PART THREE: HOW THE PROJECT WAS PURSUED

Introduction

This chapter will focus on how the project was pursued. It tracks the research process from previous relevant work through to three interconnected phases of development that resulted in the final submission. The submitted work is discussed in detail with reference to its adoption of formal strategies associated with relational aesthetics, postproduction, early conceptual art and installation. Other work produced during the research is also discussed.

Previous relevant work

Both conceptually and formally, this project developed directly from my Honours investigation, which visually explored the relationships between language and identity, and resulted in a series of installations entitled Don't let it slip, 1999. Significantly informed by the French Algerian post-structural writer and philosopher, Helene Cixous, the work combined two basic visual elements: deconstructed books and digital images of my hands, lips, tongue and ears, the body's tools for gesture and communication.
The images were presented as small, book-sized light boxes and a QuickTime movie, which were juxtaposed against architectural-like structures created from thousands of ripped up book pages. The work evoked the idea of identity as tenuous, emergent and paradoxically both separate from, and embedded within, culture. The project concluded that the relationships between language and one's sense of self are inherently complex, involving issues related to gender, the body, culture, power, truth and history. The body of work that combined to form *Don’t let it slip* was thus a beginning rather than a conclusion. This project used that work as a springboard for an in-depth visual exploration of the ways in which language and subjectivity are inextricably interconnected.
Three phases of research

Phase one: experimentation

The earliest stages of the research began with a broad engagement with theory, literature and studio experimentation. While reading Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and Deleuze and Guattari, I was investigating the work of artists such as Ann Hamilton, Hanna Darboven, Xu Bing, Christian Boltanski and Susan Hiller. I was particularly interested in a range of powerful strategies adopted by these artists, including the use of repetition and multiple forms, references to writing as ritualistic work or as palimpsest, and the use of installation to activate the relationship between viewer and work. I experimented with all of these strategies in the early stage of research, along with digital imagery and site-specific work. My central concern was to explore a range of approaches to evoke the paradoxical nature of the relationship between language and subjectivity. Unsure of how the project would develop, I envisaged a final submission that might incorporate a mixture of both two- and three-dimensional work.
The experiments with digital imagery, which continued on and off for about eighteen months on a several projects, were never resolved. The first suite of images were appropriated from my family photo album and an obscure range of books. Large scale, surreal and moody, they included a finger pointing at a goggle-eyed mad woman, a priest holding his hand heavenward, a close-up of my own face as a young child, and the naked body of a blindfolded woman.

Figure 4: Digital images, unresolved work, 2000

Figure 5: Digital images, 2000

As the research progressed, some of these artists and writers became less significant to the project and are thus not included in the contextual discussion in the chapter on context.
Some of these images were overlaid with digitally produced text or my own handwriting. The aim was to suggest a narrative link between the images, but at the same time to evoke the idea of subjectivity as mysterious and ultimately impenetrable. The essential difficulty with the work was its reliance on the literal use of text to evoke the idea of language. Later experiments with still imagery sourced from a video of myself undergoing an electroencephalogram were similarly limited in their capacity to evoke the idea of a relationship between language and subjectivity.

The most successful projects undertaken during this stage of the research were installation-based rather than two-dimensional, and re-used the deconstructed books from my Honours submission. The ambiguity of the ripped up book as a visual symbol, combined with furniture, performance and other materials, more powerfully evoked a range of ideas about the paradoxical nature of our relationship to language and the knowledge conveyed through language. The deconstructed books were made by ripping up thousands of second-hand books, removing their covers, separating the pages, mixing the pages of several books together, then rebinding them using muslin strips. As symbolic objects, they represent the values and ideas we tend to associate with the book: knowledge, history, truth, culture, education, wisdom and authority. But at the same time, they represent a paradox. Ripped from their original bindings and rebound in such a way that they cannot be read, the exact nature of the knowledge, truth and wisdom they promise to contain is denied. This denial is further emphasised by stacking the books in multiple form, resulting in a visual sameness that conceals the diversity of their content (fiction, biography, history, religion, science, medicine and a wide range of reference texts). As in the stacked archival boxes and biscuit tins of Boltanski's installations, individuality is both implied and negated.
The series of work that focussed on using the book as a visual motif is concerned with juxtaposing individual experience against the idea of a vast institution of knowledge that represents the burden, weight and authority of an indecipherable past. It also explored the idea of language as both meaningful and meaningless and, most particularly in certain works that incorporated performance, it heightened the relationship between the worker, viewer, artist and space. As well as employing repetition and multiple forms, the work also incorporates palimpsest and ritual, strategies used by Ann Hamilton and Hanna Darboven in tandem with the mutiple. In particular, I was interested in the use of the multiple to overwhelm the viewer, the use of palimpsest to both promise and deny meaning, and the combined power of performance and installation to activate the relationship between the viewer and the work.

**Performances**

The first project completed as part of the research, entitled *My hands are tied*, 2000, was held in the Foyer installation space in Hobart, an unusual venue because the small gallery faced directly onto a café. The aim was to experiment with the books to see how they could be re-combined to create new work. Although I knew I wanted to create a solid wall of books as part of the installation, I deliberated over what else to include. I drew sketches that incorporated light boxes and towers of book pages but felt these ideas resembled my Honours work too closely. The fact that the space was fairly small and intimate and faced onto a café that was quite public, was instrumental in my decision to carry out a writing performance. It was an opportunity to see how performance would impact on the work, the space and viewer engagement. Inspired by Holzers' truisms and Ann Hamilton's performance techniques, I chose to repeatedly write a simple, everyday saying that would literally reflect the task I had
set myself, but at the same time evoke a sense of paradox. I decided to write the words *My hands are tied* over the pages of old books, but I had also considered using *The writing is on the wall*. The latter was rejected because it lacked the personal connotation of *My hands are tied*.

![Figure 6: My hands are tied (installation view), 2000](image)

Viewers entered *My hands are tied* by passing through three vertical towers of stacked book pages, which formed a type of architectural threshold that separated the performance space from the café. The wall directly in front of the viewer was stacked from floor to ceiling with deconstructed books, giving the illusion of a huge wedge of inaccessible information and knowledge that continued into an imaginary space at the back of the gallery. Embedded within this wedge, with only its front legs visible, was a small, antique table. Every day, for three hours over a period of three weeks, I sat at the table and I wrote the words *My hands are tied* repeatedly over loose pages from the wall of ripped books in front of me. I used an old-fashioned nib pen and dipping ink and as each overwritten page was finished, I nailed it randomly to either one of the bare gallery walls with blue tacks using a small hammer. Over the three weeks, I overwrote about 650 pages. The titles of the chapters or books they came from were visible at the top of the page and became a source of fascination for viewers:
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By his own hand, The worm turns, Giving and receiving, Rabbit stew, The call of the blood, The lesser trail, Unexplored, A giggle of girl, Staggering into orbit, The complexity of the problem...

Figure 7: My hands are tied (performance detail), 2000

My hands are tied explored the limitations of language using ritual and repetition. Turning the unique mark of my personal handwriting and an everyday phrase into an abstraction, it was about the failure of accumulated history and knowledge to reflect individual experience. Like the rituals of those who suffer obsessive compulsive disorder, the action of writing and repeating became its own raison d'etre, both promising and denying meaning.
The following year, the ideas developed in *My hands are tied* were further explored in Linden Gallery, a contemporary art space in an historic colonial house in St Kilda, Melbourne. The building provided a perfect venue for the sense of history evoked by the antique table and ripped books. However, when I arrived to set up the work, I realised I had not shipped enough of my ripped books to successfully achieve what I had originally planned, which was to stack numerous waist height towers of books around the writing table. To create the illusion of more books, I built one large pyramid-shaped stack instead, which was positioned in front of the antique writing table.
During the performance, I wrote the words *I have my work cut out for me* over the book pages, then tossed them to the floor, gradually forming two mounds of densely scattered paper on either side of the work space. This work also included a sound track of a faint but persistent scratch of pen across paper that was burned onto a CD, hidden inside the desk drawers and played when I was not performing. The idea was to evoke the continuous presence of the individual at work despite their absence. Viewer reactions to this performance were generally more inhibited than with the previous work, possibly because of the more formal gallery situation.

The resolution of this work was less successful than *My hands are tied*. The stack of books needed to be much higher - at least over my head when I was sitting at the table - and, although I was adamant at the time that the writing table be in front of the stack, I think it would have been better to build the stack of books right in the centre of the room, hiding my work space behind it. This would have created a greater sense of mystery and surprise for the viewer.
Although both of these performances were met by a range of viewer responses that included genuine interest, amusement, hushed reverence and frustration at failed attempts to distract me from my work, overall, they seemed to be characterised by the type of objective distance between viewer and work that O’Doherty identifies as a sense of trespass. 2 This idea of trespass, in which the viewer feels that he or she has entered forbidden territory, has been a highly significant component in the submitted work. While the final submission has aimed to provide the viewer with a range of different experiences and the possibility of engaging in different roles, it is dominated by an underlying sense of tension evoked through the idea of trespass.

**Site-specific projects**

The site-specific work completed during this phase of the research included one text based collaboration and two projects created in libraries. The latter incorporated deconstructed books combined with text and enabled me to test my ideas in a broad public context.

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The text based collaboration, entitled *CONTENT* (#1), 2000, was created with Marcus Prince and held at the University of Tasmania's Fine Arts Gallery, a difficult space because it is long and narrow, with doors and windows at either end. Our aim was to focus on a single word to emphasize the different ways each of us incorporated mark-making in our individual practices while also commenting on the nature of experiencing art within the gallery setting. We experimented with collaboratively writing on A5 pieces of paper that we were going to pin to the gallery walls to form landscape-like sentences and paragraphs. We rejected this idea as too obvious and decided to pare down our use of text and materials to its most minimal. We chose one word - *content* - and worked with that. I repeatedly wrote the word in white chalk over one wall of the gallery, starting in the top left hand corner and finishing in the bottom right. Marcus copied one of my chalk words, enlarged it to fill the entire wall opposite, and painted it using clear acrylic medium.

![Figure 13: Content, #1, 2000](image)

On first entering the gallery, it appeared to be empty - two white walls with nothing on them. The only real evidence of any 'content' was a row of white powder on the blue carpet along the length of one wall - chalk dust that had fallen to the floor while I was writing my rows of content. Of course, the endless rows of chalk written words and the large acrylic letters became visible on closer
inspection. However, it was not possible to see either in their totality from any one spot in the gallery – the viewer had to move within the space to try and catch the 'content' of the work as light from the windows fell and played on the walls.

Figure 14: Content #1 (detail), 2000

By highlighting the multiple and ambiguous meanings of the word 'content', CONTENT (#1) harks back to early conceptual art's concern with the dematerialisation of the art object as a strategy to challenge ideas about the nature and function of art. It thus reflects a somewhat Kosuthian approach to the relationship between language and art. I look back on CONTENT (#1) as a significant work, despite reservations at the time about its overall importance to the project. While future projects did not pursue the idea of language as art, they did become more and more concerned with the way in which the viewer was challenged to engage with the work. CONTENT (#1) also provided the basis for a site-specific installation designed for the University of Tasmania's Central Library.
Towards the end of 2000, I was commissioned by the State Library of Tasmania to create a permanent art work around a structural column in the centre of the Library's foyer. The brief was to make work that promoted the library as a significant and active community resource while also disguising an aesthetically problematic architectural feature of the building. The project challenged my ability to transfer my ideas about language to a highly visible public setting.

The completed work, entitled *Voice* (2001), consists of a wedge of coverless books stacked behind toughened glass and sandwiched between two stainless steel panels. The panels are covered with lists of verbs, laser cut from stainless steel, the letters raised, suggesting a printing device such as a letter-press. The verbs themselves - words such as think, dream, imagine, journey, voice - refer to the transformative power of books and reading. In this setting, the coverless books evoke the mystery of recorded human knowledge and, linked with the verbs, point to the unlimited potential of the written word and its ability to kindle the imagination. The column of books and verbs physically recedes into the ceiling, suggesting a vein of knowledge that continues to flow throughout the rest of the building. The work plays on the idea of books and knowledge as architecture, a visual strategy also used in *My hands are tied* and my Honours submission.

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3 The work can be viewed at the State Library of Tasmania headquarters building, 91 Murray Street, Hobart.

4 As the structural column continues up into the other floors of the building, the architects who worked on the re-design of the Library's foyer suggested that my work be continued on the next two levels, which would have included the Lending and Reference libraries. Unfortunately, this project fell through due to lack of funding.
Voice has demonstrated that the visual metaphor of the deconstructed book can be successfully adapted to a range of readings when combined with different materials and concepts. The juxtaposition of stainless steel (a material I had never used before) and old paper, contrasted the old with the new, the handmade with the industrial, and the past with the future. However, the project was also not without its challenges. My original proposal had incorporated digital images of children's faces overlaid with text, rather than the stainless steel panels used in the completed work. Because Library management were clearly ambivalent about the images, I decided to get rid of them altogether, again paring back my ideas to their most basic concepts. I then experimented with
various materials that would be suitable in a public library setting: timber inlaid with metal lettering, and different types of steel - from stainless to untreated - with letters cut into the surface as well as being raised above. Once the Library had agreed to brushed stainless steel as the preferred material, I had to find a company that could laser cut steel lettering to my specifications. I also had to have all the words I chose to use in the work approved by Library management, a process that involved removing certain words and replacing them with others. 5 This reinforced the inherent power of language in a way I had not anticipated.

*Voice* thus involved a number of compromises that do not accurately reflect the type of experimentation and risk taking I was prepared to undertake with other research work. While I think *Voice* is site-specifically successful, it does not challenge the viewer about their relationship to language and knowledge to the extent I wanted to achieve.

The second site-specific work I carried out in a library was placed in the University of Tasmania's Central Morris Miller Library. Entitled *CONTENT (#2)*, 2003, it harks back to *CONTENT (#1)* and can be seen as a companion to the State Library commission.

The idea for *CONTENT (#2)* developed every time I walked through the entrance foyer of the Morris Miller Library which features an in-built 6.5 metre long display cabinet, usually exhibiting rare or unusual items from the Library's collection. It seemed the perfect location for a site-specific work but it took two years before the idea for *CONTENT (#2)* was realised. I had considered hanging large, 

5 One of the words the Library specifically wanted to see on the panels was the word *free*, which I added. However, I had to remove the word *forgive* because it was considered too close to the word *sorry* which was considered too politically volatile at the time.
text-based, digital images inside the cabinet or displaying books of my own choice with cryptic labels attached, but these ideas were never resolved. Again, it was a matter of reducing an idea to its essence. I thought about the function of the library and how I could question that function in the simplest way. One day, I simply walked past the cabinet and saw it filled with ripped books overlaid with the word CONTENT.

Figure 17: Morris Miller Library display cabinet, 2003

Figure 18: CONTENT#2, 2003

CONTENT (#2) transformed the display cabinet into a type of architectural dig, completely filling it with deconstructed books that suggested geological strata of information. I then employed signwriters to cover the display windows with a vinyl film that
resembles etched glass. The letters CONTENT were then cut from the film, turning it into a giant, frosted glass stencil through which the tattered spines of the coverless books were visible. The work thus appeared like a window into the architectural foundations of the building. As with CONTENT (#1), it played with the multiple meanings of its title, the stencilled word CONTENT shifting between noun and verb. But in this case, the word was also juxtaposed against layers of ripped and mended book pages, the literal content of the display, which metaphorically evoked the structural foundations of the library. Thus, on one level, that content referenced the knowledge, history, culture and authority of the university, but, because there were no clues to the titles of the books, the actual content was denied. The books became, in a sense, contentless.

Figure 19: CONTENT #2 (detail), 2003

Despite the satisfying resolution of this project, which was exhibited in the library for most of the 2003 academic year, I felt that the work was still not providing the viewer with the level of challenge I wanted to evoke about our relationship to language and knowledge.
Other Work

During this first phase of research I also carried out other, less successful projects using the books as basic building blocks. Work such as *STILL ME*, 2001, attempted to focus more keenly on the relationship between subjectivity and language, melding the idea of a self that is always shifting with the visual stillness of text. The work consisted of two huge words, STILL on one side of the gallery, ME on the other, that were constructed from ripped books. The words floated on the walls with no visible means of support and were accompanied by a sound track that attempted to evoke the gentle purr of fingers flicking through pages. I had planned to embed this within the books using tiny speakers. The project fell flat. The sound track was tinny and the use of books to create words seemed overtly literal. It is possible the project may have worked in a much narrower space, such as a corridor, so that the viewer was forced to trace the letters with their body in order to read them, however, I was not convinced about the overall concept. I experimented with other ideas that incorporated giant words made from clear perspex and stainless steel but these were never realized beyond diagrams (and overly expensive quotes from fabrication companies!) I also worked on a collaboration with a dress designer, sewing words into fabric with hair. In general, my criticism of all this work was its reliance on the literal use of text to evoke the idea of language.

The first phase of the research project is thus essentially dominated by the use of text and the deconstructed book as central visual motifs. Although many of the works created during this phase were successful in terms of conveying the paradoxical nature of our relationship to language and knowledge, I was highly conscious that the use of books was beginning to become a formula. Their evocative texture and colour created an almost guaranteed visual aesthetic. In addition, the books were associated with one particular
view of language and knowledge - that associated with history, culture and scholarship. I wanted to challenge the aims of the project further and experiment with different ways of evoking our relationship to language and knowledge. At this stage, however, I was unsure of how to proceed. I felt like Billy Gould in The book of fish, dragging behind a huge sled laden with false documents, but unable to let go.

This early phase of research is thus marked by the lack of a clear strategic direction. It was a time of experimentation and investigation. It still seemed possible to create a final submission that included a range of formal approaches, but it was also clear that I had not established a satisfactory two-dimensional visual vocabulary. Working with objects and performance was far more successful but I was no longer satisfied with the particular visual language I had developed using deconstructed books and text.

The work created during this first phase of the project is included as support work.

**Phase Two: critical turning points**

The second phase of the project is marked by two key events that made a highly significant impact on the way the project continued to develop. One was the opportunity to take up two overseas residencies, one in London, the other in Paris, during which I was exposed to particular contemporary art and other experiences that had an undeniably profound impact on my approach to the research. The other was a commission to make work for a group exhibition on contemporary self-portraiture which resulted in a new visual language that formed the basis of the submitted work. This second phase was also accompanied by a theoretical shift that stemmed from drawing parallels between fiction and post-structuralism.
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Overseas

At the end of 2001, I suspended my candidature for six months to take up a three month Australia Council Residency in London and a two month residency in Paris at the Cite Internationale des Arts. I also spent one month in Riga, Latvia, the birthplace of my parents. Taking place at the half-way point of the research, these opportunities enabled me to take stock of the work I had completed and reassess ideas about how to strategically pursue the rest of the project.

My time in London enabled me to experience an extraordinary array of contemporary and other art practice that would otherwise not be possible in Australia. The most significant of these experiences in terms of the research was Mark Wallinger's *No man's land*, a major solo exhibition of his work held at Whitechapel Art Gallery from 2001-2, which I was compelled to visit three times. One of my concerns about abandoning the books from my practice, which by this stage I saw as a burden and an obstacle rather than a challenge, was how this might affect the overall *style* of my work. Wallinger's work completely altered my thinking in this regard. His ability to mix disparate mediums such as video projections, sculptural objects and framed images, while maintaining a rich dialogue between works, demonstrated that ultimately, consistency of style did not

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6 I had to suspend my research to take up the Australia Council residency as their policy does not permit the funding of post-graduate research. My project was to visit some of the greatest libraries in the world, most specifically the British Library, Cambridge University Library and the Bodeleian at Oxford, in order to develop new ways of exploring the visual symbols of the book and the word. While the work that resulted from the residency is concerned with our relationship to language and knowledge, it is distinctly different from this research project in terms of visual aesthetics as well as the way in which it focuses on the book, the word and the library to evoke its ideas. The work included a series of small artist's books composed of digital images and a major solo installation held at Contemporary Art Services Tasmania in 2003. Documentation is included in the support work.
matter. To convey a series of linked ideas successfully, it is not necessary to be master of a single technique; rather, it is necessary to combine carefully selected images, objects or forms that in combination evoke the strength of the ideas driving the work. Wallinger's work gave me a renewed sense of excitement about the possibility of experimenting with a range of different materials, strategies and forms. It was subsequently accompanied by an engagement with a new range of artists and an interest in a different range of strategic approaches. Ann Hamilton, Xu Bing, Hanna Darboven and Christian Boltanski, although still significant to the research, were superseded by artists such as Ilya Kabakov, Mike Nelson and Michael Landy.

In Paris and Riga, the idea that there is no universal language, and that identity and culture are embedded within language, was powerfully confirmed through the personal experience of having to communicate in French and Latvian. To speak another language is to think differently and thus to express ideas about oneself and the world differently. My time in Riga was dominated by visits to relatives, some of whom I had never met before. The fragments of their lives I was briefly able to share reinforced the impact of a communist regime that overshadows my family's personal history. While I did not consciously set out to evoke the idea of a totalitarian bureaucracy in the submitted work, I have no doubt that my personal history is embedded within its overall visual aesthetic.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

The second key turning point in the research was the opportunity to participate in the group show *Figure it*, an exhibition that featured the work of five women artists who all utilise their bodies in their
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practice to explore issues about identity. The curatorial premise of the show was an exploration of the links between self-portraiture and the body. Although I had never considered my work as exemplifying portraiture, I created an installation entitled Are you thinking what I'm thinking? that questioned the relationships between language, knowledge and personal identity using a set of visual tools completely different to those used in the earlier phase of the project.

Figure 20: Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Video still, 2001

The idea for Are you thinking what I'm thinking? grew from a desire to explore the relationships between language and subjectivity using a completely new visual language. As both language and subjectivity are associated with brain function, I decided to see what happens in the brain while thinking, speaking and writing about my identity. I arranged to have an electroencephalogram (EEG) done whilst using the two languages I grew up with - Latvian and English.

7 Held in the Plimsoll Gallery, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, in 2001. Curated by Jonathan Holmes and accompanied by a one day conference on portraiture organised in conjunction with the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra.
The test was carried out in the Psychology Department of the University of Tasmania whilst I repeated the following statements in five minute sessions for each language: *Mans vards ir Brigita Ozolins. Es zinu kas es esmu. My name is Brigita Ozolins. I know who I am.* A fellow postgraduate videoed the procedure and the psychology researcher who carried it out provided me with a series of graphs and charts that illustrated average brain activity for each of the tasks undertaken during the EEG.

The project started with a few basic elements: a video, stills captured from the video, and the results of the EEG. However, I was unsure of how to manipulate this data to make it relevant in a context beyond my personal experience. I began by making digital images from the video stills and the EEG data, but as already
discussed, the results failed to successfully evoke the idea of the relationship between language and personal identity.  

![Figure 23: Are you thinking what I'm thinking? (digital image), 2001](image)

The breakthrough came when I decided to work with the data as is, and re-present the experience of undergoing the EEG. The focus was thus shifted from the creation of an object or image that was embedded with the thematic concerns of the project to the creation of a scenario that evoked for the viewer elements of the experience I had undergone in the psychology department’s lab. *Are you thinking what I'm thinking?* thus creates a fictional reality that provides the viewer with a *relational experience* (echoing elements of Nicolas Bourriaud's theory).  

The work consists of two rooms, numbered 714 and 715. Room 714 is small, brightly lit and empty. The walls are lined with patterned acoustic tiling that both dominates the empty space and deadens the sound. There is one item in the room - a mirror, positioned just a little too low for comfortable viewing, reflecting the chest rather than the face. It may be difficult to stay in this room for too long as it evokes both a sense of trespass and of being observed.

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8 Some of the digital images have been included in the support work.

9 However, at this stage of the project, I had not come across Bourriaud's theories.
Room 715 is next door. Lined with the same acoustic tiling as in 714, it is furnished with a desk, office chair, filing cabinet and computer. It is clearly someone’s work place. Above the desk, positioned at just the right height for viewing while sitting, is an
observation window that looks directly back into room 714 (the 'mirror' in that room). On the computer monitor, a rather jerky movie of a woman having an EEG in a room lined with acoustic tiling identical to that in rooms 714 and 715 is playing continuously. The desk is covered with text books, EEG data sheets labelled with the name OZOLINS BT and other paraphernalia.

The EEG data indicates that OZOLINS BT is probably bilingual, speaking both Latvian and English, but there is a marked difference in brain activity between the English and Latvian experiments. The filing cabinet is open and it is possible to rifle through the files which are packed with meticulously classified personal data about OZOLINS BT: birth certificate, bank statements, employment and school records, private correspondence and so on. There is the opportunity for the viewer to do a little research of their own, to create an identity for OZOLINS BT from the available data and thus assume the roles of observer, researcher and constructor. However, while sifting through the files, the viewer may suspect:

a) that the data in the office is a series of 'red herrings', promising significance but containing little more than a mundane list of facts, and

b) that he or she is being watched.

Scanning the room carefully, it may be possible to detect a surveillance camera in the corner of the ceiling. The viewer may glance back at the observation mirror. Who is watching whom?
Are you thinking what I’m thinking? explores the difficulties associated with defining the self in terms of the physical, objective world. It has created a pseudo scientific environment based around the collection of EEG and other data with the aim of giving the viewer an experience about self-observation, self-definition and self-limitation. What makes me what I am? What makes you what you are? Is it ever possible to be thinking what another person is thinking? The work asks whether the collected receipts of a life, like Michael Landy's inventory of 7,227 destroyed possessions, can

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I presented a paper entitled *Are you thinking what I'm thinking?* at the 4th International Consciousness Reframed Conference, held in Perth, Western Australia in October, 2002. I had thought the research was leaning towards consciousness studies but, after the conference, realised that this direction was not quite right for the project.
ever provide a true picture of identity. In Paul Auster's *The locked room*, the relationship between objective evidence of an individual life and subjective experience is succinctly evoked in the following lines:

No matter how many facts are told, no matter how many details are given, the essential thing resists telling. To say that so and so was born here and went there, that he did this and did that, that he married this woman and had these children, that he lived, that he died, that he left behind these books or this battle or that bridge - none of that tells us very much…. No one can cross the boundary into another - for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself.  

_Are you thinking what I'm thinking?_ thus questions whether self-portraiture is possible.

In addition to questioning whether identity can be objectified, the work also raises questions about our complicity in the social systems that govern our lives. It does this by setting up a chain of observation that can't be traced back to a single source. Who is watched through the mirror? Who watches from behind the mirror? And is anyone watching over both? Viewers become part of this chain simply by entering the two scenarios that make up the work. In room 714, they _become_ the observed subject. In room 715, as they gaze through the mirror, stare at the monitor and check through the files, their role switches to that of complicit observer. They have become part of the system that observes, investigates and gathers information. In addition, viewers may suspect that the chain of observation extends beyond rooms 714 and 715, and may thus modify their behaviour accordingly. The work thus implies that while the subject may be controlled by the system, it is also

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complicit in the perpetuation of that system. *Are you thinking what I'm thinking?* thus implies a network of unspoken but shared rules. As in Orwell's 1984, behaviour is constantly self-regulated to comply with the principles of the political and social system.

The process of making Rooms 714 and 715 was not straightforward and involved a range of aesthetic and conceptual decisions. My original idea was to construct one room - the research office - with a fake observation mirror, which would have resulted in a tableau-like installation. I had also not considered using acoustic tiling. However, as I began to gather furniture, files and other materials for the project, I realised that in order to successfully evoke the experience of being in the Psychology Department's lab, it was not enough to simply imply aspects of architecture and design - I had to create a three-dimensional environment that resembled the original situation. Constructing two rooms, both lined with acoustic tiling and divided by a real observation mirror, became just as essential to the final work as the classification and ordering of the filing cabinet and the editing of the video. It was important that the viewer enter the two rooms and actually experience being both an observed subject and a seemingly objective observer. (Dan Graham's mirror works, which play with the ambiguities of subjective and objective experience, come to mind).

The *detailing* of Rooms 714 and 715 thus became highly significant. I paid particular attention to the style of office furniture and equipment, as I wanted to evoke a fairly neutral institutional atmosphere that was neither too contemporary nor overly dated, a 'look' I have continued to strive for in all of the submitted work. Once the rooms were constructed, I was surprised to realise just how significant the acoustic tiling was to the experience of engaging with the work, both on a psychological as well as a physical level. The tiles not only deadened the sound but also any sense of self within the space. In addition, their pattern suggested a type of all-
encompassing language or code that was built into the very architecture of the space. Rooms 714 and 715 incorporated a new and exciting range of materials, strategies and ideas about language and subjectivity that offered an alternative to the books and became the impetus for developing the series of inter-related works that constitute the final submission.

*Are you thinking what I'm thinking?* thus represents a highly significant turning point in the research. It explores our relationship to language and to knowledge using a range of materials, cultural references and strategies that extend beyond those adopted in stage one of the research. The book and the library are replaced by an office and other rooms within a mock institution, thus dispersing ideas about language and knowledge across broader social references. In the submitted work, language and knowledge are referenced not only through the deconstructed book, but also through files, shredded documents, EEG data, hygrothermagraph readings, 12 and varied imagery of black holes. All of these materials and forms imply either indecipherable or ambiguous information that in turn evokes the idea that language both promises and denies meaning. In addition, the submitted work introduces the idea of surveillance through the use of mirrors, cameras and windows, which create a sense of underlying tension and trespass. The adoption of this new range of materials, combined with the overall structure of a bureaucratic institution, facilitated the creation of environments that challenged the viewer to assume roles that extend beyond passive observer.

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12 A hygrothermagraph measures room temperature and humidity and is often seen in galleries and museums.
Theory and fiction

The third significant turning point in this phase of research was a shift in attitude towards French theory. During this period I continued to read Foucault and other post-structural thinkers, but also began to read the fictional works of Kafka, Banville, Flanagan, Orwell and Auster, who were conveying many of the same ideas through visually evocative narratives. It was thus possible for me to draw parallels between philosophical ideas and a series of powerful images drawn from literature. These were significant in developing specific works within the submission, in particular the trolley and the maze-like store-room. Anna Funder's *Stasiland*, which was read in a period that overlaps with phase two and three, provided important imagery for developing the shredding, and sorting and surveillance rooms.

This second phase of the research was thus characterised by major shifts in thinking and in making that resulted in a much clearer idea of the direction the project would take. I decided that installation was the most effective way of engaging and challenging the viewer and I was no longer afraid of experimenting with a diverse range of materials and forms. I realised it was not necessary to use the literal visual symbols of the book and text to evoke experiences about language and knowledge. I had also decided, through the construction of Rooms 714 and 715, that the final submission would become one large, interconnected work rather than a series of individual projects. However, it was not until the third phase of the project that I came across Bourriaud's theories of relational aesthetics and postproduction, which provided a clear theoretical framework for the new strategies I had begun to employ.
Phase three: resolution

In the third and final phase of the research, the project was resolved through the process of melding a range of strategies, materials and ideas. Elements from postproduction and relational aesthetics were adopted in tandem with an aesthetic of administration. The visual symbol of the book and references to the library, while still incorporated in the work, were replaced by an overall atmosphere associated with bureaucracy. Installation became the preferred method of working and, in conjunction with the strategy of the maze, was used to create a network of interrelated scenarios about our relationship to language and knowledge.

The submitted work has focused on creating installations in which the experience of the work is more significant than the objects and materials used to create it. While certain objects and images, such as the booth, the trolley, the black holes and the books, have been constructed (or reconstructed) with some attention to detail, the aim has not been to embed these with specific individual meaning. Rather, the focus has been on using these objects to create environments that encourage an experiential interaction. This, in turn, may disrupt and challenge existing ideas about the relationships between language, knowledge and subjectivity. The strategy of the maze, in combination with the creation of almost theatrical scenarios, has enabled the viewer to experience a range of shifting roles that include passive witness, active participant, complicit detective and anxious subject. Because the viewer can never be sure about their role throughout the submitted work, a degree of tension and confusion may result, calling the viewer's own sense of subjectivity into question. Our relationship to language, knowledge and information is thus dominated by the memory of a psychological experience that may last well beyond the actual physical encounter with the work.
The way in which these strategies have been applied will now be discussed through a description of all the submitted work. I have roughly followed the order in which it is likely to be experienced by the viewer. Documentation of projects included in this discussion incorporate a mixture of completed work, work in progress and work exhibited in spaces other than the Plimsoll Gallery. It may thus differ slightly from the submitted work which has been documented accurately on the enclosed CD.

Booth, 2000-3

*Booth* is the first work encountered in the submission. Sited in the foyer of the gallery, it stands in isolation from all the other installations. It is about the size of an old-fashioned phone booth and is made from highly grained plywood that has been stained a rich brown.

There is a locked door on one side and at the front, positioned quite centrally, is a small shuttered window. The shutter is not completely closed - there is a gap of about 5mm between the window ledge and its base, through which a line of light is just visible. The suggestion
that someone is actually inside the booth is evoked both through the stream of light and through sounds that emanate from within - the rustle of pages, a stapler, a small cough, the clickety-clack of a keyboard. The booth clearly suggests that some type of exchange takes place between the public and whoever works inside, but no clues as to the nature of that exchange are provided, nor is it clear why the booth is closed.

Figure 30: Booth (detail), 2003

*Booth* was one of the first ideas devised in the early stages of the research, but it took three years to decide it was worth pursuing. My original plan was to site it in various socially and culturally significant locations around Hobart - outside the Museum and Art Gallery, the Police Station, the Hospital, the Town Hall, and so on - over a period of one or two weeks, documenting public reaction to its presence. However, this idea did not develop beyond doctored photographs of possible sites because I was unsure how it fitted within the overall aims of the research. In 2003, I reconsidered *Booth* and made it for Living Artist's Week, having received permission to locate it inside the State Library of Tasmania's foyer. It was a perfect site for an object that suggests information exchange.
Although carefully reconstructed, *Booth* is essentially a 'postproduction', copied from portable offices I saw on a visit to Riga, Latvia, in 1992, just nine months after the country's liberation from the Soviet regime. 13 It also indirectly references Wallinger's *Tardis*, 2001, a beautiful highly polished stainless steel replica of the British phone booth (and, of course, Dr Who's time-machine). Wallinger's booth is simultaneously mysterious and familiar, entirely absorbing its environment through its mirrored surface but also using its powerful reflection as a means of denying access to the world that lies within. The booths in Riga, on the other hand, were dull and unimaginative, reflecting the mentality of a totalitarian regime. They were used for a range of business and official transactions such as visa control, currency exchange and public information. Interestingly, they were always located inside another building - the airport, the railway station, a shop. I recall the experience of standing inside a cake shop in a long queue outside one of these booths, waiting to exchange money. When it was finally my turn, I approached the tiny window, my head slightly lowered to see inside, but the shutter was slammed in my face with no explanation. I was a little shocked. Someone in the queue explained that it was lunch time. Interestingly, the person within didn't leave the booth and I was the only one who left the queue.

*Booth* uses the strategies of intervention and site-specificity to provide both an introduction to the rest of the work and a postscript at the end. It intrudes upon the gallery foyer, challenging the viewer to question its function and engage with its presence. Essentially, it is a paradox. Through its simple, functional and portable design, it is clearly institutional, and yet its highly grained panelling evokes a sense of individualism. *Booth* is also both public and private. It is located in the foyer of a public building and yet it has shut the

13 I have never seen them on subsequent visits and assume they no longer exist.
public out with no explanation, both promising and denying a transaction between the outside world and the inside world. During the three weeks it remained in the foyer of the State Library of Tasmania, Booth successfully mystified library visitors, but it also resulted in a degree of frustration. At that stage, I had not developed its sound track, which I now see as an essential element of the work. The addition of sound has provided a means of giving something familiar back to the viewer, enabling a level of subjective engagement without giving the game away, so to speak. In some respects, Booth functions in a similar way to the deconstructed books, which also both promise and deny access to their contents.

The construction of Booth was plagued by a range of seemingly minor aesthetic decisions - the amount and pattern of grain in the plywood, the exact size and positioning of the window and the door, the shape and depth of the window ledge, the colour of the stain, the style of the timber trimmings and door handle and lock. As with Rooms 714 and 715, attention to detail was highly significant to the outcome of Booth. With the exception of the highly grained plywood, which I chose as a way of evoking individuality within the institutional, the other stylistic decisions were based on emulating the aesthetics of the booths I saw in Riga - practical, simple, undecorated.

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14 Some people tried to prize open the locked door and push open the shutter through frustration. Others left tokens, such as sweets, on the window ledge.

15 Although I carefully design my art work, I do not have the expertise to make it myself. The trolley, the booth, the shelving in the storeroom, the mirrored wall and detailing in Rooms 715 and 714, and the meeting room wall and door, have all been engineered and constructed to my specifications.
Reception, 2003-4

As the main body of submitted work is constructed to give the overall impression of a series of rooms within an anonymous institution, entry is via a reception area. Reception rooms are essentially places of transition and waiting. They also provide valuable first impressions of the organisation they represent. This reception area is minimal and austere, fitted out with desk, visitors chairs, directional signs for rooms 701 - 758, and a light box that illuminates the slightly esoteric and ambiguous logo SECURE CONTENT. A human sized plastic plant, implying a practical, no-nonsense attitude, is positioned near windows that look out over a garden, and a subtly positioned security camera watches over everyone who passes through the area. An inspection of the computer screen on the desk reveals thousands of names flashing hypnotically in alphabetical order against a pale grey background. It is not possible to tell what these names represent - they could be clients, past happy customers, or subjects of investigation.

Figure 31: Reception, light box, 2004
The aim of Reception is to set the scene and initiate viewer curiosity. Like the storerooms created by Mike Nelson for the 2001 Turner Prize or the strange institutional spaces invented by the Kabakovs, the exact nature and function of this organisation remains unknown. It could be a security office, an information archive, a government department or an insurance office. Its austere, administrative aesthetic, based around the colour grey, may evoke a slight sense of unease that could make viewers feel tentative about following the directional sign. However, the ambiguity of the reception area also presents a challenge that invites both searching and investigation, luring the viewer to seek out what lies beyond. Through the simple act of following the directional signs, the viewer unwittingly becomes a client of this unknown institution.

The aesthetic decisions that influenced the overall design of the reception area were based on Rooms 714 and 715. The overall colour scheme is built around grey, from the reception desk and chairs, to the SECURE CONTENT light box and the computer screen. Grey is a neutral, 'in limbo' colour that evokes the nondescript rather than the specific. It is also one of the most popular colours for office furniture. (Most of the auctions I attended to find specific items for the submitted work were dominated by grey melamine.) I did consider hiring a more imposing reception desk that was imbued with an overt sense of power and authority,
but ultimately decided that the simple, grey desk with a return offered just enough tension to evoke a slight sense of unease and ambiguity.

**Trolley, 2003-4**

Once through the reception area, one of the first objects encountered by the viewer is the trolley. Three and a half metres long but only ninety centimetres wide, and stacked to almost three metres in height, this is an absurd trolley that would be totally impractical for transporting materials around the corridors of this institution. It is both a physical and intellectual obstacle, blocking clear passage through the rest of the space and also defying common sense. Stacked with around 450 individually numbered cardboard boxes, each box filled with its own plastic bag of shredded documents, it threatens to collapse its load if anyone gets too close or attempts to move it around. In addition, the six digit numbering system used on the boxes fails to provide any clues about the contents of the carefully sorted and stacked plastic bags. While the numbers may suggest dates (birth dates? death dates? significant historical events?) they essentially remain an indecipherable code that both promises and denies meaning.

![Figure 33: Trolley (work in progress), 2003-4](image-url)
The realisation of the trolley is indebted to the melding of a number of important references. Conceptually, it is most significantly informed by Billy Gould's sled of false documents that he feels compelled to drag with him through the wilderness of south west Tasmania on his escape from prison. Billy's aim is to reveal to the authorities the lies that have been recorded as a true account of penal life on Sarah Island.

Of course, the sled is ultimately too much of a burden to him and is eventually abandoned. The trolley in the submitted work aims to evoke a similar sense of burden. Its huge load of shredded but obviously significant records suggests a vast but inaccessible store of information and knowledge that may never become accessible. The trolley's load also makes direct reference to the endless bags of shredded Stasi documents that are being meticulously pieced together by a team of 'puzzlers' in the former East Germany. The trolley reflects a similarly obsessive desire to make sense of details in order to regain lost meaning and wholeness.
The cardboard boxes themselves are genuine 'postproduced' objects. They were bought at an auction complete with coded numbering and, although they were obviously used for storage, their original function remains unknown. The strategy of stacking multiple storage boxes that suggest an archival system has, of course, been used by Christian Boltanksi as well as a range of other artists. The use of the multiple in such large quantities creates an atmosphere of being overwhelmed. In Boltanksi's work, the viewer is confronted by a clear allusion to countless unknown lives. In this work, the viewer may be overwhelmed, but the contents of the trolley remain ambiguous. It is possible to imagine that the shredded papers have something to do with individuals - perhaps the endless list of names flashing on the computer screen on the reception desk - but they could also refer to something completely different. The viewer cannot be certain about the content of the trolley's load. In addition, the trolley presents the viewer with the physical challenge of negotiating the way past its precarious bulk in order to find the other spaces within the institution that have now been entered.

While the idea for the trolley was easy to imagine, it was more difficult to formally resolve than I expected. Its size was determined by the number of boxes I had, so the initial process involved stacking all the boxes in various configurations to work out the optimum width and height of the trolley. During this process, I also
had to decide how to stack the boxes in a way that was both stable but also slightly precarious because I wanted the trolley to be just a little threatening.

Figure 36: Trolley (work in progress, first version), 2003

In addition, I had to develop a way of filling each box with shredded documents. My early attempts at stacking the trolley resembled a large, disordered collection of bird nests because I stuffed the shredded documents directly into the boxes, without sorting them into plastic bags first, as in the submission. Of course, I then realised that an organisation that promises **SECURE CONTENT** would never allow such disorder and insecurity, so I developed a very methodical system based on bricklaying for stacking the boxes - and I used plastic bags to package the shredded papers.

Much of the shredded paper used in both the trolley and the shredding room, which is discussed next, was sourced from a select number of public and private institutions and organisations. I was entrusted with the shredding of documents of a highly confidential nature about an undetermined number of individuals. Although viewers of the submitted work will not be aware of the true nature of those documents, the fact that many private papers are amongst them is particularly significant because it resonates with the conceptual concerns underlying the project as a whole. Because I am aware of their contents, the shredded documents not only
represent inaccessible information, but also fragmented subjectivities.

**Shredding Room, 2004**

Beyond the obstacle of the trolley lies a large space that is literally a landscape of shredded documents. The viewer makes their way along a narrow pathway that leads through undulating hills of multicoloured paper. Shredded documents form a grassy carpet underfoot. In some places, the paper reaches shoulder or head height, in others it collapses into small vales that fall around the knees and ankles. Completely engulfed by this sea of inaccessible information that lures through its sheer volume and its promise of a bed-like softness, the viewer may be tempted to play amongst the mounds of shredded paper - or even to throw themselves into it. This room both overwhelms and invites a sense of play. However, the atmosphere of fun evoked within the shredding room is short-lived. At a certain point along the path, the viewer unknowingly triggers a sensor that switches on a large, heavyweight shredding machine located somewhere near the centre of the room. It rumbles and grinds mechanically for five seconds before coming to a sudden halt, transforming the experience of being engulfed by shredded documents from one of play to one of shock.  

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16 At the time of writing the exegesis, I had not yet decided whether to include the sensor driven shredder or not, unsure about its impact on an underlying atmosphere of silence that is evoked throughout the rest of the work. However, I was also eager to shock the viewer and provide them with an experience that both promises a sense of fun but also denies it.
The shredding room thus emphasises the paradoxical idea that knowledge both promises and denies meaning through engaging the viewer in an intense physical experience. Like the trolley and the booth, the contents of the shredding room ultimately remain unknown and indecipherable. Unlike the trolley and the booth, the shredded landscape lures the viewer into a false sense of security which is then destroyed through the strategy of shock. The shredding room thus further extends the overall sense of tension and anxiety that gradually builds as the viewer proceeds further into the institution that promises SECURE CONTENT.

The idea for the shredding room grew from two sources: the actual process of spending hours shredding documents for the trolley, and the insistently powerful imagery from Anna Funder's *Stasiland*. As
I destroyed vast quantities of documents, I imagined an entire room that was a literal landscape of destroyed information and knowledge. The prospect of creating an installation that would literally and physically engulf the viewer in the idea that language and knowledge both promise and deny meaning was an exciting one. The shredding room thus uses to extreme the strategy of the multiple.

**Storeroom, 2003**

From the shredding room, the viewer may next find themselves at the narrow entranceway to the storeroom that leads directly into a confined, body-width corridor lined with shelved, ripped up book pages along one side and unlabelled storage boxes along the other. The shelves and boxes reach to the ceiling and the space is so tight that the viewer can literally smell the history embedded within the books stacked on the shelves. The storeroom begins as straight corridors but eventually leads to a maze-like internal structure consisting of towers of cardboard boxes. It is difficult to assess the extent of the internal space. Although there is the suggestion that it is possible to go further and further into the maze, because pathways are visible in the distance, these pathways ultimately remain inaccessible and out of reach. The storeroom is thus a literal dead-end, even though the exact nature of that end is unclear. There is only one way out and that is the same way as going in.

The storeroom offers a scenario that appears both real and unreal. It may be possible to imagine the person who created this storage area, deliberately and painstakingly taking apart thousands of books to

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17 Paper for the *Shredding room* was also sourced from Collex Recycling, which provided shredded documents from businesses and government departments all over Hobart.
search for something contained within. Presumably that something was not found because the remnants of the search have not been discarded. Instead, they are stored and boxed, like a project that was abandoned because it was impossible to finish. The storage boxes themselves evoke their own sense of mystery. They may be filled with more ripped up and rebound pages, with books that have not been through the destruction process, or even quantities of shredded documents. As with all of the other scenarios within this institution, their content remains obscure and inaccessible.

Conceptually, the storeroom is about the futility and eventual abandonment of a search for an essential truth. On one level, it intends to convey the idea of the limits of language and a philosophical dead-end - the failure of accumulated knowledge and information to provide meaning and truth. On a parallel level, the storeroom can also be read as a search for an essential core of being that does not exist. The physical experience of entering the storeroom is like taking a journey inside someone's head, into a space that seems clear at the start but leads to confusion as one ventures deeper inside. Rather than finding an essential core of being, the centre of the storeroom is a fragmented, claustrophobic space that leads nowhere other than further into itself.

Figure 39: Storeroom (work in progress), 2003
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Equally importantly, *The storeroom* represents the end of working with the book as a visual motif within the project. In a sense, I am the unknown person who ripped apart the books and tried to find something within them. I am the one who thought I might be able to find something, not only within language and within the knowledge that is expressed through language, but within my self. However, as discussed earlier, working with the books eventually became a dead weight and a literal dead-end because I felt I was not challenging the aims of the project to the extent that I wanted to. *The storeroom* is thus my farewell to the books within the research project and as such plays a crucial role in the final submission. It sums up many of the ideas conveyed in the early stages of research, as well as dramatically increasing the level of interaction required by the viewer. In early work, such as the performances, the viewer tended to be witness or observer, as opposed to active participant. This is a work that can only be experienced through physical interaction.

![Figure 40: Storeroom (work in progress), 2003](image)

The visual imagery for the storeroom is indebted to Fogg's apartment in Auster's novel *Moon Palace*, in which a young man's inheritance of thousands of books becomes both his furniture and a measure of his physical and psychological self. Using the strategies of the maze and the multiple form, the viewer is lured into the decentred interior of the storeroom, undergoing a palpable
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experience about language, knowledge and the idea of the subjective self. That experience is not only characterised by the physical tightness of the storeroom - it also creates an environment in which the viewer's role shifts between witness, investigator and complicit subject.

The construction of the storeroom was probably the most difficult and frustrating of all the installations to resolve. I knew when I began to create the maze that it would consist of boxes and books, but my original concept was quite different from the final outcome. I had envisaged a very messy room that was crammed from floor to ceiling with an assortment of boxes, ripped books, unripped books, book covers, papers, files and documents, with a small work space in the very centre. However, once I began to sort and stack these materials, I found it almost impossible to work with their inherent disorder. I rejected everything that lacked aesthetic uniformity and worked only with the ripped books and standard-sized storage boxes. I rearranged these into various configurations that had a tiny central space which alternately included a small work desk, a surveillance monitor and an open box of books. However, these were all cliched solutions that symbolised the existence of a central core of meaning and thus contradicted aspects of the conceptual concerns of the project. I almost abandoned the storeroom because I was unable to resolve the centre of the maze. I reviewed the work of other artists who had used maze-like formations, including Wallinger's *Prometheus bound*, 1999 and Boltanski's *Réserve: Les Suisses morts*, 1990. I also made a trip to Melbourne to see The *Labyrinthine Effect*, 2003, an exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art that was based around the idea of the labyrinth. The exhibition included Bruce Nauman's *Four corner piece*, 1971

18 This is a stylistic feature of my art practice. No matter how hard I try, I am unable to resolve work using an aesthetic associated with casual disorder.
and John Pym's *Loaded*, 2003, both of which provided important experiences of different mazes. Nauman's work is based on an endless circular chase to catch an image of one's self. Pym's is a claustrophobic, darkened tunnel of corridors that makes the viewer intensely aware of the physical limits of their body. Ultimately, I was able to resolve my storeroom by abandoning the idea that a maze has to lead somewhere and by focussing on the creation of an intense physical engagement with the deconstructed books and storage boxes. I made the storeroom narrower and tighter so the viewer's body would brush against the boxes and books as they passed through it, and I stacked the boxes higher towards the ceiling. The centre of the maze became a decentred arrangement of towers of boxes which evoked the idea of endless unknown possibilities rather than a fixed resolution.

**Rooms 714 and 715, 2001**

Adjacent to the trolley lie rooms 714 and 715. Lined with cane-ite acoustic tiling and conjoined by an observation mirror, these spartan rooms are set up to mimic a research lab. As they have already been described in detail earlier in this chapter, I will only discuss them in terms of their overall impact within the institutional structure of SECURE CONTENT.

Rooms 714 and 715 are particularly significant because more than any other spaces within the submitted work, they directly suggest the presence of a subject and enable the viewer to observe and examine evidence of the existence of that subject. In 715, not only is someone visible on a computer monitor, but an open filing cabinet reveals the personal records of that individual. The room thus directs the viewer's memory back to the endless list of flashing names on the computer in the reception area and, by implication, suggests the existence of many similar labs in which other individuals are also
being scrutinised. The fact that the individual being investigated within room 715 is myself is also significant. It confirms that I do not exist outside the system I am exploring - I am part of that which I endeavour to understand.

Figure 41: Room 714 (entrance detail), 2001

While Room 714 - the empty room with the one way mirror - evokes the experience of being observed whilst also observing oneself, Room 715 focuses on engaging the viewer as complicit observer. As stated earlier, by rifling through the filing cabinet or examining the data on the desk, the viewer becomes implicated in the chain of observation and investigation that is implied by both spaces. Both rooms also herald the possibility of discovering more about the function of the institution that destroys and then repackages books and documents.

Figure 42: Room 715 (entrance detail), 2001
It is also important to stress that these rooms are essentially a replication of the type of lab in which I originally underwent an EEG to measure my brain activity. They are thus 'postproduced' rooms, using existing materials, furniture and information, in combination with some manipulated video documentation to create an experience that evokes the idea of a constructed subjectivity.

Meeting Room, 2002-3

Meeting room is sited opposite the shredding room and the trolley. It is not possible to physically enter this room. The only way to see what is happening within is by spying through a window in a locked door that has been frosted with the words SECURE CONTENT. Peering through this window it is just possible to make out what is happening inside. The room is dark and in its centre is a table covered in documents, glasses and other paraphernalia, suggesting that a meeting was in progress, but was suddenly interrupted. A jacket over one of the chairs suggests that someone may return at any moment. The focus of the room, however, is a series of mysterious, slightly blurred images being projected one by one every three seconds onto one of the end walls. The images show strange black holes in a sea of whiteness. They could be satellite images of a lunar landscape or close-ups of bullet holes in a wall - it is impossible to tell. Directly opposite the window through which the viewer peers is another door, labelled with the number 758. Obviously it is a room that the viewer will never get to enter.
The resolution of this room went through two different phases of development. In its earliest manifestation, it was more of a board room, with a very long table and twelve chairs. Each place at the table was laid out regimentally with paper, pencil and water glass. There was no real sign of human activity within this highly constructed space and the twelve places at the table made too direct a reference to the Last Supper. I thus reconstructed the room with a much smaller table that only seats four and, in my one concession to disorder within the submission, covered it with scattered papers and documents to suggest a real meeting that had been suddenly interrupted. I also added a pair of glasses and a jacket, to further suggest the absence of individuals who may return at any moment.
This new version of the room also introduced an internal door that implies further rooms the viewer is unable to access. The door through which the viewer peeks to see inside also altered. Originally, it was a floor to ceiling window with half open venetian blinds. However, once the SECURE CONTENT logo was devised (in the last 8 months of the project), it became logical to use that logo as a way of establishing connections between the reception area and this room.

Meeting room is constructed with reference to the strategies employed in the complex scenarios of the Kabakovs and Mike Nelson. It also uses the ambiguous imagery of the black hole as a lure to engage and mystify the viewer. But while it invites curiosity, the room also creates a degree of frustration and suspicion. What are the black holes, what do they mean and why are they being studied? Why is the viewer unable to enter the room and what lies in the inaccessible room beyond? The locked door implies that whatever happens within the meeting room is privileged or secret. Thus it also suggests the idea of an invisible authority or power that has access to that which the viewer does not. However, because the viewer has to peer through the window to see what is going on in the room, he or she becomes implicated in the network of watching that underlies all the installations in the submitted work. And, as in
rooms 714 and 715, the viewer observes but may also suspect being observed.

The recurrent black circular image grew directly from a fascination with the emotive quality of the acoustic tiling used to line rooms 714 and 715, which were discussed earlier. The tiles had impacted on the overall experience of the work far more than initially anticipated, creating an all-encompassing braille-like pattern that resembled a strange language or code which in turn became part of the very architecture of the space. I decided to further explore the potential of the tiles as a new visual element for work that might interconnect with the other spaces I was developing. I scanned one tile, digitally enlarged the pattern of black holes within it and printed out the results as A4 images to form a large grid over one wall of my studio. Although the results were visually interesting, as with my other digital experiments, I was not confident I could resolve the idea two-dimensionally.

Figure 46: Digital project, unresolved work, 2001

I did devise a work that involved covering three walls of a room with the enlarged grid of black holes, the third wall covered in text that spelled out a saying that referred to ignorance being lifted like a fog once mankind was exposed to true knowledge. However, I felt the use of text was too literal. In addition, the reliance on the two dimensional digital image formally divorced the work from the fictional scenarios I had created in the other installations. I needed
to incorporate the black holes into the project so that they became part of the larger institutional system I was gradually developing.

Because of their ambiguity and mystery, the black holes have been used as recurring visual and conceptual motifs throughout the submitted work. Black holes constitute the negative space of the acoustic tiles that line rooms 714 and 715. Enlarged black holes are projected onto the wall in the meeting room; smaller, moving patterns of black holes are viewed on a computer screen along with obsessively reconstructed shredded imagery of black holes pinned to the walls of the sorting and surveillance room (discussed further on). The black holes, like the deconstructed books and the shredded documents, thus became a sub-language that was used to evoke that which cannot be understood. However, while the deconstructed books and shredded documents promise to hold significance, the black holes represent a system that does not follow the normal rules of language. We know that the ripped books contain words that can be read or translated and we know that the documents could be pieced together to reveal their contents. The black holes, on the other hand, remain completely indecipherable. In addition, their varied manifestations within the submitted work suggest a system of relationships that are never clarified.

**Surveillance and sorting room, 2003-4**

The final room within the institution that promises *SECURE CONTENT* is accessed by a narrow corridor that leads into what appears to be the central hub of the organisation. The entranceway is protected by a circular convex mirror that allows whoever is within the room to observe anyone approaching. There is a lot of information in this room: large, body sized bags of shredded documents; panels along the walls covered in partially reconstructed
images of what appear to be black holes; scientific recording equipment; a computer screen that shows a moving pattern of black holes, and a series of monitors that survey activity in other parts of the organisation.

A small desk is covered in trays of neatly organised shredded papers, presumably the source of the obsessively and meticulously reconstructed images on the walls.
PART THREE: HOW THE PROJECT WAS PURSUED

Here, the viewer's role switches between that of researcher, witness, voyeur and detective. This room potentially offers the key to understanding everything encountered elsewhere within the organisation, making sense of the shredded documents, ripped books, black holes and the mysterious research lab lined with acoustic tiles. However, while a range of seemingly important clues are provided in this room, these ultimately fail to explain the nature and function of **SECURE CONTENT**. The black holes on the computer monitor are different from the ones being reassembled on the walls of the room, which in turn don't exactly match the projected images of black holes in the meeting room. It is not possible to determine whether the large white bags of shredded documents are in the process of construction or destruction. The surveillance monitors reveal activity in different spaces within the institution, including the reception area and Room 715. A flatbed recorder is operating, producing a continuous roll of graph-like data that resembles the EEG readings observed in the research office. A wave generator shows the activity of small intense green dots and wave-like forms. None of this information actually makes clear sense, nevertheless, relationships do exist between some of the data and the viewer may be tempted to revisit the other spaces on the off-chance that a piece of vital evidence may have been missed. The room thus evokes the idea of continued searching and enquiry despite the absence of meaning and ultimate order. It indicates that
closure is not possible and that meaning is not derived from finding answers, but from the process of continuous re-assessment of a situation. This room is thus not the final room in the submitted work, even though it was the last to be created. It is just another link in the network of possible narratives within the organisational structure of SECURE CONTENT. It reinforces the idea that meaning is a network of incompleteness. In addition, the observation mirror that reflects movement both in and out of the room, not only makes reference to the idea of surveillance, but more importantly emphasises the idea that there is no central core to the network of power that operates within this institution. Everyone - be they subject, visitor, witness or voyeur - is part of that network. And, because there is no central hub of power, a degree of tension similar to that evoked in Rooms 714 and 715, is also created. Perhaps one should not be in this space.

The realisation of the sorting and surveillance room is significantly indebted to the image of the puzzlers who painstakingly piece together shredded documents and other records in Funder's Stasiland. While their task is ultimately an impossible one, they persist in attempting to reconstruct the untold stories of the lives of thousands of people who need those narratives in order to gain some sense of meaning and wholeness. The reconstruction of the black holes makes direct reference to the obsessive dedication of the puzzlers. However, while the puzzlers may end up with fragments of information about someone's life, the black holes remain mysteriously indecipherable.

The sorting and surveillance room went through a process of resolution similar to that of the storeroom. Early versions had attempted to incorporate many more materials and references, including stacked boxes, ripped books, archival files, list of names and book titles and other information based paraphernalia. However, as with the storeroom, paring down these materials
resulted in a more intense yet ambiguous atmosphere. As I removed boxes and files from the space in which I trialed the work, reaching a stage where the reconstructed images of black holes and recording equipment dominated the space, the room became more, rather than less interesting. This reductive approach, which intensifies relationships with specific materials and ideas, has been used to resolve many of the works within the submission. It is a strategy used to great effect by Boltanski, Hamilton and Gillick.

**Summary of phase three**

Phase three of the project was thus dominated by the creation of a series of installations that essentially evolved from rooms 714 and 715. The process of developing these other rooms was not straightforward and a number of projects were rejected. I had developed plans for a library from which viewers could borrow books; a wall-sized digital projection of the titles of all the ripped books used in the storeroom; a lab in which viewers could listen to instructions on a CD and carry out an automatic writing exercise, a projection of video segments from the 1920s Boris Karloff movie, *The man who changed his mind*, in which a monkey undergoes a brain swapping experiment, and a video of a monkey running in circles inside a small cage. The monkey videos were rejected because they introduced new concepts about language and experimentation that extended too far beyond the parameters of the research. The other work failed to develop beyond the conceptual stage because it was superseded by the projects centred around shredded documents, which more powerfully evoked connections with the type of language and information featured in 1970s technology.

19 However, the monkey videos will be used in new work that will be developed as a result of the research.
rooms 714 and 715. My aim was to develop work that extended ideas about language and subjectivity as suggested within rooms 714 and 715, without digressing too far from the central concerns of the project. The final stage of working thus focussed on establishing interconnectedness and homogeneity while simultaneously introducing enough diversity to evoke the idea of a paradox, challenge and mystery.

An unexpected outcome of phase three was the extent to which issues about surveillance were being evoked by the new work I was producing. This was not consciously planned at first. Rooms 714 and 715 were essentially about the process of self-observation but they also suggested observation by an unseen source, producing an underlying sense of tension. I was drawn to this tension because it created a more challenging experience for the viewer as well as extending the idea that we are complicit in the systems that govern our lives. I thus decided to include direct references to surveillance in new work I was making as a means of emphasizing an atmosphere of unease and uncertainty.

All of the installations that constitute the submitted work form a network of inter-related scenarios. Each scenario implies a relationship with another through the use of recurring visual motifs and materials, and yet those relationships can never be clearly defined because they remain uncertain and questionable. The materials used to create the scenarios reference different types of knowledge and information that are conveyed through different types of language. There is the language of the official document, the language of the book and the archive, the mysterious language of black holes and the languages associated with other types of information such as EEG data and personal records. By creating a network of maze-like scenarios that are based around the collection, sorting, destruction and reconstruction of these languages, the viewer is lured into an environment that may challenge and disrupt
their existing ideas about language and knowledge. The viewer's experience is characterised by a range of shifting roles in which he or she often becomes the subject of the work or is implicated in the observation and investigation of absent individuals. This results in a state of confusion and uncertainty that evokes the idea of a fragmented subject in a state of limbo. And yet the clues provided in each of the scenarios compel this uneasy subject to search for meaning and wholeness despite their seeming absence within the environment in which they find themselves. Ultimately, the only solution is to keep reinventing narratives that might explain the nature and function of the system that promises SECURE CONTENT. Meaning is thus a continuous network of incompleteness.

Figure 50: Are you thinking what I'm thinking? (Directional sign), 2001
PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

This project began with the basic premise that our relationship to language is paradoxical because language does not mirror reality. During the research process, this concept of contemporary subjectivity expanded into a highly complex and multi-layered picture that depicts a subject both constructed and fragmented through a network of language games and power relations. This subject is burdened by the weight and legacy of an uncertain past and is unable to rely on knowledge or truth, which are innately contingent and elusive. Our relationship to language and knowledge is thus underpinned by paradox and anxiety - and yet it is also characterised by lure, mystery and challenge. We are subjects in limbo, caught somewhere between a humanist yearning for wholeness and a post-modern fear of meaninglessness and loss of self. We are shaped and restricted by discourses and institutions that, far from being disconnected from us, are constructions of our own making. In order to understand ourselves, we are driven to investigate how those structures operate. We are compelled to find meaning and order despite their seeming absence, driven by the desire to understand the story of how the self has come to be. The organisation that promises SECURE CONTENT offers a range of possible narratives that contribute to that understanding.

The installations that make up the submitted work have adopted elements from Nicolas Bourriaud's theories of postproduction and relational aesthetics in tandem with early conceptual art's aesthetic of administration. The 'cool', objective aesthetic associated with hardline conceptualism, which was used to demonstrate that language could be art and art could be language, tended to ignore subjective content and experience. This project has borrowed elements from that aesthetic with the specific intention of engaging viewers physically and psychologically in such a way that their
ideas about language and knowledge may be challenged and disrupted. Postproduction, which is based on the re-use of existing and familiar materials, ideas, forms and cultural signs, has enabled the construction of scenarios in which the viewer is invited to develop new narratives about language, knowledge and subjectivity. Strategies associated with relational aesthetics have enabled the viewer to form new relationships with those materials and ideas. This submission includes materials that are familiar and have been used by other artists, including books, documents, storage boxes, office furniture, computers, and surveillance equipment. While the materials themselves are not new, they have been 'postproduced' using strategies such as the maze, the multiple form and destruction, to create a new visual language about the cultural construction of subjectivity. The result is a series of interconnected installations that emphasise a physical, psychological and intellectual engagement with ideas about language and knowledge. The experience of interacting with the work thus plays a more significant role than the contemplation of the objects and materials that constitute the work.

The project has also contributed to the field through the particular way in which it has developed its picture of the contemporary subject's relationship to language. This was achieved through an engagement with literature, post-structural theory and elements of personal experience. The fictional work of Paul Auster, Richard Flanagan, Franz Kafka, George Orwell and John Banville has evoked powerful imagery that not only parallels many principles of post-structural theory, but has also informed the realisation of many of the installations included in the submitted work. Literature has provided a means for articulating and making real many of the philosophical ideas important to the research.

By melding imagery from literature with ideas that have principally been derived from Foucault and Rorty, the project has identified four key features of the relationships between language, knowledge
and subjectivity: language does not mirror reality, the subject is fragmented and in limbo, the subject is complicit and compelled to search for meaning, and meaning is a network of incompleteness. As with the materials used to create the installations, these ideas are not new, but the particular way in which they have been explored within the submitted work has created a new visual language that contributes to our understanding of the relationships between language, knowledge and subjectivity. This new visual language represents the familiar in order to create new narratives about language and self.

The key concept that language does not mirror reality has been realised through the use of objects and materials associated with different types of languages that both promise and deny access to their meaning. A booth in the foyer of the gallery invites a public exchange but denies it; shredded documents and ripped up books clearly contain cultural knowledge and other information that has been purposefully made inaccessible, and images of various types of black holes imply secret information but remain indecipherable. To further confuse the viewer, these references to different types of languages have been presented to suggest interrelationships; however, those interrelationships are never clarified. The inherently paradoxical nature of our relationship to language is thus demonstrated.

That the subject is fragmented and in limbo has been predominantly evoked through the viewer and the way in which he or she interacts with the submitted work. All of the installations create scenarios that invite the viewer to play a range of constantly shifting roles. Most often, the viewer is the subject of those scenarios and thus the subject of the organisation that promises SECURE CONTENT. Navigating through the maze-like arrangement of rooms, he or she is exposed to situations that evoke a range of experiences. The reception area invites curiosity and establishes an atmosphere of
unease; the trolley creates a physical obstacle that demands a degree of initiative to move beyond it, and the shredding room invites a sense of play that is rudely disrupted by the unexpected shock of a shredder turning on. The meeting room invites voyeurism; the storeroom, curiosity and confusion. Rooms 714, 715 and the sorting and surveillance rooms arouse tension about being watched but also invite participation in the process of watching. Because every scenario is different and the viewer's role is never certain, an overall atmosphere of tension and anxiety results, evoking the idea of a fragmented subject in a state of limbo. The idea of fragmented subjectivity is also reinforced on a metaphorical level through the deconstructed books and shredded documents, the jerky moving image of the woman in the EEG cap, the intermittent sounds that emanate from the booth, and the decentred and impenetrable maze within the storeroom.

The subject's complicity in the systems that govern our lives, and the compulsion to search for meaning is again re-inforced principally through viewers' interaction with the work. As soon as viewers pass from the reception area into the spaces beyond, they become participating subjects, searching for meaning within the organisation that promises **SECURE CONTENT**. The complicit nature of this participation is particularly evident in room 715, where the viewers are invited to riffle through the filing cabinet; also outside the meeting room where they have to make a conscious effort to peer through a window to see what is going on; and within the sorting room, where they watch the activities of others on surveillance monitors. The search for meaning is evoked through the recurrent use of multiple materials and images that imply connections between each other but are never explained. Thus the different types of black holes suggest they are part of one language, yet that language never makes clear sense, and a relationship between readable files, shredded documents and a list of names is implied but never clarified. The work thus encourages searching and
enquiry as viewers attempt to piece together the relationships between scenarios and materials that seemingly provide evidence of an overall narrative.

The idea that meaning is a network of incompleteness is implicit in the overall experience of interacting with the work. The viewer is lured to revisit different rooms in order to reassess clues that may explain the nature and function of the organisation that promises SECURE CONTENT. However, no matter how many times the viewer revisits and reassesses the information and evidence on offer, it is not possible to establish a secure sense of meaning and purpose. The relationships between the language of black holes, the language of shredded documents and ripped books, and the language of listed names and files, are contingent and tenuous. Nevertheless, the scenarios encourage the invention of individual narratives that may offer possible explanations for what is going on. SECURE CONTENT thus becomes a network of endless possibilities for devising new stories about our relationship to language and knowledge. There is no closure, only the continual process of re-experiencing and redescribing the fragmented narratives suggested within the work.

Through the process of resolving the project, the complexities that characterise our relationship to language and knowledge have become increasingly evident. The shift in the research, from a focus on language essentially associated with academia, high culture and history, to the broader language of institutionalisation, has led to a new interest in bureaucracy and surveillance as themes for future work. Other issues, such as the relationship between man, animal and language, have also emerged, providing further new directions that were not anticipated at the outset of the project. In addition, the opportunity to distil ideas that have emerged from the submission into different configurations is an exciting one. Rather than
providing closure, the research has opened pathways for further investigation.

The project has not come to a neat conclusion. Just as language and knowledge are constantly evolving and changing, so too, is their impact on our sense of self. Our understanding of the relationships between language, knowledge and subjectivity is an ongoing process - this project is thus one possible resolution in a constantly evolving series of narratives.