

Agatha Gothe-Snape
YOU AND EVERYTHING THAT IS NOT YOU
15 March – 14 April 2013
The Physics Room

Deep Times, Fast Feelings

Chloe Geoghegan

The world the world
The world the radical fact.

The world the world
The world the radical fact.

The world the world
The world the radical fact.

The world the world
The world the world the radical fact.

It's all about you your agility
It's all about you your agility
It's all about you your agility
It's all about the world's agility.

The world the world is changing radically
The world the world, factu-radically.

The fact the fact is radical fact
It's all about the world's agility.

The world the world
It's all about the world's agility.

The world the world the radical fact
The world the world the radical fact
The world the world the world the radical fact.

I ask the world about the radical fact.

Australian artist Agatha Gothe-Snape is known for presenting complex ideas through conceptual frameworks. Her practice deals directly with meaning, frequently employing strategies such as improvisation or graphic design to convey significant objectives in both psychological and physical spaces. Often involving collaborations with dancers, actors, audiences and other artists, and developed through conversations, directions, choreographies or instructions, Gothe-Snape's past projects have critically responded to the varying institutional, social, and historical situations that she has encountered. According to a recent *unMagazine* review, these processes within her practice have the potential to be commemorative:

Drawing on and drawing in her precursors and contemporaries, her ardently cross-disciplinary practice attributes great importance to the social dimension of art-making and is expressly sympathetic to repeating other practitioners in the interest of her own voice.¹

In much of her recent work, colour, text, movement and materials work into these existing processes, acting as cues, giving the viewer total agency and inviting them to explore a deeper aesthetic response.

As part of the 2011 exhibition *Social Sculpture* at Anna Schwartz Gallery in Sydney, Gothe-Snape presented *Text Work*. This consisted of three components: a large instructional text on the far wall of the expansive gallery space that read, "DO NOT APPROACH THIS END OF THE ROOM / DO NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE"; a yellow line painted across the floor at the threshold of the entranceway; and three bright yellow works on paper titled *Choreography #2*, *#24*, and *#6*. Together, these works introduced and proposed possible pathways and delineations of movement between the various artworks displayed in the space. Writing on the exhibition, curator Nicholas Chambers discussed Gothe-Snape's wider practice through these works:

If motion underpins Agatha Gothe-Snape's various individual projects, we might think of her overall oeuvre as a psycho-geographical map that traces connections between spaces, bodies, emotions and ideas. [...] Gothe-Snape describes the activity of making art as akin to attempting to navigate through different fogs, each representing different areas of knowledge and experience.²

Although *Text Work* registers characteristics of self-orientation through ways of mapping and being within a space – thus, as Chambers describes, psycho-geographical in nature – these works similarly approach a kind of phenomenological, site-specific reasoning through their conception and construction. The structures she has built

¹ Matthew Greaves, 'Agatha Gothe-Snape's Four Parts' in *unMagazine*, issue 6.1, June 2012, 100-102.

² Nicholas Chambers, 'Agatha Gothe-Snape, Aesthetics in Motion' in *Contemporary Australia: Women* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, 2012) 72-75.

around the idea, the graphic wall text and various coloured lines, become the subject of a conscious experience drawn from the space they are in:

If I am doing a striped painting or a really fine gouache work, it becomes about the experience of making that painting, and the breath, and making historical reference to other types of those practices. If I need to call upon performance I am interested in evoking that sense of crisis I am always having in my body. [...] I guess it's about trying to navigate the crisis of being human.³

The Physics Room exhibition *You and Everything That is Not You* starts with this idea of navigating crisis, brought on by the fact that Gothe-Snape created the work for this show during her time in Christchurch. This, however, was not a 'crisis technique' as such; it was an improvisational means to contextualise her own human response to her experiences in the post-earthquake city. In 1980, German-American artist Hans Haacke wrote, "purely visual art is increasingly unable to communicate the complexities of the contemporary world."⁴ In 2013, presenting text, sound, movement, objects both digital and found, all coincide within a space as a series of what writer Joshua Simon calls 'unready-made' cue points. Advocating for a new economy of meaning within the discourse of sculpture and exhibition, Simon suggests this kind of complexity communicated within contemporary art is neomaterialistic:

Objects in an exhibition are characterised by a suspended duration of being, allowing them an existence beyond use and exchange value. As both a retinal and non-retinal viewing mechanism, the exhibition embodies a much wider aesthetic experience that allows us to view commodities as they are. More than in any other context, commodities are most true to themselves as art.⁵

As Gothe-Snape's work carries forward Simon's current thought, as her series of object-based works give the viewer a total agency to explore the complex experiences of the contemporary world, that is, the deep times and the fast feelings.

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Arriving with only a few digital files, Gothe-Snape opened herself up to new people and places. For the first four days of her visit, Gothe-Snape stayed at the studio of local artist Mike Hewson – a central city villa on Oxford Terrace that was due to be demolished at the end of the month by the Earthquake Authority. During this time Hewson took Gothe-Snape on a 'red-zone tour,' essentially experiencing the out-of-

³ Agatha Gothe-Snape in conversation with Susan Gibb, accessed 12 May 2013, <http://www.welcome-to-society.com/Mother>

⁴ Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: senses of place in a multicentered society* (New York: New Press, 1997) 284.

⁵ Joshua Simon, 'Neo-materialism Part I: The Commodity and the Exhibition' in *e-flux Journal* 20, November 2010, accessed 29 May 2013, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/neo-materialism-part-one-the-commodity-and-the-exhibition/>

bounds ruins through Hewson's re-telling and re-visiting of the central city he lived and worked in and still has connections to through his own practice. The experience of being in this 'zone' before others who have not yet been able to brought on feelings of regret and contention: "Should I have said no? We were there for about four hours; we just sat there. Was it my place to sit?"⁶

Hewson and Gothe-Snape also spent a lot of time conversing about their own experiences of faith and contrasting religious beliefs, something that has directly transferred to the resulting work: *Quick Pew*. Borrowing leftover concrete blocks from Blaine Western and Michael Parr's *neither a Window, Opening or Wall* (2013), The Physics Room offsite project on the corner of Gloucester and Manchester Streets, Gothe-Snape built a pew-like bench that was placed in the centre of the gallery space. These found but related objects that were used to create the pew were connected both physically and psychologically to the space; moved from one project to another. The pew became what Gothe-Snape defines as "the listening point to the oral and visual outwards – toward the view while thinking about being in the world with our spirituality, how we find space to sit and be there."⁷

Quick Pew also became a place to sit in the gallery and take in the other works in the exhibition, especially *The World's Agility*. Sung by local musician Sebastian Warne, *The World's Agility* was recorded in the gallery space using text extracted from the work of Louise Menzies for the previous Physics Room exhibition *World, Business, Lifestyle, Sport* (2013). During this exhibition, Menzies produced a full-page text work that appeared in Christchurch daily newspaper *The Press*. The back page displayed: "THE WORLD / THE WORLD / RADICAL FACT," and Gothe-Snape has linked this to her own *Text Work* through her use of Menzies' words as lyrics. As *The World's Agility* reverberates through the gallery space on loop, it permeates the whole exhibition. It is a vital cue directing the viewer to consider that moment in time: "Seb and I were recording the idea of what a song is and how to see a song in a different way."⁸

As the viewer sits on the pew and listens, the all-important act of looking is not left behind. Installed as vinyl-cut lettering across the windows which contrasted with the bright blue and white nearly building-less skyline were the words: "DEEP TIMES". Looking through the window and down three floors to the street below is an exercise in orientation, not only for those looking for memorable landmarks in the surrounding streetscape, but for those looking to place themselves within the current space and moment. While working in the gallery and with the previous works such as *World, Business, Lifestyle, Sport* that were so closely related to the gallery's locale, Gothe-Snape felt very aware of her own presence in this free-standing historical building. The Physics Room is located at levels two and three of the Old Central Post Office

⁶ Agatha Gothe-Snape, in conversation with the author, 21 April 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Building, built in the 1930s and then closed as a post office in the late 1980s. The building itself is a unique sight in the central city, often being referred to as a physical and metaphorical ‘island’ – a reference to it being a lone survivor in an area where many other buildings have not, and to the group of tropical-looking trees that sit around the brightly coloured pastel façade.

Feeling odd at such a height in a city lowered to the ground for earthly reasons, Gothe-Snape saw the building as a place to look up into or look out of, as a place that holds artistic meaning in relation to the rest of life outside, as a headquarters from which to ponder how time and geology are interrelated. “DEEP TIMES” originated from a text message that was sent from Gothe-Snape and local artist Miranda Parkes to The Physics Room director Melanie Oliver. To Gothe-Snape, this moment highlighted the variance in socio-cultural customs and mind sets that being present in a new and unique place offers. Gothe-Snape is acutely aware of the fragility of translating tone, thus coming from a profoundly light-hearted, considered moment, “DEEP TIMES” remains buoyantly free of any misintention as it rests against the outside world, neither patronising nor too assertive within a community often sensitive to generalisations and over-confidence.

In the way that these three works interact with each other and the audience, Gothe-Snape has also included two more works in the exhibition that provide an opportunity to interact with her as the initiator of these lived experiences. *Expression Curtain* hangs in the window space, intersecting and interacting with the *Deep Times* text, gently billowing as the open window lets in gusts of air and echoes from the city outside. The bright yellow, red, and green hand-printed material was found at the local ‘Shabby Chic’ market by Gothe-Snape when she first arrived in Christchurch. Originally made at the Sydney College of Arts in the 1980s, the material was purchased by the stallholder at the Balmain Market in Sydney, coincidentally close to where Gothe-Snape’s parents reside. Thus, in a very organic way, this handmade fabric is symbolic of Gothe-Snape’s own role in the space; how the synchronicity of the objects, the artist and the viewer can work across a certain time and space.⁹ Furthermore, Gothe-Snape instructed the gallery sitters to open the window for the duration of each day, thus creating a social context for the curtain as a primarily formal sculptural object through the shared experience of giving and receiving instructions.

Placed opposite *Expression Curtain* was a monitor featuring the digital presentation *Easy Paint*, which brings forth the all-important notion of colour within Gothe-Snape’s current practice. Where the seat and the song show the improvisational physicality of *You and Everything That is Not You*, the graphic context of the curtain, the window text and this PowerPoint presentation emphasise how something as simple as colour or shape can form collective readings and perceptions. Although the basis of the work arrived with Gothe-Snape as an existing work (*Fast Feelings, Fast Colours*),

⁹ Ibid.

it evolved into *Easy Paint* during her time in Christchurch in response to the conversations she found herself having about home repairs and renovations that were a consequence of the earthquakes. Gothe-Snape downloaded Ezy Paint, Resene's virtual painting software that allows you to see the finish before you start redecorating:

Colour is truly a magical property. It can transform an environment, create a style, set a mood and alter perceptions. The choice of colour is personal, an expression of our individuality and can evoke both positive and negative feelings.¹⁰

These wise words from the Resene website reinforce that simple elements within our daily lives can have a powerful impact. By presenting *Easy Paint* as a PowerPoint presentation, Gothe-Snape was virtually painting the walls – a process in itself that seemed vastly inconceivable when the same idea could simply be presented digitally and therefore sustainably in terms of budget and time. The resulting installation: a PowerPoint presentation leaning against the blank white wall was a prompt for the viewer to “paint the wall with your minds.”¹¹ By inserting an image of the gallery space into the software, applying, matching and setting the PowerPoint to loop, the coloured walls generated an underlying rhetoric within the show surrounding psychological meanings within personal expression. While *Expression Curtain* (positioned opposite) is wholly personal, *Easy Paint* offsets this by exposing individual ‘choice’ and ‘experience’ through the generalising processes and languages of simplistic, everyday online software. In this way, Resene and PowerPoint as brands emphasise common patterns within the mindset of the individual as part of mass society, and for Gothe-Snape, *Easy Paint* displays those patterns that allow each of us to read the world immediately before us.

On the opening night of *You and Everything That is Not You*, Gothe-Snape created a small run of approximately 100 badges that featured short verses resembling Resene paint names, which are well known for their unique and often poetic combinations. RUSTIC CEDAR, SHOOTING STAR, ROMANTIC SUN, FOG ENERGY, RAINBOW MONKEY, MALIBU BOURBON, SUPERHERO SURRENDER, BUBBLES BULLWHIP, ECSTASY HEARTBREAKER, TOPSKIN ROMANTIC, TUTTI FRUTTI MONA LISA, FLASHBACK FUSCHIA...The number of badge combinations directly corresponded to the number of colour combinations in *Easy Paint*, and acted as a cue for the visiting audience to activate the exhibition. Gothe-Snape describes her intention for the badges was to give the audience a heightened sense of the work as they were having a drink, looking out the windows and listening to the music: “your own badge is on your body, which is also part of the space.”¹²

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¹⁰ Resene website, accessed 24 May 2013, http://www.resene.co.nz/homeown/use_color/usecolor.html.

¹¹ Gothe-Snape, 21 April 2013.

¹² Ibid.

The view, the seat, the sound, the curtain and the colour: five works that have come together from conversation, observation, chance and exchange through the artist and the place. Gothe-Snape describes this process as how “fast meetings can generate fast feelings” in a new situation, interweaving relationships between each other, art, place and history. In considering the exhibition, several recurring themes reveal themselves within each work and the installation as a whole. Firstly, it becomes apparent that Gothe-Snape’s neomaterialistic practice – be it unique to her visit to Christchurch or her general approach – blurs pre-existing notions of autonomy and heteronomy in art, forcing these opposing concepts into a kind of tension that is played out within the exhibition as a whole. According to French philosopher Jacques Rancière, the productive contradiction of art’s relationship to social change is characterised precisely by the tension between.¹³ As Gothe-Snape re-performed and re-proposed each work within the social framework of experience, the depth and voice of every pre-existing fragment resurfaces. It seems as though Gothe-Snape has choreographed a commemorative tone throughout the space, from very explicit signals to artists and artworks linked to The Physics Room, to more subtly felt attitudes, mind-sets and opinions inherent within the Christchurch locale.

Tying the ephemeral into the physical, it is important to remember Gothe-Snape’s engagement with the legacies of sculptural practice, defined through her utilisation and construction of a range of communicative objects. In a recent text published in association with her solo show *Late Sculpture* at The Commercial Gallery in Sydney, fellow Australian artist Shane Haseman writes of Gothe-Snape’s objects as physically impressive, in terms of supporting and conversing with sculptural heritage:

...there is a real desire to foster the challenge this period of sculpture threw down to the ways in which the viewer develops a relationship with the object; a challenge that ultimately creates an interactive experience between the viewer and the work.¹⁴

Referring to the radical restructuring of the traditional sculptural object that came about in the 1960s and 1970s, Miwon Kwon notes: “these imperatives came together in art’s new attachment to the actuality of the site.”¹⁵ Thus the ephemeral becomes physical and the physical becomes ephemeral through underlying perceptions of site within the exhibition. The “interactive experience” Haseman is referring to in Gothe-Snape’s practice is precisely what the amassing of object and meaning within *You and Everything That is Not You* intends to become, however, there is a crucial relationship formed between the two: that of site specificity.

¹³ Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’ in *Artforum*, issue 44, February 2006, 179-185.

¹⁴ Shane Haseman, *Agatha Gothe-Snape’s Late Sculpture*, Sydney, The Commercial Gallery, accessed 6 May 2013, http://www.thecommercialgallery.com/uploads/Shane_Haseman_AGS_late_sculpture_essay_3_back_picture_helvetica.pdf.

¹⁵ Miwon Kwon, ‘One Place After Another’ in *October*, issue 80, Spring 1997, 86.

Recalling Lucy Lippard's statement that "Artists can be very good at exposing the layers of emotional and aesthetic resonance in our relationships to place,"¹⁶ Gothe-Snape ultimately brings forward Lippard's argument that art is a framing device for visual and social experience. For Lippard, art proposes multiple views of the ways in which a space or place can be and is used, thus establishing a series of bonds that radiate out from the central focus of art – that of community. By integrating herself into the Christchurch community, what resulting works *Quick Pew*, *The World's Agility*, *Deep Times*, *Expression Curtain* and *Easy Paint* offer in this context is a translation of her own experience of the complexities of locality. This in turn offers us, as the mostly local audience, a chance to reflect upon this place and our own lived experience here. Lippard contemplates:

I wonder what will make it possible for artists to 'give' places back to people who can no longer see them, and be given places in turn, by those who are still looking around.¹⁷

In this way, *You and Everything That is Not You* is a generous showing; Gothe-Snape gifting her own practice, and herself, as a genuine intermediary between the audience and their environment. Deep times.

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¹⁶ Lippard, 286.

¹⁷ Lippard, 292.