Searching for the subject: 
new narratives through installation.

by

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Signed statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Abstract

This project has visually explored the relationships between language, knowledge and subjectivity. Its conceptual foundations have been developed through an engagement with post-structural theory, literature and personal experience. Its visual language has been formed by adopting aspects of Nicolas Bourriaud's theories of postproduction and relational aesthetics in tandem with early conceptual art's aesthetic of administration.

The result of the project is a series of installations that focus on viewer experience and offer the possibility of developing new narratives about our relationship to language and knowledge. The installations incorporate already existing materials, cultural signs, objects and ideas associated with institutional practices of collecting, manipulating and disseminating information. The familiar language of bureaucracy has thus been used to create a network of seemingly interconnected scenarios that engage the viewer in the shifting roles of protagonist, subject, witness or voyeur. A sense of uncertainty and confusion is produced, evoking the idea of a fractured subjectivity in a state of limbo, a condition in which meaning is gained only through attempting to piece together the different narratives on offer. The nature of our relationship to language and knowledge is thus evoked through physical and psychological interaction as well as visual engagement with the work.

The project's concern with language, knowledge and information systems harks back to the conceptual art movement of the 1960s and to contemporary art's accompanying engagement with philosophy, in particular post-structuralism. Within this context, it has re-visited and re-assessed ideas about the role of language in defining contemporary subjectivity and has explored strategies for conveying
those ideas through installation. From Kosuth to the Kabakovs, it references a broad spectrum of artists who have investigated related themes using an almost uncategorisable array of non-traditional materials, styles and strategies.

The project has concluded that we are fragmented subjects in a state of limbo, our relationship to language and knowledge characterised by paradox, anxiety, complicity and challenge - and a continued search for meaning and wholeness despite their seeming absence. Ultimately, it has presented the viewer with an opening: a new network of possible narratives about language, knowledge and self. Although these narratives appear to be linked, they fail to come to a neat conclusion. Just as contemporary subjectivity is in a state of limbo, so too, are the scenarios depicted in the installations.
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