Chasing a Metaphor: Monstrosity as Manifesto

[IMAGE: MAIN TITLE]

Ladies and Gentlemen, you may remember me from last time . . .

[IMAGE: ME, from movie for last seminar]

Videoing myself ranting away in an old shed out the back of our house, I announced my desire to make an open "invitation" to failure, to mistake and error, to aberration and deviance. I proposed that, **through the metaphor of monstrosity**, I wished to critique **designing** as a predominantly linear, and problem-solving process. But I didn't really show you any graphic design.

[IMAGE: BAND IMAGE, from movie for last seminar]

I did show you some footage of a band I was in, and I ended my home-made movie with the rather naïve statement that I wished "design could be as fun as playing in a band".

[IMAGE: TITLE, from movie for last seminar]

Things, ladies and gentlemen, have become rather more complicated – the Monster more elusive than expected. The harder I looked the more invisible *it* became . . . a ghost perhaps . . . to the point where I sometimes wonder if I actually really saw anything anyway. And then, of course, I begin to think that perhaps that's the point?

[IMAGE: PART 1, TITLE…]

PART 1:
T H E   M O N S T E R
or
… Attempts at an Invitation …

Today I want to begin by running through projects I've started—and never actually finished—since May. I won't have time to go into a lot of detail unfortunately, as I want to end this talk by reflecting on the larger body of my research to date. Through the following projects I'm looking for connections, threads, dead ends, and preferences — speculation that might hopefully act as a pointer, a where to from here?

I don't want to be quite as vague as I was last time. I have made some progress – **I think**. And, whereas then I was attempting to lay the groundwork for the metaphor, I hope, this time, to ***begin*** to show it in action. Capture it on the run maybe . . . in desperation even a blurry photo will do!

I left Melbourne last May feeling quite stuck, and unsure of my proposal. Much of what I've done since has involved me really just trying to get my head around what I thought I'd **said** then. On reflection I see that what I should have been focusing on was what I'd actually **'done'** in May. But I'll come back to that.

[IMAGE: ONE WEEK POSTER PROJECT – POSTER #1(Town)]

On Monday the (get date) I had twenty A1 posters put up around central Christchurch. My loose plan being to spend that week developing a poster that would be **'finished'** on Friday, but that would be replaced—actually, pasted over—everyday until then… in an **'unfinished'** state. With this project I was interested in how I might exhibit some kind of public gestation of an image, or artefact. Monstrous in it's incomplete state.

[IMAGE: ONE WEEK POSTER PROJECT – POSTER #2(Town)]

I really struggled with this idea of completion or finished-ness though. Each image ***was*** —for all intents and purposes — ***finished*** when it was turned into a 'poster', and stuck up around town.

[IMAGE: ONE WEEK POSTER PROJECT – POSTER #3(Town)]

By this I mean it reads as finished, because that's the expectation. When a notice is ***up***, it's finished. It might ***change*** tomorrow, but I don't think anyone read it as unfinished or incomplete?

One of the things that bugged me about this project was not really getting any feedback, or being able to gauge any audience response. I was pasting these up really early each morning, and was unable to stick around.

This begged the obvious question… who was this for? **Them**? Or **me**?

[IMAGE: ONE WEEK POSTER PROJECT – POSTER #4(Town)]

Of course it was impossible for me not to consider the fact that this **was** the image that would be **reproduced** and **pasted up**. What I'm trying to get at here, I think, is a certain feeling of guilt — that I wasn't exhibiting a **real** design process, but rather a **contrived** one? I found it almost impossible to evaluate these as a series of incomplete steps towards a complete goal.

I considered my attempt to **'perform'** the usually private process of it's making in public . . . to make manifest it's own manifestation . . .

[IMAGE: ONE WEEK POSTER PROJECT – POSTER #5(Town)]

The original impetus behind this work had come from Laurene's questioning me about my inclusion of my band in my last seminar, and my interest in live performance over recording. I don't think we talked specifically about design as a performative gesture, but the vague idea was somewhere in the back of my head.

Performing Design? What the hell does that mean, and why the hell would you want to? I should state that I saw the **'Design'** as the performer and **NOT** myself! I can't stand performance art, and I was concerned that the project shouldn't venture into **that** territory.

[IMAGE: ME, from movie for last seminar]

But of course, I began to think about this guy!? Had my mode of communication, my movie, perhaps been more important or significant than I realised?

[IMAGE: BOLLARD SURGERY MOVIE – 2 minutes]

In my last seminar I'd mentioned someone I called, The Mad Designer. A couple of people picked up on this in particular. A few of you expressed a certain interest in the possibility of **my** being **the monster!**

A few months ago when I did this, it was, both literally and metaphorically, a stab in the dark. All of a sudden, reviewing it to write this talk, it seems to be begging for some kind of added significance…

At the time I hadn't considered it but there's a link between this and what I did next.

This is not what I did next.

This is a manifesto I wrote for my Research Methods paper last year. Although I didn't write it actually, I appropriated parts — texts and images — from elsewhere and constructed what I wanted to say using other people's stuff. I guess I'm putting this in here right now for two reasons… it represents my first attempt to construct the ***practitioner as a character***, and it is my ***first manifesto***.

PART 2:
<u>T H E   M A N I F E S T O</u>

or

… Attempting to be Systematic …

Following my last appearance here, I had been stuck on two comments in particular… firstly—and mostly—Cameron's suggestion that I needed to be "more systematic", and secondly Dave's question about how this matters to the discipline of design outside of my own personal speculation.

I guess the idea of writing another manifesto had been bubbling away for a while. I'd really enjoyed putting the 'Hybrid Practitioner' one together last year, and something about dogmatism and ideology really appeals to the reformed Modernist in me. A kind of El Dorado, something I'm looking for that I know doesn't necessarily exist.

The conquistador! The Evangelist! The Mad Scientist! ***The rant!***

To try and take what this guy had been saying, and to apply it systematically to my research… breaking the monstrous metaphor into its different constituent parts, writing a manifesto for each one, and making work from the manifestoes…

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Title and Intro]

To write a manifesto around the metaphor seemed like a great way to clarify it—both for myself, and others. Initially I considered what would be common through each manifesto, my general interest in the metaphor that might then be split into separate parts to test. Much of this came straight from my last presentation…and I didn't clear much up for myself here, but it was useful as a way to get started.

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Frankenstein Manifesto]

It occurred to me that I might use different types of monster already existing in popular culture to differentiate and motivate each 'sub-manifesto'. ***Frankenstein's monster***—the obvious first choice—the monstrous hybrid…

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Zombie Manifesto]

The ***Zombie***…brain dead, rotting…

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Vampire Manifesto]

The ***Vampire***…a parasite, appropriation…

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Werewolf Manifesto]

The ***Werewolf***…morphing, at once benign, and then threatening

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Werewolf Manifesto]

[IMAGE: FIRST MANIFESTOES FOR MONSTROSITY, Alien Manifesto]

and finally, The ***Alien***… the re-contextualised, the monster out of place

As I'd already suggested in my 'Inviting The Monster' movie, I conceived of the monstrous in potentially two distinct but related ways. ***The monstrous process, and the monstrous artefact***. In writing the manifestoes I tried to clarify this in terms of the audience and/or the practitioner's response to the work.

The first one was easy. Frankenstein's hybrid construction of appropriated parts was what lead me to the monstrous in the first place. The other four were more problematic, and despite their brief appearance this took me a long time to try and figure out how these categories of the monstrous might manifest themselves through graphic design. Unfortunately I don't have time to really go through each one in detail, ***but…***

Basically I wanted each one to offer up, or propose, some kind of ***transformative*** gesture. Some, the Alien for instance, seemed more obvious than others…

…some more abstract or ambiguous. And I still haven't really got my head around these.

I was torn between being wanting to be over-the-top, evangelical, and poetic on the one hand, and being obvious on the other. But in the sense that this was an exercise for me to figure out what the hell I was doing, I tried to be as specific, brief, and meaningful as possible.

I toyed with the idea of making work at the same time as trying to figure out each manifesto, but in the end decided to try and finish writing it… then apply it to making work… then re-visit and re-write it.

PART 3:

T H E   M A N I F E S T I N G

or

… Attempting to make a Monster…

I have, over this year, been becoming increasingly nervous about my ability to develop coherent *design* projects as a part of my Masters research. My friends, some of whom are postgraduate fine arts students often take the piss out of the fact that I'm always and *writing*, and that I never seem to be *"making work"*. But I'll come back to this later on…

I like to approach research with a sense of humour, and I had recently been making fun of Lisa Grocott's loosely disguised suggestions that you could solve pretty much *anything* with a good diagram. My girlfriend, Anna, has recently moved to another city and we've been having "issues" about where we'll both be in the future. I joked with Lisa that I'd *work it out* by mapping our relationship as my Masters thesis.

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP]

I liked the idea that the manifestoes could apply to any project, and in that sense content wouldn't matter. The work could be *about* anything, I just needed to start making something, and something about the *ridiculousness* of this idea obviously appealed to me.

Being that the 'Frankenstein Manifesto' had been the easiest to write, the one I felt like I *got* the most, I decided to begin with it. At this point I planned to remake the *same* map, the *same* basic content, five times. One based on each manifesto.

I should point out right now, however, that I haven't done this yet. I got this one half finished and began to have serious doubts about my research… which is what I *really* want to talk about today, and will get to shortly…

[IMAGE: JOHN SPEED MAP]

Maxim number 1, on the Frankenstein manifesto states, "The Monster is manufactured from stolen parts."

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, Just started]

The *parts* must come from disparate or unrelated backgrounds…

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, gap between 'globes']

Any relationship between parts accidental, The Monster must be "assembled at speed"…

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, Just started]

and the connections be left visible. The bolt through the neck.

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, 'The Monster']

Enjoying working with sellotape and scraps of paper, I modified the manifesto at this point, stating that *this* monster must be made by hand.

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, New York Monster]

Shadows reveal the construction as a palimpsest, a hybrid — some *other* lurking beneath…

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, Anna Bottom 'Fire']

My original intention to map something abstract, a romantic interlude, started out well enough…

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, Anna Top 'Water']

…but quickly became more about me, and my own desires and preoccupations!

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, Me Top 'Earth']

I kind of lost my focus I think, and wasn't really mapping anything anymore. The idea to methodically visualise something in an effort to *'understand'* had given way to what was simply becoming a romantic illustration of the world according to Luke.

[IMAGE: ANNA + ME MAP, Me Bottom 'Air']

I was stuck, I think, somewhere between the monster and the map. The relationship between maps and monsters had become apparent, and I liked the connection. The *map* as such, wasn't supposed to be

important though, just content with which to make and test my monster. I was confusing what I wanted to get out of the exercise I guess?

[IMAGE: BLOG SCREEN SHOT, Crisis bit….]

And then, at the exact same time the world played a cruel trick on me — I turned 31.

I really want to take this opportunity to briefly apologise to anyone who's been reading my blog in the last few weeks… it's been angsty and whiney, and I'm not proud of myself. I felt like something was, or is, seriously and fundamentally wrong in my research. I've never had this much trouble making work before.

[IMAGE: PART 4, TITLE…]

PART 4:

THE METAPHOR

or

… Attempting to be Poetic …

Ok. So! This is *originally* where I was going to start this talk. For some reason I guess I thought it was important to drag you all through what I've been doing lately, before attempting to suggest, now, in this last part of my presentation that the monstrous *is* actually in here somewhere… just not quite where I've been looking.

If I can, I'd like to show you my snapshots again, and suggest that if you look closely The Monster is there, always on the edge of the frame, and never quite in focus, but there none the less.

[IMAGE: IMAGES OF ME IN MY WORK]

At this point I'd like stick to my claim that I am not the monster. Although it is certainly presenting itself as a possibility, what I am really interested in right now, is what's happening *around* me.

I had become increasingly upset and nervous about my seeming inability to finish things off. I felt like I should push on with the maps, and investigate the other four manifestoes, but I really wasn't confident that I was on the *kind* of track I wanted to be on.

I decided—very recently, and in part due to this talk looming—to spend some time trying get my head around *what* I was doing and *why* I wasn't feeling good about the trajectory of my research.

[IMAGE: DIAGRAM 1 FROM WORKBOOK.]

I tried to locate The Monster *within* my research… to make sense of my methodology, the metaphor, and my manifesto.

[IMAGE: DIAGRAM 3 FROM WORKBOOK.]

I tried to position the *monstrous* in relation to the extended history of my topic since I'd begun this research last year.

I considered *pulling* the focus *out* from The Monster specifically, and to point the topic, more generally, at *'metaphor'*. I realised, although I'd used the term *'generative metaphor'*, I hadn't *really* considered what this meant. I also began to think about the application of the 'monstrous', as a generative metaphor to the larger picture of my practice, rather than just the *process* or the *production of artefacts*…

[IMAGE: MAPS OF PRACTICE, on John Speed map.]

Of course it had occurred to me a while back that there's a close link between maps and monsters — one dealing metaphorically to that which is *known*, and the other to that which is *unknown*.

In this map—again unfinished—I'm trying to locate aspects of my practice in design in relation to my body. The further out to sea—towards the horizon—a word appears, then the more monstrous it is. The island on the left is an outline of myself photographed from above, and the one on the right, my feet, from below.

[IMAGE: MAP OF PRACTICE (A)]

Words located around the island that is my head, are of ideas, theories, processes, and actions related to design.

[IMAGE: MAP OF PRACTICE (B)]

And my southern hemisphere consists of people's names — a sphere of influence perhaps. Although I've obviously tried to include people (actually their practices) that I don't necessarily ***'get'***, or even ***'like'***.

While I simply haven't had time to resolve these maps, it's been quite beneficial for me in the sense that it's provided me a space, and a process, with which to try and ***locate*** **myself**. What's subsequently interesting about this is how ***dis-located*** I feel.

[IMAGE: IMAGES OF ME IN MY WORK]

This prompted me to look back over my topic again, from the beginning, to view the disparities and connections within my stops and starts. Deep inside my own fears and anxieties I was forced to consider what the hell I was doing ***here*** in the first place. Why did I want to do a Masters? How did I end up teaching? Why don't I feel like a ***real*** graphic designer anymore? And when the hell did I become so ***pathologically*** narcissistic?

While I obviously won't be answering all that in depth in the next couple of minutes, I would like to briefly tell you what I've found, and where I think it points to from here…

[IMAGE: BLANK]

My desire to return to the Academy was entirely romantic. I'd been working as a graphic designer in the real world for almost a decade, and I was burnt-out, disappointed, and bored with what my life—or my practice—had become.

[IMAGE: MANIFESTO/PRACTITIONER IMAGES]

What I am beginning to see here is ***some one*** who is searching for ***some thing***. On reflection I see a practice that has changed quite dramatically over the last three years . . . and one that has become fragmented and dislocated in the process.

Before this I simply ***did*** graphic design . . . Now I'm ***talking*** about design, trying to ***write*** about design, attempting to ***teach*** it, to ***plan*** and ***develop*** courses, and—laterally related I think—***performing*** and ***playing*** music.

So… I'm tempted to try my metaphor on for size — my practice as a kind of Monstrous Body?

In this respect I'd like to try and apply my topic—my thinking—to the disparate projects that I have, up until now, been locating **'outside'** of my research. While I see the value in fabricating design projects firmly within the topic, I think the reason I never finish these is because they always feel so forced in the first place. I like the idea that if I'm researching my practice, the things that I enter into more 'naturally', can then become significant parts of that research.

In this sense I see possible significance in the Manifesto's consistent appearance in and around my practice. Like I mentioned, it's quite possibly my inability to shake my Modernist upbringing, or my tendency toward the romantic, but I'd like to suggest that the manifesto, the monster, and the map share a similar goal. That each is a method for **dramatic interpretation**, **diagnosis**, and **prophecy**.

Of course it bugs me that the first manifesto, a year and half old now, is, ironically, more monstrous than the more recent second attempt. My research has not been knowingly centred around questions about the manifesto though, and the value of this reflective process has been to see more value in aspects of projects that I had previously dismissed, than those in which I placed more of my effort.

I want to propose to continue my research over the next few months by **interpreting**, **diagnosing**, and **prophesising**. I want to continue my investigation of the monstrous metaphor in two distinct but interrelated ways —

[IMAGE: METAPHOR DIAGRAM]

firstly, through the **map** as a methodology of **describing** and **interpreting**, and, subsequently, through the genre of the **manifesto** as a methodology of **prescribing** and **motivating**.

The monstrous then is a creature of perception. This suits, I think, the development of my interests in design becoming perhaps more epistemological than artefactual… in a sense. In my reading I am becoming interested in how Design is perceived as **being**—as a practice, and as a discipline more broadly. In my role as an educator I am increasingly required to be involved in such conversations, but I am also increasingly aware that my experiences as a practitioner do not necessarily engage smoothly or correctly with either the propositions of academia, or industry. I would like, through my research, to be able to develop the monstrous as a potential **other…** a **complexity** that I might contribute more to the discussion.

[IMAGE: THAT'S ALL FOLKS]