Toby Huddleston

Interruption: Again

Curator
David Cross

**Wk 1** 24 September, *Interruption: Radio*, 10am - 12pm, all FM radio stations in the Hobart CBD.

**Wk 2** 1 October, *Interruption: Post*, mass mail out throughout Hobart CBD.


**Wk 4** 15 October, *Interruption: TV*, 6pm - 7pm, selected television channels: ABC, SBS, WIN Television and Southern Cross Television.

Curatorial Statement
David Cross

Toby Huddlestone sought to tackle the premise and location of *Iteration:Again* remotely with a series of carefully staged media interruptions. His four components focused on different modes of information dissemination across radio, television, newspaper and post. Each week, the artist advertised that he would conduct or more accurately stage, a strategic insertion of specified information into each of these popular media or modes of communication across the whole of the island. Huddlestone was especially interested in employing information/entertainment modes that while globally ubiquitous had specific and particular local resonances particular to Tasmania.

Beginning with radio, Huddlestone let it be known that between the hours of 10am and 12pm on Saturday September 24, he would insert the first 22 seconds of Serge Gainsbourg’s paen to love, ‘Je t’aime’ into every commercial and public radio broadcast across Tasmania. Deliberately not specifying the precise time of the broadcast, the audience were forced to choose a station and be at the ready for Gainsbourg’s languid, breathless musical intro to suddenly start up. Changing stations was not an option as the risk of missing the interruption was too great. That many people missed the interruption, together with the astonishing logistical complexity of the premise, created in the minds of the audience a sense of uncertainty that the ruptures actually took place. The artist responded to this suspicion with his own convincing *touché* by providing as evidence a range of different taped recordings through speakers at the *Iteration:Again* Hub at CAST.

In the weeks that followed, Huddlestone set in train equally outlandish acts of media intervention asking the audience to find different needles in the veritable haystack. From eight-centimetre lines printed somewhere in the Saturday newspapers, to four frames of the SMPTE colour bar briefly interrupting prime-time viewing on all the television stations in the state, Huddlestone conjured the slightly alarming personae of a British conceptual artist with Rupert Murdoch-like Australian media reach.

By asking the audience to accept his game of searching for the rupture, the artist established a clever exchange whereby the constant potential of success was countered by the sheer weight of information that had to be patiently dissected over significant periods of time. Where a newspaper might be scanned and flicked through, Huddlestone asked for forensic examination. Where the television might be on in the background, he urged an unheard of and optically painful scanning of the screen for an hour. And where he promised that 2000 people would receive postcards in their letterboxes, local residents were forced to sit it out for that day’s mail just in case they were one of the lucky ones.

Although clearly an irreverent and audacious assortment of actions, *Iteration:Again* challenged us to consider the reach, scope and materiality of public art and how it might be possible to draw audiences into a complex and critical engagement with popular sources of information.
Critical Response
Bryony Nainby

Forgettable Encounters I’ll Always Remember
I knew I would need to keep my wits about me when I was assigned Toby Huddlestone as the artist I was to respond to during *Iteration:Again*. He was notoriously slippery. His previous projects had included placing barely noticeable obstacles on footpaths that people occasionally tripped over, and bumping into passers-by on crowded streets, jolting them into an awareness of others in a relational stealth-attack. In *Protest Apathy* (2009), Huddlestone staged ‘an apathetic demonstration’ in Trafalgar Square, London in which participants waved limp placards bearing statements such as ‘It’s All Fine’ and ‘Carry On’.

In each project his prankster tactics and arsenal of humour and irony were unerringly deployed to create scenarios where audiences were forced into an encounter with that which they normally would barely notice – their immediate social, cultural and political surroundings. It was slightly unnerving.

**Interruption:Radio**
Between the hours of 10:00 and 12:00 on Saturday 24 September 2011, the first 22 seconds of Serge Gainsbourg’s ‘Je t’aime’, will be played across all radio stations within the FM bandwidth in the Hobart CBD area, Tasmania.

Despite loathing commercial radio, for art I was willing to endure two hours of aural discomfort. After all, the artist was promising a love song. Determined not to miss this steamy encounter I scribbled down every ad, every inane voice-over, every trashy hit …

Like a Duchampian pawn, I waited to be moved.


... *HOFM home of variety one-hit wonders weekend presented by euphoria furniture. Love plus one haircut 100. Think fresh think tasty think national pies great oozy pies. Cheap cheap cars at tilford trade clearance centre. Better sport a better way to bet on sport drop into your local tote. Ready to go panic at the disco. HOFM hobart’s home of variety another one hit wonder. Born to be alive patrick hernandez.*

By 11am I was feeling desperate. It was an impenetrable fortress of commercial social engineering. Could Huddlestone’s 22 seconds of love in a foreign language somehow cut through?
One-hit wonder sale euphoria furniture. Garden supplies tolosa quarry tolosa street. Better sport from the tote a better way to bet on the footy. Yes yes yes luxury seven seat suv big savings performance autos. Coogans famous no deposit terms. Good sports fishing tackle toys bridges brothers. Savage garden I want you. HOFM price breakthrough panasonic limit one per customer …

The first time I sat through a performance of John Cage’s ‘4’33”’ the experience of observing time passing was profound. Consciously attentive of every passing car, footsteps in the corridor, the distant strains of sudden laughter, each moment was rich with the sound of human existence. This was not like that.

This was a portrait in sound of a world bloated by consumption and informed by sensationalist, commercially driven headlines, where people who just wanted to enjoy the footy were being persistently encouraged to gamble on the outcome while watching the game on a new 60-inch plasma screen, no deposit required. A portrait of a world without silence, without reflection and heading for bankruptcy.

Later, at the Iteration:Again Hub, I found recordings provided by the artist as proof that several radio stations had in fact played a fragment of ‘Je t’aime’. HOFM was not among them. But was this a clever post-production con? Did any of the stations actually participate? Or had Huddlestone falsely promised an encounter with art in one expected form, only to substitute it with another which could only be properly experienced in a state of expectant misapprehension? No one else seemed to have heard it, and the artist, all smiles and clearly amused, wasn’t giving anything away.

** Interruption:Post **

On Saturday 1 October 2011, 2000 postcards will be hand-delivered to residential addresses within a four-kilometre radius from the political centre of Hobart, Tasmania.

The artist’s next intervention involved a junk mail strategy, dispersing his postcards in letterboxes along with the glossy catalogues, community newsletters, lost pet notices and Hobart City Council election leaflets. I luckily lived in the designated zone, but no postcard arrived. Had my street been missed? Had he delivered them to anyone?

The next day at the Iteration:Again Hub the postcards, along with photographs of the artist placing them in letterboxes, were on display. They were white with his four proposed Interruptions printed in plain black text. For some time this was my only experience of the work, and it relied on knowledge accessible only through the documentation provided by the artist. But instead of acting as proof, the photographs emphasised Huddlestone’s action as unverifiable. Should we believe
the artist’s claims? Unless we witness the action ourselves (as I later discovered others had), we can only believe that Huddlestone undertook this activity because he tells us so. And we know that he is sometimes unreliable.

In engaging with Huddlestone’s work it is impossible to ignore his conceptual predecessors. Vito Acconci’s Following Piece (1969) presents a similar public/private performance for which the only evidence is ephemeral documentation, and in thinking about Huddlestone’s work the first question which arises is, ‘In what way is this work contemporary?’ Is it merely a derivative re-working of an old idea, or perhaps a deliberate homage to his conceptual art heroes from the 60s and 70s? A deconstruction of what artists do? A cynical satire of the contemporary art world?

Perhaps it’s just advertising, nothing more than the artist’s shameless self-promotion. Or maybe it was a discrete co-opting of this border zone between public and private as political space. If so, in my neighbourhood several mayoral candidates beat him to it. In the end I was left asking, ‘What is it that Huddlestone really delivers?’

**Interruption:Newspaper**

On Saturday 8 October 2011, an eight-centimetre line will be printed horizontally at random in *The Mercury, The Examiner, The Advocate*, and *The Cygnet and Channel Classifieds* newspapers, Tasmania.

Huddlestone’s postcards set me on a journey to revisit conceptual art’s finest moments. Among other seminal texts I read Sol LeWitt’s ‘Sentences on Conceptual Art’, and for this iteration by Huddlestone Sentence 33 seemed particularly apt: *It is difficult to bungle a good idea*. Like LeWitt, Huddlestone understands the power of a line to make us aware of space. For Interruption:Newspaper, the artist organised a line to be printed according to prescribed conditions in Tasmanian newspapers. Positioned centrally on page seven of *The Mercury*, Huddlestone’s line didn’t jostle for attention among the strident advertisements, shrill headlines and narrative-laden photography. It was still, perfect, eloquent in its silence. Surrounded by a slim border of white, it commanded the entire page.

I was reminded of the Futurists who printed their Manifesto on the front page of the French newspaper, *Le Figaro*, in 1909. Was this line a representation of Huddlestone’s own manifesto? Is he perhaps some kind of anti-Marinetti, proselytising principles of calm and consideration, order and linearity?

LeWitt’s method for his line drawings was to devise a set of instructions, such as ‘50 randomly placed points all connected by straight lines’ (Wall Drawing No.118), which could be implemented by assistants, or in fact by anyone. His approach
Skirl of bagpipes heralds MONA FOMA

EMMA HOPE

THE annual MONA FOMA festival was launched in Glenorchy yesterday with a band featuring bagpipes and drums parading through the shopping centre.

Earlier this week the festival had a glamorous launch underneath the Sydney Harbour Bridge, but yesterday curator Brian Ritchie donned fluro green Dr Martens boots and a kilt to lead the band playing guitar while Northgate shoppers looked on in bewilderment.

"The idea was to make a lot of noise, get a grin on people's faces and let the people out here in Glenorchy know that MONA FOMA is afoot again and coming at them in January whether or not they want it," Ritchie said.

"One of the sub-themes this year is bagpipes. At several different times during the festival in different, non-traditional formats we have bagpipe players."

MONA FOMA runs from January 13-22 with events every day at Princes Wharf No. 1 Shed as well as City Hall, Theatre Royal and a range of other venues.

British superstar indie rocker PJ Harvey headlines the festival with a concert on January 21.

For bookings, go to www.mofo.net.au hopee@news.net.au

Hodgman protests

ZARA DAWTREY

GREENS leader Nick McKim should "rein in" anti-logging protesters planning to rally outside Hobart's Harvey Norman store today, Liberal leader Will Hodgman said yesterday.

Protesters will target the retailer as part of an international campaign against the use of Australian timber.

Mr Hodgman said activists had previously damaged Harvey Norman stores and disrupted business in a way that was "anything but peaceful".

"Rather than being attacked, Harvey Norman should be supported for selling furniture made from sustainably harvested Tasmanian native forest timber, creating jobs for Tasmanians," Mr
attempted to remove subjectivity from the thought processes of art-making, but in carrying out his instructions the expression of individuality through the handmade mark returned.

In his art practice Huddlestone explores an awareness of our surroundings and the power of mediums of communication. In *Interruption:Newspaper* the artist seemed to adopt LeWitt’s approach by providing instructions regarding the printing of the line to several newspapers, entrusting the work’s execution to the layout department. The power of the piece comes precisely from this handing over of the creation of the mark to others. Regardless of where the line appears Huddlestone knows it will create a clear break in the relentless transmission of media messages. His simple line creates a space of consciousness that brings its surroundings into sharp relief. Among the entertainment, the petty political machinations, the births and deaths and public notices, the systems of trade and commerce, it acts as pointer to the communication mechanisms which mediate our engagement with the world. Huddlestone’s line points to itself, then its surroundings, and ultimately at us.

**Interruption:TV**

Between the hours of 18:00 and 19:00 on 15 October 2011, the SMPTE colour bar and tone will be transmitted for four frames simultaneously across ABC, SBS, WIN TV and Southern Cross television stations, Tasmania.

Unsurprisingly, I missed Huddlestone’s television interruption. Despite my scepticism, I diligently sat through an hour of ABC TV which included a travel show in which the presenter tried rotten herrings and other Scandinavian delicacies, and a no-nonsense gardening show. At a broadcast rate of 25 frames per second, seeing four frames of a test pattern was always going to be a challenge. Perhaps I looked away at the wrong moment, perhaps I blinked, perhaps my vision just isn’t that acute.

Perhaps what happened instead is that Huddlestone offered one thing, but delivered something else to those who were looking for it. In a conversation following *Iteration:Again*, someone spoke about Huddelstone’s work as attempting to ‘go beyond the aura’ of art. He offers a prospect, a possibility, but the work is only realised through its reception by those willing to participate in his conceptual game.

For those who chose to play along, his Interruptions created memorable encounters with the forgettable detritus of our everyday lives by magnifying our awareness for brief concentrated periods. His conceptual tactics might echo those of the past, but his mobilisation of them in our contemporary context provokes us to reflect on our current situation in fresh and surprising ways.