My Life as Sculpture

Visual Arts as Unique Autobiography

Tobias Richardson
Masters by Research: Exegesis
Fine Arts
2012

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"I hereby declare that the work herein and all practical works, now submitted as an exegesis
and exhibition for the degree of Master by Research of the Charles Darwin University, is the
result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers
have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this research
has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently
submitted in candidature for any other degree."

Tobias Richardson 29th February 2012
ABSTRACT

*My Life as Sculpture* is an interdisciplinary research project incorporating both sculpture and drawing and is presented as an installation (Raft Artspace, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, March 2012). Developed over two years, the artworks explore themes of autobiography and the built environment. The research aimed to clarify and extend the relationship between the artist's twenty-year practice and the continuing themes of self and built environments. The juxtaposing of physical vernacular forms (built environments) with psychological and metaphysical elements creates the autobiographical framework. The artworks are presented in the context of abstractionist aesthetic theory and within contemporary Australian practice. The research method is primarily wood construction, combining found objects, developed through studio practice at Charles Darwin University, and drawings created whilst traveling in Australia and abroad. The research combines family history, artists' biographies, abstractionist aesthetics and contemporary practice. The discussion and analysis that accompanies the artworks are distilled into overlapping chapters covering theoretical perspectives, materials and processes, and results. The artworks reference several key visual artists, particularly Willem de Kooning, Gerrit Rietveld and Carl Andre, as well as contemporary artists such as Peter Atkins and Phoebe Washburn. Strategies to reconcile the vast, interpretive and self-reflective nature of autobiography as a subject are tested. This project argues that as a practicing artist I see biography as theory and subject matter. The project's results include a substantial exhibition of artworks, but also a broadening of my understanding of the potential autobiography has for the visual arts.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank, in no particular order, the following people and places for their support, inspiration and serenity.

Simon Cooper, Andrea Ash, Paul Hay, Asha Richardson, Hayley West, Anita Angel, David Angel, Peter Dowling, Fiona Morrison, Steve Eland, Dallas Gold, Marian Davis, Zeb Olsen, Ruth Waller and Peter Hill.

Charles Darwin University Art School and Office of Research, the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, Raft Artspace in Alice Springs and the Northern Territory art’s community.

Dedicated to Margaret Alexia Richardson
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INTRODUCTION

Artists create within the framework of their time and place and, either consciously or unconsciously, contribute to a growing aesthetic language and theoretical perspective. These integrated aesthetics and theories form the vantage points for an artist's work and its place in history.

The completion of this research, both in practical and written terms, resulted from an acknowledgment of the multiple perspectives of contemporary practice. My practice is driven and defined by these various and interrelated perspectives and these in turn are affected by the history, place, imagery, materials and processes of the artwork at the time of their creation. I am always there, not as a voyeur, but in the first person.

My approach encapsulated for me autobiographical subject and imagery, assessed in immediate day-to-day experiences, whether at home in Darwin or the Blue Mountains of NSW, travelling in Africa or living in Paris. I always thrive from direct, sensual and physical contact with an object, place or experience to make art about it. The choice of experiences and subjects from which I work is governed by aesthetic potential and by their contribution to my subject field of the built environment. By having a physical link to a subject, I can place it in the real, extract truth and avoid romanticising the subject.

In 2010 I became 42 years old. Forty years on from my birth, the objects and designs of my childhood are now relegated to history and are fading from my memory. 42 is an age from which I could now confidently command a balanced view of life in respect to childhood, midlife and death. My possessions and memories from the 1960s and 1970s became reassessed and requalified; I have avoided romanticisation, ultimately using things from my past as signifiers. This perspective was gained from life, reaffirmed by having children and aging parents. My eldest child Asha, who is nine, is of a similar age as when I first started forming the memories that followed and chased me. I am my father for my daughter and my daughter is me as a child; I see my own life mimicked by family members, providing motivation and pathways for my creative expression. The spacing and linking of generations pulls me forward and pushes me back into history.
Sometime late in 2009 I decided to undertake a two year sculpture research project at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory. I knew the place well. The school at the University had a great workshop that was rarely used and I was given a huge studio with 24-hour access. I was set to make an abundance of sculpture. I started my research by looking at my past works, specifically relating to the built environment and the memories and stories associated with them, and started to conceive new sculpture. Early in 2010, at the start of my research, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and ultimately passed away – altering my perception and working method profoundly. I now had to travel to Canberra regularly and I was consumed with end-of-life stuff. My work quickly embraced this change and my mother’s situation afforded me a tangible and real story to link to my creativity with autobiography. Furniture items started to take form; my mother had a lot of furniture that I equate with her and as her body failed, special furniture was required to help. All the time while visiting Canberra to care for my mother, I would take time out at the National Gallery, which is just a walk away. I fell in love with Gerrit Rietveld’s Berlin Chair and de Kooning; both these artists became important points of reference for me. As death neared, I thought of the stories of my childhood. Seeing Carl Andre’s Lever in 1974 in Sydney with my mother became significant. Life seems to have come full circle and these cycles are completed in mysterious time. It is all become one for me art—life and death, art became the therapy; it was a way of coping and to express the things that I could never find the words or heart to say.

Diary Entry - September 30th 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

The approach to my exegesis mimics the approach of my practice. Colleague Simon Cooper lucidly explained my approach to research and creative practice as “your experience of the relationships between theory, thoughts, inspiration, processes and creativity is that they are not linear, clear or defined but tangled, multiple, intersecting, circular, poetic and sometimes random” (email conversation January 17th 2012). Various voices are scattered throughout this paper; text-boxes describe individual artworks like labels in an art gallery and unedited diary entries in italics, lifted from my numerous sketchbooks and journals, promote autobiographical and first person accounts.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
The Lived World

Bird-boxes (Richardson 2010) is an example of my ‘lived world’ experience. It is a series of six stacked identical black boxes with wooden rails on one side exposing a white interior. The bird-boxes are replicas in colour, material and scale to the bird-boxes I saw at Darwin’s rural Freds Pass Show in 2009. I was drawn to the cages in multiple ways; they were handmade and artful, they were indicative of abstract/minimal form. I linked them to my own memories as an avid collector and keeper of animals. This work was created after I visited the show, thinking their beauty needed to be seen beyond a country fair. Sculpture has the greatest potential for extending their story. I appropriated the bird-boxes, but only after I had experienced them and they became part of me.

Being there, sketching from the real, gave my subjects a feel of legitimacy that is vital. I could not, for example, grab pictures off the internet of the Byzantine churches in Ethiopia which I would dearly love to visit and draw, as it would lack the soul needed. Artist Peter Atkins claims that appropriation comes in context. He cites visiting a cultural group in Southern America and using their design in artworks only after he had been there (Larkin 1994).
**Bird-boxes**
2010
Wood & acrylic
110cm x 103cm x 30cm each (six pieces)

I encountered these bird-boxes at an annual rural show in Darwin. I was drawn to their modular quality and sculptural potential. The reproductions mimic the colour, material and scale yet remain subtly different now, as sculpture.

2. *Bird-boxes*. Wood & acrylic, 110cm x 103 x 30cm, Nan Giese Gallery Charles Darwin University 2010, Darwin (Richardson 2010)

3. Bird Display - Freds Pass Rural Show, Northern Territory, 2009

*My Life as Sculpture*
Tobias Richardson, 2012
**Green Cross**
2011  
Wood & enamel  
79cm x 79cm x 22cm

*Green Cross* was the first sculpture I made in 2011 after three months’ travel abroad to Paris, London, Mali in Africa and southern China. During these travels I became fascinated by the ubiquitous presence of suspended green crosses that indicated a pharmacy. The cross is loaded with all sorts of unavoidable connotations. I thought about the cross as faith related to healing, illness and human connectedness.

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*I have a close relationship with pharmacies. All my adult life I have been a recreational drug user. As I have gotten older, I no longer source illegal drugs for obvious reasons, but I do partake in interesting ones when legally available. In countries with relaxed pharmaceuticals laws, I visit the pharmacy like one might visit the corner pub.*

Diary Entry - August 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

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4. *Pharmacy Sign – Timbuktu.* Gouache on paper, 32cm x 23cm  
Mali Sketchbook (Richardson 2011)
Travelling

I am never more content than when I am travelling, when getting lost is the right way to go. Travel makes life simple and self-contained.

Travelling is always very creative and stimulating, with new architecture, cultures, experiences, materials and imagery to engage me everywhere. In travel, these stimuli can be fleeting and I have to wrangle ways to hold onto to them once I have moved on. Art making, in particular drawing, forms a link to the places I have been, as does collecting materials on the street, photography, reading and writing.

5. Shrouded Scaffolding. Gouache on paper, 25cmx 25cm
   China Sketchbook, Guangzhou (Richardson 2011)

Paris (November 1st – December 24th 2010)

Towards the end of 2010, I spent a few months working in a studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. During my time in Paris, between my flâneur exploits, I read and made art. Andrew Hussey’s 2006 biography of Paris, Paris The Secret History is a history of massacres, rebellion, sex, silly monarchs and utopian idealism in what I realised was a very layered city. It was through knowing these layers of stories that the city opened up to me and I became part of it and started to draw the city with its past architecture and stories that were no longer in existence. The long-gone Bastille prison and the notorious Winter Velodrome, used as a transit point for the July 1942 Jewish roundup by the Vichy government, became subject matter.
6. Ministry of the Interior (Winter Velodrome)
Site of the former Winter Velodrome. Acrylic on paper 50cm x 65cm
Paris (Richardson 2010)


I went to the Louvre and it snowed all day. The views out the windows of the Louvre were just as enchanting as the art. I found a lot of the narratives in Andrew Hussey's Paris biography in gigantic French historical paintings; these I suppose were the movies of the time. Everywhere there were artworks of decapitated lactating women. After visiting the Louvre, with my newly acquired awareness of French history. I was moved to respond in drawing to the endless depictions at the Louvre of busty women and massacre.

Diary Entry: November 30th 2011, Paris (Richardson)
Walking

Guy Debord was an avant-garde thinker and prime motivator for the student-inspired riots of Paris in 1968. What interested me about Debord was that he was motivated to revolution not by hunger or persecution but by philosophy. Debord, who was associated with the Situationist International movement, defined psychogeography in 1955 as "... strategies for exploring cities – anything that takes pedestrians off their predictable path and jolts them into a new awareness of the urban environment" (Debord 1955 in Hart 2004). It was thrilling for me to discover a term that clarified how and why I walk in cities. Many people have meandered the streets of Paris for centuries seeking adventure, crime, revolution, creativity and understanding. As a flâneur, I walked without an agenda; an activity that brought focus to my environment and allowed me to see the fabric and objects of a city and direct them to creative practice. Each day, after having explored some part of Paris, I would retreat to the studio and draw on my experiences using my own drawing vocabulary.

Through walking and literature, I discovered the site of the old Bastille, a former notorious Parisian prison demolished in the 1789 French Revolution. I completed a series of large-scale drawings depicting the imposing façade of the prison from old models and paintings I had seen in museums. The site is now a huge roundabout and nothing remains of the once massive structure that occupied the site – just memories, memories of buildings.

Like many buildings in my œuvre my attraction is multifaceted; the Bastille has great aesthetic appeal and an evocative history. I seek castles, prisons and other emotive public buildings in my travels; these become ubiquitous links as I travel the globe. The Bastille’s simple yet massively imposing design, its correlation between a dark history and its dark stonework fabric and that it no longer stands makes it an ideal subject to be evoked through art.

8. Bastille. Acrylic on paper, 150cm x 165cm, Paris (Richardson 2010)

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
Collecting
Collecting, searching and the archiving of objects is a creative act that has infiltrated my practice for years. Objects are collected using criteria defined by time and space, taking on a provenance that directs the design of artworks, imbuing deeper meaning and significance on found objects. Provenance is the defined origin/history of an object and drives meaning and narrative. This origin can be used to enhance metaphysical values, validate materials and found objects, and provide pathways for aesthetic expression.

My usage of the term metaphysical has a philosophical root that implies qualities beyond the tangible and known, qualities that are abstract both physically and emotively.

The processes involved in collecting discarded objects have many qualities pertaining to my creative practice. The manipulation of materials, the arrangement of objects as well as the looking and searching, are all methods used in visual arts. A number of works in this research resulted from the display of collected materials, archived objects that through sculpture are elucidated in new ways.

**Handball – Found Ball Collection**
2010
Found balls, wood & enamel
82cm x 82cm x 8cm each

This collection consists of found balls which are all a size that can fit into my hand. The balls are displayed in a series of shelves, not yet completely filled, suggestive of an ongoing narrative.

9. *Handball – Found Ball Collection*. Found balls, wood & enamel
   82cm x 82cm x 8cm each, Darwin (Richardson 2010)
**Diana and the Thirteenth Pillar**

2010/11
Wooden toy blocks, glass & concrete
81cm x 245cm x 120.5cm

*Diana and the Thirteenth Pillar* could be a possible Tintin adventure.

Slowly built over two years with children's toy blocks procured from opportunity shops. *Diana and the Thirteenth Pillar* is a reliquary. Housed in the middle of the work is a fragment of concrete from the thirteenth pillar in the Place de Alma tunnel in Paris where Diana Spencer died in a car-crash on August 31st 1997.

The tunnel is a major road artery in Paris and is full of traffic. I crossed over to the centre of the road and slid into the tunnel dodging traffic, counting off the pillars until I reached the thirteenth one, no sign of an accident, just a nondescript concrete pillar. Using a rock I broke of a tiny piece of the pillar before making my escape. I notice the people in cars flying past staring at me; they must be thinking there's another one of those fucking Diana freaks!

Diary Entry – December 2010, Paris (Richardson)

10. *Diana and the Thirteenth Pillar,* Wooden toy blocks, glass & concrete
81cm x 245cm x 120.5cm, Darwin (Richardson 2010/11)
Mali (December 25th 2010 – January 13th 2011)

I decided, after reading a biography of Frank Zappa, that I would leave Paris and go to Mali in Africa. I have always wanted to see the earthen architecture in Mali and Zappa’s creative drive gave me the energy and conviction to go. On Christmas Day 2010 I flew from Paris, via Algeria, to Bamako in Mali.

Arrived Mali at dawn. Just walked around Bamako, getting a ‘feel’ for the city and its ways. Was drawn to familiar places like the mosque, cathedral, the markets with fetish items for sale like monkey heads, snakes etc, the river and one huge skyscraper. I start to see familiar concrete and tiled architecture. This type of architecture is very similar in design and aesthetic to what I’ve seen on numerous trips to South East Asia and has been the subject of much drawing broadly titled New Asian Buildings. It leads to reason then that I will create a New African Buildings series. The mud buildings I seek are not a feature of the capital Bamako and will be, I understand, found in rural areas.

Diary Entry - December 25th 2010, Bamako, Mali (Richardson)

The last series of drawings I completed while in Paris were the Pre Mali Drawings (Richardson 2010), drawings that depicted the grand earthen mosque of Djenne. The pre drawings enabled me to become intimate with and develop an appreciation of the mosque prior to seeing it first-hand. It was only when I had booked my ticket and acquired my visa to Mali that I felt the real urge and conviction to make these drawings. The pre-drawings of the mosque were emotional when compare with those completed onsite in Mali, which were more analytical.

11. Djenne Mosque - Pre Mali Drawing. Acrylic on paper, 50cm x 65cm
Paris (Richardson 2010)
Mali is so beautiful and I have been completely overwhelmed by the Earthen Architecture, as I now refer to it, the mud cities, houses and mosques. The mud structures are so organic, made by hands with simple techniques and local materials. The architecture looks and feels sculptural. The difference between the ground that the building stand on and the actual building is non-existent, something I find very moving. I am drawn to the mosques, grand and small with their towering minarets capped with ostrich eggs and megaphones. The buildings come in various appearances; organic blobs of melting ice cream, simple squared huts to amazingly detailed multi-level structures. The ubiquitous sticks that
protrude from the larger mud buildings are one of their defining characteristics; in fact without the protruding sticks the buildings would lose a lot of their animation. The protruding sticks, called torons (Velton 2009) have a number of purposes: they form the internal structure to support taller buildings, and by protruding act as a permanent scaffolding that allows for repairs to be carried out by the masons or bareys (Velton 2009 p.116) and finally the sticks have aesthetic worth; it is this combination of uses that makes these buildings quite extraordinary.

Diary Entry - December 25th 2010, Djenne, Mali (Richardson)

**Lounge Chair (Timbuktu)**
2011
Recycled wood construction
103.5cm x 81cm x 90cm

In Timbuktu I came across a street stall that was making and selling lounge chairs and other furniture made by hand from found timbers, with no electricity. I was so excited by this street stall, for me it was a manifestation of my studio. The lounge chairs intrigued me, so I drew and photographed them in their construction stage prior to upholstering, as frames hewn from found timbers. Back in Darwin, I recreated a lounge chair in similar materials and scale. I would have loved to have taken a souvenir of one of these lounge chairs, but their size made it impractical to take to back to Australia and anyway, what would customs have to say?

Diary Entry - 8th January 2011, Timbuktu, Mali (Richardson)

*Arrived Timbuktu – if you had asked me a month ago where Timbuktu was I would have had no idea. Today Timbuktu seems symbolic; gone are the legends of romance, intrigue and danger. Yet the town is a fine place to visit, it is about as near to the northern desert as a tourist can go, as al-Qaeda are apparently lurking in the dunes further north.*

Diary Entry - 8th January 2011, Timbuktu, Mali (Richardson)
14. Lounge Chair (Timbuktu). Recycled wood construction, 103.5cm x 81cm x 90cm
Darwin (Richardson 2011)

15. Chair and furniture street stall/workshop, Timbuktu, Mali, January 2011

Sketchbooks
I started filling sketchbooks around 1985 when I studied at East Sydney Technical College in NSW. My drawing teacher at the time, Robert Eadie, challenged students to maintain sketchbooks at all times.

Visual diaries, journals, sketchbooks, notebooks whatever they are called, are essential and integral vehicles for capturing and documenting all ideas face-to-face. I call them sketchbooks. These days I keep two types; one is for drawing, the other a scrapbook for gluing in bits and pieces of ideas, photos, writings, found objects, exhibition invites etc, as clues for the creative process. There is no editing in sketchbooks and they are immune to criticism. An important aspect of sketchbooks is
the sequential nature of them. I faithfully record dates and places, creating a log that spans my lifetime. Sketchbooks allow me to trawl and compare recent directions and ideas. Scrapbooks coincide with sketchbooks and studio practice and record all the notes, measurements, photos and sketches that lead to major works. Once artworks have been collected, destroyed or decayed, the vital sketchbooks and scrapbooks will still exist and can deliver insight into the artwork as an alternative to photographic documentation.

16. Fish Reliquary – Musée du quai Branly. Gouache on paper, 20cm x 14cm
Paris Sketchbook (Richardson 2010)

During periods of travel, visual diaries become paramount. When travelling I am especially creatively alert and fired-up; “For Richardson, drawing is both a discipline and a ritual, essential to finding his creative bearing, both in studio and life: “I draw where I am so I know where I am”.” (Angel 2007 p.91). Sketchbooks capture and record in real time, acting as multi-functional portable studios. Whilst travelling in Mali I completed a sketchbook in a new manner. I made one hundred drawings in mixed media on envelopes and other locally sourced scrap paper. This loose format allowed me to exhibit the individual drawings, effectively displaying an entire sketchbook.
Sketchbook – I again will attempt a more sideways sketchbook, one that can be taken apart. The Mali sketchbook will be individual loose pages, roughly no larger than A4. All the paper will be found in Mali, scavenged from the street, brought from stores. I will catalogue the drawings by sequencing numbers, date, subject and location. The journal will in many ways act like a visual diary. The drawings will prompt ideas for sculpture back in Darwin. So far managed 60 odd drawings and will be able to make 100. Most are found and reflect the day-to-day, a travel-log as such. The drawings provide links for my experiences, legitimise subjects and give me something to fucking do besides being a tourist, in fact being an artist provides an escape from the norm of a tourist and allows for the unusual and neglected to be subject/focus.

Diary Entry - January 4th 2011, River Niger Ferry, Mali (Richardson)

17. Fetish Market – Bamako. Gouache on paper, 23cm x 32cm
Mali Sketchbook, Mali (Richardson 2011)

Drawing in the Final Installation
The final installation of sculptures co-existed with drawings and provided alternate in-ways and out-ways for reading this research. While sculpture remained the main focus of this research, drawing was an essential and ubiquitous part of the process.

The scale of my drawings varied from small works on paper scraps and sketchbooks to large drawings on quality paper. The materials of the drawings were generally determined by the work’s scale; large paper works with broad bushes and house paints, while smaller works and sketchbooks in gouache and pen, but ultimately anything that can make a mark was utilised.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
SECTI ON 2 - TIME

Back to the Future

What happens today affects the reality of yesterday and tomorrow in a coexistent and ever-changing dynamic. Experiences today cause reassessment of memories and trigger new ones, whilst influencing and guiding future perception. It is from this dynamic that I extracted creative research.

To understand and appreciate my history, I rewound it and sought connections and empathy with objects and stories from the past. Consistently, my physical and emotional connection with the past starts in the Middle Ages and moves forward from there to the modern era. The Bayeux Tapestry, circa 1070 became the symbolic end-point or start-point of my history. The famous Medieval tapestry from France depicts the secular and vernacular nature of the Battle of Hastings in 1066. I have been visiting the township of Bayeux in France since 1977 to see the tapestry. The embroidery is so free in my mind; floating space, expressive perspective, vivid colouring and layered narrative constitute this massive site-specific installation; a true indicator of future modern artistic pursuits if ever there was one.

My connection with the 11th century (Middle Ages) is a response to the material and collective memories of the last one thousand years of Western history. Living in multi-cultural Australia offers a clarifying perspective for my European background and its aesthetic preferences from afar. Last Supper (Richardson 2010) and Crusaders (Richardson 2011) are two works that address this historical and cultural perspective. I have spent many more years living in the outback Australian communities of Utopia and Maningrida than in traditional European towns, more time in square corrugated shacks than in stone medieval buildings, yet feel most connected with European environments. This, I believe goes further than cultural positioning and is a deep cultural aesthetic connection.
Crusaders
2011
Masonite, wood, acrylic & metal trays
76cm x 227cm x 15cm

The Medieval chainmail figures are crusaders swarming across Europe. These are ancient and contemporary tourists or soldiers. The base of the work is an assemblage of metal souvenir trays, linking travel with the metal of Medieval armory.

18. Crusaders. Masonite, wood, acrylic, metal trays and tins
76cm x 227cm x 15cm, Darwin (Richardson 2011)

Forward to the Past
Art is the subject of my art because I am an artist. Artworks that I experience and develop connections with provide influence, aesthetic parameters and narrative for my own work.

I do not find a need to create work that is ‘new’ when I feel connected to what came before. I prefer to extend history through ways of seeing and making in current time and space. A principle sculptural aim of Andre was “extending the traditions of modernists sculpture” (Bourdon 1978 p.50). Carl Andre’s Lever (Andre 1966) and Gerrit Rietveld’s Berlin Chair (Rietveld 1923) are two artworks that I explored that are linked with biographical connection. I first saw Andre’s Lever in 1974 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales when it was included in the touring exhibition Some Recent American Art (Licht 1973). Rietveld’s Berlin Chair at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra is a more recent reference. I visited the gallery regularly in 2010 and became aware of the chair and it developed into a solace and catalyst for my research and life.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
Revel
2010–2011
85 found bricks
6m in length

Revel is a reconstruction of Carl Andre's 1966 work Lever (Andre 1966). Revel is the backward spelling of the word lever, apt as it means ‘to celebrate’. Revel is my homage to Carl Andre.

Andre's work Lever holds particular significance for me. It was my first significant experience with modern art, when in 1974, aged six, I saw the sculpture at the Art Gallery of NSW. Andre's Lever was a neat row of 137 bricks, nothing more, but something else. Lever was as intriguing and mysterious, and it haunted me.

Lever was a slow revelation that took time to appreciate and understand. Lever is stripped back to the essentials that are in turn highlighted and paraded. My relationship with Lever is both personal and academic, both aspects leading and supporting each other.

The apparently simplistic nature of Andre's work is misleading, both in meaning and construction. The task of finding 137 bricks in Darwin was not easy in a city primarily built of cast concrete, wood and steel, and after two-years I had only managed to find 85 bricks. In contrast, on a trip to Sydney, I was able to easily and quickly collect 137 discarded bricks in a few days; a telling sign of the different fabrics of these cities.

I extended the work of Andre 38 years later, in Australia, from used bricks rather than new ones. The act of 'extending' has a physical and inevitable presence in line with my creativity. I hope he does not mind. Carl Andre was specific that the bricks he used in Lever were unified and brand-new; the bricks in my version are in a state of entropy and capitalise on the material's history and transformation.

I realise now that I failed to find 137 I only found about 85. It. In short bricks are hard to find in Darwin. In the end it was process driven with extensive searching, transporting and cleaning. While perhaps Revel like one of the simplest works it was by far the most complicated to make.

Diary Entry – October 2011, Darwin NT (Richardson)
Andre’s brick sculptures were inspired by his experiences with lakes, a genesis I explored with a brick moat sculpture at Lake Macquarie Regional Gallery in NSW in 2010, *Lake* (Richardson 2010). The circumstances in which Andre’s brick sculptures were first created have been summarised by David Bourdon “For some time it had been apparent to Andre that his sculpture should be low. In summer, 1965, while canoeing on a New Hampshire lake, he realised his sculpture had to be as level as water” (Bourdon in Alley 1981, p.13).

*My Life as Sculpture*
Tobias Richardson, 2012
Commode (Berlin)
2010
Wood construction & acrylic
95cm x 69cm x 56cm
After Gerrit Rietveld Berlin Chair (Rietveld 1923)

At the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra is a Gerrit Rietveld Berlin Chair (Rietveld 1923). During 2010 I spent considerable time in Canberra caring for my mother, whose illness prior to her passing confined her to a commode chair; pretty much a wheelchair with toilet feature.

I would walk to the nearby National Gallery and meditate on the artworks. I soon gravitated towards Rietveld’s chair; it became a comfort for me. It demonstrated beauty, calmness and comfort. The chair became counselor. I started to investigate Rietveld and a whole world of aesthetics and philosophy opened up; I fell in love.

Paul Overy describes Rietveld’s chairs as “Standing before or sitting in a Rietveld chair, you are made acutely conscious of the relationship of your body to the space around you that it occupies” (Overy 1969). A function of Rietveld’s chairs, with their hard seats and backs, is to focus our senses, to make us alert and aware. Rietveld was not interested in conventional ideas of comfort like an armchair that relaxes you so much that you fall asleep. He wanted to keep the sitter physically and mentally toned up (Overy 1969). These statements had direct consequences for my interpretations of my mother’s comfort. Her chair was not for comfort but for...
necessity. She was acutely aware of present time and illness when confined to the chair. Rietveld’s vision was that furniture would become spatial compositions, with the planks and batons of their construction revealed rather than hidden. Materials were to be easily obtained and able to be made cheaply by the common person and thus Rietveld designed with economy and a minimum of materials (Drijver & Niemeijer 2001). This truth to materials was played out in my commode sculpture. Simple plywood was used with the joints and construction exposed. Grey is my favourite colour. Rietveld’s favourite colour was grey too. De Stijl’s manifesto had an insistence on use of a primary colour range that included black white and grey. My commode version is loyal to this colour range.

My art practice, like all practices I suspect, is a factor in the trajectory of art history. Connectedness with past, present and future art history is continually reassessed. For example I felt able to connect with Rietveld through my European heritage, living in Holland as a child in 1977, visiting a Rietveld exhibition in Utrecht Holland in 2010, and because I regularly see Rietveld’s Berlin Chair (Rietveld 1923) in Canberra. All these links provided a deep response that gave me the go-ahead and ambition to make Rietveld/de Stijl-influenced art.
I was able to also extend my childhood memories, myths and objects. Distance and scale had changed and objects became symbolic and revered. Photos, stories and objects provided potential to distort and revalidate. This merging of past experiences and materials with current creativity underpinned this research.

1977 was a memorable year for me. My family moved from Sydney to a small English village. Lower Heyford, in Oxfordshire England, is composed of 15th century thatched stone cottages scattered along a canal – very idyllic. I spent my time there exploring the surrounding countryside collecting bird eggs, searching for badgers and visiting castles – the experience had a profound and lasting effect upon me. Perhaps in retrospect it was experiencing English culture, my heritage, for the first time that changed me as a child. England was the setting for so many childhood stories and aesthetic values in Australia. I visited Lower Heyford 33 years later in January, 2011 the fabric of the village remained intact. My sense of scale had changed, the walk to the surrounding fields was no longer the epic journey that a child takes to discover his world but merely a quick walk or a one-minute drive. The barn behind our house was no longer massive, dark and foreboding. The canal was now quiet and gentle while as a child it was loud and raging. The bird life I discovered as a child was no longer a discovery. These are changes that are not physical but metaphysical – both realities can be testified through art making.

Diary Entry - January 25th 2010, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire, England (Richardson)
Our Favourite Records
April – 2010 – March 2011
Acrylic, enamel, fabric on board, canvas & plastic
31cm x 31cm each
Series of 20

This series of essentially painted works depicts favourite vinyl album covers and was inspired by my daughter Asha. Asha contributed with drawing, painting and sculptural ideas. A child’s hand in this work enabled me to navigate the playfulness the work needed. The reduction of the album covers to pictorial elements with no text transformed them to painterly compositions.

This work investigated inheritance through a linkage of my past with my daughter’s future trajectory into the world of vinyl music appreciation. The vinyl albums are part of the handing down of family heritage and artifacts.


24. True Colours - Our Favourite Records. Acrylic on board, 31cm x 31cm
Darwin (Richardson 2010)
**Duck Truck**

2010  
Form-ply construction  
49cm x 47cm x 83cm

*Duck Truck* is a sculpture about remembering. It is a scaled recreation of a toy owned and loved by my late brother Mark, who passed away in 1962, before I was born. I only knew of the duck truck from a few photos and family stories. The truck is long gone.

*Duck Truck* was up-scaled using simple mathematical scaling. I have enlarged the truck to my current body-size in 2010 against my brother’s body size aged 18 months in 1962, approximately doubling it. Scaling the work enabled me to ground a figurative relationship into the work. The new sculptural *Duck Truck* is about 80cm in length, the original was 40cm.

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25. *Duck Truck*. Wood & toy blocks, 49cm x 47cm x 83cm  
Nan Giese Gallery, Charles Darwin University 2010  
Darwin (Richardson 2010)
SECTION 3 - MOTIVATION

Pluralism
My art today, as I evaluate it, is at a pluralistic end point, a kind of 'Super-Post-Modernism' where anything and everything can be turned into art and any meaning read into it.

Abstract art, while often claiming a non-objective position, appeared to me full of meaning and emotion. The Minimalist seemed to have made a more successful attempt at a non-objective stance and they in turn inspired future artists. My installation of sculpture and drawing provides pathways for reconciliation with the lack of distinction, characterised by pluralistic and abstract perspectives, in contemporary art.

I sought imagery that was layered with meaning and readings and formed with the materials of life. My thinking was circular and went something like the chicken and egg story: Material is subject and subject is material, subject is life, life is subject, aesthetics are history, history is artists, artists are theorists, I am an artist and so on and on and on.

The Broken Ear
2011
Wood assemblage
30cm x 100cm x 40cm

The Adventures of Tintin and The Broken Ear (Hergé 1943) was a favourite comic book of mine as a child. I was enthralled by the adventures and ethnographic artifacts featured in Tintin's adventure, firing my imagination for travel to faraway places. A raw, unhinged construction like a puzzle of the Broken Ear figurine lying on the floor on an upturned plinth continues the narrative for me as an adult. Making sculpture became grown-up play that acknowledged abstract aesthetics.
26. *The Broken Ear*. Wood assemblage, 30cm x 100cm x 40cm
Darwin (Richardson 2011)

27. *Tintin and the Broken Ear* (Hergé 1943). Frames from comic showing figurine

Abstraction keeps presenting in numerous guises. In Russia, Kasimir Malevich sought to represent the visual world with non-representational imagery as a type of pure art, in what he coined Suprematism, exemplified in *Black Square* (Malevich 1913). De Stijl is primarily abstraction, an art form without subject matter but full of content, without personal arbitrariness and expression but striving toward essential truth. By the 1960s some Minimalist artist like Carl Andre had developed an abstraction conjoined to the logic of the geometric forms of industry: it had conceptual underpinning and discarded the touch-of-hand. Today we find abstraction showing up everywhere. Australian painter Peter Atkins seeks abstract compositions in discarded packaging, jackets of old books, signage etc. in what he terms “Readymade Abstraction” (Atkins 2008). The source materials of Atkins’ paintings are not far away and there is no denying the heritage of his works.
It is the moment when a form finds its abstract state that creativity is exciting and real. I see a lot of abstract painting about abstract painting – this type of work always fails to engage me, I just see and long for what happened before.

Diary Entry – September 3rd 2011, Sydney, NSW (Richardson)

Art critic Arthur Danto, in a discussion on Hungarian artist Ágenes Eperjesi, states “the pluralistic structure that has increasingly come to define the production of contemporary art, especially since the 1960s when artists first began to explore the possibility of using vernacular imagery” (Danto 2007). The idea that aesthetic refinement equates with beauty and excellence is no longer a measure of artistic quality. Robert Rauschenberg’s cardboards in the early 1970s (Bois, Elliot & Helfenstein 2007) collaged cardboard boxes as simple, vernacular material amazingly as a case in point. Ten years earlier in Paris, Jacques Villeglé created collages from torn street posters (Durozoi 2008) with equal intensity. It is the aesthetic power of the material plus the limited intervention that make such engaging art. It is this slippage of aesthetic values and vernacular forms that drives me as an artist.

The first art history text I read was Graham Hopwood’s Handbook of Art published in early 1970s; the guts of the art syllabus for my schooling in the 1980s. Hopwood’s text is now very dated, but when I found a copy at local a Darwin opportunity shop I was charmed to reread sections and be reminded of my school days and early art forays. Hopwood’s description of Cubism, my favourite style at the time, still rings true. Cubism, he writes, is an attempt to seek a kind of inner truth and the representation of subject through multiple viewpoints (Hopwood 1975 p.116).

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
This found painting is abstract in nature and formed with no intent, but instantly evoked a landscape to me. A low horizon under a turbulent white sky had to be a good setting for a gothic novel like *Wuthering Heights* (Bronte 1847). ‘Wuthering’, I learn from Wikipedia, is a Yorkshire word meaning turbulent, so it is an apt title.
In June 2011 I made a two-week trip to Fiji to research family history. In the early 1960s my parents had lived and worked in Fiji and I sought out the places where they had lived and worked. The desktops had been salvaged from the rubbish-tip at the Queen Victoria School in Tailevu in Fiji where my parents taught between 1960-1962. I pretended the desktops were from my parents’ time. The desktops are aged with graffiti, flaking paint and wood decay. I scribed some new graffiti just to bring them up to date.

**Utopia Boards**
1997-2011
Wood & paint
Various dimensions
Nine works

These paintings represent some of the first works I made when I moved from Sydney to the Utopia Homelands in the Northern Territory in 1997. They are reworked hand-painted checkerboards used by locals to play a type of checkers game. Over two years in Utopia I collected lots of checkerboards that were fashioned into various artworks. In 2011, I salvaged nine checkerboards from a dismantled artwork. The Utopia Boards, as I now call them, as singular items, reminded me of the famous Papunya Boards produced in the early 1970s in the Western Desert region of Australia. Geoffrey Bardon was a teacher who taught in the area (1971–73) and is credited for motivating local artists to paint with western media on permanent surfaces like boards. As a teacher in Indigenous Homelands, Utopia (1997-98) and Maningrida (1999-2002) with an interest in art, I saw tidy biographical parallels with Bardon.

At the time, I was privy to the play of children and adults, and felt connections to the handmade objects I found, like the checkerboards.

"Indigenous children are the makers and inventors of these toys rather than the receivers of toys made by adults for children" (Haagen 1994 p.107). This important distinction fueled has my interest in the aesthetics of handmade toys, games and other objects.
Metaphysics and Meaning

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that examines the nature of being, the non-physical aspects of life. Metaphysical appreciation is ancient, and today has a broad inquiry base. Principally, metaphysics implies the deeper and underlying meaning of things (Hankinson 1992). I argue that metaphysics, by its very nature, is identifiable in all arts, even the non-objective. I expose, in my art, elements and hints of the underlying structures of narrative, construction, material and form. For example, an artwork depicting a table initially draws us to speak of ‘table’ but that is just a start, a prerequisite. My table has decals and smells of furniture polish. These are the multiple pathways that lead to new meanings.

My artworks remain open to metaphysical interpretation. The viewer does not necessarily need to know all my intentions and meanings underlying an artwork in order to appreciate it. I wish the viewer to install their own reading, through their experiences and aesthetic appreciation. However knowledge of my intention does not necessarily spoil the reading, rather it acts to direct the viewer. An artwork’s title may provide a clue to this intention.

Alberto Giacometti and Dreaming

John Berger describes Alberto Giacometti’s work as “... the incomplete history of his staring at it” (Berger 1980 p.180). A wonderful quote that encapsulates for me the endlessness of art making and how it spans time. Giacometti has always been an important artist for me as he lived the artist life, died for it and in between made such punishingly sublime art. It is perhaps his early surrealist works that best parallel my practice. I have seen a lot Giacometti in my travels and they never fail to freeze and confine me to continue the gaze.

Artist Alberto Giacometti showed me the metaphysical underpinning possible in art. Giacometti’s The Palace at 4 a.m. (Giacometti 1932) is a cryptic building-skeleton full of symbols staging the memories of the artist’s relationships, a sculpture conceived as and in a dream (Lord 1985). I have puzzled over and loved this work for years.

Dreams come true. I always looked for subconscious prompts to provide subject matter and reasoning. I sometimes dream in art. In the ghostly world of waking, as the night’s dreams start rewinding and fading, I will scribble and commit to memory the shapes to become sculpture, amazed at my new ‘free’ idea.
Death Memory – Band Saw & Spine (Richardson 2010) is a work in two parts, two distinct works butted together to form the collective Death Memory. One part Band Saw (Richardson 2010) was inspired by a dream in which I was at a Ricky Swallow exhibition and he had assembled a sculpture depicting the band saw from the Charles Darwin University’s workshop. This particular band saw was a tool I used constantly in the making of nearly all my works for this research project, and to have made a scaled wood assemblage was fitting. Spine (Richardson 2010) was the reconstruction of the floating spinal column suspended in the frame structure of The Palace at 4 a.m. (Giacometti 1932). The spine was originally my father’s medical specimen from the 1960s, apparently from an Indian female. I always worried about the woman, who was she? Perhaps it was she who inspired the title Death Memory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Death Memory – Band Saw &amp; Spine</th>
<th>Spine</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band Saw</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood construction</td>
<td>Wood, acrylic &amp; bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176cm x 58cm x 50cm</td>
<td>71cm x 40cm x 40cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Death Memory consists of two juxtaposed sculptures, both conceived in dreams. Band Saw has its start in a dream I had of a fictional Ricky Swallow sculpture and Spine inherited the dreamscape of Giacometti’s surrealist masterpiece The Palace at 4am (Giacometti 1932). Death Memory like Giacometti’s sculpture, is a psychological framework imbedded with symbols of relationships (Lord 1985). The sculptures elucidate and confuse various levels of identity.

31. The Palace at 4am – lost plaster version (Giacometti 1932)  
Photography by Man Ray 1932
Montparnasse was the Parisian artists’ haunt in the early 20th Century. I sought out Alberto Giacometti’s studio/home. While un-open to the public the studio remains an artist studio and I could see inside a bit from the street. The studio today captures little of the romance and historic feel that I had nourished in the artist’s biography, it ‘felt’ faded by time, had the artist really stood here? I understood that this was not my past experience but rather someone else’s and to try and extract a kind of pilgrim’s uplift was in vain. Visiting Giacometti’s studio was in the end an act of research that turned up nothing. I had hoped to find the studio unmarked and abandoned, to be the first to explore the ruins to upturn debris and recover crumbs of plaster from Giacometti’s sculpture, this would truly have been something.

Diary Entry - November 14th 2010, Giacometti’s Studio
No. 46 rue Hippolyte - Maindron, Montparnasse, Paris (Richardson)

**Suspended Scorpion**
2010
Wood, plastic & clay
35cm x 23cm x 24cm

A clay scorpion suspended in a box like frame. I always have clay available for when children visit my studio. Asha, my daughter, made this scorpion for me while in my studio and I thought of Alberto Giacometti’s surreal figures suspended in cage-like frames. Frames speak to me of metaphysical homes exposed in skeleton form, ideal settings for an arthropod and its exoskeleton.

**Gothic Memory**
I use structural architectural features to formally depict my memory of a building and as an interpretive tool for a building’s form: beams, columns, framing, scaffolding etc.

Gothic philosophy and architecture, as I perceive it, expresses that the structural elements of a building are exposed through necessity and not hidden; they are expressed as aesthetically integral parts. Gothic architecture allows for internal spaces to become bigger and grander by incorporating structural features like flying buttresses on the outside. By parading the structural elements of a building and not hiding them, truth is exposed and manipulated as the nature of a building’s being.
I draw buildings literally as though I was building them. Firstly I lay out a floor space, then put up wall frames, add a roof, clad the building and so on, using formal and non-formal perspectives as tools to disclose the building.

I am inspired by the types of buildings that are associated with my memory and link the cultural worlds in which I live and travel; buildings of worship, schools, jails, castles, museums, hotels and hospitals. These buildings become spaces and places to remember. When the buildings come in a vernacular form, the links converge, for example a demountable building can become a classroom with a blackboard, a church with a cross or a hotel with beds.

32. *Fort - Malacca Malaysia*. Gouache, collage on paper, 26cm x 21cm
Malaysia Sketchbook (Richardson 2001)

**Keystone**
2011
Matte black speaker boxes - Wood construction, found speaker boxes & acrylic
272cm (inner height)

*Keystone* is a large architectural work made of speaker boxes arranged to form a Medieval archway. The individual speaker boxes function like the building blocks or stones in the arch. This work utilises both found speaker boxes, gutted of their speakers and wiring, and empty speaker boxes made by me, the difference indistinguishable and unimportant. The speaker boxes are painted in matte black acrylic, the standard colour in rock and roll staging. An open relationship between the speaker boxes and the archway is proposed; a façade, a Medieval homage and a thumbs up for heavy metal rock music, all this and more and less. Façadism is “an architectural technique in which an old building is knocked down

*My Life as Sculpture*
Tobias Richardson, 2012
save the front, giving the illusion of the presence of the past" (Hussey 2006 p.148). This kind of architectural strategy had solutions for *Keystone*. What remained important for the work was the assimilation of forms and objects leading to new relationships.

*Keystone* is a good example of the strategy I use to create large works by piecemeal approach, making the work in small portable units. Sculptor Carl Andre's arrangement of units of material to form sculpture was clearly an influence, although I acknowledge he would never have been so literal.

To apply a constraint and grounding in humanism the archway measures an inner height of 272cm. This height would allow the tallest man ever recorded to pass under the archway. American Robert Waldow (1918–1940) measured 272cm and is recorded as the world’s tallest man (*Guinness World Records* 2010, [2009]). Brice Marden's abstract portrait of Patti Smith, *Star (for Patti Smith)* (Marden 1973) also inspired my interest in determining the scaling of this artwork in human terms. The dimension's of Marden's painting were determined by Patti Smith's height and outstretched arms. Without being explicit, specific dimensions can underlay the subject of artworks and hint at narrative and also provide a visceral relationship to the viewer's body dimensions.

33. *Keystone*. Wood, speaker boxes & acrylic, 272cm inner height
Raft Artspace, Alice Springs 2012
Darwin (Richardson 2011)
SECTION 4 - ARTISTS

The Artist as Autobiographer

Whether my works’ genesis is in dreams, memories, daily life or travel, all have an autobiographical underpinning.

Autobiography is multi-faceted; it talks of identity, memory, self-awareness, ideology, mirrors, narrative, sequence, ego and confession.

I have assessed that visual artists do not create biography, with the exception of portraiture, to the extent that they create autobiography. Many visual artists exploit and trawl their selves for subject matter and inspiration. Most artists I know reflect at least on some level, a personal view in their work. The approach of visual arts to autobiography is highly fragmented and diverse and struggles by its nature to be chronological in the way literature can effectively do.

Contemporary visual arts question the function and fallacies of the autobiography and weave this into the work. Literature tends to claim truth and fact (Steiner & Yang, 2004).

Biographies as Theory

*Theory is readable in the art made by the artist and in the life they live.*

Diary Entry – August 2011, Leura NSW (Richardson)

"Aesthetics is for artists what ornithology is for birds" - Barnett Newman 1973 (de Antonio 2009)

My studio is an experimental playground where theories and ideas evolve from the results of experimental studio practice, serendipity and play. It is in the studio that I am most comfortable, with my hands doing the 'thinking'.

The lives of other artists are naturally fascinating to me but further they are therapeutic 'mirrors'. Whilst discussing the virtues of artists' biographies with fellow artist G.W. Bot, she commented "You are never lonely when you can know the lives of other artists" (in conversation with the artist, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery Sept. 24th 2010).

*My Life as Sculpture*

Tobias Richardson, 2012
A puzzle, over my twenty years as a practitioner, has been to find use and relevance in the theories that circulate and interpret art practice. Text-based theory does not motivate me to understand my or other's practices with the relevance that the actual process of making and seeing art does. The artist is in a privileged vantage point because they are there in the first person. Reading artists' biographies proved to be a very successful way to study art history and theory. Biographies placed me in the studio with the artist. However I did not read any artists' autobiographies, as I could not locate any relevant for this research.

My research methodology had resonance and was highlighted through insightful artists' biographies. Embedded within an artist's biography is the artist's practice exemplified through their lived experience and not influenced by subjective outside theory. I am an artist and so it is the history of other artists' lives that motivates me and to which I can relate. Good biographies cover the theory of an artist's work but with a holistic presentation that balances the artist's practice, culture, relationships, legacy and their day-to-day life. As a practicing artist, I am in a position to relate to the biographies of other artists and to empathise with their way of thinking and find parallels with my own life and work.

As previously stated, biography can intertwine the theory, history, methodology, practice and personal life of an artist with deep, broad insight. Inherent to biographical writing is the chronological approach; a very relatable method for understanding. Anecdotes, artists' quotes and pictures provide various entry points to an artist's creativity and life and become a powerful complement to their work. Visual artist Christian Boltanski states: "the really interesting autobiographies are those that speak not of the author but of every reader" (Steiner & Yang 2004). In saying this, Boltanski is reminding us of the endless search for identity involved in an artist's life.

It is important to note that the authenticity of an autobiography can always be questioned; what was forgotten? What was left out? What was highlighted? And what is fallacy?
Homage

Four main artists emerged as major focal points for this multi-shaped research project. The protagonists Alberto Giacometti, Willem de Kooning, Gerrit Rietveld and Carl Andre are backstage motivators for the framing and encouragement of my practice. These artists exemplify an aesthetic excellence and life urge that I strive for as an artist. The biographies of Giacometti, de Kooning, Rietveld and Andre that I read linked my biographical subject matter for this research project as well as providing theoretical support.

"All contemporary art is part of the history of art and is not made in isolation. Art historian Jan Avgikos writes in her catalog essay on Phoebe Washburn, "There is so much historical precedent ready to be deployed to explicate her practice that, depending on the viewer's acumen and knowledge of art history, endless associations can be composed and legitimated in no time at all" (Avgikos 2007 p.33).

Willem de Kooning

Reading the biography de Kooning: An American Master, co-written by Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan (2005), opened my eyes to De Kooning's life and work as never before. I had always admired de Kooning, but after looking at his paintings afresh, with biography in hand, I felt a sense of wonderment and awe. De Kooning's life was passionate; he was punk with an art-life lived to the extreme. I discovered de Kooning's late abstracts paintings, which I had been previously familiar with, and these works really captured and defined an aesthetic highlight for me. The vast end years of de Kooning's career living in Long Island are an unreal moment in the history of painting. My reading of these late de Kooning's are of an artist slowly emptying out his paintings and his life. If you can image the Atlantic Ocean drowning the Hampshire landscape in cold moving light – you have a de Kooning.

Below is a selection of quotes from Stevens and Swans de Kooning's biography that resonated with me.

"I found out I wasn’t the only one"

Picasso always had a certain unshakable grip on me. Cubism shattered the image illusion by dragging out the metaphysical and unseen qualities of form and this had a lasting effect on my own approach to art making. Picasso was the benchmark artist and lurked in Australian school curriculums when I was schooled. He was unavoidable and I grew to love him. I confess to being self-conscious about my
enthusiasm for Picasso when I was younger; he was not ‘cool’ at art school. To this day I always look at a Picasso whenever I have the chance. It seems that Willem de Kooning too was a great admirer of Picasso and his influence is unmistakable in de Kooning’s figurative paintings. From New York, Picasso acted as a link for de Kooning back to Europe. For some critics and artists of the time this was problematic as it negated de Kooning’s chance to be an all American original (Stevens & Swan 2005).

34. Willem de Kooning Late Paintings exhibition, State Hermitage Museum St. Petersburg Russia 2006

“Trembling”
De Kooning was adamant that no single ‘idea’ or ‘claim’ could be made for the meaning and direction of art: it was as though art ‘trembles’ (Stevens & Swan 2005). This pluralistic view invigorated my conviction that the art I make has its genesis in layered, interlaced and multifaceted research and method. Carl Andre also believed “Art is produced dialectically – it comes from a convergence of forces” and doesn’t pull in any one direction (Whitechapel Art Gallery 1978 p.3).

Evolution, as we know, results in new organisms that are the best fit for their environment, these organisms in a pre-state have diverged, they have been changed, an art historian may say innovated, but organisms can equally evolve through acts of convergence; birds, bats and insects all came up with the same idea to get wings and fly.

Diary Entry - October 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)
"Beginning again"
After de Kooning completed his celebrated painting *Excavation* in 1950 he could easily have claimed his style and set about repeating the work with a guarantee of success, but instead de Kooning turned back to figurative painting, which at the time was not in vogue with the avant-garde who favoured abstraction. "(de Kooning) forever abandoned, in order to begin again. He was once more at home, adrift" (Stevens & Swan 2005).

The journey for me is to continually reinvent and redefine. As I write this (October 2011) I am setting up a new studio in Blue Mountains of NSW after thirteen years in the Northern Territory, searching for new subjects, motivation and curiosity.

"Chest Pain"
"Knots in his chest" (Stevens & Swan 2005) de Kooning suffered anxiety that presented as chest pain.

> Cryptic chest pain has harassed me for years, all sorts of tests and probes have not diagnosed the cause - doctors say "just relax". I know the pain is a physical manifestation of anxiety, perhaps art too is a manifestation of anxiety, an accumulator of energy to cure the worries.
> Diary Entry - October 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

"Life"
De Kooning said "an artist is like a homespun philosopher" whose ideas about living and wondering about life were not an end product but a mode of living (Stevens & Swan 2005). Surely art is and has to be a mode of living.

"Mirror"
"De Kooning in 1950 was one of those artists with a mysterious divining rod for what his culture must create in order to know itself" (Stevens & Swan 2005). I believe art must reflect alternate answers and interpretations back to society.
“Out-of-it”
De Kooning said “I’m in my element when I am a little bit out of this world: then I’m in the real world, ... when I’m slipping, I say, this is interesting!” (Stevens & Swan 2005). I feel most creative too when I am not in the main stream, when in a slippage, for example when travelling.

Gerrit Rietveld
Over recent years I felt so much connection with Gerrit Rietveld’s aesthetics and philosophy that it became a life-altering experience. After finding the Berlin Chair (Rietveld 1923) in Canberra in early 2010 I then travelled to Europe and saw numerous exhibitions of Rietveld’s works, as well as reading books on the artist. Bertus Mulder’s 2010 book Gerrit Thomas Rietveld: Life Thought Work, the 2010 retrospective Rietveld’s Universe in Utrecht, Holland, its associated catalogue and the Mondrian/De Stijl Exhibition at the Centre Pompidou (December 2010 to March 2011) all expanded my connection with the artist.

35. Rietveld’s Universe – Chairs. Central Museum Utrecht, Holland 2010

“Vital Urge”
Rietveld’s work explored the attitudes and philosophies to life with which Rietveld was deeply concerned. Consciousness was fuelled by a ‘vital urge’, an urge that encouraged him to create and find faith (Mulder 2010).
"Artistic Architecture"
Rietveld made a distinction between constructional and artistic architecture. The former was architecture for a specific purpose the latter concerned with something higher, space and spatial awareness, which in turn contributed to human growth (Mulder 2010).

"Austerity"
Rietveld was concerned with austerity, which he claimed "is not impoverishment but on the contrary a means to intensify reality" (Mulder 2010). 'Less is more' is a mantra I have solidarity with. For me it is the ability to intensify simple and often neglected imagery and materials.

In November 2010 I travelled to Utrecht, Holland. Utrecht is where Rietveld lived and worked and the town contains many of his significant buildings. I was able to find some of his famous buildings, including the Rietveld Schröder House and to visit the Utrecht Central Museum's major Rietveld retrospective Rietveld's Universe.

The Rietveld Schröder House is a home built in 1924 on what at the time was the edge of Utrecht. In my evaluation it is a unique piece of sculpture, design and architecture, being utopian and so personal, whimsical and idiosyncratic. It is an experimental lab of philosophical art, design and life (quoted in part from wall texts at the Rietveld Schröder House). The house is full of abstract and sly contradictions and is hard to define. There are so many elements to the house to which I can relate. The house reminds me of the journeys artists take, involving not only creative making but also creative looking. The house is so positive, as though it wants to improve life from the simplest aspects to the grandest.

The Rietveld Schröder House is unique in Rietveld's œuvre. He was free to build a house without any predetermined claims on the space, as 'artistic' architecture. Most of his architectural projects were client-based and designed for specific use. In the Rietveld Schröder House, Rietveld and Truus Schröder designed a home that could express their artistic urges. Schröder was Rietveld's friend/mistress whom Rietveld lived with after his wife's death in the Rietveld Schröder House. Rietveld died in 1964 and Schröder continued living in the house until her death in 1985.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
I was inspired by Rietveld's rendering and delineation of floor spaces. I saw ways in which this could influence my own art making. Rietveld used a domestic code of colour and texture to specify areas of usage. Felt flooring was used near the beds, white linoleum designated the paths to other parts of the house and rubber was used for wet areas. Like all elements and materials in Rietveld's work, he engages with them in spatial and meaningful ways.

Rietveld gave the impression he would be exacting in his execution and you expect his work to be very refined. In reality nothing could be further from the truth; it is playful and economic. The kitchen drawers in the Rietveld Schröder House for example are only painted a few inches in from the opening: why paint the whole draw when it will not be seen? On closer inspection the house is whimsical and handmade throughout. Changes and adaptations are obvious. It is a very human building. At the time the house was built, in 1924, Rietveld wanted to use concrete but it was too expensive and difficult at the time, so he had the house built of bricks and rendered to look like concrete. It was Rietveld's manner to find solutions even if an illusion. Rietveld had a great belief that technology would solve the world's problems and seemed willing to come up with alternatives while he waited.

36. Rietveld Schröder House (Rietveld1924) Utrecht, Holland 2010
Maristella Casciato's 2010 catalogue essay for the 2010 exhibition Rietveld's *Universe* in Utrecht argues that the "key to reading Rietveld's œuvre as a designer is to see it as a whole process centered on the theme of the home" (Casciato 2010 quoted in part).

In early December 2010 I went to the recently opened Mondrian/De Stijl exhibition at the Arts Centre Pompidou in Paris (December 1st 2010 – March 21st 2011). This was an exhibition I had keenly waited for and I responded to it with fervor.

The exhibition Mondrian and De Stijl was so amazing, two exhibitions side by side interweaved. One half dedicated to Piet Mondrian and the other to De Stijl movement. De Stijl was really a short, but important, artistic burst (1917 – 1931) a chapter in many artists' path toward abstraction. De Stijl, like many artistic movements in the 20th Century had a unifying goal that was the redefining of art in terms of a total and social art, De Stijl sought solutions to this in geometric terms.

Time has literally aged the art of De Stijl. The wooden frames around a Mondrian are fragile they are expanding, fading and cracking with nails exposed, I think they even appear Medieval. The paintings are now housed in acrylic boxes to protect the integrity of the original artworks and frames – when will this cycle end?

Architectural drawing – so much of my drawing in the last ten years has had an architectural quality, but a quality that could never be engineered into reality. I have always considered my drawings to be expressing the metaphysical qualities of a building’s architecture. Then I discover “counter construction” drawings by de Stijl architects, especially Theo Van Doesburg. Counter construction drawings, also known as axonometric projections, are composed of floating surfaces in a space – drawings that are not in perspective but expressive of creative vision. I am starting to recognise my own aspirations in the work of these amazing de Stijl artists, it is motivation, it is a pursuit, it is a synergy forming.

Diary Entry - December 4th 2010, Centre Pompidou Mondrian/ De Stijl Exhibition, Paris (Richardson)
Carl Andre

I could not locate a biography of Carl Andre although I did find interesting biographical detail in Robert Katz’s 1990 book *Naked by the Window: the fatal marriage of Carl Andre and Ana Mendieta* and numerous catalogues on the artist. Katz’s book focuses on the death of artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985), Andre’s wife at the time. Mendieta fell to her death from a window in their New York apartment. Andre was put on trial for her death but was not convicted. Katz’s book gives insight into Andre’s life and work as background to the tragedy.

* Again I have selected bits and pieces of Andre’s story that engaged me ...

“**Potential subject matter on death**”

The first exhibition, post Mendieta’s death, of new work by Andre, was by invitation only. The show, in 1988, consisted of three sculptures; a handless mason’s trowel, an abstract crucifixion and a third piece, a window. *Window* consisted of a wood-frame, four feet, nine inches high, and two feet, seven inches wide, hung on a blank white wall. There was no pane, but it was closed and made opaque by metal screening. In the lower part of window, the screen was torn (Katz 1990). Reviewer Alfred MacAdam saw death as the central theme in *Window* (MacAdam 1988). The police, while investigating Mendieta’s death, made a detailed description of the window and all its dimensions, as well as a plywood model of the building (Katz 1990).

“**Material and off-cuts**”

“You know, Carl, that’s sculpture, too” said artist Frank Stella (Katz 1990). Stella was referring to the untouched materials that lay around Andre’s studio. These materials, untouched by the sculptor’s hands, would evolve into the essence of Andre’s sculpture. Andre had discovered a new direction “the cut matter made into space – not the space cut into matter” (Katz 1990). Andre would now make sculpture out of arrangements of raw material units. I liken this to my use of off-cuts, the raw materials, left over by others and re-purposed by me.

“**Flat**”

Water was a revelation to Andre. While canoeing on a lake, Andre saw that water, as a flat surface, offered the solution he sought for his sculpture; ultimately an extension of the tradition of sculpture, best exemplified in his mind by Constantin Brancusi (Katz 1990). Positioning sculpture as floor-works, like the flat surface of water in a lake, enables the viewer to walk on and into the works.

*My Life as Sculpture*

Tobias Richardson, 2012
"The thralldom of a sculpture by Mr. Andre is owed to the clarity of his intentions, to the frank and unambiguous way in which the materials are assembled. It does not aim to rival the psychodramas that were acted out in Abstract Expressionism. It does not deal in an outrageous dream life of the Surrealist, it just lies there and minds its own business." (Russell 1980).

"Conviction"
Andre answered critics who said his art was a 'put-on' by saying "People who think I am putting them on believe that I have them in mind when I work. I don't." (Katz 1990)

Carl Andre and the Art Gallery of New South Wales
The newly opened galleries at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in May 2011 display the donated John Kaldor Family Collection of art. As a centre piece to the galleries was a series of three Carl Andre sculptures. Two of the Andre sculptures were floor pieces and as was the artist's intention, people were allowed to touch them, or in this case walk on them. 'Do not touch the artwork' – becomes an ancient museum adage for these sculptures. At the same gallery 37 years earlier I recall seeing another Carl Andre sculpture Lever (Andre 1966), I now feel a cycle has been completed.

Since early 2010 I have been searching for a copy, to no avail of the catalogue for the Some Recent American Art exhibition where I first saw an Andre in 1974, it is out of print and highly collectable. Then on a day trip to Lithgow on the western edge of the Blue Mountains in NSW I found a copy in an Op Shop for a few dollars.
Diary Entry - August 8th 2011, Lithgow, NSW (Richardson)

Today I went to the Art Gallery of NSW to research the exact spot where Lever was installed in 1974. The Gallery's research library was able to provide me with copies of the original installation shots taken back in 1974. And with a little prowling around the gallery I found the spot, oddly located on the first lower floor alongside the toilets, it brought back a faint memory, a ghost. The photos I took of the location will make good subject for some genre painting one day.
Diary Entry - August 31st 2011, Sydney, NSW (Richardson)

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
The Field
The concept behind writing on 'the field' is to acknowledge my position within contemporary practice in Australia and internationally. It identifies artists that parallel my practice and those I believe have 'best practice'. Ultimately it is my understanding of the contemporary field in which I practice and enables me to see my contribution to the field and relationship to other practices. It is through intersecting and shared art histories, biographies, methodologies, subject matter and materials that I forged and composed new work.

My research explored and referenced two distinct intertwining subjects; autobiography and formal notions as abstractionist aesthetics. The artists were equally distinct. While Giacometti, de Kooning, Rietveld and Andre were key locators in the history of art for me, these artists do not work in the current field I work within. In fact all are dead except Andre.

The selection of contemporary artists that relate to and intersect with this research into autobiography and aesthetics is very broad. There are artists who consciously and specifically focus on autobiographical elements in their work and others I cited for their aesthetic approach.

I focused my 'field' to five artists' specific works, but it is a list that is potentially endless. Many of the artworks referenced here I have experienced first hand, a point endorsed through the broad personal approach of this exegesis. These are not necessarily my favourite artists, but rather artists that speak to my own practice.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
The most recognisable and explored expression of autobiography in visual arts is surely self-portraiture. British artist Tracey Emin made some of the most enduring art in recent time from a raw and potent autobiographical position. *My Bed* (Emin 1998) presented the artist's actual bed with debauched trimmings, an abject self-portrait loaded with narrative suggestions.

In a contrary tack to Emin, *My Birth* (Richardson 2010) is a self-portrait rendered as a formally detached object, in the spirit of minimalism. It is a work in which scale and weight were determined by my size and weight at birth. Unlike Tracey Emin's work, *My Bed* (Emin 1998), *My Birth* (Richardson 2010) does not share the emotions of the maker. It is analytical rather than expressive and confessional. I saw *My Bed* at the Charles Saatchi's *Sensation* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 1999.

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**My Birth:** January 15th 1968, between 12:12pm and 12:45pm, Methodist, Auburn District Hospital, Dr. Blockleage. Delivery: Instrumental lift out
Wood, plaster & enamel
58cm x 9cm x 9cm
4.1kg

This refined self-portrait is expressed in dimension and weight rather than as expression and likeness. The dimensions are determined by my birth height of 58cm, head circumference of 36cm and weight of 4.1kg. This sculpture links abstraction with the figurative and provides reasoning for an otherwise random oblong.

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In 2007 I travelled to the 52nd Venice Biennale and experienced Callum Morton's grand installation *Valhalla* (Morton 2007). Morton made a faithfully scaled reconstruction of the family house his father built in 1974, a house designed with modernist principles in mind. The house, in its sculpted state, suffered from trauma and was in ruins. Ruins reflect the personal fact that the house no longer existed, as well as broader states of entropy that characterise world politics. Stuart Koop describes the social and political crossovers of *Valhalla* (Morton 2007) as "Oedipus meets Osama" (Koop 2007). Morton describes his process as "(the) materiality of memory" (Morton 2007), a physical manifestation of memory. It is a psychological space amplified by three musical lifts found inside the sculpted house, lifts that could go anywhere. Morton's interest in the mythology of architect parallels with my concerns with architecture and its use as subject matter for the visual arts.

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*My Life as Sculpture*
Tobias Richardson, 2012
38. Valhalla, polystyrene (Morton 2007). Steel & mix materials 465cm x 1475cm x 850cm, 52nd Venice Biennale

New York installation artist, Phoebe Washburn, creates gigantic sculptural works employing literally tons of discarded and reclaimed materials. Of particular interest to me is her use of wood, a major component of her work. Wood off-cuts are joined together to create huge site-specific structures. Washburn’s raw and energised working method sees her materials take on new and exciting aesthetic forms that grow through a process of construction. In Hammerhead: Reliquary for Teeth (Richardson 2011) the work’s solution was found in Washburn’s use of wood off-cuts. Washburn’s motto is “Find a material, break it down, rebuild with it” (Avgikos 2007).

Victoria – Birds and their Death
2011
Wood, wire, paper labels & bird skulls
198cm x 75cm x 65cm

The philosophy of artist, Phoebe Washburn, liberated this sculpture. Washburn’s resolve with found wood provided the conviction needed to push this assemblage to such a seemingly random end. The bird skulls are a collection I amassed over years with quasi-scientific method. I always seek methods to display my collections in ways that transform them. In this piece I linked opposing narratives; a densely pack Victorian-era bird display with a girl named Victoria to whom I lost my virginity.

Victoria was the first girl I had sex with when I was about 16, a two-second shag that ended with embarrassment.
Diary Entry - August 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
39. *Victoria*. Wood, wire, labels & bird skulls, 198cm x 75cm x 65cm
   Darwin (Richardson 2011)

**Hammerhead: Reliquary for Teeth**
2011
Wood, clay, acrylic & tooth
81cm x 245cm x 120.5cm

*Hammerhead* evolved from trips to Paris in 2008 and 2010. The Quai Branly Museum is a massive museum that you navigate as though in a darkened maze. It houses a vast collection of objects from indigenous cultures across the globe. One object in particular, a reliquary from the Solomon Islands (Santa Anna Island, 20th Century), gripped me; a large wooden fish with a chieftain’s skull. My version is of a hammerhead shark, with my tooth housed in a hollowed space.

40. *Hammerhead: Reliquary for Teeth*. Wood, clay, acrylic & tooth
   81cm x 245cm x 120.5cm
   (Richardson 2011)

At the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 I came upon an exhibition from Estonian artist Marko Mäetamm. Mäetamm directly uses daily life and family as subject matter; subjects that border on a comical, murderous state; “the place between our expectations and experiences” (Hannula 2007). Mäetamm’s interdisciplinary practice incorporates painting, sculpture, text, installation and video. In Loser’s Paradise, Mäetamm’s installation of works for Venice 2007, two works particularly resonated with me: Bleeding House (Mäetamm 2004) and Sandbox (Mäetamm 2006). Bleeding House (Mäetamm 2004) is a series of paintings of buildings: familiar buildings with blood pouring from their windows. The buildings become human as their orifices bleed. Mäetamm uses a strategy of danger, playing the murderer (Hannula 2007). As an artist, Mäetamm parades life’s stories as conundrums. Sandbox (Mäetamm 2004) is a sculpture that depicts a familiar child’s play area subverted with objects of danger. A stock carries a hangman’s noose and a drop-space is located in the sandbox, the objects became dysfunctional. We ask “what might happen?” (Hannula 2007). I related to Mäetamm’s strategies that use the built environment, open narrative and implications of danger.
Train (Exquisite House)
2004, reworked 2010
Wood construction & enamel
74cm x 170cm x 9cm

Train is a scaled-up sculpture of my childhood drawing of a train from 1973. It is a pertinent work that holds a common thread to my prior practice and provides motivation for current research. It was originally made in 2004 for an installation of approximately twenty similar works titled Exquisite House (Richardson 2004), first exhibited at 24HR Art Northern Territory Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin, 2004. Exquisite House reworked my first drawings and at the same time challenged the notion of appropriation with creative interpretation from a distorted past.

Of the twenty original works from the series, five remained by 2010. Decay and collectors had dissipated the collection. For the reworking I mannered the train with a thick layer of enamel paint and isolated it on a plinth.

The subject chooses me (my memories) rather than the other way.
Diary Entry - 2004, Darwin, NT (Richardson)

42. Train (Exquisite House). Wood & enamel, 74cm x 170cm x 9cm
Nan Giese Gallery Charles Darwin University, 2010
Darwin (Richardson 2004-2010)
5. Peter Atkins. Readymade Abstracts
Australian artist Peter Atkins' approach to abstraction and found objects has consistently fascinated and encouraged me to refine my use of found imagery and materials.

Atkins refers to his paintings of floating forms as "readymade abstracts" (Atkins 2008). He scours his local environment for overlooked materials, designs, images and patterns, which are incorporated into abstract compositions. "[Atkins'] interest lies in recording the human connectedness of the materials and revealing the commonality of shared histories" (Atkins 2008). By seeking the abstract elements in his immediate locale, Atkins' style of investigation has numerous corresponding elements with my practice.

**White Button**
2010
Wood, glass jars & white buttons
19cm x 167cm x 11cm

*White Button* was realised by continuing the recycling process of objects, albeit in a subverted fashion. In opportunity shops I found multiple jars of white buttons. I was told that the buttons were salvaged by hand from old clothes, sorted into jars and sold on. I collected these jars for their aesthetic value and underlying narrative. I always thought I would empty the buttons out of the jars and make a sculpture, but realised their ultimate value lay in what they were: collected buttons in jars: I just needed to shift the context from opportunity shop to gallery to sharpen their focus.

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43. *White Button* (detail). Wood, glass & buttons, 19cm x 167cm x 11cm
Darwin (Richardson 2010)

*My Life as Sculpture*
Tobias Richardson, 2012 53
SECTION 4

The Built Environment
The built environment has been subject matter, motivation and catalyst for my research and has a unifying effect on my visual arts practice. The 'built environment', for my purposes, is defined as physical, structures with identifiable materiality, as opposed to natural forms such as the landscape or figure. I claim my preference for the built environment on many levels: primarily it is the environment that I inhabit and in which I was raised. Cities, with their buildings, roads, furniture, grids and homes define my environment. The materials in my sculptures deal with direct and tangible translations of the materials used in the built environment.

My father showed me a photograph of him in the army, a medic on a ship headed for Vietnam, c.1968. This is a potent subject with much referencing and relationship potential. Part of my research is to reflect on the actions best related to aesthetic and material choices. The most obvious and captive element of the photograph is the image of my father and many artists would start there. However, I am not interested to work with the figure and instead scour the image for an architectural or material element, one that can be used as a signifier for telling the unseen and poetic.

Diary Entry – April 2010, Canberra, ACT (Richardson)

Crawl Space - Stairs
2010
Form-ply & wood construction
123cm x 167cm x 190cm

This work references the materials and techniques used in cast concrete construction. The stairs are classic imagery. In this work the suggestion of stairs is never realised and acts as a future memory, or perhaps an anxiety.

I located this work in a temporary state just prior to casting in concrete. I am drawn to the formwork in my environment: it is very sculptural and to my eye often better looking than the building it becomes. Formwork acts as an exoskeleton that is cast off. It is the poetic stuff of buildings. Much of the contemporary built environment is the result of formwork and thus its deployment as sculpture to depict the built environment is ideal.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
Furniture

There are numerous sculptural works in this research project that are in essence furniture. These sculptures are reconstructions of furniture with which I had some relationship and they function to illustrate fragments of my life. The shift to art from the original furniture item has been made by changing the material, function and context, albeit only slightly at times. As sculpture, the furniture item is no longer a utilitarian object but recontextualised into an object in a gallery, something to be mused over. The materiality has shifted too, as new material was used in the construction to provide leverage from the original and to access new interpretations and responses. For example, in Sideboard (Richardson 2010), I have used the cheapest of wood available: particleboard. The original was made in oak. By changing the wood, I imparted a change of meaning. What that change is open for conjecture. The particleboard acts to humble the object in the face of death, to simplify it and to represent decay and fragility. The underlying narrative of Sideboard (Richardson 2010) is a long association with my mother’s, mother’s father’s sideboard brought from North America in the 1800s.

In contrast other furniture artworks dealt with the day-today, Commode (Richardson 2011) is inspired by designed equipment for physically impaired people that my mother had used in illness. In each case the original furniture items changed and gained depth when they became sculpted versions.
**Sideboard**

2010  
Particleboard construction  
98cm x 127cm x 56cm  

*Sideboard* is a scaled reproduction of my grandmother’s father’s oak sideboard in particleboard.  

Through the use of material manipulation, this work set up a number of opposing dialogues, vague questions and hints about the origin of the object. The work is strongly autobiographical as homage to the memory of my childhood homes.  

The original sideboard was made over a hundred years ago by a skilled furniture-maker in oak. The new sculptural version, made by me, an amateur furniture-maker, was crafted from cheap particleboard in 2010. In *Sideboard* the limitations of the material become apparent and are highlighted. The particleboard lacks strength, is prone to rot and is ugly. Decals and other labeling have been left to expose the origin of the material.  

The design values of the work are similar but the aesthetics are realised in opposing intentions and material. Mr. Sheen furniture polish emanates from the particleboard and adds a further dimension to the work; an olfactory trigger from my past.

45. *Sideboard*. Particleboard construction, 98cm x 127cm x 56cm  
Darwin (Richardson 2010)
Crate Furniture

Over this research period I have created a series of furniture-based sculptures inspired by the Dutch designer Gerrit Rietveld. Of particular interest to me from Rietveld’s vast œuvre was his crate furniture. Rietveld used readily obtainable wooden planks from packing boxes and, without any complicated construction or design, created various simple furniture items. This was early DIY at its best! The re-used readymade planks needed no machining except to be cut to size. Rietveld made them in kit-form, to be taken home and assembled. He designed furniture that was simple, able to be mass produced and affordable (Mulder 2010).

I have used wooden pallets rather than packing crates. Pallets are readily available just as wooden crates would have been in the harbour towns of Holland one hundred years ago, both being disposable, wooden industrial objects designed for transportation.

Adjustable Hospital Over Bed Feed Table (Pallet Furniture)
2011
Wood construction with plastic containers
105cm x 85cm x 38.5cm (plastics max. 26cm high)

In August 2010 I spent time in a Canberra hospice. During my time there I observed and drew hospice furniture and other features. I was particularly interested in feeding tables and replicated one as a sculpture, referencing Rietveld’s crate furniture designs. My ‘feed table’ is in opposition to the care the hospital furniture is intended to provide; mine is purely a prop and is wobbly and has splinters. It is not adjustable and is covered with old plastic containers. My intention in creating an oppositional duplication is to highlight the differences between the real, functional object and its sculptural replica.

The plastic containers on the table were my late brother’s and always were in storage while my mother was alive, never to be played with. After my mother’s death the containers became available to me. I inherited them and they became highly symbolic to me. This is a sculpture I would never have been able do if my mother was still alive. A plastic milk bottle, among the other containers on the table, is a sly symbolic gesture. The ‘use-by’ date on the milk bottle is that of my mother’s death and milk is the nourishing nectar of a mother who is now sadly absent.

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
46. Adjustible Hospital Over Bed Feed Table (Pallet Furniture). Wood & plastic 105cm x 85cm x 38.5cm, Darwin (Richardson 2010)

**Pallet (Pine)**

2010  
Pine wood construction  
14.5cm x 110cm x 100cm

Darwin, where this pallet was made, has a limited supply of found wood. Wooden pallets are one source available. This sculpture is inspired by Rietveld’s crate furniture, but using wooden pallets instead. I am confident that if Rietveld were working in Darwin today he would turn pallets into furniture items.

In an act of transformation, by inverting the logic and completing material cycles, this work *Pallet (Pine)* is made with the best pine money can buy from Bunnings Hardware store. It is built with attention to detail through dedicated dowelling and sanding. *Pallet (Pine)* not only inverts the functionality of the simple pallet, but also alters Rietveld’s intentions to make simple objects. This pallet work becomes an important endpoint in my exploration of abstractionism and furniture; basically it completes a cycle of discovery.

As a simulacrum, the pallet can now be viewed as an object re-imagined as a classic minimalist artwork. Because the pallet artwork retained the original substance of wood and size, the shift only hovers on the edge of simulacra positioning.
Rietveld’s use of recycled materials has relevance in 21\textsuperscript{st} century social, environmental and aesthetical thinking. I saw cardboard in the construction of temporary accommodation for homeless people in Paris on recent trips to that city. Called ‘cabana for a day’ by one Paris local, these incredible cardboard shelters were ingeniously fitted with shelves, hanging devices, doors and beds. The reuse of discarded waste as valued building materials had applications for my sculpture. The manipulation of materials already imbued with history and meaning by circumventing them to expose new meanings is a classic technique used in contemporary art.
CONCLUSION

Through this research project, *My Life as Sculpture*, I have been able to characterise the boundaries, define the relationships and understand the methodologies in my practice. The process of creativity is ongoing and endless, meaning that conclusions may surface only to need further resolution in the future. The process is about discovery and that process will never end, although I do find answers in the creation of artworks. I cannot make any promises for my work in the future, expect that I will be aware of outcomes as well as maintain the courage to learn and to change.

My practice remains broad in scope and I see little chance of it narrowing. It is too dynamic to pin down decisively. However there has been as a result of a two-year focus on sculpture and autobiography a convergence of certain truths. I have developed a deeper understanding of the motivation and processes of my practice and clarified the reason behind my use of certain imagery and materials. For particular artists I was able to complete in-depth studies of their lives and work and establish points of reference to my own practice. The use of artist biographies has been an important tool to discover art theory and I will continue to explore this mode of research.

*My Life as Sculpture*
Tobias Richardson, 2012
I have aimed, over the last two years, to produce artworks and undertake research centred on autobiography in the visual arts. I have attempted to use materials and imagery that reflect and highlight the central theme and to draw together the seemingly disparate features of my practice under this subject of autobiography. While at the same time I have sought parallels in the lives of other artists with mine.

The prime outcome of this research has been the production of nearly 50 sculptural works, made at the Charles Darwin University's wood workshop. As well, a large selection of drawings, created whilst travelling, complement the sculptures. An exhibition of selected artworks, as an art installation, brings the individual works together in a dense and seemingly chaotic manner. The installation confirms the tangled and pluralistic autobiographical narrative that I have aimed for with this research, allowing the viewer to follow the exhibition and form unique narratives.

During the two years of study I was able to travel in Asia, Europe, Africa and within Australia. The travelling enabled me to expand my methodology of evolving artwork from experiences in time and space. While working abroad I was able to find and seek parallel subject matter when back in Australia. Travelling provided me with the scope to work and assess my practice within an international framework.

The success of the project lies in the physical artworks produced and the interrelated paths of learning undertaken. The project was conducted at a particular time in my life that was difficult and fuelled by change and these forces are evident in the work.


My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012
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• Hergé (1943). Tintin: The Broken Ear (1978), Methuen, England

My Life as Sculpture
Tobias Richardson, 2012


**DIARY ENTRIES**

P.2  Diary Entry - September 30th 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

P.5  Diary Entry - August 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

P.7  Diary Entry: November 30th 2011, Paris (Richardson)

P.10 Diary Entry - December 2010, Paris (Richardson)

P.11 Diary Entry - December 25th 2010, Bamako, Mali (Richardson)

P.12 Diary Entry - December 25th 2010, Djenne, Mali (Richardson)

P.13 Diary Entry - 8th January 2011, Timbuktu, Mali (Richardson)

P.16 Diary Entry - January 4th 2011, River Niger Ferry, Mali (Richardson)

P.19 Diary Entry - October 2011, Darwin, NT (Richardson)

P.23 Diary Entry - January 25th 2010, Lower Heyford, Oxfordshire, England (Richardson)

P.28 Diary Entry - September 3rd 2011, Sydney, NSW (Richardson)

P.33 Diary Entry - November 14th 2010, Giacometti’s Studio No. 46 rue Hippolyte - Maindron, Montparnasse, Paris (Richardson)

P.36 Diary Entry - August 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

P.39 Diary Entry - October 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

P.40 Diary Entry - October 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

P.44 Diary Entry - December 4th 2010, Centre Pompidou Mondrian/De Stijl Exhibition, Paris (Richardson)

P.46 Diary Entry - August 8th 2011, Lithgow, NSW (Richardson)

P.49 Diary Entry - August 2011, Leura, NSW (Richardson)

P.52 Diary Entry - 2004, Darwin, NT (Richardson)

P.54 Diary Entry - April 2010, Canberra, ACT (Richardson)