

School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

**Adventures in the Irreal: Science Fiction, Utopia and
Contemporary Art Practice**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Abstract

This practice-led research project seeks to form new, speculative connections between art and utopia through a hybridisation of science fiction and contemporary art practice. Contemporary art is a form of creative practice which emerges from the postmodern rejection of progressive, linear accounts of art history. Within this state of contemporaneity, traditional conceptions of art history no longer function as satisfactory narrative accounts for the presence of art. At the same time, all the various understandings of art contained within these histories are laid out like a toolbox for contemporary artists to pick from and combine as they see fit. Included in this toolbox is the modernist connection of art and utopia often gestured towards in the manifestos of twentieth-century art movements.

Building on the work of contemporary art historian Amelia Barikin, this research project seeks to create artworks which embody the critical, speculative functionality of science fictions in relation to utopia, and in doing so form new connections to it distinct from those evidenced by manifestos and movements of the twentieth century. In order to realise this aim, the imaginative framework of “cognitive estrangement,” created by science fiction critic Darko Suvin as a means of articulating science fiction genre’s ability to make thinking strange in relation to its subject matter, is appropriated and treated as a method for developing science fictional artworks. Alongside this framework, the concept of “material fiction,” derived from artists Jonah Freeman, Justin Lowe and Alexandre Singh’s discussion of their 2008 installation *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*, is expanded on as a means of articulating science fiction as installation artworks. These methods are deployed in the creation of the artworks which form the creative component of this research project.

Each of these artworks simulate access to a science fictional world, and each of these simulated worlds embody the imaginative framework of cognitive estrangement. This interaction of cognition and estrangement opens up a speculative space regarding utopian aspects of each artwork’s subject matter, and in doing so forge new connections between contemporary art practice and utopia. These artworks evidence not only the functionality of the methods developed as part of this research project in terms of creating science fictional artworks, they also evidence the generative, speculative possibilities of these methods in relation to contemporary examples of utopia.

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Introduction

'Adventures in the Irreal' is a practice-led investigation into the speculative possibilities made available through the creation of artworks that are also science fictional narratives. Building primarily on the work of contemporary art historian Amelia Barikin and science fiction critic Darko Suvin, the science fiction artworks created as part of this research project are constitutive of a speculative approach to the utopian aspects of their subject matter. Within the post-historical¹ condition of contemporary art, this ability of the artworks developed as part of this research project to act as estranged approaches to utopian elements of their subject matter is of significance. This is because it allows contemporary art practice a new means of negotiating and establishing relationships to utopia distinct from those previously developed through the manifestos and movements of modern art.

The outcomes of this research project are twofold. The first outcome is the set of methods I have developed over the course of the last four years which provides a means of producing science fiction narratives and articulating them materially as artworks. These methods have been developed by adapting, firstly, Darko Suvin's cognitive estrangement as a way of producing science fiction narratives, and material fiction; and secondly, the relationship of the material science fiction artwork to its narrative, which I have derived from artists Jonah Freeman, Justin Lowe and Alexandre Singh, and expanded upon as part of this research project. Cognitive estrangement allows for the creation of science fiction narratives that can be directed towards specific, speculative relationships with elements of their subject matter through the centring of the narratives around the plot device of the "novum," or "new thing." Material fiction is an approach to the materiality of artworks which emphasises the relationship of the science fiction artwork in question to the narrative that it articulates, and by extension, the novum around which that narrative is centred. These methods are discussed over the course of chapters one and two, before their specific implementation in each science fiction artwork developed as part of this research is evidenced in chapters three, four and five.

¹ The term "post-historical" refers to an understanding of contemporary art practice described by art critic Arthur C. Danto in his book *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (2014). This understanding of contemporary art practice, and its significance in relation to this research project, is developed further in chapter one.

The second outcome of this research is the speculative approaches these artworks provide in relation to the utopian aspects of their subject matter. The ways in which the artworks I have developed are speculative is informed by an established relationship between science fiction and speculation often expressed through the initialism of “science fiction” as “SF.” These initials allow for the suggestion of a secondary meaning, that of “speculative fiction.” The speculative potential of science fictions in relation to their subject matter is developed further in chapter one, where the potential of this speculation in relation to utopia is also discussed, as well as what this might mean in terms of contemporary art’s relationship to its own histories.

The artworks developed as part of this research act as speculative lenses for three subjects: the white cube gallery space, the museum, and conspiracy theory. Each of these subjects has its own specific relationship to history and utopia. The white cube is a utopian product of modern art history; the museum is a space in which histories are articulated in material form, and the utopian outcomes of these histories are gestured towards; and conspiracy theory can be thought as a form of historical counter-narrative which emphasises either the dystopian or eutopian aspects of culture and history it is positioned in relation to.

The Island, the first artwork developed as part of this research (discussed in chapter three), speculates on the white cube and its ongoing presence in contemporary art practice. *An Event*, the second artwork in this research (discussed in chapter four), was developed in collaboration with artists Oliver Hull and Giles Bunch. This work estranges the narrative conventions of museum space, opening up a speculative space regarding the manner in which historical narratives are formed from raw events. The third artwork developed as part of this research, *Earth Coincidence Control Office* (discussed in chapter five), was made in collaboration with Jack Wansbrough. This work proposes the existence of a conspiracy theory, which reframes the problematic inheritance of the mind-expansion movement, and opens up a speculative space regarding language and its construction. In this exegesis, a chapter is dedicated to each of these works. These chapters discuss the

science fiction narratives of the respective works², the manner in which these narratives are articulated materially, and the speculative potential of the work in relation to utopian aspects of its subject matter.

In creating artworks which are intended to function as speculative approaches to utopian aspects of their subject matter, I am not seeking to advocate for these utopias, but rather aiming to open up speculative spaces regarding them. This research project reflects my position, informed by the work of literary critic Fredric Jameson, that contemporary utopian discourse should be a pluralistic imagining of possible utopias as opposed to a form of advocacy for any particular utopia. My approach to science fiction has been informed by Jameson and Suvin, and I view the genre as being inherently linked to utopia. As such, this research project is concerned with producing science fiction artworks which are able to speculate on the utopian aspects of their subject matter, rather than advocating for the moral, ethical or economic benefits of the utopias suggested by these aspects.

Across all its various articulations in novels, comics, films, television, video games and contemporary art, science fiction retains the core function of Suvin's framework of cognitive estrangement. This framework locates the significance of the science fiction genre as emerging through the interaction cognition and estrangement that allows it the ability to make thinking become strange in relation to the content of science fiction text. This "making strange" of thought itself, in turn, allows alternate, speculative approaches towards the subject matter of the science fiction to emerge. In this sense, all science fiction has the potential to be speculative vehicles in relation to utopian aspects of their subject matter; however, not all science fictions are deliberately directed towards these utopian aspects, despite their ability to be read as having relationships to utopia. Another way of phrasing this might be to say that not all science fiction appears to be deliberately directed towards specific speculative relationships with their subject matter by their author, but I believe that all science fiction can be read as being speculative, however generic, tacky,

² While each chapter refers to the narrative of its respective artwork insofar as it relates to the specific material articulation of the narrative that is the subject of the chapter, summaries of each artwork's narrative are provided in the appendixes (see appendixes A, B and C).

flimsy or kitsch they might appear at first glance. The *Warhammer 40K*³ science fiction universe is one such example, which can be interpreted in a number of interesting and speculative ways, even though these interpretations may not always match the intentions of the original authors. This research project, however, is directed towards these utopian aspects, and therefore aims to contribute to discourse on utopia as well as discourses on contemporary art and science fiction. Ultimately, this research project is an experiment within the hybrid space of science fiction art, and represents only a small venture into an area of practice which contains, in my view, a largely untapped reservoir of critical, speculative potential.

This research project takes part of its title from a term created by science fiction author Iain M. Banks. This term, the “Irreal,” is used by Banks to describe the virtual space that the powerful artificial intelligences (AIs) of his Culture series have created for themselves, and which they often occupy when not directly engaged in some aspect of the material universe. Discussed in more detail in chapter one, the “Irreal” can be thought of as being functionally similar to the concept of a “novel-within-a-novel” as it operates within the scope of Banks’ Culture series; it is the utopian imagination of the most powerful intelligences within a fictional text that is, in itself, an expression of Banks’ utopian imagination. Within my own research, the term Irreal functions as a metaphor for the relationship of the artworks I have created as part of this research to the utopian aspects of their real-world subject matter that are estranged within the worlds of their fictions. The spirit of the Irreal, as an imaginative space concerned with utopia, and which allows the aspects of reality that it exaggerates, minimises, ignores or replaces to be compared with and contrasted against their real-world counterparts, is something that I feel the work I have created as part of this research embodies. In my view, the artworks I have developed are adventures into this Irreal space; a simulation of some aspect of the utopian, science fiction universes they are representative of. My utopias, unlike those imagined by the Minds of the Culture novels, are materialised in reality in the form of artworks. As such, this research project is concerned with developing methods through which science fictional

³ *Warhammer 40K*, or *Warhammer 40,000*, is a science fiction universe which is primarily the setting for Games Workshop’s tabletop game of the same name. The setting has been fleshed out across a broad variety of media. I have a great affection for this science fiction universe, but part of that affection stems from the fact that it is very melodramatic and, to be blunt, often quite silly.

approaches to utopia can be developed and articulated materially in the form of artworks. The following exegesis will offer evidence of these methods, the speculative relationships to utopia that they enabled my artworks to embody, and the significance of these outcomes.

Chapter One: Contemporary Art, Science Fiction and Utopia

This chapter will provide a background for this research, evidencing how key concepts from the fields of science fiction and contemporary art are either treated as, or inform, methods utilised in the production of the creative component of the project. This research project aims to create artworks that are also science fiction texts, and to explore the speculative possibilities made available through this experimentation. My intention with this research is to create artworks that embody the *narrative* qualities of science fiction, as opposed to visually identifiable science fiction aesthetics. This is not to say that the aesthetics of science fiction are not present within the work to varying degrees, but to emphasise that the aesthetic decisions made in the process of creating the work are in service of its narrative, rather than the inverse. Consequently, in terms of the science fiction genre, this project has primarily been influenced by written SF texts, such as novels and short stories, as opposed to visual science fiction texts, such as films, comic books or video games. Despite this concern with narrative, the creative outcomes of this research project are visual artworks, and therefore, I have to acknowledge the fact that they are themselves, ultimately, visual science fiction. In light of this, a concern of this research is the question of how to articulate a fictional narrative in the form of a material artwork. This question deserves its own chapter, and requires some foregrounding in terms of the theorising of science fiction within this research project, and how this informs the creation of each work's narrative. The subsequent question of how to articulate a fictional narrative in the material form of an artwork is addressed in chapter two. This chapter provides a theorising of the relationship between science fiction, contemporary art and utopia. In doing so, it will evidence the manner in which Darko Suvin's imaginative framework of cognitive estrangement has been utilised as a method within this research, and the significance of this approach.

This research project locates its significance at the intersection of contemporary art and science fiction practices. Consequently, it builds on the work of other artists, scholars and science fiction authors who contribute to the field of science fiction art. A significant resource for understanding this hybrid field is the work of contemporary art historian Amelia Barikin. In her introduction to *Making Worlds: Art and Science Fiction* (2013), a collection of essays on science fiction and art practice, which she edited with fellow

contemporary art historian Helen Hughes, Barikin advocates for the unique potential of science fiction art. In the introduction she states:

The linking point between these conversations was the idea of science fiction as a platform for the building of alternate art histories. This collection is as such less concerned with how science fiction is referenced by artists, than with how works of art have begun to actually embody the operating systems of their content; how science fiction might be performed, materialised or enacted within a contemporary context. (2013, 8)

My research project echoes the core premise of this statement, namely, the aim of creating artworks which are also science fictional texts. In this sense, this project can be thought of as a practice-led investigation into how Barikin's proposition might be deliberately enacted through contemporary art practice⁴. In doing so, this research explores what the "operating systems" of science fiction might be, and how these might allow science fiction to be "performed, materialised or enacted" within a contemporary art context.

Towards the end of her introduction, Barikin refers to the following link between science fiction and contemporary art:

That art disorients in productive ways is critical, and speaks also to one of the founding definitions of science fiction by Darko Suvin: the theory of cognitive estrangement. In the early 1970s, Suvin suggested that one of the most revolutionary elements of sci-fi is its ability to render thought itself strange, revealing the fragility of perception in the making of meaning. But this kind of aesthetic and cognitive dissonance is not always a rigorously intellectual or even theoretical process. It is more often recognisable as a sensation, a kind of sensual, vertiginous pleasure invoked by the opening of a chasm, the creation of a whole through which another reality might emerge. The new territories of art, then: can they be accessed

⁴ As much as this research might be considered an attempt at fulfilling Barikin's proposition, it is also a point of divergence from her research in that Barikin's use of cognitive estrangement and other ideas from science fiction is in the act of interpreting artworks, whereas my own use of these ideas is in their creation.

through the delirium of estrangement, through the vortices of science fiction, in ‘no-knowledge zones’? (2013, 11)

Barikin’s use of the term “no-knowledge zones” refers to a concept she applies to the practice of French contemporary artist Pierre Huyghe, whose work and practice are the subject of her book *Parallel Presents: The Art of Pierre Huyghe* (2012). Huyghe produces artworks that can be interpreted as science fiction, such as *A Journey That Wasn’t* (2005). This artwork “documents” the artist seemingly travelling to Antarctica in order to interact, through the medium of a strange device, with an albino penguin. The narrative of this work could be interpreted as science fiction that pivots around the existence of this strange device. Huyghe’s influence on my practice, and the parallels between his approach to fiction and “documentary” and my own “material fiction” are discussed further in chapter two. However, Huyghe’s practice and the concept of “no-knowledge zones” are less significant to my practice, and this research project by extension, than Barikin’s connection of Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement to contemporary art practice. As Barikin describes, cognitive estrangement is a founding definition of science fiction which foregrounds the genre’s ability to “render thought itself strange” (2013, 11). This research project takes Suvin’s definition and treats it as a method for producing science fiction narratives; an imaginative framework, or “operating system” (2013, 11) of science fiction, to be utilised in the creation and interpretation of science fiction artworks⁵.

Cognitive Estrangement:

Descended from Bertolt Brecht’s “alienation effect” (*Verfremdungseffekt*), Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement was first created as a means of distinguishing the genre from other, similar genres, such as fantasy and folktale. Originally developed in the early 1970s,

⁵ Another prior connection between science fiction and contemporary art practice is made by art critic Andrew Frost in his 2013 paper *Science Fictional Aesthetics: The Novum and Cognitive Estrangement in Contemporary Art*. In this paper Frost suggests an application of cognitive estrangement to contemporary art practice, applying it as an interpretive framework to a number of science fiction artworks. He suggests that “a ‘true melding’ of contemporary art and science fiction” (Frost 2013, 1) might be achieved through the novum and cognitive estrangement. I view Frost and my own work as running parallel to one another, with him using cognitive estrangement and other ideas from science fiction criticism in the interpretation and critique of contemporary artworks, while I utilise these same ideas in their creation.

Suvin first proposed his definition for the genre in “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre” in 1972. Over the course of the seventies, Suvin further developed his definition into a framework which continues to provide a means of approaching and discussing the critical, speculative relationships between the worlds of the science fiction genre and the reality of its authors and readers. Suvin’s 1979 book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (2016) expanded on his theory of cognitive estrangement, and is considered to be one of the most significant developments in the field of science fiction. As literary critic Gerry Canavan states in his introduction to the 2016 reprint of *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*: “What Suvin did is establish a discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, that subsequent SF authors have had to contend with, whether positively or negatively” (Canavan, in Suvin 2016, xii). Later in this same introduction, Canavan quotes science fiction author and critic Mark Bould who describes Suvin as a black hole whose gravity science fiction authors are unable to escape (Canavan, in Suvin 2016, xiii). Suffice it to say that Suvin, and his theory of cognitive estrangement, are both massively influential and highly contentious within the field of science fiction criticism. This research project does not attempt to negotiate cognitive estrangement as a definition for the entirety of the science fiction genre. Rather, it is an experiment in treating cognitive estrangement as a method to be utilised in the creation of artworks which are also science fictional texts.

Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement offers scholars a method with which they can examine how science fiction is critical, and in what ways. For Suvin, the critical potential of a science fiction text rests on the “novum” or “new thing,” around which the text is centred, and through which the world of the text is differentiated from that of the author and/or reader (Suvin 2016, 16–17). This “novum” is the warp drive of *Star Trek* (1966–1969), the replicants of *Bladerunner* (1982), and the Zone of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky’s *Roadside Picnic* (1972). The strange device central to Huyghe’s *A Journey That Wasn’t* might also be considered a novum. A novum is the novel (as in interesting and innovative) plot device, the central MacGuffin⁶, which allows for the world of the science fiction to exist and

⁶ “MacGuffin” is a term invented by screenwriter Angus MacPhail to describe an event, object or device which drives the plot of a fiction forward and/or motivates its characters. This object is often irrelevant in its own right but serves as central plot device within the narrative of the work. MacPhail coined the term while working with Alfred Hitchcock, whose films often feature MacGuffins, such as the statue which contains a

drive its plot forward. Within the world of the text, the presence of this novum is validated by the cognitive aspect of Suvin's framework. This "cognition" takes the form of the reader's recognition of elements of this fictional world, those that are shared between their world and the world of the fiction. By extension, the reader recognises the manner in which the novum has differentiated the world of the text from their own. This leads to the estrangement in Suvin's definition, in that the world depicted in the text, through the recognisable difference produced by the presence of the novum, is "made strange" in relation to the world of the author and/or reader. This estrangement provides a space for a thinking-through of the difference the novum has produced within the world of the fiction. It is this consideration of the estranged world of the fiction which, like a funhouse mirror distorting a person's image, "renders thought itself strange" (Barikin 2013, 11) in relation to the elements of reality recognisable within the world of the text.

A familiar and relatively simple example of cognitive estrangement in action can be found in James Cameron's 1984 film *The Terminator*. In this film the novum of a time travelling robot is introduced into the film's world, an otherwise familiar Hollywood approximation of its audience's own world. The presence of this robot radically differentiates the world of the *Terminator* films from that of reality, and provides a vehicle for speculation, not only on the implications of artificial intelligence, but also the contradictions and fateful implications of time travel. According to Suvin, science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (2016, 20). This difference of the text from the author's empirical environment can also be extended to the reader of a science fiction text who, if the text is relatively contemporary, shares this environment with the author to the same extent that they share it with any other human being. It is through the recognisable difference, or estrangement, of the world of the fiction from the world of the author and/or reader that

microfilm in *North by Northwest* (1959) (Selenica 2017, 114). Suvin's novum is similar to MacPhail's MacGuffin in that the novum is often central to various characters' motivations, and drives the plot forward, but distinguishes itself in that the novum is often a significant aspect of a science fiction text's world and, as such, its relevance is foregrounded. Nevertheless, there is a generative cross-pollination between the MacGuffin and the novum, especially considering the fact that many science fiction plots take the form of detective stories.

science fiction, understood through the lens of Suvin's cognitive estrangement, finds its criticality.

As part of this research I have adopted Suvin's framework and adapted it into a method to be utilised in the creation of science fiction narratives, which are in turn used as the basis for science fiction artworks. In doing so, I mirror the function of cognitive estrangement as an interpretive framework by inventing a story which is deliberately centred around a novum of my own creation. For *The Island* (chapter 3) this is the titular Island; a sentient, intelligent landmass which manipulates the desires of human beings. In the case of *An Event* (chapter four), it is the central Event; an ambiguous cataclysm which produces a multiplicity of alternate timelines. The novum central to *Earth Coincidence Control Office* (chapter five) is the existence of a secret society that believes in the possibility of cross-species communication with dolphins. Each of these narratives is addressed in its respective chapter—and is summarised in the respective appendix (see appendixes A, B and C)—alongside an examination of the speculative possibilities made available by utilising cognitive estrangement as a method for producing these narratives.

Science Fiction and Speculation:

This research project utilises Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement as a method to be deployed in the creation and interpretation of science fiction artworks. This involves harnessing the poetic and critical potential of this framework, including an understanding how this potential is suggested through cognitive estrangement in the first place. This term, as Canavan notes, is "a superficially oxymoronic formulation that matches the paradoxical relationship between 'science' and 'fiction' in 'science fiction'" (Canavan in Suvin 2016, xvii). Canavan further details the complexity of this contradictory relationship:

Suvin's restatement of the oxymoronic relationship between 'S' and 'F' in his proposed conjuncture between cognition and estrangement does more than simply restate the problem: it is a judo-like embrace of this opposition that orients SF around this very paradox, and in the process transforms both horns of the dilemma, opening the 'S' of 'science' into as much *sapientia* (wisdom) as *scientia* (knowledge), and remaking the 'F' of 'fiction' not so much as 'falsity' but as 'possibility,' or, even more precisely, as 'theoreticity'—'fiction' better understood not

as a *deviation* from the truth but as an alternate orientation towards it. (Canavan in Suvin 2016, xvii, original italics)

Here, Canavan elucidates some of the controversial aspects of Suvin's terminology, drawing attention to the critical and poetic potential of its oxymoronic qualities, and positions science fiction as a genre concerned with producing alternate orientations towards truth. Canavan's understanding of SF provides an expanded consideration of the genre's poetics via his interpretation of the "scientific," or cognitive, and "fictive," or estranging, aspects of the "science fiction" label. This understanding of Suvin's theory, as being concerned with alternate orientations towards truth, and of being inherently oxymoronic or paradoxical through its proposed interaction of "science" and "fiction" or "cognition" and "estrangement", resonates with my treatment of it as a method utilised in the creation of science fiction artworks. It also frames cognitive estrangement as having a generative relationship with the concept of the Irreal, in that the Irreal within the scope of this project is intended as a fictional mode of unreality, a "not real" imaginative space wherein the utopian aspects of each artwork's subject matter can be approached through the speculative lens of estrangement.

In her recent work *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway expands on the SF initialism:

An ubiquitous figure in this book is sf: science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far. This reiterated list whirls and loops throughout the coming pages, in words and in visual pictures, braiding me and my readers into beings and patterns at stake. Science fact and speculative fabulation need each other, and both need speculative feminism. I think of SF and string figures in a triple sense of figuring. First, promiscuously plucking out fibres in clotted and dense events and practices, I try to follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times. In that sense, SF is a method of tracing, of following a thread in the dark, in a dangerous true tale of adventure, where who lives and who dies and how might become clearer for the cultivating of multispecies justice. Second, the string figure is not the tracking, but rather the actual thing, the pattern and assembly that solicits response, the thing that is not

oneself but with which one must go on. Third, string figuring is passing on and receiving, making and unmaking, picking up threads and dropping them. SF is practice and process; it is becoming-with each other in surprising relays; it is a figure for ongoingness in the Chthulucene. (2–3)

Science fiction's transition into "SF" allows the genre to transcend its literary limitations and become something far more expansive and fluid, namely, a method for speculating through fiction and fabulation. In Haraway's view, this initialisation is in itself open to speculation. As mentioned in the introduction, this research project is not concerned with the validity, or lack thereof, of the various definitions of science fiction and similar or related genres mentioned in this exegesis. In my opinion, none of these various definitions are completely satisfactory in their attempts at defining an entire field of creative production, nor should they have to be. Rather, I view these various definitions, including Suvin's cognitive estrangement, as complementing each other and the possibilities of science fiction as a genre. I do not adopt a rigid taxonomy for the science fiction genre; instead, I treat one of its founding definitions as a method for producing works which I consider to be science fiction. Instead of entering into a debate about whether a particular creative work is or is not science fiction, utopian, or otherwise, I seek to utilise the influence of the various works and definitions in order to further the speculative possibilities of my own creative work. In this sense, my position is similar to Haraway's, in that what in another context might signal a limiting of scope in order to be specific, instead becomes, within the context of this research, a creative framework to further the speculative potential of my artworks, and a means of opening up fresh avenues of inquiry.

Canavan's and Haraway's discussion of the "S" and "F" of science fiction suggests the second meaning, that of "speculative fiction," is most often attached to these initials. The slippery nature of the "science" of "science fiction" has led some critics and authors to classify the genre as pulp, with "speculative fiction" serving as a classification for works that truly speculate about aspects of the author's reality. In many ways, this aim of distinguishing speculative from science fiction echoes Suvin's original intention when developing his theory of cognitive estrangement by separating truly critical science fiction from pulp. My position is that its result are similar; rather than clinically separating the speculative from the science fictional, the proposition of speculative fiction as a distinct genre instead results in a more complex understanding of the science fiction genre's

speculative and critical potential. The tension between these two terminologies is perhaps best represented by the different positions of authors Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood. Both of these authors have written works that are considered exemplary examples of the science fiction canon, including Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1973) and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). However, despite her work winning the inaugural Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987 for the *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood rejects out of hand that her writing is science fiction. This rejection seems to stem from a concern that her writing might be relegated to the realm of pulp. In the essay "Writing Utopia," which is included in the *Moving Targets* anthology, she states:

The Handmaid's Tale, I must explain for the benefit of the one person in the audience who hasn't read it yet—out in paperback, and a bargain of cheap thrills for \$4.95—is set in the future. This conned people into believing it is science fiction which, in my mind, it is not. I define science fiction as being about things that are not possible today—that depend, for instance, on advanced space travel, time travel, the discovery of unseen monsters on other planets, or which contain various technologies which have not yet been developed. But in *The Handmaid's Tale*, nothing happens that the human race has not already done at some time in the past, or which it is not doing now, perhaps in other countries, or for which it has not yet developed the technology. We've done it, or we're doing it, or we could start doing it tomorrow. Nothing inconceivable takes place, and the projected trends on which my future society is based are already in motion. So I think of *The Handmaid's Tale* not as science fiction, but as speculative fiction. (Atwood 2004, 102-3)

I disagree with Atwood's position outlined in the above quote. I think that her definition of science fiction as being about things that are not possible today is disingenuous with regards to the critical possibilities of the genre, and in fact what she is describing is, at its core, an articulation of the speculative functionality of science fiction. In my view, much science fiction is about things that are possible today, and *The Handmaid's Tale* is an example of this. Atwood's novel could be interpreted as science fiction in which the novum of widespread infertility caused by pollution brings to the fore pre-existing misogynistic beliefs, resulting in an oppressive, dystopian setting. Similarly, Neal Stephenson's recent novel *Seveneves* (2015) begins as what might be readily identified as speculative fiction

tracking what might occur if the moon exploded but ends with a third act which takes place thousands of years after the moon's disintegration, and describes a setting that would be more recognisable as science fiction under Atwood's definition. For me, if the distinction between speculative and science fiction is merely the proximity of the setting chronologically to the present (i.e., "near future" settings), its lack of estrangement (i.e., the "realism" of the setting), or its aesthetics (i.e., the presence or lack of aliens, spaceships, "monsters," etc.), then this is not a helpful or meaningful means of distinguishing one form from another, as it is far too easy to muddy this distinction simply by attempting to apply it to Atwood's own novel, let alone the writing of other science fiction authors. My view is that science fiction is necessarily about things that are possible today; however, not in a literal, technological sense, rather in a metaphoric, imaginative sense. Science fictions depict, to varying degrees, settings which are estranged from reality, but this estrangement is tempered by the cognitive or recognisable aspects of the text, without which the world depicted in the science fiction would be indecipherable. In this sense, all science fiction is necessarily about things that are possible to imagine today. However, this process can be difficult, and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, one of the genre's critical capacities is not its ability to imagine new, truly alien settings, but its failure in attempting to do so, and in that process demonstrating the limits placed on our imagination by our own context.

Le Guin responds, with good humour, to Atwood's self-definition vis-à-vis science fiction in her review of Atwood's 2009 novel, *The Flood*:

This arbitrarily restrictive definition seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awarders. She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto.
(Le Guin 2009)

Le Guin's position that this distinction between speculative and science fiction is perhaps the result of an understandable anxiety concerning the acceptance of science fiction as a legitimate literary genre points, in my opinion, towards the artificial nature of this distinction. In the same way that Suvin's efforts to cauterise science fiction from other related genres such as fantasy and folk tale emphasise the fantastical and cautionary qualities of much science fiction, Atwood's attempt to separate the speculative from science fiction simply re-emphasises the speculative nature of science fiction. Some

science fiction may be about “monsters” or other similarly identifiable science fiction tropes, but this does not prohibit a text of this nature from being speculative. When I read science fictions like this, such as Iain M. Bank’s *Excession* (1996) (the book from which the metaphor of the Irreal, which is central to this project, is taken), where the plot is partially driven forward by a society of violent, squid-like beings called the Affront, I do not dismiss them out of hand as fantastical pulp. Instead, I am placed into a speculative space in which I attempt to extrapolate from my own context into the world of the text. What would it be like to meet a society such as the Affront, whose physiology and ideology are so radically alien not only to myself as the reader, but also to many members of the Culture who are the central characters in the novel? This extrapolation on behalf of the reader, the attempt at meeting the estranged world of the text halfway, is the “speculation” of the science fiction genre, and the manner in which I consider my artworks to be speculative. My artworks are this meeting between the estranged world of their fictions and the material world of reality; a creation of permeable, Irreal space between fiction and reality.

The Irreal:

As part of this research I utilise the term “Irreal” as a metaphor for the utopian imagination at play within the creative works I have produced. The use of this term within this project is appropriated from the work of science fiction author Iain M. Banks. Banks utilises this term in his Culture series to describe the virtual space that the powerful artificial intelligences (AIs) of the titular Culture create for themselves, and which they often occupy when not directly engaged in some aspect of the material universe. The Culture is what many might consider to be a eutopia⁷ by contemporary standards; a post-scarcity society occupied by a neo-anarchist collective of humanoid lifeforms—what we might recognise as aliens—and these AIs, often referred to as Minds. These Minds are incredibly advanced even by the standards of the science fiction genre; they are able to occupy multiple “bodies” at once, and these “bodies” might range from humanoid avatars to small fleets of spacecraft, essentially allowing them a degree of omnipotence, at least within the habitats they maintain for the biological members of the Culture. Despite this great intelligence and their

⁷ “Eutopia” is the positive form of utopia, which can be understood in contrast to the negative form of utopia known as “dystopia.”

independence from biological lifeforms, the Minds in Banks' novels, unlike Skynet of the *Terminator* movies or other similar AIs in science fiction, are mostly benevolent participants in the larger collective of the Culture. Many of the books in the series describe interactions between Minds and biological lifeforms in which the Minds appear to be essentially indulging the whims of these much more limited intelligences (although they are often revealed to have ulterior motives). However, this does not mean that the Minds, despite their engagement with the material universe, do not view it, and the Culture as a part of it, as limited in comparison to the possibilities that they can imagine. This is where the Irreal comes into play. The Irreal is something comparable to an incomprehensibly complicated video game engine, an impossibly elaborate version of John Horton Conway's *Game of Life* (1970), or an imagined visualisation of an idea made more concrete as a consequence of the vast imagination generating it. This allows the Minds of the Culture to create artificial, nonmaterial universes that comply with the more perfect principles which they desire. In a sense, the Irreal allows the Minds of the Culture to imagine, and to an extent realise⁸, utopias in a way that does not betray the neo-anarchist, utopian collective which they are a part of, in that they are not forcing their utopian visions onto this larger collective. It also allows them to explore utopian principles, which for the Minds are often expressed mathematically (or "metamathematically" as it is described in the series), without impacting others, and to share their findings in the form of Irreal universes with each other.

The Irreal is described in the following passage from *Excession*:

This was the way the Minds spent their time. They imagined entirely new universes with altered physical laws, and played with them, lived in them, tinkered with them, sometimes setting up the conditions for life, sometimes just letting things run to see if it would arise spontaneously, sometimes arranging things so that it was impossible but other kinds of bizarrely complication were enabled.

Some of the universes possessed just one tiny but significant alteration, leading to some subtle twist in the way things worked, while others were so wildly, aberrantly different it could take a perfectly first-rate Mind the human equivalent of years of

⁸ The extent of this realisation is that these Minds are able to "imagine" or "simulate" (these concepts seemingly run parallel to each other from the perspective of these AIs) universe-sized realities which, from the perspective of a life-form being simulated within this Irreal space, are indistinguishable from reality.

intense thought even to find the one tenuously familiar strand of recognisable reality that would allow it to translate the rest into comprehensibility. Between these extremes lay an infinitude of universes of unutterable fascination, consummate joy and absolute enlightenment. All that humanity knew and could understand in every single aspect, known, guessed at and hoped for in and of the universe was like a mean and base mud hut compared to the vast, glittering cloud-high palaces of monumentally exquisite proportions and prodigious riches that was the metamathical realm. Within the infinitudes raised to the power of infinities that those metamathical rules provided, the Minds built their immense pleasure-domes of rhapsodic philosophical ecstasy. (Banks 1997, 139)

The Irreal of Banks' novels can be thought of as a kind of powerful utopian imagination, one that is both serious and playful, rational and absurd, and as vivid as reality. It can also be thought of as operating in a similar fashion to Suvin's cognitive estrangement, in that these Irreal simulations require at least "one recognisable strand of reality" or, as Suvin might describe it, some cognitive element, in order for the Mind in question to understand the estranged universe of an Irreal simulation. While my artworks may aspire to be as vivid and complete as the visions of the Minds of the Culture, they ultimately fall short as my own imaginative capacity and means of production cannot challenge those of the fictional AIs. However, they do share many of the qualities of Banks' Irreal: they are concerned with utopian visions, and with speculative considerations of "what if" scenarios, and they are sensitive to their own imaginative shortcomings, although this might be considered a divergence from the majority of the Minds of Banks' novels, as many of them seem sincere in their belief that their Irreal imaginings are superior to the base reality they physically exist in. A notable exception is *Excession*, which tells the story of some of these Minds being confronted with the shortcomings of their utopian imaginations, represented in-text by this Irreal space, when they come into contact with evidence of an older, more utopian society in the form of the Excession itself. Within the scope of this research the functionality of the Irreal is to act as a metaphor for how I see my artworks operating as a form of utopian imagination, and the utopian potential I view as being available to science fiction art more broadly.

Utopia and Science Fiction:

The artworks I have created as part of this research are directed towards speculative relationships with what I consider to be utopian aspects of their subject matter. This direction is informed by the historical and contemporary relationship between science fiction and utopia. Suvin makes this connection in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, in which he conducts a vast historical survey of the genre, dedicating an entire chapter to defining utopia as a sub-genre of science fiction. According to Suvin, utopia can be defined as:

the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationships are organised according to a more perfect principle than the author's original community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternate historical hypothesis. (2016, 63)

In his monumental work *The Principle of Hope*, published in three volumes between 1954 and 1959, German utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch categorises all cultural expression as containing within it some aspect of utopia or some utopian impulse (Bloch 1995). Suvin follows Bloch in this regard and seeks to further demarcate utopia as a fictional genre, distinct from nonfictional utopianism (Suvin 2016, 16). He positions this genre within the larger genre of SF, emphasising that utopia is also “based on estrangement.” This, in turn, emphasises the potential of cognitive estrangement as a method for approaching, and speculating in relation to, various conceptions of utopia.

Suvin does acknowledge that, historically speaking, science fiction is descended from Thomas More's original *Utopia*, first published in 1516, which gave the genre and concept its name. Suvin positions science fiction in this genealogy as “a niece of utopia—a niece unusually ashamed of the family inheritance but unable to escape her genetic destiny” (2016, 76). However, he views contemporary utopian fiction as a sub-genre of science fiction, despite this genealogy establishing science fiction as emerging, in part, from the pre-existing genre of utopian fiction. This characterisation of utopia is controversial within both the fields of science fiction and utopian studies, having “certainly invigorated criticism in both fields” (Canavan in Suvin 2016, xxi). As Gerry Canavan explains:

Suvin's work has been nearly as influential in the field of utopian studies as in SF studies—particularly as so much utopian speculation and dystopian/apocalyptic warning in our moment is now, from a genre perspective, SF. In our time—with the world now fully mapped, and no hidden islands or isolated valleys yet lurking that might hold the secret to another sort of history—it is the imagination of the science fictional chronotype (the future, other dimensions, outer space) that yields the opportunity to both imagine radical social difference and connect that radical difference to our own situation in the here-and-now. Cognitive estrangement constitutes precisely this twofold move: we transport ourselves to the other world (estrangement) so that we can better think about this one (cognition). (Canavan in Suvin 2016, xxi-xxii)

The strength of this connection between science fiction and utopia, and the functionality of cognitive estrangement as a means of approaching and articulating this connection, is what prompted me to direct the artworks created as part of this research project towards utopian aspects of their subject matter. When I use the phrase “utopian aspects of their subject matter,” what I mean by this is the elements of reality that I view as being utopian, or as having some utopian potentiality. My artworks do not attempt to fully map out or articulate a utopia in the sense of More's original text. Instead, they present, in a hyperbolised manner, fragments of a utopia already present within their real-world subject matter. They provide an estranged orientation towards these utopian aspects, pointing towards them from the perspective of a science fictional world, and, in doing so, opening up new avenues of speculation in regards to these utopian aspects of my reality.

In his 1994 essay “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” utopian theorist Lyman Tower Sargent outlines a history of utopian thought before suggesting a series of definitions for its contemporary iterations. These definitions are as follows: the eutopian, or positive utopias; the dystopian, or negative utopias; the utopian satire; the anti-utopian, or utopias intended to criticise other forms of utopia; and the critical utopia, or utopias that acknowledge the problematic nature of utopia and factor this into their description (Sargent 1994, 9). Sargent's essay evidences the complexity of utopia as a concept in the contemporary setting. From my perspective, no utopian text is explicitly any one of these “faces” of utopia. Rather, all utopias are a mixture of some or all of these definitions. The utopia of the Culture, for example, is a positive eutopia in the sense that it is, in almost

every way I can think of, a perfect society from my perspective; individuals are given absolute freedom in their choice of lifestyle, body, sexuality, gender, hobbies, and so on. There is no money, no shortage of food, no restriction of information. Benevolent AIs take care of the boring practicalities of society, such as the shipping of goods and people, and the running of habitats similar to cities. No one needs to die unless they want to, and if they do, they have the option of being uploaded to a digital equivalent of heaven, or being reborn into a new body. However, much of the Culture novels are concerned with what happens when this utopia is confronted with a society or individual who does not view the Culture as being eutopian, such as the *Affront*, whose name is derived from the Culture's general opinion of them. In this exegesis I use the term "utopia" as a blanket term which is intended to accommodate this multifaceted (or multi-faced) understanding of utopia described by Sargent in his essay. The utopian elements of reality, which my artworks act as speculative lenses for, are not explicitly positive, negative, or otherwise. They are, like most of reality, a complex mixture of eutopian, dystopian and anti-utopian elements, open to satire and critique. The artworks I have created should similarly not be taken as advocating for the utopias suggested by these elements. Instead, like the Irreal universes created by the Minds of Banks' novels, my artworks are intended as "not real" speculations which take these elements of reality I consider as having some utopian potentiality and estrange them within the worlds of their fictions. Within these worlds, I combine dystopian, eutopian, satirical, critical and anti-utopian elements in order to produce a complex intermeshing of speculative possibilities in relation to elements of my reality I am estranging within my fictions.

Utopia, Pastiche and Contemporary Art:

The complex relationship between science fiction and utopia is further developed and articulated by literary critic and Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, which was first published in 2005. In the introduction to this book, Jameson refers to Olaf Stapleton's 1930 science fiction novel, *The First and Last Men*. These "first and last men" realise, as they evolve and become a space-faring species, that they cannot actually perceive alien species, or evidence of alien species, that do not share some aspect of their identity with humanity. Adding further weight to his argument, Jameson quotes from Alexander Gerard's 1774 *Essay on Genius*: "When Homer formed the idea of *Chimera*, he only joined into one

animal parts which belonged to other animals; the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent” (Gerard in Jameson 2007, xiii). Jameson cites this as an example of the limitations placed on the utopian imagination by our cultural context:

On the social level, this means our imaginations are hostages to our own means of production (and perhaps to whatever remains of past ones it has preserved). It suggests that at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment... and that therefore the best Utopias are those that fail most comprehensively.

It is a proposition that has the merit of shifting the discussion of Utopia from content to representations as such. (Jameson 2007, xiii)

Jameson’s framing of utopia relocates contemporary utopian discourse, moving it away from concrete, thoroughly mapped utopias in which the inner workings of utopian society, such as politics and economy, are fully described, and instead towards a discussion of things that may be utopian, or have utopian potentiality. He states, “It is not only the social and historical raw materials of the Utopian construct which are of interest from this perspective, but also the representational relations between them, such as closure, narrative and exclusion or inversion. Here as elsewhere in narrative analysis what is most revealing is not what is said, but what cannot be said, what does not register on the narrative apparatus” (2007, xiii). In my view, what Jameson is proposing here is a model for understanding utopian discourse as a form of pastiche, in which various elements of the author’s reality are exaggerated and combined in novel ways, forming new utopian relations between them, and emphasising their utopian potentiality. Under this model, utopias are not exclusively proposals for a better society, or cautionary tales about how much worse things might be; instead, they are a means through which the limitations of the contemporary utopian imagination can be tested. In stating that “the best Utopias are those that fail most comprehensively,” Jameson is not arguing for a discourse consisting of poorly constructed utopian texts, rather he is proposing that it is in the failure of a utopia to exist as a distinct society from our own that we come to understand the limitations placed on imaginations by our cultural context. The more estranged a utopia is, the more difficult it becomes to imagine this utopia, as we are only able to construct it within our minds from what we already know. In this sense, all utopias must fail, either in their realisation or in our ability to imagine them, pushing up against the culturally enforced limitations of our

imaginings.⁹ The science fictional worlds of the artworks I have produced as part of this research are produced through a pastiche of pre-existing elements of my own cultural context that I view as having some utopian potentiality. Through this process I aim to embody the utopian model proposed by Jameson, creating works which, through their novel combination of pre-existing elements, provide a means for reflecting on the limitations of the contemporary utopian imagination.

Later in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson further solidifies the connection between science fiction and the conception of utopian discourse that he is proposing. He posits an understanding of science fiction as a form of resistance against closure of the utopian imagination caused by the limitations placed on it by the cultural context of postmodernity—a resistance to the “end of history” through the genre’s ability to act as a vehicle for imagining, or rather attempting to imagine, the future:

...[T]hings are not seized, immobile forever, in some ‘end of history,’ but move steadily in time towards some unimaginable yet inevitable ‘real’ future. SF thus enacts and enables a structurally unique ‘method’ for apprehending the present as history... its deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatise our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representations which prove upon closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished, the atrophy in our time of what Marcuse has called the

⁹ An example of the relationship between culturally enforced limitations of the utopian imagination and the failure of utopias to present true, radical difference in a concrete fashion can be seen in the difficulty many science fiction texts have in articulating a utopian setting divorced from capitalism. In the *Culture* series, this can be seen in the manner in which many characters revel in the excesses of their post-scarcity utopia, leading fundamentally hedonistic lifestyles, as if part of their pleasure was derived from the monetary value of their activities, when it would seem more likely that they would, for the most part, not exhibit a great awareness of this. Similarly, in *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin depicts an anarcho-syndicalist society living on the planet Anarres; however, this society sits in direct juxtaposition to the authoritarian and capitalist societies of A-Io and Thu, who occupy the neighbouring planet of Urras, and it is through a contrasting of these social structures that the book’s speculative criticality emerges. Banks playfully engages with this problem in his 2004 standalone novel *The Algebraist*, which features a society of long-lived, gas-giant inhabiting aliens known as The Dwellers. These aliens live in an essentially anarchistic society whose only means of exchange is social kudos, and they exist in satirical juxtaposition with the feudalistic, class-driven human society with whom they interact over the course of the novel.

utopian imagination, the imagination of otherness and radical difference, to succeed by failure, and to serve as unwitting and even unwilling vehicles for a meditation, which, setting forth for the unknown, finds itself irrevocably mired in the all-too-familiar, and thereby becomes unexpectedly transformed into a contemplation of our own absolute limits. (Jameson 2007, 288–89, original italics)

This statement might initially read as a pessimistic view of science fiction, but it is my opinion that Jameson’s theorising of the interrelationship between utopia and science fiction is the genre’s core significance. Contemporary art involves a constant, self-referential questioning of what can be considered as contemporary art; a constant pushing up against, and nudging outwards, of the cultural limitations of the artistic imagination. Similarly, science fiction constantly questions, through its various alternate, estranged orientations towards the present, the absoluteness of various “truths,” be they scientific, cultural, perceptual or otherwise, and in doing so speculates on the utopian potential of such questioning. This questioning is often achieved through the presence of a novum within the world of the text which defies or surpasses some limitation that is viewed as being absolute in the author’s own time, such as space travel in the age of Jules Verne, or faster-than-light travel in the contemporary setting. This novum, however radical, is limited in the sense that it must still be comprehensible. Even science fiction narratives dealing with what might be considered radical nova are still anchored in the familiar, recognisable or “cognitive” aspects of the text, no matter how estranged their worlds might become. However, as Jameson alludes, neither science fiction or contemporary art can really imagine the future, or a true, radical alterity. Consequently, this questioning becomes speculative in the case of science fiction and, as this research project evidences, science fiction art; a form of fictive thought experiment entered into through the interaction of cognition and estrangement.

In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Darko Suvin describes utopia as “a method rather than a state,” one that “cannot be realised or not realised, it can only be applied” (2016, 67). Jameson takes a similar position, advocating for an essentially pluralistic conception of contemporary utopian discourse:

What is Utopian becomes, then, not the commitment to a specific machinery or blueprint, but rather the commitment to imagining possible Utopias as such, in their

greatest variety of forms. Utopian is no longer the invention and defence of a specific floorplan, but rather the story of all the arguments about how Utopia should be constructed in the first place. It is no longer the exhibit of an achieved Utopian construct, but rather the story of its production and of the very process of construction as such. (Jameson 2007, 217)

The understanding of utopia that Jameson is proposing speaks to the nature of this project. None of the artworks I have created as part of this research “exhibit an achieved utopian construct.” Instead, they are pastiches of elements of my reality that I view as having some utopian potentiality, offering a speculative lens in relation to these elements, while simultaneously drawing attention to the limitation placed on my ability to imagine a utopia as a consequence of my cultural context.

The pluralistic understanding of utopian discourse proposed by Jameson has a synergy with the relationship of contemporary art practice to the modernist art histories that inform it. In his book *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (2014), art critic Arthur C. Danto describes an understanding of the post-historical condition of contemporary art that in many ways mirrors the contemporary condition of utopia as described by Jameson:

One mark of art having ended is that there should no longer be an objective structure with a defining style, or if you prefer, that there should be an objective historical structure in which everything is possible, nothing is historically mandated: one thing is, so to say, as good as another. And that is my view of the objective condition for post-historical art. (Danto 2014, 44)

Danto’s conception of contemporary art as having a pluralistic relationship with its own history, is one that resonates with me as a contemporary artist. It is also, in some ways, utopian. In this view, art history, with all its various techniques, concepts, devices, tropes and utopias, is flattened out and presented as a toolbox for contemporary artists to work with. However, Danto does not take this condition of contemporary art practice to be the flawless utopia it might initially appear as. After all, contemporary art remains deeply affected by the Eurocentric, post-colonial history of modernity, as well as the histories that preceded it. This results in a relationship between contemporary art and art history which

is weighted towards those who have benefited from this history, while continuing to disadvantage those who do not. The history of science fiction is similarly steeped in colonial concepts such as exploration and otherness. However, as with contemporary art, science fiction has more recently become a discourse which allows female, queer and multicultural voices to be heard and valued in new and unique ways. It is my hope that the methods developed as part of this research might be utilised in this manner by practitioners from backgrounds less privileged than my own, so that they might produce new forms of estrangement, and new relationships to the utopias of the past, present and future. Only through a testing and demonstration of potential utopias within contemporary art practice can its applicable eutopian potentiality emerge.

In a similar manner to Jameson's framing of the imaginative possibilities of science fiction, Danto, in *After the End of Art*, tempers the imaginative possibilities of contemporary art practice:

...we live and produce within the horizon of a closed historical period. Some of the limitations are technical: one cannot produce easel paintings before the painting easel is invented. One cannot make computer art before the invention of the computer. In speaking of the end of art, I am not foreclosing the possibility of undreamt of technologies that will put at the disposition of artists the same range of possibilities the easel painting and computer exemplify. How could I? ... In both conditions—the end of history and the end of art—there is a state of freedom in two senses of the term. Human beings, in Marx and Engels's picture, are free to be what they want to be, and they are free from a certain historical agony which mandates that at any given stage there is an authentic and inauthentic mode of being, the former pointing to the future and the latter to the past. And artists, at the end of art, are similarly free to be whatever they want to be—are free to be anything or even to be everything. (Danto 2014, 44–45)

In his framing of the limited imaginative possibilities of SF, Jameson positions it as being uniquely able to function as a means of “apprehending the present as history” and of pushing up against, and thereby demonstrating, the limitations of utopian imagination in the contemporary setting (Jameson 2007, 288–9). Danto's identification of contemporary art as being post-historical, and therefore open to all the possibilities presented by art

history, is tempered by his recognition of the limits placed on artists' imaginations by the tools and techniques available to them. Like Homer and his Chimera, the Minds of the Culture and their Irreal, or Olaf Stapleton's *First and Last Men*, contemporary artists are limited in their creation of contemporary artworks by what they know as art, or by what they think art could be. In addition, like the contemporary utopian imagination, contemporary art under this framework is not defined by its ability to produce radical newness (unlike the *avant-garde* of modernism), and is instead defined by the production of novel combinations of pre-existing concepts, materials or ideas. This is another form of pastiche which informs the production of my artworks, particularly in my approach to the material fiction of each work.

Later in *After the End of Art*, Danto further expands on the limitations placed on contemporary art practice by the cultural context from which it is being produced:

One does not escape the constraints of history by entering into the post-historical period. So in whatever way it is true of the post-historical period in which we find ourselves that everything is possible, this must be consistent with Wölfflin's thought that not everything is possible. The gamey whiff of contradiction must be dispelled by making distinctions between the everything that is possible, and the everything that is not. (Danto 2014, 198)

This embracing of what I view as being one of the great contradictions of contemporary art is similar to Canavan's description of Suvin's "judo-like embrace" of the "S" and "F" of science fiction. Contemporary art offers a utopia where all forms of expression are validated and viewed as art, but this utopian vision is also limited in that what we view "as art" is historically and culturally affected. So, while we may have a condition in which all things could be considered as art, we cannot relate to something "as art" without some means of accessing it as such. Danto explains this using examples from art history, making the point that we do not relate to artworks from other time periods as the people living in those time periods related to them, just as a Palaeolithic human or ancient Egyptian, ripped from their own time and deposited within a contemporary art gallery or museum, would most likely not relate to objects housed inside as we do. Therefore, he writes:

The sense in which everything is possible is that in which all forms are ours. The sense in which not everything is possible is that we must still relate to them in our own way. The way we relate to those forms is part of what defines our period.
(Danto 2014, 198)

For Danto, this post-historical condition of contemporary art is arrived at through a rejection of the narrative structures of art history leading up to this point. He characterises modernist art history as “the Age of Manifestos” (Danto 2014, 46), in which each respective manifesto would attempt to capture the art of its time and location, and provide a philosophical definition for it (Danto 2014, 46). This results in a view of modernism that can be described as the story of the rise and fall of a variety of aesthetic utopias. In the contemporary setting, this sense of story, of narrative, is gone, replaced by an encyclopaedic awareness of these prior narratives:

The narrative structures of traditional representational art, then of modernist art, have eroded in at least the sense that they no longer have an active role to play in the production of contemporary art. Art today is produced in an art world unstructured by any master narrative at all, though of course there remains in artistic consciousness the knowledge of the narratives that no longer apply. (Danto 2014, 48)

In the contemporary setting, all that we know of art history is laid out before us. From this perspective, the various utopias gestured towards through the manifestos and artworks of modernist art movements, and the relationships of art to utopia suggested by these artistic visions, are also made available to contemporary artists to play with. Acting on Barikin’s suggestion that SF artworks are able to act as a “platform for building alternate art histories” (2013, 8), this research project provides alternative orientations, or approaches, to this relationship between art and utopia and its various manifestations. This relationship to utopia, coupled with Jameson’s conception of SF as a “structurally unique ‘method’ for apprehending the present as history” (2007, 288), allows the artworks I have created as part of this research project to propose new, speculative relationships between utopia and the present, post-historical condition of contemporary art.

Conclusion:

SF today means more than simply science fiction. It is the speculative. It is a method for developing alternate orientations towards truth. It is a means of approaching, and speculating, in relation to utopia, in all its multifaceted, contemporary iterations. For contemporary art, science fiction provides a new means of interrogating and questioning its relationship to its own histories, and forging new ones. This research implements science fiction as a method, one which can be understood through the framework of Darko Suvin's cognitive estrangement and the metaphor of Iain M. Banks' *Irreal*. This chapter has outlined how this method is adopted as part of this research. It has evidenced the critical potentiality of this approach for developing science fiction, particularly in relation to utopia. Finally, it has evidenced the relationship of this approach to the current state of contemporary art practice, as understood through Arthur C. Danto's "post-historical" lens. Ultimately, I view science fiction as a form of speculative, utopian imagination, and this research as a practice-led application of this imagination in the process of making of contemporary art. The next chapter addresses how the science fiction narratives developed as part of this research are articulated materially. The following chapters focus on the creative component of this research. Each of these chapters articulate how the methods developed as part of this research are implemented within my creative practice, and evidence how these methods allow each work to form speculative relationships with utopian aspects of their subject matter that are estranged within the worlds of their fictions.

Chapter Two: Narrative, Art and Speculation

In the previous chapter I outlined how this research project adapts Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement into a method to be utilised in the production of science fiction artworks. This approach allows me to create science fictional works which are speculative, specifically in relation to utopian aspects of reality that are exaggerated within the worlds of their fictions. This chapter is concerned with the manner in which I aim to translate the speculative potential of these narratives and worlds into their material realisation as artworks. In this chapter I first position this research project in relation to curator Lizzy Muller's theorising of science fiction artworks as "speculative objects," before triangulating my own approach to making as being primarily informed by museological practice, installation art and set design. Following this I discuss my own experience of the 2016 Sydney Biennale, which was concerned with science fiction art and its relationship to contemporary society, and how this experience informed the direction of this research project, as well as the influence of relevant artworks which utilise narrative elements. Finally, the latter half of the chapter details a significant influence on this project, Jonah Freeman, Alexandre Singh and Justin Lowe's artwork *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun* (2008), from which the second method developed as part of this research, termed "material fiction," is derived.

Speculation and Materiality:

In the pursuit of making science fiction artworks which are speculative in nature, I share a similar concern with curator and arts writer Lizzy Muller who, in her essay "Speculative Objects: Materialising Science Fiction" (2013), makes an explicit link between the speculation of science fiction and the material embodiment of science fiction narratives as artworks. In summarising the relationship between science fiction and speculation, Muller states the following:

We both fear and revere the immensity of the universe, just as we both desire and revile the augmentation of our own powers through science and technology. Science fiction has surfed the waves of this oscillation, dramatising utopias and dystopias, helping human beings to think through the ontological and ethical implications of new techno-scientific discoveries.

Science fiction does this through extrapolation and speculation—that is, it projects from the known into the unknown. It opens up alternative perspectives—whether temporal, spatial, political, interspecies or intergalactic—from which we can see and interrogate our own situation in a new light. (2013, 1)

Muller’s essay discusses her own curatorial practice-based research, centring on the exhibition *Awfully Wonderful: Science Fiction in Contemporary Art* (2011) (fig. 2.1) which Muller co-curated with fellow curator and arts writer Bec Dean. However, much of the content of this essay could, in my view, be similarly applied to the artworks I have created as part of this research project. In her essay, Muller proposes the idea of the “speculative object,” which she describes as:

a way of understanding how both the artworks and artefacts included in the exhibition function in human experience as philosophical tools that provoke reflection about scientific and technological change, and the relationship of the present to possible futures and alternate pasts. (Muller 2013, 1)

Muller’s notion of speculative objects is perhaps best encapsulated in the conclusion of her essay where she states that “the exhibition was filled with objects... that suggested alternate realities, but at the same time inhabited, with concrete physicality, our own” (Muller 2013, 4). This understanding of science fiction artworks as speculative objects is similar to my framing of my artworks as occupying an Irreal space between fiction and reality, and points towards the subject of this chapter: the concept of material fiction, and the implementation of this concept as a method to be utilised in the creation of science fiction artworks.

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FIGURE 2.1 HAYDEN FOWLER, *ANTHROPOCENE*, 2011.

Mixed-media installation. Exhibited as part of *Awfully Wonderful: Science Fiction in Contemporary Art* at Performance Space, Sydney.

Reproduced from artist's website:

<http://www.haydenfowler.net/projects/anthropocene.html>

Content is removed due to copyright restrictions

FIGURE 2.2 JO LAW, *THE WORLD OF THINGS* (DETAIL), 2011.

Mixed-media installation. Exhibited as part of *Awfully Wonderful: Science Fiction in Contemporary Art* at Performance Space, Sydney.
Reproduced from artist's website: <http://www.jolaw.org/world/>

Muller views the speculative object as provoking “reflection about scientific and technological change” (2013, 1). I do not consider this form of science fictional provocation to be a significant aspect of my own artworks, although it is an understandably suitable application of science fictional approaches to making art. Instead, my aim is to create artworks which are speculative in relation to utopian aspects of their real-world subject matter. This is not to say that speculation regarding scientific or technological change is not utopian in nature, as it most certainly is. Instead, I simply wish to emphasise that the subjects of my own science fiction are not selected for their relationship to technological or scientific change, but are instead selected for what I view as a pre-existing utopian potentiality. In her essay, Muller also outlines a relationship between her speculative objects and utopia. In the conclusion of her essay, she refers to Jameson's claim regarding the limitations of the utopian imagination and the science fiction genre's ability to speculate in relation to these limitations (2013, 4), which was discussed in the previous chapter of this exegesis. Muller positions her speculative objects in contrast to Jameson's positioning of science fiction:

It is not by any means the aim of this essay to argue for the superiority of physical over textual artworks, but it is interesting to note that the nature of the experience generated by the speculative objects I have described offers a possible counterpoint to the impasse identified by Jameson. The experience of speculation provoked by these objects is visceral and ambiguous. In the interplay of their impossibility, obsolescence and liminality with their tangible existence, these objects act not only as mirrors of our own reality, but also as portals that allow us, if only fleetingly, to move beyond it. (2013, 4–5)

In the previous chapter of this exegesis, I stated that I view my artworks as also being subject to the impasse described by Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2007). The artworks I have created as part of this research are differentiated from Muller's speculative objects through their difference in subject matter and because I understand them to share the impasse described by Jameson. Like Muller's understanding of her speculative object, I view my artworks as mirrors of reality, and, similarly, I think of them as portals to other worlds. However, this is a metaphor; an Irreal imagining of the work as permeable space between the factual, objective world of reality and the speculative, fictional world that the artwork belongs to. As artworks, their narratives are articulated in unique ways; however, aside from this major difference, they function similarly to any other form of science fiction in that they do not offer true access to other, alien worlds, but instead fail in their attempts to do so. As discussed in chapter one, my position is that it is in this failure—the collapse of the estranged world of the fiction into the cognitive world of reality—that all science fiction, my own work included, find their criticality. This is because in that collapse, the relationship of the science fiction to the context from which it was created becomes clear. The *Terminator* films (1994–2019) are not just action blockbusters about a human versus robot war; rather, they are vehicles for speculating in relation to the concept of artificial intelligence and the logical complexities that emerge in relation to the idea of time travel. Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1962) is not just a novel about a sentient ocean; it opens up speculative avenues of thought in regards to how we identify and categorise intelligence and communication. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) is not simply a story about a physicist who invents a new theory of space and time; it provides an avenue of speculation in regards to the moral complexities of imagining utopias, suggesting that no utopia is strictly eutopian, dystopian or otherwise. None of these texts overcome the impasse described by Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future*, but it is in their failure to do

so, and their consequent recognition as being estranged, distorted versions of their creators' own context, that they find their criticality. Similarly, my artworks are not depictions of actual alien universes, they are Irreal simulations of what I imagine an alien universe might look like. They suggest alternate realities, but do not truly allow access to them. They are fictions made present in three dimensions. They are not portals to another universe, but attempts to imagine what another universe on the other side of the proverbial portal might look like, the failure of which reflects in a speculative, critical manner on the universe from which they were created.

As stated in the previous chapter, I view my artworks as meeting between the estranged world of their fictions and the material world of reality; a creation of a permeable, Irreal space between fiction and reality. As outlined above, this is a helpful metaphor, but in truth, when engaging with one of my artworks, a viewer may simulate access to the world of their fictions, but they never truly leave the gallery.¹⁰ Like the utopian imagination of the Irreal in the Culture series, my artworks are both grounded in, and limited by, the reality from which they are created. They are grounded in the sense that without a relationship to the real world, they would lack criticality and speculative potential, and have no “familiar strand of recognisable reality” (Banks 1997, 139) that might allow them to be comprehensible to my viewers. They are limited in that I am unable to imagine what a true utopia (as in a fully formed, “more perfect” society, distinct from our own) might look like, as my imagination is as constrained as any other individual existing at this moment in time, being “hostages to our own means of production” (Jameson 2007, xiii). The Irreal nature of my artworks extends to their material forms. Over the course of this research project, my understanding of my artworks has shifted between viewing them as artworks which are identifiable as installations, to artworks primarily influenced by museum displays, and, at times, artworks which have more in common with set design, and I have experimented with framing the work as each of these things at different times. Now, critically reflecting on the project as a whole, I comprehend them less as any one of these material disciplines explicitly, and more as artworks which, through their materially fictive nature, are suspended between these three forms. As I have created each artwork's material realisation in the service of articulating its own narrative respectively, the form each work

¹⁰ The manner in which gallery space both constrains and makes possible contemporary artworks is the subject of the fiction of *The Island* and is explored further in chapter three.

takes is decided by the intended speculative criticality of the work. Consequently, each work I have created as part of this research might readily be identified as an installation, a museological or archival work, or as an artwork which borrows primarily from set design; however, this is a consequence of my intention with its narrative, rather than the narrative being a consequence of the artwork's material form, although there is always a degree of feedback between the material fiction of an artwork and its narrative as I am creating it. Moreover, although an artwork I have created might mostly conform with a particular form, they all, at least from my perspective as their creator, contain recognisable traces of the others. In this sense, my artworks are suspended between these three material approaches. This understanding is furthered by my approach to installing and exhibiting these artworks. Although there have been a number of different installations of *An Event*, for example, each of these installations has been a different material "articulation" of the work's fiction. In this sense, one installation of *An Event* might be like the set for a science fiction film, the next like a museum display, and another like an installation artwork. However, they all carry within themselves traces of the other material approaches. For me, they are never explicitly one or the other, but are instead a mixture of all three with some elements being more or less emphasised in each exhibition of the work.

Each of these three forms suggest a different relationship of the viewer to the artwork. An installation positions the viewer within the artwork, emphasising the presence of their body within the gallery space. This form of artwork requires the presence of the viewer in order for an interpretation of the work to be properly formulated. As discussed in chapter one, Amelia Barikin, in her introduction to *Making Worlds*, argues that the ability of artworks to "disorient in productive ways is critical", and can be linked to the "delirium" of estrangement present in science fiction. On the final page of her book *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), art historian and critic Claire Bishop provides an understanding of installation art that frames this form of artistic practice as having particularly confusing or disorienting properties:

Installation art... insists upon the viewer's physical presence precisely in order to subject it to an experience of decentring... it is the achievement of installation art that on some occasions (and these may only be very rare), the ideal model of the subject overlaps with our literal experience, and we genuinely do feel confused, disoriented and destabilised by our encounter with the work. (Bishop 2005, 133)

This “experience of decentring” central to Bishop’s conception of installation art suggests that this form of contemporary art practice has unique possibilities in regards to science fiction art. Installation art, through its ability to decentre and fragment the perspective of the viewer within the work, in turn, contains within itself the possibility that this fragmentation may be a means for speculation. It can offer multiple, fragmentary perspectives—literally, in the sense that the viewer is forced to take in the artwork in parts and construct the larger whole within their mind’s eye; and metaphorically, in the sense that an installation can offer a fragmented view of its subject matter. This fragmentation in the case of science fiction art can be extended to the work’s narrative. What this means for this project is that the artworks created as part of this research are able to suggest science fictional modes of decentring by articulating their narratives across a scattering of objects, texts and imagery within a gallery space. With the narrative delivered in this fragmented mode, the estrangement of the work’s fiction is further pronounced as the viewer’s role in constructing this narrative is emphasised. In this sense, I engage the conceptual and formal structure of an installation artwork in order to further the disorientation and accompanying estrangement of the artworks I have created.

A viewer’s interaction with a museum display is often more passive than with an installation. In my view, this passivity lends authority to the museum display. It conveys a historical narrative to a viewer, and the viewer tends to receive this narrative as a factual thing, as a truthful depiction of the subject of the display in question. Museum displays and dioramas act both as props for this historical narrative and as evidence of it. When it comes to art, museum display can often limit or interfere with an artwork’s ability to challenge dominant understandings of historical events through the incorporation of the artwork as a prop for a particular historical narrative¹¹. It can also override the artwork’s ability to engage with concepts or feelings that are difficult to describe through the language of didactic panels and catalogue essays. As geologist and sociologist Kevin Hetherington, in summarising French philosopher and literary theorist Maurice Blanchot’s

¹¹ An example of this reduction of an artwork to the role of a prop for a historical narrative can be seen in the way that Francis Bacon’s *Study after Velázquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) is often explained as being symbolic of the the “death of god” despite Bacon’s rejection of this assigned meaning.

critique of the traditional museum and its modernist extension in the form of the *musée imaginaire*¹², states:

Such an institution was, for Blanchot, founded on a betrayal of the true experience of art. It promises to make art something that is at our disposal yet in practice disposes with the possibility of our connecting with it in a meaningful way because of the artificial character and simplistic narrative conventions of the space in which such an experience is found. At its worst the museum creates not an encounter with art but a mere spectacle of its experience. For Blanchot, the imaginary museum simply extends this principle further beyond the confines of a specific space to the broader world of modern culture. The museum is, in this argument, a space of lack, a space where the negative in art is turned into a positive and its challenging effects devalued. (Hetherington 2006, 599)

My works borrow the authoritative language of the museum in order to tell fictional narratives. This is a subversive gesture on my behalf. By telling fictional stories while utilising museological elements, I am undermining their authority, and hopefully leading viewers to question the authority of this language as it is utilised by museums, gallery spaces and art institutions. The science fictional nature of my work further extends this subversion, as my artworks' narratives each have an estranged relationship to the histories that they are positioned in relation to. It would be fair to say that my works, to varying degrees, "mask" their fictions through my intermeshing of their narratives with "real" historical facts, and that they utilise the language of the museum to further this masking, muddying the viewer's clarity as to what is and is not "real" or "fictional" within the work¹³. This, like the utilisation of the conceptual and formal structure of installation art,

¹² The *musée imaginaire* is an idea put forward by Andre Malraux in his 1947 essay of the same name. In this essay, Malraux proposes an extension of the traditional museum into other media, such as photographic books. As Hetherington states: "He could not have imagined the Internet and our culture of simulation and virtuality at that time but, no doubt, would have approved greatly" (2006, 598).

¹³ While I prefer the term "museological" in relation to my artworks the term "archival" could equally be applied to in relation to my approach to creating artworks as described above. Archival art, as described by art critic Hal Foster, "draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that

further the disorientating qualities of the work and, consequently, its potential estrangement. Alongside this, the critical, speculative relationship of each artwork to the histories that inform its fiction is furthered through the suggested authority of the museological elements employed in the work.

A film, television or theatre set can be understood as different from an installation artwork or museum display. It requires activation, or suggests the possibility of an activity taking place within it. A set is an environment within which a fiction can be told. Sets are often only made believable in post-production, once elements such as green screens have been filled in with the required imagery. Alternatively, they are only convincing from the front of stage, with props sometimes constructed as two-dimensional objects faced towards the audience. A set requires make-believe, on the behalf of actors and audiences, in order to be convincing within the world of its fiction. A set seen from a different angle, without computer graphic imagery, or deactivated without the presence of actors, is often flimsy looking, sometimes even comical¹⁴. Within contemporary art, the influence of set design can be seen in many artworks across many mediums. Examples of this are Mark Leckey's combination of museological elements and set design in his use of chromakey green¹⁵ in his work *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* (2013) (fig. 2.3); the cinematic qualities and theatrics of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* (1994–2002) (fig. 2.4); and the suggestion of pre-rendered, made-for-cgi spaces, akin to those used in the making of

underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private." (Foster 2004, n.p.)

¹⁴ Something that informs my use of set design as an influential material form in relation to this research is the pre-existing connection between Suvin's cognitive estrangement and Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, sometimes referred to in English as the distancing or alienation effect, or as Brechtian estrangement. Suvin's cognitive estrangement is an adaptation of Brecht's method, retooling it for the purpose of critiquing and defining the genre of science fiction. Brecht originally developed the *Verfremdungseffekt* for use in theatre, where it is deployed as a means of preventing immersion within the narrative of the play, and consequently positioning the audience more critically in relation to the subject of the play or its themes. The tension between installation art, set design and the museological within my own work could be viewed as having Brechtian qualities, in that the work often oscillates between immersive and non-immersive qualities depending on my intention.

¹⁵ Chromakey green is the shade of green used on sets when CGI or other filmic elements need to be inserted in post-production.

modern blockbusters, in the work of Hito Steyerl, as in *Factory of the Sun* (2016) (fig. 2.5). My works draw on the sense of fiction and make-believe that sets suggest; they utilise the construction of narrative and relationships to history evident within museum displays and dioramas, and require the presence of a viewer within the work that is central to installation art. The synthesis of these three art forms within my practice firstly allows my work to articulate science fictional narratives across an array of media, and subsequently produces work that embodies the speculative nature of science fiction.

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FIGURE 2.3 MARK LECKEY, *THE UNIVERSAL ADDRESSABILITY OF DUMB THINGS*, 2013.

Installation view. Bluecoat, Liverpool.

Reproduced from *e-flux*: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/32857/the-universal-addressability-of-dumb-things/>

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FIGURE 2.4 MATTHEW BARNEY, *CREMASTER I*, 1995.

Colour film, 40 minutes. Production Still. Photo: Michael James O'Brien

Reproduced from: <https://www.artforum.com/film/ed-halter-on-matthew-barney-s-cremaster-cycle-25581>

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FIGURE 2.5 HITO STEYERL, *FACTORY OF THE SUN*, 2016.

Installation view, MOCA Grand Avenue, Los Angeles.

Reproduced from MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art):

<https://www.moca.org/exhibition/hito-steyerl-factory-of-the-sun>

Science Fiction Art versus Art about Science Fiction:

The connection between art and science fiction is one that has recently received some attention both academically and artistically. An example of this is the 20th Biennale of Sydney. Titled *The Future is Already Here—It's Just Not Evenly Distributed*, the 2016 Biennale was named after a quote from science fiction author William Gibson (Rosenthal 2016, 30) and included a broad variety of artworks that could be interpreted as science fictional, or as referring to science fiction. This connection to science fiction permeated the exhibition structure of the Biennale—for example, Carriageworks, one of the “embassies” or exhibition spaces of the Biennale, was given the title “Embassy of Stanislaw Lem” after the Soviet science fiction author. Within any of these embassies, a viewer could encounter science fictional aesthetics and imagery. I spent a week in Sydney visiting these various exhibition spaces in the early stages of this research project. My interpretation of the Biennale as a whole is that there was a great variety of interesting works that engaged with the manner in which science fiction is visualised in cinema, television, video games, comics books and other visual genres. However, there were very few works that actually operated *as science* fiction, by either enacting or embodying the speculative, critical capacity of the genre.

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FIGURE 2.6 KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI, *PAINTING WITH HISTORY IN A ROOM FILLED WITH PEOPLE WITH FUNNY NAMES 3 (TRAILER)* (VIDEO STILL), 2015.

Video, dimensions variable. Lodos, Mexico City.

Reproduced from Art Viewer <https://artviewer.org/korakrit-arunanondchai-at-lodos/>

Nevertheless, there were exceptions to this. Korakrit Arunanondchai's *Painting with History in a Room Filled with People with Funny Names 3* (2016) (fig. 2.5) told the story of the artist attempting to communicate to a sentient drone the importance of a painting that he is creating and, by extension, this story concerns the significance of subjectivity in relation to concepts like beauty. More broadly, this work engaged with the relationship of human subjectivity to the construction of meaning in relation to creative works, particularly in response to the increasingly digital archiving of knowledge. Cécile B. Evans's *Hyperlinks or it Didn't Happen* (2014) (fig. 2.6) was accessed by navigating a tunnel on Cockatoo Island while wearing a virtual reality headset. This headset displayed a tiger walking in front of you through a rapid succession of environments, as you progressed, in reality, down the tunnel while holding on to a railing for guidance, which was an estranging experience in its own right. Upon reaching the end of the tunnel and removing the headset, the viewer was confronted with a video projection and a very large pile of 10 x 15 cm photos. This video projection told the story of a digital, artificially intelligent copy of actor Philip Seymour Hoffman which, while still incomplete, is confronted with the death of his biological "original" and experiences what might be interpreted as the software equivalent of a nervous breakdown. All of this occurs while the artificial Seymour Hoffman has access to the internet, and is in conversation with other AIs, including a Japanese digital pop idol, a spambot gone rogue, and what appears to be an invisible woman living an idyllic life with her lover on a secluded beach. These artificial intelligences join the digital Seymour Hoffman in his quest for meaning, and in doing so they explore a selection of imagery which exists in this online space as imagined by Evans. Engaging with these works, and others like them, I experienced a similar estrangement of reality as I would when reading a novel by Ursula K. Le Guin, Iain M. Banks, Stanislaw Lem or William Gibson, which is to say, an experience similar to the "vertiginous pleasure" (2013, 11) described by Barikin. However, from my perspective, these works were in a minority of truly science fictional artworks that was vastly outnumbered by works at the Biennale which referenced the aesthetics of science fiction, or were illustrative of science fiction concepts.

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FIGURE 2.7 CECILE B. EVANS, HYPERLINKS OR IT DIDN'T HAPPEN (VIDEO STILL), 2014.

Video, 22:37, dimensions variable. Cinémathèque Robert-Lynen, Paris.

Reproduced from Carosposo

http://www.carosposo.com/2015/EN_cecile_b_evans

Visiting the 2016 Sydney Biennale was a formative moment for this research project. For me, it clarified the difference between science fiction artworks, and artworks about science fiction or artworks that engage with science fiction aesthetics. The latter two, in my view, was much more common at the Biennale than the former. This is not to say that artworks that engage with science fiction imagery, which are about science fiction, or engage with science fiction aesthetics, are not of value. There is much interest to be found in this discourse, and it is something that I am broadly interested in as part of my artistic practice. Additionally, the distinction between the two is not black and white; both Arunanondchai and Evans also engage with science fictional aesthetics and imagery as part of their science fiction artworks. Nevertheless, this distinction is valuable from the perspective of attempting to make artworks which align with Barikin's proposition that artworks might "embody the operating systems" (2013, 8) of science fiction and, in doing so, become science fictional texts in their own right.

Narrative and Contemporary Art:

This research project is informed by a history of science fiction; however, it also owes much to the history of narrative artworks. Influences on my practice in terms of science fiction art vary from the complex intermeshing of fictive and historic elements present in the work of Korakrit Arunanondchai, to the science fictional estrangement of Cécile B. Evans; however, I am not exclusively influenced by artworks which can be interpreted as science fiction. The installation practice of Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn involves an approach to materiality that is flimsy in its construction, and which expresses a concern with history and utopia. This can be as seen in his artwork *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake* (2000) (fig. 2.6), which collages a variety of significant historical material under the umbrella of twelve monumental souvenir spoons. As described by cultural theorist Marc James Léger, “each spoon represents a ‘failed utopian ideal’ that the artist links with questions of democracy, consumption and world hunger” (2008, 42). Similarly, the potential for installation artworks to articulate narratives which could be interpreted as having science fictional qualities is evidenced in the work of Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, who created the work *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1988) (fig. 2.7)¹⁶. This artwork could be interpreted as a science fiction text that pivots around the novum of a slingshot which is capable of launching a man into space. Kabakov often uses the term “total installation” to describe his work or the work of similar artists. This conception of installation art has a generative relationship to the manner in which cognitive estrangement and the metaphor of the Irreal operate in the creative works produced as part of my research. In a conversation with Kabakov and cultural theorist Victor Tupitsyn, curator Margaret Tupitsyn provides an interpretation of Kabakov’s term which is of significance to this research:

What’s important here, however, is that installation has somewhat different purposes: to separate itself from the world, to become an autonomous metaphor,

¹⁶ It should be noted here that any number of narrative artworks could be used as an example in order to articulate this aspect of my research. Notable examples which I unfortunately do not have the room or wordcount to discuss are: the practice of the artist Mike Nelson, who foregrounds the structural and conceptual influence of fictions on his practice; the collaborative practice of Wilkins Hill, who utilise cryptic narrative elements in their works; and the fake museology of The Museum of Jurassic History.

democratic in form but otherwise closed. The installation vision of the world is a magic crystal in which everything can be surveyed. And that's what we mean when we speak of totality. (Kabakov, Tupitsyn and Tupitsyn 2009, 66)

The installation's "separation from the world" is similar to the estranged relationship of science fiction to reality. Additionally, the metaphoric relationship of the installation to the world, as a "magic crystal in which everything can be surveyed," is similar to the manner in which the metaphor of the Irreal operates within this research and Banks' Culture series. Kabakov's framing of fiction within his work and his utilisation of installation art as a means of articulating these fictions offer a parallel to this research project in that they mirror the relationship of my works' fictions to their material articulations. However, my work is differentiated from Kabakov's through my deliberate production of science fiction narratives, and through my hybridisation of various art forms in the pursuit of articulating these narratives as artworks.

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FIGURE 2.8 THOMAS HIRSCHHORN, *JUMBO SPOONS AND BIG CAKE*, 2000.
Installation, mixed media and various materials, 4.58 x 16.5 x 8 m.
Reproduced from Musée D'Art Contemporain De Montréal,
<https://macm.org/en/collections/oeuvre/jumbo-spoons-and-big-cake/>

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FIGURE 2.9 ILYA KABAKOV, *THE MAN WHO FLEW INTO SPACE FROM HIS APARTMENT*, 1985.

Installation, 1400 x 3000 x 2500 mm. Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Reproduced from artist's website: <https://ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/installations/the-man-who-flew-into-space-from-his-apartment/#lg=1&slide=7>

Both Hirschhorn's and Kabakov's installations emphasise the presence of the viewer in relation to the work, but in different ways. Hirschhorn's work is complex and dense with references. It requires that the viewer to fossick through the installation, examining its details in order to build an interpretation of the work as a whole. In this sense, in my practice I parallel the process of world-building that can be seen in Hirschhorn's work. Likewise, I use historical "facts" to develop work that is positioned in a critical relationship with the histories these "facts" support. Similarly, I like to think that my artworks reward a viewer who is willing to fossick through the details of the work as they build a sense of its overall narrative and material fiction. Kabakov's work, on the other hand, positions the viewer in a very limited sense. When viewing *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1988), the viewer is limited to viewing the central novum of the work through cracks between boards that have been used, within its fiction, by the police to seal off the room from which the main character has launched himself into space. In this work, the construction of narrative is generated by the perspectives given by the other occupants of the building, whose apartments are open, and the limited glimpses of the central element of the work, namely, the main character's apartment. Both of these artworks align in some way with my discussion earlier in this chapter on the speculative potentiality of fragmented perspectives in installation art. My work for the most part does not physically limit the ability of the viewer to navigate the work, however it does share some commonalities with Kabakov's work. This is seen in its privileging of the work's narrative and emphasis on the viewer's positioning within the larger installation, as well as its use of multiple spaces providing multiple perspectives on the same narrative, particularly in the case of the 2016 installation of *An Event at Success* in Fremantle, Western Australia, which is discussed in detail in chapter four.

In the previous chapter I mentioned the influence of French artist Pierre Huyghe's practice on my own. Huyghe's work is a prominent example of a contemporary artist working with narrative. His works engage with a number of the same themes as mine, including history, narrative devices, fiction and speculation. In the previous chapter I mentioned what is probably his most well-known work, *A Journey That Wasn't* (2005) (fig. 2.10), and suggested that this work could be understood as a science fiction text that pivots around the novum of a strange device which Huyghe uses, within the fiction of the work, to

communicate with an albino penguin. *A Journey That Wasn't* is an enigma. The title of the work suggests the entire story is a fiction, and yet Huyghe (seemingly) really did travel to the Antarctic Circle in 2005 to create the work. Further complicating the distinction between reality and fiction in regards to this work is that fact that the various individuals who participated in the work subsequently give conflicting accounts about what happened in Antarctica once they got there (Hodge 2014). All of this is made even more confusing by Huyghe's exhibition of an animatronic albino penguin titled *One* in Paris in 2006 (fig. 2.11). The uncertainty of Huyghe's work, his blending of reality and fiction, is what allows for a greater degree of speculation on the part of the viewer when compared to a more clearly fictive work. Engaging with *A Journey That Wasn't*, even fifteen years after its creation, I find myself entertaining the speculative possibilities of the work; *what if he really did communicate with the penguin?*, I find myself thinking, against all rational understandings of the situation. *Was it a robot all along? Was all of it fake? Did he fake going to the Antarctic Circle?* Huyghe provides some insight into how he achieves this uncertainty in a 2004 interview with art historian George Baker:

I occupy both sides of a divide: I build up a fiction and then I make a documentary of this fiction. The point is: we should invent reality before filming it.

(Huyghe 2004, 106)

This process outlined by Huyghe—the construction of a fiction prior to a “documentation” of this fiction—runs parallel to my own process of constructing a science fiction narrative prior to producing the material articulation of this narrative in the form of an artwork. Similar to Huyghe, my aim with this process is to obfuscate what is real and what is not real within the work, placing the viewer into an uncertain position, and forcing them to navigate the speculative possibilities of the work as they construct their interpretation of it. Huyghe's framing of “documentation” as a means of responding to his fictions is similar in nature to my own process of material fiction, in that both processes involve some degree of treating the fiction of the work as a real event which is being captured in some form by the artwork. However, my own process is differentiated from Huyghe's in that his process of “documentation” seems directed almost entirely towards obfuscation and the uncertainty that accompanies this, whereas within my practice the obfuscation of what is “real” and “not real” is in the service of interrelating the cognitive and estranged aspects of the work with one another, thereby furthering the speculative potentiality of the work.

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FIGURE 2.10 PIERRE HUYGHE, *A JOURNEY THAT WASN'T* (FILM STILL), 2005.
Film, dimensions variable. Mariam Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.
Reproduced from *Witnessing You* <http://www.being-here.net/page/4540/pierre-huyghe--a-journey-that-wasn-t>

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FIGURE 2.11 PIERRE HUYGHE AND FRANCOIS ROCHE, *TERRA INCOGNITA / ISLA OCIOSIDAD*, 2005.
Aluminium honeycomb pavilion.
PIERRE HUYGHE, *ONE*, 2005.
Animatronic.
Installation view, MAM/ARC, Paris.
Reproduced from *New Territories*: <https://new-territories.com/terraincognita2.htm>

Hello Meth Lab in the Sun and Material Fiction:

The second half of this chapter applies the imaginative framework of cognitive estrangement to the artwork *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun* in order to provide an interpretation of it as science fiction and offer an understanding of “material fiction,” the method developed from *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun* as part of my research. This interpretation foregrounds aspects of *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun* that are of significance to this research project: the specifics of my encounter with the documentation of the work that informs my subsequent interpretation of it; the relationship of utopia to the work; and the concept of material fiction put forward by the artists in their interview with curator and arts writer Raimundas Malašauskas. This concept of material fiction is, then, expanded upon and applied in each subsequent chapter, where its utility as a means of world-building in science fiction artworks is evidenced.

Encountering Meth Lab:

Hello Meth Lab in the Sun (henceforth referred to as *Meth Lab*) was installed at Ballroom Marfa, a contemporary art space in Marfa, Texas, in 2008. Two years prior to this, artists Jonah Freeman, Justin Lowe and Alexandre Singh proposed:

...a sequence of seemingly disparate environments, interpreted through the practice of alchemy. Each of the various rooms... will bleed and morph into one another. The totality of the installation will create a ricochet of ideas, a focus on the metamorphosis of materials: vegetables into broth, match heads into meth. An industrial, culinary and narcotic revolution. (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh in de Lima Greene 2009, 24)

As Alison de Lima Greene explains, “detailing the scheme further, they [Freeman, Lowe and Singh] referenced museum culture, specifically natural history dioramas and period rooms, as they laid out the framework for the three dominant components: an underground meth lab, a corporate trophy room, and an organic hippie cult kitchen” (de Lima Greene 2009, 24). As the work was being installed, additional components were added, allowing *Meth Lab* to evolve into an artwork which de Lima Greene describes as “existing in both an insistent present and filled with echoes of our immediate past” (2009, 24). This multi-

temporal quality of *Meth Lab* is what led it to be of such great interest to me, and is also the reason why I consider the work to be so influential in terms of this research. The manner in which the timeline of *Meth Lab* (its narrative) is articulated materially across multiple rooms, objects and texts is also what led to the development of the second method utilised as part of this research, namely, material fiction. This influence is itself “made strange” by the fact that I never witnessed this artwork firsthand, having only encountered it through the *Meth Lab* book, published the year after the installation was exhibited. However, this encounter has informed my understanding of the work and the manner in which I approached each artwork I created as part of this research project. In this project I locate the significance of *Meth Lab* within a tension between fact and fiction; between its narrative and the historical narratives it refers to, the utopias it gestures towards, and the manner in which its material fiction allows the artwork to be interpreted as being speculative.

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FIGURE 2.12 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE, HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2008.
Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from “Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009.

The *Meth Lab* book functions as documentation of the exhibition. It contains documentary photographs of the exhibition, accompanied with texts, some of which are seemingly situated within the fictional world of the work¹⁷. The relationship of documentation in this form—which, as an object, resembles a novel, and is both viewed, in the sense of looking at the pictures, and read, in the sense of reading the accompanying texts—and *Meth Lab* as a project is interesting. It produced in me a more paranoid and conspiratorial approach to the book than I might normally have had towards the documentation of an artwork. This is because *Meth Lab* is (at least partially) a convincing simulation. Reading the book was like dipping in and out of the strange, alternate timeline made present through the work, an experience akin to reading science fiction. This tension between documentation and fiction influenced my inclusion of materials that might exist as documentary “evidence” of each exhibition, such as catalogues, floor sheets and websites, within the fiction of the world of each of the artworks produced as part of this research.

¹⁷ Some of Freeman, Lowe and Singh’s comments regarding *Meth Lab* could be thought of as being situated within the fictional world of the work, such as Singh’s comment that the museum space of the installation has been occupied by the same group of people this space is cataloging (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 40). However, the text that reads to me as being most situated within this fictional world is David Hollander’s “AN 3219: Community Ritual and Group Psychosis,” which mimics the form of an educational worksheet, but which suggests that a series of absurd processes be undertaken in order to achieve its learning outcomes (Hollander 2009, 33–36).

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**FIGURE 2.13 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
*HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2008.***

Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from “Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009.

Meth Lab, like other works referred to in this chapter, is concerned with the logic of museums (*fig. 2.12*), with the simplification and reduction that occurs when translating the complex reality of brute events into historical moments, and the utopian connotations of this. The realisation of the work at Ballroom Marfa in 2008 involved the simulation of several utopian groups’ occupation of the same location over the course of the latter half of the twentieth and perhaps early twenty-first centuries, with evidence of the more recent utopias layered directly over the evidence of the earlier ones. The manner in which these various groups are utopian, and how it is that the work functions as “evidence” of these utopias, are expanded upon over the course of this chapter. These utopias are referred to using a variety of different terminologies in the accompanying texts, but most are simply described, in the chronology of the work’s fiction, as a secret society which was part “Big Pharma” corporation, part 1950s New York socialite secret society; an organic hippie cult inspired by communes of the 1960s and 70s; and the titular meth lab, which has seemingly been the site of a recent explosion or fire (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 37–9). The

evidence of these various utopias was displayed in the installation in a manner that straddled the divide between museum diorama and television stage set. Hence, it is an ideal influence in terms of my own triangulated approach to making, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. “It is interesting to consider how that museum metanarrative affects our reading of the environments,” artist Alexandre Singh remarks in the interview with Malašauskas: “Obviously they are always simulations, and much more so than any cinema or theatrical set. Is the museum itself abandoned? Maybe these are parts of the museum that have been occupied by the same group the museum is cataloguing” (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 40). This comment by Singh links *Meth Lab* to the museological, to set design, and to the “simulation” of events that occurs within museum space. By articulating the narratives of their work through museological conventions, Freeman, Lowe and Singh subvert these conventions and undermine their authority as factual, truth-telling devices. They also put in relation to one another the concept of utopia and the narrative conventions of museum space, opening up a speculative space regarding the role of the museum, and history as the narrative told by the museum, in both directing and limiting the contemporary utopian imagination.

As both a reader and a viewer, in my encounter with the *Meth Lab* book, and as an individual existing in a timeline that differs from the fictional timeline of the work, I felt as though I was positioned outside of the *Meth Lab* installation. I was viewing it from afar, geographically, and through the distance of the book as an interface with the work, but I was also being constantly dragged back into the world of its fiction through the misleading “evidence” displayed within. This emphasised my role as a reader, forcing me to negotiate the world of the work in a paranoid manner. The viewers of the installation were provided with similar fodder for paranoia; the entire building was wired with a bespoke analogue audio recording set-up (*fig. 2.13*), constructed from old reel-to-reel tape recorders, which recorded their journey through the many rooms of the installation. As the viewers entered the last room of the space, they found themselves “in an undecorated space, empty but for two speakers wired to play back the sounds of your progress through *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*” (de Lima Greene 2009, 26). It is at this point that the viewer might realise that they are the protagonist of the work (de Lima Greene 2009, 26). Like the reader of Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (2017), they are aware of both timelines: one enclosed within the Ballroom Marfa, a building in Texas, and within the fictional world of *Meth Lab* as presented within the book; the other encompassing the rest of the world,

including themselves. This places the viewer/reader in a unique position that allows them to consider the critical, speculative potential of the manner in which these worlds reflect on each other.

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**FIGURE 2.14 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
*HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (DETAIL), 2008.***

Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from “Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009

Perceptual Shift: Cognitive Estrangement and The Narrative of *Meth Lab*

Artist Liam Gillick comments on the role of the viewer in the world of *Meth Lab* in his essay “Restaging Intensity” (2009), included as part of the *Meth Lab* book: “The role of the viewer in this case is strained. We are not being shown a tableau vivant. Nor a true diorama in the museological sense. In fact, the exhibition as a whole has more in common with the perceptual shift familiar from science fiction” (2009, 31). This perceptual shift, as described by Gillick, has much in common with Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement, in that they both open up a speculative space for consideration of the implications of the world of the fiction in relation to the world of the reader, viewer, author or artist. Much of my research stems from this commonality, as it could be said that the core of the project is a consideration and implementation of Suvin’s framework as a means of producing this

perceptual shift described by Gillick. However, an application of Suvin's framework to *Meth Lab* raises an immediate question: what is the core novum of this science fiction? After all, there are three distinct, fictional utopias included within the work, and each one of these is supported by a multitude of discrete objects and texts which exist within the world of the work. To complicate this further, each of these utopias mirror historical and contemporary utopian visions: the "Black Acid Co-op" (2009, 37) (*fig. 2.15*) secret society reflects the exclusionary utopia of 1950s America, of Frank Sinatra and the postwar faith in capitalism's ability to do good, as well as the sinister ramifications of this belief; the hippie commune kitchen (*fig. 2.16*) mirrors the utopia of the love generation and the remote communities into which these counter-culture communities retreated; and, finally, the meth lab (*fig. 2.17*) reflects a more contemporary vision one which "implies a degree of crazed focus and delusion that it might actually be possible to make your own complex drugs" (Gillick 2009, 30).

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FIGURE 2.15 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE, HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (DETAIL), 2008.
Installation. Dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from "Hello Meth Lab in the Sun", 2009.

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FIGURE 2.16 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE, *HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (DETAIL)*, 2008.

Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from "Hello Meth Lab in the Sun", 2009.

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**FIGURE 2.17. JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2008.**
Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from
“Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009.

It should be noted here that *Meth Lab*, as far as I know, was not intended as science fiction. However, in surveying the fiction of *Meth Lab*, one aspect of the plot both allows for and constrains the possibilities of its fiction. This is the existence of the first occupants of the building that would eventually become a meth lab within the fiction of the work. This collective, referred to by the artists as the “Black Acid Co-op,” was a secret society which, as suggested by the artists in their interview with Raimundas Malašauskas in the *Meth Lab* book (2009, 37) and in the work’s material fiction, had engaged in occult practices. It is also suggested by the artists and through the material fiction of *Meth Lab* that this society in some way manipulated cultural and economic relationships to drugs and drug use, essentially directing the production and consumption of drugs in Western society over the course of the twentieth century. As Justin Lowe states: “they were the global chemists that might actually benefit from the production of Sudafed and its illicit use in making crystal meth.” (2009, 37). In some ways the fiction in *Meth Lab* is like an estranged version of “Big Pharma” conspiracy theories which posit that drug manufacturers manufacture illnesses in order to sell cures. However, rather than being concerned with the validity of vaccines or the role of 5G technology in the spreading of COVID-19, the fiction of *Meth Lab* is concerned with the availability of the ingredients necessary to produce methamphetamine, suggesting a direct sense of cause and effect between the manufacturers of pseudoephedrine and illicit transformation of this drug into methamphetamine. In other words, the fiction of *Meth Lab* suggests that Sudafed and other brand name versions of pseudoephedrine were deliberately concocted by the Black Acid Co-op in order to profit from methamphetamine addiction.

Within the physical carapace of Ballroom Marfa itself, transformed into an ambiguous home for all three of the utopias in the work, the sense of cause and effect between the original occupants of the building, the Black Acid Co-op, and the subsequent utopias of the work, is heightened. In cramming these three utopian groups into the one, limited physical space, Freeman, Lowe and Singh place various elements of reality in relation to one another. Within the world of their fiction, the utopian potentiality of these objects, images, videos, and so on, is exaggerated as they are implemented as part of the world-building of *Meth Lab*. The result is that the gallery space is transformed into something suspended between museum, communal and domestic spaces, with traces of other uses occasionally bubbling to the top. Within it, the sense of causality between the various utopias of the work is heightened, especially in the location where the utopias of the work spill over into

one another. Jonah Freeman expands upon some of these connections in the *Meth Lab* book:

I do think a kind of mash-up occurs between these environments associated with these seemingly disparate groups. By putting them in a sequence we try to point towards some sort of macro-connections between them. For instance the hippie countercultural revolution of the 1960s definitely opened up a sort of permissiveness as far as drug use goes; this could somehow be linked to the methamphetamine epidemic in America. Although meth culture is not as an idealistic mind-expanding culture, it is still a ritualistic drug culture as far as these groups of people are producing very powerful drugs and then consuming them in some kind of nihilistic ceremony. And of course both of these groups are linked to the various sites of industrial power and production. Or it could be said they are enveloped by them. An example in meth counterculture is the easily accessible industrial products that go into the production [sic] like Sudafed and muriatic acid. In hippie counterculture it is a very direct reaction against industrialised society. (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 39).

I interpret this connection as resonating with my proposition that the central novum of *Meth Lab* is the existence of the Black Acid Co-op and their deliberate manipulation of events related to the utopias of the subsequent groups. The connections between these groups suggest a sense of cause and effect between the three utopias and the larger cultural movements they are representative of. This causality in the timeline of the work parallels the timeline of recent history, in which cause and effect are far more difficult to pin down. In this sense, *Meth Lab* provides us with a microcosmic, alternate timeline which is estranged from the timeline of twentieth and twenty-first century history in a recognisable, or cognitive, manner. Like *The Man in the High Castle*, the work positions the viewer in such a way that they are allowed access to the various timelines of the work. This in turn provides a space for consideration of the implications of the timelines of *Meth Lab* in relation to understandings of recent history. It suggests the possibility that the “causes and effects” of the viewer’s own timeline might be no more or no less real than those contained within Freeman, Lowe and Singh’s artwork. That what is seen as evidence of our own historical causality might in fact be expressions of completely different happenings in the past, such as secret meetings between secret societies, the hidden activities of reclusive

hippie communities, or the high-tension underground world of illegal methamphetamine production. This is the estrangement of *Meth Lab*; the “perceptual shift” (2009, 31) described by Gillick.

Within the narrative of *Meth Lab*, the earliest utopia, that of the Big Pharma secret society, both makes possible and limits the subsequent utopias of the work. This is seen in how the Drop City-like hippie commune is framed as a reaction against the industry and affluence that the members of this secret society are representative of, and the more recent meth lab being made possible by the availability of industrially produced drugs and chemicals such as Sudafed and muriatic acid. This narrative of cause and effect also aligns with Jameson’s theorising of science fiction and utopia discussed in chapter one, as it could be viewed as a series of increasingly narrowing utopian horizons, where the dystopian interests of the various members of this secret society have hobbled the imaginative possibilities made available to the subsequent utopian groups of the work. Viewing *Meth Lab* through the lens of Suvin’s cognitive estrangement allows for an interpretation of the work as pivoting around the novum of the Black Acid Co-op. In articulating their fiction within the limited physical space of Ballroom Marfa, Freeman, Lowe and Singh heighten the sense of cause and effect between the three utopias of the work and allow for a reading of the work to emerge which is speculative in nature and reflects critically on the timelines of recent history. How the material decision-making behind the work allows for this interpretation to emerge, and emphasises its speculative possibilities, is addressed in the next sections of this chapter.

Material Fiction as Method:

The central aim of this research project is to create artworks which embody the narrative qualities of science fiction. Part of this research involves creating works intended to encourage a viewing relationship that suggests the possibility of the work being read like science fiction, and, inversely, to create artworks which are essentially science fiction texts that are viewed. These aims may seem contradictory, but their contradiction is much like that of “science” and “fiction,” or “cognition” and “estrangement,” as described in chapter one, in that their critical potential is to be found in the tension between them as opposed to either extreme. The most significant difference between the viewer of an artwork and the reader of a science fiction text-based work is that the viewer typically encounters a

material object whereas the reader of a science fiction text imagines objects based on stimulus provided by the author. Is it possible for a work to produce both positions at once? *Meth Lab* suggests this possibility through the work's "material fiction," a concept put forward in the interviews with the artists included in the *Meth Lab* book. In these interviews, the artists refer several times to the idea of a material or materialistic fiction, perhaps best encapsulated in the following dialogue taken from the interview with curator and arts writer Raimundas Malašauskas:

RAIMUNDAS [MALAŠAUSKAS]. It is like the different sections exist simultaneously although they are coming from different periods. In that sense it reminds me of period rooms in the museum, when you have a room in the style of Napoleon II, and then Napoleon III, and then behind the next door you can find some Bauhaus furniture because this is how history is narrated in this museum. So in that sense the whole display of Meth Lab was based on museum logic.

JONAH [FREEMAN]. Yes, definitely. In the way that museums can offer a form of time travel, but they can also be like a graveyard. The idea of presence through absence is an important component for all the rooms in the piece. Spaces that were once inhabited but are no longer.

JUSTIN [LOWE]. This is an essential thought, and I think it really led to our material choices, not only in how they relate to each different community and their environments, but also the inherent aura or residue of material, for instance in voodoo practices how items from the people you want to contact or hex must be used in the ritual, and some things have a larger capacity for mojo than others.

JONAH. You could say that we were going for some sort of materialistic fiction. In the sense that the central theme of community, ritual and psychosis is strictly manifested through the traces of activity on an environment.

(Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 39–40)

According to Freeman, Lowe and Singh, a materialistic or material fiction is a means of directing the materiality of the artwork in question towards an articulation of the fiction of

the work; the evidence of “community, ritual and psychosis” in the case of *Meth Lab*. Within *Meth Lab* this approach to materiality is also produced in relation to museum dioramas as well as cinema and theatrical sets (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 40), and is tied to the relationship between alchemy and sculpture: “The theme of alchemy could be applied specifically to sculpture or the act of making sculpture. Sculpture, at least in a traditional sense, is using one material to represent another. Marble becoming flesh, for instance. This is not exactly lead into gold, but it is a transformation. The material of fantasy” (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 40). Thus, it can be inferred that material fiction, at least within the scope of *Meth Lab*, is inherently linked to the symbolic quality of the art object and its materiality in relation to the fiction it supports, as well as its symbolic quality in relation to broader narratives within art practice and history, such as alchemy and sculpture. A simpler phrasing of this understanding is that material fiction is a way of thinking about art objects and their materiality in relation to the narratives (fictional and otherwise) they support and/or relate to. It is an approach to world-building which foregrounds the relationship of elements of the work to its fiction. This concept of material fiction is of significance to this research project, and will be expanded upon in each of the following chapters, in which the specifics of each artwork’s material fiction are affected by the particular science fictional devices at play in the work, the subject matter of the artwork, and the critical intention of its narrative.

Over the course of their interview with Malašauskas, Freeman, Lowe and Singh frequently contradict each other and there are disparities between their interpretations of the artwork they had collaborated on. They offer a multiplicity of interpretations for the various elements of the work, an approach which I find generative and influential in terms of this research. This contestation of the authorship of the work begins on the first page of the interview, where they address the Black Acid Co-op:

RAIMUNDAS: So who are those people with cactuses, crystals and coyotes in the black-and-white photos?

JONAH: The way we described it initially to the people we were collaborating with for the photo shoot was that it was a cross between Norman Mailer’s fiftieth birthday and the last scene from *Rosemary’s Baby*. We wanted to have a sense of a kind of affluent crowd that gave the aura of wealth and power, but not exactly a

corporate situation, something that was a little more along the lines of Radical Chic... like the people at Norman Mailer's birthday as captured by Garry Winogrand—that was a strong point of reference for the style of the pictures.

JUSTIN: They might be some kind of board, like a Black Acid Co-op, we were thinking that these people were the ones that would be indicted on more of a global scale. Like they were the global chemists that might actually benefit from the production of Sudafed and its illicit use in making crystal meth.

ALEXANDRE: The pseudo-museum in which we displayed the photos had a certain ambiguity. It was possibly a museum 'looking out,' a space built by a culture to display its own artefacts and history. In that sense the photos also carry this same ambiguity; we don't know if they are being taken by these characters for their own pleasure or by an outside agency documenting this ritualistic activity.

(Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009, 37)

The three understandings offered by the artists regarding this one aspect of the overall installation of *Meth Lab* evidences the granular nature of the work's material fiction. It also provides evidence of the speculative potential of this form of contested authorship. Freeman, Lowe and Singh's disagreements and uncertainties about the meanings of various elements of *Meth Lab* introduces uncertainty to the work, and this uncertainty leads to speculation on the behalf of the artists and myself as a reader/viewer. Within the material fiction of *Meth Lab*, the black and white photographs are not representative or symbolic of any one thing, even in the interpretation of the artists who created them. Instead, they contribute to the speculative potential of the work in that these photographs—like much of the rest of *Meth Lab*, and the works created as part of this research—embrace the flux of potential meanings that accompanies their ambiguous relationship to the fictional narratives of the work, an ambiguity that is only heightened by the artists' refusal to offer a more concrete interpretation. This contested approach to collaboration informed the way in which I and the artists with whom I collaborated over the course of this research approached the creation of our artworks, and is expanded upon in chapters four and five.

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**FIGURE 2.18 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
*HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2008.***
Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from
“Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009.

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**FIGURE 2.19 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2008.**

Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from "Hello Meth Lab in the Sun", 2009.

Returning again to the narrative of *Meth Lab*, and my science fictional interpretation of this narrative established earlier in this chapter, the concept of “material fiction” might be thought of as the manner in which the narrative of the work is articulated materially through various elements across the larger artwork. The three utopian worlds of *Meth Lab* are layered on top of each other; their interrelationships evidenced through the various material micro-connections within the larger installation. These micro-connections are positioned in relation to one another and the utopias of the work in a variety of ways: a poster of Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator* with a tear through the middle, through which a viewer might travel to another room of the installation (*fig. 2.18*); a reel-to-reel tape recording set-up travelling through the wall cavities of the installation, recording the viewer as they explore (*fig. 2.14*); a meth lab explosion revealing the pink fiberglass insulation inside the walls, as well as a strange, radiant light spilling from the mangled air conditioning ducts (*fig. 2.19*). And smaller elements, too: scenic photographs torn roughly from their source materials; odd layerings of newspaper clippings in the windows (*fig. 2.13*); an excessive amount of Mountain Dew stacked in a hallway (*fig. 2.19*). All of these elements have clearly been carefully selected by Freeman, Lowe and Singh, and positioned in specific ways in order to articulate aspects of the work’s fiction. It is this approach to fictional world-building within an artistic context that I take to be the method of “material fiction,” and which this research project appropriates and expands upon in a variety of ways, as detailed in the following chapters.

The science fictional nature of *Meth Lab*, as articulated through its material fiction, is what allows it a unique relationship to the histories informing the work. When interpreted through the lens of Suvin’s theory of cognitive estrangement, these histories, ranging from modernist utopian visions, to the histories of alchemy and sculpture, are estranged from the world of the viewer via their containment within the fictional world of the work. This, in turn, allows a space for critical reflection on not only the impact these historical narratives have in the contemporary setting, but also the manner in which these histories are articulated by institutions such as the museum. It is the generative quality of this hybridisation between art and science fiction that this research project seeks to expand upon, and on which it places its significance.

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**FIGURE 2.20 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
*HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2008.***
Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from
“Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009.

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**FIGURE 2.21 JONAH FREEMAN, ALEXANDRE SINGH AND JUSTIN LOWE,
HELLO METH LAB IN THE SUN (DETAIL), 2008.**
Installation, dimensions unknown. Ballroom Marfa, Texas. Reproduced from
“Hello Meth Lab in the Sun”, 2009.

Conclusion:

Hello Meth Lab in the Sun is a significant influence on my practice and this research, both as an artwork and as science fiction. Like a good space opera, its worlds are rich, and it contains within itself a great variety of interesting elements which relate conceptually to the “real world” outside of its fiction. This research project owes much to *Meth Lab* as a significant influence and as an inspiration for the particular hybridisation of science fiction and contemporary art practice developed as part of this research. Many devices and elements shared between *Meth Lab* and this research project are more specific than the broader umbrella of a hybridisation of science fiction and contemporary art practice, but which nonetheless can be placed under this umbrella. These include the concept of material fiction, a concern with the relationship between contemporary art practice and utopia, and an ability to produce the “perceptual shift” or cognitive estrangement native to science fiction through artistic practice. However, this research project differentiates itself from *Meth Lab* through my deliberate production of science fiction artworks via a practice-led methodology involving a hybridisation of approaches from science fiction and contemporary art practice. Within this research project I seek to expand upon some of the ideas present within *Meth Lab* by implementing the imaginative framework of Suvin’s cognitive estrangement as a method for producing science fiction narratives and developing Freeman, Lowe and Singh’s concept of material fiction into a method for articulating these narratives in the form of artworks.

Chapter Three: *The Island*

This chapter will discuss the first body of work created as part of this research project. Titled *The Island*, this work was created with the intention of exploring the similarities and differences between a novel and gallery space in terms of their potential for articulating science fiction narratives. In the early stages of this project, while I was formulating the fiction of *The Island*, it became apparent that one of the critical capacities of science fiction is its ability to mimic the narrative structure of history and present estranged, fictional histories to its audience¹⁸. This allows science fiction the ability to open up a speculative space regarding history and its narrative form. Within a gallery space, this narrative form could be thought of as the histories that this space emerges from and participates in. As the creative component of this project evolved, one of the core elements of the research emerged: the relationship of science fiction to utopia, and the speculative potential of this relationship within contemporary art practice. Within the field of science fiction, the novel is a form through which utopia can be approached and opened up to speculation. Within contemporary art practice, gallery space often takes the form of a contemporary iteration of the “white cube.” “White cube” is a term coined by art critic Brian O’Doherty as part of a series of essays he wrote for *Artforum* in 1976, and which were later collected into the book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986). This form of gallery space is both an architectural frame for contemporary art and, I argue, a utopian object in its own right. *The Island* was developed with the intention of approaching, and speculating in relation to, this utopia. The fiction of the work functions as an allegory for the relationship of the white cube to contemporary art practice, and its material fiction evidences this narrative in a manner that estranges the world of the work from the world of the viewer and myself as the artist.

¹⁸ All science fiction texts suggest histories through the difference of the world of the fiction from that of the author, but many texts also contain within themselves accounts of their fictional histories which are told in a manner that mimics the causal narrative structure of real-world history. Examples of this include Olaf Stapledon’s *The First and Last Men* (1930), Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* series (1942–1993) and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Mars Trilogy* (1992–1996).

This chapter is divided into two halves, followed by a conclusion. The first half will cover the background of the work, highlighting the research which informed the creation of *The Island*. The second half will discuss the installation of the work at Moana Project Space in 2016. This section will address the narrative and material fiction of the work, its various elements, and the manner in which these elements combine to create an artwork that functions as science fiction. Finally, the significance of *The Island* in relation to the research objectives of this project will be discussed in the conclusion.

Background: Science Fiction, Gallery Space, and Utopia

As discussed in chapter one, Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement centres around the presence of a novum within the world of the fiction which estranges this world from that of the author and the reader. In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin not only outlines the framework of his theory, he also conducts a vast historical survey of the genre, dedicating an entire chapter to defining utopia as a sub-genre of science fiction (Suvin 2016, 51–77). It is this relationship that came to my attention while I was developing *The Island*, and which ultimately led to the work's primary concern: the relationship of utopia to contemporary art practice and, more specifically, the continued prevalence of "white cube" gallery spaces as a means of displaying contemporary artworks.

Robert Hughes, in his canonical history of modernism, *The Shock of the New* (1980), writes:

The culture of the twentieth century is littered with Utopian schemes. That none of them succeeded, we take for granted; in fact, we have gotten so used to accepting the failure of Utopia that we find it hard to understand our cultural grandparents, many of whom believed, with the utmost passion, that its historical destiny was to succeed. The home of the Utopian impulse was architecture rather than painting or sculpture. Painting can make us happy, but building is the art we live in, it is the social art *par excellence*, the carapace of political fantasy, the exoskeleton of one's economic dreams. It is also the art nobody can escape. (1980, 164)

Hughes, writing under the shadow of postmodernism, describes a relationship to utopia that persists into the post-historical present of contemporary art practice, where there is no

longer any significant investment in the various utopias described in the manifestos of the movements of twentieth century art. However, he locates the utopian impulse of this broader movement of modernism in architecture. Continuing this line of thought, it then follows that the gallery space is where art objects can find their utopian frame. Art, also, cannot escape the building it lives in. Even when it is able physically do so, as in the case of land art, it exists only in relation to, or indeed opposition to, the idea of the gallery. The white cube gallery space, the ideal, utopian home for modern and contemporary artworks, is one of these failed schemes referred to by Hughes, one that nonetheless persists into the present.

Brian O'Doherty's celebrated text, *Inside the White Cube* (1999), is renowned for its seminal critique of gallery space, and for coining the term "white cube" to describe both the physical, white-walled gallery space and the utopia which it gestures towards. However, it remains little remarked upon that the text begins with a brief reference to the science fiction trope of a spaceship departing Earth. As the spaceship rockets away from Earth, the planet dwindles, and the visual and temporal information gathered by the astronaut is compressed. This reference is used by O'Doherty to express the difference between lived experience and history:

Life is horizontal, just one thing after another, a conveyor belt shuffling towards the horizon. But history, the view from the departing space craft, is different. As the scale changes, layers of time are superimposed and through them we project perspective with which to recover and correct the past. No wonder art gets bollixed up in this process; its history, perceived through time, is confounded by the picture in front of your eyes, a witness ready to change testimony at the slightest perceptual provocation. (O'Doherty 1999, 13)

This difference between the act of looking at artwork in terms of its relationship to history and the act of looking at an artwork on its own terms is necessarily at the core of this research project. The science fiction artworks that form the creative component of this project, including *The Island*, suggest an oscillation between their roles as artworks and their roles as historiographic props which support the science fictional "histories" of their fictions. This is an aspect of their material fictions, and one which allows them to propose speculative relationships to their subject matter. In the case of *The Island*, this subject

matter is the utopia of white cube gallery space and its relationship to contemporary art practice.

In *Inside the White Cube*, O’Doherty argues that modern gallery and museum spaces lack a sense of time, and instead privilege the relationship of the artwork to the historical period within which it was created:

Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of ‘period’ (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status: one has to have died already to be there. (O’Doherty 1999, 15)

O’Doherty goes on to argue that this “eternity of display” is achieved through the white cube’s subtraction from the artwork of “all cues that interfere with the fact that it is ‘art’” (O’Doherty 1999, 14). This subtraction of anything that might interfere with the status of artworks displayed within white cube gallery space results in a space which is dislocated from any sense of time, while referring to and being rooted in historical narratives that account for the status of these artworks. This timeless quality of the gallery space, and its relationship to history, in the context of this research project, take on a science fictional quality that informs the fiction of *The Island*.

In my view, the white cube is itself a somewhat science fictional device. This is reflected by art critic and historian Thomas McEvilley in his introduction to the expanded edition of O’Doherty’s text:

The white cube was a transitional device that attempted to bleach out the past and at the same time control the future by appealing to supposedly transcendental modes of presence and power. But the problem with transcendental principles is that by definition they speak of another world, not this one. It is this other world, or access to it, that the white cube represents. (McEvilley in O’Doherty 1999, 11)

This framing of the white cube by McEvilley aligns with Fredric Jameson’s conception of utopia as a pastiche of the author’s environment which, rather than truly describing a “more perfect” society, provides an estranged reflection of the social and cultural context from which it emerges. The white cube, like other utopias, finds its criticality not in a

successful transcendence of time and space, but in the failure of this transcendence, in its collapse back into the present. This form of gallery space is as much an ideological and cultural construct as the art objects it houses and the museological space it imitates. It is within this fiction of transcendence that the failure of the white cube's "utopian scheme" reveals itself. Its failure is that of many utopias: it oxymoronically attempts to transcend the history from which it was developed, while at the same time being dependent on this history for an understanding of the utopia which it is attempting to realise. The white cube, like science fiction, is interesting not for its projected utopia of neutrality and blankness, but for the way in which this form of gallery space fails to be neutral or blank, and in doing so reflects critically on the context from which it was created and continues to be perpetuated.

The "other world" which the white cube promises access to is a modernist continuity of the Platonic creation mythos. In this narrative account for the origin of the world, there is a dimension of pure forms from which our universe was born. As McEvilley states:

This set of elements—point, line, surface, solid, simulacrum—conceived of as contentless except in their own nature, is the primary equipment of much modern art. The white cube represents the blank ultimate face of light from which, in the Platonic myth, these elements unspeakably evolve. (McEvilley in O'Doherty 1999, 12).

Against this image of a pure background, works of art can find as close to an ideal, utopian frame as they can manage within the contemporary setting. However, this image of purity is just that—an image—imagined by visitors to the gallery space who are, like myself, immersed within the world of contemporary art. Consequently, we have learned, both consciously and unconsciously, the various tropes and cultural formalities that accompany viewing an artwork. As O'Doherty states in *Inside the White Cube*: "We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the space first" (1999, 14). However it is not as though contemporary art viewers, myself included, are unaware of the historical shortcomings of the white cube. Rather, it is that, in the post-historical condition of contemporary art, the white cube has become a genre device similar to the dimming of lights at the cinema, or the hush that precedes the beginning of a play—one that signals an awareness of the performed nature of the device, but a participation in it all the same.

In chapter one I outlined the many versions of utopia described by Lyman Tower Sargent in his essay “The Three Faces of Utopia Revisited” (1994). While the white cube may have been thought of as a positive utopia in its early modernist conceptions, the state in which it is described by O’Doherty, or perhaps more aptly the tone in which he describes it, is that of a critical utopia. He recognises the radical roots of the white cube, as well as the complexities of its state at the time of this writing:

The white cube is usually seen as an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society to which the gallery also provides access to. It is a ghetto space, a survival compound, a proto-museum with a direct line to the timeless, a set of conditions, an attitude, a place deprived of location, a reflex to the bald curtain wall, a magic chamber, a concentration of mind, maybe a mistake. It preserved the possibility of art but made it difficult. (1999, 80)

Here, O’Doherty poetically gestures towards the complex relationship of modern art to the white cube; it is at once a fundamental aspect of how we understand and approach artworks both as artists and as viewers, as well as one its great problematics, in that it has become difficult to imagine artworks separate from this architectural framework. At times, it can seem, to me, that art is symbiotically related to the white cube. Certainly, I find myself imagining my artworks in relation to this timeless, blank void of the white cube. In this sense, the white cube gallery space precedes the artwork and in doing so both limits and constrains the possibilities of artworks as much as it permits them. Like O’Doherty, many artists, curators, viewers and academics understand the potential for the particular logic and language of the white cube to limit, restrain and even interfere with the possibilities of artworks, both in terms of production and interpretation. This has resulted in a situation where interested parties attempt to develop strategies for approaching, subverting or problematising the relationship of the white cube to the art objects that it houses. This includes O’Doherty himself, who, under the pseudonym Patrick Ireland, created, among other things, installations that introduced maze-like structures and geometries to gallery space. The effect of the many approaches of O’Doherty and others to the problem of gallery space is that engaging with it has become its own form of discourse. It is this artistic discourse, as well as that of science fiction and utopia, which *The Island* contributes to.

Despite O’Doherty’s *Inside the White Cube* being over forty years old at the time of this writing, the form of gallery space described in this seminal text continues to be the standard exhibition space for contemporary artworks. As curator and arts writer Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez states in her 2017 essay “For Slow Institutions”, “the spectre of the neutral white cube still haunts many architectural visions, museum directorships, and newly built art institutions” (Petrešin-Bachelez, 2017). Discussion regarding the political, social and economic structures which support the continued existence of this form of gallery space continues to be a significant aspect of contemporary art discourse. Writing in 2009, curator and arts writer Simon Sheikh describes the contemporary condition of the white cube:

As O’Doherty concludes, the spatial arrangement overdetermines—consumes—the works (or, if you will, statements placed within them) to the degree that context becomes content. The task of critical art then becomes one of reflecting and restaging this space. Of course, this is exactly what happened in the 1970s, as well as in the so-called expanded field of art today. As such, O’Doherty’s texts attest to the epistemological shift from the modern to the postmodern era of art and politics. In spite of these changes, however, the text not only marks a beginning, an end, or a part of a history, but is equally relevant today as part of a continuous debate—an ongoing struggle, if you will. After all, most galleries, museums, and alternative spaces still employ the white cube as the favoured *modus operandi* for exhibition-making—as the dominant model for the showing of art. Gallery spaces and museums are still white cubes, and their ideology remains one of commodity fetishism and eternal value(s). (Sheikh, 2009)

The Island does not offer a science fictional solution to the problematic of gallery space within contemporary art practice. Instead, it offers a lens through which the relationship of contemporary art to the white cube can be approached in a speculative fashion. Within the fiction of the work, the central novum, the Island itself, is a reflection of the white cube, and of the relationship of utopia to creative production more broadly. However, this reflection is estranged and distorted, more akin to a funhouse mirror than a vanity. The next section of this chapter outlines the narrative and material fiction of *The Island*, evidencing how this narrative was developed through the framework of cognitive estrangement, the manner in which this narrative is directed towards a speculative relationship with the gallery space it

exists within, and how the material fiction of the work articulates this narrative so as to foreground its speculative potential.



FIGURE 3.1. KIERON BROADHURST, *THE ISLAND* (VIDEO STILL), 2016.
Digital video. 13.43. Moana Project Space. Artist's own image

The Material Fiction of *The Island*:

The Island was exhibited at Moana Project Space in May of 2016. Moana, an artist-run initiative, occupied a heritage-listed former ballroom on the second storey of a building on Hay Street in Perth from 2012 to 2017. This gallery space was a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional white cube: angular, with faceted walls that sloped away from the central space in places, and a triangular door that allowed access to its interior. The inward-facing walls maintained, unless an exhibition required otherwise, the radiant whiteness of the white cube, but some wall areas had exposed wooden frameworks and supports traditionally masked behind the floating walls of galleries. The Moana gallery space was an example of a contemporary iteration of the white cube that acknowledges the problematic of the histories informing it—specifically the shortcomings of its modernist foundations—and incorporates itself into this problematic through its design. The construction of the Moana gallery space avoided being cube-like through its geometry, and exposed the staged nature of gallery space through its literal exposure of the stage-like construction of the gallery.



FIGURE 3.2. KIERON BROADHURST, *THE ISLAND* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Moana Project Space. Artist's own image

The Island was developed with Moana in mind: a self-referential installation concerned with the utopia of white cube gallery space, housed within a self-referential gallery space concerned with possibilities of the same utopia. The installation comprised four main elements. The first was a video in which a narrator, ostensibly the unnamed sailor, tells their story through subtitle text incorporated into this video. The second element was another video work which acknowledged the work's fictionality through a reference to one of the SF influences for *The Island*—the 1997 film adaptation of Carl Sagan's novel *Contact*. The third element was a large sculptural work titled *Jacob*, which occupied the centre of the gallery space and took the form of a "failed" attempt at modelling the Island, as well as providing a reference to another filmic influence on the work, namely, the television series *Lost* (2004–2010). The fourth and final element was a catalogue (see appendix D) for the exhibition, which was comprised of elements created by myself and by three contributors, namely, Francis Russell under the pseudonym Alan Smithee, Graham Mathwin and Amy Hickman. The elements created by myself and these contributors were, to varying degrees, incorporated into the world of the work's fiction.

First published in 1726, Jonathan Swift's utopian satire *Gulliver's Travels* (2014) begins with two shorter texts before launching into Gulliver's account of his journey. The first is ostensibly written by Gulliver's close friend and relative Richard Sympson, and is addressed directly to the reader. This foreword positions Gulliver as a real person whose manuscript has been edited by Sympson, who removed "innumerable passages relating to the winds and tides, as well as to the variations and bearings in the several voyages, together with the minute descriptions of the management of the ship in storms in the style of sailors; likewise the account of longitudes and latitudes; wherein I have reason to apprehend, that Mr. Gulliver may be a little dissatisfied" (Swift 2014, 5). The second is a letter from Gulliver "himself," in which he scolds Sympson: "I hope you will be ready to own publicly, whenever you shall be called to it, that by your great and frequent urgency you prevailed on me to publish a very loose and uncorrect account of my travels" (Swift 2014, 7). These twin forewords embody the utopian device of the travel narrative¹⁹ and

¹⁹ The travel narrative is also known as the imaginary voyage. This device has been inherited by SF, with many SF narratives beginning with similar prefaces. In many ways this device can be thought of as the science fictional equivalent of the phrase "based on a true story" appearing at the beginning of a film.

have the effect of destabilising the fictional nature of the text, either by misleading the reader into believing that the text is real, or asking them to participate in a satire of “true” accounts told in the form of a novel. Additionally, they fulfil the requirement of utopia as being located radically elsewhere, “irredeemably other, and thus formally, or virtually by definition, impossible of realisation: it thus reinforces Utopia’s constitutive secessionism, a withdrawal or ‘delinking’ from the empirical and historical world” (Jameson 2007, 23).

The catalogue for *The Island* begins with a small disclaimer: “*The Island* has been constructed from material purchased by the artist during the auction of an anonymous dead estate in early 2015. The views and opinions expressed in this work are not necessarily those of the artist or his collaborators” (see appendix D). The material within the catalogue further emphasises my utilisation of the utopian device of the travel narrative in its destabilising of the fictional nature of the work. Like the forewords to *Gulliver’s Travels*, and the texts included in the *Meth Lab* book, the essays and other material included in this catalogue contradict each other as well as the narrative of the primary video work. An essay by Francis Russell, under the pseudonym Alan Smithee, discusses a completely different and much more extreme version of both *The Island* as an exhibition and myself as an artist. Additional texts by Graham Mathwin and Amy Hickman respectively take the form of a dream sequence involving Napoleon Bonaparte, Victor Hugo and Ayn Rand, and a speculative interrogation of the island utopia motif in relation to Guantánamo Bay and the US government’s treatment of Chelsea Manning. Like the travel narrative, which borrows the trusted device of a book’s foreword and twists it in order to destabilise the reader’s relationship to the fictionality of the text, this playful use of didactic material has the effect of destabilising the viewer’s position in relation to the fictionality of *The Island*²⁰. This is because the catalogue, usually a trusted lens for understanding the often obtuse world of contemporary art, is obviously, and unapologetically, lying to them. This lie, however, is flimsy, and its fictionality is apparent both in the catalogue, which

²⁰ A notable connection between science fiction and the playful fictionizing of didactic materials I utilise in my own practice can be seen in the work of arts and science fiction writer Mark von Schlegell, who produces science fictional texts within the framework of contemporary arts media. An example of this is his short story *Somerset or, A Glance at the Deep Future of the Avant-Garde* (2011), which utilises imagery from the artist Ben Rivers’ film *Slow Action* (2010), but which does not clarify or provide a non-fictional context for the film

declares on the back cover that “Kieron Broadhurst is an artist who investigates the speculative potential of fiction within contemporary art practice,” and in the work itself, through the flimsy nature of its material fiction.

It is unlikely that Swift wanted to trick his readers into truly believing the narrative of *Gulliver’s Travels*. Given the context of his other works, such as *A Modest Proposal* (1729), it is much more likely that he was, instead, satirising the romantic accounts of colonial explorers of his time. I, likewise, do not want to truly trick my viewers into believing the content of the catalogue or the fiction of *The Island* as a whole. Rather, I want to provide a lens for the work that is simultaneously generative for the fiction of the work whilst also subverting the generic function of the contemporary art exhibition catalogue, which is to explain and contextualise the work in terms of the contemporary art discourse it is contributing to, and thereby locate it within a history related to this discourse. Another function of the catalogue is to provide the viewer with an authoritative lens through which to view the work. Often, it seems to me, a catalogue can fulfil the second function unintentionally while fulfilling the first. This can have the negative effect, in my opinion, of overriding the viewer’s own subjective interpretations of the work. Perhaps O’Doherty’s claim that we “see the space first” can also be extended, at times, to seeing the didactic materials first, be they in the form of a catalogue or a museological panel on the wall. It is this functionality of the catalogue that *The Island* destabilises through my inclusion of elements of the catalogue within the world of its fiction.

The main video work of *The Island* (see appendix E) tells the story of the work (appendix A) from the perspective of the unnamed sailor as detailed in the narrative section of this chapter. This video takes the form of a series of intentionally poor-quality digital renders of tropical islands and landscapes with superimposed subtitle text (*figs.* 3.3–3.5). Within the fiction of the work, these renders are contextualised as a product of the unnamed sailor’s attempts to recreate or visualise in some way the Island. In reality, I commissioned these renders through the website *fiverr.com*. Fiverr is an online marketplace for freelance services where users can hire, for relatively small amounts of money, the talents of freelance designers, voice actors, coders, and so on. The renders I purchased are of a poor quality and are inconsistent as I ordered them from different Fiverr creatives for small sums of money, using only vague descriptions and a combination of stock photos and clip art imagery. The resulting effect is that the computer graphic imagery of the video work

appears to be dated or cheap by contemporary standards, and it does not have the detail or assets to match the descriptions of the narrator in the accompanying subtitle text. The disjuncture between the visuals and the descriptions given by the narrator embodies the central, generative function of the concept of material fiction in that it is simultaneously an element of an artwork with apparent, impoverished material qualities, while also gesturing towards an estranged, imaginary, and “more perfect” equivalent of itself. This duality of the main video work—the pronounced differences between the subtitle text and the computer graphic imagery—also furthers the fiction of the work as it emphasises the unimaginable, unrealisable, utopian qualities of the Island, as well as the failures of the narrator in their attempts to recreate it.



FIGURE 3.3. KIERON BROADHURST, *THE ISLAND* (VIDEO STILL), 2016.
Digital video. 13.43. Moana Project Space. Artist's own image



FIGURE 3.4. KIERON BROADHURST, *THE ISLAND* (STILL FROM VIDEO), 2016.
 Digital video. 13.43. Moana Project Space. Artist's own image

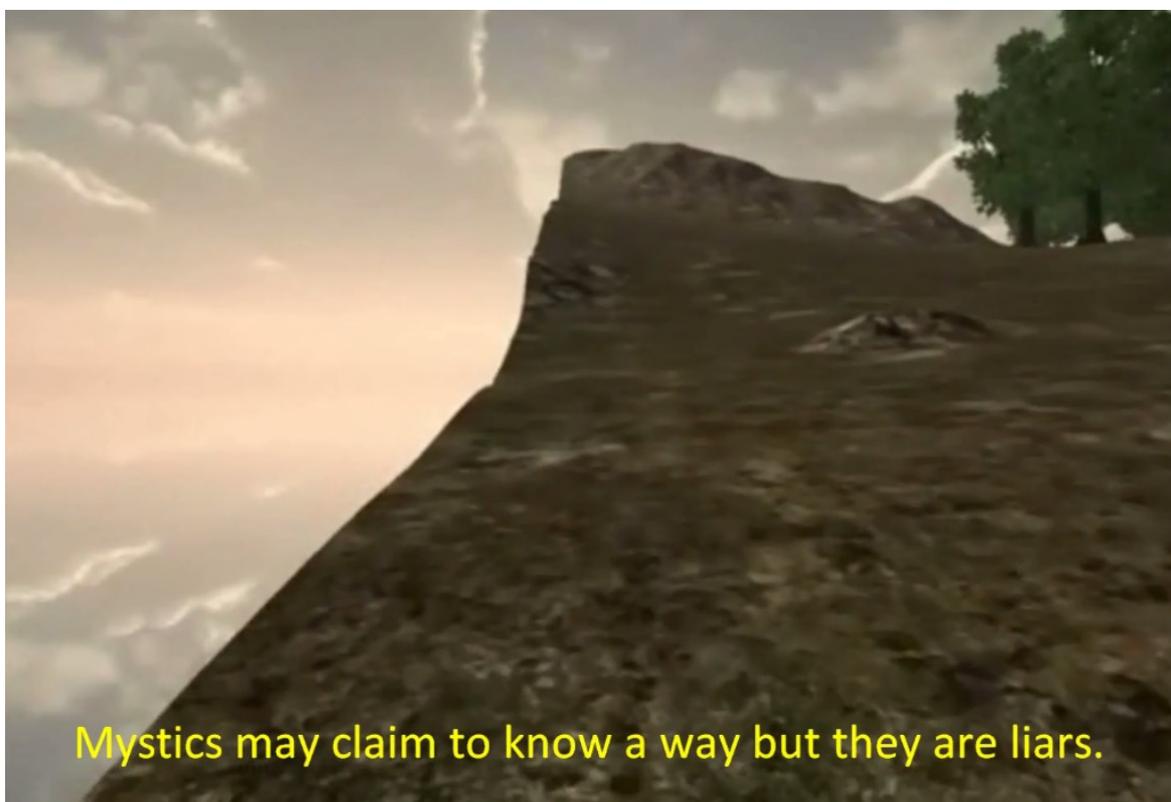


FIGURE 3.5. KIERON BROADHURST, *THE ISLAND* (VIDEO STILL), 2016.
 Digital video. 13.43. Moana Project Space. Artist's own image

In the installation of *The Island*, a second video work, titled *Jodie Foster Nightscape*, was displayed on a small television screen and installed to the right of the main video projection (fig. 3.6). This work was slower in pace than the main video, and was accompanied by audio in the style of a meditation or relaxation tape²¹. It also functions as a “cognitive,” or recognisable, aspect of the work’s fiction in that it directly references the SF film *Contact* (1997) through its title. This title, in combination with the CGI aesthetic of the work, refers to a specific scene towards the end of the film. In this scene, Jodie Foster, playing the lead character Dr. Ellie Arroway, meets an alien intelligence, which has taken the form of her deceased father, on a CGI beach at night time. The entirety of this scene, within the fiction of the film, is being rendered by the alien intelligence in order to make the experience comprehensible to a human mind. By contemporary standards, the CGI in this film is of nearly as poor a quality as the cheap renders I was able to purchase through Fiverr. However, the reference to this particular scene from *Contact* was not only to tease out aesthetic similarities between my work and the CGI of the film, but also to draw parallels between the alien intelligence imagined by Sagan in the book that the film adapts and the one imagined by myself as part of the fiction of *The Island*. Ultimately, this reference in the work was intended as a nod towards a pop-cultural influence on the project and the parallels between its fiction and my own. It was also a “cognitive” aspect of the work’s interaction of cognition and estrangement, in the sense that if a viewer

²¹ The video itself is a short loop of waves lapping at night on a beach of one of the CGI islands of the main video work. However, this video was given a duration exceeding the one hour listed in the floor sheet that accompanied the exhibition. This duration is decided by the audio track that accompanied the video, which I purchased from the website ambient-mixer.com. This website seemingly takes advantage of users’ lack of familiarity in regards to audio software. Through the site, you can purchase customisable ambient audio loops which you create by altering the levels of the various sound effects that comprise the larger soundscape of the ambient loop in question. This is a helpful tool. However, the website allows you to purchase increasingly larger durations of the same audio loop for greater amounts of money, despite the fact that most programs that will play the audio will allow you to loop it infinitely. I thought that this was an interesting and hilariously cynical business model with a generative relationship to the utopian image projected by a website that allows you to create your own relaxation and meditation soundtracks, so I purchased the maximum duration of the *Pure Beach* audio loop. This maximum duration is what decided the duration of *Jodie Foster Nightscape*. The manner in which the construction of this work is informed by the various materials appropriated as part of its construction is a good example of how I view the process of creating material fiction, in that the material decisions made as part of the creative process are informed by the potential for fictionality and, in the case of this research, their potential relationships to utopia.

recognised the reference of the title of this element of the work, they might, by association, recognise the aesthetic and narrative parallels, and thereby come to understand the fictionality of the work as a whole.

The final element of *The Island* installation was a large sculpture which occupied most of the central space of the gallery. This sculpture was titled *Jacob*, in reference to a character from the television series *Lost* (2004–2010), and was a hybridisation of a New Age shrine and an architectural or sculptural maquette (fig. 3.7). This element of the overall installation of *The Island* was intended to function, within the world of the work's fiction, as an attempt at either modelling the Island itself, or producing the manmade copy suggested by the narrator of the main video work. The model element of *Jacob* was constructed from a large pile of sand with some Himalayan rock salt lamps embedded in it (fig. 3.8). New Age practitioners often believe in the cleansing power of these kinds of rock salts, and my inclusion of them in *Jacob* was intended to refer to this belief, as if I or the narrator were attempting to create a spiritually “clean” version of the Island. However, like the video works, this attempt lacked any discernible details like those being described by the narrator in the subtitle text and it was—given that it was mostly made of sand—constantly in flux. *Jacob* was intended as a visual representation of the unimaginable, unrepresentable quality of utopia; a simple sculpture made of sand and rock salt which, aside from its suggestion of spiritual cleansing, was not as loaded with content as the central video of *The Island*, which dominated the space. However, in terms of the work's fiction, it was significant, in that it represented an attempt at modelling or recreating the Island; a questionable fulfilment of the wishes of the unnamed sailor who narrates the central video. In this sense, *Jacob* extended the fiction of *The Island* into the exhibition itself by suggesting that the artworks I had created were a product of the Island's infection of the unnamed sailor, and then me through the purchasing of their estate, and that perhaps the viewer themselves were being infected also, simply by viewing the work. This significance of *Jacob* as it relates to the fiction is a successful example of material fiction in action, in that the artwork's speculative possibilities are made available to the viewer through their reading of it in relation to the overall narrative of *The Island*.



FIGURE 3.6. KIERON BROADHURST, *JODIE FOSTER NIGHTSCAPE*, 2016.
Installation view of digital video, 01:00:13. Moana Project Space. Image Courtesy of
Guy Loudon.



FIGURE 3.7. KIERON BROADHURST, *JACOB* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.
Mixed media. Moana Project Space. Image courtesy of Guy Loudon

The material fiction of *The Island* was generated through a hybridisation of SF and contemporary art devices. The catalogue appropriated the device of the travel narrative, the science fictional equivalent of a knowing wink, in order to complicate my role as the author of the work and to emphasise the narration of the work provided by the subtitle text of the main video work. This central video utilised poorly rendered computer graphic imagery purchased online in order to mask evidence of my hand in the work, and the lack of correlation between this imagery and the narrative content of the subtitles provided a means of gesturing towards the utopian concerns of the work as a whole. *Jodie Foster Nightscape* followed suit in its construction from material purchased online, and introduced a cognitive, or recognisable, element to the work's fictional world, in terms of its connection to the film *Contact* (1997). Finally, the large, central sculpture, *Jacob*, gestured once more towards the utopian concerns of the work through its lack of detail and its inclusion of Himalayan rock salt lamps, as well as providing a speculative extension of the fiction of *The Island* into the exhibition itself. These elements combine within the larger exhibition of *The Island* in a manner which privilege their utopian potentiality, and provide a working example of a material fiction producing a speculative outcome.



FIGURE 3.8. KIERON BROADHURST, *JACOB* (DETAIL), 2016.
Mixed media. Moana Project Space. Image courtesy of Guy Loudon

The narrative of *The Island* was heavily influenced by science fiction such as Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1970), Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic* (1972) and Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach Trilogy* (2014). Each of these fictions centres around nova of landscapes which exhibit some signs of intelligence, and could be read as having speculative relationships to utopia within the worlds of their fictions. That said, the primary narrative influence on the *The Island* was the television series *Lost* (2004–2010). The stories of *The Island* and *Lost* are concerned with island paradises that exhibit some form of sentience, have apparently supernatural properties such as teleportation, and are able to interact with the outside world, albeit through different means. Additionally, both fictions lack a satisfying conclusion. The final episode of *Lost* frames the entire experience of the various characters as part of some kind of spiritual progression, an escape from a purgatory of sorts. For *The Island*, there is no final episode; the fiction of the work loops back on itself. The Island has infected humanity with an idea, and this idea sustains it. In order to fix this problem, the narrator suggests a recreation of the Island, but this recreation may also be a product of the Island's parasitic relationship to humanity, creating another Island which further implants an idea, and so the cycle repeats. My intention with this circular narrative is for *The Island* to act as a speculative allegory for the relationship of contemporary art practice to the utopia of the white cube and, more broadly, of the relationship of utopian thought to creative production. Rather than resolving the narrative or the work, and telling the viewer that "the moral of the story is..." *The Island* concludes by implicating the viewer as part of the fictional narrative of the work and, ultimately, leaves any conclusion that might be reached, via an engagement with the work's speculative properties, in their hands.

Conclusion:

The circular quality of the narrative of *The Island* parallels the circular relationship of contemporary art practice to white cube gallery space. An artwork may exist outside of its physical boundaries, suggest an alternative form of space, or even consume the entirety of the gallery, but ultimately these gestures exist in contrast, or in relation, to the white cube, its descendants and its reinterpretations. *The Island* was not intended as a solution to this problematic; rather, it was an experiment in how SF devices might allow an alternative, speculative approach to this utopia. It is in this sense that the work was successful; the

explicitly fictional approach exists in an estranged relationship to the gallery space, and through this estrangement reveals the white cube to be another kind of fiction, albeit a much more pervasive and inescapable one than that of *The Island*. As O'Doherty writes, "the gallery space is all we've got, and most art needs it. Each side of the white cube question has two, four, six sides" (1999, 81). Conventional approaches to the white cube may limit or restrain the potential readings of a contemporary artwork, and while a science fictional approach does not provide a solution to this problematic, it does provide an alternate, speculative orientation towards it.

Chapter Four: *An Event*

Towards the end of *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O'Doherty states that “museums have drawn forth a kind of museum art, to that degree an official art, appropriated for mass viewing” (1999, 112). *The Island* represents the first step in terms of the creative component of this research project, exploring the speculative possibilities of science fiction in relation to white cube gallery space. The artwork discussed in this chapter, *An Event*, was created in collaboration with artists Oliver Hull and Giles Bunch. This work explores elements of the hybridisation of science fiction and art practices central to this research, but not previously addressed in *The Island*. These elements are the unique narrative and speculative possibilities of the sub-genre of science fiction known as alternate, or alternative, history. Aspects of this fiction were developed collaboratively with Hull and Bunch, while at the same time we each created and explored separate tangential narratives stemming from the central novum of the work—the “Event” itself. This resulted in a great multiplicity of alternate histories stemming from the Event, all supported through an array of media. *An Event* was articulated in several forms, including Hull’s AAC (2015) (fig. 4.1), exhibited at Seventh Gallery in Melbourne, and my own work *Ultra Rare Shiny* (2015) (fig. 4.2), exhibited at Firstdraft in Sydney, as well as a website constructed by Hull from material contributed by all three artists (see appendix F) (fig. 4.3). This chapter will focus on the 2016 installation of *An Event* at Success, a gallery space in Fremantle, Western Australia. The installation of the work mimicked museum space, exploring the speculative potential of alternate history when articulated museologically. In producing this work, Hull, Bunch and I, taking influence from *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*, explored the generative possibilities of collaboration as a means of introducing contested authorship to the work.

Like the previous chapter, this chapter will be divided into two halves, followed by a conclusion. The first will introduce the background of *An Event*, discussing the various influences on the project from both SF and contemporary art practice, as well the hybridisations of these approaches which inform this aspect of my research. The second section of this chapter will discuss the narrative and material fiction of the installation of *An Event* that occurred at Success in 2016, providing evidence of how material fiction engages with the concerns of its fiction in a critical, speculative manner. Finally, the

significance of the work in relation to this research will be discussed in a conclusion which draws from the previous two sections.

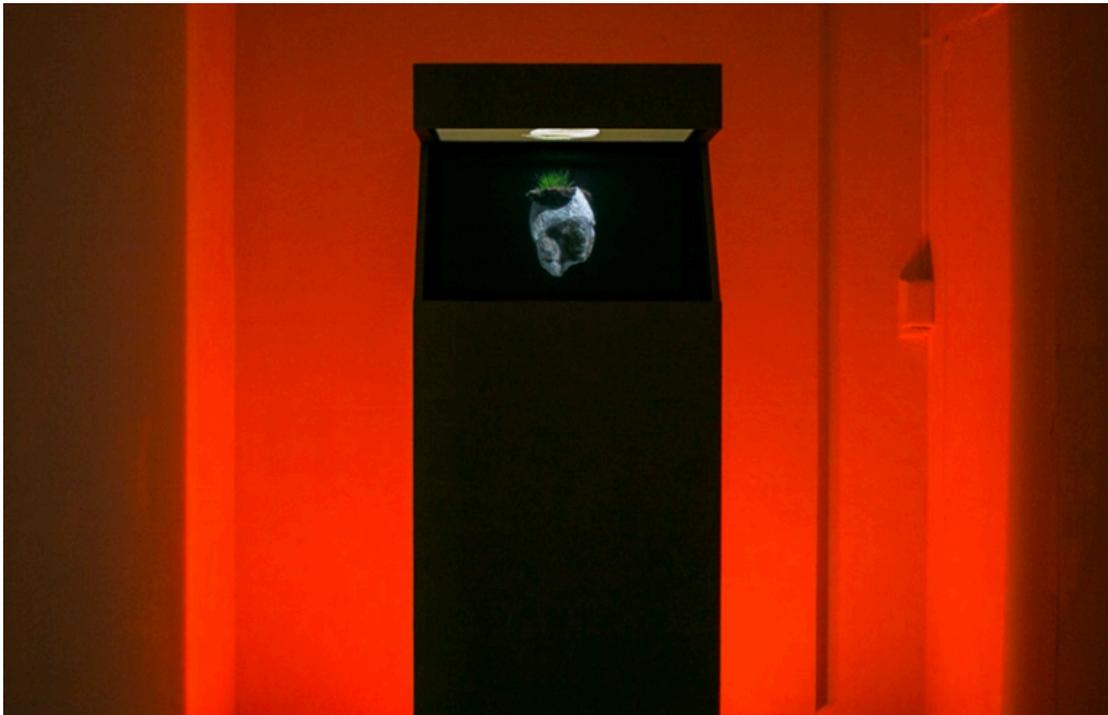


FIGURE 4.1. OLIVER HULL, AAC, 2015.

Installation, mixed media. Seventh Gallery, Melbourne. Reproduced from artist's website. <https://www.oliverhull.com/>



FIGURE 4.2. KIERON BROADHURST, *ULTRA RARE SHINY*, 2015.
Installation, mixed media. Firstdraft, Sydney. Artist's own image.

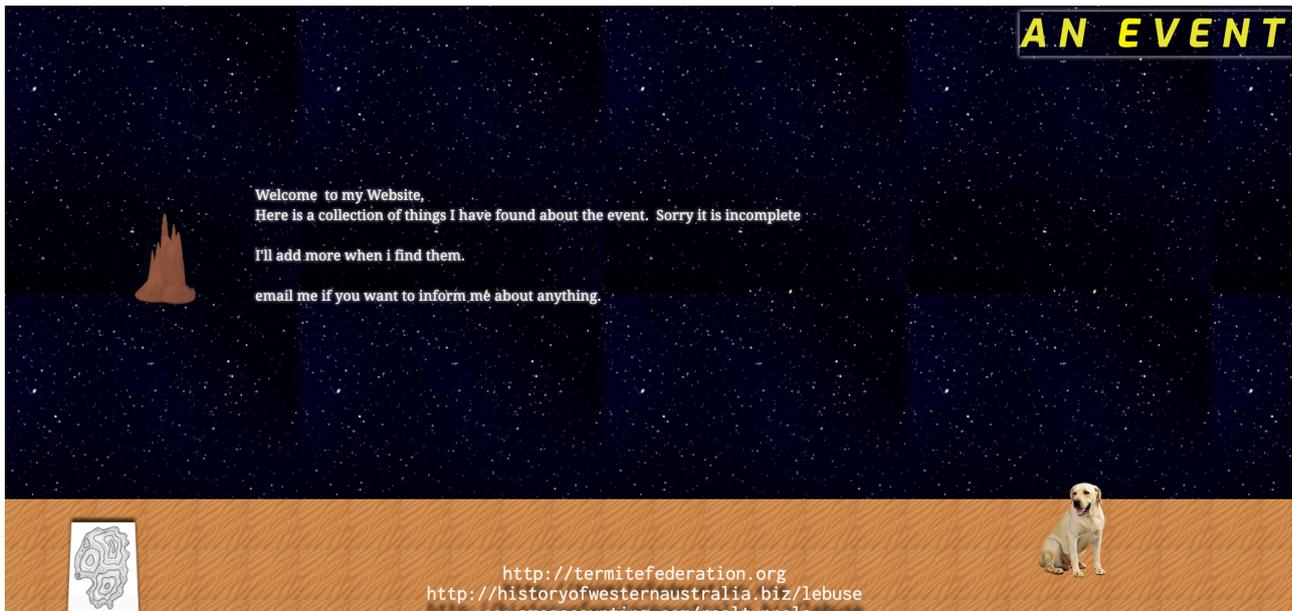


FIGURE 4.3. OLIVER HULL, WITH MATERIAL BY KIERON BROADHURST AND GILES BUNCH. AN EVENT WEBSITE. 2015.

Screen shot of digital artwork. Available online at <http://anevent.com.au/>

Background: Alternate History, the Museum, and Utopia

Alternate history is an outlier within the field of science fiction. This is because it does not position the present as the past of a future described in the text, as per the generic version of science fiction described in chapter one. Instead, alternate history positions the present as an alternative to the timeline described in the text. There is some debate about the validity of alternate history as a form of science fiction given this lack of futurity, however this research project is not concerned with this debate. Instead, I focus on what the speculative possibilities of alternate history might be within contemporary art practice when it is treated as a form of science fiction that can be understood and structured through the framework of cognitive estrangement. My understanding of alternate history within the confines of this research project is informed by the work of literary critic Karen Hellekson, who described the genre as follows in her essay “Towards a Taxonomy of the Alternate History Genre”:

In his introduction to *Three Trips in Time and Space* (1973), Robert Silverberg writes, ‘If all things are possible, if all gates stand open, what sort of world will we have?’. As a genre the alternate history—the branch of literature that concerns itself with history’s turning out differently than what we know to be true—attempts to answer this question. The alternate history concerns itself with plausible causal

relationships, and as such, it concerns itself with narrative and time. (2000, 248)

In creating *An Event* as an alternate history, I seek to embody this concern with narrative and time. For me, the criticality of alternate history questions the manner in which narratives, primarily historical narratives, are produced from raw events. It does this by speculating about how things may have been different if the event or events had occurred differently, or been recorded differently. Within the scope of *An Event*, this concern and its accompanying criticality is directed towards the manner in which historical narratives are constructed within museum spaces. The installation of *An Event* at Success carried this concern through to its material fiction which involved mimicking museum space and its narrative conventions.

The alternate history genre allows for an exploration of alternate possibilities in the historical record, and projects with a great multiplicity of timelines involving alternate pasts, presents, and futures have undertaken this exploration. This suggests that it would be an ideal vehicle for speculating in regards to the limitations placed on the contemporary utopian imagination by our understanding of history. As mentioned in chapter one, a significant part of the difficulty of imagining utopias is that we are only able to construct them from what we know. Fredric Jameson in his 2005 book *Archaeologies of the Future* states: “On the social level, this means our imaginations are hostages to our own means of production (and perhaps to whatever remains of past ones it has preserved)” (Jameson 2007, xiii). Where *The Island* engages with the contemporary condition of the white cube as part of its speculation, *An Event* engages with museum space in order to open up a speculative space regarding the manner in which we preserve the remains of the past, and how this effects our ability to imagine the future.

The complicated relationship of the present to the histories suggested or explicitly stated by science fiction texts, whether they declare themselves as alternate histories or not, is one of the genre’s most significant critical capabilities. Hellekson emphasises the significance of this relationship in terms of alternate history specifically: “The alternate history rewrites history and reality, thus transforming the world and our understanding of reality. These texts change the present by transforming the past” (2000, 249). Alternate histories produce estranged historical narratives with speculative relationships to our own histories. Taking into account the specific location of the timeline of an alternate history as

being differentiated from the world of the reader and/or author through an alternative understanding of, or outcome to, a historical moment or moments, the genre can be understood as conforming to Jameson's conception of SF as enacting and enabling "a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the present as history" (2007, 288). This is due to the alternative history of the text sitting in an estranged yet recognisable (i.e., cognitive) relationship to a history or histories of the world of the reader and/or author. Through the interaction of cognition and estrangement, alternate histories open up speculative approaches to the histories from which they diverge. This critical relationship problematises the causal relationships of the histories of the real world by making them strange in their juxtaposition against the causal relationships of the history of the text. It was this critical capacity that Bunch, Hull and I sought to achieve through *An Event*.

Amelia Barikin begins her essay "Quantum Entanglements and the Construction of Time: Do We Need a Science-Fictional History of Art?" (2015) with the following questions:

Can an image preserve its own past, or create its own future? If an image is capable of moving beyond its original context to speak to us anew, in the now, then what place does the 'past' or 'future' occupy in narrative accounts of the presence of art? (2015, 17)

Here, in my view, Barikin speaks to the post-historical condition of contemporary art, in which the formerly linear history of art is laid out as a toolbox for contemporary artists to pick and combine from as they see fit. Art history, the primary narrative account for the persistence and presence of art, is revealed as a construction in the contemporary setting, raising questions about the histories that accompany art objects and the significance of art objects in relation to histories, artistic or otherwise. Seen through the lens of Barikin's science fictional proposition captured in the title of her essay, the "past" and "future" of art can be viewed as fictive devices similar to the pasts and futures of the alternate history genre.

Barikin makes a case for science fiction as an alternate approach to art history which allows for contemporary, non-linear understandings of time. She cites the work of French artist Laurent Grasso as an example of how science fictional conceptions of time in contemporary artworks can function, stating that:

Grasso's interpretation of history as a 'block' of time in which one can move forwards and backwards—history as an echo chamber crossed with asynchronous resonances or a network of entanglements—is clearly in conflict with established art-historical and museological scholarship that relies on teleological narrative to track the so-called development of art in stylistic, conceptual or iconographic terms. Although the 'point-line-point' model of temporality was essential to the futurity of European modernity and the Western conception of the avant-garde (with its attendant dedication to the 'new'), it is incapable of dealing with the heterogeneity of contemporary time-scales. (2015, 20)

Barikin's theorising of SF as a unique lens for approaching history in what she terms the "long now" (2015, 19)—the "tenseless" (2015, 22), post-historical present—is one that allows images and models of time native to theoretical physics to be applied to art history. In the application of these models, which are in themselves metaphors for complex mathematical constructs, to art history, Barikin suggests a science fictional restructuring of this history, allowing for new relationships between historical and contemporary artworks, and by extension, new art histories, to emerge. While *An Event* does not engage directly with art history, it does, through its articulation of multiple alternate histories within the same, simulated museum space, subvert and estrange the traditional, linear narrative conventions of this kind of space. Additionally, it suggests that the methods developed as part of this research may offer a means by which these alternate conceptions of time and history might be approached through a contemporary art practice.

Museum spaces have played an integral role in the construction and retelling of the teleological, "point-line-point" model of history, artistic or otherwise. The narrative conception of art that is produced by this model, as discussed in chapter one, can be viewed as series of aesthetic utopias, each rising and falling in sequence. However, in the contemporary setting, this narrative model of progression, and the ideals of purity and beauty towards which this progression was directed, are rejected, raising questions about the role of the museum in relation to contemporary art. Arthur C. Danto in *After the End of Art* addresses this complication in relation to the Museum of Modern Art:

This tended to put the Museum of Modern Art in a kind of bind no one had anticipated when it was the home of 'our art.' The bind was due to the fact that 'modern' had a stylistic meaning and a temporal meaning. It would not have occurred to anyone that these would conflict, that contemporary art would stop being modern art. (Danto 2014, 11)

It is within this disjuncture between contemporary relationships to history and the investment in linear narrative histories that often accompanies museum space that I locate the speculative significance of *An Event*. Museum space, with its accompanying logic of progression towards a contemporary outcome, carries with it a narrative structure. Our fictionalised museum space fails in its attempts to articulate multiple contradictory narrative accounts of the central Event of the work simultaneously and, in doing so, subverts its authority and the authority of the narrative conventions it employs.

In the abstract of her master's thesis, "To Infinity and Beyond: A Critique of the Aesthetic White Cube" (2012), art theorist Whitney B. Birkett neatly summarises the historical context from which the white cube emerges, and its relationship to gallery space:

In the 1930s, New York's Museum of Modern Art and its director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. developed the aesthetic 'white cube,' a display method that was revolutionary in its objective focus and clean execution and fulfilled the unique needs of its era. Since this time, our society and culture have changed, yet art museum display has largely remained in stasis. (Birkett 2012, n.p.)

Through the white cube's historical connection to, and ongoing relationship with, museum spaces that house artworks, *An Event* functions as an alternate orientation towards the same utopia of transcendence and pure forms that *The Island* functions as a speculative allegory for. In this sense, *An Event* is able to offer a speculative lens not only in relation to the linear model of history, but also the utopian horizon towards which this model under modernism was directed. This is how *An Event* provides a science fictional approach to the utopia that contemporary museum and gallery spaces problematically reproduce.

The Material Fiction of *An Event*:

In chapter two I discussed the process artist Pierre Huyghe engages in when creating his artworks. As he states in a 2004 interview with art historian George Baker:

I occupy both sides of a divide: I build up a fiction and then I make a documentary of this fiction. The point is: we should invent reality before filming it.

(Huyghe 2004, 106)

The process behind the material fiction of *An Event* parallels this process described by Huyghe. The fictions of *An Event* were created prior to their material articulation at Success in 2016, and this material articulation mimicked the form of a museum space “documenting” the existence of these fictions. This section of this chapter will discuss aspects of this approach to the material fiction of *An Event*, evidencing how the speculative potential of the work was furthered through the creative decisions made by Hull, Bunch and myself.

Success was an artist-run initiative which occupied the basement of the former Myer department store building in central Fremantle, Western Australia. The larger exhibition venue was divided into a number of smaller gallery spaces, one of which was the space in which the installation of *An Event* took place. Hull, Bunch and I, along with assistance from the Success team, installed *An Event* in the large, rectangular space at Success which we subsequently divided into three smaller rooms. Each of these rooms can be understood to have a different temporality within the larger collection of narratives that is *An Event* (appendix B). They can also each be understood as a different form of material response to the central novum of the mysterious Event. This section will address each room in turn, highlighting the alternate temporalities of each room and their relationships to each other, as well as the specific material fictions at play within each area of the installation.

An Event, like *The Island*, took advantage of the determinative effect didactic materials have in regards to the artworks they provide a context for. Prior to entering into the installation of *An Event*, viewers were provided with access to didactic materials in the form of a floor sheet and museum-like audio guides. These didactic materials, like the catalogue of *The Island* were incorporated within the world of the fiction Hull, Bunch and I

had created. The floor sheet of *An Event* was an artefact of our approaches to collaboration within the scope of this particular work (see appendix G). This approach was one of contested authorship, influenced by Freeman, Lowe and Singh's approach to collaboration as evidenced in their interview with Malašauskas (2009). This floor sheet took the form of a conversation between Hull, Bunch and I, but was in fact a fictional text that I wrote with input from Hull and Bunch. In this fictional conversation, we directly address the viewer and attempt to offer them some helpful didactic information related to the installation, but end up disagreeing with, or contradicting, each other and offering multiple interpretations of each element we address. This approach to collaboration, in which the actual meaning of the work is contested by the collaborators themselves, furthers the speculative potential of the work by placing the viewer in a similar, "strained" (Gillick 2009, 31) position as that of the viewer of *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*. Like the catalogue of *The Island*, the floor sheet of *An Event* did not explain the work or offer a singular interpretation of it, but instead furthered its fiction by offering a number of alternate, contradictory interpretations. Available immediately outside of the installation was a series of radio headphones. These headphones were tuned to several FM radio transmitters which were hidden in the ceiling of the gallery space. However, a viewer who used these headphones would not hear an audio guide in the traditional sense. Instead, they would, as they travelled between each room of the installation, find that the headphones, in between washes of conflicting static, played songs created by Bunch which were positioned within the fiction of the work as creations of the fictional band Pluto Gang. These headphones, and their accompanying audio, furthered the work's mimicry of museum space while at the same time subverting the traditional function of an audio guide, in that they played music, as opposed to providing any explanation of, or context for, the work. The headphones also furthered the speculative potentiality of the work in that they, like the floor sheet, replaced a didactic, museological device with one that suggested a poetic relationship between Bunch's songs and the artefacts which constituted this installation of *An Event*.

The Office Space:

Accessed through a literal missing “fourth wall,” the first room of *An Event* was a museum diorama-like simulation of an office space (figs. 4.5–4.6). This office space, within the fiction of the work, was a recreation of the office spaces of several “researcher” characters developed by Hull, Bunch and I, with these various office spaces superimposed over the top of one another within the work itself. Consequently, there were materials within this space relating to probably every aspect of each of our fictions, with much overlap in terms of the relationship of various elements within the space to our many divergent narratives. Within my own fiction, a multitude of geographers, archaeologists, conspiracy theorists, ufologists and amateur rock enthusiasts fluctuate in and out of the space, leaving behind evidence of their various understandings of the Event. Evidence of these understandings were layered over the top of one another quite literally in the form of a website available on a desktop computer (appendix F) noticeboard, a cluttered desk, a full bin, and a failed attempt at trying to organise and store a broad variety of research materials within the one wire-frame office caddy. These various elements of the Office Space related not only to my own fictions of geological and biological difference caused by the Event, but also to Hull’s and Bunch’s narratives. My own contributions to the room consisted of material relating to the Principality of Hutt River, various rocks, rock collecting as a hobby, geology, doctored material relating to the history of UFO sightings in outback Western Australia, and a variety of materials referencing and relating to ants and termites seemingly constructing tumour-like growths as part of their nests²². For me, these materials were intended to occupy the tension between fact and fiction that pervaded the work as a whole. This, alongside the mass of contradictory narrative threads referenced within the office space, resulted in a room that acted as a speculative lens for the larger artwork, in that it was fractured between many conflicting and contradictory fictions, while at the same time it was an attempt at marrying these fictions within the physical carapace of the one museum diorama-like installation. Within the office space, there was an oscillation between real-

²² Part of the intended speculation of *An Event* was directed towards the relationship of an explosion or impact such as the one(s) imagined by Bunch, Hull and myself, to the history of nuclear weapons testing in Australia. For the most part this was addressed by Bunch through his fictions, but it nonetheless carried over into my own work and Hull’s. This was most evident in my own fictions through my inclusion of the irradiated termite mounds and through the suggested relationship of the Event to the possible testing of dirty bombs by Aum Shinriko at the Banjawarn sheep station in Western Australia in the early 1990s.

world absurdity in the form of Hutt River, UFO sightings, and the idea of geologists keeping pet rocks, and the fictional absurdity of elements suggested by the material in the space such as ants and termites building, rather than growing, tumours as the result of being irradiated by the Event. This inclusion of real-world and fictional absurdity further obfuscated the distinction between fact and fiction within *An Event*. This, again, emphasised the role of the viewer in negotiating this distinction and, in doing so, the speculative possibilities of the work.

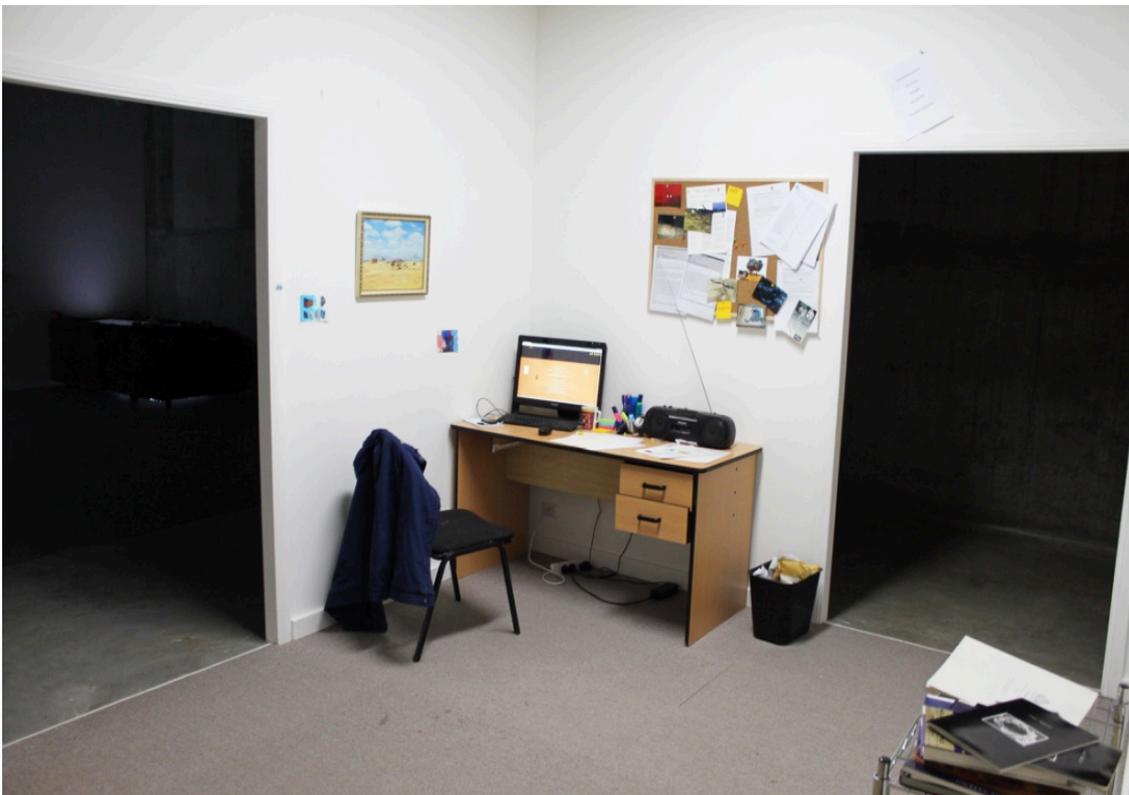


FIGURE 4.4. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.

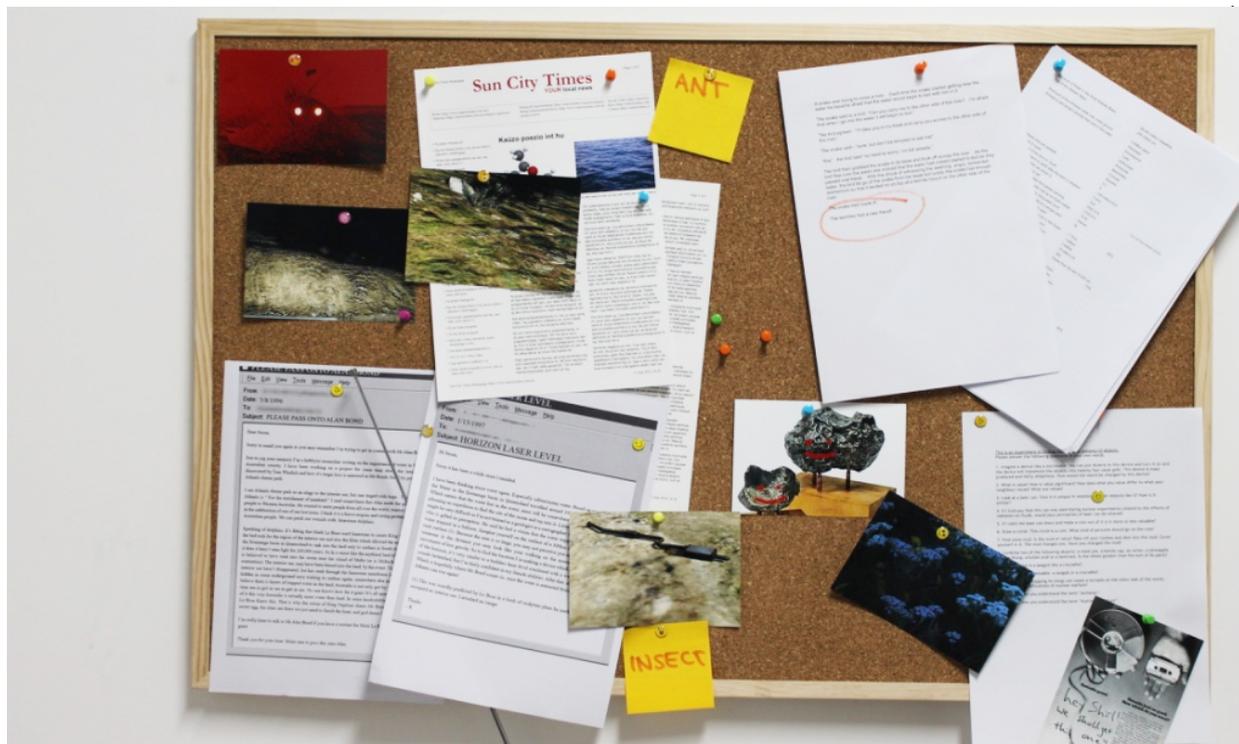


FIGURE 4.5. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT (DETAIL)*, 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.



FIGURE 4.6. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT (DETAIL)*, 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.

The Dark Space:

Leading out of the Office Space were two doors, each leading to one of the other rooms of the installation. One of these doors led to what I called the “Dark Space.” In my fictions, this space was a hybrid between a museum diorama of the initial impact or explosion and a museum display referring to the geological ephemera left behind by this impact. In one corner, a series of shelves were arranged in a scattered pattern intended to reflect the trajectories of material thrown into the air by the Event, as well as the carbon “shadows” left behind by objects too close to ground zero, which were vaporised by the energy of the Event. The variety of materials on the shelves was intended, within my own fictions, to both refer to the catastrophic violence of the Event, and the impossible distortions it introduced to the landscape. This was reflected through the mixture of materials common to outback Western Australia, such as rocks and animal bones, with materials that would have to have been artificially introduced to the site, such as non-fossilised sea shells, lumps of bitumen, pumice, and a copy of Pluto Gang’s mixtape. My approach to the material fiction of this space was that the Event, as it occurred, greatly distorted time and space in the surrounding area. This resulted in the geological record of the location having been “shuffled” like a deck of cards—sea shells being “defossilised;” bitumen roads that had rolled up on themselves and attempted to mimic the form of the rocks they had displaced; animal bones becoming metallic; and rocks becoming bone-like. This distortion of time and space at the location of the Event estranged the location from its surroundings and current scientific understandings of the Western Australian geological record. The result was a fictional location which existed in geological juxtaposition with the landscape it diverged from, creating a direct comparison between this fictional landscape, along with its accompanying sense of time and space, and the more conventional geology and sense of time and space that the Western Australian outback is understood to have in reality

Opposite this arrangement of shelves was a polystyrene foam monolith. Embedded in the surface of this monolith was a screen which displayed a digital video created by Hull showing a slow pan around an image that, to me, appeared to be an estranged equivalent of a topographical map. Above this monolith was a hole smashed into the gallery wall, revealing another hidden dark space behind. In this space floated an ambiguous, golden,

rock-like object lit from a hidden light source. This rock was intended on my behalf as some aspect of the material that caused the Event, an alien artefact or unknown material, such as the “thorn” of Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach* trilogy, as well as a materially fictive suggestion that perhaps some element of the Event had been hidden behind the gallery wall all along. It was also a reference to the central plot device of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky’s *Roadside Picnic* (2012), the Golden Sphere. Within my fictions, the Event, in a manner similar to the Golden Sphere, could act as the condition for some form of wish-fulfilment due to the unknowns of both its destructive potential and alien properties, potentially providing the means for a utopia as well as the foundations for new technology, just as the Zone does in the Strugatsky brothers’ novel.



FIGURE 4.7. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist’s own image.



FIGURE 4.8. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH, AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.



FIGURE 4.9. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT (DETAIL)*, 2016.

Detail. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.

The Light Space:

If the dark space of the installation represented the moment of the Event occurring, the light space of the work represented the onsite archaeological, forensic, corporate and amateur research approaches to this moment of impact within the work's fictions. This aspect of the installation was intended, like *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*, to straddle the divide between television set piece and museum diorama. Central to this space was a large cardboard cutout made by Hull, and a large monolith created by Hull and me. This monolith, in partnership with the monolith from the dark space, referenced the monoliths of Stanley Kubrick's iconic science fiction film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In Kubrick's film, these monoliths effect human evolution and possibly control our fate as a species. Within the fiction of *An Event*, these monoliths problematised natural explanations for the Event, indicating that either the Event was so outside of the human understanding of nature that it was able to produce geological phenomena that, to human eyes, seem to be artificial, or that whatever was behind the Event was artificial in origin.

To one side of this monolith was a low plinth constructed of milk crates and an L-shaped piece of wood. On top of this plinth were several rocks. Some of these rocks were fake, constructed from ceramic, bitumen and/or polystyrene foam. The others were real. The vast majority of these real rocks were moraines—that is, rocks collected by a glacier as it moves across the landscape before being eventually deposited. These specific moraines were collected by my father when he was a meteorologist working in Antarctica in 1977. They are from an area of Antarctica known as the Vestfold Hills, considered an oasis by Antarctic standards, where there is relatively little snow, and patches of the Antarctic landmass are exposed. Some of these areas are former glacial valleys containing many of these moraines. These valleys can contain materials from hundreds of kilometres away, from areas that have been trapped under ice for potentially millions of years, including fossils and other evidence of what Antarctica might have looked like prior to becoming a frozen desert. The depth and different senses of time suggested by these rocks and their unique mode of collection via the momentous and gradual journey of a glacier across a landscape contributed to this element of the work's poetic relationship to time, history and temporality. Layered on top of this was the glacial moraines' bizarre insertion into the Event and, by extension, a landscape long devoid of glaciers, suggesting that either the Event somehow altered the geological record of the impact site, or that these rocks have

been transported to the site of the Event from some other timeline or location. For me, the collision of temporalities suggested by this element of the work embodies the central criticality of *An Event*; a science fictional estrangement of the manner in which historical narratives are articulated within museum space.



FIGURE 4.10. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.



FIGURE 4.11. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.

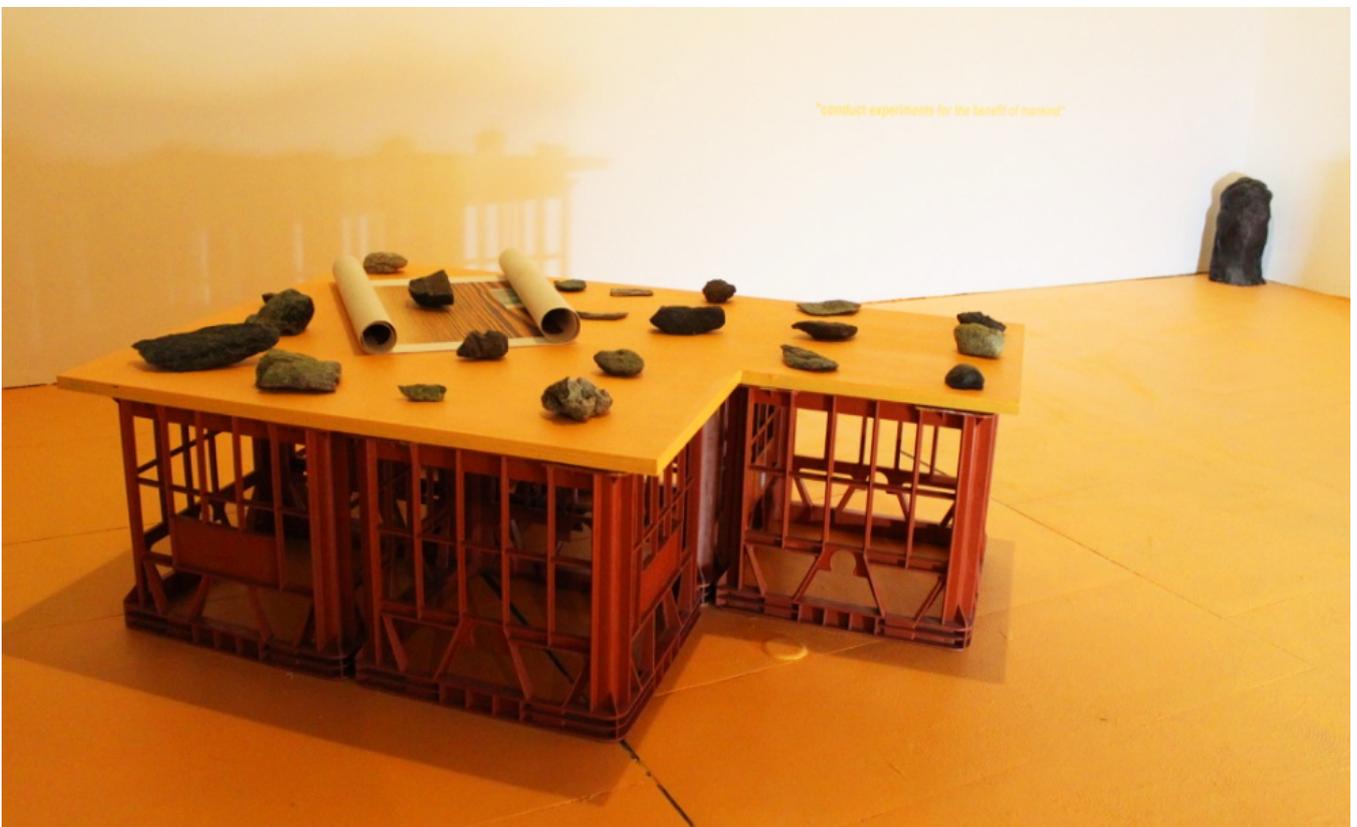


FIGURE 4.12. KIERON BROADHURST, GILES BUNCH AND OLIVER HULL, *AN EVENT* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2016.

Installation, mixed media. Success, Fremantle WA. Artist's own image.

Conclusion:

In chapter one, I discussed the work of Amelia Barikin who, in describing Darko Suvin's theory, foregrounds its "ability to render thought itself strange, revealing the fragility of perception in the making of meaning" (2013, 11). *An Event* embodies this aspect of Suvin's framework, rendering the logic of museum space strange in its material fiction, and subverting the construction and articulation of historical narrative which occurs in this space. The speculative conclusions of *An Event* are far more in number than that of *The Island* and *Earth Coincidence Control Office*. This is, in part, due to the nature of the collaboration Bunch, Hull and myself undertook, drawing inspiration from the conflicting tone of Freeman, Lowe and Singh's interviews which accompany the documentation of *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun*. This approach to collaboration, and the specific science fictional nature of the central novum of *An Event*—the Event itself—resulted in an installation which did not evidence one science fiction narrative but a great multiplicity of contradictory, contrasting, and at times synergistic narratives which pivot around this shared novum. The resulting image of the narrative structure of *An Event* is not a picture of any one particular narrative arc, or an allegorical loop as in the case of *The Island*. It is, instead, a complex, web-like pattern of interweaving narrative threads. As such, this conclusion is less concerned with evidencing the allegorical or speculative quality of any particular narrative thread of *An Event*, focussing instead on the critical, speculative connotation of a science fiction artwork which holds, suspended in itself, such a great variety of alternate histories.

The elements of *An Event* described in this chapter are some of the means by which the fictions of the work were articulated within the gallery space at Success in 2016. The material fiction of the work was concerned with time, history, and the articulation of narratives within museum space. Each of the three rooms of the installation provided different approaches to these themes through their articulation of different aspects of the central Event. Within these different rooms, Hull's, Bunch's and my own fictions came into contact with one another in generative, contradictory, and synergistic relationships. The various elements of each of our fictions were also positioned in similar relationships. Some were real, like the glacial moraines of the light space; some fake, in deceptive ways, like the ceramic rocks of the work; and some obviously fake and prop-like, such as the polystyrene foam monoliths. This consistent oscillation between real and imaginary, prop

and simulation, alternate and established history was what allowed *An Event* to embody the indeterminate nature of its central novum: an unknowable, impossible to categorise “event” with great history-altering potential. These ostensibly history-altering energies involved in the Event, alongside the attention to geology and the alternate conceptions of time suggested by the ancient and faux-ancient materials included in the work, contributed to its function as an alternate history or histories. Alternate history can be understood as a sub-genre of science fiction that asks, “What if?” The central novum of *An Event*, its mysterious impact or explosion, was one of these “What if?” scenarios. What if the Tunguska event, or something similar yet far more alien, had occurred somewhere else on Earth? What if it did, and we just missed it?

Within utopian fiction there is often a degree of separation of the history of the utopia from prior histories in order to free the thinking-through of this utopia from the baggage and weight of prior history. This is also often the central novum of the work, or it could be understood to be, such as a journey to Mars, a crash-landing on an untouched paradise, or a shipwreck before washing up on unknown shores. This severance from history in More’s original *Utopia* is achieved through the digging of a deep channel which separates the landmass of Utopia from the mainland (2016). Within *An Event*, the titular Event was in itself this severance; the central novum which differentiated the many colliding, contradictory timelines of the work from that of the viewer and artists. *An Event* suggested a great multiplicity of timelines and temporalities, a great variety of alternate chronotopes, spreading from the shared origin of the Event. Within this fiction, our own timeline is simply one where either the Event did not occur, or it went mostly unnoticed, as in the case of the Tunguska Event.

The many timelines of *An Event* were “narrated” within the space, not only by the three artists behind the work, but also by the various fictional narrators we had created and placed within the Office Space of the installation. The suspension of these many timelines within the single three-room, museum diorama-like installation, subverted the authority of the museum diorama as a device used to articulate “true” historical narratives in institutional museum spaces, as in this instance it was effectively and knowingly lying to its viewer in its simulation of science fiction scenarios. This simulation was, in turn, subverted through the prop-like nature of many aspects of the installation of *An Event*: the foam monoliths, the cardboard cutouts, the various flimsy attempts at creating fake rocks—all of

these elements contributed to the work's acknowledgement of its fiction and the subsequent suspect quality of the various historical narratives it was articulating, real or otherwise.

Ultimately, *An Event* is an alternate history which takes as its subject matter a moment which might have the potential for the severance from history that utopia so often requires, while at the same time attempting to articulate this moment and the many timelines which diverge from it in historical terms through museum dioramas and archives of research material. This central contradiction of the work results in a confusing pastiche of colliding, contradictory, synergistic alternate histories suspended within the one installation. These fictional histories are directed towards a variety of utopian horizons, and are estranged from the linear narrative model of history traditionally articulated within the museum, producing a speculative space in regards to the connotations of this estrangement in relation to our own reality and its histories, and the forms in which they are articulated. The various approaches to utopia and the great variety of timelines and temporalities included in the work, not only by myself but also by Bunch and Hull, resulted in a work that embodies the critical, speculative disorientation of SF—the “delirium of estrangement” that Barikin identifies—directing these confusing elements towards a speculative relationship with history and the role that narrative plays in its construction.

Chapter Five: *Earth Coincidence Control Office*

As my research progressed over the course of this project, I became interested in how close a science fiction text can be to reality while still embodying the narrative qualities of science fiction, which is to say an interaction of cognition and estrangement. This led me to revisit my interest in conspiracy theory and, subsequently, to a consideration of how a conspiracy theory might be “read” as science fiction, or vice versa. This, in turn, led to my collaboration with Jack Wansbrough, an artist also from Western Australia. Together we created *Earth Coincidence Control Office*, also referred to in this exegesis as *ECCO*, the third science fiction artwork developed as part of this research project. This chapter will discuss the installation of *ECCO* at FELTspace in Adelaide in 2017. I will expand upon several of the ideas from the previous two chapters, while also introducing new ideas related to conspiracy theory and utopia. Where *The Island* takes as its subject matter the gallery space itself and the modernist histories this space relies upon to function in the contemporary, post-historical setting, and *An Event* proposes a “What if?” alternate history scenario, *ECCO* takes the form of a conspiracy theory which functions as a science fictional extension of the bizarre research of American scientist and psychonaut John C. Lilly. This artwork, like *An Event*, mimics the form of a museum diorama. In this instance, the diorama in question supports a form of narrative with a different structure and speculative potentiality than that of an alternate history. Like *The Island*, *ECCO* proposes the existence of a utopia which is a pastiche of several preexisting real-world elements. In appropriating the narrative structure of a conspiracy theory and articulating this narrative structure in the form of museum diorama, *ECCO* functions as an example of how the methods developed as part of this research can be used to subvert the authority and narrative conventions of gallery and museum space while also providing a speculative lens for utopian aspects of the artwork’s subject matter. This chapter, like the two previous chapters dealing with the creative component of this research, will be divided into two halves, followed by a conclusion. The first will be a propositional interpretation of conspiracy theory as a form of science fiction informed by theorists of both cultural studies and science fiction criticism, as well as the speculative, utopian potential of this approach to narrative. The second half will detail the work’s material fiction, evidencing the relationship of the artwork to its narrative. Finally, a conclusion will examine the speculative potential of the work in relation to the previous sections.

Background: Conspiracy Theory as Science Fiction

The understanding of conspiracy theory utilised in this research project is primarily informed by Australian academics Emma A. Jane and Chris Fleming's *Modern Conspiracy: The Importance of Being Paranoid* (2014). Jane and Fleming discuss the contemporary nature of conspiracy theory and its associated "debunking," proposing an interpretation of conspiracy theory that moves beyond dismissal, condemnation or disregard, and into a space of critique and speculation (2014). Within the framework developed by Jane and Fleming, conspiracy theory is situated as being both symptomatic of the condition of contemporary culture, and as having potentially critical relationships with the same elements of the culture from which it is produced. Jane and Fleming do not claim that conspiracy theory is exclusively a product of this contemporary condition; rather, that conspiracy theories often gesture towards the elements of the culture they are a product of, and are therefore symptomatic of these elements. They take the position that this relationship between conspiracy theory and its cultural subject matter can be viewed as being intrinsically critical. My position is that the estranged, reflective quality of conspiracy theory can be thought of as having parallels with Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement and Jameson's framing of utopia in *Archaeologies of the Future*. It is in this sense, and in the sense of having unique relationships to history in its suggestions of historical counter narratives, that conspiracy theory is like science fiction. A speculative extension of this line of thought, which this chapter and *ECCO* enter into, is that perhaps the only real distinction between a work of science fiction about reptilian humanoids controlling the world, and a conspiracy theory about the same thing, is the declaration of one as fiction and the other as fact. *ECCO* is situated within this speculative space, and operates as a means of exploring the potential of its proposition of a fictional conspiracy theory, the intermeshing of this conspiracy with the real-world histories from which it emerges, and the articulation of the resulting narrative in the form of a museum diorama-like installation.

In *Modern Conspiracy*, Jane and Fleming make an interesting case for the criticality of conspiracy theory in the contemporary moment:

Rather than representing a rupture from the rationalist tradition, our case is that the contemporary cognitive mood so conducive to conspiracy thinking actually involves

a certain *continuation* and *amplification* of several Enlightenment ideals, albeit often in burlesque form. This forms one basis of our contention about the ‘rightness’—or at least the formal *reasonableness*—of many of the modes of thinking utilized by conspiracists. While we may balk at the bizarre excesses of some of their conclusions, it is harder to fault, at least in principle, their scepticism and spirit of independent inquiry. In other words, there is method to what may at first blush appear as madness. (2014, 4, original italics)

This quote contains within itself interesting relationships to this research project and to SF more broadly. The first is the attention to the “contemporary cognitive mood so conducive to conspiracy” and its “*continuation* and *amplification* of several Enlightenment ideals.” Over the course of their book, Jane and Fleming reject the common misconception that conspiracies are a contemporary phenomena—a product of the media environment and ideological tensions of recent history—and instead make a case for conspiracy theory emerging as distinct phenomena around the same time as the Enlightenment. This period of history, with its privileging of reason and logic, and its rejection of the authority of religious organisations, produced both the narrative structures of conspiracy (evidence-supported and pseudo-historical) and the absence of meaning (due to the decline of religious authority) which might, for some people, be filled by means of a narrative which accounted for their contemporary condition. Alongside this, the increasing exclusivity, specificity and institutionalisation of knowledge alienated large numbers of the population from newer, philosophical or scientific accounts of the world. Jane and Fleming do not discount that the contemporary, post-internet setting is particularly conducive to conspiracies, but rather make the case that the origins of what is nowadays called conspiracy theory lie much further back in time than the twentieth century. They go on to state that this informs their argument that conspiracy theories are not simply the products of madness or idiocy, but are instead alternate narrative accounts for contemporary phenomena which contain within them a critical potentiality. In other words, while the conspiracy theory itself may seem ridiculous or completely bizarre (for example, that lizards control the world), the reason for it existing, and its relationship to reality, may suggest a reason for its existence—specifically, that people feel the elite of society exert an unreasonable amount of influence over them and the world more generally. This framing of conspiracy theory by Jane and Fleming further supports my argument that the speculation of conspiracy theory has parallels to that of science fiction and utopia, and that

the narrative structure of conspiracy might be utilised in the production of science fiction. *ECCO* is an experiment based on this premise, and this chapter will attempt to elucidate the manner in which this experiment was conducted, as well as the significance of its outcomes.

In chapter one I discussed the work of art critic Arthur C. Danto and literary critic Fredric Jameson, both of whom address, within their respective fields, the “end of history” which has occurred within the contemporary moment. Neither of these critics are making a case for “the end of history” in the sense of history no longer being recorded or society ending and therefore losing its history, but are instead referring to the postmodern, late capitalist condition of contemporary culture in which ideological investment in historical narratives of progress and enlightenment have been rejected. In this contemporary cultural condition, it has become difficult to imagine concrete alternatives to these rejected models of history and their outcomes, as our imaginations are trapped within the conditions provided by these same outcomes we are attempting to imagine alternatives to. It is this imaginative short-circuit that SF intersects, providing an explicitly fictional model for thinking through utopian aspects of contemporary culture in critical, speculative ways allowed by the interaction of cognition and estrangement. Conspiracy theorists may not be developing their theories with this kind of criticality in mind. However, as Jane and Fleming show, conspiracy theory can certainly be framed as such:

But while conspiracists reject grand narratives produced by authorities and the agents of mass mediation, they replace these not with a plurality of micro-narratives but with new, alternative metanarratives which explain things outside and around those versions of reality produced by the supposedly untrustworthy institutions of government, science, mass media, and so on. Thus we see that conspiracists are able to reconcile a modern/postmodern distrust of authorities with an apparently overpowering urge to embrace all-encompassing explanations. (2014, 59)

Conspiracy theory, as Jane and Fleming understand it, produces metanarrative understandings of contemporary society that I contend can be framed as having science fictional relationships to the metanarratives of recent history. In their postulation of a secret society of lizardmen who control the world by impersonating powerful individuals, conspiracy theorists—perhaps unwittingly—provide a satirical, science fictional allegory for

the uneven distributions of power and wealth that are part and parcel of contemporary capitalist society. The thinking through of this allegory is “made strange” through the science fictional novum of alien lizard people, and its allegorical and critical, speculative functionality is only increased, in my mind, by this hyperbole. After all, mentioning the fact that there are individuals with disproportionate amounts of wealth and power within our society is no great revelation, but proposing that these individuals are scheming together against humanity, and that they are in fact immortal reptilian shape shifters, is far more divisive and estranged from everyday experience.

Earth Coincidence Control Office appropriates this science fictional quality of conspiracy theory, as well as its unique narrative form, as a distributed narrative that cherry-picks real-world information to support its existence. In appropriating this narrative form, *ECCO* also embodies several other traits of a conspiracy theory: a relationship to utopia (more often its dystopian facets), a confirmation bias directed towards all-encompassing explanations, and a suspicion of authoritarian power structures, particularly those that contradict the conspiracy theory of the work. Like *An Event*, the installation of *ECCO* mimics a museum diorama, with the work presented as the documentation of the existence of the secret society central to the fiction of *ECCO*. Through this mimicry and its nature as a SF conspiracy theory, *ECCO* proposes unique, speculative relationships to the histories, both real and imaginary, that it borrows as part of its subject matter, and the various utopian horizons towards which these histories are directed.

The Material Fiction of *Earth Coincidence Control Office*:

The installation of *Earth Coincidence Control Office* at FELTspace in Adelaide in February, 2017, took the form of a museum diorama fictively “recreating” the Adelaide offices of the Earth Coincidence Control Office. The ECCO of this installation was that of Wansbrough’s and my fiction (appendix C), as opposed to the ECCO of Lilly’s writings. This diorama was an estranged version of an open-plan office space made up of several desks, a large map, and a variety of oddly pieced-together noticeboards. Accompanying this was a catalogue which took the form of “timeline” of coincidences that existed within the world of the work’s fiction (appendix I). All of these elements combined to form the material realisation of *ECCO*, which will be discussed in this section.



FIGURE 5.1. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE (INSTALLATION VIEW)*, 2017.
Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.

In the months leading up to the exhibition at FELTspace, as Wansbrough and I were discussing and building the fiction of the work, I attempted to enter into the role of an individual who perceived themselves as a member of the work's Earth Coincidence Control Office—a true believer in the psychic moment between Lovatt and Peter, who was attempting to carry forward the impossible task of creating a language from coincidence. My attempt at roleplaying this individual took the form of taking walks and bringing a disposable camera, or several disposable cameras, and taking many photographs with deliberately poor composition and with no clear focal point. I would shoot from the hip, into the sky, at my feet. I would take photos of cracks in the pavement, clouds in the sky, no clouds in the sky, water, leaves falling; really anything that could be considered coincidental. This process mimicked the central contradiction of the work's fiction: that attempting to create a language of coincidence is a Sisyphean task, as any attempt at deliberately engineering a coincidence will prevent the outcome from being coincidental. I took hundreds of these photographs while, at the same time, ordering a similar amount of

102 x 152 mm postcards from eBay. I developed these photographs at the same dimensions, one of the most common sizes for family photographs, holiday snaps, and cryptozoological photography prior to digital camera technology and the internet's relegation of this form of image to the category of historical artefact. I, then, circled parts of the image on the postcards and the photographs I had taken with red permanent marker. This circling mimicked the red circles and arrows that frequently appear in conspiracy theory media such as YouTube videos and cryptozoological books or websites.

These images populated the noticeboards of the work, displayed in arrangements that suggested some underlying logic, but which revealed nothing of this logic. Some photographs of a flock of pigeons, with the pigeons themselves circled, might be placed next to several photographs of water. A postcard of a seaside pool might be arranged with two postcards of two different lighthouses, the oceans next to each lighthouse circled along with the water of the pool. These circles, within the fiction of the work, were the ECCO members' attempt at locating and isolating coincidences, just as a linguist might isolate the sounds that make up a word. I also laminated a selection of these images and took photographs of them floating underwater in the ocean with a disposable underwater camera, a gesture that I considered, within the material fiction of the work, to be that of a member of ECCO attempting to communicate with dolphins by sharing these images with them. Wansbrough welded together a variety of new joining mechanisms for the noticeboards which allowed us to arrange them in odd ways. The pre-digital nature of the photographs, alongside the dated mustard-yellow and ratty brown cloth of the noticeboards, combined to provide this aspect of the work with a sense of authenticity, as though elements of this office space had endured since the late 1960s or early 1970s. This, in turn, suggested that the photographs and postcards collected on these noticeboards were the ECCO members' attempts at mapping what they believed to either be "raw" coincidences or coincidental messages from other cells of the society, before they eventually ended up in the museum diorama that Wansbrough and I created. These images and their arrangement reflect for me the core interest of *ECCO*; an engagement with the utopian but ultimately flawed poetics of Lilly's attempts at interspecies communication, and the speculative possibilities gained by attempting to articulate a fictional narrative of this kind in the form of a museum diorama.



FIGURE 5.2. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE (INSTALLATION VIEW)*, 2017. Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.



FIGURE 5.3. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE (INSTALLATION VIEW)*, 2017. Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.

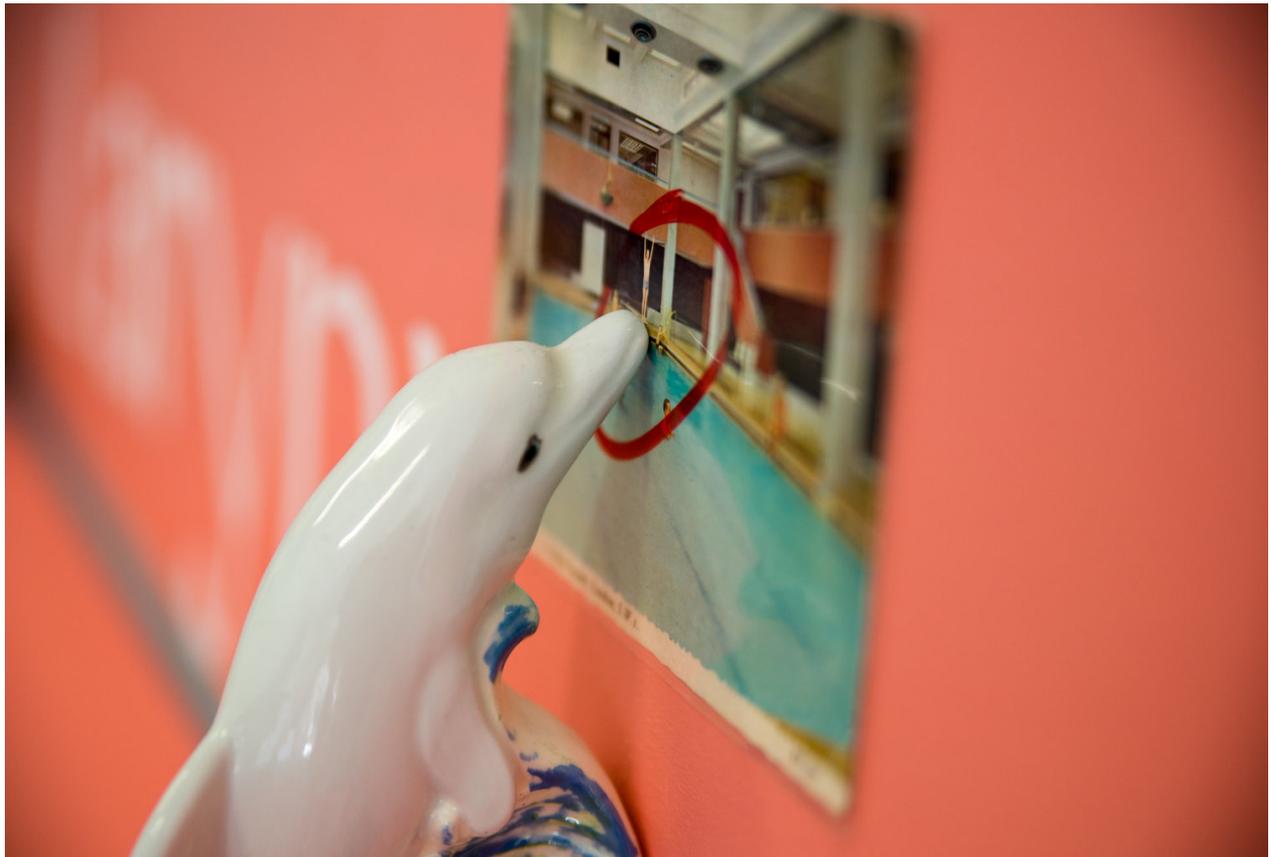


FIGURE 5.4. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE (DETAIL)*, 2017.

Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.

Each the three desks of within the installation was “occupied,” in our fiction, like the office space of *An Event*, by a member of the Adelaide cell of ECCO. Two of these desks folded out of the wall and had text painted on them: “Larynx” on the pink desk, and “Laugh/angst” on the orange desk. These words were chosen by Wansbrough to refer to the New Age and hippie elements of the work’s fiction, as some elements of his contributions to the work referred to or mimicked the idea of laughter therapy (a joke, in his view, centring on the similarity of dolphin squeaks to forced laughter). This was complemented with a video made by Wansbrough which spliced together footage of dolphin handlers and trained dolphins performing at the Atlantis Marine Park in Two Rocks, Western Australia, in the 1980s, alongside video shot by Wansbrough of a staged group laughter therapy session at the same location, now dilapidated and abandoned, in late 2016. The mixture of audio in this work—some of it recordings of dolphin noises, others recordings of people forcing laughter, and some of it the audio of Margaret Lovatt attempting to teach Peter to speak—played on loop within the gallery space, furthering the uneasy juxtaposition between reality and fiction which pervaded the work as a whole.

In between these two fold-out desks, occupying the centre of the gallery space, was a large fold-out world map. This map is actually a self-published work by an individual called Maurice Gomberg, and known as the “Outline of Post-War New World Map.” Gomberg self-published the map in 1942, and little else is known about him outside of this publication. The map shows how Gomberg presumably conceived of the West splitting up the various territories he believed they intended to lay claim to at the end of the war. However, within the fiction of the work, it is more important that the map has, printed in large font at the bottom, the words “New World Moral Order,” alongside some highly conspiratorial language regarding how the US, along with its Western allies, intend to split up the world between themselves after the war and establish the “New World Moral Order for peace, freedom, justice, security and world reconstruction.” This map was covered in a mixture of small cards depicting various technologies and scenes from life in the twentieth century, some of the “coincidence” photos and postcards, and a collection of blue crystals. The scenes on these small cards varied from images of dams and construction sites to satellites and submarines, and are in fact vintage Weet-Bix collectible cards I has purchased in the lead-up to the exhibition. The blue crystals are the cheap, plastic kind used in fish tanks or flower arrangements, and intended as a reference to New Age practices related to crystals providing some form of spiritual cleansing. The majority of

these various elements are distributed over the map in a manner intended to reference divination, while some of the elements are deliberately placed in order to betray this reference and place the map into an uneasy space between deliberate composition and the random (or not so random, if you believe in it) chance of casting stones or other materials as part of a divination ritual. This element of the work's material fiction was also a nod to the divination methods used to construct the alternate history of the *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, the novel-within-the-novel in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (2017). In this sense, the map, like the "coincidence" photographs, embodied the oxymoronic mission statement of the ECCO of our fiction, in that it was attempting to map and therefore quantify in some manner the essential randomness and unpredictability of the divination method suggested by the material fiction of this element of the artwork.

The final desk of this installation was occupied by a character Wansbrough and I both referred to as "the Boss." In our minds, this character had been a founding member of the Adelaide chapter of the Earth Coincidence Control Office and, therefore, was the most invested in the success of the society's goals, as well as being jaded about the possibilities of this success. Central to their desk is a tacky, dolphin-themed photo album. Enclosed within the frames of the open pages of this book are postcards depicting a kissing scene from a film, a cliff face which resembles a human face in profile, and a fossilised human jawbone. This arrangement suggested a common theme of faces, lips and jawbones, all features required to speak a language as humans understand it, but also suggested an esoteric approach to what constitutes a "face" in the cliff face, and of what constitutes language, as in the "language of love" suggested by the kissing.



FIGURE 5.5. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE (DETAIL)*, 2017.

Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.



FIGURE 5.6. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2017.
Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.

Most valuable to me, in terms of this arrangement, however, was the fossilised human jawbone placed in relation to the kitsch aesthetic of the photo album. For me, this aspect of the work carried with it the suggestion of alternate temporalities, in a manner similar to the variety of geological materials included in *An Event*. Within the photo album, the relatively recent (and generally very kitsch) technology of airbrush painting is placed in relation to an image which indicates the true depth of human history in the form of the fossilised human jawbone. Within the material fiction of the work, this contrasting of temporalities could be understood as the way in which the Boss—the individual whose desk, and by extension, whose photo album this is—attempts to come to terms with the divergence of human and dolphin histories which occurred, within the timeline of the catalogue which accompanied the work, “10 000 000 years ago: After the early ancestors of humans become genetically distinct from them, dolphins return to the sea” (appendix I). This timeline is a gross oversimplification of the evolution of the species, and is intended within the fiction of the work to imply that the members of ECCO assign a kind of agency to this divergence in evolution, as if the dolphins had chosen to return to the ocean so as to separate themselves from what would one day become humanity. As a consequence of this belief, the Boss, in their jaded but determined investment in ECCO’s aim of creating a means by which humans and dolphins might communicate, is attempting to negotiate the depth of difference between the two species. However, their “language” for dealing with this is restricted in the sense that rather than approaching the problem as a scientist or philosopher, they are instead approaching it as a pseudoscientifically minded diviner, and so their attempt at resolving this issue of interspecies evolutionary difference takes the form of a book which places images in relation to one another, submerging them in a backdrop of dreamy, rose-tinted dolphin imagery. The series of misnomers, misinterpretations and biases which factor into this aspect of the work’s fiction inform a material outcome which, like the photographs and postcards arranged on the haphazard noticeboards of the work, emphasise that there is a logic behind the characters’ thinking, but that this logic is so estranged from contemporary, everyday understandings of the world that it has become borderline inaccessible. It also, like much of the material fiction of the work, provides an estranged form of access to the utopian poetics within Lilly’s research. This, in turn, opens up a speculative space regarding their potential significance in the contemporary setting, where, generally speaking, conspiracy, pseudoscience and mind expansion are rejected out of hand, along with any utopian potentiality these ideas might hold.



FIGURE 5.7. KIERON BROADHURST AND JACK WANSBROUGH, *EARTH COINCIDENCE CONTROL OFFICE (DETAIL)*, 2017.

Installation, mixed media. FELTspace, Adelaide. Image courtesy of Steph Fuller.

Conclusion:

Earth Coincidence Control Office is simultaneously the most estranged science fiction artwork created as part of this research project, and the most intermeshed with histories of the real world. This does not make it the most successful, necessarily; each of the works has been successful in their own ways, providing a speculative approach to a different form or aspect of utopia. *ECCO* provides this approach through its reclamation and rehabilitation of the poetics of Lilly's and Lovatt's original intentions in their experiments; the utopian idea of cross-species communication, and the estranging quality of this in relation to language. Through a science fictional extension of these experiments into a conspiracy theory concerning a secret society obsessed with developing a language of coincidence, the work furthers this estrangement while utilising the absurd nature of Lilly's subsequent experiments as a destabilising, yet cognitive (insofar as his experiments are verifiable aspects of real-world history), factor. The material fiction of *ECCO* is, overall, similar to that of *An Event* in its mimicry of a museum diorama. However, in this instance, the bluff of the museum diorama, rather than being revealed as a kind of set piece, is maintained throughout the larger work as much as possible. In this case, the mimicry of museum space acts as a cognitive element of the work, grounding it in a history of practice which refers to, or is intermeshed with, "true" accounts of history in the form of artefacts or dioramas.

When Wansbrough and I created *ECCO* it was in the immediate aftermath of Donald Trump being elected president. I recall watching clips online of protestors in Washington DC during the install period of the original exhibition, and we included reference to Kellyanne Conway's coining of the term "alternate facts" in the original version of the *ECCO* timeline. I remember being angry at the time, but had we known the weight that conspiracy theories would have now, in 2020, at the time of making the work, I think we would have been more directed in our use of science fictional conspiracy theory. This is not to say I view the original articulation of *ECCO* as a mistake or as a poor work – if anything I think the opposite. What I mean by this is that I do not think either Wansbrough or myself quite realised the potential power of conspiracy theory at the time, or the level to which it can be manipulated to serve political ends. Reflecting now, in 2020, on the original *ECCO* and on its more recent articulations at Cool Change Contemporary and John Curtin Gallery, I consider this artwork to have an ongoing, emerging significance as the world

comes to terms with living in a “post-truth” era. As theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states “In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorise out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious or complaisant” (2003, 125 – 126).

Ultimately, *ECCO* reframes conspiracy theory as a form of utopian historical counter-narrative which could be understood as science fiction, and attempts to blur this distinction further by appropriating the narrative form of conspiracy theory in order to create a science fiction artwork. The result embodies Barikin’s “delirium of estrangement” (2013, 11) and provides a unique form of access to the utopian ideals at play within the life and research of John C. Lilly. While his legacy might be tainted by the unconventional and frankly bizarre course that his life took following his conversion to the mind-expansion movement, the original poetics of his goal of communicating with dolphins are indeed beautiful. *ECCO*, for me, is a continuation of Lilly’s poetics as well as a recognition of his problematic legacy.

Conclusion:

I began this research project with a simple question: how can I create a science fiction artwork? As my research developed, it became apparent to me that what I am primarily interested in is creating artworks which embody the narrative qualities of science fiction, specifically its ability to operate as a form of speculative, utopian imagination, and to achieve this through an interaction of cognition and estrangement. In order to realise this goal, I have studied the “operating systems” of science fiction (Barikin 2013, 8), utilising Darko Suvin’s “imaginative framework” of cognitive estrangement (2016, 20) as a means of developing the fiction behind the artworks. Alongside this, I have developed an expanded sense of the concept of “material fiction” put forward by Jonah Freeman, Justin Lowe and Alexandre Singh in their interview with Raimundas Malašauskas included in the *Hello Meth Lab in the Sun* book (Freeman, Lowe, and Singh 2009). This approach has allowed me to articulate the science fiction I have created as artworks, successfully realising the project’s initial aim.



FIGURE 6.1. KIERON BROADHURST, *EXCESSION* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2019. Installation, mixed media. Cool Change Contemporary, Perth. Image courtesy of Graham Mathwin.

The science fiction artworks I have created open up speculative approaches towards utopian aspects of their subject matter. *The Island* offers an approach to the utopia of white cube gallery space, suggesting that contemporary art may be inherently linked to this form of gallery space in a sort of symbiotic, though limiting, relationship, just as the Island of the work is linked to the very desire for utopia itself. *An Event* functions as the point of divergence for a great multiplicity of alternate history narratives which are placed in estranged relationships with the histories of the real world, opening up a speculative space regarding the role that museum space plays in articulating and perpetuating historical narratives, as well as the utopian horizons towards which these histories are directed. *Earth Coincidence Control Office* takes the narrative structure of a conspiracy theory and uses it as a means of rehabilitating the poetic nature of John C. Lilly's experimental attempts at interspecies communication, opening up a speculative space regarding language and its construction.



FIGURE 6.2. KIERON BROADHURST, *EXCESSION* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2019. Installation, mixed media. Cool Change Contemporary, Perth. Image courtesy of Graham Mathwin.

These artworks were originally developed for the gallery spaces in which they were first exhibited. In April, 2019, these artworks were re-exhibited as part of my exhibition titled *Excession* at Cool Change Contemporary in Perth, Western Australia. This title was taken from an Iain M. Banks novel of the same name, which centres around the protrusion of another universe into the universe of Banks' Culture series. Part of my reason for appropriating this title is that, within the exhibition at Cool Change Contemporary, all three science fiction artworks created as part of this research project were placed in direct relation to one another for the first time. This allowed for new, speculative relationships to emerge as the fictions of the work interacted with one another. It also allowed me to suggest casual relationships between the artworks that I had created, permitting further science fictional speculation to emerge around the relationship of the artworks to one another, as well as the aspects of reality estranged within the worlds of their fictions.

Like the universe of Banks' Culture novels, which is described in fragments across the ten novels of the series, the worlds of my works are only evidenced in the "real world" of myself and the viewer in a limited sense, in that each element of each artwork which articulates the fiction of the work refers only to a fragment of this overall fiction. They are also restricted in their possibilities, in the same way all science fiction is, by the limitations of the utopian imagination described by Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future*; that no matter how estranged the world of a science fiction narrative might become, it is still anchored to this reality through the limitations placed on the imagination of the author and reader by their cultural context(s). This is the first way in which the science fiction artworks I have created as part of this research are like the Irreal of Banks' Culture series; they are simulations of the idea of an alternative, utopian universe, not an actual form of access to them. The artworks I have created as part of this research each offer a glimpse into how I imagine the worlds of their fictions exist, and, as such, I view these fictions as an ongoing project, with each exhibition offering a material articulation of a different aspect of the overall fiction of the work. The multiple versions of *An Event* which existed prior to its installation at Success in 2016 are an example of this, as are the alternate understandings of the fictions of the two latter works created as part of this research offered by my collaborators. The *Excession* exhibition further emphasised this, with each of the three fictions I have created as part of this research being exhibited alongside one another for the first time. In this exhibition, each artwork was articulated using an alternate approach to their material fictions, emphasising different aspects of their narratives.



FIGURE 6.3. KIERON BROADHURST, *EXCESSION* (INSTALLATION VIEW), 2019. Installation, mixed media. Cool Change Contemporary, Perth. Image courtesy of Graham Mathwin.

The narrative of *Excession* (2011), as previously mentioned, pivots around the central novum of the “Excession” itself. The Excession is the protrusion of another universe into the universe of the Culture, the eponymous group central to the series. This protrusion cannot be “viewed” by any of the many different perceptive technologies of the Culture, or by the other alien races concerned with either communicating with or manipulating the Culture for their own ends. In the epilogue of the novel, it is revealed that the Excession is in fact sentient, and has come from a higher plane of existence—a much older, more advanced universe—in order to see whether or not the inhabitants of the Culture’s universe are ready to be incorporated into the utopia of this higher plane. It decides that they are not, and retreats back to its home, bringing with it a copy of one of the Minds of the Culture. *Excession* reveals that the utopia of the Culture is not perfect, at least not according to the Excession itself. It also reveals that the Minds of the Culture, despite being unimaginably powerful intelligences from the perspective of the human-like intelligences of the series, cannot even perceive the Excession as a representative of this more perfect utopian society, let alone imagine anything like the universe from which the Excession emerged within their imaginative space of the Irrreal. In this sense, the Minds of Banks’ series share the same limitation of their utopian imaginations as described by

Jameson, a fact which their confrontation with the Excession emphasises. In many ways, Banks' *Excession* can be read as an allegory for the Culture series' overall relationship to utopia—that even though the Culture might appear as a radically eutopian society, free of many of the limitations which hamper eutopian possibilities in the present, such as limited resources and uneven distributions of wealth, it is just as deeply flawed as any other utopian society, and just as blind to these flaws as it is to the nature of the Excession itself. This allegorical relationship to utopia within Banks' *Excession* is the other reason why I appropriated the book's title for my exhibition at Cool Change Contemporary, and why, in chapter one, I foregrounded the metaphor of the Irreal as being significant to this research project.

My approach to utopia within my practice is similar to the approach evidenced by Banks throughout the Culture series. I do not view my works as advocating for any one particular utopia, or as having any one explicit relationship to it. Rather, I view my works as having a speculative relationship to the concept of utopia itself, in that they act as alternate, science fictional approaches to it, and, in doing so, offer estranged methods for thinking through the relationships to utopia present within each work. The structuring of my work through the imaginative framework of cognitive estrangement allows me to direct the fictions I create towards this form of speculative relationship with utopia. Material fiction is a means of foregrounding specific elements of these narratives as they are being articulated in material form. This method allows me to select elements to include in each artwork which, in turn, allow for the most effective, speculative foregrounding of their narratives. By utilising these methods, I am able to create artworks which embody the narrative qualities of science fiction—its interaction of cognition and estrangement, its innate speculative potential, and its relationship to utopia.

Over the course of this exegesis I have described science fiction in a number of ways, each of which provide some insight into what science fiction can do and how it does it. Now, reflecting on my research as a whole, I offer my own definition: science fiction is a form of utopian imagination. It allows for the speculative proposition of alien worlds which, once they are expressed, are revealed to be not so alien after all. Instead, the alien worlds imagined through science fiction are exposed as estranged pastiches of aspects of the author's and/or reader's own context. This, however, is not the failure it might initially appear to be, rather it is the significance of the genre. Science fiction allows us to make-

believe that we are travelling to another place but instead delivers us back to our departure point with a new perspective. It is like a funhouse mirror, through which we can view a distorted and often monstrous version of ourselves. When we go to step through such a mirror, we instead collide with our own reflection, and are painfully reminded of the fact that the world on the other side of the mirror is not real, and that the monster or alien we were so eager to meet is, in fact, us. This research project has been a small experiment with this utopian imagination within the field of contemporary art practice; a brief journey into the Irreal. It is my hope that there will be many more to come.

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Appendixes

Appendix A.

Narrative Summary *The Island*

The narrative of *The Island* is told, for the most part, from the perspective of an unnamed narrator. Within the fiction of the work I purchased a deceased estate at auction and discovered amongst the estate a variety of material relating to the existence of the Island. Amongst this material was an account of the Island's existence which summarises the unnamed narrator's encounter with the Island, their subsequent lifetime of research, and their proposal for recreating the Island so that humanity might exert some level of control over it.

The Island, as described by the narrator, is a sentient, god-like being which 'infected' humanity at some point in the distant past. This 'infection' is not a bacteria or a virus, but is instead an idea. The Island, at least in the opinion of the narrator of the work, 'infects' people with an awareness of itself; the idea of a perfect, yet impossible to describe, location. This 'infection' is, in essence, a utopian imagination; an idea of a better place. As described by the narrator the Island sustains itself from the emotions this idea produces; the hope of working towards a better future, and dissatisfaction that accompanies failing to do so. The narrator proposes that if humans could recreate the Island they would be free from its infection as their emotions would no longer sustain it, and would instead fuel their creation. However, it is suggested through the material fiction of the work that this utopian dream of the narrator is in itself a product of the Island's infection, and so it too is doomed to fail, and to produce both hope and dissatisfaction as part of this process, thereby continuing to sustain the Island.

The fiction of *The Island* extends to its exhibition. Through the material fiction of the work it is suggested that I have created this artwork in an attempt to fulfil the designs of the unnamed narrator and, in doing so, I am furthering the infection of the Island. Each element of the work either alludes to some evidence of the Island, or functions as an attempt at simulating it. This further positions the viewer as the most recent individual to become aware of the Island's existence, and consequently become infected. This leaves

the narrative of the work on a cliff hanger; what will the viewer do now that they know of the Island's existence?

Appendix B.

Narrative Summary: *An Event*

The narrative of *An Event* is not so much one, linear narrative, as it is a premise from which a multiplicity of narratives stem. The 'Event' central to all of these narratives is a large impact or explosion which occurred in the West Australian outback during the Second World War. Given that such a large portion of West Australia's already sparse population were engaged in the war effort at that time, the Event, despite being such an incredible phenomena, occurred without very many people noticing. As such it did not register as part of the larger historical narrative of the twentieth century and has since become the subject of conspiracy and speculation rather than archaeological or scientific study. The lack of interest in the Event from institutional knowledge bases is inferred within the narrative of the Event to perhaps be deliberate. This is because it has become clear to those that have attempted to research the Event that phenomena occurring at the impact site cannot be explained via these systems. This phenomena, at least within my own fictions, includes but is not limited to: 'sailing' stones similar to those found in the Death Valley National Park, geological evidence at the site which is impossibly incongruous with the surrounding landscape, the presence of monolith-like stones at ground zero, evidence of man-made materials attempting to mimic natural forms (and visa-versa) both in and around the site, termites constructing mounds with tumour-like growths on them, and the ongoing persistence of UFO-like lights in the sky over the site. The combination of this various phenomena alongside the conspiratorial nature of the research associated with it is intended to suggest to the viewers of *An Event* that this site is a bizarre, otherworldly location with little in common with their reality.

This premise is inspired by the real-world event which occurred over remote Siberia in 1908 known as the Tunguska Event. Evidence gathered over the last century or so point towards the Tunguska Event being caused by a large asteroid exploding at an altitude of five to ten kilometres above a remote and sparsely populated area of Siberia. This explosion has been estimated to have been equivalent to the explosive force of as much as 15 megatons of TNT, or around 1000 times as powerful as the atomic bomb dropped

on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945 (Tedesko 2018). It flattened approximately 2000 square kilometres of forest in the surrounding area and is the largest impact event to have occurred during human history. However, because it occurred in a remote region of Siberia at the time that it did, the Tunguska event was not investigated properly until several years later, and even then the findings of this investigation were not disclosed to the larger world until the 1960s, when the USSR released documents relating to the original investigation. Consequently speculation regarding the origins of the Tunguska event, which was witnessed and recorded in a variety of different ways across Europe and Asia, was rife for over half a century. These explanations ranged from rational explanations (meteors, underground gasses exploding) to absurd conspiracies (aliens trying to scare humans off using nuclear weapons, for example). Our interest in this event was due its speculative potential and the sheer energy of the original event; it is interesting to think that an event of such magnitude could have occurred in recent history and go largely unnoticed. It is also interesting to consider how 'lucky' the world was that the meteor which caused the Tunguska Event did not arrive earlier, later, or at a more severe angle than it did. If it had the results may have been catastrophic and might have resulted in a very different series of events occurring subsequent to its impact. Imagine, for instance, if the Tunguska Event had occurred over one of the capitals of the emerging superpowers of the twentieth century. The speculative potential suggested by the Tunguska Event, as well as its cryptic history, is what our decision to model our 'Event' after the Tunguska Event, essentially transposing it (with additional, science fictional properties) into the outback of West Australia during the Second World War.

The resulting fiction describes a mysterious, poorly understood location which is thought to be the result of an 'Event' occurring. This Event was similar to the Tunguska Event in that it was some form of explosion or impact which was recorded through a number of sparse and incidental methods such as seismographs and scattered eye-witness accounts. However, for the most part the world's attention was on Europe at the time and the ongoing conflict of the Second World War and so the Event barely registered as part of the historical narrative of the twentieth century. In the fictional setting of *An Event* the site of the Event is an ongoing mystery full of phenomena similar to that of the Zone from Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic* or the ominous Area X central to Jeff Vandermeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy. It exists alongside and intertwined with real-world, conspiratorial phenomena from the recent history of West Australia such as: UFO

sightings, the formation of the micronation known as Principality of Hutt River (formerly known as Hutt River Province), the purchase of Banjarn Station by the Japanese death cult Aum Shinrikyo in 1993, and the possibility of them having tested sarin gas and “dirty” bombs on the property, and the many conspiracies and mythologies surrounding the figure of Alan Bond, as well as his failed Atlantis Marine Park. Within the fiction of *An Event* these real world event were used to mask the fiction of our Event while at the same time provide a cognitive (or recognisable) aspect to the work’s interaction of cognition and estrangement in that much of these conspiracies, mythologies and facts are verifiably part of the West Australian historical record, despite their obscurity.

To this day, Hull, Bunch and I do not have concrete understandings of each others’ *An Event* fictions, despite our close collaboration on the project and that all of our narratives pivoted around the central novum of the Event itself. For the moment, however, I will provide a brief summary of my broad overview and interpretation of their fictions. Hull’s fictions were concerned with disappearance of an inland sea as a possible consequence of the Event, Alan Bond and an amateur researcher’s interest in this inland sea; and the subsequent history of attempts to both find and harness this now near-mythological body of water, as well as the utopian potential of its discovery. Bunch’s fictions were concerned with a history of British nuclear testing in Australia, with the colonial and political connotations of this, and with a fictional band called Pluto Gang who created music in response to this history, and in light of the Event having occurred. Each of us developed smaller micro-narratives within these broader umbrella fictions which contradicted and contested each other as much as they did the fictions of the other collaborators. The result was a great multiplicity of contesting narrative explanations for the material “evidence” of the Event included in the installation at Success in 2016. The result was a subversion of the museological structure which the installation as whole mimicked, producing an estranged and all the more difficult to navigate museum space which oscillated between real evidence of bizarre, real-world histories and ‘evidence’ of the various fictional narratives of the work.

Appendix C.

Narrative Summary: *Earth Coincidence Control Office*

The fiction of *Earth Coincidence Control Office* is based in, and emerges from, the life and work of American physician, neuroscientist, psychoanalyst, psychonaut, philosopher, writer and inventor John C. Lilly. In the 1960s, Lilly published a book on the subject of communicating with dolphins titled *Man and Dolphin* (1962), and subsequently received funding from NASA to research whether such a form of communication was possible. These early attempts at cross-species communication by Lilly involved attempts to train dolphins to speak, undertaken at a dolphinarium and research laboratory in the Virgin Islands, and were focussed on Lilly's belief that the high-pitched squeaks his captive dolphins were making were their attempts at speaking English (Riley 2014, n.p.). Over time, these experiments would develop and attract the attention of Margaret Howe Lovatt (formerly Margaret Howe) who, despite her lack of scientific qualification, joined the lab and became involved in the experiments taking place there.

Lovatt's interactions with the dolphins at Lilly's dolphinarium have been the subject of several sensational articles over the years, beginning with an article that appeared in *Hustler* magazine in the late 1970s. However, the sensational reporting on Lovatt is perhaps unfair, as it often ignores the fact that she proved herself to be a capable and caring dolphin handler. She developed a connection with Peter, one of the captive dolphins, and over time her and Lilly's attempts to train Peter and the other dolphins to speak became increasingly experimental. Lovatt came to believe that stronger personal bonds with the dolphins were necessary for the experiment to succeed, and so she convinced Lilly to flood the bottom storey of the house attached to the dolphin research lab:

Maybe it was because I was living so close to the lab. It just seemed so simple. Why let the water get in the way?... So I said to John Lilly: "I want to plaster everything and fill this place with water. I want to live here."

(Lovatt in Riley 2014)

Margaret lived in this shared environment with Peter for some time. During the time that these experiments were taking place, Lilly was introduced to LSD by Constance Tors, the wife of Ivan Tors, the producer of Flipper, and became a convert to the mind-expansion movement (Burnett 2016, 36). This would deeply affect the direction of his subsequent research and his legacy as a scientist.

Lilly became convinced that LSD held the answer to the problem of cross-species communication. He repeatably dosed the two female dolphins that were part of the experiment to see what might happen, but to no effect; the female dolphins did not appear to be affected by the LSD. Peter was exempt from these experiments because Lovatt insisted that Lilly not give him the drug (Riley 2014, n.p.). It is from this point that the fictional narrative of ECCO that Wansbrough and I created diverges from the historical narrative of Lilly's experiments. We created a fictional conspiracy theory which proposes that Lovatt, Peter the dolphin, and Lilly all took LSD together at some point, and that the shared psychic connection Lilly had hypothesised would emerge — but not for him. Instead, this state was achieved between Lovatt and Peter, who would in that moment psychically communicate the foundations of a shared language between dolphins and humans. Within the shared psychic space that Lovatt and Peter occupied, Peter communicated to Lovatt that the language of dolphins was not based in sound like that of humans, but in the coincidental shapes water makes when manipulated by sound and movement. As such, the shared language he and Lovatt created the foundations for during this acid trip was based in coincidence. Lilly, also tripping on LSD, intercepted fragments of Lovatt and Peter's psychic conversation, but misunderstanding Peter's communications as emerging from an imagined alien intelligence concerned with coincidence rather than the dolphin he had given hallucinogens. This idea, over time, expanded into what Lilly called the 'Earth Coincidence Control Office', which he believed to be an alien entity controlling the occurrence of coincidence on earth. This aspect of the narrative is actually true; Lilly would go on to propose the existence of Earth Coincidence Control Office in his 1973 autobiography *The Center of the Cyclone: An Autobiography of Inner Space*. The fictional ECCO of Wansbrough and my own work, inside the world of our fiction, would then adopt the moniker of Lilly's real-world ECCO as a disguise, allowing them to hide on the astral plane from other humans tripping on LSD, and in reality from anyone who might

be attempt to discover the existence of their secret society, or at least that is what our conspiracy theory would propose.

The true conclusion to story of Lilly, Peter and Lovatt is a tragic one. As Lilly became increasingly distracted with the possibilities of mind expansion, the experiments in interspecies communication that he and Lovatt were undertaking with Peter waned, until the funding from NASA was pulled. This resulted in Lovatt and Peter being separated. Lovatt stayed behind on the Caribbean island where the research had taken place, married the photographer who had been documenting the experiments, and together they moved into the dolphin research house and started a family (Riley 2014). Peter was sent to a dolphin research facility in Miami where he was poorly cared-for in comparison to his time with Lovatt, and possibly even neglected by Lilly.²³ A few weeks later he—according to Lilly and Lovatt—committed suicide by deliberately drowning himself.²⁴ Lilly would go on to become a prominent member of the mind expansion movement. After being recommended ketamine as a cure for his migraines in the early 1970s, Lilly developed a liking for the dissociative effects of the drug and began taking it in increasingly larger doses (Jones 2015). During one his dissociative experiences under the influence of ketamine, Lilly had an experience that would deeply affect his perception of the world and his subsequent research:

That evening I took 150 milligrams of ketamine, and suddenly the Earth
Coincidence Control Office removed my penis and handed it to me. I screamed in
terror. My wife Toni came running in from the bedroom, and she said, “It's still
attached.” So I shouted at the ceiling, “Who’s in charge up there? A bunch of crazy
kids?” (Lilly in Jones 2015)

²³ Lilly would claim that a number of the dolphins in his care died while on a “hunger strike,” but as historian of science Graham Burnett points out, “neglect seems more likely” (2016, 38).

²⁴ The use of the word “suicide” here is perhaps controversial, but is supported to some extent by the manner in which Peter died. Dolphin trainer and animal rights activist Ric O’Barry claims that “dolphins are not automatic air-breathers like we are... Every breath is a conscious effort. If life becomes too unbearable, the dolphins just take a breath and they sink to the bottom. They don't take the next breath” (O’Barry in Riley 2014).

The Earth Coincidence Control Office is, according to Lilly, one of God's field offices. It is a biological entity that controls the level of coincidence on Earth. This is incorporated into the larger narrative of Lilly's psychonautic literature, which involves increasingly higher states of consciousness given a scaling system, in which certain "numbers" or states of consciousness facilitate psychonautic abilities such as telepathy and astral travel (Lilly 1990, n.p.). I mention this aspect of Lilly's research here because it folds back into the fiction of Wansbrough and my *Earth Coincidence Control Office*, and is an important aspect of Lilly's ongoing legacy, this legacy of Lilly's being the background against which the fiction of ECCO is contrasted.

The fictional conspiracy theory of the ECCO Wansbrough and I created is three-fold. First, there are the conspiracists of the secret society who believe in the psychic connection between Peter the Dolphin and Margaret Howe Lovatt, and who seek to further expand the language of coincidence founded by Lovatt and Peter by engineering coincidences themselves. I should note here that within the fiction Wansbrough and I created, it is unclear whether there is any organised secret society or whether individuals who consider themselves to be part of the society perceive, through their mapping and interpretation of coincidences, the existence of other chapters of the society that may or may not exist. Regardless, these individual members or small groups are conspiring to engineer coincidences, and to map and translate what they perceive as the coincidence-messages of other humans and dolphins. Second, there are the conspiracists external to the secret society but inside the world of the work—such as the fictional version of Lilly himself—who perceive the actions of the secret society, or coincidences they perceive to be the actions of this society as part of a conspiracy and look for explanations for this conspiracy—Lilly's own Earth Coincidence Control Office being an example of this. Third, there is the conspiracy between Wansbrough and I, to treat the fiction of our ECCO as if it is an odd piece of real-world historical trivia that we are simply making a work about, and to maintain this front through the material choices in the work and its didactic material.

Appendix D: Catalogue for *The Island*, 2016.



KIERON BROADHURST IS AN ARTIST WHO INVESTIGATES THE SPECULATIVE POTENTIAL OF FICTION IN CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE.

IN THIS EXHIBITION BROADHURST POSITS THE EXISTENCE OF A REAL ISLAND UTOPIA AND TRACES ITS EFFECTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY.

This document was produced for an exhibition at Moana Project Space in May 2016.

1F 618 Hay Street Perth
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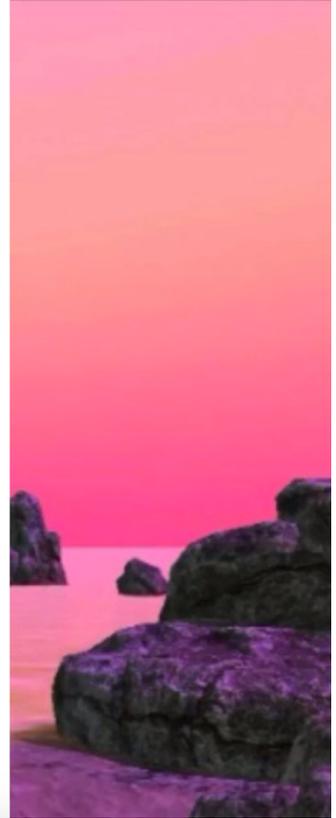
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Designed by DB

Kieron Broadhurst *The Island* 2016
Still from video

KIERON
BROADHURST:
THE ISLAND

6 MAY - 29 MAY 2016

MOANA
PROJECT SPACE



ISLAND FEVER

My first meeting with Broadhurst colours the entirety of my interactions with him after that point and as lead up to his new exhibition, *Island Fever*. I'm late on arrival at the trendy North Perth cafe we had agreed on, appearing a good twenty minutes past the selected time and to find an impatient man, hunched over an alfresco table, covered in tattoos of various unintelligible signs and well known characters from popular culture, sat amidst spent espresso glass casings, which are scattered like shells from a discharged light machine gun. I apologise vehemently as I attempt to settle myself, retrieve and organise my writing and recording materials from my leather satchel and begin the interview, which, however, only seems to make Broadhurst more impatient with my display, provoking him to ask me to compose myself, to take my time in doing so, and to try to not allow my tardiness to result in subsequent mistakes that would waste his time further. In response to this I apologise, marking my second apology for the meeting and drawing more ire from Broadhurst, which motivates me to engage him in chit-chat about Perth more generally, a city I am not at all familiar with, to which, he, that is to say Broadhurst, simply responds by informing me that he is from the south-west of Perth, that he is a stranger to Perth as much as I am, and that, hell, maybe no one really belongs to Perth at all, or that Perth was simply the name a bunch of fucking lost and fucking clueless people—that is to say, he said, fuckwits—had given to a place they had no right to nor could learn anything from. After pausing for a few minutes, minutes that were filled only with my discomfort and Broadhurst's building impatience, he tells me that he and his father had once taken a trip in a light aircraft, that they had gone up in one, 'up in one' being the exact phrase he uses, and as he speaks his straightened arm moves upwards and at an acute angle and with dramatic effect, mimicking the ascent of the light aircraft, explaining that he couldn't have been older than seven or eight and that his dad had taken him to see Western Australia from an entirely different perspective, to see Australia for what it is, an island, 'an island,' he repeats while staring wildly, his arm straightening and moving further and further up, moving impossibly high, as if he must have lowered it back down to the table at some point to begin elevating it again, though I never saw him do this, I never saw him do this though I never took my eyes off him or his arm the whole time he was speaking about the light aircraft, a light aircraft that he had been in with his father, and from which he had seen Australia as the Island that it is, connected to a vast sea, and in which he and his father would crash, nearly dying, both of them, and out from which his next body of work would be built. After this his arm came crashing back down onto the table, sending discarded espresso glasses away like disturbed rats, and he told me that if I hadn't understood what he has just told me, which he had chosen to tell me after waiting for me to regain my composure, composure absent due to my lateness, if I hadn't understood this, he said—though now my regained composure was ruined by his hand slamming down on the table, crashing down onto the table like the light aircraft he and his father had sat in, terrified, so many years before—well if I hadn't understood this then I wouldn't understand the first fucking thing about his art or what it was he was trying to do, and, with this, Broadhurst excuses himself and walks away, lighting a cigarette as he went, leaving me to my fate of not having a fucking clue about his art or what he was trying to do.

The Island has been constructed from material purchased by the artist during the auction of an anonymous dead estate in early 2015. The views and opinions expressed in this work are not necessarily those of the artist or his collaborators.



Kieron Broadhurst *Phone Screen the One* 2016
Screengrab from iPhone

I don't particularly like Broadhurst. No, that's not true. I don't know Broadhurst particularly well and that causes me to feel threatened by him. No, that's not true either. I feel bad and I'm having to deal with Broadhurst a lot at the moment, and dealing with Broadhurst a lot at the moment makes it seem as if this 'dealing with him a lot' is the cause of my feeling bad, and my feeling bad presents itself as being not an effect but as a feeling of dislike for Broadhurst, a feeling that is untrustworthy and, accordingly, shouldn't be trusted. I slump to the bed not trusting this feeling, feeling it anyway. When the phone rings, and it is Broadhurst, I will feel worse. The phone rings, and it's Broadhurst, and, feeling worse, I ask in a voice clearly tinged with dread how he is doing and whether or not the art is going well, a supplementary question that makes me cringe. Broadhurst responds by asking me what 'Thai Green Curry in Fifteen Minutes' is—referring, clearly, to one of the few paid pieces of writing I have amassed in my sad career as a journalist, having produced the recipe for a glossy magazine—and I tell him that it sounds like a recipe, a response I utter not to sound clever, which I surely don't, but out of sheer panic for being at all interrogated by a man I may or may not dislike, depending on the trustworthiness of my untrustworthy feelings. Sighing, Broadhurst explains that he knows all too well that 'Thai Green Curry in Fifteen Minutes' is a recipe, but knows not at all what it is doing as one of the few items on a barren resume of a worryingly under-qualified journalist. In desperation I try to explain to Broadhurst that food is emerging as an exciting new horizon in advertorial content production, and that, just like himself, I am potentially on a new cusp of artistic production, boldly delving into a terrain unencumbered by the obstacles of trivial distinctions between high and low art, between commercial product and artistic expression, between aesthetics and advertising, in other words, I answer in a fashion that is as dishonest as it is despicable, though not in the least comical, as it becomes clearer and clearer from Broadhurst's calm and measured sighing that I have neither convinced him nor fooled him into thinking that I have at all convinced myself. Broadhurst asks me to spend a few days with him on a short road trip, to begin at my convenience, but at some point during the next fortnight, to go see the alleged UFO crash site in Mundaring and some of the more peculiar spots in Margaret River, places where surfers collect DMT and junkies go to receive last rites, and, after which, to my great relief, he hangs up, allowing me to sink into cool hotel sheets, made wet by cowardly perspiration.

As I walked with Broadhurst through the scrub, conscious of the possibility of deadly insects or gruesome reptiles, I try to outline the grand theory that occurred to me a few nights prior to our expedition, a thought that occurred to me after I had smoked a small amount of hydro—which I had acquired from some seventeen year olds in north Perth, the transaction not itself being that noteworthy as it was simply instigated by my being asked if I was a 'faggot,' and, given that I had responded negatively, that I should 'buy some weed faggot,' an injunction I promptly, albeit awkwardly, complied with—and simply laid on my bed with my eyes closed, allowing a scattered train of thought to sediment around the question of Broadhurst's art and the reasoning that might underpin it. Perhaps feelings were more apt than reasons, insofar as I couldn't quite tell if there was a clear reasoning behind the actions and endeavours that had culminated in *Island Fever* at the Moana gallery in Perth, a small exhibition space that could barely contain the thousands of individual documents that comprised Broadhurst's work, a work that, more or less, comprised of the documentation of his having purchased a small geometrical allocation of international waters, and the subsequent development of this allocation—which, it should be noted, itself necessitated such a maddening amount of paper

-OAHU
 -THULE
 -KRAKATOA
 -XIBALBA
 -AXISMUNDI
 -KOLOB
 -HY-BRASIL
 -BALTIA
 -LEMURIA

Kieron Broadhurst *The List* 2016
Digital image

that were so foreign to me that from both of our perspectives they may as well literally be magic, even though they certainly were not. 'Money magic is fucking real,' Broadhurst muttered—you tell anyone about my money magic and I will fucking kill you.' We walked back down the hill.

Ok, time to come clean. Obviously none of this happened. Right now you are reading a sheet of paper in a gallery—or maybe reading it at home after being at the opening and enduring too much bad wine and too much worse small talk—and this sheet of paper has obviously been put together by a team of people—myself included—and is therefore a fabrication, something faked and therefore not trustworthy. I could tell you that what you just read was a kind of allegory or metaphor and try to justify what you've just read, but, the problem here would be that I'd need to explain precisely what is meant by allegory or metaphor—and that's just too tricky an undertaking! This gets even trickier if we point out how constructed—and clichéd—the whole shift to second person 'you are reading this' schtick is. 'You' aren't reading this, because 'you' aren't some universal placeholder, some vague pronoun, 'you' are actually 'you'—ok this isn't making sense, what I mean is that there is a split or gap between the 'you' that this text addresses (that you could be anybody at all) and the 'you' that actually thought 'ugh, I guess I'll go to the show tonight, may as well make the effort, I guess it will be a cool show, Kieron is a cool guy and Island Fever does sound like a cool exhibition so I guess I'll go out tonight, in some ways I'd rather stay in, wouldn't we all though, better to go out, better to go out and to look at some work and to speak to people and to think about things and talk about things, I mean, let's face it, you don't get a great chance to look at the work when you're at an opening, but, on the other hand, you do get a chance to meet with people and to share experiences, have a laugh, share pain, that kind of thing, and maybe that's really what openings are for, more of a question of solidarity than critique or aesthetics, maybe, I dunno, but I guess it's good to go and see the show, though I should make the effort to come and see the show more than once, like, sure, go to the opening, get all dressed up and go to the opening and have some fun and talk to people, but then, maybe mid week when it's quiet, come back to the show and actually look at the stuff there and think my own thoughts and then maybe do something with those thoughts (like make something or write something or whatever), yeah, that sounds like a plan, I'll definitely do that, go out to the show tonight and speak to some of the people there, like Kieron, I'll say 'nice one mate, great show' and he'll smile at me with that infectious smile and I'll think, yeah mate I'll be back, I'll be back mate.'

Alan Smithec

work that one could move through the gallery space, as I had done in a pre-showing some days before—as a child might navigate a snow storm, or, alternatively, one could piece the space together as if one were a forensic accountant with their nose absorbed in blood money, piecing together document after document, figure after figure, comparing diagrams whilst using arcane systems of a personal devising to tabulate corruption and greed. Stoned, a grand theory about the work had emerged in front of me, eyes closed, laid on top of my bed's linen, and it was this theory that I felt a great urge to outline for Broadhurst, as we traversed the scrubland he had insisted I visit with him, so that perhaps I might get a sense—even if it were that, a mere sense, not a notion or something stronger still, but just a sense, maybe contained in a look such as a wry smile or a small nod of appreciation or simple acknowledgment—that I understood, that I understood anything at all about the work that Broadhurst had done. The grand theory, as I laid it out to Broadhurst, involved an extension of the metaphor of the island to the very production of the work of art in the contemporary world, an outlining of the dynamics of artistic production in terms of a metaphor that saw art substituted for a territory that is both connected to and divested of contact with other territories by water—here functioning as a substitute for meaning or sense—insofar as the water allowed for and, so often, precluded the possibility of the exchange between these different territories—and, since the viewer and artist do not seem to have a place within this metaphor as yet, with the artwork finding its articulation in the metaphor of the island, and meaning or sense finding its articulation in the metaphor of the currents of water that both tied and sever the artworks from each other in history, with the artwork and the sense or meaning of that artwork being articulated in the water and the island being articulated in the same way it would stand that the artist and viewer are both island and water themselves, both a territory that can be explored and can be entered into exchanges with other territories as they are that medium of exchange itself, both the locus and movement of sense and meaning just as they are the solid hyle or stuff that is to enter into an exchange. This, perhaps better or poorer articulated, was what I said to Broadhurst, as we reached the ascent of a large hill that looked down upon sand and more scrub, being high enough that I felt slightly overwhelmed by the view that was ahead of us, a sense of being overwhelmed that, along with the shortness of breath I had experienced trekking up the hill, would have perhaps made my grand theory harder to grasp—or perhaps easier to accept—by anyone other than Broadhurst, who simply waved a dismissive hand in my direction and referred to my grand theory as 'a series of trite clichés,' a bundle of 'foolish thoughts' that truly revealed just what a 'useless cunt I was going to be' when it came to producing an article that had 'even an iota of value.' Changing tack, feeling that it was best to deflect, I asked Broadhurst how he had stumbled upon so much money, the sheer amount of money that it would have taken him to acquire, not only a small patch of sea in international waters, but, furthermore, the labour and materials needed to construct an artificial island, the sheer amount of soil that would have had to have been dredged up from the bottom of the sea and piled up so as to allow for even the lightest structure to be built so that he could complete his exhibition Island Fever. Broadhurst's response was confusing and involved several things that I did not fully comprehend; nevertheless, Broadhurst's answer seemed to revolve around money as a kind of magic, as involving some degree of invocation, 'it was fucking easy mate,' he told me, and then proceeded to ramble half coherently about the purely fictional status of money, the way that money is exchanged for more money, that no bank could give you anything for your money other than notes of paper that promised something called money, or data collating how much money you had, 'money,' he muttered, 'you just pull it out of the fucking air'—a comment that I assumed he meant figuratively, that, perhaps, Broadhurst had some knowledge of finance or the art of investment, and, perhaps again, he had such an ability to procure money that, from his perspective, it almost was like a form of magic, that his ability to gain wealth, like his ability to make art, though it might seem mystical, and even be experienced as such, simply involved a set of techniques

WISH
 YOU
 WERE
 HERE

Kieron Broadhurst *Wish You Were Here* 2016
Digital image

NOT WITHOUT VIOLENCE

The Cumaean Sibyl, an oracle, asked for eternal life but forgot to ask for eternal youth as well, and so wasted away until only her voice was left, echoing in the ampulla in the temple. A cunning trick, throwing your voice into a jar, and the woman behind the dais is never mentioned. The true prophet of the ages – a liar and a cheat, and forgotten.

Victor Hugo, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Ayn Rand are walking on the shoreline of an island. We come in on the middle of a conversation.

Napoleon: ... In revolutions, every thing is forgotten. The benefits you confer today are forgotten tomorrow. The side once changed, gratitude, friendship, parentage, every tie vanishes, and all sought for is self-interest... but I will not do any thing which may lead people to imagine that I am a prisoner – I have been forced here contrary to the law of nations, and I will never acknowledge their right in detaining me. I have no intention to attempt to escape, though I have not given my word of honour not to try. Neither will I ever give it, as that would be acknowledging myself a prisoner, which I will never do. They have put me here because I alone had the ambition necessary to create an empire of Europe! I wished to found a European system, a European Code of Laws, a European judiciary: there would be but one people in Europe. And where is that dream now? Still in fragments. I was a victim of circumstances, I did my calculations, and this is my fate: part only of a dream.

Rand: Well... My own island is America, certainly already a set of United States, but I am not so enamoured with its progress. It is an island of contradiction. Yet it is a pleasure to meet you, Monsieur Hugo, Monsieur Bonaparte. You may be a sentimental man, Monsieur Hugo, but your prose is a wonder to read, and your characters! Such vitality, such a sense of life...

Hugo: And you, Madame Rand. Though I must object that it is wrong to be sentimental. You object to the altruist, but you would do well to consider the common humanity of people. People are not always so well off to escape from misery. How can anyone escape from the circumstances they find themselves in if they must do everything themselves? Perhaps you, Napoleon, are right to decry bloodshed, but let us not forget the lessons we learned from it: liberté, égalité, and not least fraternité for those without power we must defend, those who are weak must be helped. The conscience is perhaps a strange thing, but it is no evil, and the measure of what is good in this world.

Napoleon: Monsieur Hugo, can I say how pleased I am to be in such company, and let the decisions of my nephew not stand between us. It is true that all men must be equal in the eyes of the law, yet that they often fall on the path. I would say this: I was nourished by the ideas of liberty, yes, but it is sometimes necessary to suspend liberties in order to further their cause. Order cannot be totally undone, and it is necessary always to maintain it.

Rand: It is much less like you think, both of you. This altruism, the forced sacrifice, the very idea of order, and the moral imperative is the cause of great problems – people who are incited to sacrifice themselves do not think properly, rationally. Let us think merely of military sacrifice – and conscription! – and that, Bonaparte, we lay at your feet – you and your Grande Armée! You talk of your conscience, Monsieur Hugo, but nothing has been more abused than the incitement to act against our own selves – our own best rational

Ambient atmospheres > Environmental > Beach

Pure Beach

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Kieron Broadhurst Pure Beach 2016
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interests. It is necessary that we see reality for what it is, and are not bound to all these other needs and wants. If one cannot be the engineer of one's will and world, then it is not a world of égalité at all – and definitely not one of liberté! You and your altruism deny the reality of the world. That sacrificing for the other, particularly through being forced to do so, results only in what I can contemptuously describe to your idealism as inequality.

Hugo: Yet let me ask how anything is to be created under this philosophy of yours? What bonds will hold the world? What dream will create the future? Those of capitalism and laissez-faire economics, the ownership of land and capital? These are not the bonds that are necessary to undertake great works, or even public works – the works of roads, the works of education; and furthermore, it is necessary that we are altruistic so that everyone may be of equal footing. The misery of the poor is great, while the humanity of the rich is lacking.

Napoleon: The poor man is an honorable man, so long as he is not a beggar. While I support the universities, and education for all, people must work for their due. A beggar will receive naught but contempt from Napoleon!

Rand: But you! Monsieur Bonaparte, who inspires sacrifice in his people, no less! A military genius you may be, but you clearly did not take into account all the factors well enough to succeed in Russia. And with what did you make people behave as they did? To follow you there? With your own incitement to the irrational! Yet what has lasted of your regime? France was no larger than before. Your rule was broken. You have left only a code! A code of good, reasonable, civil contract! For this however, I am most thankful to you for. You can keep your military campaigns.

Napoleon: You come from a different world, Madame Rand. It is true, at least some of what you say. I have always tried and endeavored to find the rational man, and to uphold the sciences and mathematics and study of the empirical world. But war is a necessity. It is forced, but it is, in the end, an agreement. It is not an unreasonable unleashing of violence. The men of my armies are not unaware of themselves. It is true I have inspired multitudes with such an enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me, but they would also profit. The riches of France, would multiply under a perpetuation and extension of the republic. It is the French you have to thank for your ideas, the upholding of the rights of the individual man. I may have used force, but it is for the rational man, and the republic, and indeed the legacy of the revolution, that I made war in Europe and abroad.

Rand: It is the regression of such a system that you speak of, though – a regression designed to uphold it. We are the inheritors, but it is not the system you built that made America the place it is. America is the birthplace of true capitalism, and the individual. The French are a collectivist nation at heart – whether imperial or social. You say you are for reason, but in true reason there is no war, no aggression, no force.

Hugo: But there will also be nothing to hold together the world, nothing to help the poor suffering beings of this world. Too many individuals and someone will abuse another. There will be endless abuses. The individual is an origin of great evil. It is only in collectivity that we can serve justice. You might have led a war, Monsieur Bonaparte, but you did also continue the revolution of our state. Let us not pretend that it is only about leadership in battle. You gave people freedom from the codes of feudal life, the most regressive of all. And what would modern land ownership promote but the same regression to allegiances and conglomerates? It is, finally, unjust that people should be given roles that only circumstances allow them into. A freedom from circumstances and the possibility to dream!

Napoleon: Yes, yes. The lineage of kings is often that by which error is made, although often our families are the only people we can trust. It is necessary that we look beyond, to the world of the enlightenment – and it is true, Madame Rand, that reason is there, that we must weigh the balances of our time, but it is not the case that we owe nothing to others. We owe everything to another force. You must know as well as I that the world works mostly by chance. Will and volition only takes you so far.

Rand: You say this, yet you were the 'emperor' of France. I will not take it – especially from you – you must realize that the world is different now too. We do not need your checks and balances. Progress will occur only if there is a freedom for rational individuals to operate, to follow the path they have reasoned for themselves.

Hugo: There will be no progress without social progress.

Napoleon: Monsieur Hugo, you are an advocate of what, exactly? Your politics are inexact to the point of vagaries – the future is a dream indeed to you. And Madame Rand, I would say similarly – it is impossible to create liberty without the mechanism to defend it, and at times, remove it.

The three reach the end of the beach, and begin to walk back.

Rand: Monsieur Hugo, you suffer the archetypal virtues and fatal errors of the nineteenth century. Do you think progress just happens? That ignorance and poverty are the only evil? You feel enormous, incoherent benevolence and seek to abolish human suffering. Yet as you proclaim these ends, how will you achieve them? You seek to end poverty with no idea of the source of wealth. You want people to be free, with no idea of what is necessary to secure political freedom. You do not even see the disastrous contradiction of combining reason and faith! And Monsieur Bonaparte, I decry your falsity – you were an emperor, not the agent of the people, the agent of the revolution you claim to be. You uphold your perception of order at the expense of freedom, when really any actual contradiction will destroy itself of its own volition.

Hugo: The benevolence of humanity is nothing to be looked down on. The endless free market will destroy the ability of people to seek what you yourself sought out and found. You claim no family among humanity, yet have depended on the benevolence of society, and depend on it still for your protection. The infringing nature of governance on capitalism is necessary to protect the rights of those who would be trampled by individuals with great power. For what is to stop the abuse of labour, and the abuse of those with reduced faculties – of children, of the disabled, of the old? Humanity is a family of people. And faith! What is it but faith that can maintain them? It is from God that we learn to be just and good to those who surround us.

Rand: You do me a great injustice. I worked hard to obtain the position I have today – no affirmative action or life on welfare helped me to where I am. There is a need only for the government to defend the rights of the individual – to allow each individual what they have earned, and to protect them from those who would use force. They must not oppose the will and work of the individual in any other respect. But you know I have gone far with reason and thought, everyone knows my influence! – The person for whom this text is written made a body of work with the title of my book – Atlas Shrugged! Do you really think you can escape my shadow anymore? In words or deeds? The governmental procedures that define life is the fiction I wrote, all those years ago, and the world knows

it now – all you progressive critics did not see the face of the world like I knew it to be. History will prove me right. You will see reason triumph. The shape of modernity is the shape of the characters I have drawn. It is inscribed in the shape of John Galt.

Hugo: A reason without place for the unreasonable circumstances people often find themselves in is only a cruel way of reinforcing luck. If you were not so fortunate, perhaps you would not be so quick to dismiss the case of helping people who have suffered. (sighs) perhaps I will take up watercolour. Ink and wash.

Napoleon: Circumstances are indeed a force to be reckoned with, but it is up to brilliant people to retrieve what they may from them.

Rand: Yes. I know about suffering. I can tell you about what it means to live under a socialist economic and governmental system! – It is the very soul of the soviet Russia I grew up in. It will never work as a political system, it is my own volition that got me out of it, that got me here, not the care and benevolence of others.

Hugo: Man is not always a rational being, though. The behaviours of people are not indicated always by their own self-interest – and sometimes it is for the better, to stop crime and injustice requires someone who is willing to leave their path and intrude on the fate of another, who may perhaps be weak and abused. The incitement to altruism that you speak of is not one always towards a heedless self-sacrifice, but often the preservation of another's life. It is not reasonable to have to endure pain or difficulty for another, but it may be the right thing to do. Justice is not reached at by selfishness.

The three stop discussing as they reach the end of the beach again. Moving back from the beach, the sea fills our view.

Some sources:

- Bonaparte, Napoleon; O'Meara, Barry Edward. (1822) Napoleon in exile, or: a voice from Saint Helena.
- Colson, Bruno (2011) Napoleon on war.
- Hugo, Victor (1862) Les Misérables.
- Hugo, Victor (1874) Ninety-Three
- Rand, Ayn (1940) 'Introduction to Ninety-Three' in 'The Romantic manifesto'

Yet that should not add to any misconception that this most sibylline of texts is anything but another lie.

Graham Mathwin

THE PRESIDENT'S OTHER WOMAN

Every year, the United States sends a cheque for \$4, 085 to the Cuban government for the lease of the land occupied by the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base. And every year, the Cuban government fails to cash the cheque: Guantánamo Bay is occupied territory. The first detainees were taken there in 2002, after the Bush administration declared it outside the legal jurisdiction of the United States. This careful disavowal of sovereignty, conversely, means that the United States can do whatever it wants there, since neither Cuban nor U.S. laws apply. Bound to no one, Guantánamo is legally nowhere, like an island in an island. This is how Guantánamo authorizes itself to speak the truth. One of the first things it said was: "I am alone with myself."

I USED TO BE UNHAPPY / OH YES / I LIVED IN THE CORNER OF A ROOM / THEN YOU CAME ALONG AND FUCKED THE SHIT OUT OF ME / I WON'T BE UNHAPPY AGAIN

One version of the story says that Clinton (Hillary) stayed with Clinton (Bill) because of their legacy, as a political family. Solid as a rock, Hillary saw the necessity of appearing not to suffer. She gained much from the scandal, politically speaking: in the eyes of the people, she went from being a powerful but dishonest woman to one who was loyal and good. The Clintons remained an American institution, a united Family. Another version of the story is that when she was asked, she said something to the effect of: "it's just something that happens between two people." That is, that there's a kind of absolute privacy to sex, as something that happens between two people. Even in such a very public scandal, a matter of national shame, the secret—of both suffering and sex—happens between two people.

And then, of course, there was *Pres.* Clinton's unwittingly Heideggerian moment: "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is." During the Paula Jones lawsuit, his attorney announced that an affidavit was filed by Monica Lewinsky that stated, "there is absolutely no sex of any kind in any manner, shape or form, with President Clinton." This is the "is" that Clinton called into question. Clinton means: we are not having sex. There is no sex, right now, at this instant, in this courtroom—there is no sexual relation. We have heard this one somewhere before, under different circumstances. And he is not entirely wrong: it does, in some sense, depend on what the meaning of the word "is" is. It depends on whether the sexual relation that he did not have with that woman, Miss Lewinsky, does in fact designate any one thing. Or if it—the sexual—relates anything at all. If we were to claim that it does designate something that is, we would have to ask where it is, and when it is. Instead, if we announce that there is no sex between President Clinton and that woman, it would be to state exactly what is proper to it that it is only ever something—but a verb, like to fuck—that happens between two people, a third thing between two. Even when we are alone with ourselves.

SPRING IS A COCK THAT'S HARD / OH YES / I KNOW YOU'RE A SECRET TERRORIST / 'CAUSE LOVE LEADS TO DEATH

Much of what we know about Guantánamo comes not from public officials but from the enormous release of the Guantánamo Files, a trove of classified documents from Joint Task Force Guantánamo, comprised of 759 detainee assessment dossiers, released by WikiLeaks and traced to Chelsea Manning, then Bradley Manning. Because of this we know that



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Guantánamo operates as a truth machine, a system that takes in hundreds of people and performatively produces terrorists or detainees of high risk or high interrogation value. Even at the time of the leak, almost 600 of the detainees had been released by the Bush administration for lack of evidence. Many of those "high-value" prisoners were shown to have made it all up, in the hope of better conditions or an end to the interrogations.

This phrase, "Chelsea Manning, then Bradley Manning," is important, not only because no news outlet seems capable of referring to her without this as a qualifier. They were slow to call her by her name, too. Some have suggested that no one could take seriously her gender on account of suspicions about her motives and her state of mind. Some others have suggested that it goes the other way: Manning's crossing of a particular border (gender) threw into question her position in relation to other borders (national, psychological), like, whose side are you on anyway? Manning became doubly a traitor and a patriot, a border-crosser or a cross-dresser or a double-crosser, depending on whom you asked. In any case, she was always—in the press, at least—between two. At the same time, her leaking of the Guantánamo files, along with the Afghan War Logs and the video known as "Collateral Murder", seem inextricable from the problems that come with being a queer hacker in the military under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Obviously, and as the chat logs between her and Adrian Lamo evince, she was motivated by a sense of public good, but she also wrote to him that "living such an opaque life, has forced me never to take transparency, openness, and honesty for granted." Manning was always in some sense unfit to appear in public, as someone coded by the military and by public discourse as "private." In some sense, her leaking of the files was a solicitation: a call that remains active and open, to a public that does not yet exist and which might receive her as someone capable of telling the truth. The truth, in this instance, might filter out to transform the world into one wherein she is retroactively authorized to speak it, as a woman alone—like an island in an island.

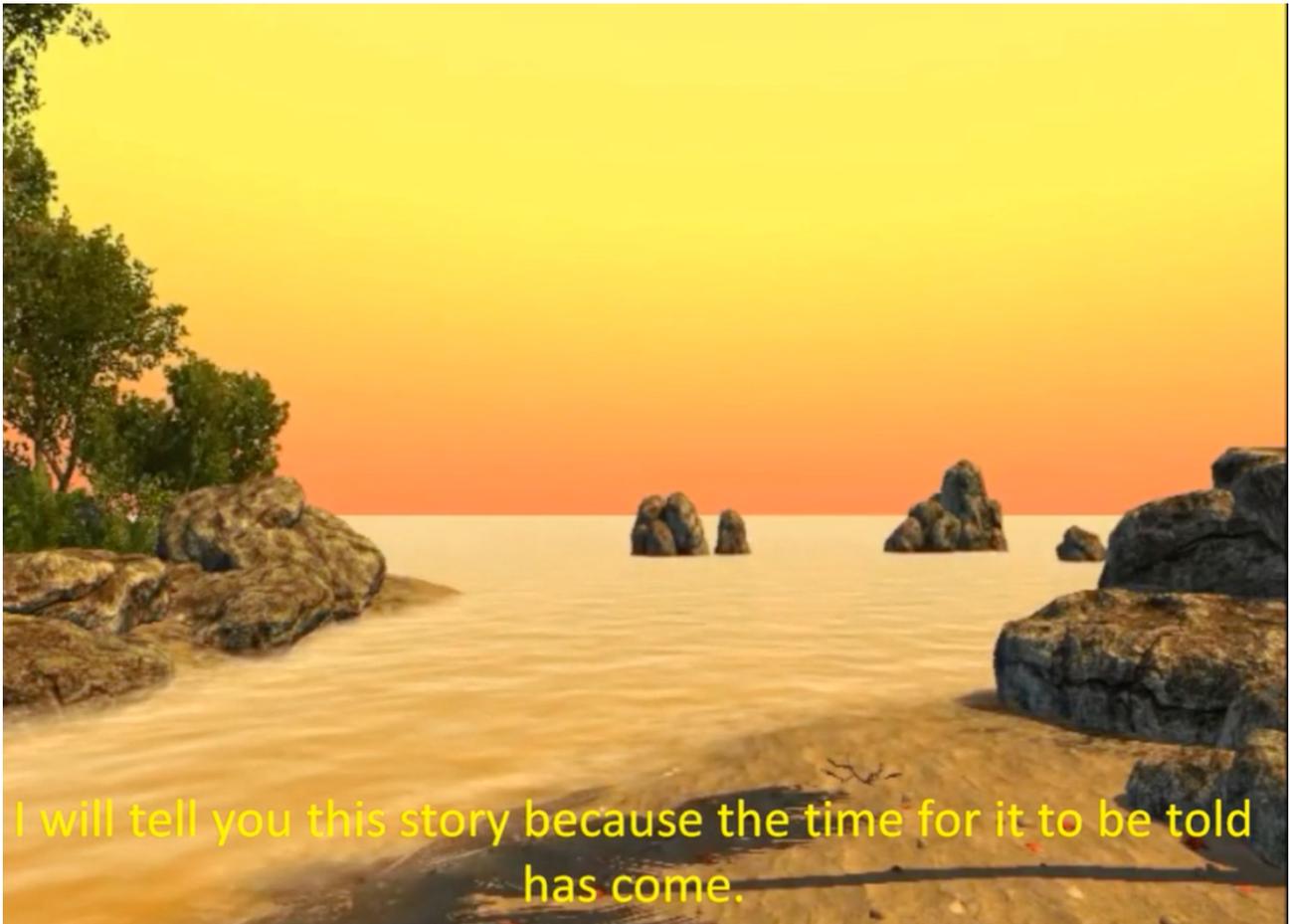
*I WON'T EVER BE UNHAPPY AGAIN / THOUGH IT'S BEEN A WEEK SO YOUR
LOVE'S ALMOST OVER / THE WORLD'S ABOUT TO EXPLODE / TERRORISTS NEED
NO MORE COVER / OH YES LOVE LEADS TO DEATH / OH YES*

Amy Hickman

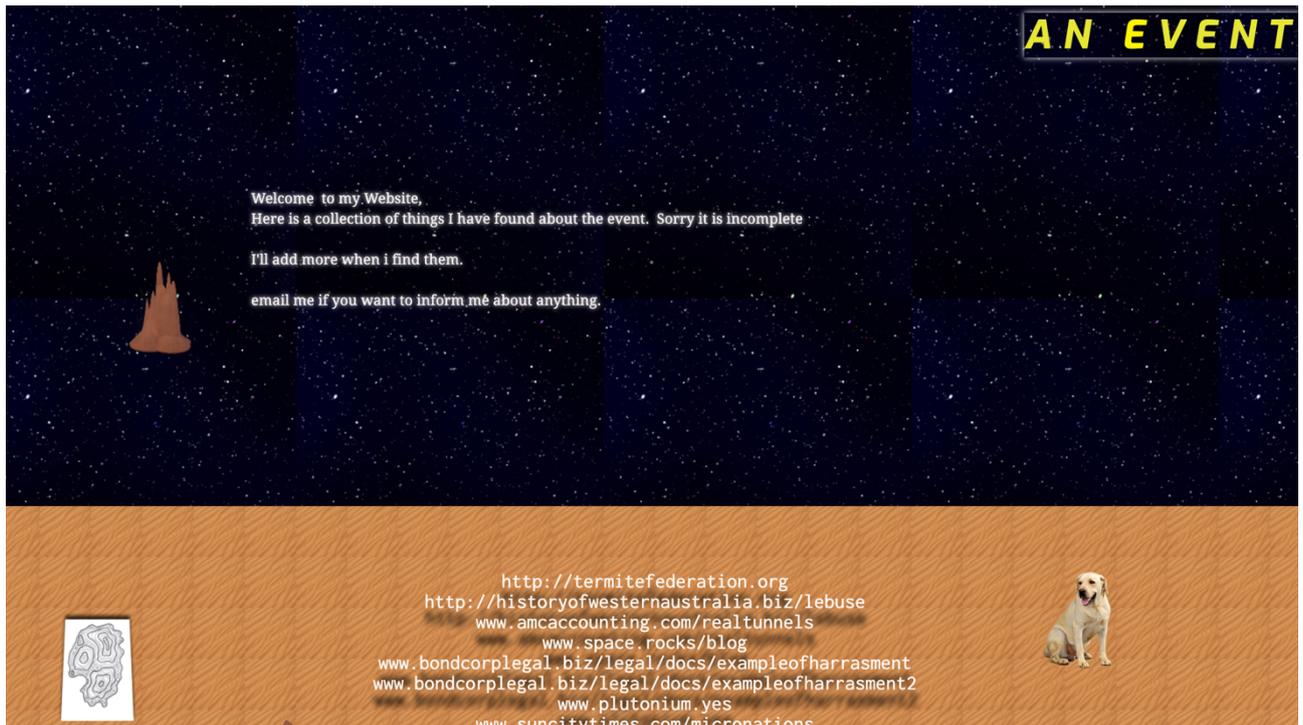
~~~~~  
Kieron Broadhurst would like to thank the following for their contributions towards this project: Dr Susanna Castleden and Dr Robert Briggs for their assistance and feedback. Alan Smithee, Amy Hickman, Graham Mathwin and Fiverr users giancarlo1986 and cool\_designers for their contributions. Jess Day and Ben Kovacs for their assistance in making the work for this show. His parents and siblings for their ongoing support.

Also available at: [http://moana-ari.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Kieron\\_Cat\\_Web.pdf](http://moana-ari.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Kieron_Cat_Web.pdf)

**Appendix E: *The Island*. Digital video. 13:43.**



Accessible via the following link: <https://vimeo.com/166471989>

Appendix F: *An Event* website.

Accessible via the following link: <http://anevent.com.au>

### **Appendix G: *An Event* floor sheet.**

*An Event* is an investigation into the speculative potential of inserting fictional narratives into the history of Western Australia.

O: Is it though?

K: I'm not sure...

O: One thing I am interested in is disrupting ideas of research-based practice.

G: I am interested in how fiction might be a tool for navigating cultural landscapes.

K: I am interested in fiction too, but for different reasons maybe.

G: Thank you (person who is reading this) for coming to our show. I couldn't make it. I was going to catch a cargo ship over because I am concerned about my carbon footprint, but then I didn't because it would have cost a lot of money and taken a long time.

O: I'm sad you didn't Giles that would have been a cool thing to add to the show.

K: Yeah me too, but I do get not wanting to be on a ship for three months.

G: I was going to make a science fiction movie about my journey on the ship but instead I invented this band called Pluto Gang.

K: The band is still cool though. I like the band.

O: Hey (person who is reading this) are you standing in the office yet?

K: You can play with the computer if you like...

G: And touch things...

O: Touch the things in the office.

K: But not in the gallery because those things are imaginary.

O: Yes the person in the office is imagining the things in the other areas of the gallery.

G: And things that are imaginary aren't real so you can't touch them.

K: Some people think you're not real.

O: We tried to tell them that you are real.

K: But they didn't believe us.

G: I'm not sure that it matters if I'm real or not.

K: Hey (person who is reading this) If you really want to know if Giles is real maybe you should Google it.

O: Maybe we should mention what is happening outside the office?

K: I suppose we should even if the things that are happening aren't real.

G: I like how orange the gallery is.

K: It looks like a Cheezle.

O: It's meant to look like a set for a movie or something.

G: I saw some photos and I think it looks like a gallery with the floor painted orange.

K: There are things in it now though.

G: What kind of things?

K: There is a big monolith and some rocks and a flag and some prints and some other things.

O: There is some bones and some fake rocks and some real rocks and some sand and some tvs in the roof.

G: That's pretty cool.

K: I think the kind of movie that might happen in that part of the gallery is something between Indiana Jones and Wake in Fright.

O: That sounds horrible.

G: To be honest most of Australia sounds pretty horrible and really beautiful at the same time, although I've only seen it in pictures.

O: Just because it sounds horrible doesn't mean it wouldn't be an interesting film. Although I think the movie that could happen in that part of the gallery is something more like Wolf of Wall Street combined with Billy Maddison combined with an old tourism advert for Western Australia, and it would be a B movie and also be educational about geology.

K: Maybe both films would use the set and only die-hard fans of both franchises would notice.

G: That happens quite a lot in Hollywood, re-using sets.

O: Do you see the darker space as a sequel to the film from the orange space?

G: I see the darker space as ground zero of a nuclear explosion.

K: When bombs explode in the desert they turn the sand to glass.

G: Maybe that's why they blew them up on islands off the coast of Western Australia instead.

O: Maybe, or maybe they just really hated turtles.

K: Hey (person who is reading this) what film do you think would happen in the gallery space?

G: Keeping in mind that whatever it is just being dreamed up by the person who owns the office.

O: Who does own the office?

K: An person investigating whether or not UFO sightings around Hutt River are real or not, but when they start investigating they uncover an elaborate conspiracy and it sends them crazy.

G: A member of Pluto Gang who had to get an office job to make ends meet in his mid-thirties and now his political beliefs are being compromised by his participation in the mechanisms of capitalism, and all of this makes him very depressed so he day-dreams about the desert where he grew up, and the adventures he had there, and the adventures he imagined that he would have had there.

O: I kind of thought it was a hobbyist researcher who has a kind of casual interest in some aspect of Western Australia, but through their weekend research they have accidentally uncovered some fragments of the Event and they are not sure how to react to this.

K: What even is the Event?

G: A nuclear explosion of some kind.

K: A meteor impact.

O: I thought it was something we can't even classify, like a black hole or something.

- Kieron Broadhurst, Oliver Hull, Giles Bunch, 2016.

Also accessible via the following link:

<https://www.kieronbroadhurst.com/writing/2016/11/24/an-event-floor-sheet>

**Appendix H: An Event video walkthrough.**

Accessible via the following link: <https://vimeo.com/183596770>

## Appendix I: ECCO timeline.

**50000000 years ago:** Early ancestors of dolphins and humans appear on land.

**10000000 years ago:** After the early ancestors of humans become genetically distinct from them, dolphins return to the sea.

**1324:** All sturgeons, whales and dolphins in British waters are declared the property of the Queen.

**1660:** A ship sinks in the Dover straits. The only survivor is a man named Hugh Williams.

**1767:** Another ship sinks in the Dover straits. The only survivor is a man named Hugh Williams.

**1820:** A ship capsizes on the Thames. The only survivor is a man named Hugh Williams.

**1835:** Mark Twain is born as Halley's Comet passes by Earth.

**1895:** The only two cars in Ohio crash into each other.

**1898:** Morgan Robertson writes *Futility, or the Sinking of a Titan*, which tells the story of a monstrous ocean liner, which sinks after hitting a iceberg 400 miles off the coast of Newfoundland at 22 knots.

**1902:** Mark Twain dies, as he predicted, as Halley's Comet passes Earth again for the first time since his birth.

**1912:** The RMS *Titanic* sinks after striking an iceberg 400 miles of the coast of Newfoundland at 22.5 knots.

**1914:** After a series of coincidences an assassin manages to kill Archduke Franz Ferdinand, setting into motion a series of events that results in the first World War. The license plate of the vehicle he dies in is A11118.

The British Navy convert a passenger liner, the RMS *Carmania*, into a makeshift war vessel. In order to go undetected, they disguise it as a German passenger liner, the SMS *Cap Trafalgar*. It sails to Brazil, where it sinks a German vessel of the coast of Brazil. The ship it sinks is the SMS *Cap Trafalgar*, converted by the Germans into a makeshift war vessel. In order to escape detection they had disguised it as a British vessel, the RMS *Carmania*.

**1918:** WW1 armistice is signed. The date is the 11/11/18, (A111118)

**1922:** Construction of the Hoover Dam begins. Over the course of its construction 112 people will die. The first is a man named J. G. Tierney, on December 20th.

**1934:** While walking down a street in Detroit a man named Joseph Figlock catches a baby who has fallen from a high window.

**1935:** While walking down the same street Joseph Figlock catches the same baby who has, again, fallen from the same window. Construction of the Hoover Dam is completed. The last man to die is J.G. Tierney's son, Patrick Tierney, on December 20th.

**1940:** A ship is destroyed by a German mine. The only survivor is a man named Hugh Williams.

**1950:** Soviet Russia begins its secretive weaponised dolphin training program

**1960:** USA begins its own dolphin training program.

**1965:** John C. Lilly gives Margaret and Peter LSD

**1973:** Lilly posits the existence of ECCO in his autobiography *The Centre of the Cyclone: An Autobiography of Inner Space*. The same year the film *Day of the Dolphin* is released, despite Lilly's attempts to suppress it.

**1974:** The Dolphin Embassy is proposed by Ant Farm in *Esquire Magazine*. Neville

Ebbin is killed after being struck by a taxi while riding his moped in Bermuda.

**1975:** Erskine Ebbin, the younger brother of Neville, is killed exactly one year after his brother, on the same street, on the same moped, after being struck by the same taxi, which was being driven by the same driver and carrying the same passenger.

**1978:** The Dolphin Embassy project is discontinued. ECCO butterfly breeding program begins. Hundreds of butterflies are dropped from aeroplanes around the world in the hope that the movement of their wings might instigate a greater number of coincidences. The largest concentration of butterflies are dropped off the east coast of South America.

**1979:** Super Typhoon Tip forms. It is as large as half of the North American Continent and makes landfall in Japan, causing large-scale flooding. The storm leaves 11,000 people homeless. The ECCO butterfly breeding program is discontinued.

**1980:** Lennon shot.

**1981:** Immediately after giving a speech on the inevitable and random nature of death, astronomer Daniel du Toit chokes to death on a breath mint.

**1984:** Douglas Adams publishes *So Long and Thanks for all the Fish*.

**1991:** The Soviet Union collapses. Its dolphin training program is taken over by the Ukrainian government.

**2002:** Two seventy year old men are separately struck and killed by lorries 600km outside of Helsinki. It is later discovered that the men were identical twins.

**2010:** BP Oil Spill. Michael Dick travels to Sudbury, Suffolk in search of his estranged daughter, who he has not seen for ten years. She makes contact after spotting herself in the background of a photograph of him in the local newspaper.

**2012:** Near the Gulf of Mexico a dolphin is discovered stranded. Later scientists discover that she is deaf, but is able to understand some forms of sign language.

**2014:** After the Crimean Crisis Russia takes back control of the Ukrainian dolphin program.

**2017:** The year of conspiracy. Donald Trump becomes president of the United States. The term 'alternate facts' is coined by his counsellor Kellyanne Conway. ECCO is exhibited at FELTspace in Adelaide.

Also accessible via the following link:

<https://www.kieronbroadhurst.com/writing/2017/4/18/ecco-timeline>