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A line made by walking and assembling bits and pieces of the bodywork of illegally dumped cars found at the edge of roads and tracks in the Illawarra escarpment (Curating Cities Database)

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Abstract

To reflect on the Illawarra culture of dumping rubbish in the local escarpment bush.

To reflect on the limited capacity of art to effectively intervene in the culture of dumping – perhaps only through doubling and complicity is anything possible?

To remediate Land Art traditions by intervening not in nature itself, but in a layer of impure addition and by deliberately avoiding the grand scale of 60's US Land Art. The work also plays homage to the cutting works of Gordon Matta-Clark

Keywords

cars, found, edge, dumped, roads, tracks, escarpment, assembling, walking, made, line, bits, pieces, illegally, bodywork, illawarra

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A LINE MADE BY WALKING AND ASSEMBLING BITS AND PIECES OF THE BODYWORK OF ILLEGALLY DUMPED CARS FOUND AT THE EDGE OF ROADS AND TRACKS IN THE ILLAWARRA ESCARPMENT - Brogan Bunt



Project: A Line Made By Walking and Assembling Bits and Pieces of the Bodywork of Illegally Dumped Cars Found at the Edge of Roads and Tracks in the Illawarra Escarpment, 2013. Illawarra escarpment, Sydney, Australia. Photo courtesy of the artist.

A series of walks are made up into the Illawarra escarpment to remove sections of illegally dumped cars with a battery-powered angle-grinder. The work represents a minimal intervention in a profoundly impure environmental space. It draws together aspects of action, documentation and written reflection to consider the complex relation of art to a particular, compromised 'natural' landscape. Each walk follows a similar pattern of going up to a known dumping site, cutting a square section from a car, documenting the event in photographs, carrying the cut out piece back as a sample and then writing a narrative account of the overall walk for the project blog. The final exhibited work was composed of the car pieces, before and after photographs, a hand drawn map and a stack of free printed copies of the project blog.

Here is the introduction to the project from the printed version of the blog posts:

I live in Wollongong at the base of Mt Keira and at the edge of the Illawarra escarpment bush. At the top of my driveway, looking southeast, I can see the Port Kembla steelworks just a few kilometers away, spewing smoke and flames. But turn the other way, towards the west, and I'm facing thick green temperate rainforest. This hardly, however, constitutes a pure contrast between nature and human industry. The escarpment bush is no pristine wilderness. It was extensively logged a century ago and is now full of feral deer, rampant weeds and all manner of gently and brutally inscribed human traces. Despite this, the escarpment retains a strange resilience. It always strikes me as wonderful that I can head out my door and be immersed in this steep, green and leechy space for hours at a time without encountering anything that remotely resembles a suburban street. This project is an excuse to make something more of this experience, to explore its potential relation to dimensions of artistic practice.

My specific focus is in pursuing a minor sculptural intervention, or at least in performing a specific sculptural act—cutting pieces out of illegally dumped cars.

There are many illegal dumping sites up in the escarpment bush. I have never known quite how to react to them. When I first encountered them I could scarcely believe that people could

Funders / Commissioners: Artist funded

Cost: \$450 – battery-powered angle grinder, blades and sundries

Location Details: Work produced in Illawarra escarpment (near Mt Keira, Wollongong, NSW). Work exhibited at Articulate Gallery, Sydney.

Date of Delivery: Included as part of The Situated Line (Michele Eliot, Jo Law, Boni Cairncross, Ruth Hadlow, Brogan Bunt), Articulate Gallery 22 April – 12 May 2013.

Medium: Sculpture, photography, drawing, blog-posts/booklet

Dimensions / Technical Specs: 7 walks into the Illawarra escarpment 7 X 45X45cm samples of illegally dumped car bodies arranged in a line 7 photographic collages of the cutting event in which samples were removed 1 drawing of the overall map of illegally dumped car sites Pile of booklets of the blog-post documenting the various walks into the Illawarra escarpment

Funding Sources: Individual

Themes: Waste, Recycling, Consumption

have such a careless disregard for their local environment. I can understand litter and general trash, but whole cars rolled over the edge of steep slopes, often alight, to raze long slides of bush and form distant rusty heaps seems to indicate something more—not just disregard, but a kind of hatred for this green space, for everything that it represents. It is as though the children of people who used to work in the steel works, who have no hope of working in the steel works themselves, are perversely determined to fashion the surrounding bush in terms of their own unobtainable future.

Author: Brogan Bunt

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In doing this, however, they unwittingly manifest something else, something contrary to any initial violence. Once the wrecked vehicles come to rest in the bush, once the flames have abated and darkness returns, the cars begin to drift away from whatever they initially represented. They discover a relation to the forest. They become—however disturbingly—a new part of it.

AIMS

Cultural

To reflect on the Illawarra culture of dumping rubbish in the local escarpment bush.

To reflect on the limited capacity of art to effectively intervene in the culture of dumping – perhaps only through doubling and complicity is anything possible?

To remediate Land Art traditions by intervening not in nature itself, but in a layer of impure addition and by deliberately avoiding the grand scale of 60's US Land Art. The work also plays homage to the cutting works of Gordon Matta-Clark.

Social

The social concerns of the project speak to the complexity of artistic intervention in social and environmental issues. Rather than very directly making gestures of social critique there is often the need to adopt devious and compromised means in order to demonstrate strands of ambivalence and complicity.

Environmental

The work also considers how the dumped cars become absorbed into the escarpment forest—become habitat for animals, become sites for weed growth. But not in any scientifically rigorous way, rather to question narrowly aesthetic responses.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

Cultural/Social

I delivered an artist's talk about the project during its exhibition at Articulate Gallery, which attracted a good crowd. I also spoke about the project at an Aotearoa Digital Arts "Networking" masterclass run by visiting artists Simon Pope and Julian Priest in Auckland, New Zealand (Auckland University of Technology, 3 April 2013). Finally, I organised a walk that visited most of the illegally dumped car sites that I dealt with in the project (11 April 2013). Simon Pope and Julian Priest participated in this latter event. Like myself they have a particular interest in remediating aspects of digital culture (for instance the notion of a network) via lived, experiential forms (in this case, walking). The event had a profile, then, within the context of the local and New Zealand arts scene. Since then, I have presented papers about the project at the 19th International Symposium of Electronic Art (Sydney, 17-16 June 2013) and most recently at the 5th International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology: RENEW (Riga, Latvia, 8-11 October 2013). This has led to further dialogue with network artist Julian Priest, discussion with Scottish locative media artist, Beverley Hood (http://www.abruptcounters.com/?page_id=1201), as well as invitations to participate in relevant artistic residency/workshops (in Puerto Rico and Norway).

I would say that it was mainly in terms of promoting reflection and debate that the project has proved valuable. I still have people reading the on-line version of the blog-entries and I have engaged in many discussions with people about their experience of encountering dumped cars in the local environment. The key issues concern how to respond to this dumping and its implications for how we engage with and value the local bush. A broader issue, which I have pursued in the international conferences listed above (ISEA and RENEW), concerns how strands of contemporary media practice have come to involve dimensions of direct environmental interaction. In this respect, the project has provided a provocative model for rethinking the possibilities of media art beyond narrowly technological conceptions. I make this argument in the two relevant conference papers, "Intimate Disavowal: Turning Away from Technological Media Art" (ISEA) and "Walking as Mediation: Experiments in Non-Technological Media Art" (RENEW).

PROJECT DELIVERY

The organized walk and the booklet of blog entries proved very successful in terms of prompting reflection and discussion. The gallery installation probably needed more thought. Gallery visitors tended to regard the cut out pieces of cars and the photographs as found art objects, rather than as samples documenting a process and a particular environmental situation. I addressed this issue in my gallery talk and there were useful suggestions made in terms of possibly simplifying aspects of the installation. But there was also recognition that the work had value as a provocation, questioning the relationship between dimensions of action, documentation, writing, sculptural assemblage and drawing. It may be that a certain medial complexity and awkwardness to the work was necessary in order to open up new possibilities for environmental art practice.

I should note that the project takes most coherent form in the set of associated blog entries. This blog was not primarily intended as an interface for public dialogue. It was instead conceived as publicly accessible project journal. I have had a good feedback about the blog from a range of artists and academic

colleagues, but very few people wrote specific comments within the blog itself. Comments were never directly solicited and most readers have tended to encounter the blog only once the project itself was complete.

I am interested in re-exhibiting the work in Wollongong, where the issue has considerable local currency.

IMPACT OF ARTWORK PRODUCTION

I took reasonable care not to damage local wildlife or plants. My aim was to demonstrate a private custodial relationship to the local environment—an attitude of care that does not pass through official channels. In saying this, however, I should note that the abandoned cars are known habitat for a variety of animals. Removing small sections of the cars may have compromised some aspect of this habitat, but only in a minor manner. Walking, of course, necessarily affects the environment, but again in a minimal manner. I suspect that the greatest environmental impact was in the exhibition of the work – the printing, travel, lighting, etc.

SOURCES

Brogan Bunt. Brogan Bunt. <http://www.broganbunt.net/?p=2045> (accessed September 13, 2013).

Brogan Bunt "Intimate Disavowal: Turning Away from Technological Media Art" Cleland, K., Fisher, L. & Harley, R. (2013) Proceedings of the 19th International Symposium on Electronic Art, ISEA2013, Sydney. <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/9716>

Brogan Bunt "Walking as Mediation: Experiments in Non-Technological Media Art", Media Art Histories 2013: RENEW conference, Riga, Latvia, 8-11 October 2013

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