

Modeling Psychoses

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I have been interested in ideas relating to the <model> for many years and this has been expressed in my explorations of model (<scaled-down> and <ideal>) landscapes. The computer programming that lay behind the collaborative alive project that I made with Gordon Selley, *TechnoSphere* [1] (1995) included Gibsonian affordances, with both the artificial creatures and the environment modelled algorithmically such that creatures perceived one another and the landscape in terms of what they could afford one another (for example, grass or other creatures as potential food). In the interdisciplinary *Cell* [2] project this was taken further as we developed a complex and highly detailed (though necessarily partial) formal model of how stem cells behave in the adult human body. The importance of embodied, situated and distributed knowledge and behaviour was central to the resulting computer simulation of stem cell behaviour. In mapping the knowledge domain of stem cell theory we had previously discussed the <situatedness> of the then-current theories themselves (the impact of the environment of the lab, the available technology and the researchers) in the scope of the hypotheses that they proposed. Recently I have become interested in compulsive writing: what <rules> might define that behaviour – how might I make a model of compulsive writing? I have experimented by conducting my own compulsive writing projects, <modelling> myself on one compulsive writer (Emma Hauck) in order to understand another. I have also analysed the components of some compulsively written texts (the form of the handwriting, the objects described in the texts) to gain insights about the author.

Over the course of 25 years I have been the unwilling recipient of hundreds of letters, ranging in length from two words, to almost a hundred pages long. All have been written to, and about, me by a delusional stalker diagnosed as suffering from psychosis. My interest in <modeling> psychosis is driven by this experience - I feel compelled to understand his state of mind, the better to protect myself and as a way of facing my fear. To induce a psychotic episode in myself is to close the gap between us, to resist the urge to make the man who stalks me <other>, to immerse myself in my own unconscious, however uncomfortable. This active exploration of my <inner> space is contrary to the way I have outwardly lived the last 25 years: refusing to succumb to fear by travelling and working when it was suggested I go into a witness protection scheme; continuing my life as an artist though Press coverage of my shows can trigger an escalation in my stalker's threatening behaviour; not speaking publicly about the experience of being stalked. The letters are a starting point for me to <model> psychosis: to consider the <rules> that define psychotic behaviour (as evidenced in the letters-as-objects) and to <execute> these rules, like a computer program might execute a code, in order to try and trigger a psychotic state of my own.

The resulting works form the basis of this contribution, and are part of a larger body of work called *My Stalking Silver Jubilee*. They are discussed and shown here for the first time. Writing is the source of all the works, the writing I have received and the writing I have produced in response. I have focussed on a dozen letters, received in 2000, taking their content and handwriting style as my inspiration. By so-doing I have entered an isomorphic relationship with my stalker. Isomorphism comes from the Greek *isos* meaning «equal», and *morphe* meaning «shape»; a similarity of structure or form. I wanted become similar to him in form: obsessed, seeing connections where others see none, making images from words and finding analogues for those images via google image search).

In his book, *Thinking Through Material Culture*, Carl Knappett [3] discusses «the codependent nature of the connections between mind and object». He takes a relational approach to perception and concludes that our understanding of material culture is a codependency of mind, agent and object. Assuming my perception is relational and codependent is a useful tool as I interrogate my perception of the letters that I have received, and as I conduct my own writing experiments. It has also been useful to look at copies of letters inscribed by allegedly psychotic writers. The well-known letters by Emma Hauck have become key works, touchstones that have helped to push my thinking and my writing. In the exhibition, *Beyond Reason: Art and Psychosis* [4] were a series of so-called «artworks» made by the patient Emma Hauck, titled *Letter to Husband*. These pencilled letters are typified by one in which Hauck wrote (ca 1909) over and over again «Sweetheart, come», in pencil, until the single page of paper is reminiscent of a field painting, a dense layering of text that becomes image. I look at these works reproduced in a catalogue and imagine Emma Hauck writing them, and find it hard to believe that she did so on the understanding that she was making art and that they would be exhibited in a gallery after her death. It makes more sense that they were letters, a correspondence from her to her husband, willing, through text, her husband to visit. To rescue her from the asylum? To hear what she has to say? Who knows because the implication of these being in the Prinzhorn Collection is that her letters were never sent. If this is the case she was doubly betrayed, once by whomever she trusted the letters to, believing they would be posted, and secondly by the re-branding of them as art. The works are labelled with her name and her apparent mental illness, as though the illness (if it were accurately diagnosed) was as much the author, or as though the letters-cum-artworks were a gauge or expression of her illness. If such repetitive writing was an expression of psychosis, could a state of psychosis be induced, temporarily by writing in a similar way, repetitively?

What is the relationship between letters-as-objects and the psychological states of the writer and subsequent reader? The psychologist James Gibson [5] takes a relational approach to perception, proposing a <direct perception> that includes the idea that objects (in this case letters) have a set of <potentialities> linked to a set of possible actions. He called these «affordances». For Gibson these affordances are not always simply embedded in an object, but can arise out of a mutual relationship between the object and the agent (the agent being the writer in one instance and the reader in another). Considering Emma Hauck's letters in terms of Gibsonian <affordances> allows us to consider the possibility that the letter might not only be an object through which to communicate, that it might not need a recipient or reader (her husband). Instead the letter could be a trace of the act of writing, with the act of writing <affording> relief, or excitement. This way of perceiving the letters turns my discomfort about them remaining, unsent, in the Prinzhorn Collection on its head: it suggests that they may not have been inscribed with the intention of ever being sent to a reader. Of course, I will never know what those letters afforded Hauck, or how she intended them to <be> (sent to her husband, destroyed, kept, to be artworks). My perception of Hauck's letters are as much influenced by my <situated cognition> as their instantiation was influenced by her <situated cognition> at the time of writing. By 'situated cognition' I mean that any cognition of the letters is embodied, situated and distributed. I can make some guesses about Hauck's situated cognition at the time of writing, but any <model> I have for her state will necessarily be partial: I assume that as she wrote while in an asylum she had very limited control over her movements and environment, but I know nothing of the detail of her embodied state (medication, clothes, comfort levels for example) nor of her environment (temperature, noise, the kind of people and surfaces around her) nor of her psychological state. My situated cognition as a reader of her letters is inflected by my experience of being the unwilling recipient of letters written by someone with psychosis. My feelings of fear, anger, desperation on reading those particular letters, made me want to <arm> myself with knowledge about what such letters <mean>, and Hauck's letters were sufficiently removed from my own experience that I could consider them in a less emotionally charged state. So, the unwelcome handwritten letters I received might, like Hauck's, be presented as <symptoms> or expressions of psychosis (indeed this was the position that the legal team, defending the man who stalks me, took as a way of dismissing the threatening content of those letters). By defining them in this way they become models, when we take the word to mean a «phenomenon that accounts for its known or inferred properties and may be used for further study of its characteristics: a model of generative grammar; a model of an atom; an economic model.» [6]

When I embarked on the *Bad Hand* writing series I did so to test whether the process of writing a brief phrase, repeatedly, would afford me a sense of psychosis. My mimicking of Hauck's situated cognition was very partial (I wrote not from an asylum but from the comfortable, safe, quiet freedom of my basement) and was an attempt to explore the potential connections between the bodily, situated, experience of such writing; the concurrent <state of mind> of the writer and the resulting letters. When I began I felt self-conscious, though I noted that as soon as I held the pen I <knew> what short phrase I would write, «Leave me alone». I was surprised that within a few minutes of beginning I felt a rush of emotion and that as I wrote on, I felt waves of anger, fear, despair and calmness, the intensity of which belied the physical environment in which I was situated. Later, when I looked back at the writing <unfolding>, and heard the sound of the pen and my hand moving across the paper, the changes in handwriting style prompted a body memory and I remembered which emotion I had felt at which phase of the writing. After the act of writing, the letter, especially when played back as a video, was an object that afforded me insights into my emotional state, and the potentiality to experience that state again. My letters became a <model> for my behaviour at the time of writing.

If Hauck's writing can be used as <model> of the way someone suffering from psychosis expresses themselves, then by following that model, by using their handwritten letters as a <hand book> could I experience a sense of psychosis myself? This is using the term <model> slightly differently, as a preliminary work or construction that serves as a plan that can be used in testing or perfecting a final product. The sense here is that the <model> is not the same in quality or size as that which it represents. Similarly, the connection between my letters and emotional state, and Hauck's, can be seen as temporarily and partially <isomorphic>. By producing a form (handwritten letter of repeated short phrase) similar to those of Hauck's I wanted to see if I would experience a psychological or emotional isomorphism (would my psychological form become similar to hers through the act of mimicry). By working in this way I was using Hauck's letters as a partial, scaled down <model> of psychosis and my intention was to 'model' my behaviour on hers in order to try and get a sense of the feeling of psychosis.

The art work

After zoom in g in on & editin g the fon t
som e m ore, I see sick again. It's like
you clin g you when I take the lan dles
that describe the arc in the letter 'i' on &
start to chan ge them. Coregully,
Brogain g lan dles to alter the arc on &
make the letter larger, on & m ore
sim ilar to the on e you write with a bro
in letters to m e.

So, I make some changes to 'i' and slowly begin to
work out the spacing between individual letters. This
relationship between letters is called kerning. The
full stop is now smaller, more like the marks you
make, but when I see it appear on the screen as I type
it is less true. The ink spot, plague mark full stop,
the ● seemed right somehow.

As I work on the kerning and see the result as I test
the font right now, I see what the problem is. Your
handwriting does not have uniform kerning. Some
times letters have spaces between them, each
individual capital and lower case on island. Or each
letter a status, singled out, shown separate.

And as I type the font disappears and is replaced by Times New Roman.
Why? It makes me zoom out and I'm writing in the font made by tracing
your letters in order to zoom in.



Video: 1 >

The video piece, *leave me alone* from the series *Bad Hand* is in homage to Emma Hauck. I sat in a small soundproof room and wrote the first phrase that came to me, repeatedly, until the physical pain in my hand from writing made me stop. I used a Livescribe pen, with audio which enabled me to playback, in real-time, the act of writing (and the sound of my hand and pen as I wrote) and make this into a video.

While the well-known Hauck letters comprise of only one phrase, repeated, the letters that I received were sometimes lengthy and contained rich descriptive passages about objects, people and places. Reading these letters brought images to mind and that prompted an associated set of art pieces. The photographic series, *Manifestations*, are a product of a particular making process. Five years after the court case that temporarily imprisoned the man stalking me, I decided to re-read the transcripts of a batch of the letters he sent to me. I read one or two each day when I arrived at my studio. Sometimes I was literally sick with fear and revulsion. Other times I wept. My <situated cognition> was such that I could not easily separate the object (letter) from my embodied experience of it (nausea, adrenalin, stress) and its distributed environment (fear of death; the bureaucracy of crime). For weeks I gradually accustomed myself to reading the typed-up versions.

After a month or so I could read them all, in one go, without crying, throwing up or shivering. The content of the letters started to feel separate from me. I began to notice different words and phrases as I became less physically affected by the letters. I became less focused on obvious threats and bloody descriptions. I began to skip over the passages detailing sexually violent fantasies. Instead, I was drawn to a hitherto hidden narrative, populated by objects and characters that seemed to be of value to him, and to have a meaning that I could not easily discern. I used search engines to <associatively> connect these words and phrases to images. I wondered if doing this would help me to understand his world. If I understood, I reasoned, then should he succeed in capturing me, I might be able to reason with him, on his terms. I would have a better chance of escaping. Once again, I used the letters as a model of the inner world of someone with psychosis, the written descriptions as representations, or models, of his world-view. As there were usually only words I was interested to see what actual images might be associated with them.

The process of making the photo text works:

1. Read the transcriptions of the letters sent 2000-2001.
2. Select key words or phrases.
3. Enter the words or phrases into google image search.
4. Download images from the search.
5. Select one image from each collection of downloaded files.
6. Use google to search for an object identical, or as close as possible, to that shown in the downloaded image that can be purchased online.
7. Buy the objects.
8. Document the objects at high resolution.

The prints, *Taking Your Hand*, were made as I designed and used a font based on my stalker's handwriting. I limited myself to only writing about the experience of using the font.



Abb: 1 >



I went to Stratford and in a Charity shop in Ely Street
there was very silent black clothed model of you.

Abb: 2 >



Abb: 3 >



Abb: 4 >

Makin go on t'from his bon dwidin g
is a process of zoom in g in on & out
The mean in gs of the sen ten ces you
wrote are lost as I look at the slope of
in dwidin of letters

But when I zoom out, lean back in
m, clear on & look at a letter from a
distance, even though it is not in
one of your sen ten ces I feel a little
sick

The I zoom back in again because the
size of the letters is not proportionately
right. The 'p' is tiny, on & the 'o' too big

I look at the photocopied letters again,
begin to on ly see in dwidin of letters
on & how they flow in to other letters,
begin to read the mean in gs that
you made with them. The mean in gs
that I made of them

Then I go back to the font software
on & start to edit

Abb: 5 >

After zoom in g in on & editin g the font
som e m ore, I fee sick again ● It's like
touchin g you when I take the ban dles
that describe the arc in the letter 'i' on &
start to change them ● Carefully,
draggin g ban dles to alter the arc on &
make the letter larger, on & m ore
sim ilar to the on e you write with a biro
in letters to m e ●

So, I make some changes to 'i' and slowly begin to
work out the spacing between individual letters. This
relationship between letters is called kerning. The
full stop is now smaller, more like the marks you
make, but when I see it appear on the screen as I type
it is less true. The ink spot, plague mark full stop,
the ● seemed right somehow.

As I work on the kerning and see the result as I test
the font right now, I see what the problem is. Your
handwriting does not have uniform kerning. Some
times letters have spaces between them, each
individual capital and lower case on its own. Or each
letter a status, singled out, shown separate.

And as I type the font disappears and is replaced by Times New Roman.
Why? It makes me zoom out and I'm writing in the font made by tracing
your letters in order to zoom in.

Abb: 6 >

Transcription of *Taking Your Hand: Number 3*

Making a font from his handwriting is a process of zooming in and out. The meanings of the sentences you wrote are lost as I look at the shape of individual letters.

But when I zoom out, lean back in my chair and look at a letter from a distance, even though it is not in one of your sentences I feel a little sick.

The I zoom back in again because the size of the letters is not proportionately right. The <p> is tiny and the <o> too big.

I look at the photocopied letters again, trying to only see individual letters and how they flow into other letters, trying not to read the meanings that you made with them. The meanings that I made of them.

Then I go back to the font software and start to edit.

Transcription of *Taking Your Hand: Number 5*

Thinking about the process of making art as a combination of <inner> and <outer> work. This project is an experiment in exploring the inner. Wondering if it is possible to continue to make large scale pieces that are external to me (outer) if I do not address the <inner>.

At the threshold of the <inner> is my experience of receiving unsolicited letters. Of reading threats and being full of fear. And fury.

Typing now, in your hand, is an oscillation between moving into the fear, to the <inner> and <out> again.

I realise that every time I type a letter on the keyboard that I have not yet managed to replace with a scan from your letters, the font switches from Stalkero3 to Times New Roman. I don't have a comma, or apostrophe.

I go back to the font menu and reselect Stalkero3, then type a comma and lose it. Then return to the menu and select Stalkero3. The act of typing becomes an oscillation between the uncanny sense of seeing my words in your hand, and starting the psychological journey in towards my repulsion and fear and boredom of all that I know and think about you. And how that process is interrupted by suddenly seeing your hand writing, or a close approximation of it, replaced by the Times New Roman font.

I cannot explore the <inner> with these font interruptions. Which means I'll have to go through the letters again to find every letter and punctuation mark that I can so the Stalkero3 font (which currently has no brackets or numbers) stops breaking up and reverting to Times New Roman.

Jane Prophet is a British artist living in the USA. She has worked with new media for two decades and integrates it with traditional materials to produce <surprising and beautiful objects>. She makes photographic pieces, temporary installations, objects and video. Site-specific light-based installations include Conductor, a flooded power station lit with luminescent cables and Counterbalance, an outdoor installation in rural Australia made in response to climate change. Many pieces explore of our experience of contemporary landscape. Decoy and The Landscape Room combine images of real and simulated landscapes, and Model Landscapes includes miniature trees made from mathematical data. Works-in-progress include a large scale earthwork and a series of planting pieces such as a meadow and orchard.

Jane Prophet has been a key member of a number of internationally acclaimed projects that break new ground in art and science. Her collaborations with stem cell researchers, mathematicians and heart surgeons radically re-envision the human body. Past projects include the award-winning website, TechnoSphere.

Fussnoten

Seite 85 / [1]

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<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/model> [09/29/2011].

Abbildungen

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Jane Prophet, Manifestation, 2011, sketch using google found image.
Photo courtesy the artist.

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Jane Prophet, Manifestation: model, 2011. Photo courtesy the artist.

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Jane Prophet, Manifestation: sindy, 2011. Photo courtesy the artist.

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Jane Prophet, Taking Your Hand: page 3, 2011. Photo courtesy the artist.

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Jane Prophet, Taking Your Hand: page 3, 2011. Photo courtesy the artist.

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Jane Prophet, Taking Your Hand: page 5, 2011. Photo courtesy the artist.

Videos

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Jane Prophet, Bad Hand: leave me alone, 2011, extract from 2 hour movie (online version) / stills from video (pdf version). Movie file and photos courtesy the artist.