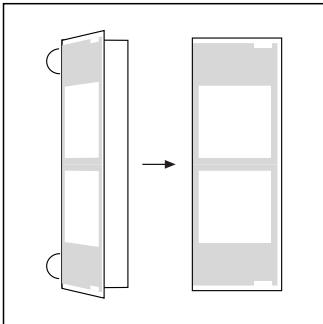
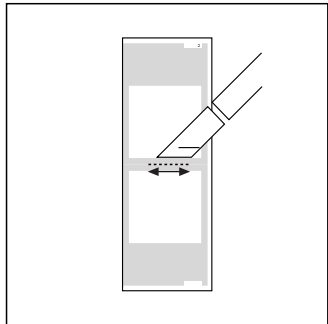


Construction

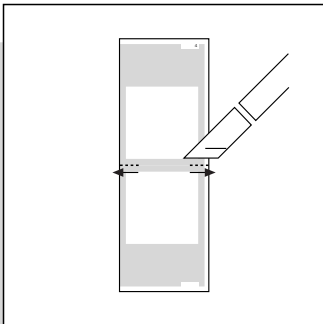
1:



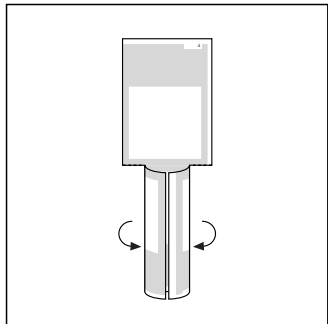
2:



3:



4:



1: First, fold each A4 sheet in half along the vertical axis.

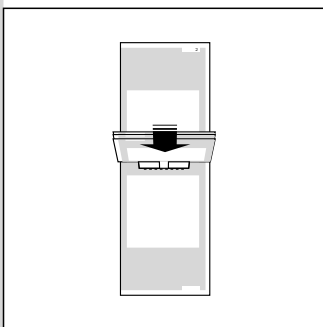
2: Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first A4 sheet. (pages 1/2/11/12)

3: Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.

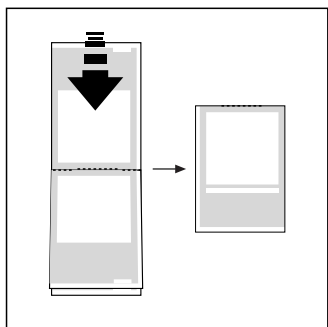
4: Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second A4 page (pages 3/4/19/20).

5: Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first A4 page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/17/18), fourth (pages 7/8/15/16), fifth A4 sheet (pages 9/10/13/14) with the even pages in ascending order.

5:



6:



6: When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.

In an unpublished piece¹⁸, primarily on Wittgenstein's *On Certainty & Culture and Value*, I noted that there is no doubt a single gesture which instigates the existence of a circle sketched upon on a page. That is, if we imagine a circle roughly sketched upon a piece of paper, whilst that first point of contact between pencil and paper may not be distinctive or perceivable, its invisibility cannot negate its logical & structural necessity. That invisible co-ordinate is essential, it is both beginning and end. In this process, the centre of the circle occupies a wholly immaterial position, thought of & considered, yet unmarked, only indicated as an imaginable, as invisible. It is conceivable only through consideration of its relation to the sketched circumference. How would the mediation of technology affect this procedure? We would give a computer the co-ordinate of the centre, and the measurement of the radius: a circle would then appear onscreen. Here, the beginning of the sketching of the circle – that first mark – remains virtual. The procedure and the relationship has been reversed. I doubt that these transcriptions of thought process and number crunching may be accurate or true: they are however accurate or true portrayals of my thoughts then, many years ago, and now, in an instant of remembrance.

"our reasoning about new experiences should begin with an assumption that these experiences can be explained by the same forces that have explained previous experiences"¹⁹

In this thoughtfulness, an edifice is established which has its fixed sites for the past, the present, and the future. The relation between them acts throughout as the convention of such a thought structure. With regard to the aesthetics & thematic of past and future, memory and anticipation – cf. the Jamesian & pragmatist examination of truth as a designation for a statement or opinion

An artist friend once said to me in Westminster Abbey, "There is no doubt an action which instigates the existence of a circle on a page..."

link. She remained impervious to any response. She herself did not respond to any signals sent to her over the video phone. She herself did not respond to any signals sent to her over the video phone, markedly devoid of significance, which were transmitted over the centre. Tallentire sat at a table in London and performed small anonymous inserted amongst computers and other equipment on display at the visitor's near unmarked in the Telecom centres. In Dublin, the video phone was simply Telecom Eireann centres – in London and Dublin. The piece however remained video phone – to link up two communicative arenas – the British Telecom & richest of contemporary commonly available communications technology. The least marked. The least evident. In *Inscribe I* (1994), Tallentire used the imperitive to lessness, is always – & paradoxically – visible. The least visible. acting as the sign within the signified, is perhaps the foremost exemplar of this ambiguity. The nondescript acts as a pervasive, uneasy aura enveloping much of the multimedia work of Anne Tallentire. Absence, the persistent or rather a radical review of the communicative facility & ability? The nondescript, is an attempt to communicate nothing – aught – an aimless, fruitless task,

"Nothing will come of nothing." *King Lear*

omnious nagging doubt, are the catalysts of the physical threat within Doherty's text, that taut interval resting between the formation of certainty and an either a scene or a person. A nervousness in the analogy between image & required by the viewer to establish a historical, political, & ethnic profile of slide, video & sound based works, Willie Doherty has examined the limits

TOXIN: TRUTH, MULTIMEDIA, & CONCEPTUAL ART

DECLAN SHEEHAN

DIFFUSION



This publication is designed to be freely available to download and print out. Under no circumstances should any version of this publication, whether print or electronic, be sold by any third party without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN: 1 901540 18 9
British Library Cataloguing-in-publication data: a catalogue record for this publication is available at the British Library

Proboscis gratefully acknowledges the support of the Arts Council of England and the CRD Research at the Royal College of Art in making DIFFUSION possible.

DIFFUSION Print design by:
Nima Fatatouri (blutopia@cwcom.net)
Paul Farrington (tonne@scantone.easynet.co.uk)

DIFFUSION Interaction design by:
Noel Douglas

All rights reserved.
First published by Proboscis in 2000.

© Proboscis & Declan Sheehan
Series Editors: Giles Lane & Catherine Williams
www.diffusion.org.uk

Declan Sheehan
TOXIN:TRUTH, MULTIMEDIA, & CONCEPTUAL ART

Something must happen. The viewer at Anne Tallentire's exhibition *Instances* at the Irish Pavilion in the 1999 Venice Biennale encountered a video projection of dawn breaking. An event. Seen first as near absolute darkness, over a period of thirty minutes nothing happens, save for the most monumental (and most spiritually significant) event. Dawn breaks. This is not the magnificent spectacle of a John Hinde postcard of a sunset or sunrise: it is its antithesis, a dull urban nowhere. We view a metal grid fence in the foreground becoming visible as the light rises, and characterless tower blocks dimly visible in the distance throughout the duration of the piece.

What could the following mean of the philosopher William James: "Always prone to depression, he had as a young man reached the very depth of despair when writings by the French philosopher Renouvier persuaded him that he was intellectually entitled to believe in free will. He decided – he described it as his first act of free will – to believe in free will."¹ At the very least, this casts a distinctive light upon our discovery that William James had once intended to be an artist. The self-sustaining nature of such thought behavior – the exercise of a pragmatic, yet nonetheless extra-ordinary logic – brings to mind Christian Boltanski's words in an interview with Stuart Morgan, that he could quite reasonably have been committed at one point if he had not been able to use the justification, "I'm an artist".² There is a cybernetic accent to such thought as James' – a feedback loop, self-generating, self-sustaining, with the ability to evolve and develop characteristic of such innate harmonious disharmony. If the foundation (of what..? of thought itself perhaps..?) persists as wholly self-sustaining – i.e. sustained by the self of the foundation itself – then all experience is immediately framed, its mediations & mediums seen as no more & yet no less than a pattern of inherently beautiful (– ! – but with the efficient beauty of a perpetual machine) Meobius strips.

16. Joan Fowler, *ibid*.
17. Allen Feldman, *ibid*.
18. Declan Sheehan, *Towards an understanding of LW*, unpublished, 1992
19. David A. Hollinger making reference to the thought of W.K. Clifford, James Clifford, and the scientific conscience, in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, *ibid*.
20. Joan Fowler, *ibid*.
21. David A. Hollinger, *ibid*.

"People buy postcards when they are on holiday – and this is virtually the only time they do buy postcards – they buy them to send to their friends. And very often they put a message on the back to the effect that we are having a wonderful time here. There are two factors here: they want to buy a postcard which is so beautiful that it justifies the choice of the place that they decided to go for their holiday. People often make a mistake. They go for a holiday somewhere and realize they made the wrong choice. But they'll never admit that to their friends and they want something to fully support their attitude in going to this place. They have to justify their decision to their friends and, whether it's true or not, they have to tell their friends that they really are enjoying it and isn't it a lovely place as you can see from the picture."³ What

recognition, belief structure & function:
object without function. There is a delicate exchange between mental state, in, in order to act as itself, as a sign. Otherwise it is merely an image, an merely view such objects: a sign, for example, must be used, must be believed such as signs, talismans, icons, rest upon their use value. It is impossible to and printing of colour postcards. The belief structures of magical symbols love. Hinde situated this process within a contemporary industry, the reproduction with the stamp of a form of magic, invested by their creator (the Creator) with of the sublime. Traditional arts & crafts may be said to create signs, objects of a world where all is good, beautiful, wherein each & every view partakes a John Hinde vision acts as a humanistic talisman, a symbol of the mystery postcards.

– the faith of the Butlins holiday camp – as pictured by John Hinde Studios
Our True Intent Is All For Your Delight

NOTES

1. from the Introduction, Ruth Anna Putnam, in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam, Cambridge, 1997
2. Little Christians: a conversation with Christian Boltanski, in *What the Butler Saw: Selected Writings* by Stuart Morgan, Durian Publications Ltd, London, 1996
3. John Hinde quoted in the catalogue, *Hindesight: John Hinde Photographs and Postcards by John Hinde Ltd. 1935-1971*, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 1993
4. David Lee, introduction in *Hindesight*, *ibid.*
5. David Lee, *ibid.*
6. Willie Doherty, *same old story*, eds Katherine Wood/Robin Klassnik/Liam Kelly, Matt's Gallery, London, 1997
7. Religious faith, intellectual responsibility and romance by Richard Rorty, in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, *ibid.*
8. James Coleman, Ulster Museum, Belfast 10 June - 3 July 1982, in *CIRCA* #5, July/August 1982, Dublin
9. Willie Doherty, *zonezero*, <http://zonezero.com/magazine/distant/doherty2.html>
10. Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, University of Chicago Press, 1991
11. *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1994
12. Joan Fowler, *SO DIFFERENT ... AND YET: Language and Theatre in the work of JAMES COLEMAN*, in *CIRCA* #17, July/August 1984, Dublin
13. Richard Rorty, *ibid.*
14. Sean Cubitt, *Abandoned Projects In The Pursuit Of Beauty*, in *Coil* #6, London, 1998
15. David Noble, quoted in *Hindesight*, *ibid.*

b1: certain responses are wrong, & therefore by extension, certain responses are not wrong, THEREFORE

b2: certain responses are right (or a certain response is right).

Establishing the truth value of a conceptual response so clearly, substantially accents the procedure of conceptual response itself. Such correctness or otherwise – the truth value – can, by extension, be recognized as merely an embellishment, an ornamentation added to adorn the procedure itself.

manipulations occur here? None whatsoever. We are merely establishing a view of the world, our knowledge of the world. Colour, perspective, texture, intensity of light & shade are factors which designate & signal a mental state. "And even if the bright colours were not part of the actual photograph, existing colours could be cleaned during the separation stage before printing, or changed completely. Hinde spared no expense in post-production techniques to ensure that the picture conveyed precisely the optimistic mood that he felt people wanted."⁴

Any apparent deception in the quotes above is in fact an attempt to embody and to forward a sense of well-being, a contentment. Simply a mirror of a common memory function.

"Hinde realized that the reality of a view, and the image of that same landscape in a tourist's memory, were not the same. Colours were stronger in the mind's eye and all the best aspects of a location were magically moved into the same picture. Hinde attempted to make his postcards correspond more closely to the image of a place which the tourists might carry away in their heads. He did this by stage-managing the photograph down to the last detail and then intensifying colours and erasing unwanted details during the post-production phase."⁵

Factory (Reconstruction) is a 10 minute video piece from 1995 by the artist Willie Doherty:

"A monitor fades up to a static shot of the devastated interior of a derelict factory. The sound of someone dragging metal is audible from somewhere out of shot. After several minutes a male figure enters from the left. He moves

There is by now, of course a double play on examinations of the perception process within conceptual art: an educated, art aware viewer is inclined to relationship to realize an answer.

claim that those raising a doubt are invoking an ethical trauma or ordeal? We need no more than to think of the negative authority of doubt within the love as aesthetic & epistemological) ordeal. But is this an exaggeration – to of our existence. To provoke such doubt is to invoke a profound ethical (as mere twich in the truth process: it is an acute trauma within the soundness human conventions and social relations. A doubt therefore is not simply a around it, but it does so within the field of vision established for truth within convention/s. Truth itself establishes the human conventions & social relations there is therefore a social dimension to truth, it is mediated within socialized with theirs."⁷

"Our responsibility to truth is not, for (William) James, a responsibility to get things right. Rather, it is a responsibility to ourselves to make our beliefs cohere with one another, and to our fellow human beings to make them cohere knowledge as use value.

order, to construct a schematic, to construct a – the – knowledge of the world, of Vietnam? of Lebanon? of Grozny? – charts the Sisyphus attempt to construct Beyond any personal or geographical specificities, this footage – of Serbia? screen fades. This sequence is repeated continuously."⁶

large pieces of debris and rubble and appears to be attempting to create some sense of order. He continues with this apparently impossible task until he finally moves out of frame. The sound of his efforts is still audible as the

in which the present justifies a past prediction of its own future – we would make reference to the James Coleman's early work *Two Seagulls, or One Seagull Twice* (1973/74).

"(Coleman) had earlier photographed a seagull or seagulls outside the gallery and then projected two sets of slides in two separate rooms of the gallery. this leaves the spectator caught between the two images unable to determine whether the work involves one seagull or two."²⁰

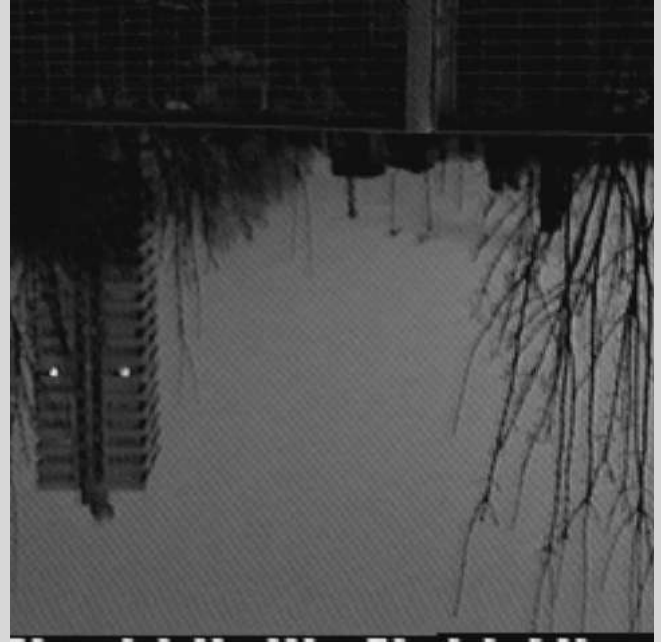
What is an idea in which "we have no right to believe"? W.K. Clifford, the English nineteenth century mathematician who was part of the heritage of ideas which William James used as a foil for his own, noted that a belief in the uniformity of nature, that "nature is absolutely and universally uniform" is such an idea.²¹ Whilst such a belief is apparently sustained within the positivist scientism of Clifford's thesis that "our reasoning about new experiences should begin with an assumption that these experiences can be explained by the same forces that have explained previous experiences"(ibid.), Clifford was in fact careful to avoid such absolutism. What is essential to note here is that there exists dissension over the ideas in which we have a right to believe. The connotations of such a debate are many. There is primarily an acknowledgment of the plurality of ideas, that there exists a spectrum of possible conceptual responses to intellectual & sensory stimuli. To posit any conceptual response to stimuli as wrong instantly infers that there is at least an accompanying right conceptual response. The structure would appear to be as follows: either a: every response is acceptable,

OR

nod knowingly, and think, "ah, the duck/rabbit trick" for example, and to place such an artwork within a well-known art historical, geographical framework. This near instinctual response – the easy recognition of a type of art – however, can itself be played upon as a double and be used to sidestep any defeating sense of over-familiarity. One can develop an awareness, as Barthes noted in a different context, of the stereotype: "It is at once corny and solemn", a reference made in a different context in a review of James Coleman's work by Anne Carlisle.⁸

"These photographs owe nothing to the documentary tradition, They do not propose any evidence of truth. Their open-endedness and contingency implicate the present as much as the past. They exist as objects in another reality from their time of production; the reality of a mediated second hand experience, of fictionalized accounts merging with historical and socio-economic data. Their job is to be there. They occupy space in an uncertain present, a past which is in the process of being denied and a future without history."⁹ Willie Doherty's work is not merely a meditation on narrative function and narrative device: it carries a literal likeness to actual lives lived within Doherty's own environment, the North of Ireland as a region satiated with cautious processes of recognition. In *Formations of Violence*, Allen Feldman transcribes the necessity of the process of telling within the North of Ireland's apparent cultural & political imperative towards sectarian violence:

"Telling is the sensory identification of the ethnic Other through the reception of the body as an ideological text... Telling constructs a conjuncture of clothing, linguistic dialect, facial appearance, corporeal comportment, political religious insignia, generalized spatial movements, and inferred residential linkages... Telling politicizes the senses as historical artifacts..."¹⁰



Each human agent acts as a decoder and encoder of multi-media/ed inscription: text & image, aural and visual signals.

"Tracy, do you think the *Mona Lisa* is really the *Mona Lisa* or simply a pattern of lines and dots that we perceive to be the *Mona Lisa*?"

In Robert R. Riley's essay, *Leave Proof: Media and Public Information*, there is a key to the thematic of James Coleman's whole oeuvre: "The display of pictures as research into thought process and as a record of historical practice..."¹¹ The multimedia within Coleman's work has revolved around the near constant centre of slide photography presented alongside written or spoken or performed texts. Artifice is present within both the inherent instability of language and its referents – when is a statement true? – and within staged or intricately chosen photographic scenes. Human relation and existence is portrayed as an inherently multi-media/ed event, knowledge as the conclusion encounter with the young daughter of a friend (a traveler, cameraman, set designer etc etc etc). Early in the morning, driving along, the young girl poised her head slightly to the side in enquiry mode and asked, in enquiry tone, "Tracy, do you think the *Mona Lisa* is really the *Mona Lisa* or simply a pattern of lines and dots that we perceive to be the *Mona Lisa*?" This bears resemblance to the duck/rabbit illusion made reference to by Wittgenstein, (itself made reference to in Coleman's 1974 piece, *Playback of a Dream*) and as Joan Fowler has pointed out, "To a degree this illusory feature of the ways Western culture understands pictures is the paradigm for all Coleman's work"¹²

"the impulse to draw a sharp line between the cognitive and the noncognitive, and between beliefs and desires, even when this explanation is relevant neither

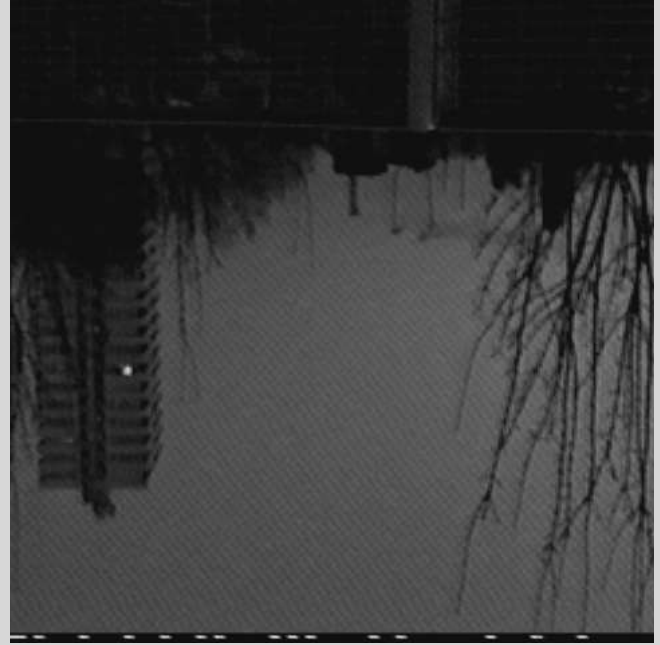


to the explanation nor the justification of behaviour, is a residue of the false (because useless) belief that we should engage in two distinct quests – one for truth and the other for happiness."¹³

Uneasy dissonance is a dazed condition into which we stumble as a result of ignorance, and here I am reminded of an entry in a text by Sean Cubitt: "CRITERIA Genuine laziness is the least appreciated of the virtues. Ignorance is the only unforgivable vice."¹⁴

Is there even a pure vision which the John Hinde Studio postcards can be accused of corrupting, a documentary tradition of photography or image-making, perhaps, which his manipulations corrupt or betray? There is a story behind the John Hinde Studio postcard, *Fishermen on the Aran Island*, Co. Galway, Ireland by the John Hinde Studio photographer David Noble. The fisherman posed in the foreground sits working at his nets wearing an Aran sweater. In fact, it took much time to find the piece of clothing, as nearly none of the inhabitants of the island had an Aran sweater. Photographed on a Sunday morning, the currach carriers were all in their Sunday-best suits for church. The photograph was the result of a day's intricate preparation and half a day's shoot.

"There's an interesting story about another picture I took on Aran. While I was going around the island I came across a perfect cottage, thatched everything, sat right in front of the horizon of Connemara. It was a perfect picture so I set up and took it. I found out afterwards it was the cottage that Flaherty had built for the family who appeared in his film *Man of Aran*. He'd deliberately chosen the spot to build the cottage because it made a good picture."¹⁵



"Telling politicizes the senses as historical artifacts..."¹⁷

What is the liminal point of knowledge or recognition? The Gestalt representations of black & white image – duck/rabbit, face's profile/vase – rest at the extreme within a theoretical context. Yet in the real world, that of human relations & emotions, what are the equivalent liminal points? Within a series of photo,

The minimal, the minimum is always in a porous state, ready to be deduced, invested with meaning. We are constantly engaged in a quest for significance: any departure from the quest – what are the options, meditation, drug use... (we note here that the French for hard drugs is *stupéfiants*) – is itself immediately invested with an awesome cultural significance. Each vision and each act is immediately read as a meditation or a further sign. The self-ness, the self-identity, or any event is perhaps the greatest threat of all (cf. What does it mean? What's it meant to mean? & all of Becker's *Happy Days*). We are made numb by instances of destruction – shellshock, emotional trauma, sensation & meaning.

On the other hand, acts of creation are instantly inferred as instances of stabilized reality: there are only projections of ourselves and our relationships to others through the mediations of our social constructs."¹⁶

Within the work of James Coleman, conventions are revealed as not simply a series of implied codes within narrative (in both a literary sense, e.g. romance, and a historical sense e.g. revolution), but also within identity, visual sense, and an epistemological framework, to the final & ultimate extent of knowledge – the world – itself. *Box* (1977) is a Coleman piece based on film footage of a 1926 boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney: a presentation which results in the following for Joan Fowler, "There is then no sense of a stabilized reality: there are only projections of ourselves and our relationships to others through the mediations of our social constructs."¹⁶