

In-Habit.

Notes from Jude following first In-Habit meeting for posting on In-Habit virtual forum:

Present: Jude Anderson, Emilie Collyer, Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy, Jason Maling, Ernesto Rios, Carl Pannuzzo, Chi Vu, berni jannsen, Jacques Soddell, Megan Beckwith, Simon Howard, Tara Gilbee, Ali McNicol, Melita White, Kelly Fliedner

Apologies: Mandy Nicholson

BEGUN! (preamble)

Monday, February 9th 2009 – *In Habit* Office In Habited.

Mother Superior room table set.

Chairs, table, bookshelves, internet access, drink glasses, printer, morning sun...

First gesture – remove the anti stress symbol on the In-Habit office door -

We've moved into "doubt country" where a little stress can grow big things.

Do we leave the door open to show we're in?

How loudly can we talk and laugh without "irating" the neighbours?

Other residents all have "art" on their walls and doors.

What might the fact that we have nothing on the walls mean?

Who might care?

One way to find out - free drinks for neighbours and us at 4pm on April 6th.

And now, thanks to Emilie, we can inhabit virtual space;

In Habit – the forum for non stop 24 hour insomniac access to ideas, questions, thoughts, prompts, tomes, links, events, debates, dreams, data, deliberations, provocations, all in/of/among/from one to another so to you all

WELCOME TO THIS SPACE!

THE GOODIES:

There's already a calendar for those who hanker after organisation, there are Malcolm Miles' notes because he's a such a clever thinker, there's the Feb 9th provocations in case someone's source papers get mixed up with the washing, there's quantitative data from the City of Yarra which might be useful in this quantitative evidence based research age, and I'm working on a possible framing for projects that came as an idea on Friday – Emilie's and my first day "in" our In-Habit room number 8 (meeting space of vertical infinity, and now as a beginning, place of first framework ideas and forum construction and chats).

As well, there are my notes as a record of thoughts and associations (stuff of archives) following our first In Habitation.

It's for you to add yours in any shape or form to and for the forum.

It's far from my nature to keep a diary or anything akin to that so this tentative attempt is a big leap for me.

Yours in such delight at having you with me for what we've begun, and the trepidation at having to note my muddy thoughts for a stretch of time,
Jude

TIME TO PLAY!

THE MEETING

#1 *In Habitant* notes from Jude following 09/02/09

The beginning of our 'In Habiting' the Abbotsford Convent had me filled with emotion.

It was shared with 14 willing, inquisitive, and open minded artists: Berni Janssen, Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy, Chi Vu, Melita White, Jason Maling, Ernesto Rios, Carl Pannuzzo, Emilie Collyer, Jacques Soddell, Ali McNicol, Tara Gilbee, Simon Howard, Megan Beckwith and Kelly Fliedner. Regrettably, Mandy Nicholson couldn't be with us due to some of her family members needing support post the fires.

In trying to locate that emotion, I'd say it's somewhere between emptied and filled - "tabula rasa" and "auto de fe" - like the '2' suspended between those two nines (09/02/09) as equal extremes. So I must remember to ask Carl what that might be as a musical construction or sound.

Our first *In Habit* meeting as a gathering of artists was for me at the same time a wonderful clearing of the decks to begin again, allowing new ideas to present themselves - and the fatal necessary burning of books so that all that remains is in what's remembered.

- That of the great pleasure of having us all (bar Mandy) together around the table for the first time - so many clever, generous, sensitive, people, - and that of a concluding chapter.

Just before lunch, Megan told me that of the 7th of February fires, the Bendigo fire had ripped through Happy Valley. I knew in that instant that the 150 year old house and surrounds that my forbears had built and lived in, beginning with the engineer, poet and miner whom I'd paradoxically referred to that morning, would be gone. And indeed it was. It's a past I rarely refer to but it was always "there". And with a flick of a cigarette butt, history is changed, cleansed, and now along with emigration, gold history, and mullock heaps - as part of my memory of events creating place, there's "the Happy Valley fire". (photos posted on forum)

Warren Meeks, an aboriginal aural historian living in the area, told Emilie and I as we sat on his verandah a couple of years ago, that what a lot of people didn't know was that there were big lizards right through the area and not all of them were good.

The Chinese who came to the goldfields 150 years ago described the Central Victorian gold area as the "dragon's tail". Lying on gold country, the dragon reached from one side of Australia to the other.

Of the many words used to describe the historical place and site of these February 7th fires, it's struck me (Ali was even furious about it at one point later this week) that so many of these adjectives were Christian and war history related as if somehow the lived of this catastrophe fuelled by nature, took on the imagined scale of 20th century crimes against humanity, war, and events of biblical proportion – “The Australian Holocaust” (Channel 7 News), “Hiroshima” – (an interviewee on commercial radio), “Hell in all its fury” (Rudd).

So to give this (mis) use of words some perspective, above and beyond the insult they confer to those whose families did survive the Holocaust or Hiroshima, I Googled a few stats. Approximately 11 million lives were lost through the nazi crimes of The Holocaust, around 140,000 civilians died in the American bombing of Hiroshima, and just as a nod to Rudd - with only 30% of the world's population being Christian, this according to Christians leaves 70% or something like 490 million people to die in hell.

Again like an urgency we need poets of all art forms to help name catastrophe and provide us with a means beyond crass commercial news to interpret it.

As I'm getting long in the tooth, it seems like almost every 25 years, like a generational memory trigger, with mostly Mountain Ash country bursting into flames, we have to be reminded that fire has always been part of place in Australia. In an 1853 poem about bush fires, Charles Harpur describes it as a “Monster carnival in the primeval forest” and after visiting Australia in the 1930's H.G. Wells wrote “Bushfire is not an ordinary invader, but a guerrilla”... and then there's the Ralph Smart and Mary Cathcart Borer 1940's Bush Christmas suspense story and Patrick White's famous “Because they had looked into the fire, and seen what you do see, they could arrange their lives. So they felt”. And that's just the writers.

Is it too much of a logical leap then to suggest that this indicates that every generation of artists is urgently needed? Like a poetic hand rail to prevent the falling into sensationalist and facile word use.

And I've also grown up with the understanding that Aboriginal cultural attitude towards fire as a crucial part of their ancestral Dreamtime is one of inviting contemplation in particular contexts, and demanding explanation as an object. It would be great to have Mandy's perspective of this.

My feeling is that contemplation and explanation are central to exploration and investigation.

Metaphorically then, this burning beginning seems at the very source of how to begin again; to contemplate a renewed context and through investigation and exploration, explain what we leave behind in order to embrace what else and who else might be around and in front.

And that's not so scary – it's wonder full.

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