Snack Art machine at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) for an upcoming Contemporary Collection Benefactors (CCB) function. Originally, Sandra had asked for the flagship machine but it became obvious that the moving this machine for a one night appearance was logistically impossible.

To solve this dilemma, I recreated *The Periodic Pending Machine* as a *Periodic SnackArt Machine* and most fortuitously made a *Perambulating SnackArt Machine*. *The Perambulating SnackArt Machine* was the most mobile and flexible manifestation and the most important to my current direction. These two human-operated machines are portable and can insert themselves to exhibit work at any function, exhibition, festival or suitable event, without the bureaucracy of formal invitation.

The type of work included in *SnackArt* is documented on the website www.snackart.com.au. I support the artists in *SnackArt* by running this project at no cost (except postage) to the artists involved, meaning there is no commission taken and as mentioned no censorship. (Figures 8 - 12.)

SnackArtists

Artists' participation comes about in a variety of ways. To begin with I invited artists I am familiar with and whose attitude and whose work I believe will suit the project. I then invited artists I had not met based on my personal engagement with their work as in the case of Papa Box, an artist living and working in Osaka, Japan^{xxvi}. I continue to do this. I also encouraged artists to apply to be a *SnackArtist* on the web site www.snackart.com.au and I have had some artists approach me as they have found out about the project by word of mouth.

This project invites artists to think differently as there are physical constraints on the work to be exhibited, i.e. strictly no bigger than 13 x 18 x 4.5 cm and priced at \$20 or less. The philosophy of this project is to provide a non-precious space to trial ideas, take risks, have and poke fun. Artists have welcomed the invitation to exhibit knowing the financial gain is minimal, instead seeing the playfulness, an opportunity to connect with a different audience and a freedom for artists they may not have previously considered as a viable or desirable part

of their art practice. I believe that for some artists work made for *SnackArt* fed back into their ‘normal’ practice. Gina Sinozich began making larger patchwork works from small *SnackArt* sized works, Barbara Gough found the *SnackArt* format a way to keep making work during a time of a loss of confidence in art, Shane Forrest uses the *SnackArt* format to experiment making ‘pressureless testers’.

SnackArt as a tactic –Pasquinade, Karnivale, Ludic, Boycotten, Xenia

SnackArt is in various degrees pasquinade, kanivale, ludic, boycotten and xenia. By this I mean that various aspects of these strategies invigorate this project. As pasquinade it hijacks the snack – an impulse purchase which slips under the radar of personal budgeting since the price is inconsequential (unlike the calories) – and so the artwork is priced similarly. The mobile *SnackArt* machine engaged more fully in pasquinade tactics since it was performative and participatory. This manifestation was also a deliberate boycotten tactic since I could appear or try to appear anywhere I chose. As the perpetrator I remained anonymous to the general public and since this was my first foray into the time worn and honoured acting tradition of wearing a mask, it was remarkably easy for a misanthropist, like myself, to engage with the general public in predominately positive interactions.

Since I consider the *SnackArt* machines as a karnivale art tactic rather than a novel way to sell artists’ work, as such, I enter into a knowing and mocking dialogue with notions of value, price and prestige. The *SnackArt* machine is providing a ‘take away’ object, a “perverted” surrogate appearing naïve and offering amusement. Whenever I describe this artwork or when people first see it their reactions are very positive. The familiar is made a little unfamiliar and the parody of consumerism is ludicly challenged. Consumerism is also shaken slightly since this project relies significantly on generosity. As I ask artists to reduce their price but not the complexity of their product, generosity is evident in the willingness of artists to contribute to something with negligible monetary return. As I do not take a commission for running the *SnackArt* exhibition space I reciprocate and instill this project with a generosity of spirit.

The flagship *SnackArt* machine satisfied either aesthetic hunger, with the tempting range of *SnackArt* or physical hunger, with the tasty ‘Snack food’, as both products cohabitated. Having purchased an artwork, physical thirst or hunger may be assuaged. Vice versa, having purchased chocolate, a sudden urge for art may also be satisfied. In this way both intellectual and corporeal sustenance is considered.

The function of the art vending machines is primarily to serve an accessible, alternative exhibiting space. The secondary function is then to dispense inexpensive yet refreshing, curious and original artworks through a process whereby the unique art object or a multiple, created by a particular artist is selected in the same way as consumables, in this case non-essential impulse items. This project is part of a continuous process of critique of consumerism. It is undertaken in the understanding that it joins a raft of like-minded art projects which may not succeed in changing the multinational economic rationalist regime we labour under, but that trying to point out its imperfections, weaknesses, hypocrisies and absurdities is an ongoing and necessary activity.

I would ask the commercial aspect of the project be considered as a decentring strategy in the footsteps of Fluxus' and Situationists' positioning of art into everyday life – a conscious withdrawal from the fetishising elitism of the gallery. The experience is not complete without commercial investment by the consumer and it is this interaction that raises difficult questions about art as a commodity. I tinker with the predictable nature of the delivery of products and hope the contradictory nature of the commodity-form and the paradoxical nature of consumption are foregrounded as theoretical concerns of this project.

The concept of selling art using a vending machine is not new or original, Robert Watts, Yoko Ono, Orlan and other artists have tinkered with the act of vending. I use this method and form to engage in what I consider a form of art activism. This is my response to the recuperation and commodification of artistic practice and the often inventive, profane, clever and humorous tactics of art activists against such conditions. Recuperation of art is now inevitable. It is in this vein that I have conceived *SnackArt*. Artistic attempts at criticism of contemporary culture through détournement seem already stamped with a use-by date for recuperation by hungry companies anxious to feed their demographic with new and novel titillations. The best that can be hoped for is to extend the use-by date of artworks. I attempt to create within the structures of commodification and as the work looks so much like a commodity already, delay the inevitable.

***The Ekphrastic Agency: an inquiry, as art, into art*^{xvii}**

In June 2008 The Ekphrastic Agency T.E.A, a free mobile art customisation service, appeared uninvited at the Sydney Biennale. I have chosen the word Ekphrasis since its origin in Greek rhetoric is the term for a form of verbal description assisting the reader, or in this case Agency

client, to visualize the thing described as if it were physically present. I try to convey and activate an enthusiasm for the artwork I 'customise' to the client.

Since July 2008 T.E.A has been customising artworks to interested (and sometimes perplexed) clients in the streets of Sydney and nearby townships. T.E.A. is a free service and seeks to disseminate accessible knowledge, highlighting the moment of shared information, and to act as a small antidote to the moral amnesia created by endless novelty. (Figure 13.)

The T.E.A. agent makes contact in a random and unexpected way with whoever is passing by. The agent engages the potential client verbally. If this person agrees to a customisation (however bemused they might be), the agent then begins the questionnaire. Using answers to the questionnaire the 'agent' selects, then describes, the artwork to the client. The client may not love the work, but the agent endeavours to help the client understand and/or appreciate the work.

The works in T.E.A.'s 'stable' are personally favourite I*Ts (idiosyncratic and unconventional) and they are both contemporary and date back to Fluxus, but mainly they are under-known and under-cherished due to their ephemeral or conceptual nature. The physical appearance of T.E.A. involves a small portable kiosk covered with promotional testimonials by previously satisfied customers, an 'agent' who holds a clipboard/palette, a filing system containing the information about each artwork on offer, a dossier for the client containing a 'certificate of custodianship' to be filled out upon the completion of the customisation, an information sheet about the artwork including leads for further research, 'conversation starters' to encourage the client to engage others in discussion of 'their' artwork and a 'loyalty card'. Custodianship means they have the 'Agency' rights to talk about the work at morning teas, lunches, dinners, bus queues etc., wherever they feel the need to enhance their cultural credibility. After the specified time the rights return to the agency and the agency may 'give' that artwork to someone else. This doesn't mean the first client has to stop talking about the work merely that the agency may have given custodianship to someone else, who will then have the 'official' rights to any cultural credibility they can access. The specified length of time varies. The reason for this has to do with the next proposed outing so the agency does not run out of artworks to customise but the general period is three weeks to a month. The loyalty card entitles the client to a free artwork (one of my *SnackArt* works), redeemable after six customisations on six separate occasions. Figure 14 & 15.

The intimate, balladeering nature of T.E.A taps into a long tradition which has been marginalised in a consumer-riddled culture. Its nomadic character makes it free from the restraints of a particular time and place which is a very liberating and empowering aspect, as is the flexibility of the physical setup. The work is not reliant on the need for an assistant and so this increases its flexibility. I set my own schedules and choose the artworks. Purves considers that the qualities necessary for gift based works to ‘keep functioning as heretical détournements’^{xxviii} and avoid being ‘otherwise accounted for’^{xxix} are that they be unannounced and speedy with an exit and unexpected with a re-appearance.

Making no money, running at a loss, requiring a one-to-one interaction/engagement unsustainable in a growth market, I create no physical artwork for the agency, which at most uses minimal stationery supplies and I run to no schedule but the one I choose.

Sitting in a comfortable armchair with a nice cup of T.E.A.

In cyberspace I can navigate a universe of information from a comfortable armchair with a cup of tea. I am, in my words, ‘an avant-garde bourgeois semionaut’^{xxx}. I collect many I*Ts this way but also anecdotally from conversation with others and from journals, books and newspaper articles. T.E.A. aims to conserve under-known artworks, placing them in people’s memory banks rather than shut away in books or in the morass of cyberspace. Such artworks can have been lost due to the speed with which we all consume images, becoming buried under layers of junk art advertising. Positioned in memory, they have the potential to be reactivated by serendipitous circumstances and possibly influence other synaptic decisions. This is of course the same for ‘real’ artworks but, in the case of T.E.A., this has been achieved without consuming materials. The idea of a physical work once told cannot be erased. It can be forgotten perhaps but it may be reactivated in the same way as memories by the sight of mention of something unrelated. Although we may not be able to own or take the work with us, the knowledge of it will persist. Paul Mann describes this concept, ‘Indeed the art object as such needs not be exchanged, or even exist; only its representation needs to circulate.’^{xxxi}

Being online means being under surveillance. Our lack of self-restraint with information encourages the development of a surveillance society. As an art tactician and agent for T.E.A., I search this reified space on behalf of my client. I feel equipped to navigate this dangerous terrain, distilling and locating useful starting points which may help the client to leap over the dross and minimise exposure to cunning traps of the ‘normal’ artworld. The information clients are given is then relocated in a vibratory landscape and they may choose the least abstracted,

most authentic method to pass on this information- in conversation, in dialogue. In conversation, they may interpret, embellish and create, using their ekphrastic powers to verbally communicate their experience.

T.E.A. and remembrance

The importance of remembering and repeating become apparent in the face of moral amnesia, like that of Ronald Reagan who, in 1985, wanted us to stop remembering when he said ‘I feel very strongly about not reawakening the memories of the past.’^{xxxii} Remembering and repeating are particularly useful tools when we live in a world of rampant renewal where the market creates shorter and shorter cycles of styles in an effort to keep us too dizzy and busy to notice that it is the same thing in different colours, styles, sizes or shapes. Or when our links are weakened by constant change or replaced with links to fabricated realities, it then becomes very important to retrieve and revive solid links. Since the world is made visible and preserved in works of art which testify and provide evidence of lived experience and existence, it might be that it is worth reclaiming some of these as guides for how to continue living a shared existence rather than a fragmented one.

In this climate it is an ethical act to remember, and we might do well to listen to the words of Milan Kundera, ‘The struggle of men against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting’.^{xxxiii} Hannah Higgins also reminds us that ‘The goal of all education, indeed, should be to establish a sense of continuity between self and the world’^{xxxiv}.

Using oral means, T.E.A. reconnects with an antiquated form of sharing information, activates a web of associations – personal, serendipitous and synchronous – aims to raise consciousness and engage imagination, uses a nonlinear logic and provides a detour for learning. Helping people reach understanding helps break the stranglehold of the spectacle.

The Ekphrastic Agency and Fluxus

Craig Saper sees the lack of capitalist value in a Fluxus work means that the value of the work exists in its communicative and educational aspects. He feels that ‘when the work has passed out of their [the producers’] possession, it is the responsibility of the new owner to restore it or possibly even to remake it’^{xxxv}.

Joseph Beuys saw that art practice could reconfigure the social fabric. ‘Convinced that thinking and spoken forms constitute what he called “Social Sculpture”, Beuys began to move his performative work out of the gallery context to engage in teaching and direct political

action^{xxxvi}. He put these ideas into practice cofounding Germany's Free International University and the Organisation for Direct Democracy. Paul Schimmel interprets the outcome for the role of the artist, arguing that Beuys 'transformed the role of the artist from that of entertainer to teacher, from clown to politician, from shaman to professor'^{xxxvii}. Craig Saper sees Beuys's pedagogical activities as stimulating invention strategies. 'We can describe this Fluxscholarship as a nomadic type of invention: picking up ideas and running with them^{xxxviii}'. He goes on to say the same inventive attitudes and methods of circumventing capitalist paradigms are an important part of the pedagogy of the FluxAcademy, a social project to disseminate and give ownership of knowledge.

Disguised as an innocuous 'agent of capitalism', resembling a market researcher or other free trial facilitator, combined with a verbal invitation encourages people to approach with some sense of familiarity. I begin to surreptitiously circumvent the capitalist interaction they would be expecting, to provide a more nurturing experience. Pertinent to the practice of T.E.A. is the oral aspect, unique unrehearsed dialogues qualify as a form of nomadic invention. Fluxus artist Bengt af Klintberg describes Fluxus artwork as 'transmitted orally just like folklore and performed by everyone who wanted to'^{xxxix}.

The Ekphrastic Agency and capitalism – Social bonds not stocks and bonds^{xl}

I soon became aware that T.E.A operated as an exchange, not just a gift. The artwork is not bestowed like a gift but 'earned' by the 'client' for an exchange of time and interest. As well as asserting and exposing my ideas, I am engaged with other people's beliefs and responses which test and stretch my own, enabling growth. This is the Xenia aspect of T.E.A. T.E.A's 'musicality'^{xli} is evident as it is not used up or devalued, by being used. In this way T.E.A is my antidote to what Purves describes as 'products of surplus in an opulent society'^{xlii}. As a Pasquinade, T.E.A. employs 'simplicity'^{xliii} and 'playfulness'^{xliv} by imitating familiar commercial, educational and bureaucratic experiences but avoiding becoming one.

The Ekphrastic Agency connecting audience and artwork

Allan Kaprow expounds on the difference between a theatre audience and an audience of passers-by by explaining that,

When a work is performed on a busy avenue, passers-by will ordinarily stop and watch, just as they might watch the demolition of a building. These are not theatre-goers and their attention is only temporarily caught in the course of their normal affairs. They might stay, perhaps become involved in some unexpected way, or they

will more likely move on after a few minutes. Such persons are authentic parts of the environment.^{xlv}

I found this to be a useful explanation of the type of audience I wished to create with T.E.A. An important aspect of a Fluxus work is that the 'presence in time'^{xlvi} of the artist is not necessary nor is the presence of a physical artwork. The artist can use the audience as satellite exhibition space. The audience passing the artwork are creating an audience of their own. This is certainly the way I conceive of T.E.A.

The audience or 'client' is encouraged to become the 'agent' and pass on the 'artwork' and the sharing increases their 'cultural credibility'. In this way I have created work truly in the spirit of Fluxus. Such work 'de-mythologises the role of the artist, to undermine the perception of the artist as a genius and replaces the artists with a facilitator. My experience in teaching persuades me that most people would like to understand art but are hampered by their feelings of inadequacy, some of which are produced by an abundance of opaque art and pompous wankery. T.E.A. sifts through this morass and presents its clientele with something potentially meaningful and an opportunity to listen and learn. John Dewey believes that,

Instruction in the arts of life is something other than conveying information about them. It is a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of imagination, and works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share the arts of living.^{xlvii}

I do not promote the notion that I can select a perfectly matched artwork for the client as any match is primarily achieved by intuition, 'chance'^{xlviii} and serendipity.

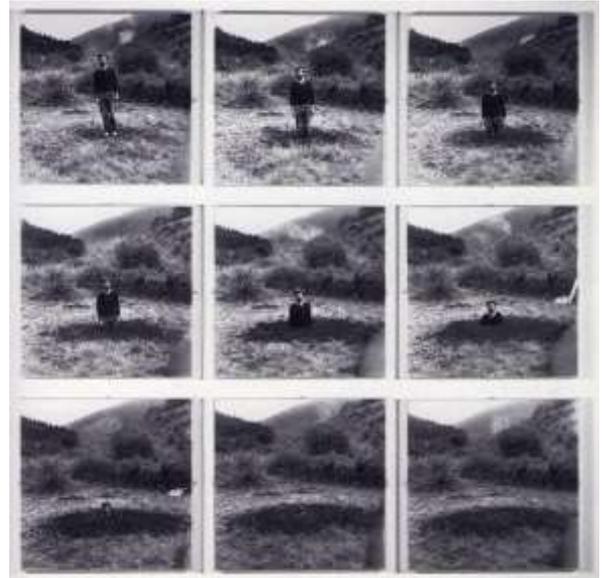
By assisting the 'client' to know about a sometimes challenging artwork or practice in a supportive and lighthearted way, I plan to go some way to enacting this idea of Dewey's. I also get to see any moment of change in the viewer unlike the unshared experience of the commercial gallery, though I do not promote the eradication of the solitary gallery reverie.

As the agent of The Ekphrastic Agency I do not playact interactions with my clients. I am not a form of spectator entertainment which is why the customisation is private, one to one. I approach the conversation as normal and natural, and deal with any puzzlement or questions honestly. I have had my customisations rejected twice. I do not offer a second or replacement artwork. If the client rejects the artwork selected I agree to disagree, knowing that I have already attained my objective of giving information about the artwork to the client. The only

difference between a successful and an unsuccessful customisation is that the client who accepts the selected artwork receives a certificate and dossier.

T.E.A. actively engages in avoiding recuperation, using the tactic of Xenia and Boycotten. The agency is free on both sides of the equation, artist and audience it appears as much as possible on its own terms, accepting invitation but also appearing uninvited working from experience with the adage 'it is always easier to apologise rather than to ask permission'.

As an art practice, the interactions I have are unscripted interactions are direct and real and unlike a gallery exhibition, I get to see the reactions of each viewer. The various appearances of T.E.A. have confirmed my original belief in the suitability of this work to fulfill all my criteria for a personal moral, ethical and activist art practice. My experiences with running the agency has been very rewarding and the feedback I get makes me think that many of my clients are delighted and touched by this work. As a meta-artwork, this artwork has enabled me to offer an intimate and hopefully meaningful guided walk in an alternative *Rt landscape to others. (Figures 14 & 15).



Figures 1: left: Jane Naylor, *Disappearance of the artist: Homage to Keith Arnatt*, 2010,
 Figure 2: right: Keith Arnatt, *Self-Burial* (Television Interference Project) 1969, Paul Wood,
Movements in Modern Art: Conceptual Art, Tate Publishing, London, 2002, p. 39



Figure 3: *left* The Periodic Pending Machine @ COFA Graduate Show, 2005.

Figure 4: *centre* Close-up of the control panel.

Figure 5: *right* The operating mechanism.

Photos: Shane Forrest



Figure 6 & 7: The Flagship Snack Art Machine 2006 *SnackArt* and snack food co habit in the Flagship machine.

Photo: Jane Naylor



Figures 8- 12: Permabulating SnackArt machine in various locations: Great Escape Festival, Newington, Surry Hills, Norton St Leichhardt, uninvited and unscheduled at Art Safari Chippendale and Harajuku, Tokyo Japan. 2006-2008
Photos: Shane Forrest and Lisa Alison

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SATISFIED CLIENTS

"I was easily able to introduce my matched artwork into conversation the day after taking custodianship. This conversation was deep and meaningful." Nephra Forrest

"The artwork I was matched with gave me many hours of intellectual stimulation. The service was professional and caring. I would recommend this to anyone." Betty May

"I would like to wholeheartedly endorse The Ekphrastic Agency. Now I will be hopelessly compelled to do some art of my own... Thank you." Robert Percival

"Throw out that dull conversation about work, put some spice back in your after dinner chat and impress with your next espresso. I'll definitely be back." Felix Terry

Figure 13: The Ekphrastic Agency advertisement for *Art & Australia*, Spring Issue, Vol 46, No 46, 2008.

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Figure 14 & 15: left Jane Naylor, Testimonials from satisfied clients of The Ekphrastic Agency and The Ekphrastic Agency Kiosk. Photo: Jane Naylor

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- ⁱ Naylor, J. *The Independent *Rt Tacticians' guide to the Art Universe*, PhD thesis University of NSW, 2010
- ⁱⁱ Its place in the format of the thesis and now what I use to refer to this concept.
- ⁱⁱⁱ 'pataphysics can be briefly described as the pseudoscience of imaginary solutions coined by Alfred Jarry in 1983
- ^{iv} Friedman, K. *Forty Years of Fluxus*, 1998 <http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/kfriedman-fourtyyears.html>, Accessed 2/1/2007.
- ^v Turner, C. ed. *Art and Social Change : Contemporary art in Asia and the Pacific*, Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 2004, p. 21. Turner believes the term "culture industry" here is meant to be read with its original meaning – a term of abuse invented by Theodor W. Adorno in the 1960s.
- ^{vi} Hill, P. *Superfictions. The Creation of Fictional Situations in International Contemporary Art Practice*, PhD exegesis and website, 2000, <http://www.superfictions.com/encyc/entries/film.html> , Accessed 27/4/2008.
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} And when it looks like the substitution may be exposed, Frankenstein's assistant to The Spectacle, The Media, is powered into overdrive with diversionary tactics. Currently these are in the form of a "War on Terror", more particularly terrorists lurking in our local shadows and as I tidy up these footnotes Global pandemics are good for domestic diversion and sales.
- ^{ix} Livraghi, G. "Editorial: The 'carnivalization' of the internet", *Net marketing*, No 63, 21/5/2000, <http://www.gandalf.it/netmark/netmar63.htm#heading01>, Accessed 30/12/2008.
- ^x Boje, D. M. "Carnavalesque Resistance to Global Spectacle: A Critical Postmodern Theory of Public Administration", New Mexico State University, April 12, 2001; Revised April 30, 2001. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, Vol 23, No 3 http://cbae.nmsu.edu/~dboje/papers/carnavalesque_resistance_to_glob.htm , Accessed 4/6/2007.
- ^{xi} Westecott and Jahn-Sudmann, Ludic-Society intrudes a New Discipline – LUDICS, <http://www.ludic-society.net/>, Accessed 17/8/2007.
- ^{xii} Jorn, A. *Pataphysics: A religion in the making*, 1961, <http://www.infopool.org.uk/6104.html> , Accessed 3/10/04.
- ^{xiii} Wolfreys, J. 'In perspective: Pierre Bourdieu', *International Socialism Journal*, Issue 87, Summer, 2000, <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj87/wolfreys.htm>, Accessed 12/7/2009.
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} Schmidt Campbell, M. 'Artistic Citizenship: The role of the arts in a time of crisis', *Artistic Citizenship: A public voice for the arts*, Schmidt Campbell, M. and Martin, R. eds. Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 24.
- ^{xvi} Mann, S. *Sousveillance: Secrecy, not privacy, may be the true cause of terrorism*, 2002, <http://wecam.org/sousveillance.htm>, Accessed 14/6/2009.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} These actions and motivations differ from those within professional associations and artists run exhibition spaces when they merely self-promote and make art to sell art aligning with the art market. Thus they are outside Fluxus traditions.
- ^{xix} Developed by Augusto Boal in Argentina in the 1970's.
- ^{xx} Press release, Exhibition- Shopdropping: experiments in the aisle, Pond, 2005, http://www.mucketyduck.org/b_1_exhibitions/shopdropping/ Accessed 22/1/2008. Lewis Hyde "It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection ... a gift makes the connection."
- ^{xxi} McIlveen, F. "The Power of the Object over the Person", Purves, T. (ed) *What We Want is Free: Generosity and exchange in recent art*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 177.
- ^{xxii} Gordon, L. and Neese, A. (curators) *Exhibition – You Can Have it All*, Salvation Gallery, New York, 2007, http://ychia.com/ychia_catalog_207.pdf, Accessed 17/11/2008.
- ^{xxiii} Cubitt, S. *Amateur Aesthetics*, 1999, <http://homepage.mac.com/waikatoscreen/talks/amateuraesthetics.pdf>, Accessed 12/1/2009.
- ^{xxiv} Walker, J. A. *A Dark Art for a Dark Time?* 2009, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19932004/A-Dark-Art-for-a-Dark-Timewps>, Accessed 20/3/2010.
- ^{xxv} Ibid.
- ^{xxvi} His work for SnackArt can be viewed at http://www.snackart.com.au/papa_box1.htm, own website.
- ^{xxvii} Wood, P. *Movements in Modern Art: Conceptual Art*, Tate Publishing, London, 2002 p. 43. Paul Wood states "Conceptual Art: simultaneously the *ne plus ultra* of modernist reductionism and an inquiry, *as art*, into what art was".
- ^{xxviii} Purves, T. *Blows Against the Empire*, Purves, ed., op. cit., p. 38.
- ^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} I find Colin Davies' definition useful, 'Semionauts make connections within our universe of proliferating signs'. Davies, C. and Parrinder, M., *Who Are the semionauts? Limited Language*, 2007, <http://www.limitedlanguage.org/discussion/index.php/archive/who-are-the-semionauts/>, Accessed 4/5/2008.

^{xxx} Mann, P. *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1991, p. 21.

^{xxxii} Maguire, M. *The Memory Theatre of Giulio Camillo*, 1986, http://www.creationproduction.org/maguire/pdf/memorytheatre_mmaguire.pdf, Accessed 30/4/2008.

^{xxxiii} I bid.

^{xxxiv} Higgins, H. *Fluxus Experience*, University of California press, Los Angeles & London, 2002, p.192.

^{xxxv} Saper, C. 'Fluxacademy: From Intermedia to Interactive Education', *Fluxus: A conceptual country*, Milman, E. editor and curator. Providence: Rhode Island School of Design, Graphic Design Dept, 1992, p 45.

^{xxxvi} Brown, B. A. *Art & Mass Media Second Edition Revised*, 2005, p. 53, <http://www.csun.edu/art/faculty/Art&MassMedia/Media12--Late%2020%20Cent%20A-G.pdf>, Accessed 21/5/2009.

^{xxxvii} Schimmel, P. ed. *Out Of Actions: Between Performance and the ...*, 1949–1979, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Thames and Hudson, Los Angeles, 1998, p. 84.

^{xxxviii} Saper, C. op. cit., p. 51.

^{xxxix} Dezeuze, A. 'Transfiguration of the Commonplace', *Variant*, Issue 22, Spring, 2005 <http://www.variant.org.uk/22texts/Dezeuze.html>. Accessed 14/1/2009.

^{xl} 'Rancière, J. 'Problems and Transformations in Critical Art//2004', Bishop, C. ed. *Participation*, Whitechapel and The M.I.T. Press, 2006, p. 90. Jacques Rancière suggests a role for art to repair the weaknesses in social bonds. 'Art no longer wants to respond to the excesses of commodities and signs, but to a lack of connections ... by offering small services, the artist repairs the weaknesses in the social bond'.

^{xli} One of the 12 Fluxus characteristics identified by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman.

^{xlii} Purves, ed., op. cit., p. xi.

^{xliii} One of the 12 Fluxus characteristics identified by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman.

^{xliiv} One of the 12 Fluxus characteristics identified by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman.

^{xli} Kaprow, A. 'Notes on the Elimination of the Audience', Bishop, C. ed. *Participation*, Whitechapel and The MIT Press, 2006, p. 104.

^{xli} One of the 12 Fluxus characteristics identified by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman.

^{xli} Higgins, H. op. cit., p. 208, footnote 64.

^{xli} One of the 12 Fluxus characteristics identified by Dick Higgins and Ken Friedman.