Part Two

Themed Analysis
Chapter Five

5.0 Precursors and Models for Art and Ephemera

Introduction to Models

Key internationally recognised art between the 1950s to 1990s has been chosen for this chapter to provide models for ‘art and ephemera’ where artists’ use of ephemera as material, and as processes in visual arts, overlap. The selected mix of material is from where artists borrow from time-based change or implement ephemera in artwork. Presenting these models responds to my first question ‘what artistic means could illuminate environmental fragility?’ Ephemeral materials, used in visual arts significantly over the last six decades, demonstrate change to communicate concepts, or act as metaphors for issues-based art. Influences for the incorporation of these less permanent materials come from older diverse cultures, and these precursor models for ‘art and ephemera’ are discussed in this chapter leading to post-1950s models.

Few works from a pre-1950s mainstream visual arts or fine art paradigm are relevant to this project to identify art practice that makes use of an ephemeral material. However artworks or icons from 700 to 1,400 years ago are relevant as precursors to appreciate the telling age in objects. These are from Tang and medieval art periods, and my study in these areas uncovers aesthetics of ephemera in partially preserved figures. Many of these would have lost much of their aged beauty if any restorative attempts had been made, and the signs of age and deterioration evident in these artworks and icons are relevant to art and ephemera as metaphors for environmental fragility and concern.
Similarly, Aboriginal drawings on rock walls and ageing icons in Buddhist caves are contributing areas of iconic images because they are intimately connected with the eroding natural environment. Both inhabit ancient rock caves and are on eroding walls that give way to the natural elements. These precursors provide critical distance and act as aesthetic examples. The latter have relevance to anti-archive art for this study, and are discussed further in the next chapter in the context of revered icons as models. In addition, the Japanese concept wabi-sabi inherent in many art forms, either through a conscious adoption of the concept or an ambiguous borrowing from another culture is relevant for the appreciation of signs of age. These precursors contribute to an appreciation of the aesthetics and discourse for art and ephemera by challenging the cannon of archival and commodity-based systems for art.

Disparate art examples have been positioned with an escalating emphasis on ephemeral practices in this and the following chapters to focus on ephemera with a conceptual link to time-based change. I am not creating a chronological recount of art and ephemera, as it might be used in art history, but as stated in the methodology I review previous accepted practice in order to position a vital contemporary perspective. This chapter is not an exhaustive account of models for art and ephemera rather I adopt key art from specific art movements. These illustrate my points about how, and why ephemera, for material and concept, have come to be used intentionally in art. Comparative studies of a number of artworks will demonstrate this intentional use. Artists re-visited from the twentieth century provide concepts to generate discourse about new approaches to art and ephemera. Thus re-interpretation of art movements from Dada, Arte Povera, Fluxus and the Situationist International is relevant for this study due to the manner in which the artists produced an art statement against the grain of a conservative society by using unconventional and ephemeral processes. In my post-structuralist re-reading, these artists contradicted the society that supported the erection of the permanent monument, preserved structure or archived art. In this study signs of blind
acceptance or preservation for its own sake are questioned. Relevant examples to present a case against unquestioning acceptance of archive are works where artists have conceptualised art and ephemera. This art is often proactive in subverting a precious commodity to the point where the ephemeral art piece speaks through the memory of an artist’s action.

Examples from previously defined genres are redefined in the processes and concepts of art concerned with ephemera. For Roemer (1995), ‘Once art is no longer privileged, it is open to the same deconstructive analysis as all our structures and can itself become an instrument of change’ (Roemer 1995, 187). The potential for art to be this instrument of change is addressed primarily from my visual artist’s perspective where earlier eroding art provides important associations with crisis in the natural environment. Lippard (1984) and Henri (1974) contribute to this discourse with reference to attitudinal change from 1945 to 1990 and explicate artists’ responses to changing times. Lippard (1983) brought attention to the influences of ancient cultures, in sculptural and ritualistic forms, on the visual arts in the 1970s and early 1980s. These ancient eroded artworks have implications for my study where I sought unintentional models of ephemera. Sonfist amongst other 1970s artists responded to these ancient art forms.

Plate 5.1 Alan Sonfist 1975 Pool of Virgin Earth, on chemical waste dump, Artpark, Lewiston, New York, Diameter 25’ x Depth 6’ [photograph Lippard 1985, 229]
Sonfist’s (1975) *Pool of Virgin Earth* on a chemical waste dump is also relevant due to the artist’s materials and intention to repair the earth. The Green Museum provides facts critical for Sonfist’s intended reclamation in New York City. In this way, models for art and ephemera showing beauty in decay are often those objects that are close to, or have started to merge with the earth, through states of disintegration, positively identified as reclamation. These works and statements were produced for a variety of reasons, though my key models for this study show concern for the natural environment.

Sections in this chapter; Precursors: art ~ ephemera; and Chinese Tang and European Medieval Icons, link culture with accidental occurrences of erosion in art. Examples from these have influenced my artwork and some of my subsequent practice is discussed in this chapter where art is specific to aged beauty and particular ageing processes that foster appreciation of art and ephemera.

**Links with Aboriginal Art**

At the beginning of formal ceremonies in Australia, particularly cultural occasions, official speakers will firstly acknowledge the traditional elders of the local land and their ancestors. In this introduction to the analysis I pay tribute to ancient tradition and Aboriginal Australian art and the extraordinary changes it has endured in the Australian environment over millennia. Caves with Aboriginal Art near Laura in Northeast Queensland hold some images that are too fragile to risk potential intrusion by tourists. Some are protected through secrecy and visitors are only allowed on site with guides.

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1 In 1969, Sonfist monitored the air quality of four popular New York City intersections… and posted the results to alert passers-by … In 1973, Sonfist drew Seed Catcher, whose concept parallels Ono’s 1961 Painting for the Wind and Haacke’s 1970 Bowery Seeds. Seed Catcher …[is a]: “pool of virgin earth to collect the seeds of nearby forests through wind and animal migration.”…Later realized as Pool of Earth (1975), it occupied a …deep hole in land that was tainted by chemicals leached from nearby Love Canal. Sonfist laid a clay-based, sealed environment (…untainted earth) over the wasteland to collect the seeds [http://www.greenmuseum.org/c/ecovention/sect5.html](http://www.greenmuseum.org/c/ecovention/sect5.html).
Chaloupka states ‘This photograph was taken in 1979. Since then, further deterioration of the painted surface has occurred’ (Chaloupka 2000, 2). My inclusion of this art is for the respect people might develop through realisation of the vulnerability of the fading image and what this implies. Not all these images are available to Western eyes and some are not to be photographed. This respect for iconic images and their meaning or stories also influences my attitude to art and ephemera.

Plate 5.3 left Stones with grinding marks on site, right sharp rocks for tool-making, Mount Isa [photographs Lord 2005]

Rock sites, tools and castings (Plate 5.3) are often protected on sites through seclusion in an attempt to maintain rather than preserve a shifting icon, and these provide models for a consideration of new work. In some instances, with respect for
old art objects that are rare and fragile, ‘landowners’ do not allow strangers into a place where artefacts are vulnerable to removal or defacement.

Plate 5.4 Joseph Beuys (1970) *Thousand Oaks* Documenta 7, Kassel, Germany [photograph right Günter Beer]  
<http://www.diacenter.org/ltproj/7000/dokumenta7.html>

The opposite from the secluded imagery mentioned above as a model for art and ephemera is apparent in high profile art, such as the well publicised works by Beuys, *Thousand Oaks* (1970) Plates 5.4 and 5.5.

Plate 5.5 Models and influences: Beuys (1970) *Thousand Oaks* Documenta Kassel, Germany

In contrast to Beuys, Aboriginal cave paintings and iconic religious artwork such as the Buddhist sculptures in China’s Yungang Caves near Datong, or caves near Hangzhou were not made to appear as disintegrating, but now attract tourists for their fragile but lasting quality in the landscape.
Precursors: art ~ ephemera

Long surviving cultures contribute to concepts about time and age, and act as visual clues to how erosion and disintegration can operate as agentic metaphors. Post-structuralist theorising assisted in revisiting worn imagery and erosion as agents of change. In contemporary art these can act as potential metaphors for major global change.

Plate 5.6 Hangzhou cave wall with crouching figure [photograph Lord 2003]

The old and disintegrating statues in Buddhist caves and their counterparts in various temples and shrines have survived in some cases for 1500 years. Worn areas indicate tactile touch as reverence and this idea of the worn object and appreciated age relates across cultures evidenced in concepts such as wabi-sabi.

The Japanese concept of wabi-sabi is an influence on the study as I observe the way cultures have a specific relationship to the imperfection of age in cultural icons. Wabi-sabi implies balance between a philosophical construct and an aesthetic ideal (Koren 1994). The concept values relics, unravelling garments or imperfections in silk cloth. The encompassing dichotomies are referred to in many art forms in contemporary culture, in ceramic as well as ‘fibre and fabric’. Some artists acknowledge the influence from the Japanese concept. I identify the idea in icons of change in Indonesian silks in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Thai silk in the Royal Museum in Bangkok, Thailand. A regional comparison is the fine fabrics altered by women in early 1900s that after years of wear show unravelled threads (Plate 5.7).
Plate 5.7 Margaret Lyne (1920s) Cut Lace cloth – and unravelling threads from regional Queensland [photograph Lord 2009]

These and the iconic and ageing images of change from Chinese Tang and European medieval art are precedents in the appreciation of an ephemeral object as visual art.

Plate 5.8 Medieval figures on the front entrance to Notre Dame Cathedral Paris [photograph Lord 2007]
The chronology of these movements or art periods is not significant to the selection of the models. Significant is the ability these aged icons exhibit as models and clues to explicate an aesthetic of decay or ephemera.

The appreciation of art and ephemera emerges from viewing ageing artwork, such as a statue with evidence of woodborers or chipped stone. At other times it is an object photographed in a street gutter, of lowly origins and even lowlier event (Plate 5.9) where the object picked up from a beach could act as a turning point in practice to provide a conceptual leap about the link between erosion, ephemera, aesthetics and anti-commodity.

Plate 5.9 Lord 1998 Orange – Fold installation digital image floated in water and caustic soda 20 x 20 cm

The aesthetics of garbage (Shohat and Stam 1998) invites aspects of art from the street and this varies from serious to subversive. Lippard put forward that ‘artists

2 Images include Cornelia Parker’s Drowned Monuments (1985) and Lord, Orange (1998) Plate 5.9.
can be good at slipping between the institutional walls’ (Lippard 2006, 14), and while Lippard was referring to the capacity artists have to ‘expose the layers of emotional and aesthetic resonance in our relationships to the world’ (ibid.), in my contextualisation of the issues this also refers to meaningfully investigating cross-disciplinary activities. Thus where Simons (2004) and Hawkins (2006) both look at the business of waste with humour, as well as a commitment to create healthier responses to these facts of life, these examples mirror concepts I use to create a balance in my work and draw on humour to address serious issues. Not least is the capacity to look afresh at garbage and our spoils, in an age of abundant waste, particularly in affluent societies.

Post-structuralist theorising brings together art over ages that belong in an ascendant ~ descendent relationship with respect to who has the privilege to make, preserve, display and appreciate artwork. The historically recognised and reproduced image or icon is dominantly positioned as powerful, over and above the lesser known ephemeral or disintegrating artwork, sometimes made from recycled material or literally from garbage. These historical models provide a recognisable affinity through their shared decomposing or absent elements visible in icons in museums and second-hand markets, or literally found in the earth.

Plate 5.10 Lord Backless Axe eroding rusted object retrieved from Townsville studio garden
Objects recovered from the earth in my studio garden (Plate 5.10) are discussed in Chapter Nine and are visual links to age and earlier artwork or artefacts. They assist a celebration of the potential empowering of art showing signs of ephemerality and using base materials.

Chinese Tang and European Medieval Icons

My review of older and literally deteriorating icons presents ways to appreciate an aesthetic of erosion, through revisiting and appreciating work made by earlier artists, while contemporary artists who make similar art challenge the canon through intentionally providing metaphors for change.

Plate 5.11 Tang lady Art Gallery New South Wales [photograph Lord 2006]

Sculptures made in the Tang dynasty were once painted and glazed with colours, and examples in the Shanghai Museum and state galleries within Australia are
delicate figurines and animals that show traces of, for instance, powder colours that are preserved and only just staying on the object. Some wooden statues reveal splitting and chipping, and painted images show flaking and evidence of lost pieces. These eroding or fading images I refer to as ‘aged icons’ and they present reminders of art from the past and a world that constantly changes.

Similarly in medieval artwork, paintings show traces of the layers involved in preparation of wood and sealed surfaces. The evidence of construction, sealing, priming treatment, layers of plaster or gesso and then the application of layers of pigment, precious minerals, metals adorning spiritual icons or leaders, show their age through signs of unravelling and lifting. Their condition is preserved in a state of maintained age in museums such as France’s Cluny Museum and the Louvre, or Italy’s Vatican Museum and Uffizi Galleries. Both European and Asian spiritual deities, respectively the saints and bodhisattvas, with ageing haloes and gestures of adoration and reconciliation, are revered visually. The fact that these are often missing large pieces of the figures, and show altered colouring or splitting across a form adds to the mystery of the timeless quality of these pieces.

Revered deities, angels, saints, kings, queens, environment, ecology, flora and fauna meant particular things to the people at the time they were made. Now in their aged appearance a twenty-first century viewing of these icons might vary due to changed responses to religion and spiritual beliefs. However the acceptance in this millennium of the broken marble or wood split apart, the missing fragment of a figure and the fissured form are not only signs of age and authenticity, they provide alternative sources of pleasure and wonder. Pleasure arises from the experience of observing how something from a particular age has changed with time and that the splitting or disintegration, the ephemeral nature of the piece, is a mark of this age ~ change. The estimation of the age of a piece provides a measure of time and what happens over time. Wonder may arise from the acceptance of visual signs of age but also of survival against odds. The flaking paint is fragile and vulnerable to changes, small or more extreme. A split piece of wood is a visible sign of something that is
coming apart but still manages to stay whole. Museums preserve such icons and present them to the public. Some museums such as the Confucian Temple in Beijing are themselves vulnerable places with fragile ceiling tiles about to give way to gravity. In some museums the deities and ancestor figures are not always shown in the best lighting or condition, though they still convey the sense of importance and signs of another age.

While silencing and gaps in historical detail have occurred in many cultures, these Chinese statues have survived. They provide surprise and delight to people and especially to my perception that they might not have survived catastrophes of recent times, even after the many historical upheavals of Chinese culture. One of my questions when visiting China for the first time in 2003 was how much of the old cultural heritage icons could have survived the Cultural Revolution. My library searches revealed famous images and revered religious icons in China. The surviving authentic pieces in public museums in Beijing, Shanghai, Xi’an, Pingyao and Datong provide icons relevant for this study.

In 2003, new and banal religious icons in China were apparent, as were superficial re-developed icons. Though many people were revering the statues of Buddha and ancestral figures, the new figures appeared to have a formula that was about copying a style for tourism, thus less relevant for my study. Like post-colonial Australian popular icons, the big pineapple and the big banana, the largest deities could impress the tourist. Visitors not accustomed to older and refined versions of cultural heritage from earlier periods might accept the new ~ shiny as authentic.
Medieval figures of the 1400s are visual examples of grace and metaphysical proportions, though missing pieces from their form. Similarly, the enlightened gesture and pose of the Tang sculptures from 600, the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, and a ceramic camel with a whole band of musicians playing their instruments on its back, are valuable reminders of another culture and another time. Their faded colours and fragmentation are significant as signs of age and time past.

Preserved art pieces are now in secure positions in powerful museums with guards and lighting, temperature and humidity control. Many were not intended to be preserved in this way, for instance, Tang sculptures survive to the twenty-first century through earlier acts that placed them in the ground as funeral figures, to safeguard the dead in afterlife. Buried in the earth they have accumulated signs of age and decomposition. These signs are a link that connects the Tang and medieval artwork to my contemporary notion of the art of ephemera, to an idea of return. The signs of age and of long deep time are illuminated in a new perspective about something that gains beauty through proximity to a disintegration process. This

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3 17th January 2007 in a discussion with Ross Gibson about the search for my quest.
theorising facilitates a connection where the past ~ present binary is suspended due to an appreciation of the similar processes of change inherent in old and new.

The crumbling artefact, signs of age and gradual return to the earth are a key to deriving pleasure from something that is in a way recycled as an object of desire, an aesthetic object. Thus models for art and ephemera or the ‘performative object’ include Tang Dynasty Yungang caves, medieval sculpture and aged icons showing signs of age. Re-visited as ready-mades, they assisted my recognition of erosion as archived and archived as erosion, shown in Table 5.1 and Plate 5.13.

Table 5.1 Collapsing binaries of new and old, archive and ephemera

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old collected icon / preserved</th>
<th>New ephemeral material / waste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eroded as archived ready-made</td>
<td>Archived as eroded Performative object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icons recovered from the earth</td>
<td>Icons returning to the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positions of reverence and power</td>
<td>Positions of rejection and loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icon and art</td>
<td>Waste and art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 provides some insight into re-aligning a power issue, or rethinking ways of viewing commodity and art. In relation to power groups, the icons of reverence or rejection, repositioned by language and knowledge, transpose the perception of the icon. In this way the ephemeral artwork is a model for contemporary issues of ownership and recycling, enacting a balance between revered and despised. Archived art has a binary opposite and post-structuralist theory accepts the dominant and less privileged ephemeron. The acceptance of humus for art or relics of the gutter is influenced by the eroded archive. In Plate 5.13 the remains of sacred Buddhist iconography hold signs of chisel marks that indicate the removal of parts of the figurative sculpture from the cave wall. Here erosion, religious intolerance and vandalism contribute to signs of disintegration.
Revising a dominant discourse about preservation of art facilitates the acceptance of fragile icon and eroding land in contemporary art where ephemera is central to an appreciation of shifting balances. The ephemeron shows connections between the environment and land / earth – and acts as model or precursor for art with ‘environmental and ephemeral’ components. A deteriorating precious object can be relevant as a model for ‘art and ephemera’.

The earth pays a significant role and where gardener, Peter Cundall, (2008) celebrates the significance of soil and reveres things that provide nutrition in the ground for plants, my similar enjoyment comes from the freshness of furrowed soil inviting growth. Relevant in sites for my interpretation of art and ephemera is the unmistakable odour of rain on dry earth in opposition to humidity control in a gallery. In relation to art that is close to the earth, and artists who recycle icons from the streets or garbage, Shohat and Stam (1998) refer to the ‘aesthetics of garbage’ and revisit the way artists use disposed items that are rarely revered. These and similar models for art and ephemera exist in twentieth century art.
5.1 Twentieth Century Influences

Art historian Herbert Read (1968) distinguished ‘two lines of development’ in twentieth century art:

… one proceeding towards a fragmentation of perception and a reconstruction of form according to laws of the imagination; the other towards a ‘realisation’ of the *motif*, a composition after nature (Read 1968, 106).

The distinction assists in creating links between the catastrophic events contributing to formative art movements from the 1900s and development of major events to the present. For Read (1968) the twentieth century was ‘a period of intense fermentation’ where art movements gained the freedom to respond. For instance, Marinetti’s 1909 manifesto in ‘brave rhetorical phrases proclaimed the end of the art of the past (*le Passéisme*) and the birth of the art of the future (*le Futurisme*)’ (Read 1968).

The proclamation and manifesto emerge for artists as powerful communication strategies. Artists’ discourses furthered the concepts and causes behind their working with socio-political concerns or issues of their time. Manifestoes, important for Futurism and following art movements, link to issue-based art for art and ephemera post-2000. The implications of the manifesto and the artist’s ability to present issues in publication are essential to recognise, in the developing research, in order to communicate ‘art and ephemera’ to an audience beyond those immediately witnessing the art.

The comparison between Fluxus and Arte Povera, involves publication as well as investigative areas of poor material and challenge to *bourgeois* art of the time. Both are relevant to seeking ‘change’ as concept and as an anti-style ‘model’ for art and ephemera. Christov-Bakargiev (2002) mentions the lack of an over-arching style for Arte Povera artists ‘… often moving from one medium and technique to another without concern for a signature style’ (Christov-Bakargiev 2002, 11). Fluxus and Arte Povera artists have been crucial for this investigation and for many contemporary artists they provide the initial assurance to develop their own
investigation based on experimental processes and less traditional methods. These models are selected in order to lead to the contemporary models in the study.

In Arte Povera the execution of art from ‘poor’ materials was a unifying factor in concept and action. Though Arte Povera did not include ephemeral processes as a condition for the work it was often an aspect of the work. More importantly the issues that underlie the movement share some common ideology with issue-driven practice of the twenty-first century and are thus linked to my argument for art and ephemera. The experiences of the Arte Povera artists (Christov-Bakargiev 2002) are relative to the concerns of contemporary artists who refer to similar experiences that impact on their lives and, in this capacity, make use of ephemeral material.

Some key artists from the Dada, Arte Povera, Fluxus and the Situationist International movements attempted to make use of ephemera or disintegration as a metaphor for issues conceptually linked to political, socio-economic and environmental issues, and conflict such as war. Specific features from these previous historical movements is appropriate, for instance, the Situationist International (the SI) employed the process of psychogeographical investigation, and this parallels an opportunity for artists to integrate art and the natural environment and ecology they live in, or near. In my interpretation of the SI’s theories for art and ephemera, the chance encounters of many artists are turned into significant realisation of the impact of certain instances or things in their work. Significantly, their word derive was used as an idea in incorporate everyday surroundings in art. For many artists encounters on urban streets are triggers for the investigation of cultural metaphors. Detritus from the street, disintegration and humus in the garden are of great value to contemplate a way forward for many

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4 The word “psychogeographical” described that which “manifests the geographical environments direct emotional effects” and a psychogeographer was simply one who explores and reports on psychogeographical phenomena (Ford 2005, 34).

5 The derive involves artists engaging in chance travel or wandering without plan (Ford 2005).
artists. This is especially so for my art in relation to this thesis, discussed in Chapter Eleven.

Thus, models for art and ephemera emerge in the art movements of the twentieth century and similarities re-emerge significantly in 2000 to 2009. Artists who choose to work with poor materials or take an anti-archive and anti-commodity stance, for whatever reason, often consider economic rationalisation in art and these strategies contradict the opportunities provided by a sterile gallery interior.

Material Influences

Artists in the mid-twentieth century investigated a variety of materials that could be related to low cost and unprivileged material especially in relation to the non-archiving of art. Christov-Bakargiev (2002) describes Arte Povera as an art of ‘heterogeneous and poor materials’ where artists employed simple techniques; ‘covering a surface with a ballpoint pen’ (Boetti), using ‘humble materials such as coal’ (Kounellis), ‘and simple processes such as freezing’ (Calzolari), or creating ‘chemical reactions’ (Zorio). They used ‘everyday techniques to shape humble materials – both natural and artificial – into artworks that generate meaningful experiences in the audience’ (Christov-Bakargiev 2002, 11).

Many factors contributed to the artist’s desire to create using a mix of poor material and reactionary elements in artwork. Lippard (2006), Tucker (2004) and Christov-Bakargiev (2002) considered the economic and political influences of artists’ surroundings. Celant (2002), an authority on Arte Povera, presents a background of the time, as well as a motive for the artists’ rejection of concurrent art movements:

The term ‘Arte Povera ’ … arises from these operative conditions, which tend to overlap with working conditions, and thus it has leftist political connotations. From this comes the rejection, or at least the non-acceptance, … of the industrialization represented by Pop and Minimalist art. And from this also comes the use of found materials (Celant 2002, 26).
Artists considerations of pluralist, spiritual and cultural difference, major art debates, interdisciplinary approaches and contact with many international art genres, contributes to the development of this study for art and ephemera. These relationships facilitate ways to look at material changes for concepts that reflect issue-based art. This collection of models adds to understanding art that does not need to be archived. The relationship between artists’ practices and their theoretical contributions could emerge through numerous methods. For Boettger (2002) the Italian artists use of … lowly materials was a kind of rebellion against the aestheticization of high art as a decorative object from which both the artist and the consumer are emotionally detached. The prominently “poor” materiality challenged viewers to a more engaged and authentic response to art and to life (Boettger 2002, 15).

Boettger’s insight to the binary – the aesthetic of archived art and (anti-) aesthetic of ephemera – relates to Celant’s (1967) perspective where artists gained … a new attitude aimed at regaining possession of a ‘real’ control of being. It leads the artist to shift his [her] position continuously, to throw off the cliché that society has attached to him [her]. The artist who was exploited before now becomes a guerrilla warrior ⁶ (Celant 1967 cited in Boettger 2002, 15).

These connections to the concept of ephemera in art are through artists’ intentional relating of ideas to a place, rather than national or political boundaries or histories that would create irrelevant distinctions. Continuing influences from international movements such as Fluxus for Madonna Staunton⁷ and Arte Povera for Mario Reis⁸ are crucial to the networking of artists and their ability to work with radical art precepts and contribute to an international dialogue. Christov-Bakargiev (2002) provides a critical contemporary re-contextualisation when she states: Arte Povera is becoming invested with a political meaning once again, as it comes to be recognised as an example of artistic freedom – something to look

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⁷ Staunton’s work was at Bellas Gallery, Brisbane and MCA Sydney 2005.

⁸ Mario Reis’ works were at Multiple Box Sydney, http://www.2danksstreet.com.au/multiple.box.sydney/gallery.html, Conny Dietzschold’s second gallery, Sydney 2005.
towards when attempting to formulate resistance to the consumer society of our ‘globalised’ world (Christov-Bakargiev 2002, 11).

This relates significantly to the developing concept for art and ephemera. Lumley (2004) and Christov-Bakargiev (2002) discuss the development of work in Arte Povera from an art using simple materials to an art that ‘…leave[s] no usable or exploitable trace. They no longer last as objects, but occur as varied and continuously changing episodes’ (Christov-Bakargiev 2002, 224). The significance of this statement demonstrates how artists were prepared to use materials that could alter during the time of the exhibition, contributing to non-consumerist attitudes to art and material: thus including ephemera and disintegration in some capacity in their work.

Giovanni Anselmo’s *Untitled, Eating Structure*, (1968 granite, copper wire, lettuce), and Penone’s *Stone Rope Sun* (1968) can be considered models for this study. Lumley mentions Penone’s outdoor work:

Rope tied to a tree at one end and to a square piece of metal at the other, changes length depending on whether the weather is wet or dry. The metal object is lowered and raised accordingly. The energy intrinsic in hemp is thus ‘externalised’ through a simple structure and its exposure to natural forces (Lumley 2004, 55).

Penone has some affinity with Zorio and Anselmo, and the desire to work with mega-scale permanent artwork or humble ephemeral material exists side by side in many art movements. Similarly, lowly materials associated with dirt and garbage, also the potentially life giving, such as dust, have been included by a number of artists. Lippard (1973) listed chronological work involving dust as an ephemeral material

William Wiley and Terry Fox (among others working with Wiley) make Dust Exchange, dust having been used as a medium by Marcel Duchamp in 1920, by Barry Le Va in 1968, and Bruce Nauman (flour dust) 1968 (Lippard 1973, 23).

I acquire models for art and ephemera that are eclectic in material choice. This situation includes the problematic area of slippage in relation to artists, and how
they fit or disrupt a dominant trend or movement in art. The following section presents examples.

**An Argument for Slippage and Non-categorisation**

Re-categorisation of artwork is barely relevant when working with disparate art concepts and materials under the realm of ephemeral material. Elkins (1999, 2000) and Duncum and Bracey (2001) have discussed the necessity for art history to be reinvestigated in relation to disciplines or contexts other than art (history). Many artists are now reinvigorated by the capacity to work with professionals in disciplines separate from the creative arts. This scope for artists working with ephemeral materials and engaging in activity irrespective of categorisation or visual documentation assists my investigation. Though missing documentation is problematic for contributions to research and is followed up separately.

It follows that creating art on the margins away from a privileged centre may be intentionally subversive. Lippard (2006) discusses how artists who choose to work in small communities run the risk of being ignored by a centre, and states that

> Artists are complicit in the way the world is seen, and the real problem is that contemporary art has no real genuine social context. Artists straddling classes and cultures are living out the conflicts of the entire polity. They’ve taken upon themselves an almost shamanic task – that of entering another world, doing so for the communal good, aware that return to the high art context could be impossible (Lippard 2006, 15).

In addition to the idea that some artists are less interested in working in a centre, even if this is where mainstream art is promoted, is the chance for artists to contribute to ecological wellbeing from this distance. Artists’ collectives operating outside a metropolis show that many artists reject belonging to an urban sprawl, and intentionally use an isolated place for their creative work. This involves the Internet as a new provider for artists’ manifestoes, taken up in subsequent chapters.

Further, there is the consideration for artists’ resistance to categorisation. Such categorisation denies the innate reluctance of many creative practitioners to have
them or their work slotted into a particular ‘box’. Buskirk (2003) has referred to the ‘absurdity of isolating’ certain genres, in order to identify

… each with the brief period of initial formulation … [and where] success becomes apparent in the slippage of artists from one designation to another and…in the ongoing production over many decades by artists identified with these categories (Buskirk 2003, 11).

Aspects of slippage recur in the various ways that diverse ephemeral material for artwork can be invested with a concept. Thus I refer to slippage and the concept of slippage between genres and promote discussion about the work of artists in relation to the idea of ‘art and ephemera’. This study supports artists who are not in any way intending to remain within a style or code and resist directions from commercial streams of rigid stylistic commercialism. Artists’ resistance to being categorised is evident in ephemeral practice in art. This practice contributes to a sense of aesthetics that is not bound by genre but by a number of questions potentially addressed by material change. In this respect my thesis acknowledges the absurdity of adding yet another name to a potential genre, however, I identify that art and ephemera, as a practice, comes in many variations of form and scale. What becomes important is the way art can be used to address urgent environmental and ecological issues for the twenty-first century.

Though many artists over the last five decades had a relationship to practice and theories of creating impermanent art and using this art as a statement about timely issues, there were many aspects to these different categories. This study reflects on shifts in categorisation, and blurring boundaries of previously discrete genres and styles, in order to see the potential for new readings. Making or seeking links across previously siloed genres facilitates a new perspective on art with impermanent features.

Figure 5.1 below indicates via visual text boxes the potential for a rhizome model, that is, multiple readings for considering art and ephemera. For instance, Long and Penone were represented in Land Art and Art Povera respectively though curatorial decisions (Lumley 2004) whereas these two artists in discrete movements could
have contributed to either. Thus my re-investigation of models across accepted
genres broadens ways to look at art and ephemera and concepts about time-based
change.

Figure 5.1 Models and ongoing influences from art movements Futurism, Arte Povera, Fluxus, the SI

The post-structuralist approach assists a blurring of boundaries where previously
unrecognised areas are given agency and entrance to discourse. Figure 5.1 shows
concurrent models, multiple and parallel lines of practice, to clarify my use of the
rhizome model as a re-reading in searches for models for ephemera. It demonstrates
potentially common elements in four parallel art movements, an idea referred to for
the development for this study. Similarly, commonalities link the East and West
where art, and aged icons, show signs of age, unravelling or disintegration.

~ Tang ~ Icons ~ Medieval ~

Revered - lost - found - preserved - earthy - aged elements

Figure 5.2 Tang and Medieval similarities

The relationship of the previous art styles, genres and periods impacts on my
interpretation of these earlier situations. These ideas are developed in the analysis.

Figure 5.3 Archived and Non-archived
Figure 5.3 in an interpretation of key findings and my reflection on the capacity of art and ephemera to provide new ways to look and learn for the contemporary. “Breaking and healing” relates to a broken limb and contributes to art making through reflection on healing, through growth.

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Rhizoid interpretation for five areas of ephemera

gutter  waste  humus  garbage  earth
```

Figure 5.4 Gutter Waste Humus Garbage Earth

These figures are interrelated through my concern for aesthetics of visual elements that can be seen in detritus, humus and regeneration. The manner in which these are cyclical and return to the earth in Figure 5.4 are critical for the pursuant analysis. They contribute to the next section as visual elements to communicate concepts, and bring contradictions in relation to why artists document their work.

Contradictions arise for artists in relation to their increased ability to document photographically and to archive. The choice exists for artists to resist this documentation or archiving of their work. Institutional models of preserving work required for referencing and collecting, that is, the archiving of the object and information about artwork require that artists document their artwork. This could be through exhibitions ~ installations that include archival or photogenic work to be documented for archival purposes. The practice of visual documentation is not always the rule, for artists such as Emilio Prini produced limited work and chose often to destroy it. Flood and Morris (2001) stated

…from early on, Prini was as concerned with exploring hypothetical projects as he was with realising finished work, and the erasing of work or the covering of its traces was often more important than its production (Flood and Morris 2001, 17).

With the increased options to document and communicate, it seemed for some artists that to deny this opportunity could thus be a strategy for their creative art. Similar connections to hypothetical projects and denial of evidence, such as the artist’s intentional erasure of art, have arisen from Arte Povera and Fluxus to
Christian Capurro’s erasure artwork titled, *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette* (2005 - 2007), shown at the Venice Biennale 2007. These models reveal concerns about how artists might adopt ephemera or change as a concept and method of practice for their work. In this way Prini’s attempts to leave no trace and Capurro’s to erase his art offer ways of revising ephemera and archive in art.

Movements such as Fluxus are relevant, due to their ability to break with specific doctrines while suggesting creative and logical concepts for art and ephemera. For Kirker (1993), Fluxus proposes, ‘ways of thinking about art and life from which other ideas and approaches could grow, … [and it was] rather was fluid and open ended’ (Kirker 1993, 5). International artists George Maciunas, Dick Higgins and his publishing enterprise ‘Something Else Press’, Alison Knowles, Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Emmett Williams and Henri Chopin, figuratively speaking set the stage for art involving ephemera and time-based change. Though the Fluxus movement incorporated many more artists, an interest for this research is the development of an art form promoting ‘no costs, no waste, and lots of surprises’ (Kirker 1993, 6). The Fluxus ethos

… had no stylistic identity, but its activities were in many respects a revival of the spirit of Dada, though not nihilistic. Anti-art in the conventional sense, figures connected with the Fluxus movement emphasised the paradoxical, humorous and ephemeral in their practice. They represented a collective struggle against bourgeois aesthetics (Kirker 1993, 5).

The dissemination of experimental activity in the 1960s and 1970s via ‘Something Else Press’ according to Kirker ‘…became one of the most important…serving happenings, poetry, events, art theory, music and literature (Kirker 1993, 6). The struggle to speak out against a status quo is reflected in more recent artwork that encompasses the ephemeral and contributes to my data. This emerges through mentors who acclaim art for environmental benefits.

In addition to or in contrast with the background of the time, many artists from these movements chose to look at mundane aspects of life in order to consider the basics and bring about reflection on quotidian activity. In this respect the art acts as
a model for my reflection on ephemera and aspects of the natural environment. 
Kirker (1993) comments that the Fluxus artists treated ‘everyday life… as a model for creative expression, [where] the most mundane experiences become relevant and a spirit of freedom, openness and humour is engendered (Kirker 1993, 5). The humour and subversive nature of much of Fluxus work provides an important background for my study. For, though the quotidian is mentioned as important, it is often the case that a serious problem can also be addressed by a less than serious image. The almost benign notions of allowing an object to become part of a performance turned into a new volatile art form with Gustav Metzger. Henri (1974) acknowledges Metzger as undoubtedly the most energetic and influential figure in the area of destruction and art (Plate 5.14).

Plate 5.14 Gustav Metzger 1965 *Auto-destructive Art Demonstration of Acid Nylon Technique* [Cited Henri 1974, p. 167 Plate 136]

Metzger’s (1965) publication *Auto-destructive Art*, ‘prints a long lecture, manifesto and photographs’ (Metzger 1965 cited in Henri 1974, 167), and provides a description of his activity:

A sheet of nylon, stretched against a plate of glass about 4 ½ feet high and 8 feet in length, was painted with nitric and/or hydrochloric acid. Duration of acid application about 20 minutes (Metzger 1965 cited in Henri 1974).
A black and white film in the exhibition ‘British Art in the 1960s’ National Gallery Victoria International (NGVI), (2005), showed Metzger with gas mask and protective clothing spraying acid onto two dimensional material. Shreds of nylon appear as the acid is shot from Metzger’s apparatus and the remains of nylon become archived footage even though the artist was intent on its disintegration. Metzger’s model produces some variance to the theme of environmental wellbeing, however this work is important for its bold statement about anti-archive, and influential for my practice. Metzger’s oeuvre referenced from 1960s to 2008 covers a significant time span for art and ephemera, and his work is discussed in Chapter Seven, Mentors.

Processes and making use of changing elements play a role for some artists better known as traditionally archivist, painters and sculptors. Boettger (2002) refers to Oldenberg’s early site work Hole (1967) in Central Park New York City, as a transient, rectangular recession,

…an almost apocryphal predecessor [to Earth art]… dug in the dirt in Manhattan’s pastoral Other encapsulates the fundamentals of a genre of contemporary sculpture that in ensuing years achieved prominence for being sited in distant desert terrain and became known as Earthworks (Boettger 2002, 2).

It also acts as ‘predecessor’ to the temporary site works of the eco-artists, though their work was linked with eco-feminism, and paid homage to the earth rather than identifying space or removal of earth for formalist propositions. Boettger (2002) finds ‘Characteristic of Oldenberg’s manner of dialectic play, the Hole’s six-foot-long rectangular recession encompasses associations ranging from the formal to the funereal’ (Boettger 2002, 1). Whereas most prominent artists have made use of the archival in order to establish reputations as artists through tactile reminders of their work, the opposite ephemeral activity has been used by many artists and become accepted in many major international exhibitions. I elaborate on this thread of ephemera included as major contemporary artwork in Chapter Seven.
East ~ West: an interface

Post World War II art and radical practices of the 1960s and 1970s provide some new interface between Eastern philosophy and Western art. Artists’ use of ephemera from 1960 to 1970 was often concerned with formal aspects of art making, such as the questioning of ‘Art’ though issues were also referenced, such as war, conscription, apprehension of socio-economic behaviour and emphasis on problems in the natural environment. Joseph Beuys, one of the most prominent European artists of the twentieth century to act in favour of the natural environment and employ ephemeral acts, addressed environmental degradation with the Spurfeld Altenwerder pilot project (Hamburg 1983) a massive tree-planting project to help bind toxic substances and protect ground water (Adams 1992, 27). Similarly, for Beuys’ Thousand Oaks (1982), he…

Henri (1974) identifies ‘transcendental’ aspects in Beuys’s work and this is worthy of note, for though many people discuss Beuys’ materials and performances, Henri refers to another aspect of his work:

Through all Beuys’s work there runs a strain of what he and his interpreters are forced to call the ‘transcendental’. This is what distinguishes him from superficially similar artists working today: his work is not a demonstration of the nature of materials or processes but their use to express certain fundamental philosophical premises. Many of his ‘actions’ and objects involve the use of humble materials, of the sort that have become increasingly popular with sculptors in the last few years: felt, fat or earth. But Beuys uses them as part of a system of balances of energies and potentials, not simply as an extension of the sculptor’s normal materials (Henri 1974, 147).

This interpretation from Henri assists in my relating concepts from Beuys with those of Laib. Both Beuys and Laib have trained in science (biology and medicine respectively) and then prioritised their practice in the arts. Both have been described as deterred by the common translation of science in the west, and both sought new

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9 (Discussion with Ely at COFA, UNSW July 2006)
ways to practise or empower their ideas. Schama (1995) and Adams (1992) have discussed Beuys’ works as integral with his concerns for the natural environment and for ‘verwaldung: afforestation as redemption’ (Schama 1995, 124).

Works from Agnes Denes, Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Beuys are relevant for the investigation of models for art and ephemera. They act as suitable and viable means to expose artists’ concern about ecology. For instance, Agnes Denes’ diagram and text for *Rice/Tree/Burial* (1968) including buried *Haiku*, chained trees and rice planting, resonates with my current study. Denes’ manifesto announced her ‘commitment to ecological and environmental issues, human concerns and philosophical thought’ (Denes 1993, 338). Agnes Denes’ major work *Wheatfield—A Confrontation* (1982) has been a major influence for my research. It was simply a wheat field and conveyed important messages through its strategic location in New York City and intention as impermanent art.

Plate 5.15 Agnes Denes 1982 Wheatfield—A Confrontation Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan [photograph John McGrail]

*Wheatfield—A Confrontation* (1982) remains for me one of the most elegant examples of an art project involving ephemerality and connecting ideas about ecology and place. In this work the planting, growing and harvesting of wheat form the ephemeral elements of an artwork. Denes (2008) is working on a twenty-five year project involving ephemera as it incorporates ‘water and flood management,
urban planning, historical preservation, landscaping, and tourism into the plan (http://www.mu.edu/haggerty/exhibitions/denes.html).

Cembalest (1991) cites the close relationship between artist and ecology: in the work of artist Betty Beaumont *Ocean Landmark Project* (1978 - 80) a project indistinguishable from nature, a 300 feet long reef of coal waste, attracts certain kinds of fish. Beaumont worked with scientists at Bell Laboratories, having learnt from them that coal waste is non-toxic if stabilised and placed in water (Cembalest 1991, 101). Beaumont, like Denes, creates art for action in the environment rather than archive, thus was a model for my emergent concepts about ephemera in art. The responsibility artists took has implications for art activity today in caring for ecology and environment. Artists were bound by a respect for place, and making art a promotional tool for ecology. By not stipulating archival practice or not having the intention to archive their work in preference to ephemeral acts, they could make a strong statement about ‘maintenance’ of ecology through art.

![Image](http://www.feldmangallery.com)

Artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles is a mentor and advocate for the area of art proposed in this study, and her continuing works are relevant as contemporary models. The handshake is Laderman Ukeles’ artwork.


Carsen’s (1963) *Silent Spring* is influential as an important warning and reference to an awakening of environmental tragedy. *Silent Spring* remains a milestone and a reminder, referenced by many artists. Eco-feminist writers, for instance Diamond and Orenstein (1990), also contribute through their work to the increased activity of
art and concern for environment. These writers and artists contribute to my commitment to positioning discussed in the next section.

In response to the literature my artwork is pacifist and enjoys slow change in naturally occurring environmental activity with potential for regeneration. Artwork contrary to this, making use of explosive materials and acting for defaced or vandalised changes is less relevant due to some loss in the process of cyclical change or regeneration. The pacifist environmentalist model is one of the main concepts underlying mentor’s activities that I search for and aim to develop in my work. This was partly a reaction to the overwhelming archiving of art required by the art industry, and my personal reaction to archiving as a problematic issue or activity in contemporary ecology. A number of issues could be addressed through art and ephemera as a subversive statement for the plight of global environmental change caused by human activity. A re-consideration of abundance therefore is in my discussion of ephemera in art. Though my desire is on one hand to empower the ephemeral as a valid art statement, my concern is also to be able to subvert an art system that relies on commodity, archive and repeated presentation of an art activity that was intended to be ephemeral.

Any repeated showing of the ephemeral piece does not necessarily strengthen the case of the ephemeron as art, and is not necessary. I could, in my art practice, provide a format for a repeated showing or re-installation. However it would be more relevant if, after the performative object’s ephemeral event, I asked people to create their own ephemeral art piece, to empower a community to invest in their own art activity. My attitude is to provoke a questioning of art practice and what that practice is about or for. Additionally it is important to ask why art has become so attached to the business of making money in galleries when for many cultures the creative act was and is integrated into forms of reflection and memory.

I consider if the purpose of art is about commerce or if it can more importantly be a chance to communicate ideas. Neither is exclusive of the other, though sometimes
art is beyond money. In many art forms or genres there is not any one way to suggest a solution for human troubles or actions, but there is the capacity to produce a change in attitude to many actions. My desire to create a paradigm shift in thinking, to break with accepted notions of art and commodity, has produced valuable responses from my audiences. For me, as an artist making use of ephemeral materials, audience interaction has become an activity that engenders new contradictions to conventional practice. It assists and generates potential to use the ephemeron in new ways. In the use of the ephemeral or performative object as a metaphor for our inherent problems in the natural environment, visual artists can occupy an area of slippage, a provocative place where non-artists or others do not always go. Artists take risks and suggest to people that risks are useful. Presenting issues with implications of the sacred, as in place, and of importance to the individual artist exposes the creative person to criticism not just at the level of art and aesthetics, but in the terrain of personal belief and commitment.

The concepts contributing to an art of anti-commodity can be adopted and discussed as attitudinal symptoms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The strategy to make art that does not last can be a metaphor for many contemporary issues including the over-consumption of materials, over-production of goods, and pre-occupation with materiality, leading to a heavy environmental footprint. Tucker and Williams (1997) and Stern (2007) compiled evidence that supports my claim that over-production is an important contemporary issue. There are times for artists when the ephemeral art process is a case of making do with the material at hand. This activity aligns with some artists’ practice and concepts through an intentional recycling of material in keeping with their statement and oeuvre and is one aspect of the models that emerge in art and ephemera. Politics, economics and environment all emerge as factors in these considerations. Similarly technology adds relevant emergent issues for art and ephemera.
Technology Models and Ephemera

Anti-commodity and anti-archive belong to complex notions in art. John Cage (1969) forecast that technology would play an important role to create some freedom from the archive. Cage’s model is a blurring of the technology essential for our culture, and acquiring technology as a tool, not necessarily a commodity. The concept leads to other important assumptions that art and life, enlightenment, and technological fluency in solving problems (of life, art) could be adopted to revisit accepted ideas. In a similar way Bourriaud’s (1998, 2002) discussion of ‘relational aesthetics’ brings complex relationships to art.

Friedman’s (1969) interview with Cage (1969) shows a scenario for adopting endeavours beyond art:

Cage: … I think that what technology is, is what Fuller and McLuhan have said it is – an extension of our capacities and our present technology extends the central nervous system. So that I find this very heartening in terms of a change of society because it was through changing their minds that people, … in Buddhist terms became "enlightened," and it could be through changing the global mind, which is a mind because of the technology, because of the central-nervous-system extension, that can, then, change society, so that, well, one might call the equivalent of "enlightenment utopia." And in the past, … "utopia" was a lovely dream but impractical, and I think our technology is now making it practical (Cage interviewed by Richard Friedman 1969).

This dialogue relates to the idea of blurring boundaries taken up in Chapter Six. Cage added ‘I think our technology is, so to speak…a nervous connection between all of us … so that we can change the society (Cage interviewed by Friedman 1969).

The radio interview between Friedman and Cage is a model for the impact of new technology and change as an insight into complex connections with fields other than art. Cage’s concern for technology can also be seen as a window to alternatives. Similarly, Cage’s reference to the East and Post World War II influences from Japan such as Zen, and the lectures given by David Suzuki in the 1960s, are important in this study for appreciating links between East and West. These artists and writers also impact on developing art practice about environment since the 1960s. In an extension of Cage’s interpretation of new technology is the concept
that technology is an aid to ephemera as a device for visual art. New technology, as a means to support ephemera in art, is demonstrated in the themed analysis through artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija (1998 - ongoing).

Changing Technology: ‘art and ephemera’

Formation of twentieth century art genres coincided with a growing capacity for artists to distribute concepts through engagement with broader international audiences. Initially, this went beyond a locality via printed textual and visual language to distribute compelling issues. Turbulent times for artists could be rapidly broadcast across a twentieth century information network in radio broadcasting. Though not previously obvious in visual art manifestoes, sound and image have exploded in parallel opportunities in the decades since the 1980s, with developments in Information Technology (IT). The explosion of communication opportunities that emerged with the IT industry has facilitated such things as blogs. These can be seen as Internet manifestoes, not least for artists who work with ephemera and the earlier references to the manifesto could be re-thought from radio waves to immateriality (Lillemose 2006). Simultaneously, with the increased opportunities to communicate about art practice in visual and textual literacy via an Internet manifesto, ‘art and ephemera’ has the increased ability to document and distribute image ~ issue as online messages. Thus concepts of anti-establishment, anti-commodity, anti-archive and an opposition to the ‘taste’ or ‘fashion’ of the commercial art industry disseminate through a new manifesto.

Concepts Related to Photo-documentation of Ephemera

Access to technology enabled me to select from numerous images and show the performative object to new audiences. Henry (2005)\(^\text{10}\) asked if artists making use of ephemera as a practice would do this work if they didn’t have the technology, especially digital photography to record the work. Henry added that she felt it was

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\(^{10}\) James Cook University academic Dr Rosita Henry Head of School, Anthropology and Social Sciences (SASS), was responding to my talk on ‘Art and Ephemera’ October 5th 2007 for the (SASS) Research Seminar Series.
important to ask the question though not necessary to find an answer to this. The discussion raised questions about memory and how artists wishing to make use of ephemera and disintegration can activate memory in response to their work. Connections between technology and memory recur in this themed analysis.

In post-structuralist theory there are multiple, and sometimes contradictory, discourses and these are apparent in ‘photo-documentation,’ and the areas across visual documentation and ‘photography as art’. ‘Memory’ of an artwork and ‘photography as reminder’ of this artwork are different interpretations of a ‘performative object’ or ‘ephemeral artwork’. The photograph can become a dominant visual, and silence an earlier enhanced memory. This power imbalance relates to the richly documented and archived reproduction of art, compared to the almost subconscious memory and subtlety of the slowly disintegrating ephemeral piece. Therefore documentation can be about imbalance, especially in the retelling or re-presentation of art.

Table 5.2 Blurring a Binary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstraction</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory of an art piece</td>
<td>Photography as reminder of an art piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resign to memory</td>
<td>Visual Capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blurred reproduction, low resolution</td>
<td>Rich photographic reproduction, glossy magazine, book imagery for memory, not art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>web pages for the story, not art</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

The roles of the museum as storage facility for archive of work, and art gallery as a venue for ephemera and art, are extensions of the concept that overlapping occurs in archival and ephemeral art. When the artwork is in progress, and has to be arrested visually for posterity, that implies an archiving of the image. Artist Robert Morris discusses where the photograph was a recording device for his work:

Photographs function as a peculiar kind of sign. There is a strange relation between their reality and artificiality, the signifier-signified relation the set up is not at all clear or transparent. One of the things they do is give too much information and not enough at the same time (Morris cited in an interview October 1971 New York with Lippard 1973, 257).
Following Morris’ point is the comment from Lippard elaborating on the difference between seeing things day after day and knowing them. The point for the ephemeral artwork and capturing a moment relates to the memory of the piece. Lippard (1973) says

Then you see the photograph and it’s so completely different. Your memory fails you right at that point where the photograph replaces your memory. Five minutes before you have seen the photograph you remember a situation in such and such a way. The very second you are shown the photograph, that becomes the memory, and everything else, reality, bites the dust (Lippard 1973, 258).

My contemporary reiteration of this dilemma is that artists solve a problem in the documentation of art and ephemera in order to maintain integrity through the ephemeral nature of the art piece. For Lippard, the photograph initiates new memory. For me, one option is for the memory of art and ephemera to be a significant action and not a document. Laib’s work, discussed in Chapter Seven, posits the model for an event and not a photograph as the main outcome of the work. Whereas the non-recording of the ephemeral piece will not sit easily in a world of archived and administered art, more space can be made for the event and experience as a live experience rather than the record. Asia Pacific Triennials (1993, 1996, 1999, 2002 and 2007 Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art) have over a decade provided these experiences in performances on site, http://www.qag.qld.gov.au/apt/apt5.

Memory and (No) Documentation

In my work, accessing documentation to record the ephemeral act extends the memory of the work but not the work. In this respect, memory, as an aid to recollection of an artwork in a particular environment is important. It does not exclude re-enacting the ephemeral artwork and many of my ice sculptures could be remade. Henry (2007) related the ephemeral artwork I had spoken of to the Malanggan tribe of New Ireland, Melanesia. In complex acts of kinship and heritage, a Malanggan sculptor re-enacts a memory handed on from an elder in order to create, from memory, icons as ephemeral sculptures. In relation to the
Malanggan ritual, Küchler and Melion (1991) discuss the intricate system of exchange and memory:

The medium of exchange is the [anthropomorphic] sculpted image. It is not the sculpture itself that is transacted in the exchanges for money and indigenous currency, but the right to reproduce the image, which thus enters and defines networks of exchange across the region. The embeddedness of sculpting in gift exchange confers political and economic importance on image transmission (Küchler and Melion 1991, 32).

The significance of this relationship between exchange and memory, and discussion by Küchler and Melion about the increasing act of sculpting in a declining population, provides some parallel reading for my investigation. The declining Malanggan population contradicts our global twenty-first century expectations, where populations are predicted to keep rising astronomically. The global population is facing notions of uncertainty about ability to sustain large human populations and preserve natural environments, as we have known them (Gross 1997). The indications are that we have as a global population only two or three decades to avert the impending catastrophe of our own making (Stern 2007). Though for Lancaster (1997) this is a time of reappraisal.

A twenty-first century parallel to Malanggan sculptures, or ephemeral art production, involves the manner in which artists adopt ephemeral materials for their work, as well as who produces the ephemeral artwork, and artists’ reasons for making this work. In this respect an artist’s role may be to provide those symbols of exchange that enable a new acceptance of less material as commodity, through acceptance of the ephemeral object as an art form. It is only an alternative but in an age when we are looking for ways to produce with less finite resources and produce less of an environmental footprint (Stern 2007), it is an alternative for many artists. Recycling, though sometimes unwittingly enacted in relation to the environmental footprint and more an act of economic necessity, contributes to art of ephemera.
Earth and Eco Art, and Ephemera

My concern for the process of ephemera to heighten an idea led to asking if there could be any connection between the artist’s contribution to an art of ephemera and concepts of change in relation to land / earth art since the 1970s. Various models exist for art and ephemera in Earth Art and Land Art where artists created work with a conscious effort to bring attention to land, though not always in the best interests of the natural environment. Artist Robert Smithson, created some artwork with little concern for the environment, though at times as in the case of Robert Morris, was involved in land reclamation sites. Matsui (2007) states that Smithson was interested in

Re-evaluating obsolete and defunct sites, or exploring situations intended to enhance ‘undifferentiated’ thought processes, [and] Smithson presented possibilities for redeeming the ephemeral through reality of the post-industrial age. [Smithson’s essays]…have provided inspiration for many new methods of critical intervention in social and cognitive processes (Matsui 2007, 439).

Matilsky’s (1992) accounts of earth and land art include that of Robert Smithson, however the reclamation work of Robert Morris (1979) is of more relevance to this study in relation to the potential direction of art, ephemera and the natural environment. Willette finds Morris’ (1979) Untitled, (Earthwork to reclaim gravel pit King County) was ‘a genuine reclamation of ruined land’ (Willette 1994, 15).

For Cyphers (1992) some of Smithson’s work proposed to improve devastated mining sites, and did provide an investigation into reclamation beyond the formalist qualities he sought. Though Smithson was interested in formal elements of sculpture, his writing and artwork were linked to environment and anti-commodity. Smithson (1969) states:

I would postulate that waste and enjoyment are in a sense coupled. There’s a certain kind of pleasure principle that comes out of a preoccupation with waste. [For e.g., bigger cars, bigger waste productions] So there’s a kind of equation there between the enjoyment of life and waste. Probably the opposite of waste is luxury. Both waste and luxury tend to be useless. Then there’s a kind of middle class notion of luxury which is often called “quality”. And quality is sort of based on taste and sensibility. Sartre says Genet produces neither spit nor diamonds. I guess that’s what I’m talking about (Smithson 1969, 190-191).
Driven by a number of concerns comprised of art and environmental issues, Smithson calls entropy a ‘condition that’s irreversible, it’s a condition that’s moving towards a gradual equilibrium and it’s suggested in many ways,’ and Smithson adds:

One might say that the whole energy crisis is a kind of entropy. The earth being a closed system, there’s only a certain amount of resources and of course there’s an attempt to reverse entropy through the recycling of garbage (Smithson cited in Sky 1979,190).

Smithson’s 1970s concerns seek answers through balance, however, this was not always the action taken by Smithson, and my investigation of art and ephemera would not be complete without referring to Smithson’s large earthwork ‘Spiral Jetty’ (1970 - ongoing), a Land Art project. Since its implementation in a salt lake, ‘Spiral Jetty’ has disappeared below water and reappeared (Brook 2005 www.robertsmithson.com/). Further to his concern for waste and anti-commodity, the implementation of a major floating island artwork lies, figuratively, in a difficult position in the scheme of art and over-consumption. Even the commercial arm of posthumous web publishing does little to alleviate the impact of this work on the environment, and though elements of the piece are ephemeral, the whole remains as a gigantic legacy from the period of earth art, an uncomfortable precursor to art and ephemera.

It follows that many artists do not attempt to address or acknowledge the environmental problems confronted by contemporary society. Lacy (1995) acknowledged artists sympathetic to an art of renewal in the natural and built environments. These models offer an opportunity to discuss the artist’s ability and willingness to contribute to raising awareness of environmental concerns through addressing change as an overarching metaphor. The challenges of combining my awareness of environment with my artist’s desire to introduce traditionally acknowledged aesthetics, and knowledge of ethics provide an opportunity to develop my perspective about the processes of change through art and ephemera.
Boettger (2002), Christov-Bakargiev (2002) and Buskirk (2005) find that process is an important ingredient in the subversive nature of many artists’ practice. Lippard’s (1973) work on ‘dematerialisation’ is similarly crucial for this study and Slater (2000) states

… the ‘dematerialization' of the art object was variously concerned with a rejection of morphology and aesthetic scopism, with the rise of a text-based practice and an accent on process rather than product (Slater 2000, 1).

The artist does not necessarily solve problems and in this respect my research focus is on artists who, at some stage of their practice, have worked with subtle and / or naturally decomposing elements of change integral with the concept they advance. Though my practice is concerned with environment, land and change, many artists have taken much more esoteric reasons for combining a changing medium with their practice. The scale of the challenge to solve problems in the natural environment is not simple and not always a priority as it was for Morris’ reclamation site, *Untitled*, (King County, Seattle Project 1979). Morris bridged environment, issue, site, and land art, in a way that not all artists could manage and addressed this issue eloquently, stating

… it would perhaps be a misguided assumption to suppose that artists…would necessarily and invariably choose to convert such sites into idyllic and reassuring places, thereby socially redeeming those who wasted the landscape in the first place (Morris cited in Tiberghien 1995, 16).

The assumption that Morris queries is pertinent today, for though artists may use their voice to portray issues, and work as activists, they will not always choose to solve problems or be able to redeem the instigator of the problem. In this way the artist’s role, and existing models of art and ephemera, are ambiguous towards acting for the good of the natural environment. Hans Haacke’s artworks *Grass grows* (1969) and *Monument to Beach Pollution* (1970) were two of many bringing messages about environment to mainstream art. Haacke, to some extent, assists my reflection on ‘How might an artist provide more opportunity to empower ephemera and art with a lighter environmental footprint?’ Haacke investigates issues of conscience (Crimmin 2007), and his art and politics counter multi-national commercial ventures (Haacke 1994, 1984). Thus situations chosen for art
production can shock, and dissolve boundaries between art and life. Comparatively Lumley (2004) finds ‘Kounellis shifts the frontier of what can be defined as art, but there is never the idea that art should be dissolved into life’ (Lumley 2004, 34). For Penone, art was to work with material that was ordinary, though according to Lumley (2004), ‘Nature, for Penone, was a continuum of materials and energies of which humans were a part, not a backdrop landscape or separate sphere of life’ (Lumley 2004, 58). Penone’s (2008) work in the Biennale of Sydney, a bronze tree holding a rock in Sydney’s Domain, strategically placed near a walking path, extends his concept, though not the ‘light footprint’.

Problematizing the Gallery as Site

In transcending a signature style or genre, many artists from the twentieth century did not intentionally subvert the gallery or the traditional exhibition space however; the venue could be a problematic situation for these artists. In these art movements and in the cross-disciplinary and cross-genre concerns of this thesis, an ephemeral piece activated or performed on a site can lose some of its message or impact by being re-installed into a gallery environment. Re-positioning external site work in a controlled gallery environment could deride ephemeral artwork, or previous works of Dada, Arte Povera or Fluxus. My concern is that galleries may inappropriately install ‘ready-mades’ or try to present site-specific art. I concur with Buskirk about the problems this can raise:

Once the readymade is established as a model that allows the artist to take an object and designate it a work of authorship, to what extent is that authority, as well as the object itself, transferable? (Buskirk 2005, 6)

Buskirk refers to art administrators and museums as collectors and preservers of pieces that were not always intended for such archiving. For artists, the act or adoption of a performative object enables them to choose ephemeral material and not to preserve the material or art object. In this respect certain aspects of Dada, Arte Povera and Fluxus provide models for an anti-commodity stance with art and ephemera.
Links to Contemporary Visual Arts

Artists and art movements in the twentieth century move in and out of proximity with art and ephemera. Disparate artists can be linked over decades through working with similar processes, or by working with common unorthodox materials and disintegrating elements. They offer a consideration of diversity in concept, precept and material. Thus artworks for this study, linked by time-based change and ephemera, are related to healing in the natural environment and the capacity humanity has to address these issues with compassion.

Three areas connected in this chapter are identified as important for this thesis. Firstly, there are those artists and / or artworks that act as mentors / models, and link the disintegrating or ephemeral object to new work, explored in the next chapters. Second, is the continuum of artists’ concerns for the natural environment displayed through metaphors as art and ephemera. Thirdly, some models indicate that spiritual beliefs and understandings add depth and conceptual rigour to art; these related ideas are developed in the next chapter.

Thus commonalities of art and ephemera link artists over six decades and contribute to providing a paradigm shift in thinking about the natural environment and what we do to it, (Chapter Ten). Considering the connections between artists’ activities and ephemera, it is not surprising that the work of those directly influenced by Arte Povera impacts on twenty-first century art. For Searle (2001) this experimental work influenced artists ‘…from Sarah Lucas to Miroslaw Balka, from Cildo Meireles to Imi Knoebel, from Gabriel Orozco to Damien Hirst’ (Guardian, 29 May 2001 cited in Lumley). Similarly, Lumley (2004) recognised that Arte Povera influences in Britain alone included

… from the early 1990s, Mona Hartoum and her subversion of the minimalist object, Marc Quinn and his exploration of materials in conjunction with his own body, Tony Cragg and his ‘poetic’ assemblages, or Anya Gallaccio and her use of trees (Lumley 2004, 74).
In this study the eclectic mix provides a new melting pot for art and ephemera to address new issues. Richard Long, reflecting on the 1960s, surmised that Arte Povera opened up possibilities for artists. Long (2001) found that

The spirit of Arte Povera was much more free and relaxing to make work in: more intuitive, more open-ended, more off the cuff, more lackadaisical, the popular opposite of Minimalism (Independent on Sunday, 30 May 2001, cited in Lumley 2004).

Lumley (2004) concurs with Long that it was not until the 1980s that the significance and influence of Arte Povera were recognised. Similarly, Christov-Bakargiev (2002) stated that three resurgences in proximity to the work of Arte Povera artists occurred since formulation in 1967. These poor materials re-appear in ongoing art practice and align in new ways with art and ephemera in the twenty-first century. These are discussed in Chapters, Seven to Ten, where materials and social relationships concerning environment take new ownership of a lack of archive.

Work such as Pascali’s Two-metre cube of earth, ‘precisely rectangular bricks of rich uniform soil projecting from the gallery wall’ (Boettger 2002, 15) presents a formalist approach to the use of earth rather than any willingness to see it crumble from the wall. Pascali’s work, safely installed in a white cube gallery and documented for posterity, does not have preservation or disintegration as governing concerns. When work such as this is preserved or reinstalled new issues arise. Buskirk (2005) discusses contractual terms in some seemingly ephemeral artwork such as Antoni’s (1992) Gnaw, made of lard and chocolate. Artists’ options for material choices, from soil and lard to collapsed sheds raise presentation issues. In some cases they also invite criticism as perverse art forms.

Perverse Art

Boettger discusses Smithson’s use of dirt to partially cover a shed on a pastoral site:

This perversity condenses several aspects of both Smithson’s affinity for deterioration and counter-Establishment attitudes of the time: The destruction of a farm building is a distinctly anti-pastoral act; turning a house-like shed into a chaotic ruin rejects traditional family values; using earth – no, dirt – to
do that is a further assault on the sanctity of a home; and all these affronts were performed on the grounds of a state institution. Artistically, it is a public monument to disorder, perhaps better stated as a monument to public disorder (Boettger 2002, 200).

While Smithson’s ephemeral, anti-establishment work is perverse for Boettger, Kastner (2006), working from an ecological perspective finds that

… despite the ecological rhetoric, it seems safe to say that the idea of environmental remediation was for … [Smithson] more a situational strategy than a developing creed (Kastner 2006, 28).

I concur with Kastner that Smithson’s *Asphalt Rundown*, Rome (1969) was a strategy less concerned with environment. Artists demolishing buildings, disrupting sites or adopting rubbish from the streets raise some problems where there is a lack of appreciation for changing material states. My adoption of the disintegration of material as art also created some problematic responses, where people’s attitudes to work with a recycling or demolishing component, was that the artist’s intention is perverse. I had not realised this could be problematic, though finding models for ephemera as art posed some interesting responses in the way people look at certain art practice. Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Land of Milk and Honey* (1969), made from agar, milk and honey was presented as a mutating piece:

…a kind of false, contorted, topographical relief; …these agar-based works were initially shown as a group, when their organic materials were still in a state of chemical mutation (Bois 1996,184).

The literature facilitated reappraisal of a 1996 comment about my recycled paper artwork *ROT* (1995 - 6) as being perverse. The comment related directly to my production of work from rubbish and recycled paper that would go through a planned disintegration 11. In 1996 I was not sure how to adopt a comment about perversity, but now see the production of work that was destined to be staged as a ‘performative object’ may also be considered at odds with the art institution, (see Academics and the Institution *’). Similarly, McBride (1996) 12 queried how I would

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11 This discussion was with MVA supervisor, Ian Howard 1996.
12 Critical feedback was from curator Frank McBride, Brisbane City Hall Gallery for the installation on site (Lord 1995-6), *ROT*. 

reconcile ‘the poetic and the political’ in my work, and I formulate my response in this investigation of art and ephemera. Allowing the process inherent in the material to speak for itself through performance assists my quest. If considered rhetorical, with potential to provide an extension for my praxis, the question ‘How do you reconcile the poetic and the political in your work?’ could also be applied to the work of high profile, male artists: Anselm Kiefer, Hans Haacke and Sigma Polke. Seen positively and accepted as part of any artist’s oeuvre, the dichotomy of poetic and political exists in much contemporary artwork. The response then becomes one of conceptual realisation about the work, its material and how these address the questions raised by the artist through the work.

Developmental Processes for Art and Ephemera

My concepts based on aesthetic guidelines to select and develop work about and of elements that are returning to the natural environment, parallel my concern for integrity to be maintained in creative production. The visual process, in creative decision-making about the selection of critical image in relation to concept, drives my practice and is integral to the idea being presented.

1990s visuals are points of reference, or triggers for the development of new work.

Plate 5.17 Lord (1994) Earth face, site work on claypan, NW Queensland [photograph Lord]

Though my art could be driven by contributions from complex philosophical and literary sources, the visual development of imagery owning an aesthetic of degradation was the direction taken in developing ephemeral artwork. My 1990s

Plate 5.18 Lord (1995 - 1996) *ROT* recycled paper 400 x 200 x 200 cm

I have introduced influences from particular types of ephemera, both accidental and intentional, in prior art movements and periods of art. The significance of politic and poetic was reflected on for my new work. For Christov-Bakargiev (2002) … nature and culture are mutually defined and related, [since nature], all that is not artificial, not man-made, but springs up spontaneously is a cultural concept, while culture is not exempt from nature but is subject to its laws …This attitude is particularly relevant today, in an age when decoding the genome implies more subtle and flexible boundaries between the natural and the artificial (Christov-Bakargiev 2002, 11).

My respect for the natural environment, and increasing knowledge of how humans are capable of destroying it enhance my capacity to show how art and ephemera can highlight global warming and changes in the environment. Much more than metaphors are the models artists use to demonstrate their change in praxis and instigate a new attitude in their audience. *Absence* (2004) Plate 5.19 involved audience interaction through a performative melting object and this becomes more important in new work.
Plate 5.19 Lord 2004 *Absence an installation* Monotypes, digital banners, earth, lithographs, table, chair, plastic suitcase and ice, 900 x 1100 cm.

It remains for ideas to re-emerge about choosing the point to arrest ephemera or disintegration in visual artwork. The quandary is not whether art and ephemera can or should be photographically documented, but that the documentation does not deny the performative object its role as art and ephemera. Capturing the changing object, figurative, animate or inanimate, and its relationship to the environment contributes to further conceptual development. Memory and art in recollecting change or processes of ephemera, is developed in this study. Documentation of ephemeral art has to be considered for the making, as well as the disintegration of
the piece and artists need to take into account whether or not there is a moment when the piece should be captured for posterity.

The stages of work in progress are an important visual and conceptual development for many artists as they construct or reach toward resolving work. One stage of visual development may impact significantly on directions and complexity of the new work. The potential for the found figurative element to return and contribute to the beauty in the natural environment is a key feature of my research. Artists and authors who foreground this research contributed to art and environment by making use of an image that is changing to another state or returning to a previous one. In this way artists’ concepts about ephemera will contribute to an aesthetic of the commonplace, by recognising transformation and recycling through an iconography of degradation.

In this chapter, I have discussed models for art and ephemera pre-1990s. Influences from ‘Eastern Tang’ and ‘Western medieval’ art demonstrate similarities for my quest to find fragile and eroding images as metaphors for change and as signs of beauty. Twentieth century art addressed in this chapter reflected a time of ‘intense fermentation’ (Read 1968, 105) and ‘new volatile art forms’ (Henri 1974, 167). East and West boundaries blur in the adoption of new ideas because of the links formed: mostly due to the advantages of post-war engagement for a global culture and society.

In the following chapters, flexible boundaries are discussed where these ascribe to new areas in information technology and online potential. Lillemose (2006) writes about the emergence of ‘Immateriality’ and its relationship to Lippard’s (1973) ‘Dematerialisation.’ The contemporary idea of immateriality moves beyond any tangible evidence of ephemera, into the digital, and provides some alternatives for this consideration of art and ephemera. It also relates to image literacy through photographic documentation as a support for Internet distribution.
In the next chapter, blurring distinctions is a key to questions asked in relation to Eastern ~ Western, post-colonial Australian, and Aboriginal art where cultural perspectives provide connections. Binaries sought for my investigation of religious icons in museums reference the Tang and medieval cultures of Asia and Europe respectively. Issues for art and ephemera involve appreciation of aesthetics derived from ageing and eroding icons and paintings, as well as spiritual links to ageing ephemeral pieces and the capacity for these to evoke compassion.
Chapter Six

6.0 Blurring the Boundaries: Spirituality and Cultures, Ephemera and Art: Respect for Land and Trees

Some Prototypes – in Concept and Form

In this chapter concepts about art and ephemera are integrated with spirituality and cultural practices. I sought voices with accumulated cultural knowledge about care for natural environment to make connections between ephemera and art, spirituality and natural environment, and notions such as recycling and ‘no waste’ (Kraft 1997, 280). This writing is about those cultures with a prominent understanding of how the land, ecology and concern for people, place and environment are based on matters other than worldly possessions. In order to present this, I have also drawn on the literature for contemporary perspectives about the combined practices of art and Buddhism.

Disparate belief systems and pluralist societies assist to broaden my perspective and knowledge about sustainable practices. My adoption of post-structuralist theory facilitates a collapse of binaries, inherent in traditional cultures and contemporary societies. Harvard scholars, Tucker and Williams et al. (1997), and art writers, Baas and Jacob et al. (2004), expose aspects of Buddhist philosophy that are pertinent to the trajectory I introduce through art and ephemera as it involves ecology and natural environment.

My position as a regional artist, and relationship with a rural place, facilitates an appreciation of the longevity and stories of ‘the dreaming,’ the rock-art and drawings from Australian Aboriginal culture. In particular, the sand drawings
intended as ephemera are relevant as models and an indigenous contemporary response would be relevant for discussion in this thesis; though the re-interpretation as painting on canvas and highly prized commodities overshadows the original medium of these sand drawings and is outside the scope of this study. I present a conscious message through ephemera as art concept and practice. Indigenous Australians’ philosophical underpinning of artwork places their conceptual work within the concerns of this thesis. Out of respect I do not attempt to include the secret nature and value of the message in Aboriginal sacred art, so as not to compromise indigenous Australian work by selection of art and ephemera that might have different connotations from my portrayal. Tacey (2003) consolidates my decision: ‘If we grasp greedily for the Dreaming, then we may rightly be accused of performing the last, most fatal act of imperial appropriation in our tragic history of dispossession’ (Tacey 2003, 246).

Appreciation of traditional Aboriginal art is important for this study, and contributes to acceptance of art and ephemera, where this emphasizes place and our relationship to it. Thus widely accepted beliefs act as mentoring, for visual artists, in caring for ecology and letting things go. Tacey (2003) writes:

Creative artists cannot afford to live shallowly at the surface of life, they must put down solid roots in the soil, and as soon as they do this they hit pay-dirt, their work flourishes, their creativity takes on new life and colour, and they celebrate the deep links that connect to this place, to the indigenous inhabitants, and to the spirituality of the earth itself (Tacey 2003, 248).

Tacey supports my investigation of indigenous relationships to place. Similarly, many accounts of Eastern Buddhism and caring for forest and land have been considered from the literature. Lawrence Sullivan (1997) contributes an important connection between spiritual and environmental when he states: ‘No understanding of the environment is adequate without a grasp of the religious life that constitutes the human societies which saturate the natural environment’ (Sullivan 1997, xiii). On the other hand, Ingram’s (1997) discussion reveals that Christian religion, including Genesis and the Greco-Roman interpretation of these beliefs, has been instrumental in condoning abuse of nature. Ingram states:

…if one wants theological license to increase radioactivity without constraint, to consent to the bulldozer mentality of developers, or to encourage unbridled
harvest of old-growth forests, historically there has been no better scriptural source than Genesis, chapters 1 and 2. The mythological injunctions to conquer nature, the enemy of God and humanity are here (Ingram 1997, 73).

Ingram does not negate my understanding that any belief system or culture can adopt meaningful environmental awareness and examples of the adoration of nature also belong in this text, as does art that relates to cyclical change in natural environments. These art works, such as the Buddhist sand mandala (Plate 6.9), celebrate processes in creative acts of art and ephemera. Though I do not wish to define a genre, I am interested in outlining certain beliefs and practices that are interrelated with cycles of return in the environment. Artists’ understanding of how these changes can be respected as contributions to sustainability are therefore critical to the work that is depicted in art and ephemera.

Artist and Brisbane art director, Simon Turner (2006) refers to art, culture and his lived experiences in the Northern Territory, and states that

The cultural distance in our landscape exists between us as the viewer, and the value we place in our cultural inheritance…. The conservative distance of museum, curator and critic has deprived audiences and indigenous artists alike, in turn maintaining…historical and literary chasm[s] in Australian culture, a great Australian bite in our collective cultural, social and religious landscape (Turner 2006, 6).

Where Turner’s argument queries a gap or positioning for Aboriginal Art in a gallery system, my thesis seeks a practice that is contradicting a conservative canon of the art industry through acceptance of art that is ephemeral and appropriate on site. Therefore installations with inherent loss of visual art are relevant to this study, for instance contemporary indigenous re-enactment of drawing in sand would contribute to this thesis.

My search led to the realisation that I could link spiritual beliefs, philosophies and wisdoms from the past with some fundamental beliefs across cultures in the present. This would include a strong focus on the relationship of these beliefs to the natural environment. Where Tucker and Williams’ (1997) reference ecology and Buddhism, my visual artist’s concept about time-based change and ephemera in art, now aligns with some artists’ adaptation of these concepts.
Baas and Jacob (2004) expose concepts about ephemera as a component of an enlightened practice. These concepts cross contemporary culture and life style, visual arts and conservation of the natural environment. Attitudes to contemporary culture emerge in Danto’s discovery that studying Buddhism led to finding “the key” through ‘Buddhism’s assertion that there is no difference between illusion and reality…Art is not something that “looks” one way or another. It is a way of seeing the world’ (Danto cited in Baas 2004, 22). In this way my thesis has been informed by a number of beliefs and wisdom that can lead to further understanding of contemporary issues, especially those related to the natural environment.

Valuing Visible Elements of Change

Visual links occur between Chinese Tang in the Orient and Occidental European medieval art. Comparisons were sought and visual research conducted in museums in China, Thailand, Europe and Australia. My study of visual art identifies common visual elements from disparate belief systems and provides valuable information about worn icons. The semi-abstract depiction of Tang and medieval figures (a departure from Greco-Roman classical interests) provides increased potential to see expressive and exaggerated but refined lines in these icons from Eastern and Western cultures. Visual commonalities from Tang and medieval art bridge two different dominant, spiritual belief systems, Buddhism and Christianity. The potential for both beliefs, to make good in this life and be saved, is also about being reborn in a later life. Though put simplistically here, the value for my study was in finding icons preserved from these times that resonated with my belief in the way humans use their ability to care for each other and the natural environment. The worship of goodness inherent in religions supports sympathetic expressions in the visual iconography. These sources resonated with my own sense of aesthetics for art and ephemera, and environmental consciousness.

Connections impact on the development of this research through my long-term interest in the proximity of the ‘East’ as a northern zone sharing a similar longitude with Australia. The evidence of connections to the old ‘West’ through
the silk route and signs of Buddhist and Christian melding continue to influence my quest to find visual links in culture. For my research these connections have contributed to my artist’s conceptual approach to ephemera as a metaphor for metaphysical responses to challenges.

Some beliefs derived primarily from Buddhist culture are crucial to an art of ephemera and my proposed practice of ‘letting go’ (Suzuki 1973). For the same reason it is also important to recognise that art based on ephemeral material or a practice of ‘letting go’ has a conceptual premise in the way artwork does not have to last or be commercially available. This is also a manifestation of wisdom associated with age and tradition, and an ability / intention to see things through more environmentally sensitive discourses. Sullivan (1997) states:

In the struggle to sustain the earth’s environment as viable for future generations, environmental studies has thus far left the role of religion unprobed. This contrasts starkly with the emphasis given, for example, the role of science and technology in threatening or sustaining the ecology. Ignorance of religion prevents environmental studies from achieving its goals, however, for though science and technology share many features of human culture with religion, they leave unexplored essential wellsprings of human motivation and concern that shape the world as we know it (Sullivan 1997, xii).

Human motivation and concern underlie the concepts of my ephemeral art and my belief that all actions are interrelated. Humans share responsibility for many things including welfare of natural ecology, environment and each other and linked to these ideas is the fundamental desire for harmony between people and place. Many philosophers and cultural leaders could be cited here. Chinese philosopher Fung Yu-Lan (1962) refers to a traditional Chinese scripture *Ten Wings*

On the scale of the universe for “all things alike to be nourished and not to injure each other, for all the tao (plural) to be practiced and there to be no mutual contradictions”¹, this is also a state of harmony (Fung 1962, 108).

Contemporary artists have absorbed and reflected on the capacity of many spiritual beliefs. Seeking happiness, harmony and spiritual redemption belongs to both past and present. In some of these attitudes to life, the relevance of

¹ Fung (1962) and translator E.R. Hughes refer to ‘The Yi Scripture Amplifications and the Chung Yung’ known in China as the *Ten Wings* (Fung 1962, 81).
artists’ actions and concepts can be placed in an environmentally sensitive context. I value this capacity and cite Danto (2004) ‘Buddhism released me from applying inappropriate criteria’ [and] ‘Zen gave me an attitude I needed, but philosophy took me the rest of the way—or took me as far as I needed to go’ (Danto 2004, 58 - 59). Danto relates that he could see in the work of Allan Kaprow (a student of John Cage) that Kaprow’s work Yard (1961) ‘was in the spirit of Zen’ (Danto 2004, 58). Kaprow’s ‘pile of tyres’ at Martha Jackson’s Gallery East 69th Street was installed as art and then removed after the exhibition. Danto’s acknowledgment that he would not have known how to look at the work had it not been for his study of religion and philosophy supports the professional reading and meaning behind artists’ complex concepts. These conceptual and visual links to religious beliefs are necessary for the viewer to be in touch with a creative visual and literary world that is concerned with human impact and environment. Thus while theoretical underpinnings of change were sought from disparate sources and disciplines, spiritual references to ecology are also significant for referring to contemporary ecological changes.

My consideration of the relationship between spirituality and ecology, especially that encompassing land, is crucial for perceiving an art using ephemera as a basis for its conceptual premise. Further the combined concern for ecology and place in the twenty-first century, when global warming is such a pressing issue, is relevant not only to the creative arts, but also to the underlying principles of how we go about our daily lives. Though spirituality is not usually spoken of in connection with, or in proximity to waste, there is potential balance in the generally perceived dichotomy of waste and revering natural things, such as trees. This is addressed by recognising the importance of recycling in art and ephemera. It is also significant in the post-structuralist illumination of how art and ephemera can be part of a greater cycle.

In the literature, examples exist of many artists who have structured their practice around their concerns for ecology and the natural environment. These artists demonstrate the potential for metaphors to be played out as art and ephemera, and are important mentors for this study. Artist and practicing Buddhist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, significantly demonstrates capacious art,
sympathetic to ecology and environment, consistent with personal spiritual belief.

Plate 6.1 Rirkrit Tiravanija *the land* (1998 ongoing) and artist group Superflex created Supergas, a biogas system [photograph in Baas and Jacob 2004, 175]

Bourriaud (2002) and Baas and Jacob (2004) discuss Tiravanija as a key artist in touch with the natural environment. Tiravanija’s incorporation of land and art is practiced as a seamless operation, and his activity in ‘the land’ project is part of his art practice. Tiravanija explained his project ‘the land’ (1998 - ongoing), and how many systems were in operation in this project,

The artist group Superflex from Copenhagen has been developing their idea of the Supergas, a biogas system. The Dutch collaborative Atelier Van Lieshout has been engaged in developing the toilet system, which would be linked to the production of biogas. Arthur Meyer, an artist from Chicago, has been interested to develop a system for solar power. The Thai artist Prachya Phintong is working with fish farming. So it goes on…without end (Rirkrit Tiravanija interviewed by Jacob 2004b, 171).

By securing a place and acting out these new sustainable living practices, Tiravanija has been combining art and life, a basic premise in his Buddhist
philosophy. Bourriaud (2002) includes Tiravanija’s work in ‘relational aesthetics’, saying:

It would be absurd to judge the social and political content of a relational “work” by purely and simply shedding its aesthetic value…. For these approaches do not stem from a social or “sociological” form of art. They are aimed at the formal space-time constructs that do not represent alienation, which do not extend the division of labour into forms. The exhibition is an interstice, defined in relation to the alienation reigning everywhere else (Bourriaud 2002, 82).

Lippard (2006), Baas and Jacob (2004) and Bourriaud (2002) present ideas about artists negotiating between institutional walls to create new links, in this case with ecology and belief systems.

Plate 6.2 Rirkrit Tiravanija, the land
http://atc.berkeley.edu/upload/Rirkrit_Tiravanija1154977193.jpg

‘The land’ developed by Tiravanija (Plate 6.2) is integral as a ‘known place’ (a concept I work with), where a group of artists can be in direct association with each other and their output. For Bourriaud, in a Tiravanija exhibition:
… the purpose is not conviviality but the product of this conviviality, otherwise put a complex form that combines a formal structure, objects made available to visitors, and the fleeting image issuing from collective behaviour (Bourriaud 2002, 83).

Bourriaud finds Tiravanija an exemplifier of practice in art that goes beyond representation and Jacob (2004b) states Tiravanija is interested in finding people who ‘think in very open, creative ways to deal with life,’ and sees the land project ‘as a relational structure that emanates from Buddhist concepts’ (Rirkrit Tiravanija interviewed by Jacob 2004b, 171).

Tucker (2004) discusses the ‘impact of Buddhist thought and practice’ in the 1960s to 1970s and refers to Lippard’s (1974) “dematerialization” in art as … the valuing of the idea or concept behind the object, along with the notion that the process of making was more important than the product … a reaction to formalism and its emphasis on the object to the exclusion of all else (Tucker 2004, 78).

It is relevant to compare Tucker and Marsh in their responses to critic Clement Greenberg’s idea of ‘artistic “progress” or teleological “advance” in the making of art—an ever more reductive concept of painting as purely self-referential (the contemporary sine qua non of “art for art’s sake”))’ (Tucker 2004, 78). Marsh finds Greenbergian ‘progress for its own sake’ (Marsh 1993, 93) in opposition with pluralist perspectives that artists now use to question the earlier practices of modernity. For Tucker, this teleological “advance” was ‘called into question by artists interested in multiplicity, ephemerality, art’s reaction to the everyday, or the concept of the artist as the work of art’ (Tucker 2004, 78).

The art I have investigated and developed over the course of this study has increasingly involved the ‘ephemerality’ of material processes. During this part-time study, from 2001 to 2008 I contend that art can partially absorb the problem into its own act of disintegration. In this way the ephemeral act imposed by the performative object is also one of returning an object to nature. Tucker mentions artists’ acceptance of using ‘non-art materials in the making of art ideas or even conversation as art (Ian Wilson)’, and works of art ‘existing only as photographic or written documentation’ (Tucker 2004, 78). Tucker’s statement is important for my investigation, for acceptance of diversity in
material and what might happen in an art process. The non-art material mentioned by Tucker takes into account the conceptual premise for diversity in the visual arts from conversations and text to ideas. In my work with art and ephemera it is important for me the artist to let go of the work and to enable the art not just to change, but, in accordance with my intention as artist, to disintegrate. My intention to allow the work to remain unimportant as a commodity grew out of my concern for art to be linked by spirituality to environment and ecology.

This practice, where an image or object is intended to rot or fade away, can be confrontational for people who collect art in archival form. Archivists would find it difficult to equate this artwork, that might implode on the same day that it was set up, with the valuable and highly publicised art in the Louvre and Guggenheim Museums, or the collectable and increasingly valuable paintings of Van Gogh, Rembrandt or da Vinci. It is important to realise that ephemeral art, seen simply in opposition to archival art, would lose some value in establishing potential binary collapse. The benefit of emphasising the dichotomy – ephemera and archival art – is in the philosophical questioning raised by the ephemeron or performative object. The artist’s immersion in taking on visual art as activity or process with cycles of creation and letting go can be practised in tandem with an appreciation of archived art. Artists producing acts of ephemera can learn from traditions where archived spiritual icons show signs of age and yet retain in stillness a representation of compassion and cyclical change (McArthur 2002). Learning can be through shared belief with the respective tradition, and an appreciation of deterioration as a sign of age and continuation.

Influences from Visual Collections

The fact that we might value the old and advocate the collection of fading treasures is a different issue from how we value or look at the options available for art making today. Further, the issues art and ephemera raises about today’s concerns, be they global or local are not always acceptable or even attractive to many people, whereas generally Asian iconic sculptures and appealing statues of antiquity are. My interest in and desire to learn from the changes in eroding
art in caves and on walls are critical for my work due to visual signs of change
inherent in these icons and places. Icons from the Chinese Tang dynasty and
European medieval age with symbolic references to ideals, and understated
depiction of grace in people and animals, contribute to a great appreciation of
elegant forms in art. Their inherent flaws provide evidence of beauty in aged
icons. The implication of the differences and similarities in both Tang and
medieval art are apparent through the significance of their spiritual quests,
manifested in their respective cultural icons. Lacy (2004) writes:

Both engaged Buddhism and engaged art are inherently antimaterialist and
anti-hierarchical forms of advocacy for meaning-making within society. Both
respond to the increasing visibility of the suffering of the world, now
everywhere revealed through mass media (Lacy 2004, 111).

Artists’ adopting an ephemeral art object are often intending to provide a
provocative message undermining the commodity trend revealed in the
literature from Stern (2007), Lacy (2004) and Gross (1997) and in mass media.
An artist’s intention to leave the object after a short time to disintegrate,
becomes an important statement, and an act of defiance against the abundance
of archive. Thus non-compliance with the canon of commerce in visual art can
be directed at ‘rampant consumerism and overconsumption’ (Gross 1997, 298).
Tucker (2004) refers to artists’ involvement:

Just as the Buddha took the decisive step from a static to dynamic view of the
world, from an emphasis on ‘being’ to an emphasis on ‘becoming,’ artistic
focus in the late 1960s and early 1970s shifted away from a concern with the
integrity, competitive value, and permanence of the art object toward an
involvement with the myriad conditions that determine how art is experienced

For many contemporary artists, earlier mentors remain important as exemplars
for implementation of new voices about current concerns. Tucker’s myriad
conditions refer to a consideration of those organisations offering very
traditional art display, whereas art and ephemera could demand new viewing
experiences. A focus on displays in closed and controlled gallery environments
might not facilitate an art that identifies with concern for ecology through
alignment with ephemera and natural environment. Many art institutions
prioritise the preservation of art over the installation of objects in relation to the
conceptual message intended by the artist.
The ephemeral object needs special new considerations not usually found in the pristine conditions required for archiving artwork. Similarly, while some opportunity for the performative art object is encouraged in the art museum, there could be more opportunities for the performative object to be part of professional art activity and community engagement. These potential opportunities for engagement could include provision for showcasing ephemeral objects in natural environments, such as exterior sites or surrounding grounds of art galleries venues. Comparatively, the grounds of Buddhist islands and temples facilitate observation of nature and ancient protected trees, part of the acceptance and the importance of natural environment as sites for spiritual reflection. The incorporation of the icon into these spaces and the enhancement of the aesthetic by gazing at the icon in a weathered state provide ready-made models (Plate 6.8) for art and ephemera. Though much contemporary art and ephemera might be executed as semi-permanent icons, the notion of protection in humidity-controlled and pest-free environments becomes absurd in the equation for ephemera in art.

Further to on-site considerations, the concept of revering mountains in Asia, and sites in Australia is widely understood. Hua Mountain in China is the site of nightly pilgrimages where many people, including me, have made exhausting journeys to climb to the peak in time for sunrise. Gao Xingjian (1990) makes a similar comparison in contemporary fiction where Soul Mountain is a metaphysical search. The sacred site in Australian Aboriginal culture and mythology is another example of the way ephemera in nature can be instrumental in providing visual evidence of erosion and impact. In this way they can also be important influences for artists working with a focus on ephemera. The unintentional aspect of ephemera in this work is inspiring, both conceptually and as an instrument to show changes through drawings disrupted by time on cave walls (Plate 5.2).

Images in Australian Aboriginal culture offer important messages, about environment and ecology. These were not investigated to the same extent that I explored the Eastern Buddhist spiritual relationship with the natural
environment. I consider it impertinent to adopt any Australian Aboriginal icons in my practice. Out of respect for a culture and people already imposed on through decimation of spiritual belief even today, this practice is respectfully left for those with an integral relationship to the iconic and figurative aspects of Aboriginal culture.

Evocative images of spirituality in Aboriginal, Buddhist and European cultures are acknowledged as witness to the passage of time and as influences on knowledge and place. For this study, beliefs about the impact of humans on ecology and a metaphysical response to the natural environment can be appreciated in Buddhist ideas. Similarly, the desire to use the mind to create a state of openess and receptivity to nature is significant in a journey, both metaphysical and physical, into wilderness. Writer and educator Carol Becker (2004) discussed with Baas that, ‘many artists seem to intuitively understand that the true mind’ is also ‘no mind’ (wu hsin) (Becker cited in Baas 2004, 23). Becker also considers the issue of creativity and the ‘beginner’s mind’ of the young artist, similar to the ‘unknowing mind,’ as ‘an idea central to Buddhist thought’ (Becker cited in Baas 2004, 23).

The adoption of natural elements to show longevity or change over time is apparent in many icons and artists’ works. Similarly, the appreciation of nature as a source of ephemera is relevant. This is particularly so where there is an interest in time as an important component of ephemera which acts as a message in the artwork. Time is a constant feature in art and ephemera (Chapter Two) and one of the ways we identify with ephemera through an understanding of time-based change, demonstrated here in the preserved icons from 600 to 1400 AD in the East and West.

**Time-based Change**

Eroded cultural icons that demonstrate time-based change survive as preserved statues in museums. My observation of these icons in China, Thailand, Italy, France and Australia led to realising the visual aesthetic of age as instrumental in appreciating the old and worn in naturally occurring objects. The time-based
change observed in cultural icons in museums is significant, as the icons are exemplars of a process and the beauty inherent in that process. For my quest, these aged cultural icons were investigated along with attitudes to ephemera in art and in the environment. From this basis, Buddhist texts (Williams et al. 1997) relating to the care of the land, and the ephemeral nature of being are important to appreciate concepts about valuing visible change.

In an Asian context, the concept of preservation for a spiritual icon is aligned to the creation of a spiritual deity or ancestor figure that will act as a guardian for protection of the environment. Though icons in East and West are often sold as commodities, there is a dichotomy in the function of the object as necessarily preserved or ephemeral. Preservation of art or iconic spiritual deities, or recording art for posterity and letting go, as with the ephemeral in art or the performative object, instigates situations involving artists as producers as well as consumers and collectors of art. My concern in this study is the artist ~ producer’s intent to allow this object to go. In the burial of an object, or offering of a Malanggan carving, this was often obligatory. Conversely, the aged icon demonstrates issues of protection and care for environment, thus maintenance and memory of artefacts, either present or as a recorded image is useful via the archive.

In contemporary art, acts of art and ephemera are practised in a variety of sites or spaces designated for audience viewing. It is important to realise that the ephemeral art objects or the performative art objects do not always enter into documented archives as records of art practice. The memory of art via a photograph, such as Metzger’s 1965 Auto destructive art Acid nylon technique (Plate 1.3), is the documentation (the archive) and not the art object, a point supported by Tucker (2004, 78). This means that the art object does not exist beyond its installation or performance, and that the documentation is a record and not the artwork. Important in this realisation is the fact that many artists are willing to call instances of fragile, impermanent art, or the ephemeral act, their contribution to art, whether documented or not.
This discussion facilitates a consideration of who is represented and who is not. The exclusivity of this practice as regional and humble, for many artists makes the art object and the ‘performative object’ available to a very small group of close artists, friends and select professionals in the art industry. Timing of publicity, difficult for many artists when the work is collectable and on display for a month or a year, is significantly more problematic when the ephemeral art is fleeting and only engages socially with a small intimate group. Additionally, if it is not photogenic, or desirable as a photographic record by the canon, this work will not be available to an audience beyond a small local community, on the periphery. This loss can be compensated for some by ‘mindful attention’ to the way art is allowed to change.

Mindful Attention

Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel (1997), Ingram (1997) and Kaza (1997) discuss care based on Buddhist mindfulness and how this is relevant to ecology, and thus, the region. Jacob (2004c) relates the space of art to the ‘mind of don’t know’ and also the ‘empty mind’ as the creative mind, and refers to a number of artists who practise this awareness Zhang Huan (1995), Maria Abramovic (1991), Ann Carlson (1990), Lee Mingwei (1999), Michael Rotondi and Hirokau Kosaks (2003). Ernesto Pujol’s (2004) work shown in Plate 6.4 and Ann Hamilton, whose work is strongly based on reading, are also included in this awareness. Jacob states the ‘artist’s mind-in-making is not just the result of studied knowledge’ (Jacob 2004c, 166) and the point is to recognise wisdom beyond empirical evidence and further as a way of ‘seeing and knowing’. This is similarly recognised by Danto, Pujol and artists discussed in the chapter.

Rirkrit Tiravanija and Wolfgang Laib show this knowledge and subsequent care in their work and are discussed as mentors in Chapter Seven. Tiravanija and Laib both practicing Buddhists include environment and ephemera in their art and show evidence of these connections by engaging with the natural environment through their artwork.
I treasure the proximity of earth and dirt for my art and the image does not have to be loud or flamboyant. Some high profile artists, more interested in commerce, make use of a practice for decorative attention rather than attention to the care of the natural environment. Depiction of the natural environment through seductive decorative images, even of ephemeral material, for instance photographs of red against green flora, while attractive does not convey messages about the sustainability of our ecology and natural environment and does not contribute to this study. Even here, inclusion and exclusion are factors to consider in the way certain beliefs and art are promoted and become influential in the contemporary art world.

Buddhist relationship with the land and environment, through nurture and letting go, is evident in Japanese Zen Buddhism, an influence apparent on writers and artists. Fluxus, one of the first intercultural movements, across Asia, North America and Germany included artists such as Nam June Paik, inspired by Zen Buddhism. Lagiera (2006) discussed Paik’s (1965) work *Moon is the Oldest TV*:

> In its material form, forever advancing and evolving, the installation is a response to the different lunar phases presented to us, as if following a cycle of differences and repetitions (Lagiera 2006, 230).

Though not ephemeral in material form, Paik’s television monitors and moon sequence present concepts of ephemera and belief in natural cycles for contemplation and awe. They include technically creative and transient visual work. Paik’s work *Moon is the oldest TV*, and the message behind similar artworks relies on the viewer’s acceptance of ephemera and / or transience. In this thesis, artists’ intentions and concern for issues other than making art are paramount. Danto (2004) finds new equivalents in the combination of previously separate Eastern and Western tradition where ‘the combined force of Cage, Duchamp, and Zen [Buddhism] constituted an artistic revolution of an unprecedented kind’ (Danto 2004, 57).

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2 Nam June Paik’s *Moon is the Oldest TV* (1965) was installed at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in 2007.
Baas relates that Danto’s study of Buddhism enabled new insight to state ‘nothing need distinguish artworks from mere real things’ (Danto cited in Baas 2004, 22). Marcel Duchamp’s work since 1910 has contributed significantly to the creative visual arts and is re-interpreted by Lee (2004). Writers and artists interested in dissolving the difference between illusion and reality share interests in an art encompassing ephemera as a statement, and as an anti-commodity practice, relating not necessarily to organised religion but to metaphysical beliefs.

The relationship between art and spirituality is complex. Elkins (2004) dismisses much contemporary art that attempts to identify with religious themes, though he includes Laib, Viola, and many more artists in discussing the influence of religion in contemporary art. Elkins states that ‘Talk about art and talk about religion have become alienated from one another, and it would be artificial and misguided to bring them together’ (Elkins 2004, x). However, Elkins (2004) does discuss the relationship of beliefs and interests in art and religion held by artists, evident for instance in Bill Viola’s video installation:

VIOLA is a religious person, a practicing Buddhist with interests in Sufism, Christian mysticism, and Zen. But what exactly is religious about recordings of the ambient noise of cathedrals? (Elkins 2004, 94)

Elkins concludes here, no one quite knows how to answer this question.

Bourriaud’s (2002) ‘relational aesthetics’ was not specifically concerned with the spiritual realm, though it was connected through his discussion of Tiravanija’s art and ecology relating to universal concerns. Bourriaud’s consideration of contemporary art, as a way of ‘negotiating relationships in the world’ includes Tiravanija’s work and artists, such as Noritoshi Hirakawa, Christine Hill, Carsten Holler and Pierre Huyghe, and he states ‘the liveliest factor that is played out on the chessboard of art has to do with interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts’ (Bourriaud 1998, 8).

Both Danto’s idea, that art can be the same as ‘mere real things,’ (2004) and Bourriaud’s, that art consists of producing ‘relationships with the world’ (2002) are instrumental in building confidence for artists, to create in this way. This
confidence is helpful to redress the power balance between precious archived art with solely indoor presentation, and ephemera including potential audience and site interactivity: an interaction discussed in Chapter Eight. In claiming an area of anti-archive, contemporary artists make art that does not have to last, and are often adopting transience as an important concept and purpose in the work. Jacob (2004b) discussed insight into the potential of transition as another form of art in relation to Ulay and Abramovic’s work Nightsea Crossing (1984), an installation requiring insight into indigenous culture in Australia and Tibet. Abramovic recalled ‘attain[ing] high states of meditation—the kind of transition from the physical to mental body’ (Abramovic cited in Jacob 2004b, 188). Abramovic’s practice identifies a relationship with art and ephemera driven by ideals similar to those of indigenous cultures.

My reference to any sign of transition is visible literally in my artwork but also through audience understanding of the artwork and its action as part of a process of recycling or return. This act goes beyond my control and shows my concern for natural environment. Where my practice involves an icon or object that disappears or disintegrates in the short term, this enables the artwork to be art and ephemera.

My responses to change were to create a series of the winged ice Buddha: from the Buddhist tradition, though with wings added, it is my altered Australian interpretation. Winged ice Buddha (2007) (Plate 6.3) initially depicted the head and torso of the Buddha where I made the wings pointing upwards as in the Winged Victory of Samothrace but much smaller. Through my respect for land and ecology I also pay homage to the beauty of the site and the way most things in the natural environment are visibly in a constant state of change.
Though my work might only last for minutes, hours or days within a site or exhibition venue, the time span represents a longer process of deterioration. Some events for art and ephemera recur daily for a limited time, such as a week or ten days, for the duration of an art event. My mythological Australian ice creatures were re-presented each day, for ten days (Appendix XXIII) and presented to my audience as an Australian interpretation of an Asian spiritual figure.
Andrews, Lacy, Lippard, Schmelzer, Crimmin, Kastner and Boyle (2006) advance creative instances that I relate as ‘art and ephemera’. They discuss distinctive actions many artists take in forming relationships with place, and ecology. Overlapping areas in art and spirituality, and art and ecology are common and these authors and artists’ strong ecological convictions contribute to the study in Chapter Ten. Links between the environment and the spiritual, such as with Buddhist philosophy, were introduced in genres, such as Dada and emerge again in contemporary practice where the focus is performative ephemeral art. Buddhist monk and artist Ernesto Pujol (2004) writes that ‘cultural scholars, museum people, and artists have entered into the very heart of the faith discourse’ (Pujol cited in Baas and Jacob 2004, 11), and this is apparent through their interest in connections with and consideration of metaphysical relationships.


A key aspect of this investigation sheds light on the close relationship between human and environment, through complex cultural relationships between art and spirituality. This is important, when, in the second millennium, environmental concerns are increasingly published in the domain of science and often lack a humanitarian perspective. Artists, such as, Piccinini (2005) might focus on biological ethics in favour of environmental situations. Though these
are at time difficult to separate (and I acknowledge artists’ interests in animal
rights and bioengineering are important) my focus is on the artist’s response to
issues of the natural physical environment and human intervention.

Tucker and Grim (1997) discuss environmental concerns and contribute to my
rationale to work with, and within, the natural environment, for ‘In trying to
reorient ourselves in relation to the earth … we have lost our appreciation for
the intricate nature of matter and materiality’ (Tucker and Grim 1997, xvi). My
art engages with this materiality through empathy with land and nurturing. I
identify for this purpose the values that humans place on environment and
spiritual engagement. This is also a concern for Ernesto Pujol (2004), (Plate 6.4)
who states ‘We need to study the past, become vulnerable, transcend our fears,
better analyse the present, and look beyond the shock of the moment’ (Pujol

From the established artists contributing to my research across various styles
and art genres I identify some common philosophical and conceptual
approaches in their works, and these are synchronous with an acceptance of
ephemera. Amongst these, Lee (2004) provides perspectives linking Marcel
Duchamp and the *ready-made* to Eastern philosophy including Buddhism.
Duchamp visited a collection of 2,000 objects from South Asia (Burma,
Thailand and India)³ where key texts were available and according to Lee
(2004) the German Dadaists were particularly attracted to the Proto-Zen
philosophy of Lao Tsu and Chuang Tsu: ‘Daimonides, for example, quotes lines
from *TaoTe Ching* in his essay “Zur Theorie Des Dadaismus,” and Walter
Mehring refers to Lao Tsu and the Buddha in his essay “Enthullungen”
(Unveilings)” (Lee 2004, 126).

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³ Duchamp visited an exhibition of Professor Lucien Scherman’s collection in Munich
in 1912 at the Royal Ethnographical Museum (now the Staatliches Museum fur
Volkerkunde).
Ready-mades

Artists interpret philosophical and religious concepts and use them to communicate in textual and visual discourse and this is exemplified in the work and ideas of Marcel Duchamp. The significance of Duchamp for this thesis is as mentor for conceptual art developments over the second half of the twentieth century and ongoing, evident in the Biennale of Sydney 2008. Duchamp’s *objet trouvé, ready-mades* and formulation of ideas integral to his practice, with a focus on process continue to impact on many people. For instance, my digital photographic images of the *Eroding Buddha* (2003) captured the ready-made eroding Buddha statues at Yungang Caves near Datong. Subsequently they were installed on walls (Lord 2004) as homage to land and references to spiritual place and loss.

My reference to Duchamp’s ready-mades links art and ephemera with and spiritual beliefs. Though the relationship of Duchamp’s work to spirituality is for some authors tenuous, Baas (2004) finds, for instance, ‘the bicycle wheel was not just a *ready-made* but a wheel relating to the Buddhist law or dharma’ (Baas 2004, 20). Duchamp’s contribution to the acceptance of impermanence in art is significant as is his influence on the way in which artists could reflect on change elements within their practice and adopt impermanent art forms. Baas contributes significant information:

> The practice Duchamp initiated with his *Bicycle Wheel* shifted attention from artistic product to process, and shifted responsibility for that process to the perceiver. These shifts produced a profound change in the relationship of artist to artwork and audience that definitely altered the cultural landscape of the twentieth century (Baas 2004, 20).

This change in the relationship of artists to artwork and audience is fundamental to understanding the way artists can proceed to create work that does not always belong in a gallery venue or have any saleable potential. The anti-commodity stance is a unifying factor in my study, which sought artists who are more interested in concepts and hence less interested in art as archived object. This art co-exists with society independent of financial support, lack of commercial interest or reliance on art as a commodity. Many of Duchamp’s works, as precursors to art and ephemera, were derived from readymade materials, in a
statement against and an attempt to subvert a *bourgeois* claim on art as commodity. Lee (2004) makes connections between Duchamp’s wit and his knowledge of Buddhism, and implementation of these in his art.

Plate 6.5 Interpretations of the compassionate bodhisattva, left to right, Reigen Eto (1721 - 1785) *White robed Kannon*, [AGNSW 2005, 68], *Kuan Yin* and *Avalokiteshvara* [McArthur 2002, 43 and 117]

The reinterpretation of the same bodhisattva: *Kannon* in Japan; *Kuan Yin* in China; and *Avalokiteshvara* in India gives rise to pluralist readings from traditional and contemporary art, and these are adopted by Duchamp. Lee (2004) creates an argument for Duchamp’s adoption of Buddhist icons such as the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and the Dharma or Buddhist law, apparent in his pseudonym, *Rrose Selavy*:

…the first meaning of the word *arroser* listed in the dictionary is “to water”. The name could thus simply mean, “Watering, that’s life”—*Arrose, c'est la vie*—related to the Buddhist iconography of the compassionate bodhisattva
Avalokiteshvara…who often takes the form of a woman, and frequently carries a vase of water for giving nourishing liquid and thus relieving the suffering of all forms of life (Lee 2004, 129-130).

Integration of Buddhist philosophy with many contemporary artists’ works is evident and leads to applications in art and ephemera. Both Duchamp’s work and Buddhist icons share potential with the conceptual triangle of ephemera, natural environment and spirituality. Lee’s discussion links to my concern for water as a resource taken for granted, and has implications for my practice-led research involving concerns about current water issues, especially its absence (Appendix XVIII).

In Lee’s writing, suppositions about Duchamp give rise to difficulty, for example, where Duchamp’s humour becomes more interested in an anti-establishment stance and eroticism than a spiritual ‘pathway to enlightenment’. In a similar manner, Buddhist monk Hoti (1400s) is depicted in a humorous manner directly defying or undermining the sublime. These anti-establishment views can serve the artists’ perspective, especially when questioning the status quo. In this regard Duchamp could have been making use of the Buddhist dharma but also placing much importance on humour, required for works such as LHOOQ (1919), Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Selavy (1920/21), and the ambiguity of Duchamp’s final poster (Plate 6.6).
I concur with Lee (2004) that the hand gesture in Duchamp’s last poster could be the *mudra* (*Avalokiteshvara granting fearlessness*), or a stop sign; and the smoke borrowed from yet another source that of singer George Brassen’s smoking pipe, could be from a cigar or an atomic bomb. This imagery is post-Hiroshima and in the same way that any post-2001 imagery does not ignore the capacity of the ‘developed’ world and our use of technology to strike terror in the inhabitants of the largest cities, the smoke trail in Duchamp’s poster can equate with the shape of the powerful forces of modern warfare.

Many interpretations are possible when looking at ephemera and art with connections to spiritual beliefs and concern for the natural environment. Lee (2004) also finds that there is a connection to these philosophies through Duchamp’s access to the *Bibliothèque Saint-Genevière* in Paris, 1913, where he was working as a librarian:

[Duchamp]… told Schwarz he found the Greek philosopher closest to his own interests to be Pyrrho …Pyrrho of Ellis was a court philosopher to Alexander the Great who travelled with Alexander to India, where he was influenced by Buddhist philosophy [cf. Schwarz *Complete Works of Duchamp*, 38] (Lee 2004, 127).

Thus in appreciation of artists, such as Duchamp, who have investigated an art involving concepts about ephemera, the links to spirituality in later art genres have currency in the development of my thesis. Duchamp’s evolving piece *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915 - 25) can be considered in relation to Lee’s (2004) suggestion that Duchamp’s work has more to do with Buddhist philosophy than is popularly acknowledged. This is through obscure references to Buddhist law or *dharma* and the symbol of the wheel as renewal, amongst other references to cycles. The added complication of the accidental breaking of the glass ⁴ and its becoming a part of the work rather than being replaced also portrays “acceptance.” This consideration of subtle references to other cultural and spiritual beliefs as concepts in art, leads to the bridging or linking of cultures through art and ephemera as a conceptual practice.

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⁴ Marcel Duchamp (1964) The Large Glass
Cultural and spiritual links relate to knowledge and interest in social and ethical behaviour being integrated into the art concept rather than commercial objects. These links provide a background and understanding for art to potentially go further and to be anti-commodity. Visual art post-World War II and Buddhist or spiritual influences can also be seen in the cultural connections between USA and Japan. Similarly, some of these newly formed connections in the visual arts are to be found in British art of the 1960s, with references to conscientious objections to war, and for instance Yoko Ono’s performance art. These cross-cultural links with post World War II through the Fluxus artists and later the younger generation of British artists in the 1960s and 1970s led to the opportunity for art-making to be influenced by multi-cultural strands and spiritual influences. Thus Zen Buddhism for John Cage (1969) and Eric Satie (1970s), was linked to Dada in the past, and to the future with David Suzuki’s lectures in California in the 1960s. Epstein (2004) comments that

The best recent exponent of bare attention was the composer John Cage, whose music and art essentially became a pure expression of this mental posture. Cage’s descriptions of his process do much to make the links between art, psychology, and Buddhism understandable (Epstein 2004, 31-32).

Australian artist Eugene Carchesio references Zen Buddhism in his work, and the meaning of emptiness. In a meeting we discussed connections in his work with ephemera and Zen beliefs. Carchesio referred to the ‘Truth of opposite’ and stated that he thought it was important to ‘appreciate the second,’ meaning time, and referring to Phillip Glass’, ‘Music for Changing Parts’ (Conversation with Eugene Carchesio 20 September 2005). Gallery director Milani (2002) provides an account of the impact of Zen on Carchesio and that his watercolours dead leaves of Tokyo, (1999) ‘seemed to go beyond those historical correlations’ such as Constructivism, Futurism, the art of Joseph Beuys and the movement of Arte Povera, and that Carchesio does this:

… by evincing an affinity with a certain tradition of Japanese aesthetics; one that values emptiness as an equal to its other, and emptiness as a precondition to form (Milani 2002, 5).

From the literature Zen and sound artists Phillip Glass and John Cage have influenced many visual artists in appreciating ephemera as a source of combining beliefs with creative work.

There are two things we adhere to. One is that quiet change matters. So we don’t make a big deal put of it. And also, small projects can have really big impacts (Sinclair interviewed by Schmelzer 2006, 69).

Sinclair and Stohr work in India and an East ~ West blurring is evident in examples from these artists who work across regions and disciplines. Their work is also discussed in relation to environment and making art for sustainable living (Chapter Ten).

**Pollen and Bio-mass**

Examples of art and ephemera with Buddhist perspectives and reference to ecology span artists’ lives and art work. They include Tiravanija’s land-based practice and living life and ecological issues as art; as well as Laib’s work with pollen, wax, rice and milk. These mentors and models build my confidence to work with ephemera, though I use different materials. Bond says of Laib ‘There is something wonderful about an artist whose work is manifested as collaboration with and mediation on the processes of nature’ (Bond 2005a, 9).

The statement and seeing Laib’s works *Milkstone* and *Pollen from Pine* installed for the Third Balnaves Foundation Sculpture Project (2005), add significantly to understanding the capacity artists using ephemera have to communicate about environment and beliefs. I met Laib and in response to my question about change as a concept in artist’s work, Laib stated ‘Sometimes things that don’t last are more important than things that last a long time’ (Laib 10 August 2005 discussion with Lord). Laib’s response resonates with Bond’s (2005a) finding that Laib is, ‘deeply influenced by mystical practices and … impressed by temple rituals and offerings that he saw while researching the purity of drinking
water in South India in 1972’ (Bond 2005a, 9). The proximity of this work in relation to other practice combining humanitarian work and spiritual beliefs is evident in his choice of material.

Mentors discussed in this study mirror the Dalai Lama’s response to Geraldine Doogue (2007) who asked ‘How would His Holiness go about ‘attaining happiness?’ The Dalai Lama (2007), responded ‘Just keep going, continuously. That is all!’ http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s2009754.htm His smile and laugh assisted in the explanation that continuing is part of the process of obtaining happiness. The audience resounded audibly. The Dalai Lama’s demeanour was evidenced again in the five-day Stages of Meditation workshop in Sydney (11\textsuperscript{th} to 15\textsuperscript{th} June 2008) where listening contributed to my realisation that my research includes many qualitative instances of understanding.

Plate 6.7 Dalai Lama in Stages of Meditation Sydney June 2008 Blurring and meaning [photograph Lord]

In going beyond appearances, discussed in this workshop (Plate 6.7) memorable experiences impacted on my new work. Similarly Laib’s reflection on religious ideals contributes to my collection of data about ephemera and art imitating life as a process of change, but even more as a means to seeing things differently. In this way how humans resolve against and respond to environmental impact are influential for art practice about the natural environment. Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel (1997) discuss Buddhism and ecology through ‘interconnection of Dharma and Deeds’, and recognise:

The history of Buddhism involves a mutualism between monks and forests; latent in this philosophy and religion are parallels to ecology and the basic principles for developing a green environmental philosophy and ethics; and
Buddhism and culture are mutually reinforcing in Thailand, where the overwhelming majority of people are Buddhists (Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel 1997, 59).

Laib’s awareness of this culture shows in actions towards solving ecological crisis, though his use of ephemera in materials, such as pollen is in conjunction with many philosophical ideals. Zeller finds:

Laib likes to retreat from worldly affairs. Then he limits his dealings to nature…[his] path toward a meaning of life has led him through many countries and religions – Islam, Buddhism, Christianity – that have influenced and changed his thinking and his attitude to life. The entire approach to his works is nourished from this intellectual background (Zeller 2005, 7).

Zeller contributes to my understanding that the artist’s activity of art making is a part of life and learning. Laib provides new ways for an audience to contemplate ideas, for, as Zeller states, ‘Laib’s works open depths of experience and lead the gaze in meditation into regions that our civilisation hesitates to accept’ (Zeller 2005, 7). Laib and Tiravanija share this concern for ecology. The promotion of their practice reveals connections between their art and their commitment to make visible their concerns for humanity and ecological crisis.

Emerging and Contemporary Models: Links to Spiritual Beliefs

Artists’ intentions to adopt an unprecedented method are also relative to this study. Australian Judy Watson stated ‘Change is when you leave one area of work and go on to another new body of work; this is about taking risks’ (Watson, conversation 2005). Swiss artist Wolfgang Laib and Judy Watson, who has Australian Aboriginal heritage, work in different ways, though both show influences from Buddhism and cultures beyond their indigenous heritage or national boundaries. Both indicate an ability to allow things to happen through continuation of the work beyond their control and with natural elements. This is central to my research and choice of artists. In Watson’s (2005) work selected for this research, the change component was accidental but at the same time adopted and acknowledged by the artist as a vital part of the work. Watson’s ‘artist’s book with worm eaten tracks’ (2005) was on display at the Mayne Centre UQ. It and the watercolour made from washed-
brush-water (Chapter Eight) play out important beliefs about acknowledging change, and making use of these.

In my selection criteria for artists and writers, I made the point that bridging or linking cultures and concerns is important for the development of my visual artist’s concepts about ephemera, initially seen as a philosophy of change. In order to proceed, some of the tenets of the concepts about ephemera mirror a change in art and are integral to the way the work is able to develop in, as well as respond and adapt to, contemporary situations.

**Ephemera and Impact Linking China and Australia**

My research and art practice share and maintain an interest in the disintegration of naturally occurring and manufactured objects over time, and my formative environment shaped the emergence of my environmentalist aesthetic. Extreme seasonal changes contribute to my perception and aesthetic and this awareness links nature in human relationships and cultural exponents.

Exemplars for art and ephemera exist in the links between some traditional Chinese landscape culture and aspects of cultural interpretations of the Australian landscape. Further, my perception of visual similarities and blurred East West positioning creates links in Australia-China cultural interpretations within the broader global environment. My enquiry into China’s cultural and environmental landscape, (including painting) resulted in recognising the placement and scale of the human figure as a tiny element in the natural environment. This reduced significance of the person in nature resonates with my respect for the greater environment. My perception stems from being at the mercy of natural elements in Northwest Queensland where distance demanded hours of riding on horseback between drinking water and in dry heat. This distress increases understanding of vulnerability. Stalling a truck on top of a fireball of grass during a bushfire, and moving away in a heavy slow vehicle (as in a dream) is part of appreciating the might of nature in relation to what humans want to and can do. These vignettes are about respect for the environment and appreciating concepts of ephemera.
Contrasts and similarities apparent in China in 2003 enhanced my appreciation of the diversity of cultural beliefs, as well as the immensity of large-scale built environments, land and environmental issues. My search for icons of ephemera in China’s visual culture exposed many examples and cultural diversity. Responses to death in China presented a new difference when on my arrival in Shanghai, I learnt of the unexpected death of my father. This occasion and the aftermath raised questions about my earlier understanding of loss. Return trips to Australia and China, documented in ‘Anne’s Diary July 2003’ (Extracts, Appendix XXI) led to reflection on the icons I visited.

Plate 6.8 Eroding Buddha <eroded061> Yungang caves near Datong [photograph Lord]

Eroding Buddhist sculptures demonstrate overwhelming impact of the elements, such as wind and sun, and vandalism. In some cases faces, hands and feet are missing. The erosion of and interference to sacred icons contributed to my understanding of shared, environmentally responsive experiences. The impact of elements on these icons contributed to my creative development for the installation Absence (2004), my response to these experiences. Vitali (2005)
relates Laib’s immersion in cultures and the understanding gained through these diverse experiences and says of Laib and his family that they live in an...

...outwardly humble and inwardly rich equilibrium that seems far from the hue and cry of mundane life, yet they are entirely receptive to the world and firmly bound up with it. It is doubtless his immersion in a Far Eastern or, more precisely, Indian spirituality that does not disown his own Western origins, that enables Laib and his family to cultivate this attitude to life (Vitali 2005, 16-17).

My empathy with Laib’s experiences of life from places other than home shows that immersion in new cultural beliefs does not disown my origins. East and West offer similarities vital for the development of my praxis, art and ephemera and blurring boundaries.

Arresting change through photography is, in fact, creating the antithesis of ephemera in that it appears to stop time. This capture of imagery as an aid to memory is relevant, especially for ready-made icons from Datong. I considered the need to capture images, sometimes in sequence or in a particular order, to show ephemera and change and these ideas changed as my research exposed alternatives for praxis. Photography offers increased techniques for recording, and yet it is an incomplete medium for my art statement. Photography alone would not allow me to resolve my work for art and ephemera: though the potential for digital photography as documentation, and online reproduction as an interface for art and ephemera, and as a medium that is capable of carrying a message globally is confirmed throughout the thesis (Section 10.2, Web Pages and Regions).

Here the issue is again not to confuse a documentation process with a tangible, though ephemeral, artwork. Further, the Buddhist dispersal of sand is not to confuse an intentional religious activity with art and ephemera. The point is that artists may adopt similar processes and identify the process through a refined conceptual development, theorising and installation, as an artwork. Ross Gibson (2008) works with conversation, and after the exhibition, no material object remains. John Cage said ‘There is poetry as soon as we realise that we possess nothing’ (cited Biennale of Sydney 2008, 68).
Material Choice and Ephemera

Artists have shown influences of cultures and spiritual realms in valuing ephemera or imperfection via the selection of material for their practice. The sand mandala is one pertinent example of material change acting as an instrument in support of Buddhist philosophy.

Plate 6.9 Sand Mandala made by Buddhist monks in the Stages of Meditation Teachings Sydney, June 2008 [photographs Lord]

Though not indicated as art and ephemera, the practice is close to the way some artists work with subtle ephemeral material in order to convey a message. Jacob (2004a) interviewed artist Kimsooja who discussed sewing and realising the energy in a needle passing though cloth provides the metaphor and further action for her art. Thus in A Needle Woman (1999 - 2001) Kimsooja travels in cities as a needle going through a universe. The documentation of this work confirms the piece, though in itself it is not the piece.

Plate 6.10 Sand Mandala made by Buddhist monks and the dispersal, Stages of Meditation Teachings, Sydney 11th to 15th June 2008 [photographs Lord]
I documented the sand mandala made by Buddhist monks during the Dalai Lama’s Stages of Meditation Teachings. Peissel (2002) confirms the significance of the sand mandala and its impermanent status:

After a few days, the two-dimensional representation is literally swept away: the coloured sands are all mixed together to signify the ephemeral quality of all phenomena—a key philosophical point in Buddhist belief (Peissel 2002, 128).

In Sydney on 15th June little bundles of the sands were handed to people after the dispersal. I was expecting the sands to go into a river, as I had learnt about earlier. In this case it was seen as good fortune that the monks gave the sand to surrounding people. In a variant of this, Epstein (2004) discusses release from materialism:

Because the primary conceptual tenet of Buddhism is the lack of a central essence or substance to the self, Buddhism provided a natural inspiration to—or confirmation for—artists in the process of discovering how exciting art could become when freed from the constraints of materialism (Epstein 2004, 29).

Epstein’s discussion incorporates viewing video work by artist Pipilotti Rist titled *Sip My Ocean* (2004 MCA Chicago) where the work pulled him close to a meditative state. In many cases the process of art builds on these concepts and Epstein links some complex and diverse areas such as psychology and art when he discusses Joyce and his use of the word ‘beholding’ to convey looking at a work of art

[Joyce] was describing something like what Freud was pointing to when he suggested that we “catch the drift” of someone’s unconscious with our own. If you pull the artwork toward you the experience becomes pornographic, Joyce said, but if you distance yourself too much, it becomes criticism. The correct approach requires some sort of middle ground, where the viewer surrenders himself to his own unconscious experience of the object (Epstein 2004, 32).

Pipilotti Rist’s video and the large-scale projections of Bill Viola’s video work are similar and this is about ‘right-mindedness’ required to see and experience art. Epstein’s observation extends to the creation of art as well as viewing where artists are aware of the ‘state of bare attention’:

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5 Viola’s video projects were shown in the National Gallery of Australia 2005, and the grand situation, sound and scale of the videos on full walls in the National Gallery Australia are awesome.
Many ... [artists] recognise something of their studio selves in the descriptions that come from Buddhist teachers. The combination of focused concentration and open, non-discriminating awareness is one that many artists find essential for the creative process (Epstein 2004, 31).

Epstein (2004) also refers to viewing and psychologist Bollas’ (1987) use of the “aesthetic moment” where the ‘subject feels held in symmetry and solitude by the spirit of the object’ (Epstein 2004, 32). Though seemingly contradictory, art materials such as Richard Tuttle’s ‘unconventionally humble materials’ string, wire, pencil, nails, rope, cloth and ‘deliberately off hand placement of work’ (Tucker 2004, 75) can convey a similar attitude to the object or material. Tucker refers to ‘the quality of attention’ that is necessary to experience Tuttle’s work and states it is the ‘kind of attention’ that is significant here and continues ‘something that’s central to Buddhist practice, but hasn’t been given that much currency in talking about either making or viewing contemporary art’ (Tucker 2004, 78). Thus in my work “paying attention” to fast dissolving ice in the tropics is important.

Tucker (2004) and Epstein’s (2004) concerns for quality of attention, ecology and spiritualism have influenced the development of my ideas about art and ephemera. Similarly, Leopold’s (1966) discussion about an ethics of rightness when the ‘bio’ is considered resonates with my quest to empower art and ephemera, as it is also considerate of the bio. This relationship of a person to the bio is one to ‘place’ also recognised by Lippard (1997).

Though my previous discussion about icons in art was based on the surviving figurative icon, my own practice often excludes the figurative in favour of abstraction. Therefore the observed icons are a lesson in seeing age and the impact of elements over time. Many artists and scholars have learnt from the abstract elements in these iconic figures. In this way my work, through appreciation of erosion and ephemera, is linked to the collapse of a binary in the never-ending cycle of cherished images / icons and discarded image / icon. The following section relates my development, a type of transference, from looking at the figurative, and turning to the abstract and has more to do with place than people.
Place as a Root for Ephemera and Reverence

In my remote first home, people were not prominent and not a key part of my interest the way native animals and plants were. In contrast my father and brothers were always looking for grazing animals and signs of their presence through tracks and what they had eaten. I looked at the native flora and fauna in this natural environment. Therefore an extension of my practice, perverse in relation to a people-centred art practice, is the way I look forward on returning to this country, to a land with few people, and minimal human footprint. In this natural environment I see land that cannot provide huge produce for sustaining large human populations. The location supports many animals in a good season and is a tenable environmental situation for the native flora and fauna. In appreciating a dry place that is suited to sustaining, over millennia, a small population of Aboriginal indigenous people, flora and fauna, I have asked questions of myself: ‘Is this why I produce an art that returns quickly to the environment, a sort of compensation for the abundance of art that is concerned more with the human condition?’ This is my inherent admiration for a remote location called home, and seasonal return in an extreme climate.

By focussing my art on land, place and change processes, I acknowledge human reliance on the earth and continuation of cycles of decay and renewal. Through this lens, which values the cyclical, there is a collapse of binaries, and by appreciating opposites there is potential to avoid power struggles that favour either. Many people in remote locations, including my family, understand that they should, and do, care for the land. Whereas some people think they own the land, for many people close to the land, including indigenous people, the land owns the person. My understanding of the powerful impact of the natural environment on people supports this idea. In saying my practice is environmentally sensitive I point to many day-to-day activities that support my knowledge and practice. Therefore aspects of my art are part of my daily life: activities reflect living moments, home and gardening, valuing family, learning and art. Though much of my art work comes from my reflection on abstract qualities in the natural environment, an exception to my use of abstraction is the
deterioration of a surface or abstracted part of an eroding figure. This is evident in my translation of figurative images from the East where the deities have provided symbolic references in my search for meaning in absence, both environmental and personal.

Plate 6.11 Lord (2004) *Buddha’s Footprint* lithograph under plastic and ‘permanent’ markers for north Queensland rivers

Signs of age in icons of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas are figurative influences on my creative practice. In a similar manner, qualities observed in culturally depicted divinities and medieval saints have been absorbed as the artist’s use of eroded imagery. Both cultural sources offer differences and similarities in expression and form. These occur in hands, (sacred and mundane), trees (sacred and threatened), and feet (rich and poor, wounded and healthy). I use these images as references, and they have been influential in my work from my visual research through recognition, selection and incorporation into an artist’s statement. Similarities between Eastern and Western use of hands, feet and trees, as symbols provide figurative elements to consider in my work. In particular, images of compassion and relationships to discussion of the environment are key to this work. The Australian, suggested in the form of a kangaroo, discusses the drought with a Chinese Bodhisattva (Plate 6.12). The universal concepts of adoration, grace, compassion and fear are common to, and
bear relationship with, Buddhist and Christian influences on my visual interpretation of ecological redemption.

Plate 6.12 Lord (2004) *Bodhisattva V and kangaroo discussing the drought*, Lithograph 56 x 76 cm

Artists and artisans’ use of imagery such as praying hands are important in recognising figurative imagery shared in Eastern and Western iconography. Similarly, trees (sacred and threatened) informed some responses for my realigned positioning as an artist. Symbolism seen in museums in the way hands and feet convey signs or indicate status (rich and poor, wounded and healthy, Buddhist and Christian) was important for my development of icons of change.

Plate 6.13 Detail folded hands Shanghai museum [photograph Lord]
Figurative art, though given up for ‘art and ephemera’ is significant in its stages as performative object. Aged figurative icons led to accepting that the object could disappear and my appreciation of change moved from the symbolic iconic value inherent in figurative imagery to adopting a material change, one that responds to ephemera as part of a cycle in the natural environment.

The ephemeral nature of artwork in this chapter has been introduced through the concepts of artists discussed here, primarily with reference to personal beliefs and links to ecological health. My understanding of the relationship between doctrines considered in this study was introduced in methodology as my
researcher positioning. Art considered, ranged in time from: precursors in Tang iconography to Duchamp (1920s) through to 1970s concepts of the dematerial, to esoteric work by Kimsooja (1999 - 2001), and ongoing.

Links to the Contemporary

Spiritual, social and ecological perspectives enable artists to use change to develop ideas for work. An art statement for Beijing / Tokyo Art Projects (BTAP) ⁶, reads:

Chinese society [is] currently in the throes of an era of great historical transformation. According to Buddhist thought, mofa, or degenerate dharma, is the last historical stage in the progressive degeneration of Buddhism. Mofa or degenerate dharma, is characterized by the corrupt … the impossibility of enlightenment … [and] this exhibit deals with the question of redemption … it is about the attempts of individual people to return from a state in which the self has been distorted almost beyond recognition to a primal state of original selfhood. To save and redeem the self, self-exploration and investigation is undertaken through art (btap@tokyo-gallery.com 4 March 2005 8:14:06 PM).

In this context for visual art, the change process is used literally in art practice to evoke concerns and ideas about personal strife. This statement reveals interest in other than worldly things, and considerations of redemption. In 2003 visits to sacred shrines and Buddhist temples were popular, obvious and important aspects of cultural tourism for Chinese and internationals.

Ingram’s (1997) melding of cultural perspectives in the interests of ecological return compares Kukai’s Esoteric Buddhist teachings asserting ‘an ecological conception of nature quite different from mainstream Christian tradition’ and in contrast:

… Kukai’s universe is completely non teleological. For him, the universe has neither beginning nor end, no creator and no purpose. The universe just is, to be taken as given, a marvellous fact which can be understood only in terms of its own inner dynamism (Ingram 1997, 79).

This acceptance is relevant to artists adopting art and ephemera and also to further understanding based on revised notions of what humans demand from the environment. In this thesis for ‘art and ephemera’ change is also part of a

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⁶ BTAP is an installation space, office and gallery in a Beijing art complex.
continuum. In the event of these writings merging in an understanding of ecological wellbeing, Ingram (1997) recognises Kukai’s work combining East and West, where he states from Kukai’s perspective: ‘transformed by encounter with Christian process thought, outer and inner dialogue means to follow our collective path with embodied detachment’ (Ingram 1997, 85). Ingram concurs with Annie Dillard:

I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you. Then even death, where you’re going no matter how you live, cannot you part (Dillard 1982, 16).

In response Ingram finds: ‘In so doing, we discover there was nothing to grasp all along, because we are nature, looking at ourselves’ (Ingram 1997, 85). My incorporation of environmental concern with the ephemeral object or image concurs with Ingram ‘we are nature.’ With this significant collapse of binaries I identify and acknowledge those ephemeral aspects in art as my research in art and ephemera.

My understanding of universal ideals for goodness is that irrespective of the formal name of cultural spiritual beliefs or religions, people at the beginning of the twenty-first century, have common concern for environmental wellbeing. Stern (2007) identified the steps required to right ecological strife and the demands this places on people. Aims suggested by many writers in Stern’s compilation call for responses from the individual as well as countries. This requires a reconciled approach to the survival of the natural environment through ethical approaches. Awareness of the role we play, as individuals, is even more powerfully realised through the knowledge and increased information available in this millennium (ABC TV 9th November 2008). Though reconsideration of lifestyle partly addresses this, the individual contribution from the visual artist has an important role to play as a powerful voice, through art and ephemera.

Ingram states from a ‘theological perspective, transformed by inner and outer dialogue with Kukai: God does not demand that we give up our personal dignity, that we throw in our lot with random people, that we lose ourselves and
turn from all that is not God’ and concludes ‘If however we want to look at
stars, we will find that darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor
demand it’ (Ingram 1997, 84-85).

Thus my recognition is that the onus lies with human activity, and that we,
collectively, could respond to this statement in a way that is not blaming or
forgiving, but to act for what it is: urgently through a requirement to undo our
substantially modified practices. In response to Ingram ‘art and ephemera’ does
not require or demand, but is.
Chapter Seven

7.0 Artists ~ Mentors: Contemporary Art and Ephemera

Contemporary artists who combine material change and various practices as ‘art and ephemera’ are discussed in this chapter. Contemporary art refers to the last two decades, when practice responds to pluralist perspectives and artists have the ability to explore diverse approaches to issue-based art (Krysa et al. 2006), (Andrews et al. 2006). Thus I refer to art primarily since 1990, and visual artists who address issues, such as problems relating to natural environment and global change. Buskirk (2005) speaks of ‘negotiated decisions’ and how,

... recent artistic practices involving objects that do not carry inherent evidence of artistic authorship have necessitated new conventions for designing and maintaining their categorization as works of art (Buskirk 2005, 4).

The works discussed here do not carry ‘inherent evidence of artistic authorship’ and further they do not last as art, for instance they exist as burnt incense, pollen, silk threads or changing foliage.

Ephemera used by contemporary artists can be a powerful tool to address issues with embedded binaries, such as, art as commodity opposed to art with no commercial value. In opposition to contemporary art and ephemera, even a relatively smaller niche area of concern for land (for instance), might be addressed by art that can be archived, such as painting. However, for this study, it was important to identify artists whose practice adopted ephemera, not only with concepts related to global issues and natural environment, but who were
sympathetic in their engagement with environmental issues, through a sensitive response to art material, media and documentation.

In my search for contemporary art and ephemera in major art events, I chose artists who specifically referenced fragile materials and intentionally worked with impermanence. Key contemporary artists who make use of ephemeral material in significant ways include: Wolfgang Laib and his work *Pollen* (2005) (Plate 7.1) and Gustav Metzger’s work *Aequivalenz – Shattered Stones* (2007) (Plate 7.2). Mierle Laderman Ukeles in her ongoing *maintenance work*, (Plate 5.16) and Rirkrit Tiravanija with his project *the land* (1998 - ongoing Plate 6.1 and 6.2), share social and ecological commitment. Sheela Gowda (*Collateral* 2007, Plate 7.3) and Ann Hamilton (*Myein* 1999, Plate 7.6) are international mentors identified for strategic use of art and ephemera from recent practice and momentous artworks.

This thesis is not an all-inclusive or a definitive text on artists using ephemera or change as a metaphor for contemporary issues. During my study artists referring to events or specific issues about the natural environment were much less apparent than, for instance, artists working with issues of the built environment and urban living, reflecting demographics of population distribution. Comparative mentors are included as I consider artists who use very diverse materials and show individual approaches to art making as potential art and ephemera to address my criteria.

These artists fortify my interest in reclaiming, regeneration and revering cycles that allow us to do this. Evoking impermanence is a major factor in the conceptual nature of the work presented. Many mentors make prominent the idea of transience and the processes of change in their work, whereas fewer artists work with disintegration, degradation and decay in their work. In my work these processes are often inclusive and reflect each other, and by doing so lead to my visual interpretation of contemporary issues. For me this is to evoke dryness and ways to assist regeneration, a type of transience.
In providing some mentors as exemplars of the ideas where art can be ephemeral, and significantly contribute to a visual art discourse, I encourage more people — artists to bring their own knowledge of change in relation to practice and to create art from and with ephemera. A new response could acknowledge the performative art object as an ephemeron. In doing so the individual can empower creative practice through ideas inherent in this study. More importantly, the ideas are not owned by a thesis but distributed to individual practitioners as an invitation to make alternative art that incorporates a light environmental footprint in presentation. These are evident in varying approaches from Wolfgang Laib and Gustav Metzger.

**Wolfgang Laib and Gustav Metzger**

High profile artists Wolfgang Laib and Gustav Metzger are comparable artists working with ephemera who take notice of natural occurrences for their work. Laib collects pollen, and Metzger places stones in locations around a city. In the case of Laib’s *Pollen*, Zeller states, it is ‘almost volatile and immaterial’ (Zeller 2005, 7). Though artists have often produced ephemeral art as part of a happening or performance piece, the works selected for discussion here are, due to the artists’ intentions, primarily ephemeral, through choices made about material and change. The nature of these works contradicts notions of buying and owning artwork. The two works, Laib’s *Pollen* (2005) and Metzger’s *Aequivalenz – Shattered Stones* (2007), [www.aequivalenz.de](http://www.aequivalenz.de), as their names suggest, are composed of extremely polarised materials, pollen and stone, and yet both are creative work included in this discussion of art and ephemera. In these two examples it is possible to witness huge diversity in approaches taken by artists. Laib’s *pollen* is only pollen and has an installation room of its own, disallowing the viewer close inspection, or any chance to disrupt the carefully sifted pollen on the floor.
Plate 7.1 Wolfgang Laib’s *Pollen* (2005) indicated by Lord, visitor AGNSW – [photograph Mona Ryder]

However the aura extends across the two-metre space of separation to the viewer, so that the artwork is much more than *only* pollen. Plate 7.1 cannot duplicate this experience created by Laib. Though Laib’s work was previously known to me, and assisted in the creative development of art and ephemera, the occasion to see the work at the Balnaves Sculpture Project provided the rare chance to meet Laib and his well-publicised piece of ephemeral art. I visited the Wolfgang Laib exhibition at the AGNSW a few times and found that the impact of the materials, such as milk, marble and pollen remained strong. I asked Laib to sign his catalogue and if he would respond to my ideas about change.

Laib told me ‘change is in everything’ (Laib 2005) and we communicated through email in confirmation of the discussion and comments about his work. His painstaking and delicate procedure of collecting pollen from fields demonstrates the way this artist communicates through ecological interaction, in the manner of ephemera. Laib knows the colour will be phenomenologically in accord with his vision as an artist. Laib’s work sings a visual message, to portray meaning in a manner that is uplifting and reflective. It relates with the mind and the senses.
Compared to Laib’s pollen, Metzger’s materials are polarized and his art tackles very different though similarly sensitive issues.

Metzger’s Aequivalenz – Shattered Stones (2007) is ephemeral by the nature of placement and removal of stones, placed daily in predetermined places around Muenster, by a forklift driver for the 107 days of the Sculptur Projekte Münster 2007. The project references the bombings of Muenster and Coventry in World War II. Metzger’s artist’s statement revealed he would ‘work on this destroyed city and commemorate the past with this project, using the stones scattered day by day throughout the city’ (Plath and Metzger 2007, 149). There was no guard and the stones could be walked on, graffitied or removed prematurely. In this work there is less chance to observe an aura (Bourriaud 1992, Benjamin 1935), an aesthetic
previously expected in artwork, such as painting. Metzger’s concept leaves us with an unmistakable sense of ephemera through the orchestration of the piece. Burow described in Metzger’s work that when ‘… the 107 exhibition days come to a close, the monuments will disappear from the cityscape’ (Burow 2007, 149).

Rock that is so permanent and pollen that is impermanent contribute to my concept of art and ephemera. The positioning of both Laib’s and Metzger’s art in major international art exhibitions empowers the work, the artists and the way an audience will not only seek out the work but pay great attention to the ephemeral nature of the work. Text and image and the recorded photographic reproduction of the image remain triggers for both the introduction to the artwork and importantly the memory of the work. This comparison between Laib and Metzger demonstrates that the materiality of artwork is not always the most ephemeral aspect of the work, and that ephemera and art can by nature be about shifting material for a concept, thus facilitating impermanence of a structure or installation. That is, there is disintegration or volatility in ephemera and art but also there is an ephemeron in the conceptual nature of placing, rearranging and moving Metzger’s shattered stones.

Laib and Metzger receive extensive art industry documentation and presentation: in 2007, Laib’s through The Third Balnaves Sculpture Project, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, a project for acclaimed national artists; and Metzger’s through the Muenster Sculpture Project, Germany. Both generate interest around the world from a media provided with extensive press releases. Both artists’ works are explained and elaborated in catalogues specifically produced for the occasion of their work. Laib’s work was toured to state venues with great personal attention to placement, and Metzger’s was delivered by forklift to specified places around the city of Muenster.

Though art and ephemera might rely on a passing or changing object, integrating with a surrounding, the work in Laib’s case continues as a sequence of installations. Arguably Metzger’s work can also act in ongoing performative installations. Zeller
(2005) finds that ‘Laib never conclusively ends any of his groups of works. They exist alongside one another, equal in value and weight’ (Zeller 2005, 7). The significant work for this study involves Laib’s use of pollen. Though other materials include wax, rice, milk, wood and containers such as bronze and marble, these for me are not transient to the same extent as the work with pollen. The presence of this work by Laib or Metzger is not easily comprehended with photographic reproduction. This is one reason why I make the point that ephemeral art cannot be the photographic documentation of the work or the digital transference of the work to screen or paper but relies on the viewer participating in the experience of the work. This is to be in the presence of the work and therefore the viewer is also in the presence of the performative object.

Zeller (2005) states that Laib’s art ‘open[s] depths of experience and lead[s] the gaze in meditation into regions that our civilization hesitates to accept,’ and in relation to the conceptual aspect of Laib’s work, Zeller adds, ‘The entire approach of his works is nourished from his intellectual background (Zeller 2005, 7). Compared to Pollen (Bond 2005a), Laib’s Milkstone, (AGNSW 2005) a slab of marble with its topside carved lower to contain milk brimming to the top, can be discussed as art and ephemera to a certain extent. Milkstone does not create the same ambience of ephemera as Pollen, but does incorporate a refined sense of stillness and knowledge that milk is transient and nourishing. In the appreciation of these works Milkstone and Pollen, the capacity to reflect on the material is significant. Seeing Pollen consisting entirely of pollen sifted onto a floor, where the light reflects but also emerges from the piece, presents an experience beyond the quotidian phenomenon of light1. For me it resonates with a spiritual and metaphysical quality and for Bond (2005a) ‘The trace of this transforming hand is experienced by the viewer as a significant meaning in the work of art that precedes and survives the message of its image’ (Bond 2005a, 9).

1 Spiegelberg describes the phenomenological task as “the descriptive investigation of the phenomena, both objective and subjective, in their fullest breadth and depth” (Spiegelberg 1982, 2).
Similarly for me, the presence can be imagined in anticipation of the work, and, importantly, the ephemeral nature of this piece resonates in memory after the viewing of the work. However, my preconception and memory of the work are pale reflections in comparison to being there. Memory is important for the retention of the idea, however the experience of the work is more important for my interpretation of art and ephemera. This may be due to the fact that in a world flooded with reproductions the presence of the work and the experience gained cannot be replaced with documentation. I argue for the ephemeral work itself, that its presence is more important than a reproduction of the work. Does it mean that only people who can visit the site can appreciate the value of this piece? Probably not, but it does mean that a viewer’s experience will have sensory advantage over the recorded experience of the artwork, through their direct encounter with ephemera.

Laib’s work becomes more important to me as I appreciate what he is approaching through transience. Laib assisted my quest for ephemerality in art and communication ‘Sometimes things that don’t last are more important than things that last a long time’ (Laib discussion with Lord, AGNSW 10 August 2005). Laib’s response is important in maintaining my goal and in seeking art that can pass into another phase and yet also remain important in memory. Laib relates to a number of cultural beliefs and in this respect he could be a mentor for many artists who investigate an understanding of change. These aspects of Laib’s work and his attention to its presentation and meaning are cross-referenced in Chapter Six. In these cases I put forward that ‘art and ephemera’ is a valuable conceptual premise as a reminder or prompt for reconsideration of human impact on the environment.

2 Similarly the statues of the Buddha in the AGNSW have the ability to surprise me with their presence whereas web reproductions lose this experience.
Events and Site

Guiseppe Penone’s (2007) works for Sculture di linfa (Lymph Sculptures) were made specifically for the Italian Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Penone’s concern is for the lymph or sap as a vital life source, and thus, energy. Similarly, Laib’s milk and pollen are also essential parts of the ‘biology of procreation’ (Bond 2005a, 12). Casagrande (2007) states that Penone’s work has been ‘… noted for the vast range of materials employed, for his adoption of a sculptural practice related to the material’s process of development, and for his attention to natural phenomena’ (Casagrande 2007, 70). My interest is in Penone’s attention to natural phenomena and though Penone’s sculptures are not ephemeral, as art pieces that disappear in a short space of time, the work speaks of the lymph or sap as the source of energy we require as a species, and of the importance of a liquid for many of our processes of living and working. Penone’s interest in these processes assists my synthesis of potentially new elements presented by mentors.

In my work, I have featured the cyclical and regenerative capacity of art and ephemera to lead to new ways to comment on current issues of the environment. At the basis of my thesis is the artist’s understanding of these natural processes. Casagrande (2007) states Penone’s

…work finds poetic implications in sap as a pre-eminent source of nourishment for the earth and a symbol of energy. Lymph, or sap, as a vital element that runs through the bark of trees, reveals the form of the wood and the veins of marble, and it represents a connecting ring that unites man and nature, in a continuous state of participation and symbiosis (Casagrande 2007, 71).

The five major pieces in Penone’s installation are about complex issues of our time. The visual presentation combines the pleasure of looking, as well as the need to read about what the large tree and walls lined with engraved and moulded leather have to do with our current ecological concerns. For Casagrande (2007), Penone

… translates his connection to the earth and the landscape into his own linguistic code … and his works, whether sculptures or installations, reflect on human gestures such as touching, sculpting and modelling (Casagrande 2007, 70-71).
Though the work is large scale and installed in a building on site for the 2007 Venice Biennale, it does not fit neatly into the idea of art as commodity. When artists commit to such demanding work, even though the work might defy further conservation and preservation, there is an act of placing the meaning of the artwork beyond the material objectification of art.

Events on site, such as the Muenster Sculpture Project (2007) provide mentors and models through installations, curators’ essays and the glossary. They provide theorising and bringing authoritative voices to art events and beyond. Tue Greenfort’s work, *Diffuse Entries* (2007), in Muenster Sculpture Project (2007) is an ecologically regenerative program on Lake Aa, in Muenster. In 2006 Greenfort found signs forbidding swimming in Lake Aa, prompting an ecologically inspired project to uncover the source of pollution and ask what was being done to prevent infectious algae entering the lake. Though Greenfort’s project was about helping to solve an environmental problem, he found that prevention was not possible in the current situation of powerful lobbies preserving local industry against such intervention (Greenfort 2007, 117). Greenfort’s artistic outcome is not about archival art and he responded by placing a machine to spray Iron (III)-Chloride into the lake, which restored chemical balance. In 2006 Greenfort also incorporated mechanical and pragmatic machinery into a methane-powered lighthouse (Burow 2007, 120-121). In this way ‘art and ephemera’ moves in and out of proximity with artists working towards ecological wellbeing and this work, bridging ephemera and ecology, is discussed further in Chapter Ten, Ecology, Art and Ephemera.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles

Mierle Laderman Ukeles applies various methods to create and investigate art in combination with the land, environment and ecology. Models pre-1990s were discussed primarily in Chapter Five, for instance Laderman Ukeles’ *Touch Sanitation*, (1978 - 80) a ‘Handshake Ritual’ (Plate 5.18). I include Laderman Ukeles in this chapter, as a mentor from the 1970s to the present. Laderman Ukeles’ substantial contribution to art and ephemera involves sanitation workers in health departments and contributes to my investigation of an art that does not have to be a tangible product or archived artwork. Her exceptional examples belong to an art that connects with a local public, and challenges any conservative action belonging to lasting or material memorials. Ronald Feldman Gallery’s web pages for Laderman Ukeles’ work include *Unburning Freedom Hall* (1997) [http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/artistsrffa/artuke01.html](http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/artistsrffa/artuke01.html) a work that incorporates peace talks and ideas for social maintenance. Lippard (2001) cites Laderman Ukeles’ investigation of ‘aesthetics’ of cleaning, involving shifts from domestic maintenance in the 1970s to NYC Sanitation Department and urban disposal since 1979. Her work is a major influence on my study due to her ability to create intrinsic connection to locality and place, in a social and ecological framework. Laderman Ukeles’ project *RE-SPECT*, October 28, 1993 was a multi-part performance on quay and river, Givors, France and is relevant through the ‘letting go’ of art objects, arguably even when these are trucks, barges and tons of crushed glass.

illustrate Laderman Ukeles’ unusual employment of large earth-moving equipment for a statement about large-scale events. The large scale does not fit as comfortably with my notion of art and ephemera as some of her other works, where the acts are small and highly relevant to art and ephemera as in *Touch Sanitation* (1984).

Laderman Ukeles’ *Flow City*, (1983 - continuing) is acknowledged on the Feldman Gallery website as a:

… public art-video environment built as part of an operating waste disposal facility. Accepted by the NYC Department of Sanitation … [The] Project has 3 main interconnected components: PASSAGE RAMP, GLASS BRIDGE, [and] MEDIA FLOW WALL (http://www.feldmangallery.com/).

Though the work contains very concrete examples of materials as maintenance art, such as ‘Construction of substructure of basic flow city components, elements for handicap accessibility, and zoning for fire safety’ (Feldman Gallery 2008) these materials are constantly involved in maintenance, thus distanced from the notion of art as archived object. In addition, the project is ‘partially realized’ and Laderman Ukeles’ work has an ongoing negotiable component http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/.

Laderman Ukeles’ work presents waste processing as the strategic performative object. Burnham (1971) discusses Laderman Ukeles’ *Maintenance Art* and proposal for an exhibition in three parts. The third part involved ‘delivering refuse to the museum where it is “purified, depolluted, rehabilitated, recycled,” and conserved by various technical (or pseudo-technical) procedures’ (Burnham 1971 cited in Lippard 1973, 220). Laderman Ukeles provides examples of an art practice not concerned with archiving the object and Burnham (1971) stated that Laderman Ukeles was implying that the ‘…mythic drive behind high art has run its course’ and that,

… the sudden transference of some avant-garde artists to politics stems from a desire to find a viable revolution, one providing the needed psychological surrogate. Presently avant-gardism can only mean revival, unacceptable iconoclasm, or the deliberate presentation of non-art (Burnham 1971 cited in Lippard 1973, 221).
Laderman Ukeles’ continuing work demonstrates further development of an artist practising with ephemera. Her adoption of functional pragmatic machinery for transient art is a strategic exemplar for the study. The social impact of this work aligns with the practice sought for my research quest to link art and ephemera with ecological and environmental wellbeing. Crabtree (1994) states Laderman Ukeles’ work ‘assume[s] a genuine public dimension, heightening public awareness of modern society’s relationships to larger ecological systems’ (Crabtree 1994, 19). A number of mentors work from the position of artist as activist and their artworks stem from an action to support their convictions.

Sheela Gowda’s work *Collateral* (2007) (Plate 7.3, Plate 7.4) including burnt incense, and Sanja Ivekovic’s *Poppy Field* (2007) a field of poppies (Plate 2.2) were in the major art event ‘Documenta XII’ (2007) in Kassel and their work evidences these responses to conflicts.

Sheela Gowda

In the case of Sheela Gowda’s work *Collateral* (2007), the product *agarbathi* (incense), defies permanence. Inherently photogenic as it was exhibited in Documenta XII, 2007 Gowda’s *agarbathi* pieces were formed into shapes reminiscent of organic objects, placed on eight mesh frames. In the installation it is ultimately another delicate unstable work. Curator Grant Watson finds in Gowda’s work and title:

Collateral damage is of course the euphemism used for civilizations killed in war and the destruction of nature. Nevertheless this terrain of ash arranged across structures that suggest the dimensions of the human body presents the viewer with its own kind of formal beauty—the severity of material reduced to its fundamental shapes and substances (Watson 2007, 254).
The incense component of the work, due to its fragility, required an attendant to usher in two people at a time, (after removal of shoes) and to disallow items into the room that could be dropped onto the artwork or disturb the agabathi. Walking into this room with Gowda’s work created a memorable experience, of viewing the work and sensing the fragility of the work. References in the work to human scale, obtained by walking in the room, were intensified in this enclosed space. The experience of this piece and the necessity to enter the space of the work makes the art only partly reproducible.
Converse considerations arise in Cornelia Parker’s *Drowned Monuments* (1985) and her inverse measuring system, using trinket size souvenirs of state buildings to ‘measure a gutter.’ Instead of encyclopaedic references using recognisable building landmarks to measure the indescribable, such as the depth of a lake or harbour, the little monuments provide a reference to the gutter. Parker’s work enters the realm of art and ephemera through engagement with a real gutter as site, though it is effectively reproduced as a photograph.

Comparatively, Zheng Guogu’s (2005) *Add Oil and March Forward* presented war tanks as little objects made from fried dough (Plate 7.5). Zheng’s response to military vehicles with fried dough addresses evidence of artists who comment on, and contribute to, solutions for global situations. These are significant in my search for mentors.
The study raised new questions about how artists have intentionally used the transient nature of things to express their ideas in relation to our use of, and responsibility to, place. These include place as location, country or the broader global environment. Zheng Guogu’s work resonates with Jackson’s (1984) statement that we do not comprehend a landscape until we perceive it as an organization of space, thus implicating ownership, use, creation and change. Critical reflection on the land, our use of it and depiction of ideas about place, led to my question, ‘How do humans take responsibility for place and waste?’ Evidently we have not resolved this as we demonstrate inability to effectively recycle all that we produce. These are critical issues in relation to art, place and land.

Where my investigation reflects on a specific place, as it mirrors concerns in many places, Cameron (2003), Rigby (2003), King (2003) and Tacey (2003) refer to these concerns in an Australian context. For Cameron ‘Much place writing is done at
several levels concurrently, so that the author may be speaking from a personal, cultural and spiritual standpoint in the same paragraph’ (Cameron 2003, 11). Mitchell (2002, 1994) reconsidered the place of the traditional and great genre, Landscape Art, and how it often involved concepts to do with ownership of land and thus power. In contrast to earlier art movements or genres such as landscape my current research project for art and ephemera crosses genre and discipline, in order to illuminate alternative methods to revisit accepted or traditional perceptions (Appendix I).

Writers and artists as mentors facilitate creative production without the need for a lasting object, a praxis bringing attention to reducing pressures on environment. Schisms exist through artists’ cross-disciplinary contributions and assist my compilation of data for visual artists’ concepts and perceptions of art and ephemera. Artists’ works based on concepts integral with their lives often evolve out of a dichotomy of philosophical investigations and creation of dialogue within visual art. My collection of artists’ praxis and ephemera extends beyond one discipline, in accordance with the options available, for instance Rirkrit Tiravanija shares knowledge about sustainable living in an interdisciplinary manner and also contributes to a broad perspective through conscientious art and ephemera. Lacy (2004) discusses the way artists have adopted praxis that aligns with concepts, such as engaged Buddhism, a concept also discussed by Kraft (1997) in relation to ecology.

The matter of art that links ideas about environment and the action of humans to care for their place, often goes further than the artist’s ability to solve problems. Artists and writers use different areas of ecology and environment, so the manner and why they used them are models for my study. My argument for visual artists’ concepts about ephemera is focussed on the examples artists and art provide through a non-commercial genre or no lasting product.
Ann Hamilton

Ann Hamilton works with ideas and presentation suggesting a lighter ‘footprint’ than Kiefer’s use of lead. Hamilton’s reading contributes crucially to elements in installations. In her 1999 work the hand’s trace or act was ‘transparently present’, and this became ‘invisible’ in later work (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 179).

The processes behind her work, for instance Myein (1999), a site-specific work for the Venice Biennale, emerge from her conceptual rigour:

> Part of my process is getting to a point where I have a sense that I have found…not the right subject or form or “aboutness” of the work, but the right question to be asking, the question to prod and rub up against (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 179).

Hamilton’s process of setting up her installation in Venice involved taking time to know something about the place and people. For Hamilton, Venice was a place where you are ‘stepping on and off water: from liquid to solid and solid to liquid,’ but also where the building exterior and interior could be ‘the project’ (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 185).

Crucial for my thesis is the manner of Hamilton’s 1999 work, where she formed and clarified questions for herself about making and reading; where reading can have a ‘profound effect on one’s thinking and experience but which leaves no material trace’ (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 179). Hamilton reconciles questions of making and reading in her work and, significantly for this study, her decisions relate to what could be non-actions for ‘listening’:

> Sometimes I wonder how little one can allow oneself to do–our impetus “to do” gets in the way of our listening to what is necessary, our impetus “to say” barging in front of our listening. I wonder if this emptying out means leaving …or preparing for something else. And might I recognise what that something else is…or will I be too afraid to leave form? (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 179).

Leaving form for Hamilton might be adding colour and Braille to an existing wall (Plate 7.6). Critically, for this discussion of museums and their place in the support of art and ephemera, Hamilton stated that ‘Though museums are places that
cultivate attention, it is hard for them to recognise an act of attention as the “something” of the work’ (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 185).


Hamilton’s realisation that the gallery system does not always appreciate a subtle conceptual element also mirrors my concern about potential roadblocks in presenting art and ephemera. In this way, artists who respond and contribute
significantly to twenty-first century challenges are reliant on the curator and the institution for presentation and publication. The curator’s interpretation also identifies the significance of the work.

The reading and meaning employed by Hamilton is an exemplar for contemporary art. Hamilton asks ‘...can one use this invisible, silent and usually solitary activity and let it become the material of the practice itself?’ (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 179). Both mentor and models represent how art and ephemera provide meaningful ways to address and contextualise issues of our time and for Hamilton this involves reading. Fuchsia-coloured powdered walls and Braille were important aspects of the work Myein (Plate 7.6) where Hamilton introduced American history as representation of place. In order to do this, Hamilton incorporated Lincoln’s review of slavery, as well as Charles Reznikoff’s Testimony about legal injustice, where history is analysed in the reading and re-presentation of the facts.

Hamilton’s work kaph (meaning the palm of one’s hand) is where ‘...Hamilton keeps leading us to points where nature and culture come together’ (Herbert 1998, 27). My consideration of the light footprint, where concept supports art and ephemera, in tandem with culture and nature leads to significant findings in Chapter Twelve.

**Ephemera as Metaphor**

Presentation of ‘art and ephemera’ as a concept capable of triggering enquiry from artists and writers, references ‘contemporary issues’ inherent in selected key works. Where issues include socio-political debates and major topics such as climate change, they provide a basis to explore visual arts practice referencing ephemera as a metaphor in the presentation of work across genres and geography. Though I include work by artists acknowledged as high profile and from less-known artists, the option to create ephemera in the eye of the public, where a large audience can see and appreciate the work, is not available to all artists, particularly the regional
and isolated artist. Profile and publication for art and ephemera are therefore problematised by the same discourse that enables and strengthens the archiving of commercial art.

Many concerns for the artists who create non-archival artwork arise from the dilemma of how to re-present these objects and ideas. At what point does the ephemeral artwork get absorbed into or make a stance against the documentation process? In my thesis for art and ephemera the photograph is treated as the secondary art form. The artist’s intention, as producer of the ephemeron, avoids the documentation process ‘as art’, and delegates documentation as a decorative addition to the statement. This issue of how art and ephemera act outside the documentation process has been considered, and is discussed in future implications for the research.


**Ephemera and Memory**

Similar situations to those found in Laib’s artwork relate to what produces a memorable and meaningful art experience. Tucker (2004) discusses Richard Tuttle’s (1973) *Ten Kinds of Memory and Memory Itself* in comparison to Markus Raetz’s (1980) *Nightface* as ‘visually elusive’ works that ‘remain in the mind’s eye for years afterwards.’ In both cases, Tucker says of the artists’ work,
…it’s not just a matter of paying attention, but of what kind of attention you pay—something that’s central to Buddhist practice, but hasn’t been given that much currency in talking about either making or viewing contemporary art (Tucker 2004, 78).

Paying attention to the positioning of art and how it can be viewed physically and in the context of ideas is crucial to the way ‘art and ephemera’ is presented. This is not about preserving a product but allowing the object to perform, and this was evident for me in viewing Laib’s (2005) Pollen. For both making and viewing, the art institution and installation process belong in this discourse. Tucker finds that many exhibitions are structured so that information is valued over experience—so much so that the way we’re encouraged to look at art, in this country at least, [America] is fast, efficient, chronological, linear (you can’t often go back through the show) and packaged for marketing, with an exit through the gift shop (Tucker 2004, 78).

Prioritising fast delivery and viewing of art as information over experience can be a dilemma for organisers and patrons (especially of mega-shows) where presenting ideas in didactic labels, and making money from art, are confused with presenting the experience of art. Tucker’s reference to the art souvenir and merchandising situation in America is familiar through Australian blockbuster exhibitions, with the inevitable coffee cup covered in Monet ‘waterlilies,’ underpants featuring Toulouse-Lautrec ‘dancers’ or other designs referencing ‘Art’ in the show. Mitchell (1994) explains the importance of the post card souvenir as proof that we have been to a site, often in a hurry. In a similar manner the ‘art’ souvenir contributes to a sense of authenticity that we have been to see the work. What then, can art and ephemera have that makes the audience aware of the art experience? I found that work by Laib (2005) (Plate 7.1), Gowda (2007) (Plate 7.3) and Metzger (2007) (Plate 7.2), could offer this interactivity and memory to a viewing audience.

Alternatively, the art we pass by and notice as profound is due to the viewer’s understanding and memory, and the way particular artworks impact on them. Tucker relates that one important patron walked past contemporary art works that Tucker had seen as memorable and complained that there wasn’t anything to see. Perhaps the patron expected to see a supposedly commercial product, an artwork
that can be archived. It might be that as we reach stages of understanding about art and meaning, there can be growing recognition of what is important and how to take the time to see these works. In some cultures this recognition is related to greater understanding and could be compared to a type of enlightenment (Fung 1962) (Kornfield 1996), (Suzuki 1973), or sartori (Pollard 2005). In the West, how we look at certain artworks and ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger 1972) could become more meaningful through a combination of ‘mindful attention’ and discourse. My analysis considers the need to include visual and textual language that contributes to, and strengthens understanding of, these experiences.

Choosing mentors for this study included finding the most memorable and effective concepts in art for a consideration of art and ephemera. Visiting the work enabled critical selection of preferred creative art models. This entailed artworks that would leave an experience created by visual encounter, beyond words or beyond an everyday experience. In considering if it is the artwork or the idea of the artwork that is most important, my memory or recalling of an actual artwork and the lingering presence of the artwork through the phenomenological viewing, create a new experience. This adds to appreciation of concepts and strong recall where the artwork, its presence and impending absence through art and ephemera are crucial.

Digital Documentation as a Trigger

The fact that there is not always the opportunity to revisit the work as an icon in a museum, but through reproduction, highlights the importance of visual documentation as a method of activating memory, for the precursor works, as well as later models of art and ephemera. Buskirk (2005) refers to photography that

… digitally redrawn and then presented on a scale previously associated with painting is just one of the ways that effects identified with the medium of photography have been detached and reassembled. The turn to digital imaging can be understood both as a pivotal development in the history of photography and as merely the final destabilization of a category already called into question by the myriad ways photographic forms have been incorporated into artistic practices of the last four decades (Buskirk 2005, 120-121).
Buskirk’s reference to ‘photographic forms’ coincides with the dichotomy, ‘art’ and the ‘pragmatic’ use of photography. Digital documentation as a recording device emerges repeatedly in the face of an art that is transient, regenerative, going through change or destroyed intentionally as part of the praxis. In these cases the memory of the art pieces are important components of the art experience and poor digital reproductions or web images can be sufficient to trigger this memory. In some cases perhaps the understated is more effective for recall.

Küchler and Melion (1991) discuss Malanggan portrayal and remaking of an image by the retelling of ancestor stories about relationships and territorial rites, whereas for this study, audiences in the developed world, in the twenty-first century have adjusted to image and text to portray content or concepts for art. The complex belief in the metaphysical for the enactment of Melanggan memorial rites is referred to as:

Heat (malang), the metaphorizing life force, not the carver’s tools, is taken to be the agent that perforates the material. The carver’s hand, extended into the heated tool, literally burns itself into the material, thus impregnating it with the life force (Küchler and Melion 1991, 41).

The relationship, between the traditional Malanggan work and contemporary models for art and ephemera is one where both contain a highly conceptual and metaphysical, sometimes mystical, element. The additional power acknowledged through print or publication strengthens my quest through retelling the story of art and ephemera, as it contributes to and invites ongoing discourse. An art audience does not necessarily see a reproduction of an artwork as art, but the distinctive parts: image and concept behind the artwork, are intimately proximate to each other. That is, the concept can be re-introduced as a memory through a trigger such as a story (text) or even a poor reproduction (image).

The questions raised by ephemeral and fragile works bring the idea of reproduction and publication of this artwork to the fore. Internet distribution, like other reproductive tools, is an efficient conduit for information about artwork and especially useful to communicate written interpretations of the work. It assists in
disseminating statements by artist, curator and critic, as well as enabling audience interaction. An advantage of the digital mode, with audiences accessing information increases currency of these ideas.

The quality of an image or experience is not as well transferred online as in an installation, and so artists may have mixed feelings about adopting the Internet as a tool for the distribution of ephemeral art images. There is potential for low-resolution images to be taken by audiences, as artwork enters into a new equation of how and where to promote these ideas, even when low-resolution is accepted for a popularly recognisable image. Thus, while it diffuses the intensity of Gowda’s and Laib’s artwork, the reproduced image can act as a valuable reminder of the experience and message.

Ideas about memory and documentation lead to an area where there is a large contingent of art that can be considered as immateriality in the digital realm. Carter (2006), Geczy (2006), Machan (2006), Krysa (2006) and Lillemose (2006) discuss these as ephemeral works that rely on immateriality as a concept, and this is argued in relation to the digital as a contentious aspect of ephemera. Instead of using materiality as ephemera, the immateriality of the digital relates to conceptual immateriality and virtuality. This uses the digital realm or medium as its own ephemerality. Immateriality is linked to art and ephemera through the choices artists can make about their work, their display and promotion of this work. Arguably a digital production is archived and does not risk disappearance or loss through ephemeral behaviour, though for Krysa (2006) *curating immateriality* and engaging virtual virus in artwork do belong in this category. For some artwork it is best for the viewer ~ reader to be in the presence of the work, but for the immaterial work referred to by those working in the virtual realm, it is not possible to be in the actual presence of the work (beyond the virtual). In some ways it is being in the mind of the work.
Radically different from the concentration of visually sensory stimulus in digital realms is the aspect of art and ephemera offering options to use senses other than sight.

**Sensory Aspects of Art and Ephemera**

Ernesto Neto’s (2002) *Just like drops in time nothing*, is an installation of spices in long, hanging textile sacs. Neto’s work enables viewers to enter a multi-sensory as well as a conceptual realm. Post-structuralism provides a way to assist in seeing some of the really critical differences that ‘art and ephemera’ offers, and a way to value the discursive potential and adopt alternative strategies for contemporary new experiences. Post-structuralist binaries for this study include not only the abundance of archived stuff with deference to non-archived ‘art and ephemera’ but the sensory stimulation in response to art from Neto hanging spices or Zhang Huan’s performance sitting on a public toilet. These variations for ‘art and ephemera’ do not presume a new genre, for, as Carter and Geczy find,

> With the arrival of Postmodernism…no one Art style seemed to be dominant and so artists and Art historians began to question the idea that there could ever be ‘one style for one time’. This struck at the heart of the way in which Modernism in Europe and North America had been understood up until this point (Carter and Geczy 2006, 11).

Further considerations of binaries are shown in Table 7.1 as this demonstrates options for sweet, spicy, sour and bland.

**Table 7.1 Revised Binary: Potential for Archive ~ Ephemera**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archived stable art</th>
<th>Non-archived transient art</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conserved</td>
<td>Ephemeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Multi-sensory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old and new work and experiences</td>
<td>New and old work and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New images about ephemera</td>
<td>Old and new ephemeral art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation as commerce</td>
<td>Documentation as memory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The binary evident in the artist’s choice to install sweet-smelling spices, or to make something out of sour smells of garbage or street litter, is a critical aspect of the potential for diversity in art and ephemera. Potentially early models, my 1995-98 installation works referenced the papermakers’ use of *stuff*, ‘the stock for producing paper’ (Lord 1996). Paper, pulp and stuff are in great demand and this led to working with the ‘material of the problem’ (Lord 1996). My art tower of recycled paper *ROT* (1995 - 6), 400 x 200 x 200 cm. was a conceptual manifestation of consumable *stuff*. The dichotomy of the consumed and the consumer can be compared to Derrida’s (1991) theorising about discursive binaries and his argument that a binary is polarised. Ashton proposes 3 that it is possible that they can be cyclical and interdependent. In my study the opportunity to move from the ephemeral to the concrete, and vice versa, is an option due to a consideration of environmental wellbeing, and reflection on what we give and take back. Similarly, in older cultures such as the Chinese and Thai, the tree, the field and gardens incorporating concepts and practice about the ephemeral and the concrete are evident as an ongoing part of their culture. Similarly *wabi-sabi* contributes to my study as a model to show the revered object of imperfection as an aesthetic of disruption to the preserved or archived.

Derrida (1991) highlights an *ascendant* and *descendent* partnership where binaries such as ‘ephemera’ need their opposite ‘concrete.’ Anti-archive needs archive. The ephemeron is in the extreme descendent position though the ephemeral and archived positions have overlapping areas where some artists produce work for both the ephemeral and the archived arena. Many major artists whose work is well publicised are in this category where they work with archival art, and complement their practice with ephemeral artwork. Where and how archive and ephemera meet has the potential to collapse binaries. The collapse happens with a number of contemporary artists’ practices of blurring boundaries and can be compared to the middle path spoken of in Buddhism, and seen here in relation to art, ephemera and mentors. In my theorising I value the post-structuralist’s collapse of entrenched

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3 This was ongoing discourse, since 2007, in the visual arts studio.
binaries and propose realisation about current problematic issues and achievable responses through art and ephemera.

Gowda’s incense material, like Laib’s pollen, is remembered by many people and reinforced by substantial documentation and reproduction in journals, as well as the initial catalogue reproduction (Martin 2007, 65). Whether art is archived or not archived, a major role of the artist is that of communicator, of bringing ideas through visual imagery to participants and spectators. Carter and Geczy (2006) contribute,

We might say that the works of Art are continually being incorporated into ‘the big pictures’ which are the discourses, and these discourses operate at every level of the display and presentation of works of art (Carter and Geczy 2006, 170).

They follow this discussion by acknowledging the artist’s ability, especially with digital art, (arguably ephemeral art) to ‘…get beyond the preciousness of Art objects’ (Carter and Geczy 2006, 227). Thus in post-structuralist theorising, ‘art and ephemera’ is valuable to contribute to discourse as an alternative to archive, freeing minds and presenting environmentally sensitive alternatives.

Entrepreneurs and Discourse

Artists’ works can be investigated in a binary of sensitivity to the environmental context or as a part of the opposite resource-heavy environmental footprint. Entrepreneurial and philanthropic layers are apparent in this art, and there are linguistic tags that help to identify various types of creative artwork as environmentally friendly or demanding. Career, high profile, student and academic artists could all contribute to knowledge about place and location through art and ephemera. One of the potentially enlightening aspects of this practice is that many artists do not make art for money, but as a contribution to knowledge and visual communication about issues, rather than as consumable products. These instances include Laib and Gowda where respectively, their art involves health and issues of war. Similarly Sanja Ivekovic’s Poppy Field (2007) (Plate 2.1) literally, two fields
of opium and corn poppy, is about conflict and involves songs sung by Afghan women who struggle against terror (Seefranz 2007). Ivekovic addresses issues: drug lords and landowners against workers, and wealth against poverty. Though capitalist discourse, and obvious binaries, dominates how the art world thrives and survives, this does not deny a niche for alternative art. In this respect there is potential for blurring, a place between capitalist and anti-commercial production of art where many artists can develop and present their art for reasons other than commerce.

Zhang Huan practices his Buddhism as art, and states that inside he is Buddhist and outside an artist. Zhang presents his belief in transcendence through endurance, and talks about how we can change. Zhang says that, ‘Everything that happens was already decided five thousand years ago’ (Zhang cited by Jacob 2004b, 245). Related to the concerns voiced in this thesis about contemporary life styles, and attitudes to resources and commodity is Zhang’s statement:

But today getting bigger is not really good for people. Small house is more comfortable, more happy. In a big house you start getting nervous—feng shui—not good for the family (Zhang cited by Jacob 2004b, 246).

The artist’s comment contributes to the rationale for this thesis, that artists can highlight problems instigated by commodity in the twenty-first century. They can introduce new or alternative attitudes to people through their artwork. Zhang Huan (Plate 7.7) and Janine Antoni (Plate 7.8) place themselves in discomfort for the
production of their work. I link these artists through their actions about endurance that take place during performances and demonstrate, metaphorically, concern for culture and people. The presence of Janine Antoni in her work *Gnaw* (1992) is through the act of gnawing or other contact the artist has made with the material in creating the piece. Antoni’s gnawing results in the artist having mouth blisters and leaves the work with an unmistakable appearance of partially devoured material. Buskirk (2005) states

> Chocolate and lard are only two of a variety of materials employed by Antoni in works that range from impermanent to relatively enduring objects and have encompassed various combinations of sculpture, performance, video, photography, and installation (Buskirk 2005, 8).

Antoni’s piece is demonstrably different from Laib’s work in concept and ambience. Laib’s practice involves calm meditative time to arrange pollen on the floor with meticulous sifting. Buskirk states Antoni’s work ‘include[s] her exploration of endurance and the power of repetitive actions’ and

> … her interest in gender, particularly as articulated through the female body, her use of materials with strong cultural associations, and her continued and varied assertion of the artist’s presence in her work (Buskirk 2005, 8).

Buskirk addresses these extremes in contemporary artists’ works in the exhibition, *Open Ends*, where ‘…the individual groupings suggested…how difficult, if not impossible, interpreting art according to divisions based on style or movement has become since 1960’ (Buskirk 2005,11). Different approaches to commenting on contemporary issues, which incorporate references to an unstable material, are qualities I sought. Buskirk’s interest is in the re-presentation of art and how, with the increasing number of museums

> …devoted to collecting and exhibiting art of the present moment, the circularity of reference has further tightened, with art that incorporates a response to museum presentation subject to immediate assimilation into that very context (Buskirk 2005,11).

This assimilation into the installation venue, or institution, is problematic for my consideration of whether art and ephemera should be re-presented. I am interested in the capacity artists have to create artwork with no apparent concern for longevity
in the object. When an artist presents ephemera in art, my study looked at how artists might let art go, rather than contemplate the maintenance of it.

Plate 7.8 Janine Antoni 1992 *Gnaw* lard cube after collapse – Photo Brian Forrest (Buskirk 2005, 13) [re-photographed Lord]

In antithesis to my notion of art and ephemera, some museums re-present work that is intentionally impermanent. Antoni’s (1992) sculpture *Gnaw*, made of lard, has to be recast due to the intended collapse of material during the installation. Buskirk’s (2005) statement is particularly relevant for realising that,

> While the notion of a post-modern rupture with earlier practices is seductive as a way of describing the turn away from the unity of medium and form associated with modernism, it does not (even if accepted) explain the embrace of contemporary art by collecting institutions focused on the care and preservation of unique works of art (Buskirk 2005,12).

Though artwork is presented and interpreted as a ‘performative object,’ the ability to recast and preserve are options taken up by art museums, contrary to some intended outcomes for the artwork. Digital Consciousness website includes a description of Antoni’s ephemeral materials, such as lard, hair dye, and chocolate, and that she
…challenged the status quo of the art world by using “feminine” mediums, …as metaphors to explore female sexuality, to challenge the trappings of femininity in society, social packaging, and to challenge our patterns of consumption and consumerism...http://digitalconsciousness.com/artists/JanineAntoni/.

Even though the art gallery or museum may adopt a more costly process of recasting the object, the re-presentation of this type of work increases my concern that the art is reduced in importance, by emphasis on literal explanation rather than seeing the idea.

The work by artist Cai Guo Qiang provides a counterpoint within ephemeral art as a contrast to a natural disintegration process. Though not dealing with concepts of slow disintegration, Cai uses dramatic methods of change derived from traditional Chinese culture: the infamous and explosive material, gunpowder. London (1999) refers to ‘Projects for extraterrestrials’ No. 25 1995 where

Cai strung gunpowder through a South African power station, and at nightfall videotaped the line of light as it streaked through the building. … [Two years later] he detonated a filament of gunpowder attached to a flying dragon kite (London 1999, 196).

London (1999) finds that ‘The work has the weight of an augury, and recalls that the ancient dragon nation initiated the modern world with its invention of gunpowder’ (London 1999, 196). Cai’s shamanic ploy is humour that poke fun at rationality, and in discussing Cai’s gunpowder marks on cloth London sees that ‘The turbulent yet elegant line might represent the spirit of the Chinese people from the earliest days to now’ (London 1999, 196). In spite of Cai working with a violent explosive material, London (1999) also discusses recurrent themes in Cai’s work such as healing, where his techniques are the methods of a Shaman, bringing together ‘dissimilar entities on the basis of their similitudes’ (London 1999, 196).

While Cai’s vegetal mushrooms and atomic clouds on playing cards depict the evils of atomic weapons, his explosive work causes elements to undergo forced disintegration in an act similar to a shaman’s concern for health. In this example the performative object provides impact through ephemera, and is not lasting as a material icon. This can be a trigger for memory. In response to a discussion about ephemeral artwork, (loss) and the potential for memorable experience, an observer
stated – ‘In a world that is so caught up in immediate impression this art of ephemera is about lasting impressions’ (Informal discussion visual art studio 2007).

Identifying Problems

Many artists involved in forms of art concerning ecology have attempted to reproduce real-life aspects of the natural environment or landscape inside gallery sites. Some artists achieved this by growing plants in a white cube venue. My recognition of the problems inherent in artists trying to reproduce natural environmental aspects of ecology in a gallery is that these installations create insurmountable problems for artists and administrators, and especially for their in-house environmental products. It was my realisation that out of the problem of this aspect of art, such as eco-art, there emerged the chance for me to make use of (already) disintegrating and dying flora and to allow the ephemeral process inherent in this to become the statement. Therefore it is not necessary for me to reproduce grass in a gallery or grow plants in a gallery as an artwork. I decided to use humus and allow the next stage of the process to emerge and incorporate this into the concept about return of material to the earth.

Though the identification of this first stage or process of decay could be seen as nihilist or negative, I found this aspect of cycles in nature and its potential in culture, a major redeeming feature of art and ephemera. These ideas for me lie somewhere between Hans Haacke’s Grass Pile (Plate 7.9) work and Anselm Kiefer’s Women of Antiquity (Plate 7.10). Whereas Laib and Metzger have used living plants, pollen, incense and transferable stones, I applied my ideas about art and ephemera to tree rot, rusting tools and ice. I link this development with learning from selected models in art through practice-based research.
Plate 7.9 Willoughby Sharp, the guest curator (left) and Thomas Leavitt, the director of the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, watering Hans Haacke’s 1973 Grass Pile, [cited Boettger 2002, p. 162, fig. 69]

It may be comparatively easy in the twenty-first century to take the cycles of erosion and decay for granted, however for ‘art and ephemera’ these processes are placed at the forefront for observation and reflection. In this regard, the individual, famous or anonymous artist can contribute to ephemeral art. My voice as a regional artist working with a capacity to make a change in attitude is discussed in Chapter Eight. In isolated regions, ‘art and ephemera’ functions at a local level, and can contribute to a perspective beyond the local. In the next few examples I explore work by major artists who make strong references to ephemera, and do so in unique ways to address issues and a sense of transience through chosen material.

Dissolving Difference

This study reveals that the majority of artworks in professional spaces, even though challenging as in Anselm Kiefer’s work Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe (1984 - 1986), containing earth and lead propeller, were not designed to revert to an earthy state or
crumble onto a floor. The ‘performative object’ would in most cases have curators and installation staff rescuing items of ephemera, and preserving the ‘flotsam and jetsam’ (Lord 1997) of a deteriorating artwork or icon. Similarly with *Ephemeral Beings* (Lord 2004 - 5), (Appendix X) this response was elicited.

The material challenges in the work of high profile artists provide a variety of suggestive examples for art and ephemera. Bond (2005b) discusses Anselm Kiefer’s interest in ‘processes in an almost alchemical way,’ and in the context of archiving and preserving artwork in the Art Gallery of New South Wales,

[Kiefer] has been known to attach electrodes to paintings to grow salts on their crusted lead surfaces. I am not sure if any of these survived in the form he was planning in the studio – I doubt it but he was interested in the life of the materials and accepts a degree of life change in the work (Bond 2005b, u.p.).

Bond explains that Anselm Kiefer’s *Glaube hoffnung liebe* and *Das Wolun-lied* required restoration, ‘Not as you might expect’ where it was not ‘encrusted surfaces’ with ‘loose incorporations of straw, paper, sand bedded in a mix of oil and encaustic’ but ‘sculptural elements that began to come unstuck when the lead detached in places from the galvanised backing that supports it’ (Bond 2005b, u.p.). Though conservators and curators are interested in the preservation of the work, it seems from Kiefer’s choice of material that the exact preservation of many of his art pieces is not a major priority. Kiefer’s (1990) *Zim Zum* made of acrylic, emulsion, crayon, shellac, ashes, lead and canvas, is housed in the National Gallery of Art Washington, D. C. For this study *Zim Zum* can be perceived as an unintended entry of ephemera into a major collecting institution.

Kiefer’s three women figures, just visible in Plate 7.10 include ‘a rusting mass of razor wire and lead’ ([http://www.linkism.com/art-gallery/museums/australian/art-gallery-nsw/anselm-kiefer.htm](http://www.linkism.com/art-gallery/museums/australian/art-gallery-nsw/anselm-kiefer.htm) viewed 10 October 2008). The influences of poor and anti-archive materials from twentieth century practice have entered contemporary art and are apparent in many artists’ selection of materials. Artists from diverse groups or genres emerge as part of a binary. Table 7.2 suggests two-way movement across traditional and contemporary practices.

**Table 7.2 Dissolving Boundaries Between Tradition and Ephemera**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional art practice</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
<th>Practices of ephemera</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-capitalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local or State</td>
<td></td>
<td>NGO or ARI, sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government assisted</td>
<td>Private and Public</td>
<td>Federal Government assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Quo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities for Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumerist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-commodity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tangential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving the past</td>
<td>Acting on both</td>
<td>Change in attitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Artists in particular art movements have been instrumental in providing mentoring of eccentric and ephemeral art practice, backed up by manifestoes, and conceptual statements in galleries. Though much of the work was not intended for a commercial gallery system, it is often the philanthropic commercial art gallery dealers or industry curators, who bring this practice to both an art-educated audience and the public. Seeing the examples from key artists contributed to my decision-making for my formation of certain disintegrating objects.

In this chapter I have referred to high profile artists ~ mentors. Many of the artworks discussed in this chapter required a site where audiences could see the ephemeral pieces. In light of my criteria for inclusion in this thesis the artists have responded to issues of our time with transient work. In conclusion, Ann Hamilton, Anselm Kiefer and Wolfgang Laib contribute to art and ephemera though in contradiction to this, their works are often maintained in institutions where conservation practices are paramount. Hamilton, Kiefer and Laib provide, respectively, reading, corrosion and contemplation to place art and ephemera in a context for this study as vital contemporary art. These artists influence my praxis where consideration is not only to challenge the archive but also to implement ephemera as a conceptual tool for further action by artists. Some relatively regional examples occur in Australia and provide the material for consideration in the next chapter.
Chapter Eight

8.0 Art and Ephemera in Australia

In this chapter I focus on art and ephemera as part of a regional and experimental practice in the visual arts in Australia. This regional perspective facilitates the ensuing post-structuralist discourse analysis where terms in the field are privileged. Words such as humble, rubbish, erode, recycle, re-use, rot and salvage can trigger key ideas for an appreciation and agentic repositioning of art and ephemera.

Significant and relevant practice occurs in Townsville a local and professional art centre. In larger cultural centres Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, high profile artists provide specific examples of art and ephemera. Artists include Madonna Staunton, Luke Jaaniste and Tim Silver. Eugene Carchesio and Judy Watson have links to Buddhist cultural beliefs, as well as intrinsic understanding of their own cultural heritage, in the contemporary visual arts context. These artists’ responses to my questions have contributed to a broad understanding of why and how artists contemplate theories about and practices for ephemera. In the examples chosen, artists’ reasons for working with art and ephemera were derived from ideas about change and an acceptance of loss of archive. Ross Gibson embeds dialogue in art for *Conversations II*, (2008) and this ephemeral piece does not require an art material other than reference and conversations. For Gibson, language and text are important creative tools, and, as ideas emerge in Hamilton’s work through reading, Gibson’s writing and conversations lead to a visual artist’s praxis. In this way, ideas emerge with the potential for these artists to embed powerful metaphors in their art, through work aligned with language.
Selected North Queensland artists who develop conscious awareness of the metaphors for change through ephemeral elements in their art are Barbara Pierce, Marion Gaemers and Linda Ashton. These and other regional artists are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, Chia-Ming Cheng (Sydney), Gabriella Hegyes (regional NSW) and Jo Anglesey (Tasmania) enable concepts about, and an aesthetic of, change through ephemera to appear in their work for pertinent issues. My work is included when and where it intersects with specific examples. Some major developments in my work are discussed in Leave No Trace, Section 8.1.

Many Australian artists involved in making statements about the environment prior to the 1990s used ephemeral acts either with the human body (mostly their own) or performative objects. Jill Orr allowed herself to be partially buried in the performance Bleeding Trees (1979), as other artists also covered objects or themselves with earth, or incinerated objects, in the name of art. These activities exploring contentious land and natural environment issues have emerged in Australia over the last sixty years. Relevant here, artists Bonita Ely, Joan Grounds and Jill Orr through the performative body used their personal space or body to reference issues about land (Marsh 1993), rather than huge landforms or earth art (Tiberghien 1995). Marsh states, ‘In the 1960s and 1970s artists believed they could change the structure of the art world and produce an art that was more relevant for people’ (Marsh 1993, 179). These ideas intersect with my research in that these were not lasting or archival, and compare with my intention to contribute meaningful work about some problems of our time.

Bonita Ely’s artwork, Murray River Punch (1980) was performed in Rundle Street Mall at the Adelaide Festival of Arts. Ely’s work was to mix up the contaminants of the Murray River and offer the brown liquid to shoppers in the Mall. Ely’s action remains pertinent in this century in the ongoing water crisis in the Murray Darling catchment area. The little glass of water from Murray River Punch (1980) has probably never been seen as an iconic object, much less a performative object, but in this gesture, the encompassing of a crisis with a glass of ‘drinking water’ parallels the concept that less is more. The work is even more relevant after the Toowoomba Local Government (2006) ‘debate’
about returning recycled water to the town water supply \(^1\). Meeting Ely assisted my further investigation into how artists produce work that is not archived. Ely and Orr produced art as political statements, not intended to survive as products, and they add to this study where I have specifically sought ephemera as a ‘letting go’ of the object.


Grounds (1994) used tropical glasshouses as sites for the ‘transplantation’ of visual art and collaborated with DeLys

http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh04/4leb.html. Grounds and DeLys’ *Ceci n’est pas une pipe Sound In Space*, (1995) installed in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney were not protected by preservation within the white cube gallery or by handling with white gloves.

\(^1\) The debate was revisited on Radio National 21 May 2007 in relation to the lack of information on how recycling of sewerage water for drinking could be established as a safe process.
Artists throughout Australia are relevant for the study through connections with sympathetic concepts related to art and ephemera. From the literature I identify a number of Queensland artists: Eugene Carchesio, Robert MacPherson, Helen Lillicrapp-Fuller and Robert Owen. These artists work with concepts about ephemera in art, rather than physically disappearing works, and have influenced my consideration of art and ephemera. For instance, Carchesio uses change as a concept for his work, relating to Zen. His watercolour series *Tokyo leaves*, produced in Tokyo are ephemeral subjects and are cross-referenced in Chapter Nine, Objects. Milani wrote that Carchesio ‘values emptiness as an equal to its other, and emptiness as a pre-condition to form’ (Milani 2002: 5). Carchesio’s work links with Chapter Six through connections with Zen Buddhism and attitudes to change in artwork (Discussion 20th September 2005 Carchesio and Lord).

George Alexander (1988) stated that Robert Owen’s (1987) work exists in the context of other artists working with a capacity for change, such as

  Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Jannis Kounellis… [who] belong in part to a dissident pantheist-materialist tradition, concerned with actual process, with the structure and laws of the nodal points of material change (Alexander 1988, 19).

Alexander (1988) discussed Owen’s development of work and references to memory, in ‘… a time of change and return, and [that his work] provokes memory-emancipated imagery’ (Alexander 1988, 37). In the context of Owen’s evolving work he writes, ‘A stone from Greece marks a change of state, by translation across a body of water; a stone taken from among the olive groves which were once full of voices’ (Alexander 1988, 37). Owen adopts his topic from perspectives of personal concern. Artists have this prerogative and concepts of art and ephemera emerge from personal but disparate disciplines. Alexander cross-referenced the capacity for objects to ‘carry a presence or “aura” that floats off, reconciling opposites: … science / art, [and] presence / absence,’ (Alexander 1988, 20). He finds Owen’s “easy science” is

  … a Jungian adventure, with the works as a metaphor for the physiological process for attaining higher consciousness or healing split by way of ‘chymical nuptials’ of mercurial bride and sulphurous bachelors (Alexander 1988, 21).
Alexander’s references are alchemical, and I identify these links in Duchamp’s work (Lee 2004) and his “ready-mades” (Chapter Six). These are also relevant in Lillicrapp-Fuller’s work and my research project in 2004. Lillicrapp-Fuller’s exhibition, *Lillicrapp-Fuller A Visual Diary 1979-91* included work produced from recycled and found elements. Rainbird refers to Schwitters’ (1977) statement for Lillicrapp-Fuller:

> Even with garbage one can utter a cry...the point is to use the broken pieces to build something new; art exists only as an equilibrium achieved by giving each part its proper value (Schwitters cited by Rainbird 1991, 3).

Schwitters’ words also apply to work by Madonna Staunton. Both artists use salvaged items and concepts discussed below by Holubizky (2003). Similarly Rainbird (1991 could be referring to Staunton’s material choices when he states Lillicrapp-Fuller’s exquisite sense:

> …finds its most unique expression in two remarkable series of collages created in 1990 – *Bower house*, comprising four panels of assorted remnants from a bowerbird’s nest and *Flotsam and jetsam* ... incorporating plastic shards and other materials salvaged from Stradbroke Island beach (Rainbird 1991, 6).

Lillicrapp-Fuller’s eroding work stops at this juncture and her work relies on arresting the object and preserving iconic detritus in a frame. *Sticks and Stones* (1982) comprised of materials such as stick, horsehair, wire, balloon fragments, newspaper, castration ring, a sheet of Arabic text and a little stone, is preserved in a box frame. This artwork was new to me in 2005, though my work, especially from 1996 to 2001, related to the capacity for beach and nature to impact on rubbish for my sense of aesthetic for erosion and its use in art and ephemera. Benzaken² (1996 pers. comm.) relates the tidal zone is one of the most ephemeral and erosive of all ecologies. Significantly for my study, a number of artists find a sense of change and aesthetic in objects from the beach to comment on the passing of time and materiality. Rainbird (1991), Benzaken (1997) and arts writers concerned with contemporary Australian visual arts have assisted with key theories for art and ephemera. In the context of the institution they advance this inquiry into Australian practice.

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² Dominique Benzaken is a scientist, in 1997 working for Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and President, Umbrella Studio who wrote for the catalogue *Fold*, Shaun Kirby and Anne Lord, (1997) Umbrella Studio. We discussed the idea of fragility in the tidal zone.
Holubizky (2003) writes ‘Madonna Staunton: sorting through…organising things, in time…through time’ (Holubizky 2003, 14) and highlights the dichotomies of positioning afforded to curators and conservators who have the capacity to strengthen or weaken the standing of non-archival work.

Conservators hate them [collages with ephemeral elements] because their material condition is far too irregular and chemistry, too unstable. Fortunately conservators do not set the rules (only the occasional roadblock), but art historians have done something likewise, to diminish by lumping together as if a medium (Holubizky 2003, 14).

Holubizky’s critique of categorisation by collage as a medium is similar to that of Buskirk (2005) and Lippard (1974) who critique the use of category by chronology or genre. In my investigation, opportunities occur to appreciate the dichotomies of a variety of materials for numerous aesthetic and conceptual reasons. My evolving image of art and ephemera is influenced by disparate concepts rather than technique or traditional material. Holubizky identified flawed reasons, or “roadblocks” set up against the acceptance of various collaged “ephemeral” elements, and in this study such “roadblocks” become obsolete. Holubizky’s argument is agentic against the inherent dilemma that problematizes ephemera and would otherwise incur a misreading similar to that often applied to an art and craft hierarchy.

Plate 8.2 Signs from Staunton’s Philosopher’s Corner (studio garden) [photograph Lord 2005]

Madonna Staunton’s Philosopher’s Corner (2000 - ongoing) and her participation in Fluxus work or visual poetry is evidence of her contextual interest of ephemera. Staunton continues to receive Fluxus material from Verona Italy, and is supportive of artists making use of ephemeral material as a
process in their work. In a discussion with Staunton (2005) at her home and studio, where both intermingle, the question about working with change and ephemeral materials prompted an unusual response; ‘To catch up to contemporary practice, there needs to be a revolution’ (Staunton 2005 discussion with Lord). This followed dialogue about Staunton’s creative decision to use old letters that had started to show signs of foxing. Staunton’s desire to include foxing as an aspect in the work requiring an image of age and a change process, had been precisely the element that raised problems for curators as to whether to include the work in a major collection or not. In the artist’s studio the influences of Fluxus, living with art, and making art from the ‘everyday’ are relevant. The very existence of decay, foxing, or a broken rung could be the exciting element that provides the visual poetry Staunton uses.

The artist’s persistence with materials that might not meet curatorial standards in art museums, and her commitment to make this art, leads to the comment from Staunton (2005) ‘Unless you’re a strong spirit you end up giving it [ephemeral practice] away because it becomes too difficult’ (Staunton 2005 discussion with Lord). Gallery director Milani (2003) discussed Staunton’s art

Most significant artists…imbue in their artworks a quality that is truly their own, and in so doing, they affect the way we see the world. We have all had the experience of rediscovering old letters, concert tickets, postcards, birthday cards, clothes and the like, and have felt [in] these moments the abstraction of the past. Detached, we remain connected to these powerful triggers of memory, and the possibility of our future lies in this contradiction. Madonna Staunton’s artwork captures all this while commenting subtly on a culture whose decay produces meaning. She makes us acutely aware of time and does so through a unique and ultimately personal use of elements, creating spaces as erudite as they are intuitive, as ephemeral as they are concrete (Milani 2003, 7).

Milani consolidates understanding of Staunton’s adoption of the element of time on artwork and materials. Where this could detract for some artists, Staunton adopts “abstractions of the past” to contribute to the aesthetic of the work.

My visits to Staunton, in 2005 and 2008, enabled valuable insight into her concepts and image making and increased my understanding of Staunton’s

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3 A term applied to the brown spots on paper that indicate acidity or alkalinity measured as ‘Potential of Hydrogen’ (pH). This is an undesirable contamination of archival art paper with substances that cause deterioration.
collection and how items are adopted in her artwork. Staunton (2005) stated, artists are “working at the coal face” and that artwork often requires a lot of determination (discussion in Staunton’s studio 2005).

Plate 8.3 Collected items for consideration Madonna Staunton [photograph Lord 2005]

Staunton’s continued engagement with Fluxus artists and her surroundings are invaluable as inspiration for artists who make art from the ephemeral, worn and disintegrating object. This collection at the site of the studio is also important in the realisation of the humble object as the source of transformative experiences. Thompson (2006), Sullivan (2005) and Bamford (1999), (Chapter Two), discuss the transformative element in art.

Staunton’s work in the Queensland University of Technology Art Museum exhibition *Transformers more than meets the eye* (2004) consisted of worn material, and instilled concepts about non-attachment. The exhibition rationale adopted transformation of everyday objects into works of art, though not as an ephemeral art practice in itself. Artworks with ephemeral elements included Rodolphe Blois’ *Resilience I* (2003) comprising of twigs and *papier maché* and Merv Muhling’s *Untitled* (1991) eucalyptus twigs, wattle and plywood. Rosalie Gasgoigne’s work *Winter order* (1979), weathered timber plywood and two rusty baskets, included elements of ephemera; and though the works from this exhibition are now collected, and most likely preserved beyond further disintegration, they play on the very act of disintegration through their reference to transformation. Similarly Bruce Reynolds’ *Peninsula* (1994), linoleum and enamel on plywood, is relevant for the recognisably temporary nature of its “in vogue” domestic settings.

*Interesting Times* (2006) at the Museum of Contemporary Art continues this engagement with art objects that show transformation and age through handling.
Staunton’s work is contextualised and juxtaposed with contemporary art in a
gallery environment. Romantic Doubt (2 of 3) 2004 and Romantic Doubt (3 of
3) 2004, contain text carvings of ‘Nirvana Ave.’, ‘Utopia’ and ‘No Place ’ on
recycled wood. Links between the everyday and “letting go,” addressed in
Chapter Six through spirituality and ephemera, re-emerge here through
Staunton’s work. Zurbrugg finds
Such works ‘patch’ the discord of human lives with beautifully chromatic
chords of code and colour, text and texture, geometry and gentle juxtaposition;
little maps as it were, of vast cosmographies, inner and outer space, the
everyday and the eternal (Zurbrugg 1994, 9).

Zurbrugg’s text also relates to John Barbour’s (2005) Work (Returned) in the
same exhibition comprising silk thread, (dimensions variable) and is pertinent
here for its impermanent ambience. Barbour’s silk threads in unfixed places are
soft pieces floating against a wall and they create another means for
understanding how art can incorporate ephemeral elements. Russel Smith’s
(2005) text about Barbour makes use of a glossary as a textual device and cross-
references the Krauss (2007) publication Formless, as well as Bataille’s (1985)
notion of the informe ‘to bring things down in the world’. Smith (2005) raises
the idea that humility re-emerges in artwork with humble elements and
recognises this in Barbour’s work made with thread. Humble material, its
associations and presentation recur in this thesis.

Ross Gibson referenced two little colonial art works and an Aboriginal artwork
in his installation work Conversations II (2008). In an extract from Gibson’s
Conversations II, a conversationalist, ‘From Juno, 7-July-08’ writes

Hello Ross,
How odd? This issue could require some analysis…are we such a percriptive
[sic] society….and so not used to social critique as a part of our public
interaction and discourse - that people actually seek to hide their identity in this
way? This could make for a valuable subject in your log. Certainly it would
bring this issue into the open. While it might also be a question for many
readers of your log.
I visited your little white cube …I enjoyed very much the three fine paintings -
in relationship to each other … it is in the interaction of art, people, ideas past
and present that this beannalle [sic] has so much to offer.
The critiques so far have missed the new ground being covered here.
All best, Juno
(viewed 18 October 2008).
Reading Juno’s contribution brought my recognition of the dialogue and Gibson’s quiet, unobtrusive manner in conversing, into greater perspective. The three artworks on Gibson’s installation walls provide many opportunities to engage with Australian culture before, during and since colonisation. In this study these artworks are a trigger for memory. They contribute to a type of art and ephemera that is not intended for archiving beyond the textual representation of ideas, created from the borrowed works.

Judy Watson contemplates and creates work about place. Her reference to her Aboriginal heritage carries significant knowledge of passing icons. Watson’s references to letting things go have been known to me for a number of decades and her comment to me, ‘Be like a water-wash’ was a reference specifically about having the capacity to let things go. One of Watson’s stories is about appreciating the subtlety of coloured water that had been used to wash paintbrushes and her decision to use that water to make watercolour paintings. This was during a workshop in India and seems more poignant for the location. Watson mentioned that later, while discussing the work, somebody criticised the re-use of the water. For Watson some people just ‘don’t get it’. Watson’s decision to reuse the water with its delicate colours was a creative one and relates to her awareness of environment, over years. This work was shown in the Mayne Centre Art Gallery and Museum, University of Queensland in 2006.

Various aspects of art and ephemera were emerging through dialogue with artists, curators and writers who focus their attention on the manner in which art can create a metaphor for change and promote sensitivity to the natural environment. My thesis values these artists’ heightened sensibility towards disintegration as a metaphor for the way things are, as well as evolving cyclical states. These mentors, discussed in the lead up to my new practice, have significant and ongoing bearing on the development of my praxis. In contrast to the mentors discussed already, a crucial opportunity to communicate with seven artists occurred in the artists’ workshop Leave no trace.

4 Water-wash is a Lithographic term for floating grease or tusche-drawing material in water allowing very free shapes to be used in images. The comment was made in the 1980s, when Watson taught lithography in Townsville.
8.1 Leave No Trace

Perc Tucker Regional Gallery invited artists to participate in the workshop *Leave No Trace*, 29 September to 2 October 2005, at Wallaman Falls National Park. Finding natural occurrences of ephemera would trigger new ideas for participants. My adoption of ephemera in Northeast Queensland, led to my new praxis. Though Northwest Queensland provides many opportunities for my contemplation and observation of the environment, new realisation emerged from being with these artists in this national park. Close proximity with a small group provided valuable time to reflect on the potential to make use of the same ephemera that is obvious in a natural setting.

During this study many methods have emerged as lessons for the continued investigation of art and disintegration. Artists invited to the workshop had discussions about “leaving no trace.” Not making art to keep raised problems for some people. One evening I said that making art that won’t last doesn’t hurt, while knowing that for people mostly concerned with selling artwork, it might hurt. Artworks developed from and after the workshop were exhibited in *Habitus Habitat* (2005 - 6), Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, and most of the exhibition work was archival with digital references to the workshop. *Impossible bucket* (Plate 8.23) was a key non-archival work emerging from the experience for my praxis and *Habitus Habitat*.

On the first day of the workshop, artist Barbara Pierce said to me, ‘There is something you will like down that track’. It was pertinent that Pierce had identified a huge rotting tree as something I would find fascinating. The log had been lying for perhaps a few years across a dry part of Stony Creek, leading to the Herbert River. The place where it lay was a surface of washed stones and old flood debris, a dry part of the bank that would be under water in flood times. In the very hot environment from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm the rocks were too hot to

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5 The workshop was initiated as part of the launch of Queensland’s Seven Great Walks in National Parks (Appendix XVI).
walk on barefoot, and the log provided a shelter for small creatures and a myriad of insects. The aluminium lithography plate I was drawing on would become too hot to hold, if left facing the sun.

Plate 8.4 Log, fungi and shadow (photograph Lord 2005)

The log was a host for fungi and combined the status of fallen giant and host as it decomposed. My photographs of this log and my temporary placement of an old eroded survey peg on its horizontal surface (Lord 2005) were important for later reflection and artwork. My photographs also formed the basis for ephemera’s binary, the archive, in a series of drawings, photographic screen-prints and lithographs. More important for my evolving concepts of art and ephemera were digital images that indicated the temporary nature of all things: in this case, the giant log previously high in the rain forest west of Ingham, carried down a flooded creek, and now disintegrating on a bank. I responded to the workshop with both ephemeral and archival, as did some of the other artists.

Barbara Pierce’s work in three exhibitions, Habitat Habitus PTRGL (2005 - 6), dis/place Institute of Modern Art (1991) and Perc Tucker Regional Gallery And she breathes…meeting (2004 - 05), contain ephemeral elements. Pierce’s email refers to her materials,

… household objects / combinations of household materials / surfaces…pieces of leather shoes that I would have concentrated on for material inclusion in works rather than the fabric / clothing. … pieces of leather shoes in the collage work as well as photographs of household textiles / surfaces / objects (Pierce 31 May 2008 1:15:03).

Pierce took domestic items and tools to engage with, as part of her response to the artists’ workshop, and her work during the workshop became notably ephemeral. The red painted tape that had measured her working space at home
was reapplied to a space in the national park. The length of fabric ‘the length of
the walls of her work room plus 4/5 of one wall’ was a relational measure. The
tape or ‘measure’ was not intended for anything specific until she got to the
park where Pierce folded the tape into a concertina, only about 20 centimetres
wide in a bundle, and placed it between two rocks (Plate 8.5).

Plate 8.5 Pierce (2005) folded tape at Wallaman Falls National Park in
the artists’ workshop Leave No Trace’ [photograph Ed Pierce]

The image arrests space both in reality and in visual documentation. Pierce
discussed the origin of Compressed walls (four and four-fifths) – held
… then as I walked around the campsite with it (the tape) not really thinking, I
began to fold it backwards and forwards – concertina-like to about my hand
span dimensions. The walking and the folding of the tape ended simultaneously
and I positioned it almost immediately between the two rocks that were lying
there, I did not have to move them very far at all – they were just there already
in place at the ‘end’ of the walk. The four-fifths of a wall, the measurement not
actually having a corresponding wall in reality – I knew could be interpreted as
another wall, an imagined wall, an internalized wall, a spiritual wall – one that
could possibly exist on another level (also thoughts about the environment
‘holding us in place’) (Pierce 31 May 2008 1:15:03).

The tape remained in place for the workshop before being transformed again
into a length of fabric. Similarly, Pierce’s favourite floor rug and bundles of
twigs had temporary treatment of placement and re-assessment of space. Her
dressmaking scissors, brought to the site, were placed in existing chainsaw slits
in a tree so that the scissors took on an appearance of forced intrusion. The
common household tool, relocated and repositioned, temporarily, in the tree in a
National Park, became a visual metaphor for environmental impact. Pierce’s
(2005) earlier response to my question about artists’ use of change as a concept in their work was that

… there are many layers of meaning to the word / concept - change - and I think that it may be a factor which is ever-present in the work whether it is intentional or not, there is an awareness factor involved…[and in her manner added]… I am happy for you to use this comment if you think it is worthwhile – (Pierce 1 October 2005 6:08:13 PM).

Plate 8.6 Pierce (2005) *Tally (one of two)*, temporary work with leaves, Wallaman Falls National Park artists' workshop ‘Leave No Trace' [photograph Ed Pierce]

We continued email dialogue even though we both live in Townsville, and Pierce wrote further,

I consider myself to be an intuitive maker … receptive to stimuli of the moment. In the moment of making, I am simultaneously touching the past whilst feeling for the future (Pierce 31 May 2008 1:15:03 PM).

Questions for my new work were being formulated in relation to ephemeral elements in art and environment. The workshop enabled conversations and dialogue not usually forthcoming in daily routines.

Troy Whelan, artist and traditional owner Warrgamaygan Country provided vignettes through his knowledge about country and respect for the land. These were valuable for acknowledgement of the environment that I was exploring in relation to art and ephemera. Whelan talked to us about the land, the traditional elders and owners, and the country. It was revealing for the artists and we began to understand how we should ask about the traditions and protocols for use or reference to places and Aboriginal names.
In his temporary artwork, Troy Whelan mapped out indications of this country and references to the traditional people and place. I asked if I could photograph Whelan’s work and he gave me permission. Whelan’s work was made from twigs and leaves on the ground near the campsite, after he talked about it, he disbursed his work by walking over it. For Whelan some names should not be taken away from the place or used in non-traditional Aboriginal artwork and he sent this response to me about the significance of place and naming

Hi there Anne,
Thank you for your feedback. It was an honour to have you and the other artists on Warrgamaygan Country, and the opportunity to work alongside both you and the other artists. I look forward to seeing you at the exhibition. The photo is great. Just to let you know Jinda is the word for Waterfall, Warrgamaygan is the People, and Warrgamay is the language group (Whelan 12 October 2005 9:00:12 AM).

Troy’s dialogue was important for my investigation of new ideas about place. Of the seven artists in the workshop, some were more interested in the documentation than in the process and produced work here contrary to the way art and ephemera, as a process is relevant for my study. Other artists used various methods to develop their work with the idea that we left no trace, while showing a concern for the natural environment. The environment is instrumental in determining my appreciation of the way nature reclaims leaves and trees as humus. This contributes significantly to the next step of my visual artwork discussed in Chapter Nine, Objects.
Townsville Art and Ephemera: Locality

Townsville-based artists Linda Ashton and Marion Gaemers provide significant examples of ephemera through their own approach to letting things go based on the local environment. Their work is not intended to disintegrate during the exhibition time, though they do not oppose the process of disintegration.

Ashton’s work *Well Travelled Trunks* (2003 - 2007) (Plate 8.8) assembled work from lopped tree sections were obtained from the Townsville City Council tree- lopping program and brought to James Cook University where she works. Collaborative work with students developed a series of themed tree-trunks *The Faithful Tree, Dragon Dreaming Tree, The Tree of Ages, The Reef Tree, The Recycling Tree* (Plate 8.9 right), and *Aussie Outback Tree*. They represented the diversity of people and ecosystems in the regional area. Ashton relates that logs … were cut into sections and we reassembled them like a Frankenstein forest out of pieces of trunks and limbs; Mango Poinciana, Mahogany to make them look like trees again. We installed them in and around a concrete path by some native trees near a main lecture theatre. Some of the log sections were transformed into seats as there was nowhere nearby for students to sit while awaiting their lecture. Much of the ceramic mosaic for the decorative surface came from local glazed crockery pieces and household ornaments donated by staff and students or found at thrift shops (Ashton discussion 5th April 2008).

At the 2004 official launch for the public art piece in the university grounds, native seedlings were planted for each tree stump section that had been lopped. Along with this tangible ecological link Ashton created a poem as a statement
about change and human impact. For Ashton the poem was the important piece to keep (Plate 8.11).


These fabricated tree trunks were popular until they lost some of their pieces and Ashton relates they were then ‘positioned’ as a *nuisance* for maintenance staff. Maintenance stopped once any expectations of archive were thwarted and the work started to decay and disintegrate. The pieces have gone through substantial changes in their settings and once Ashton had the work decommissioned, the poetic environmental metaphor was the only important relic. This piece remains in a covered external corridor, a reminder that it and trees in the garden are destined for disintegration. I photographed this remaining log which had the poem attached, as it “deconstructs” (1999 - current). Its relocated position is a tribute to the lopped trees.
Plate 8.10 and Plate 8.11 Linda Ashton *Well Travelled Trunks*, external site and external corridor [photograph 8.10 Ashton, 8.11 Lord]

The juxtapositioning of ephemera and archive leads to re-visiting complex policies for ownership and preservation. It brings ‘letting go’ into focus, and questions how we can be agentic, and reposition artists whose ephemeral artworks resist the dominant archival practice in art. Investigation of ephemera and art situated against the archive in art also responds to issues of environmental loss and position through ecological devastation.

Marion Gaemers recognizes that her pieces can be kept in a garden and it does not matter if they break down and return to vegetation (Plate 8.12). In the following email dialogue Marion Gaemers relates her thoughts for making art and letting it go,

… the ephemeral nature of my work is an intentional statement. … I use the products I use because they are friendly to the environment and in an attempt to make them last longer I need to use glues and insecticides which I don't really like and are not friendly to the environment (Gaemers, May 18, 2008 12:26 PM email).

Gaemers uses traditional basket-making techniques for a contemporary statement, and incorporates local flora, textiles and sometimes found objects.
Gaemers states:

I also think that nothing in life lasts forever - except people have the expectation that art should. And it can't be art if it doesn't. It would be good to break that expectation. … There is a lot of money spent to house works of art in Museums and much of this is never exhibited. But then I have this other dilemma which is I love seeing 100 year old baskets that have been stored in these museums and always visit museums whenever I travel. … I like the making - not really keen on the exhibiting - but it is a necessary part of being an artist and I often hate seeing my old work especially when I have moved on from it: that's why I don't mind it breaking down, and then look under my house for all the old work that is stored there. Most will end up in the garden, there is just a time period or my headspace to move on and then they can be destroyed. Another thing I do a lot of, is work in components and then pull them apart and then reuse them on other items so the first work is destroyed but another is made (Gaemers, May 18, 2008 12:26 PM email).

Plate 8.12 Marion Gaemers figure V from the series Dancers stitched palm flowering stems and rag [photograph Lord]

Gaemers mentioned making art in workshops for an exhibition by Fibres and Fabrics members and workshop artists, Threads of Habit, Pinnacles Gallery May, 2008. Gaemers stated that most of the pieces would be ‘pulled apart and then reused in other things or dismantled back to the fibre to be reused’ (Gaemers, May 18, 2008 12:26 PM). Gaemers has advocated for environmental issues for many years and her philosophical comment mirrors this stance ‘I also don’t have a need to leave anything of myself behind when I die’ (Gaemers,
May 18, 2008 12:26 PM). Gaemers’ stance is valuable for this study and as concurrent work where artists contribute to empowering art that is environmentally sensitive because it has no archival requirements. In the larger metropolitan centre of Brisbane, a sophisticated approach to ephemera occurred from artists’ references to the built environment.

Brisbane-based Art and Ephemera

Gordon Craig, Curator for the Queensland University of Technology Cultural Precinct, Brisbane, pointed out very different and intentionally short-lived pieces by Luke Jaaniste. A PhD candidate at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Jaaniste brought a new dimension to ephemera as an act of temporary installation.


Jaaniste’s (2004) artworks are just visible, for instance as an addition of sticky tape to small metal floor covers. The parallel lines of sticky tape, on a well-used floor, explicate the diverse methods that artists use for conceptual work, while also defying any semblance of archive for the installed work. Jaaniste responded to my researcher questioning about ephemeral practice
I do many, many small ephemeral works [and] I have an ‘in situ’ practice and an ‘ex situ / documentation’ practice, which sounds rather similar [to Lord’s work.] Sometimes the in-situ work is directly present within an exhibition, with or without documentation of it, and usually unsigned (Jaaniste, 27 September 2005, 11:23:53 PM).

Subtlety in Jaaniste’s work complements the abstruse nature of his imagery and its relationship to his concepts. This work concurs with mentors mentioned earlier where metaphors are understated.

Jaaniste emailed

… I have very subtle works in the space without any titles or materials listing. At QUT Art Museum for “Art Scene Investigation” it was mainly documentation (pictures, maps) but then there were also the plants, which existed outside (Jaaniste, 27 September 2005, 11:23:53 PM).


Jaaniste’s reference to ‘plants’ is to the hole-punched leaves in the art museum’s courtyard (Plate 8.14). Jaaniste had related some stories about his work being problematic, in the way people in the academy looked at his ephemeral work, and the lack of lasting tangible objects or an artist’s “signature”. The loss of any archival aspect has great appeal for me through its low impact both in appearance and in the natural or built environment. Jaaniste explained esoteric aspects of his work and that

…there are a few extra layers for me as well, such that the process of my practice usually follows this workflow:
1. in situ work - the subtle ephemeral (re)arrangements of built environment - often goes unnoticed
2. documentation - taking photo, video and audio recordings, map-making
3. archive - digital archiving on my laptop, archived in a folder structure
4. presentation of documentation - various ways of 'uploading' my practice into communal/public discourses, such as website, exhibition of photos, DVD box set, journal articles etc. (Jaaniste, 27 September 2005, 11:23:53 PM).
Jaaniste’s fourth point to ‘upload’ work for publication resonates with my discussion in Chapter Ten for a light environmental footprint. This point for me, as for many artists, meets concerns and demonstrates desire not to sell tangible images or artwork.

**Sydney-based Artists and Ephemera**

Equally subtle as work that changes is Sydney artist Tim Silver’s sculpture *Untitled (what if I drive)* (2004) made from wax crayon, (initial dimension 35 x 105 x 50 cm. in an edition of two). Russell Storer, curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Sydney, suggested Silver’s work in response to my asking about artists who use change elements in their artwork. Silver was working with crayola wax crayon and silicon rubber to create references to impermanence.

Khan (2005) relates Silver’s ‘silcone-cast garmentry [as]… permanently crumpled and non-functional: a continually collapsed anti-monument, seemingly discarded on the gallery floor’ (Khan 2005, n.p.) and describes Silver’s ‘captivatingly tactile surfaces’ from chocolate and crayon that …seem to render them even more transient and disposable than the consumer objects which they replicate. Ironically as time passes and the objects crumble and decay, a more compelling and troubling narrative emerges. Beneath their alluring shiny surfaces lies a more sombre and melancholic meditation on the velocity and transience of life in a contemporary cultural wasteland, and the ever-increasing consumption and instant gratification which paradoxically, seems to leave us with less and less to hold on to (Khan 2005, n. p.).

Tim Silver (2005) responded to my concern for change in art and stated his early work was primarily for artist-run spaces and he was ‘very interested in ephemeral forms - just as much for practical reasons … as for the possibilities this approach offered’ (Silver, 15 October 2005 3:53:03 AM). My search for humble examples of art was assisted by Silver’s explanation of concepts he used in relation to change in his art. He created:

… elements which would evolve or change over the course of the exhibition itself. I thought of these objects as non-static, that is, objects that were able to participate in the world. These objects took the form of such things as, glass containers filled with hair gel which I then placed jaffas into. The dye from the jaffas would then bleed outwards and into each other for the course of the
exhibition; small bride and groom figurines made of mozzarella cheese; a 2m wingspan tiger moth bi plane from pink fairy floss, where the fairy floss became increasingly brittle, with fragments continuing to break off and shatter on the floor; 3d jigsaw pieces cast from frozen human blood (my own) which melted over white plinths and pooled on the floor where it quickly congealed … (Silver, 15 October 2005 3:53:03 AM).

Silver’s work resonates with Butler’s (2005) reference to the “performative object,” and assists my staging ephemeral objects as agentic through creative, potentially pragmatic, or functional means. He explained:

The [crayon] pieces … were very much about that process of change during the course of the exhibition … I then went on to work on Untitled (what if a drive?) much more about the theatrics of change, the possibility or suggestion of that. I guess I was feeling that I had rocked upon a formula (something melts, something rots etc) with the early work and naturally needed to shift ground somewhat. What if I drive positions objects of mobility (cars, scooters, skateboards) cast of crayola crayon in the gallery space, with traces of their paths of movement drawn out with the actual object itself, leaving behind brightly coloured traces. There is a correlation of the use value of the object here (Silver, 15 October 2005 3:53:03 AM).

Plate 8.15 Tim Silver (2008), Untitled adrift, National Art School Gallery [photograph Lord]

Silver’s sinking boat was documented in three photographs for MCA, 2005. Critically for this study the ‘boat,’ made from ground-up pastel pigment, dissolves. Silver (2005) worked with forms of documentation for the adrift series and stated,

Whilst this ultimately moves me clearly away from the notion of a non-static object – photography and even video are static in the sense that they don’t continue to change beyond my letting go of them to an audience – they will always remain the same as they are at that moment (Silver, 15 October 2005 3:53:03 AM).
Silver’s reconsideration, to have the digital installation intervene as a fixed but replaceable object, sets up another interruption to the potential for anti-archive. Silver states he:

… played with certain devices to “ramp up” this element …. The *adrift* series, for instance, when initially displayed, was shown one photograph at a time, so the disintegration of the object paralleled the passing of time of the object itself (Silver, 15 October 2005 3:53:03 AM).

Silver’s documentation strategies resonate with some outcomes for “art and ephemera” taken up in Chapter Ten. Silver’s time-based works were shown in various stages of change in commercial and public galleries for contemporary art.

Two Sydney based post-graduate artists, showing independently at Kudos Gallery, College of Fine Art (COFA) (UNSW); provide alternative consideration for art and ephemera. Chia-Ming Cheng (COFA elastic exhibition) (2005) and Caroline Huf, (MVA plots exhibition) emailed responses about their work. Chia-Ming Cheng’s (2005) work *If the dead use money, perhaps they need cash registers too* comprised stainless steel dishes, paper money with imagery of cash registers, some burnt in dishes.

Cheng wrote to me that his art was:

… certainly not archival and was not to be archival at all anyway. By giving away or burning paper, the work might be …“ephemeral” if you like. The action of burning may work as a metaphor of the reality. By giving away the paper, it intends to reflect or debase certain consumer issues. The ephemerality of my work (if there is any, or may not be obvious as your work) serves as an artistic tool for transforming meaning and somehow interacting with the
audience. On the other hand, is the very nature of consumerism ephemeral itself? (Chia-Ming Cheng, 15 November 2005 10:20:13 AM)

Plate 8.17 Chia-Ming Cheng (2005) *If the dead use money, perhaps they need cash registers too*, Kudos Gallery COFA Sydney [photograph Lord]

Cheng added that he believes the ‘same environmental problems are happening everywhere’ and ‘Artists or designers do have social and environmental responsibilities for a better world…(Chia-Ming Cheng, 16 November 2005 10:25:12 AM). Cheng’s work linked consumerism and Joss paper ⁶ as ephemeral Chinese currency:

> Joss paper itself is a metaphor of money and the action of burning is seen as a way of passing things to spirits. By burning it, people believe that they will be blessed by deities or either their loved ones would have a better after life (Chia-Ming Cheng, 16 November 2005 10:56:01 AM).

Cheng was amazed that some rich people would burn real money, for this purpose. Similarly Caroline Huf’s artwork relates to consumerism in urban environments. Huf’s work in *Plots* exhibition, Kudos Gallery 9-20 August 2005 included *tRain coat*, 2004, Sydney rail tickets, *beens*, 2004-05, woven

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⁶ ‘Joss papers can be quite different in forms and for different purposes. Joss papers are usually burnt for spirits, deities and loved ones who had passed away’ Chia-Ming Cheng, 16 November 2005 10:56:01 AM).
medication boxes, train tickets, mixed media, and two stop-motion animations, *thaught bubble* (6:02), and *ticketweavels* (1:50) 2004. Huf (2005) discussed her stop-motion animation, and woven discarded boxes

When weaving by stop-motion the train tickets, I was fascinated by the unit of each frame, when I started I knew only that the two tickets I wanted to weave together like worms, but as I was pushing each thread through with a needle point, the threads of paper began to tear, I liked this, that the tickets were weaving a plane, a mat, passing through each other, making something and disintegrating at the same time. In the end it is a simulated decay, with all the artifice of stop-motion animation (Huf 17 August 2005 12:23:45 AM).

Huf’s response provided an insight into practice that allowed a change process to happen as simulated decay during installation. My search for vignettes such as these is ongoing, and correspondence with artists who have a professional approach to work in this field remains open. These artists add perspectives for the range or aspects of ephemera in artwork. At Ivan Dougherty Gallery, (COFA), art exhibited from a trip to a research station in Western NSW October 2005 had little sign of ephemera. Postgraduate Juliana O’Dean made work from twigs from the research location and O’Dean’s was the only piece of slightly ephemeral material exhibited.

Contemporary art engaging with issues, primarily about environment, and developing concepts that translate into a visual statement is discussed in Chapter Ten, Ephemera and Ecology. In these exhibitions or events the curator *has* often facilitated the program for issue-based art such as environment and art. I present artists who adopt “soft” approaches to anti-commodity through employment of a low environmental footprint in their praxis of art and ephemera. Key works from two site events for temporary art are discussed in the next section.

8.2 Events: Strand Ephemera (2007) and In Site Out (2007)

temporary and ephemeral art event featuring 28 works in the Orange Botanic Gardens’ (*In Site Out*, October 2007). It incorporated a series of art events and a seminar.

In both events many artworks are more permanent than temporary as artists respond to organisers’ suggestions that work may be selected to remain on site; neither the Townsville nor the Orange organisers insist on artwork being ephemeral for the events. Townsville City Council invites artists to submit work that could be acquired for the Strand foreshore recreational area and Strand Park. The suggestion that local council acquire a permanently fixed artwork provides a mixed message for ephemera and archive. The invitation to artists for Strand Ephemera also creates a distinction between timed installation and material disintegration and this acts to empower and privilege the permanent and acquisitive art object.

Artist’s fees from Townsville and Orange of $500.00 and $200.00 respectively, are token payments for the amount of physical work required to produce, install and remove art. For my work in 2007, local Townsville companies Harbourside Ice and Tropical Ice provided in-kind support, through freezer access for ice sculptures. Assistance with transportation to Orange was similarly provided at reasonable rates however my costs went well over the budget for the provided artist’s fee.

Plate 8.18 Ice sculptures, Harbourside Ice and J.A.T. transport [photographs Lord]

Images for both events were reproduced in small catalogues with entries limited to one hundred words for each artist. Viewers who purchased a catalogue or had
prior knowledge of the artists’ works would be able to go beyond the obvious visual portrayal. Many artists contributed intellectually difficult work, and when not present to explain their concepts, audiences were left in need of interpretation for the work. The catalogue, provides evidence of commodity and anti-commodity where artists interpreted ephemera and anti-archival, or highly collectable and archival, in their own ways. I have selected the kinds of art and ephemera I am giving agency to and this evidences my criteria for inclusion in this study.

Key Examples Strand Ephemera

Increasing numbers of artists travel to Townsville to show work in Strand Ephemera and these are evident in the 2007 catalogue compared to the earlier events. Some of the artists applied different principles and from these I found some works significant for my topic.

Susan Peters Nampitjin’s large Fish Traps, (2007) 120 x 220 cm. in Strand Ephemera draws on her Aboriginal culture. Peters Nampitjin stated

This artwork was inspired from stories passed down from my aunty about collecting bush foods and fishing at Lake Gregory in the Tanami Desert. Knowledge of traditional lifestyles of the Walmajarri people led me to create these decorative fish traps (Peters Nampitjin statement in Strand Ephemera 2007, 4).

Peters Nampitjin’s work was installed as a long horizontal piece beside the main walking path, and in a manner that allowed easy removal after the nine-day event. This was in contrast with many other works installed in ways that could have been permanent, in compliance with safety requirements. Though these were removed after the temporary event these more permanent installations would have been artists responding to the invitation to add to Townsville’s collection of public art, for permanent viewing on The Strand.

Japanese artist Takamiyoshi Fujii invited interaction and engagement with the local community. Fujii’s The Site of Wishes (2007) was a light footprint, created from fine timber, thread, paper and metal 250 x 500 x 800 cm. Fujii (2007) stated
This installation will become the site of wishes as the people engage and write their wishes and dreams on the pieces of fabric, which will blow in the sea breeze. As the wind changes so will the direction the wishes are sent (Fujii 2007, 9).

Fujii lectures in Japan and brought with him some students from his art school. Their engagement with and responses to people about their work (particularly the ephemeral) continued in discussions at James Cook University, School of Creative Arts, and in Strand Ephemera.

Janelle Edwards’ *Bits* (2007) was made from driftwood, paint, glue, cloth 60 x 50 x 50 cm. Edwards stated ‘Bits float on the ocean then wash up on the beaches creating ephemeral sculptural structures. These change daily with the elements and our interaction with the environment’ (Edwards 2007, 11). *Bits* is Edwards’ reflection on North Queensland and New South Wales experiences and her evolving abstraction acts as transient art.

Dyasley Tuck’s (2007) *Human Nature* made from sand, rock and bamboo (1400 x 1300 x 300 cm.) is a temporary site piece. Its scale and placement create similar positioning to the work of major artists who would not re-place the work in a gallery due to the poignancy of the environment and / or architecture of the piece. Tuck (2007) stated

> The labyrinth has been created to draw attention to the effect that humans are having on the world and to encourage participants to ponder their world. People need to maintain a critical awareness of their environment by recognising information gained through all senses (Tuck 2007, 12).

Similarly Janet Gallagher’s *Wish Tree* (2007), utilising white cloth and an existing Sea Almond tree, incorporated the whole tree and was integrated into the site, where many fully-grown Sea Almonds exist on The Strand. At the end of *Strand Ephemera* the removal of white cloth left this site intact so that the work was able to leave no trace on the site and physically ‘deconstruct’ at the end of the event. Gallagher’s (2007) statement contributes to the ephemeral nature of making art that I was seeking for my study, in this nine-day event. Gallagher placed more emphasis on her idea, though her work also acts as an aesthetic image, ‘Wish Tree connects to the magic of nature through simple processes and everyday materials. The act of making this piece, is an act of
honouring this magic’ (Gallagher 2007, 24). Gallagher’s *Wish Tree* (2007) resonates with another practice, mentioned by Williams (1997) where Thai Buddhist monks have used symbolic acts of initiation and

… “ordain” the trees in the rain forest as “members of a Buddhist order” by tying strips of saffron cloth around them. [Williams continues] This rather unique tactic has actually prevented the logging of quite a number of acres of forest (Williams 1997, xxxv).

Gallagher’s tree and the Buddhist monks’ trees, both address the protective act and the nurturing of trees referenced in Chapter Six.

Maree Edminston Prior’s (2007) *Waves*, (500 x 400 x 15 cm.) resonates with art and ephemera where forms of large waves, created from sand, spread across a high-tide section of the beach in naturally occurring sand dunes. The sand waves were graceful elongated shapes. They were trashed or walked over, and did not survive intact past the first day of Strand Ephemera. My question is, ‘Was it, in the minds of the people who walked through it, an artwork, and was the walking a deliberate act of destruction?’ It could have been that the artwork was invisible to those walking on the Strand or was intentionally trashed. In each case, the trashing denied the ephemeral work equal consideration with more durable pieces. Ironically these low relief sand-waves, with large geometric shapes, were

... developed from the imprints of global brand name shoes … representing the ecological footprint. Artwork *Waves* shows the dynamics between water and land; the natural patterns of their interaction, a timely reminder of the temporary nature of our coastline (Edminston Prior 2007, 31).

The work has a parallel with Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s *Land Mark (Footprints)* (2001 - 2004), (Chapter Ten), where the artists designed special shoe soles as slogans on an off-limits beach in a military zone (Kastner 2006, 28). In comparison with Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s work, Maree Edminston Prior’s *Waves* occupied a less hostile zone, though in relation to trashing or acceptance Edminston Prior’s work may have lost recognition as art when it was walked over early in the nine-day event. Was this interaction a conscious or unconscious act of untimely destruction? In *Strand Ephemera* the former is always possible, even though security for 2007 had been increased
since 2005. Critical for this study is that the issue of security and vandalism created anxiety in some artists and indifference in others.

Gabriella Hegyes from Sodwalls NSW created mandalas as site works by pouring sand through paper-stencils. The stencils were made each night and stencilled mandalas were produced daily in workshops along The Strand walking path. The clusters also consisted of a number of simple metal-framed figures with cloth made into a shift-like garment slipped over the wire. The figures were stored offsite each night.


Hegyes (2007) wrote about the figures and mandalas:

We all came to this continent from different cultural backgrounds bringing with us our beliefs, traditions and customs – the things that make us who we are. The work aims to accentuate our similarities and celebrate our diversity. The installation is recreated everyday with new patterns and colours (Hegyes 2007, 33).

Hegyes’ tools for Strand Ephemera included a wheelbarrow and lots of buckets for collecting sand. Her concern is for this art to be interactive and to be placed temporarily into a built environment. At the end of Strand Ephemera the sand patterns were being absorbed back into the ground, though to the delight of the
artist, the patterns were retained in the bleached grass. Hegyes also coordinated *In Site Out* the ephemeral art event in Orange, New South Wales.

My work for Strand Ephemera, *Melts and tides* was literally made of ice and for the moment. It was a crucial time to attract comments and reactions obtainable from passing crowds. The responses made by onlookers have contributed significantly to my commitment to ephemeral art, the statement it can make, and the impact it can have on people. My artist’s statement reads, ‘the series of ephemeral ice sculptures about the ephemeral nature of our times and place, addresses issues of environment, spirituality and identity’ (Lord 2007, 14 Strand Ephemera). My ice sculptures, remade for each day of *Strand Ephemera 2007*, were ‘ephemeral characters’ *a praying kangaroo with wings*, 80 cm x 60 cm x 45 cm., (Plate 8.26), *geckoes with wings*, each 8 x 40 x 12 cm variable (Plate 8.21), and *a winged Buddha* (my Australian version of a mythological figure) 40 x 30 x 35 cm (Plate 8.20).


People stopped when I was assembling the work or photographing it. In my capacity as artist on site, I engaged audiences and documented the sculptures as they melted. I tested how ephemeral art, such as the series of ice sculptures, could also be placed in a public space or outdoor site and create interaction with an audience. My ephemeral characters were interpretations of Australian figures, and giving them wings invested them as mythical figures. The challenge
to present these in the outdoor tropical location was also referencing the impossibility of maintaining ice sculptures in a warm-(ing) climate.

Many people walking along The Strand and looking for the sculptures asked about the melting figurative ice sculptures, absent more often than present. The ice sculptures were adaptations of familiar icons, but questioned a stereotype of art and ice sculpture. One woman said ‘But they will melt!’ and when I replied ‘Yes,’ I could see that my brief response was enough for her to realise that this was fully intended. It delivered a message, and an aim of the artwork was to create a response to their loss. The mature-age woman’s realisation that the sculptures were intended to disappear became evident and started a new wave of response to melting artwork through my second aim, ‘to explicate autobiographical voices and textual literacy to intersect artists’ concepts, and find schisms about ephemera.’ The underlying theme ‘why do we need so many things, and why would it matter if my sculpture disappears intentionally?’ is also relevant to asking ‘where does that idea take the viewer?’ At the core of this discussion about melting there is acknowledgement of agentic behaviour where a person may realise that there is something happening beyond the obvious, and there is an empowering through visual art and language to elucidate concepts. The analysis of this realisation comes from evaluation of the ice sculpture and what it stands for, and “art and ephemera” becomes slightly more valued as an idea.

Children often accepted the melting ice and mythical interpretations. The binary of adult and child is sometimes collapsed as they watch the ice sculptures, in that the roles and perception of the adult and child looking at the melting ice are bought into approximation in a new ground of wonder and perception. The keynote speaker for Strand Ephemera 2007 Stephanie Radok visited my site, number 35, while young children were looking at the praying kangaroo with wings. One little girl said ‘Oh it’s an angel,’ and I said ‘It’s a kangaroo angel’. Radok was impressed by the child’s obvious interest and interaction and told me this was a new experience that would remain an important memory for the surrounding children. Interpretations of the ice sculptures by people coming to Strand Ephemera and In Site Out contributed a variety of reactions to the idea
of melting art. These ranged from delight, curiosity, and in one case annoyance at the ice sculptures, as they melted beyond recognition, being called art.

It was important to have Australian mythological figures or creatures, and at least a winged gecko. People connect with the familiar, so when I provided Australian winged creatures, and inserted mythological aspects, I gave the audience something to bridge a gap, and provided some common ground. This was possible just by giving the audience a term and by being there and assisting to illuminate concepts behind the work. Discussion, or at times just taking a photograph, caused people to stop and look at the very small ice gecko. It was an opportunity to collapse some binaries of archived and non-archived art, conserving and waste, melting and freezing, by having a conversation about the fact that I wanted these sculptures to melt.

The development of this practical work while gaining more insight into the post-structuralist lens and discourse analysis had a part to play in the adoption of my strategies to present work outside a gallery and to invite comments from the public or local community. My creative work 2001 to 2007 increased opportunities for audience interaction and combined new knowledge with a further understanding of making use of ephemera as a viable alternative art. There was also increased comprehension by onlookers and potential to bring their point of view to the project.

I invited children to pat the melting gecko, (Plate 8.21 top left, and 8.28) a reversal of not being allowed to touch art. These melting works show the nature of disappearance and are about contemplating our world and our future through reference to change in the natural environment and letting go. The winged gecko belongs to this idea of the mythical.

When a person in the audience at Strand Ephemera asked ‘Why do we need a winged gecko?’ I responded ‘In Asia there are many winged mythological creatures so why shouldn’t we have mythological creatures with wings in Australia?’ It was significant recognition to have the Townsville lady of Asian
descent smile knowingly at my subtle blurring of this cultural difference (Strand Ephemera audience participation 8\textsuperscript{th} September 2007).

In the local community there is an engagement and fulfilment of what the artist aims to achieve. Whereas Danto (2004), Baas and Jacob (2004), Epstein (2004) and Bourriaud (2002) have communicated about many developments and the way artists have formed new relationships across contemporary art and ecological concerns, my work was addressing a small audience in a playful art event, though my topic was addressing serious issues.

Plate 8.21 Lord 2007 \textit{Winged Gecko} – six stages [photographs Lord]
Objects that disintegrate are signs to prompt people to consider a reversal of impact on environment. This brings to notice how an artist wishes to respond to the issue of climate change, and I propose can highlight scientists’ warning notices about environmental change. Where scientists produce projects with quantitative results in many areas; some alternative interaction of the creative arts and humanities and the implementation of responses through audience interaction; a qualitative approach, can become meaningful in research and to a general public. In this respect the sciences could take more notice of findings in humanities, through audience interaction, willingness to understand and contributions. This is in keeping with broadening the discussion to encompass the capacity in the creative arts to engage with industries other than the arts.

The agentic situation was that people realised that the disappearance of the work was the message. In planning how long it would take for the ice to disappear and what happens to my work due to the disappearance on The Strand, a new set of criteria emerged for my art. In my precursor *ROT* (1995 - 6) (Chapter Five) audience interaction was not sought to the same extent.

Plate 8.22 Lord (1995 - 6) *ROT* recycled paper, 400 x 200 x 200 cm on site in The Valley, Brisbane [photographs Thierry Auriac]

Interaction with audiences on The Strand and in Orange also involved a departure from presenting the *Impossible bucket* (2004 - 8) of eroding plant matter, in a white cube gallery where interaction between artist and audience was rarely possible.
Comparative Positions

Art industry positioning for *Strand Ephemera* and *Habitus Habitat* presents vastly differing potential for preservation and ephemera. The *Impossible Bucket* made from humus was put into the gallery freezer prior to installation to kill insects or bugs supposedly housed in my artwork. Thus conservators’ practices present a clash between the white glove handling of artwork free of dirt or any creatures such as insects, and the artwork that is made to exist in dirt and the natural environment, as a part of an ecological niche. The clash, between white cube *professional standards and viewing art on site* is useful in questioning the gallery role where more precious archived art is the norm and the performative object, made to challenge this, is of concern to curators. The glass between the humus bucket and gallery combines two-way protection: of archived art from “art and ephemera”, and protection of ephemeral artwork.

Plate 8.23 Lord (2005 - 8) *Impossible Bucket* humus and cellulose glue 30 x 25 x 25 cm installed in Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville

My temporary installation pieces are produced to reflect on issues of ecology, environment, sensitivity to limited resources and the potential to make a statement about anti-commodity. Alternatively, my archival artwork acts as commodity and statement about ephemera. I don’t always make things with ephemera, such as ice, and could make an artwork out of fire. In the cool climate of Orange in New South Wales, flowers are so prominent and prompted my thoughts to make art and ephemera with flowers. Already done, Jeff Koons’ (1992 - ongoing) *Puppy* made of flowers, in Arolson was for Koons, a symbol of ‘love, warmth and happiness.’ Koons *Puppy*, of steel, soil and plants is acknowledged on the Public Art Fund site [http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/00/koons_j_00.html](http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/00/koons_j_00.html). My pieces in *Strand Ephemera* were very small and not intended as grand statements.

Members of the public gained an understanding of why my sculptures had to disappear as potential reminders of global warming. The actual engagement with people and the effort to place the work in a public realm also contributed to the agentic *°* nature of the work. I realised that in speaking with the public I could talk about the message or concept in the work. It was significant to explain the process to people who were interested but had not seen this type of work before. An important new strategy for me, to collapse a hierarchical power structure, would be to stage more art and ephemera events where I can engage with the public and challenge attitudes. These opportunities for my work and a chance to meet other artists, who create temporary work, emerged in *Strand Ephemera* and *In Site Out*.

**Key Examples In Site Out**

*In Site Out*, 28th October to 18th November 2007 was located in the Orange Botanical Gardens. Three artists, Gabrielle Hegyes, Jo Anglesey and Anne Lord, presented work in both *Strand Ephemera* and *In Site Out*, and spoke at the *In Site Out* forum, on 3rd and 4th November.
Hegyes worked in collaboration with Tasmanian artist Jo Anglesey to make *overlayunderlayoverlap*, a large checkerboard of black and white motifs based on natural forms (Plate 8.25). Domestic products, flour, tea and sugar were used to form the motifs and, even though they were intended to be ephemeral, some heavy rain created concern for the immediate visibility of the piece. Set in a large grassed area of the Orange Botanical Gardens, the work was visible from the buildings where the forum and opening were held. Jo Anglesey created another piece *HerStory* for *In Site Out* from lace, sugar, tea, pepper, soap powder and found objects, and stated,

… I consider the site, therefore the colonisation of this country, feminisation of space, gentrification of place, philosophical and cultural duality, white washing of our history, modernism, collection, compartmentalisation, categorising, the invisibility of domestic work and recognition of women’s history in the present and the past (Anglesey 2007, *In Site Out* catalogue).

Anglesey confirmed these ideas speaking at the *In Site Out* forum, where I also gave a paper with images. I spoke from a post-structuralist perspective about illuminating the topic with stories and conversations with the public. The audience was amused about the comment that ice would melt and I explained the significance of an audience’s new perspective from art that disappears. The
opportunity to explain the substantial preparatory work behind ephemeral ice sculptures: creating clay models; latex coatings; plaster supports or ‘mother moulds’, took months of part-time work and planning to apply my ideas to the project. This thinking time for why you do something and how people might react to it is important.

Plate 8.26 Lord (2007) *Ephemeral Characters* (detail praying kangaroo), approximately 80 x 50 x 50 cm. In Site Out, Orange New South Wales

My main work, *Ephemeral Characters*, was a praying kangaroo, and the biography entry was, ‘Practice and research about ephemera in art are influenced by environment and spirituality. The melting ice character is a metaphor for change and loss’ (Lord 2007 n.p.).

Taking my ice sculptures to *In Site Out* built on *Strand Ephemera* experiences of audience interaction. My artist’s statement (a prerequisite fifty words) was:

> The ice sculpture is about the ephemeral nature of our times. The Ephemeral Character could be a praying kangaroo, a Buddha or a woman as seen in ancient Chinese figurines. It is intended to address issues of environment and spirituality; the melting ice will be recorded as the sculptures disappear (Lord 2007, *In Site Out* catalogue).

The most revealing experiences for my work from the two events, *In SITE Out* and *Strand Ephemera*, were the forums and presentations by artists about their interpretations of ephemera. Discourse and using the artist’s voice was addressed differently at the two forums. Stephanie Radok, keynote speaker for Strand Ephemera forum 11th September 2007 and editor for *Artlink*, has contributed to art with ephemeral chalk drawings.
Radok had a number of stories and slides of work relating to ephemeral art, and relevant here was her story about making chalk drawings and having to clean them off prematurely for some dignitary’s visit to the site. The irony in creating visual work over three days, and then having to remove the work because of some authoritarian perspective, is a relevant concern for the discourse and agentic repositioning of art and ephemera. Any visitor passing by would probably not notice the images, however Radok had to remove her three days of drawing.

In Townsville, Radok’s reference to the interaction between children and my ice sculptures, specifically the ‘kangaroo angel’ was that the children had learnt and would remember by looking and asking questions about my work. Though my work is not intended to be realistic, the impact on audiences can be significant as these responses suggested. Many people questioned why an artist would make work that does not last. Voluntary and chance participants had asked ‘Why do ice sculptures?’ The narrative ‘…You could make it out of bronze’ reflects the way people might think about preserving art. It is the message in the act of the performative object: the hours of hard work in the presentation of this work and then the interaction with an audience that constitutes a memory and a new experience for the viewer and the artist.
Children were accepting of and imaginative about the ephemeral mythological creatures I produced for the tropics. Many responded by patting the gecko or kangaroo. Whereas the adult might say ‘It must have been interesting before it started to melt,’ many children accepted the melting and the disappearance. Both the creation and disappearance of these works were important as parts of a process of acceptance. An audience participant said, ‘…that is temporary, just ice blocks melting,’ but in the person’s realisation of the act, the same person reflects on why art is allowed to melt, and how much, and what we need to archive. Art as something that is destined to disappear in hours or less time can be compared with the most precious artwork preserved over centuries as cultural world heritage icons. In this scenario, the ice sculpture does not rate as significant. In this way, artists might ask questions through art and ephemera to challenge preconceived notions, and the audience can feel confronted by art that disappears, is demolished or removed. I ask questions about loss of form in the context of the natural environment and the local ecology, such as how a form can present, inherently, within its ability to decompose, a strategy or message about the way things erode.
A contrast within work installed on site in *Strand Ephemera* (2007) is evident in the large storage containers brought to The Strand to house more permanent (precious) work during the ten-day event. These large metal containers were locked at night, and in *Strand Ephemera* could be considered a contradiction, a visual oxymoron. The blatantly permanent storage containers held artworks that were either too precious or vulnerable to be left on The Strand overnight. These works were substantial in the content displayed, though this strategy pushed the boundaries of what was supposedly an ephemeral art event. In these cases work secured in a container for ten days would be ephemera for some artists, even if the work were not.

In my study I exclude semi-permanent figurative work for its apparent ability to remain intact and be re-situated in a “white cube gallery”*. My alternative reading of Sharon Crowe’s (2007) *Drifter*, a crocodile made from driftwood, technically an ephemeral piece, finds the work primarily unintended as ephemeral. A crocodile made from driftwood is easily accepted as a clever sculpture for an audience to know and accept, and *Drifter* won the public choice award. *Drifter* was therefore positioned or empowered by the public through links with the familiar, the permanent and the tangible. Thus in art and ephemera there is discourse that positions the range of possible art in a hierarchical structure. Art pieces that fit with ideas of technically proficient and identifiable images appeal to many of the public. Even some of the art industry audience would see less stable art and fleeting glimpses of shifting sand or ice, as less valued.

History in the visual arts is continuously re-written through a dominant discourse. The artworks discussed in prominent publications with a centralised high art perspective are often bigger, splashier and promoted in more costly ways than art in the peripheries. Further, work in the centre that contributes to a mega-performance or blockbuster showcasing of art is surveyed by a large audience. This is contrary to my pursuit of art and ephemera where I am interested in the ephemeral as anti-commodity and anti-archival. Gibson (2007) recognised my interests in humble work as a contribution to art and ephemera.
‘Highly ephemeral’ art implies change over a short time where artists make use of explosive devices for varying conceptual reasons. My research identifies with ephemera for reasons inherent in ideas about slower natural processes of change and my focus on this quality emerged with the exclusion of other artists’ references to accelerated change. Thus artworks involving explosive or violent disintegration are marginal for my study, for instance Michael Tuffery’s and Patrice Kaikilekofe’s Pisupo Mk II (1996) in the Third Asia Pacific Triennial (Queensland Art Gallery 1999, 226). This work, a large bull made from corned beef cans incorporated mechanical movement and disintegrated with fireworks. Tuffery and Kaikilekofe’s work explicates a violent process that I propose is less appropriate for my exploration of art and ephemera, though appropriately, their work implies strong messages involving preserved tinned-food and loss of traditionally sustainable food.

In this chapter I have highlighted Australian artists’ valued concepts and practices involving ephemera. I found that a chasm lies between what artists of ephemera value and what their traditional counterparts, artists working for a commercial market in art, would value. Similarly many curators and conservators value the reliable archival artists’ material for collections and museum display. The agentic cause for art and ephemera is seen as a semi-controlled but evocative process that contemplates time and change as a profound part of the cultural and iconic resemblance of composting. The conceptual development in my work addresses the topic for deliberate and slow time-based change. This idea is taken up in Chapter Nine, with a focus on the object as performative.
Chapter Nine

9.0 Objects and Passing

*My premise*

Art objects that disintegrate, melt into and merge with their surroundings until they are indistinguishable from their natural environment are desirable.

In this chapter the idea of the disintegration process as loss moves to the idea of disintegration as transition. The significance of the icon for art and ephemera is complemented by the artist’s creation of an object with an enduring capacity to impact on memory, though not as an archived object. That is, the *performative object* can be made complete as an art statement through memory. Similarly, metaphor and metonym may underlie the concept and process of art and ephemera, and can trigger audience responses to objects that disappear or disintegrate as part of that process. Though an artwork is taken away or no longer available for viewing, its role in memory is crucial for understanding and empowering an art of ephemera. This aligns with my process, allowing the disintegrating object to be a metaphor for cyclical processes in the natural environment.

Further in this chapter my praxis adopts the digital capture of shadows and fragile, tangible objects where this has relevance to refer to the act of change. In some instances the images document the Buddhist’s humble practice of “letting go”. In this area, as in Chapter Seven, I present the ideas inherent in art and ephemera to artists as a method to enhance art through temporary projects: the transitional experience proposed in this chapter requires publicity and for artists to agree to the passing object as a necessary pragmatic, twenty-first century idea. It can be, at the same time, a beautifully aesthetic and expendable product. For instance, Pierre Huyghe’s (2008) *The Valley Obscured by Clouds* renamed *A Forest of Lines*, was a
24-hour event in the Sydney Opera House 9th to 10th July 2008. Lasting from noon to noon, it is part of the expendable idea, though not necessarily a light footprint, as the piece required the Sydney Opera House concert hall to be emptied. In order to know these works through memory it is necessary to have experienced the work through seeing the ephemeral nature of the work, and I revisit the idea of phenomenological experience for ‘art and ephemera’ as it requires that the object does transform.

Meaning and Transition

Identifying meanings for art is critical for appreciating the position of objects in art and ephemera and how meaning is adopted here. Bourriaud (2002) advises the reader to turn to his Glossary for a definition of ‘Art’ and presents two entries for art. The first is traditional, in that ‘Art’ is a ‘General term describing a set of objects presented as part of a narrative known as art history’ (Bourriaud 2002, 107) and in my thesis archived art belongs to this narrative. Bourriaud’s second glossary entry for art presents a radically new perspective, pertinent here:

> Nowadays, the word “art” seems to be no more than a semantic leftover of this narrative, [art history, painting, sculpture, architecture] whose more accurate definition would read as follows: *Art is an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects* (Bourriaud 2002, 107) [researcher’s italics].

Bourriaud’s second entry “art” challenges dominant discourse and the status quo for making and seeing art. The earlier “semantic leftover” indicates for Bourriaud a change of narrative was imminent. My understanding is that art has the ability to transport the creator / viewer / reader / listener beyond the everyday, and yet in contemplation of the everyday. Revisiting our relationship with an understanding of the world through investigation and creative activity provides artists with a challenge, not just to see the world afresh but also to negotiate some of its complications. Art and ephemera has less to do with formal elements of design or abstract notions of aesthetics and this juncture is where the anti-commodity nature of the ephemeral or disintegrating object comes into play. The ephemeral object as
art can disrupt the art canon of collectable archived art (sometimes distanced from quotidian occurrences), for deeper engagement with contemporary issues. My study intends to upset while it creates meaning for viewing the eroding object as art.

For Carter and Geczy (2006) the digital can free the materiality of art to ‘…get beyond the preciousness of Art objects and uncover the true purpose of art, which is to free our minds’ (Carter and Geczy 2006, 227). Though a poststructuralist perspective doubts the word true, their concept has profound implications for art and ephemera in relation to digital immateriality. In this digital realm, Carter and Geczy’s urgency to “get beyond the preciousness of Art objects” removes necessity for the tangible object. Digital is often still an object, though the ease of recording the intangible makes a huge impact on art and ephemera as a viable alternative for art practitioners and the digital realm is a practical option for the dissemination of art and ephemera.

These various options for production, installation and promotion of art to a global audience invite disparate art. My concerns link the themes in my study and some options for art praxis. I consider a number of concepts for the complex relationship of artist with art and ephemera, issues behind their work and contribution to new knowledge.

Figure 9.1 Lord, Diary Drawing 25 September 2007
My ideas emerged with a textual drawing in my diary (Figure 9.1) representing the complexity of structuring and developing the analysis of the performative object as art and ephemera in relation to larger issues. My themes are identified for this analysis and shown as reciprocal to indicate the *inter-relationship* of issues for art and ephemera. My ideas might have been explained in a more complicated drawing than Figure 9.1, however my concepts in relation to this diagram moved from a two to three dimensional format that encapsulated cultural and environmental relationships. This was an important realisation in concert with Bourriaud’s ‘relational aesthetics’. My themes contribute to complex ideas in a model that relates to theorising and practice moving from objects to transformative experiences.

Themes identified in 9.1 are expanded in Figure 9.2 where my disintegrating objects are part of a bigger picture and artists could be mainstream or regional (Burn 1992, Lippard 1997, 2006).

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**Figure 9.2 Disintegration and Ephemera as Object: Themes in Art and Ephemera**

- **Locality**
- **Responsibility for place**
- **Understanding of place + Spiritual beliefs**
- **Disintegration, waste, decay and ephemera as object in art + digital documentation**
- **Artists and their work**
- **Objects fabricated and disintegrating: commodity + anti-commodity**
- **Resonance with natural environment**
These themes contribute to my understanding of cycles, but more importantly for the study, they led to some results that would encompass thematic parts through metaphor and object, and link with Butler’s (2005) ‘performative object.’ Both Bourriaud and Butler provided evidence of the object as part of a broader relational situation leading to my adoption of the ready-made object as applicable to my art, from my themes and evolving perspective. This practice incorporates earth, ice, humus and ready-mades. My ephemeral artworks: the impossible bucket (2005 - 2008), the bottomless billy (2005 - ongoing) and an axe head with no back (2006 - ongoing), (Plate 5.10) have either disintegrated or are in my studio, though in an installation or publication, they act as metaphors and as performative objects.

Merewether’s (2006) compilation Archive created antitheses for art and ephemera, and further consideration. Some entries provide a sense of balance in the research, and expose the dichotomies available in archived and ephemeral artwork. Archive as a conceptual arena enabled a space to see artists’ ephemeral production in this dichotomy and through the post-structuralist lens. For instance, Hiller’s (1994) contribution identifies her collection of ‘something that’s been thrown away or rubbish, of no value,’ and she states that the boxes she makes, present the viewer with a word (title), thing (object) or representation (image, text or chart): ‘And the three aspects hang together (or not) in some kind of very close relationship which might be metaphoric or metonymic’ (Hiller 1994, 42 cited in Merewether 2006). Similarly Malanggan rites of passage (Küchler and Melion 1991) exemplify relationships between conceptual usage of metaphor and metonym in contemporary art and traditional culture.

Renée Green (2002) addressed the archive and the dichotomy or binary through memory and film (digital and / or moving image) as a ‘memory receptacle’ (Green 2002 cited in Merewether 2006). Comparably, Michel Foucault’s (1969) account of archive encapsulates appearance and disappearance:

It is obvious that the archive of a society, a culture or a civilization cannot be described exhaustively; or even, no doubt, the archive of a whole period. On the other hand, it is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from
within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity and disappearance (Foucault 1969, 29 cited in Merewether 2006).

Foucault’s inclusion of archive as discourse preceding systems such as ‘disappearance’ involves the examination of how the archival can stand in for the object denying loss of memory and reference to the past. Similarly my use of the word ephemera requires both appearance and disappearance. Ephemera in conjunction with art triggers new potential through reflection, to learning over time with memory and through age-old references to previous cultures and traditions. This is about enabling a loss or absence, and a consideration and empowerment of ephemera in art. My transition from archive to ephemera is discussed in the next section.

**From Archival to Ephemeral Artwork**

In my use of overlapping themes about resources, people, time and place I promote the local in my *known place*, one that has impacted greatly on the formulation of ideas and work. In this way, I recognise that individuals will call attention to issues on a broad scale through their local identification of an issue.

Plate 9.1 Lord 2003 *Water Willow*¹ from the Survivor Series lithograph, 56 x 76 cm [photograph Lord]

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¹ This lithograph is one of seven from the series *Survivor Trees* 2003.
Artists could identify with art and ephemera as part of a bigger picture that is inherent in their own place as a small but potent sign. In my archival praxis I have drawn attention to environment and human relationships to these natural places. Water Willow (Plate 9.1) and eroding survey pegs (Plate 9.2) are just visual signs of art and ephemera. My new investigation into potent acts of creating an art of ephemera is through an appreciation of indicators, such as disintegrating tools.

Plate 9.2 Lord 2005 Eroded Survey Pegs, graphite on paper [photograph Lord]

Tools as potential metaphors parallel Hiller’s reference to boxes as metaphors and metonyms for ‘word, thing or representation’ (Hiller 1994, 42). Applying the idea of object as metaphor assists my argument to involve awareness of global concerns. Though my practical interest and specialization for this study is that I don’t make things to last, I also draw still images where I see visual signs of decay. Water Willow visually interrupts the change cycle in that an image can freeze a moment, in this case a tiny native Water Willow tree survives amongst dead foliage, bones and splinters of wood. In seeing a way to draw and / or digitise ephemera, I also have to address whether it is unnecessarily duplicitous to make both archival and ephemeral work. For me there are ways to restrict quantity and refine quality of archive and ephemera. My further development of little three-dimensional models that could disintegrate enabled an art product that could be sacrificed. Images of these objects could possibly assist realisation about the extent to which individuals impact on natural cycles and how they could be more aware of human demands having a negative impact on the re-occurrence of these life-supporting cycles.
Plate 9.3 Lord (2007) Hammerhead in display case for *Tools of Change* exhibition at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts

Plate 9.4 Lord 2007, left *spike*, right *bolt* each 150 x 180 cm. plan copies and carborundum on paper, *Tools of Change* installation, Umbrella Studio

The issues identified by artists, and through my work, investigating the potential for the art object to disintegrate, could instil in viewers an appreciation of the carbon
cycle, the water cycle and other natural processes. These cycles are exactly those that we depend on for maintaining balance in the natural environment, and it is crucial for humans to understand how we impact on these. Thus in this research for art and ephemera I have worked towards presenting opportunities for a viewing public to consider how the balance inherent in cyclical change can be maintained. Having made this point about identifying art and ephemera as a process for people to take notice of, I also suggest that it is something for artists to aspire to. The following sections involve the artist’s capacity and vision for the object in art and ephemera. In order to do this I highlight issues of anti-commodity and the critical link with art that does not last.

Commodity and Anti-commodity

Commodity and anti-commodity are useful binaries to analyse related complex ideas for art and ephemera as an alternative to a saleable, resource-hungry art practice. Reappraisal of the attention to commercial benefits derived from art, rather than creativity and associated benefits to society, is part of my continued investigation of models and mentors. There are different ways to look at material use and for the artist to contribute to a cycle of regeneration in a world that is so hungry for new commodities. Ashton (2007) stated:

Anne is more concerned about conveying the message of “what should she and each of us do when we have finished using or admiring something”. Her art-research quest is to overtly respect the circular process for all re-sources, the environment from which ALL things are derived and to which they will return. In this deep philosophical eddy there is blurring between art, artefact, antique, heirloom, implement and junk. There is no end point or 'rubbish' in this cyclical philosophy of change… only generation and regeneration (extract opening speech Tools of Change 16/02/2007 u.p., Appendix XIX).

My fast tracking of the ephemeral in an installation means the work is inherently anti-commodity. The potential for artists to shift a viewer’s attitude is apparent in art, particularly with the erosion or regeneration of the art object. The vignette, ‘it will melt!’ and the subsequent paradigm shift for the viewer, realising the art object’s loss is a metaphor, contributes further to this discourse and attempts to
present a similar message to the curator. Various means to upset a preconceived notion of what art is, and how it might or might not last, have been addressed by artists such as John Cage, Marcel Duchamp and Nam June Paik. In my contextualisation of anti-commodity, Paik (1969) contributes to continuous questioning, of what art is and a critique of commodity:

- The word is the most profound medium (Plato)
- Sound is the most profound medium (St Augustine)
- Sight is the most profound medium (Spinoza)
- …this old controversy has been settled …
- …commercials have all three of them.


Nam June Paik exposed a new dilemma for artists where commerce has taken over much of the previous emphasis on expressive and expendable work, such as art happenings (Henri 1974). Nam June Paik’s *Electronic Super Highways: Bill Clinton Stole my Idea*, (1993) a pamphlet, proposed an electronic super highway in 1974 (*Venice Biennale* 1993, 173, 176-177). Paik presents the printed word as a powerful tool to contribute an artist’s democratic vision to a mainstream event. His work reiterates and strengthens the publication or manifesto as a tool for art, and has implications for my conclusion where publication, especially online, sits with art and ephemera and is not a replacement for it. These examples are predominantly about communicating ideas, and though the discipline is visual arts, the product is not so much a commodity as a tool to communicate a message.

Major artists have created work that is powerful in concept, yet remains a mix of humble ephemeral actions through dissimilar notions of material and change. The apparent diversity of material use for art and ephemera became apparent during the development of this study. I selected art practice that resonated with my researcher ~ artist practice. Thus glossy imagery is inappropriate for my presentation, rather I chose a worn aesthetic indicated in fragile medieval and Tang sculptures of the 600s to 1300s. Where publication via the digital creates a shiny, polished and flawless image or surface, my apparent aesthetic, in the search for a disintegrating

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2 Paik’s work is reproduced as a quarto page layout and text.
icon of change and renewal, requires an earthy quality. In these 2005 - 8 works the earthy quality leading to more compost, even,\(^3\) defies commercial interest in art.

My idea of various material options for creative ephemeral artwork has been expanded with examples from innovative artists who challenged the art canon, and what it stood for. They often included unorthodox and unexpected material, leading to art as a non-commercial product. Twentieth century artists mentioned in Chapter Five were responsible for inspiring a great number of artists. A re-interpretation of this earlier art and materials is vital in a twenty-first century context. Artists who experimented and diversified from these earlier activities have grown exponentially and some provide examples that emphasise the performative nature of art objects. Many of these artists have developed their own visual language for installation in some extraordinary art events. These mentoring artists have facilitated my reflection on the workshop *Leave No Trace*, and how I developed my own work from this experience. In the next section I include my work and key artists who have influenced this development.

**Objects: Fabricated to Change**

This section advances my realisation of what a national park can offer artists for art and ephemera. Warrgamaygan Country (Wallaman Falls National Park) and the fallen log (Plate 8.4) seen during *Leave no trace* enabled me to review my own collection of rotting stumps and tree mulch in the studio-garden. The huge log, rotting at Wallaman Falls, created an awareness of the treasures in my back yard, in this case the rotting and perforated logs in the bush-house.\(^4\) Trees that self-planted and reached a height too big for a suburban garden bush-house were cut down in 1994. The logs were kept as a souvenir of the trees that had grown through the bush-house roof. This was a case of keeping logs that could only disintegrate and

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\(^3\) Duchamp’s title ‘The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even’, 1920 is referenced here.

\(^4\) Protected garden enclosure, thatched and / or covered with mesh.
on reflection I was waiting for an unidentified purpose.

Warrgamaygan Country created an opportunity to revise the way I see the environment. Conversations with artists in the workshop strengthened my conviction that the natural environment is a key to my work. Antagonistic responses from those who make archival art to my formulating ideas of art and ephemera ensured that I would challenge the canon with confidence to make work that didn’t have to last. The humus in these decomposing logs became the significant material inherent in ephemeral objects.

In creating a metaphor for my analytical framework, *The Impossible Bucket* (Lord 2005 - 2008), (Plate 9.24), with many holes and a flimsy handle was intentionally a useless object. The humus bucket resisted the intended function of a bucket, its capacity to hold liquid or matter. More significantly it could not hold the precious resource, water. This signals awareness and problem solving, and potential to re-engage with attitudes to conservation. In my diary notes, 25 May 2007, my question was, ‘Have we left the response to environmental crisis too late?’ In the construction of a thesis for art and ephemera, I return to misunderstandings about cultural conditions, what we use, why we use it and what we take for granted. My impossible bucket mirrored my concern, as an anti-commodity performative object. Transition, as an idea in art and ephemera, relates to this development of the *impossible bucket* (Lord 2005 - 2008).

This contrasts with 1970s site work where artists used disintegrating objects in Conceptual Art for formal problems even when the artist destroyed the art object. For example, a house cut in half (Matta-Clarke) and a truck-full of asphalt poured down a cliff (Smithson), as well as a woodshed half covered in earth (Smithson), were artworks framed as Conceptual Art pieces created by artists asking questions about form or “formlessness” (Krauss 1997). Renée Green re-investigated Smithson’s *partially buried woodshed* through the ‘notions of sites as memory as well as site-specific work’ (Green 2006, 50). Green found
… a cancelling out effect can also be thought of in relation to absences, lacunae, holes which occur in the midst of densities of information, as well as amidst their lack (Green 2006, 49 and 55).

Green (2006) and Bois and Krauss (1996) provide contemporary reflection on artists who address these absences / lacunae in art. This is relevant for my investigation of art objects that do not last and these authors provide theoretical explanations about “formlessness,” as precedents for contemporary issues.

Curators of the Venice Biennale (1993) and the Biennale of Sydney (2008) showcase works by Duchamp, Cage and Pistoletto, (precursor artists for this study). The artists in these exhibitions provide a cross-section of those who work with archive and ephemera, and blur areas between. Crimmin (2007) referred to Beuys, who took activism, ‘as far as becoming involved in politics’, and Haacke, who has been referred to as ‘the conscience of the world.’ Both artists have provided significant examples of the object as forsakeable in art. For Crimmin, Hans Haacke’s work Germania (1993), in the Venice Biennale German Pavilion was one of the most powerful works she had ever seen. Similarly, the experience of the broken floor and the name Germania on the far wall impacted on me as a sign of unrest.

Haacke’s artwork, smashed floor pieces of the German Pavilion as a political comment (Venice Biennale 1993, 174-5).


Where some artists create imagery from a discrete object, other artists, for instance, Pierre Huyghe (2008) The Valley Obscured by Clouds; A Forest of Lines, and artist
Avital Geva in (1993) *Greenhouse* installation (Plate 9.6), address involvement directly through installations as comments about environmental change.

Though incredible change has happened for “art and environment” over fifty years, curators predominantly include more artists from the canon in preference to lesser-known contemporary artists. These established artists, in relation to the newer names, provide important and accessible information, though they sometimes convey and maintain some modernist history. Art practice that re-emerges and provides proximity to environment is demonstrated through the work of Geva (1993 *Greenhouse*), Nikoloski (1993 *Spaces XXXIV Magic Forest 1989-99*) (Plate 9.5) and Trockel (2007 *Less Sauvage than Others*) (Plates 9.8-910). In these cases the performative work is not disintegrating per se but acts as part of a site integral with growing vegetation. Nikoloski, Trockel and Geva create visual models showing that “anti-commodity art on site” has a strong link to “art and ephemera” identifying with contemporary issues.


to create work that is intrinsic to vegetation and growth, implying reintegration into
natural surroundings. They do this visually and in actuality. Where a curator of
white box gallery installation could deny this ability to take work into a
disintegrating and potentially regenerative element, these artists encourage the
process whereby the work starts to be reclaimed almost immediately, into the site.

Nikoloski’s (1993) installation on site is
large enough to walk
through, (photographed
with figures leaving the
tunnel at the far end).

Plate 9.7 Petre Nikoloski *Spaces XXXIV Magic Forest*, (1989 - 99) installed

Closely reminiscent of the structural aspect of this work is Rosemarie Trockel’s
(2007) *Less Sauvage than Others* in the Muenster Sculpture Project, referred to by
Haberer (2007), ‘Two cuboids of dense dark-green yew coppice line the bank of the
Aasee’ where:

…a narrow tapered opening between the cuboids reveals the sole high-rise on the
other side of the lake …The view through the staggered single cuboids is not
constructed as a vanishing point, but has arisen first and foremost, out of the
architectonic of the elements (Haberer 2007, 245).
Trockel’s piece will last as vegetation beside the lake, however it is interesting to read Haberer’s conclusion about a series of Trockel’s work where ‘visibility emerges through displacement into a state of repose by means of casts, filling, cuts, or moulding…(Haberer 2007, 245). For Haberer (2007) ‘persistence in a form promises tangibility’ and

… the material used in the representation becomes “terza natura” by way of abstraction and transformation, turn[s] into something new between autonomous sculpture and momentarily captured form (Haberer 2007, 245).
Haberer suggests that the piece changes in nature though not whether the intention for this work is to maintain its current state through vigilant pruning. In the case of this not happening, the art is directly related to a passing icon rather than a preserved iconic sculpture. Significantly, Muenster supports the once in a decade Sculpture Project, thus maintaining contingent art.

Plate 9.10 Rosemarie Trockel (2007), Less Sauvage than Others [photograph Sculpture Projects Muenster 07, 247]

Trockel had drawn her sculptural images as two-dimensional precursors. It took me years to develop my models into three-dimensional objects of disintegration and I concede that two-dimensional drawings, sketches or archival work also contribute to development of ephemeral objects.

Where much contemporary art requires professional art industry personnel for maintenance, even the renowned Buddhist icons of Datong in northwest China are not preserved or re-enacted, thus remain vulnerably eroding icons of dedication with, and in, nature. Taking my cue from the profound icons in the Yungang Caves, I re-used them as objects of reverence, “ready-mades” in Absence (2004) to raise
questions about absence in the environment, through my juxtaposition of severely eroded fifth century Buddhist icons with icons of the Australian land and dry rivers ‘running’ to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Plate 9.11 Lord (2004) [detail] Absence installation ‘permanent’ markers on plastic 900 x 1100 cm below eroded Buddha images from Yungang Caves near Datong, and earth on plastic

Absence required the internal space of the gallery for the juxtaposition of east and west to occur on opposite walls. The rivers were mapped on plastic 900 x 1100 cm. with ‘permanent’ markers and I made walking over the plastic and marked rivers imperative by taking the plastic right up to the doors and walls. This necessitated
walking over the work and challenged any permanence of mark or river. Eroded riverbanks are almost sacred to me as precious icons of the country I grew up in. These riverbeds often have no water in them until a wet season brings floods, possibly for just one or two months a year.

My reference to the great rivers of Northwest Queensland is due to the land I know through my upbringing. The extremes, of dry eroded creek banks and floodwaters running to the Gulf, contribute to nutrients for the famous fishing industry in the gulf. This fact underlies the understanding of complex balances in our natural environment, where misinformed removal or taking from one system impacts negatively on the ecology of another. Cultures worldwide demonstrate respect for their natural surroundings and show evidence of understanding the subtleties and extremes of nature. In these cultures, balances in nature are also represented in art. The grace and posture of Tang riders on their horses and camels, or the great landscape traditions of Europe with careful depiction of details in the land are testament to these understandings of, and respect for, the forces of nature.

In my work I pay tribute to the natural environment and places I know well, where drought and flood have given me a great understanding of human insignificance and excessive power of the natural environment. My awareness of these powers led to interventions into the installation space with intentional references to the fragility of the digitised icons through eroded limestone on the plastic flooring. Small mounds of crushed limestone under the images of eroded Buddhist icons allude to absence. Further references to Absence are included in Appendix IX, where I bring some visual elements of my work together for the study. The next section refers to artists in the Australian context and ideas of change in objects.

Cultural Metaphors and Ephemera

Artists have made new and influential practice involving ephemera, and I address how these have impacted on my creative decision-making. In this section I identify
further performative objects. In response to questions, such as ‘How will my research empower art and ephemera?’ my study initially set out to investigate how artists and writers address their art through concepts, and as practice-driven research. Madonna Staunton states

> What is left over after the business of living is what interests me. We make our way through tons of packaging and disposable stuff each day. People tend not to notice litter…I like to introduce urban iconography, waste, scraps, scrapings of the city tissue…(Staunton cited in University Art Museum 1979, 2).

Staunton’s text provides new ways to look and her relationship with Fluxus allows glimpses into how her work develops. Though not ephemeral in the course of an exhibition (we cannot see anything move or, more critically, fall apart) we see always the idea of her noticing “scrapings”.


Staunton’s *Philosopher’s Garden* demonstrates her tendencies to make art, home and life seamless.

Zurbrugg relates Staunton’s work as ‘an intimate, modest art; the more powerful for its lack of self-conscious bravado, and for its careful elucidation of concurrent minor registers’ (Zurbrugg 1994 reprinted 2003, 11). Joan Grounds has developed work over decades in sympathy with natural environments (Plate 8.1 *Transpoes*) and shares with Staunton an iconic use of objects in proximity with the natural environment. The de-emphasis of archive in some work by Grounds and Staunton creates new ambience for my thesis through ideas about change and their incorporation of the intricacies of ephemera and time in their work.
Grounds’ work in *Transpoes* involves the subtle and humble object. In this study of the object that disintegrates, the ephemeron is not always easy to identify, in other words it is not outlandishly volatile. In many ways the integrity of the ephemeral piece is related to the way artists see issues today, and how they enable their work to respond to these issues. Many art installations are reliant on a themed common material and my themed analysis through attitude to waste, the object and its eventual decay encompasses reflection on art and ephemera. The ultimately regenerative aspect of this work contributes to this analysis.

The synchronous concerns of the artist Staunton and author Hawkins (2006), contribute to a code of wanting to take responsibility for the things we consume and leave behind. These attitudes meet with my desire to collect things from the street, garden or other source of rubbish or decaying matter (Chapter Eleven). Hawkins (2006) encapsulates a critical point about the potential to see both sides of the waste and recycling culture:

> Commodity cultures show how waste as a practice of excess can be free of negative connotations. The invitation to shop, shop, shop suppresses any mention of waste. The desire to possess and accumulate things is completely disconnected from the issue of how commodities are produced and where they end up once we decide they’re valueless. Constant consumption is framed as an expression of personal freedom and choice. But the other side of it is the freedom to waste, to discard things that are still perfectly useful (Hawkins 2006, viii).

These concepts about a primarily Western commodity fetish and throwaway society exist in Barbara Kruger’s *Untitled (I shop therefore I am)* (1987) (Plate 9.13).

Kruger’s image is also turned into a saleable object as a brown paper shopping bag (1990) in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, where the original message is subverted by the museum.

The Google search for "I shop therefore I am" uncovered many references to questioning commodity as art, and art as commodity. Similarly Hawkins (2006) developed an argument for an ethics of waste and addressed the potential for change in attitude. This coincides with my study where thoughtless production of art as commodity can be viewed as problematic in the twenty-first century. My case studies demonstrate adopted strategies or alternative vision for creating art, and less commodity, where art and ephemera statements might still deal with aesthetics but do not have to be sold.

My aspirations for this study are verified in Hawkins’ (2006) work and I recognised her strategic use of binaries to illustrate points. Whereas my study considers the problem of over-consumption in the art industry, and a celebration of the disintegrating object as a potentially redeeming element through return to the earth or humus, Hawkins’ (2006) shares a concern for waste:

> Poor waste; environmentalism infuses it with a metaphysical dimension that makes it stand for death. Images and stories about its horrifying presence are used so constantly to stage our fears about the end of the world that its vital place in the care of the self and everyday life is constantly overlooked. … I want to redress this situation, to give waste the attention it deserves (Hawkins 2006, 13).

Hawkins’ statement ‘to take notice of those abandoned things’ (Hawkins 2006, 13) resonates with my practice that incorporates abandoned icons from art and nature and shares an aesthetic with the Japanese concept wabi-sabi (Koren 1994). Wabi-sabi is also relevant for refining the notion of imperfection or unravelling as an aesthetic basis for artwork. With concepts of long deep time and the highly ephemeral, the first, change over long deep time is related to appreciating value in iconic changes and an aesthetic realised in the slow disintegration of an object.

The unintentional disintegration of ‘women’s work’ (Plates 9.14 and 9.15) from Northwest Queensland connects with wabi-sabi (Koran 1994) and the local object as clues to place and time. Unravelling, though not used in my work, was discussed by Gibson (2007) as one of the subtle changes in a garment appreciated in wabi-sabi.
Margaret Lyne, a Northwest Queensland pioneer, re-applied three pieces of fabric for domestic use. The slightly unravelling and marked pieces indicate their acquired age, and link to my appreciation of *wabi-sabi* transferred to a remote Queensland context in a financial depression.

Plate 9.14 *Margaret Lyne re-applied fabric 1930s [photograph Lord]*

Old fabrics reference a place and time in the 1930s where cotton flour sacks, worn-out garments, hessian sugar-bags, kerosene tins and wooden cases were re-applied for new purposes. I recognise the potential to be guided by age-old wisdom, evident in many cultures and there are some things that remain the same in a conceptual outlook, respectful and irrespective of age, evident in the present. These consistencies, such as valuing the fading beauty of a garment, or the intended imperfection in a ceramic piece, can be seen through the dichotomy of a creative ~ destructive binary in a post-structuralist perspective. Processes involving the disintegration of form are valued as creative and regenerative tools in this collapsed binary.

Plate 9.15 *Margaret Lyne cut lace and worn threads 1920s [photograph Lord]*
In my practice the gentle ephemera of disintegration was of more value when it showed subtle signs of slow change and the potential to return to the earth. Thus my drawings relate to slow disintegration and include icons containing disintegrating metal, aged wood and decomposing humus. Found objects showing major signs of disintegration through oxidation as rust include a steel spike, a large nail, garden tools, an axe head (with no back) (Plate 5.10) and a bottomless billy (missing the bottom half). The impossible bucket (Plate 9.24), made with pervious, fibrous material, was only possible after my exposure to disintegrating icons and reflection on the relationship of these to the processes occurring in the natural environment. The frustrated positioning of these items mirrors their capacity, or lack of it, to act in their usual manner, or for their intended conventional use.

Leaving any lasting impression or tangible object raises problems for me, as an artist advocating ephemera. Seeking a solution to the problems mentioned in the production and disintegration of ephemeral objects leads to assisting memory of their performances through digital capture. In consideration of this, my communication of thoughts was primarily through the performative object and the digital visualisation of this object. The photographic series of dis-placed survey pegs re-placed on the huge fallen tree trunk in Wallaman Falls National Park holds exciting images for me, where the chalk outline of the peg is on a crumbled surface of deteriorating log, (Plate 9.16 and 9.17). Plate 9.17 formed the last and most disintegrated image of the absent survey peg out of eight photographs. They form a diptych containing four sections each of survey pegs, from clearly defined to no definition (Appendix XXIII, DVD). Photographed during Leave No Trace these pegs as icons were temporarily placed in a location. Artists’ discussions on site, introduced in Chapter Eight nurtured ideas and in many of the resulting works, concepts were developed with little or no requirement for commercial fulfilment.
Colours and textures of materials take on those similar to earth or clay, or their immediate environment. The digital photographing of many of these objects in their surroundings, where a blurring of object and environment takes place, builds on earlier models where the performative object merges with its environment.
Plate 9.18 Lord (2005) *Peg on a rotting log* graphite on paper

The lithograph *Peg on a rotting log* (Plate 9.18) contradicts my performative objects, as it is printed on traditionally archival rag paper. However while it is a piece that relies on the *status quo* of archive and display in a gallery, it is a work that also depicts disintegration and displacement as a concept underlying my theme of the eroding object, and belongs to my selective use of archive.


Similar to my developmental work at Wallaman Falls workshop, where trees and environment created a set of criteria to work with, Brisbane-based artist Eugene Carchesio’s residency in Tokyo, Japan, contributed to his acknowledgment that ‘an aesthetics of decay [has] … a resonance within Zen Buddhism’ (Carchesio cited by
Helmrich 2002a, 13). Carchesio’s watercolour series of leaves, *From Nothing series 1*, creates meaning through the changing states of dying leaves. Colours and twisted forms of leaves play a vital part in relation to something returning to earth.


Carchesio’s leaves do not have a surrounding environment to disappear into, and this work is not ephemeral in that it does not allow disintegration in the space of an exhibition. However Carchesio’s aesthetic of working on paper, often very thin and fragile, as well as the topic of deteriorating leaves, resonate with my study as does his sensitivity to passing icons and change. Similarly, old icons on hillside sites in China provided some evidence of creative work that could demonstrate an aesthetic in degradation.
Ephemeral Ready-mades

Chinese art and culture including icons and implements that span two thousand years have influenced my reading of ephemera in art. In 2003 I searched for visual art based on cultural and religious beliefs and wisdom about the environment. In the city Datong, north west of Beijing, and at the Yungang Caves 16 km west of Datong fifteen-hundred-year-old decaying Buddhist statues extended my knowledge about and experiences of climate and ephemera. The caves hold 51,000 statues built from around mid 500 AD and both caves and icons are in various states of erosion (Plates 9.20 and 9.21).

Plate 9.21 Lord 2004 - 5 eroding Buddha series digital 160 x 126 cm. installed in Umbrella Studio

This cultural response to ephemeral change offers comparison and contrast to Australian culture and environment. In my research for the installation, Absence (2004), the sandstone icons in Yungang caves and wooden Bodhisattvas in Datong temples were photographed in their ephemeral environment. These sandstone icons could be photographed and they formed a “ready-made” iconography of ephemera
for the digital component of the *Absence* installation, the *Eroding Buddha* series (Lord 2003 - 4).

Plate 9.22 Lord 2004 - 5 *eroding Buddha* series digital 160 x 126 cm. installed in Umbrella [photograph Lord]

The Bodhisattvas in the Hua Yan Monastery in Datong could not be photographed and I drew the flowing robes and hand gestures for my records (Plate 9.23). My realisation that these wooden figures had lasted in semi-repair over many centuries added to my concern with and inquiry into the ephemeral object and its capacity to invoke understanding of time-based change.
Ephemera as a Process

In my creative development of ephemera as an art process I adopted iconic Bodhisattvas and enigmatic eroded icons. These models assisted my recognition of profound visual statements in ephemeral processes. Though the process of finding and working with ephemeral material is exciting it is also demanding, for in the end nothing of the object will remain. This is problematic for many contemporary visual artists and artworkers in a system that promotes making a living from the sale of art. The artists’ fee for installation and showing work counters this, though more questions emerged with my creation of the elements for performative objects as they were assembled for this research and knowingly ‘let go’.

Ephemera as a process, integral to the artwork questions the need for a lasting product, and art as an illusion. It also suggests that nothing is forever. In a broad overview, there are consumers – and products that people desire. In a post-structuralist binary there is recognition of acceptance, of ‘letting go’ of desirable
objects and the development of new recognition; what becomes waste, and how it is returned to the earth. The process is about adopting change as in ephemera and seeing beauty in this process.


The *Impossible Bucket* (2004 - 2008) made of leaf matter, eroded bark and humus, needed to be full of holes. It was made with gaps, and anything that might be contained in the bucket returns through these to the earth. The connection here between returning and something falling into the container of the earth is that both are in stages of renewal. In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned disintegration as transition. Here, as in Chapter Six, my thesis draws on belief systems, such as Buddhist law, that accept that everything is in a cycle of transition. Similarly, Christian and Islamic beliefs accept that humans return to dust, and share this concept of afterlife. These precedents of belief in cyclical representation also underpin relationships between an art of ephemera and the natural environment.

The relationship between the object and its disintegration becomes clearer and entwined with documentation as an aid to the memory of the disintegration process. A bucket as a metaphor would ideally have the potential to hold the precious resource, water, but the *Impossible Bucket* (2004 - 2008) has another capacity – for water to return to the bigger container, the earth. That is, water is intended to run
through it, and this is important as well. Thus for the impossible bucket, a container that cannot hold the resource, the scenario is that the whole bucket becomes absorbed by the earth through its disintegration and in turn the earth claims the water and the bucket as part of a natural process, water and humus recycling into the earth.

Similarly, the Ice basket (2007) prepared for an ephemeral ice sculpture – is impossible as a purposeful product or object, but possible as an icon of return and a performative object. Objects lacking potential to contain anything, the Ice basket (yet to be performed onsite) or any ice sculpture in the tropics are about loss and greatly challenged as products in time. They become metaphors for time-based change and have implications of impossibility. The return or disintegration is not due to age and decay as in Impossible Bucket, but incorporates the issue of melting ice. At the end of its performance it is a memory and is a key to urgent memories of melting and climate change.

In response to my paper about art and ephemera,5 Henry (2007) raised the idea that Malanggan sculptures in New Ireland, Melanesia, are ephemeral and involve significant references to memory (Küchler and Melion 1991), (Küchler 2002). I linked this knowledge of older cultures and references to ephemera where the object can be sacrificed as a trigger for memory. The ideas recur with eroding imagery and I have connected these with ideas of memory and loss (personal and environmental). My interaction with an audience and challenging people’s expectations of art, or their desire to hold on to art, facilitated engagement with people in Townsville and Orange in 2007. Audiences confronted with disappearing ice sculptures had opportunities to see post-structuralist ascendant and descendant positions as revised priorities (Conversation with Ashton 15 September 2007). Audiences’ questions about why an artist would let a sculpture disappear assisted the viewers to reflect on the disappearing sculpture. My responses were about

5 James Cook University School of Anthropology and Social Sciences research seminar, Dr Rosita Henry asked questions that contribute to art and memory.
resources as commodities, and as artists are ‘good at slipping between institutional walls’ (Lippard 2006) my artist’s stance contributes to reflection about melting and art as commodity.

My ephemeral work is intended to illuminate the manner or way that a change of attitude can occur when a person realises ways to proceed other than with archival work. Ashton suggested there are multiple ways to create new perception, and that binary flipping is an empowering way to shift perception. Responses to my ice sculptures in the challenging tropical climate of Townsville when adult observers showed concern for small ice sculptures that melt allowed them to reconsider loss through melting. The realisations for viewers: if the ice melted it was now apparent that it did not matter to the artist; changed to, not in the way the onlooker was at first thinking. The loss of the sculpture was now seen as a statement about returning something to the place and letting go of the commodity. If the ice melted then a new manner of art, not dependent on the object was at work here. If many think that art or sculptures have to be permanent and collectable, then what was happening here in the instance of the disappearing ice Buddha, kangaroo or gecko? The vignette from the onlooker who didn’t think that geckoes had wings facilitated my reply that this was a mythological gecko.

The reticence of adults to speak, though willing to let children step in to ask about a creative act, may be about hierarchy and status, due to assumptions about how things are or have been, whether we understand, and how we can react to them. It also points to the acknowledgment that children have not had creativity suppressed and are open to suggestion and change.

The metaphor of the melting ice can include the cyclical for an analytical framework. Leakage as change is part of a perspective about return. This is also about a change of state because both the water and the performative objects are in the process of going through change continuously: they do not leave a product for

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6 I acknowledge a post-structuralist reference from Ashton (1999).
the consumer, but an idea and a memory of the work. The bucket made of humus, a pervious material, and an ice-basket made of highly ephemeral ice (especially so in the tropics), instead of being objects as containers are incapable of containing anything. They both return something to the air and the soil, and after the initial freezing require no further maintenance. I acknowledge the potential for contradictory positioning in my fabrication of ice sculptures, because I have relied on freezers and energy-hungry resources for a few days to make the ice. My projects allow the ice sculptures to disappear and the short time in a freezer is balanced by the art that is intended to melt, not requiring humidity control or archival storage after the installation.

The materials for the creative work go through change like earth through earthworms (Hawkins 2006 reference to Darwin’s research). For Hawkins, one of our problems relates to the fact that white goods are an impossible material for earthworms to consume (Hawkins 2006). In my work I prefer not to have to make things from materials such as metal or bronze, in other words the inconsumable white goods material. The imagined concept of worms trying to digest metal refrigerators or plastics in computers is almost painful, though might be humorous in a black comedy. It demonstrates dramatically why my choice is to work with humus and not bright new objects. The post-structuralist theorising of the binary re-appears in the way we make use of white goods, and how we also wish that we did not clutter up rubbish dumps with them.

Table 9.1 A Binary of Desire and Taboo, Waste and Want

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desire to use white goods</th>
<th>Desire not to clutter up rubbish dumps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distancing and taboo</td>
<td>Ownership of waste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These observations lead to another section of my analysis involving ecology and art and are discussed in Chapter Ten, Ecology, Art and Ephemera.
In the production of time-consuming and demanding artwork that cannot last I am asking people, particularly artists, to think about giving, as well as taking. Though practical art is sometimes about capturing memory through the still image, there are two different things happening at the same time, the practice-led research and the knowledge built on this action. I make this overt in the study. In the analysis of my data, empowering the performative object takes precedence. This does not deny archived work but allows a new dimension in which ephemeral art can be activated and accepted. I have increasingly sought how this might be considered from my data in order to move towards the potential ‘art and ephemera’ offers artists, writers and my post-thesis work. Some options exist in public display on site as discussed in the next section.

**Ephemeral Art Objects (Lord) 2004 - 2008**

My first ice work for this study was a head and shoulders *Ice Buddha* (Lord 2004) planned to create and hold attention through its disappearance at the opening of the exhibition / installation *Absence*. It melted during the 30ºCelcius heat of a tropical summer evening in Townsville.


On the invitation to *Absence* (2004) I advertised a ‘short performance’ and people were curious to know what this would be. Director Rebekah Butler and I both
spoke at the opening where I told the audience that the melting ice Buddha was the short performance. It was a potential challenge to the audience and a sacrifice of the artwork. *Ice Buddha* (2004) was a performative object intended to challenge the idea of archived art through melting. It was positioned in the centre of the large main gallery space on an old wooden table, draped with matte plastic and this mirrored a position of respect, seen in many Buddhist temples.

The second *Ice Buddha with wings* (*Strand Ephemera* 2007) was different in concept after a space of three years, designed for an outdoor site and interpreted as an Australian mythical creature. Performative objects in *Strand Ephemera* and *In Site Out* assisted audiences to value the disappearance of the object and actively unsettle ideas of collecting and consuming.

The unexpected death of my father while travelling in China directly influenced the way I made iconography and calligraphy. I appreciated how Chinese people constructed a sense of an afterlife through spiritual beliefs. Returning to China after my father’s funeral enabled a reassessment of my spiritual beliefs and interest in how Chinese culture reflected these issues. I also appreciated Buddha statues while experiencing great loss. In this way the *Ice Buddha* resonates with experiencing the Yungang caves and Buddhist imagery through the way sacred images erode, melt or disappear. Significant in my perception of the sculptures in the Yungang caves and other ageing works in China is the eroding factor. Mentioned in Chapter Six was the ready-made aspect of the eroding figure, but much more important in the *Absence* installation was the sense of loss and absence. On another level the loss is seen through natural environmental factors of erosion and drought.

My appreciation of these figures and their iconic stature became more meaningful through my memory, beliefs and experiences. The palimpsest of new memory and culture does not alter my position as an Australian. They add to formative experiences in Northwest Queensland and a commitment to the place of North Queensland as a cultural centre. My memories of Datong and the age of the
sculptures in a fragile sandstone cliff-face are rich, and increase my appreciation of this cultural belief transposed from India to northern China. These memories and changes in my practice involve ideas of transition, emerging in Strand Ephemera and In Site Out, and extending to new work.

Ephemeral objects made during the latter part of my study, from 2004 to 2008 are discussed here in relation to objects as passing. The construction of ice sculptures involved resources and determination to create performative objects that could be of interest as they melted. The melting ice was recorded digitally as the sculptures disappeared. Responses from people, and especially children, passing by were important for me the artist. My understanding, especially after visiting China is that we need some kind of mythological Australian creature. One woman told a colleague that the ice sculptures were the only truly ephemeral art in Strand Ephemera. It was for me a more demanding matter of timing to be letting ice go than paper or leaf matter.
Plate 9.26 Lord 2007 *Ephemeral being, praying kangaroo with wings* 80 x 50 x 60 cm. ice [photograph Lord]
During the process of creating three-dimensional ice sculptures for ephemeral events, I was very aware of how these sculptures and casts took so much energy and were dependent on exhaustible resources. Would this cancel the good intention to create an ice sculpture so it didn’t have to be archived and could provide a message in its disappearance? In the artists’ meeting for *Strand Ephemera* I said the ice sculptures were about sacrifice. This was a sacrifice of the artwork and my creative energy. It included all the time spent, making the casts and freezing, as well as the costs involved in the process of creating the models, in order to have the work disappear. Many resources are involved in the construction, in the name of ephemeral art, to say something about climate change and sustainability. Finally to watch work disappear over a period of two to twenty-four hours requires some detachment from the work.

In discussing the time and effort in making the moulds and setting ice, one person mentioned that I could just have a large ice block as an iceberg and apply a mark on one level to say how it had broken off at this point, due to global warming, and made it all the way to Townsville for Strand Ephemera. I appreciated the idea, however my efforts to prepare ice sculptures to disappear in a short space of time posed significant challenges and were intended to disrupt the status quo. Even though it was my decision, it took time and commitment to the process, knowing that the product was to be sacrificed thus presenting challenges for my artistic praxis.

The Yungang sculptures set in a drought-stricken place, and literally crumbling in the cave walls bring a new realisation to my experiences of drought and the ephemeral object. The Chinese government protects these revered Buddhist icons and many tourists visit the site and show respect for these icons.

Throughout the development of this research my artwork has changed to be not just about icon and image but the sacrifice of the art object, and a resultant transformative capacity in art. This brings together ideas of the eroding Chinese...
landscape, the eroding icon of the Buddhist faith and eroding places in Australia’s fragile environment. In the installation, *Absence*, the mix of Chinese icons and Australian rivers references the eroding land and the absence of water for much of the year. My witnessing of eroding art in the Yungang caves is matched by known erosion in dry Australian places: another trigger for art.

My small act contributes to an idea. The metaphor is about how any matter can be remoulded or reconstituted as another. Water goes somewhere. Ice goes somewhere. The theory that the flapping of a butterfly’s wings on one side of the world is related to a tidal wave on the other side of the world is potentially a valuable lesson in how to understand a melting ice sculpture. My perception, of fragility and the transient nature of ice, was transposed onto other materials from 2005 to 2008. The humus in the garden provided more evidence of change. I was investigating further use, from the capacity for rotten wood to act, and this was valuable for *Watersheds and Basins* (2006).

The solo exhibition *Watersheds and Basins* was held in conjunction with Murray Darling Palimpsest, (MDP) Mildura, the MDP website and Flinders Gallery Townsville. My catalogue states

In the journey taken by this artist the focus has changed over a number of years, from landscape to environment, to incorporate images about drought, water and survival (Lord 2006, 2).

Sherratt, Griffiths and Libby (2005), and Fullerton (2001), influenced my decision to work with these issues and materials, and to comment on the place I respect and revere as special.
The ephemeral objects in the exhibition were *Impossible Bucket* 2005 - 2008, *Ephemeral Milestone* 2006 - 2009 and *Peg for non-site* 2006 - 2009, and dates are actual and estimated times for the life of the work. The two latter stay in my studio as reminders of the ephemeron. The *Impossible bucket* broke up during torrential rain as I had left it hanging underneath external steps.

In the *Watersheds and Basins* catalogue (Appendix XVII) I wrote for an audience beyond the visual arts and stated:

> Our abuse and neglect of environment leads my investigation to where art and ecology interface and to recognise that we have now reached a point where the problems related to over-consumption call for a need to reconsider the impact of our ‘environmental footprint’. In northwest Queensland there are cases where some people already respond to these pressures (Lord 2006, 4).

Disintegrating objects from wood in a traditional gallery space presented some unease for a gallery director and audience, though these were accepted alongside traditional work. Bringing together the archival and ephemeral work from 2003 to 2006 and contributing to MDP allowed more reflection on the change from archive to ephemera in my work. In my MDP talk at Mildura, I was testing audience responses to these ephemeral objects and my perspective was from the other great basin referring to the Great Artesian Basin as a life support for most places in western Queensland.
The opportunity to have the responses from people at the other end of Australia, in another huge watershed, facilitated new processes for moving on, and increased my ideas about urgency to act on my art project. Though my investigation of found metal objects from the studio garden had already spanned ten years, these were the next focus for practice. Metal objects, with signs of disintegration, such as flaking and rust, (found as disused objects, or purchased) became data for another phase of change in my work to show long deep time.

Primary data for the exhibition and installation *Tools of Change* (2007) included the actual objects that triggered thoughts about the deterioration of metal over hundreds of years. In this case, time studied was condensed to recent history, and almost all in living memory. I used old tools to reflect on change over time and then created drawings and developed ideas about the material and processes of decay. These objects and drawings were also digitised. They included objects and titles such as a steel spike, metal hammerhead, metal axe head, handsaws, spanners, shifting-spanners, keys, hose-connector and padlock.

Many of these tools, such as the axe head and hammerhead are old designs and have been lying in the earth for many years so that the metal is weathering like the geographic ‘onion-skin’ weathering. The crumbling material and oxidation have rendered the metal so fragile that they are literally falling to pieces. The flakes of metal and apparent fragility increase the appeal of these objects as ready-made performative objects. They provide sources for art and ephemera and some art and archive. These materials and influences on them by surroundings were becoming significantly clearer as metaphors that would assist in my quest to develop an artist’s response to the implications of climate change.
Objects, Fabricated and Disintegrating

The potential for the disintegrating object to be a tool for change emerges in the developing synthesis about value found and made explicit in the deteriorating object. Augé (1995) asked

...whether there are aspects of contemporary social life that seem to be accessible to anthropological investigation, in the same way that questions of kinship, marriage, bequest, exchange, and so on, came to the attention of anthropologists of the elsewhere, initially as empirical objects, then as objects of reflection (intellectual objects) (Augé 1995, 16).

The value for my thesis in Augé’s questioning is that he finds ‘In this connection and in the context of the (perfectly legitimate) concerns about method, it is appropriate to refer to what we will call the premiss 7 of the object’ (Augé 1995, 16). Where Augé raises ‘doubts about the legitimacy of an anthropology of the near contemporaneity’, my thesis argues that an appreciation of the near and an appreciation of the passing artefact, the not so new but not yet refuse, is to be valued. In fact the reflection in this thesis is to value the things that we have in the past decided could be replaced by the bright and shiny. The value of imperfect, aged and sometimes rustic objects, (appreciated greatly in the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi), is significant in this argument. Thus many imperfect but also valuable items become powerful metaphors of change.

An important recognition for my conceptual development was in the manner that cultural heritage can empower an old artefact, where the value of the object is in the age evidenced through the crumbling sculpture or unrestored medieval object. In these old stone statues, how and when the stone is worn is not just integral to recognition of age but valuable for understanding and cultural value in an ongoing context. The idea of memory is worthy of consideration in the recognition of past and passing icons. Though we might value the restored icon, it is obvious in a museum such as the Musée Cluny in Paris, that worn stone walls and floors, broken clay artefacts, aged jewellery or splintered wooden sculptures, as icons are powerful for creating ideas and memory of the past. French appreciation and

7 ‘Premiss’ was introduced in Chapter Four, page 126 as Augé’s proposition.
support of the aged object is evident in the preservation of Roman baths and older Parisii tribal objects in places such as Musée Cluny, in the preserved sanctuary of the Parisian Latin Quarter. This tourist mecca in a capital city values the worn object. Here, maintaining the 2000 year-old heritage and built environment of these earlier times is more important than the contemporary monetary value of high-rise.

My observation of objects in art museums resounded with the disintegration of the icon in my work. The 1500 year-old icons often preserved at great cost by museums, and the deterioration in these pieces, act to remind us of their beauty through signs of age. Musée Cluny is comparable with other sites in Paris where the remains of the past are now on view to the public, amongst them, the parvis du Notre Dame, the crypts in cathedrals such as Notre Dame, Sacré Coeur, and many others. Similarly the preservation of towers in Paris, Beijing, Xi’an, such as cathedrals, bell towers and drum towers, contributes to my list of preserved but not restored objects. Museums I have visited that house objects from over 2,000 years include the British Museum, Berlin’s Reichstag Museum, Louvre Museum, Beijing and Shanghai Museums. Kassel’s Staatliche Kunstsammlungen includes collections of antique glass and jewellery. These have been instrumental in my reflection on images of change.

Museums built in colonial Australia, intended by the British to house more objects of fading cultures preserve and interrupt a process of disintegration that is usually a fast and inevitable process in tropical climates. In Hawaii’s National Museum, a feather cloak from the time of Cook’s voyage contributes to my appreciation of a significant but deteriorating icon. Australia’s National Museum in Canberra houses Aboriginal stone axes, artefacts that can no longer be legally reclaimed from any site, but must be left in the ground as a reminder of the Aboriginal heritage in this land. The question that arises from ownership and preservation, not restoration of ancient and crumbling relics or artefacts, is ‘How might we value and recognise the signs of old as valuable parts of our culture?’ My thesis contributes to this
recognition through an appreciation of the deteriorating icon. It is not a fast-tracking or violent process.

**Understanding Disintegrating Icons**

A zealous Australian customs officer partially destroyed an old Chinese ceramic sculpture because it retained some dirt. In this study the action highlights a lack of recognition for the fragility and beauty of the statue. The surface glazes and pigments still carried some dirt from China and the officer’s behaviour was partly a problem of ignorance and aggression in cleaning the icon. This icon is the Pingyao Lady named after the walled city in Northwest China where I purchased her.

Plate 9.28 Pingyao lady, ceramic (detail) Chinese [photograph Lord]

This customs officer held the power to decide if an old ceramic figure would be scrubbed and effaced even though other methods of neutralising any harm caused by imported dirt were easily obtainable. It was scrubbed, and here the arts industry

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8 Australia’s strong sports culture is recognised in most households, but not art. Where news bulletins devote approximately fifteen minutes of time to sport for every major news-time broadcast, the arts by comparison, receive a mention occasionally when an art object reaches a significant resale figure. The value of the object is realised in monetary terms but
has a role to play in building public appreciation of the aged icon, particularly about valuing objects retaining significant visual memory. Perhaps news media should state why art is so important and valuable, rather than praising profit-making sales.

The ‘official cleaning treatment’ of the little sculpture concerns what is valued and not valued. This memory unfolds in studies of these objects in their prior surroundings and their ability to portray time. The fading or disintegrating object has a value beyond short-term gratification of the present to contribute to understanding current issues and quality of life. In this way, art and ephemera does not dismiss other forms of art but contributes to reflection on the nature of the society in which we live. Recognition of the importance of an icon in its surrounding environment, the artefact in its earthen grave, provides a similar critical acknowledgement of what can be learnt from the unearthed icon. The proximity of soil and crafted object, not always maintained on display, creates a visual authenticity of the found object within its place. Though not always exact, it is a similar location of object in relation to place that I have wanted to describe as a sign of valued age. The fragile silver-gelatin photograph in a cardboard box in a family home, and a metal hammerhead unearthed in a vegetable garden plot, hold some clues to how we might value and rethink our appreciation of object and place and society’s impulse to throw away. The valuable point is that our contemporary culture may not realise the importance of the aesthetic nature of icons and art. How will the beauty of an old crumbling relic be portrayed to a person only interested in, for instance, sport? Thus, I introduce the need for art and ephemera, and a recognition of the aesthetic involved. Should this be incorporated in art curriculum? Art schools are on a knife-edge, especially if the only solace given by university and government is in the way artists in art schools are taught to seek a conventional profession as money earner, rather than as cultural inventor, and re-appraiser of new knowledge. This leads to recommendations in this thesis.

not in the appreciation of the icon or in the aesthetics of the icon. The fascination with winning sport and competition counters the arts industry and reflection.
Art and ephemera can be revealed in misunderstanding of old and eroding icons. An incident in the Shanghai Museum involved a Caucasian tourist, greatly amused by a Tang dynasty statue. The visitor had misinterpreted the art object, in the historical collection of a professionally organised museum display in Shanghai. Other people from the museum caught the irony and dismissed the incident. This loss of understanding in recognising aesthetic in less realistic art, is discussed by Shohat and Stam (1998) who counter that ‘Vast regions of the world, and long periods of artistic history, have shown little allegiance to or even interest in realism’ (Shohat and Stam 1998, 32). The visitor to Shanghai Museum possibly expected more realism and finish, and may have dismissed the exaggerated colour on the face of the Tang figure as childish or crude, while ignoring what was implied in the surface appearance, the courtly stature and formal grace.

Plate 9.29 Tang lady, Shanghai Museum, [photograph Lord]

Ongoing questions evolve, including how the appreciation of aesthetics in the worn and decaying object could be related to memory and long deep time. I recognise that this is a valuable aspect of the message in my work, and that the object can
deteriorate, but that we can also see, in this deterioration, valuable relics and memory. This memory resounds with stories of the past and ways to sustain the natural environment with understanding rather than aggression. I consider an appreciation of aesthetics that could be related to erosion and the capacity for this to be a metaphor for environmental change. Though erosion occurs it is how we manage this that will be significant for the outcomes and reflection of this thesis.

Recycling and non-archival material used by many artists as a way to produce art without expensive art materials incurring luxury taxes, was not the most important aspect of my study for identifying models for art and ephemera. Many artists’ intentions and an aesthetic of disintegration or letting things go are integral to the study and involved in my construction of ideas about art and ephemera. Thus, even though anti-commodity is an aspect of the work I have investigated and incorporated in the thesis, it is not enough by itself to belong to art and ephemera.

In this chapter I have discussed how the icon as an impermanent object led to my appreciation of the performative art object as a metaphor for the way artists and their audiences can reflect on climate and other significant changes. Current issues about environment are seen as crucial to respond to in my study, and this relationship to environment has been linked to the performative object, where the passing of time is implicit in the disintegration. In the next chapter the disintegrating or changing object is connected with environment and this leads to the environmentally friendly and efficient manner that some artists have chosen to adopt for their work. Some key examples resonate with an art of ephemera where environmental wellbeing and letting go are discussed and these contribute to my quest to empower a humble disappearing object.
Chapter Ten

10.0 Ecology, Art and Ephemera

10.1 The Environment, Issues and Art

Artists who have addressed problematic issues, brought about through social impact on ecology and the natural environment, are discussed in this chapter. Many of these artists utilize ephemera and / or loss as a repositioning of the object in art, from commodity to art statement. Andrews (2006) provides some blurring of boundaries between art ~ life, and art ~ ecology and writes about ecology and art from within the art industry, and with substantial links to people working with ecological issues. Authors and artists listed in Appendix XXVI provide significant contributions bridging ecology and art. Kastner (2006) highlights artists’ practice installed on sites of contention, such as Guantanamo Bay, and interventions in naturally beautiful environmental sites occupied by USA military.

Issue-based art is a term adopted by the contemporary art industry to describe the way artists work with themes that stem from substantial issues of our time. Contemporary challenges in the natural environment, as issues, present links between my artist ~ researcher’s ‘art and ephemera’ and my concern for change in the environment. Artists have over time developed ideas and concepts for art projects around themes or issues, such as those based on war, peace, love and hate. Contemporary issue-based art can be adopted from many newly developed categories, for example, biological engineering, global warming, homelessness, animal rights, ethics in medicine and current horrors of war. My praxis maintains focus on the issue of threats to the natural environment, thus I exclude many forms of issue-based art, even some that involve ephemera.
Select works are chosen as examples rather than as an exhaustive list. Mentor – artists in this chapter include those who work with issues that impact on a place or region with links to art and ephemera. These artists work with alternative materials to adopt a perspective for radical change. The shift in art and ecology from 1970s to 1980s and concepts of Land Art to ‘land, art’ in post 2000 work includes many dedicated artists and groups, such as AfH and the land. Similarly, in her praxis, Laderman Ukeles continues substantial work in social and ecological rebuilding in distraught communities. My theorising includes Shohat and Stam’s (1998) ‘aesthetics of garbage’ and Hawkins’ (2006) ‘ethics of waste’ with implications for art and ephemera as multi-disciplinary.

These links between artists’ concepts about art and ephemera and environmental change facilitated the development of my thesis. For instance, Baas and Jacob et al. (2004) collated significant studies of artists and their relationship to Buddhist compassion and awareness of ecological strife. In my collection of data, artists and ecology are often linked through spiritual beliefs and concerns demonstrated in artwork. Artists Ann Hamilton, Telching Hsieh, Tosi Lee, Ernesto Pujol and Stephen Batchelor have contributed, over a number of years, to the closeness of ecological and social issues to art and ephemera, with close connections also to metaphysical beliefs. I propose that spiritual belief systems, such as Buddhism, contribute to a lynch pin between many artists’ appreciation of change and environmental issues. Laib and Tiravanija have addressed connections between spirituality and environment. Similarly, Guattari referred to ‘ethico-political articulation’ – ecosophy – ‘between the three ecological registers’ the environment, social relations and human subjectivity (Guattari 1989, 2000).

Mentoring artists are often involved in a collective, and through this, the production of a web site. Art collectives that support and advocate for ecological issues can be agentic and empower the processes of art and ephemera with a light environmental footprint. In the Environmental Research Event (ERE) 2007 conference, I mentioned artists’ collectives and groups who support their own locality and access.
the Internet for dissemination of ideas (Lord 2007). These collectives are often assisted by major organizations, for instance the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce (RSA) (http://www.rsa.org.uk/arts/). RSA in partnership with Arts Council England, as part of the Arts and Ecology program, supports strategies for major projects. Initiated in 2005, the program is a series of initiatives including conferences, ongoing discourse, international research trips, education pilots, artists’ projects and commissions, and a publication (RSA 2007). The RSA creates a network of groups and individuals concerned with the issues – alongside and working with, other organizations with similar concerns.

Support from RSA is linked across websites for collectives and localities. Walker Art Centre (2007) cites Latitudes, an exhibition with URL linked from RSA site, and states ‘Culture is something that never respects borders and territories’ (http://latitudes.walkerart.org/artists/index.wac?id=80). In this respect the digital network is critical for these collectives’ dissemination of artworks and ideas behind the artworks. RSA’s Art and Ecology program supports major art projects described by Siân Ede (2007) Arts Director at the Gulbenkian Foundation. Ede discussed a three-year residency program on the Galapagos Islands, also home to the Charles Darwin Research Station where four artists a year create new work for the Charles Darwin anniversary in 2009. Ede presents the difficulties:

The Pacific islands are owned by Ecuador and seen by some as a potential goldmine. They attract an increasing number of eco-tourists and new hotels and cafes are being built. The pristine habitat has long disappeared, not just because of the rats, cats and dogs that have been brought to the island, but by tourists who flock to see rare animals (once creatures without any self-protective shyness) and who inadvertently leave the remains of their picnics to invade the indigenous plant species. Tensions build up between the impoverished local community, government officials, tourists, responsible and less so, and research scientists. The Irish artist Dorothy Cross accompanied by actress Fiona Shaw have made an initial foray and report on a confusion of beauty and squalor, ancient and commercially modern, scientifically analytical and messily human. The islands represent a microcosm of the world at large where the ecology must include the social, political and commercial, besides the natural and scientific. We might justify the artists’ carbon-expensive journeys if they can reflect on life on the islands in such a way that might deter other visitors. The challenge will be great, requiring an ability to see things in a holistic context, not just as rare specimens (Ede 2007, 3).
Ede concludes that this is a ‘challenge they can rise to in their individually original ways’. In my thesis I advocate for web sites and blogs, rather than excess overseas travel, and promote the identification of our local places, even refuse sites, as potentially inspirational places.

Collectives or organizations have been established to provide links between artists and the possible solutions available in ecology and the environment. These are also crucial in creating the change some see as possible in order to avoid major catastrophe. These changes for artists can be aided by collaboration with communities in the humanities (arts, education) and in sciences, (ecology, earth sciences, engineering). Tiravanija and ‘the land’, cooperative develop renewable power sources and website www.thelandfoundation.org and are instrumental in this regard. Both the technological options for display and promotion of artwork and the ability to create new experiences from the technology offer artists a connection to the ‘real world’ as Lippard (2006) raised the problem that much contemporary art is not grounded socially. She stated, ‘Artists, after all, are complicit in the way the world is seen, and the real problem is that contemporary art itself has no genuine social context’ (Lippard 2006, 15).

A concern for Lippard, and this study, is that those who work outside the established canons of high art (publishing exhibitions and reviews within major art centres), are caught in a dilemma of losing options to present their work in these centres. Though this is not the case for all artists, Lippard states that some artists have taken on a ‘shamanic task’ and that these artists are also aware that returning ‘to the high art context could be impossible’ (Lippard 2006, 15). My appreciation of regional and isolated practice called for an investigation of methods to facilitate dissemination of issue-driven art and ephemera. These counter some of my concern for regional praxis to be part of a larger picture for art and ephemera. Thus communication strategies for art on the periphery have altered dramatically, from
the manifestoes highlighting problems pre-1990s to include World Wide Web distribution.

Where the printed manifesto was previously employed for effective textual communication and emotional reading of words, it was also another aspect of the aesthetic and conceptual layering of the work. I link outcomes from pre-1990s art manifestoes with the digital ephemera of the Internet today, as problem-solving and communication tools for dissemination of information and ‘relational’ activity. Internet has been used effectively by most of the collectives and artists discussed in this chapter for their issue-driven work, including the environmental plight, and has important advantages for art and ephemera. For instance, the Internet facilitates the acceptance of these works as intangible, through art and ephemera, while enabling disintegrating artwork (humus), and ‘disbursement’ work (sand mandalas), to reach a global audience. Internet communication becomes its own tangible message even though it can also be considered ‘immaterial’ (Lillemose 2006). Communication strategies are pertinent to my last research question, ‘How might this research inform artistic directions, cross-disciplinary considerations, and inspire further research in this topic?’ Some of these are addressed in 10.2 Web Pages and Regions.

In responding to this, my quest to empower less archived art as art and ephemera includes the issue of the regional and isolated practitioner, who can work from the periphery, and be in touch with the centre. The central showcasing of predominantly archived work in this respect is challenged, though only partially usurped, by World Wide Web distribution. Art and ephemera complies with the distribution of web-based communication, and can act using the Internet as a platform for communication of visual imagery. In this capacity it will only address those with access to Internet. This goes against my earlier point that communities can regain control of ‘art and ephemera’ events as a site process not dependant on, or linked by, Internet, thus independent of large centres. The isolated, nomadic, marginal and ‘other than centre’ carry connotations for the work being produced.
Raqs Media Collective discussed in section 10.2 is instrumental in providing material for considerations of periphery and centre in relation to artists’ voices and practice. Thus artists in India and Australia, for example, are involved in the struggle to bring region and centre into close proximity.

Opportunities to Create Art for Environmental Issues

In this section I link my themes about ephemera, art and environment, where a collective sensibility to the inherent issues can enable realisation that humans can do something about over-consumption of resources. This ambition is addressed by organizations outside the art industry and also by artists who have investigated alternative approaches to reduce impact on the natural environment and improve sustainability and quality of life style. The measures taken are revised approaches to consumption and production that previously involved a heavy environmental footprint.


http://www.mwaf.com.au/palimpsest/index.html. MDP artists responded to the exhibition rationale and challenges about the environment, and employed various processes, including the ephemeral. Excluded from this study are large works, reminiscent of 1970s - 1980s land or earth art, as they impact unnecessarily on place and are often intended to last. In this respect Strand Ephemera and In Site Out (Chapter Eight) offer greater potential for artists to consider the ephemeral in art as a viable alternative to a heavy environmental footprint and resource-hungry art making practices. Audience responses to issues through communication between community and artists during these events, discussed in Chapter Eight, supported my developmental approach to interaction on site. Alternatively, the popular aspect of some events, such as Strand Ephemera can promote a more decorative art that sidetracks issues. In this thesis on ‘art and ephemera,’ issue-based art is considered
with and beyond aesthetics, thus I exclude solely decorative art, and respond to contemporary issues through an awareness of the ‘socio-political context of … research practice’ (Mason 1996, 18). In this manner, art and ephemera that responds to significant issues can be a proactive issue-based art both in regions and on Internet.

My practical art projects for this research focussed on problems related to environment, such as degradation of place, waste, soil erosion and water issues from human and natural causes. My work relating to garbage, for instance, 2001 work, Chapter Eleven, Claiming the Gutters, generated significant decisions towards the synthesis of this study. Hawkins (2006) has contributed to the development of my ideas about how to address taboos that stifle our response or ability to address ownership of waste and filth. The concept of distancing and taboo relates to how humans in earlier centuries had to make use of distance as a method to remove waste, via indiscriminate dumping from one place to another in order to maintain wellbeing. Today the proximity to waste is global, and nowhere escapes dumping. This presents necessary engagement with current problems that cannot be ignored.

Agentic opportunities for art and ephemera occur when for instance, the Smithsonian Institute (2008) devotes an exhibition to The Secrets of Soil (http://forces.si.edu/soils/). Similarly, Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2004) in The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-environmental World attracted comments and discussion via web-logs about the concerns of environmental activism or lack of it. Peter Teague (2007), Environment Program Director, states in the report:

Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus suggest that it’s time to re-examine everything we think we know about global warming and environmental politics, from what does and doesn’t get counted as “environmental” to the movement’s small-bore approach to policymaking (http://blogs.onenw.org/jon/archives/2004/11/02/death_of_environmentalism/).
Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2004) and the *Stern Review* (2007) contributed information that led to my adoption of new processes for art practice. In light of scientific approaches to recycling in nature, the metaphors produced by the artwork act on the understanding of cycles in natural sciences, such as the water cycle and the carbon cycle. Natural cycles are taught in school as approaches to understanding natural processes, however the over-consumption of natural resources indicates that there is not enough understanding of the relationship between our consumption of goods and the current unsustainable practices. These consumer indicators also relate to the increased warming of the earth’s environment, our impact on atmosphere and ecology.

While it is difficult to acquire evidence about what audiences assimilate when looking at art, I have recorded instances of changes to audience appreciation. Thus reflection on art as disappearing object intentionally underlies the performative act. In addition, I suggest that many audiences use discretionary time for looking at art, and this can facilitate an open mind for viewing new approaches to issues, through art. These reflections of the way things are, rather than soapbox rhetoric, or pamphleteering, might lead to significant changes that could alter perceptions, such as the perceived need for an abundance of manufactured products and certain resource-hungry life styles.

Additionally, realising how we contribute and accepting that there can be an art-based carbon ethic can add relevant reflection on a current crisis. In my introduction to Part Two, I stated that natural environment and land or earth impact on everybody, and it is especially important for me as an artist to comment on contemporary issues. Numerous artists have contributed their expertise, time and experiences to the enrichment of environment as an idea, and emphasizing the fact that humans are responsible for this environment, especially now in the early part of the second millennium.
The following works discussed as art and ephemera are not solely about ephemera, but incorporate an attitude to art that accepts loss of archive as an option in art. The artists have often incorporated an ephemeral element in their work that is significant for interpreting or acting as a metaphor for the current issues of environment and ecology. Artists such as Avital Geva (1993) (Plate 9.4) work with art and gardening, and artist Meg Ogden (2008) discusses her garden as a forty-year art project. Ogden incorporates cycles in time and her garden has been 15 years in the making www.abc.net.au/gardeningaustralia. Many areas of environment are important for artists to devote their expertise and time to. I adopted the land / earth focus for my personal commitment to environment, and since the 1990s, added a focus on urban detritus, discussed in Chapter Eleven. My work pays tribute to authors and artists involved in the shifts in attitude, and these are addressed in the following section.

From ‘Land Art’ to ‘Land, art’ and ‘the land’

In this section my structure moves significantly from models or precursors to mentors. Andrews (2006) places an emphatic break between land and art in Land, Art: A Cultural Ecology Handbook. Andrews and artist Rirkrit Tiravanija emphasise distinctions from earlier art, such as ‘Land Art.’ Tiravanija applies lower case in ‘the land,’ to indicate a blurring of boundaries between art and life. Significantly, artists in 2006 ‘Land, art’ and ‘the land’ identify the art object as integral to, and part of, the ecological activities surrounding them. Here I discuss key artists in the early twenty-first century who are developing their work and lives in support of maintaining or sustaining a natural environment and land or earth.

Though many common concepts are evident between 1970s Earthworks or Land Art and the much more recent ‘Land, art’ (Andrews et al. 2006), in the latter, the natural environment and ecology are of paramount concern for issues-based art. Thus, art in the 1970s that made use of major earth-moving processes through ignorance of, or lack of concern for, the surrounding habitat is excluded from my investigation. My chosen examples demonstrate awareness of sensitive
environmental factors and follow in the footsteps of those mentioned by Miles (1997) who referred to some earlier artworks that contributed to an art inherently connected with environmental concerns:

Ecological issues are rising on political and art agendas; they inform Mierle Laderman-Ukeles’ work with the New York Sanitation Department, Dominique Mazeaud’s ritual cleaning of the Rio Grande, a study group and visit to Belize organised by Mark Dion with the Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group as part of *Culture in Action*, the work of the artists’ group Platform in London, the work of Helen and Newton Harrison, and art which is itself a process of healing the earth, such as Mel Chin’s *Revival Field* (Miles 1997, 182).

Many of these were produced from the 1960s to 1990s. The artwork following these decades that make reference to the contemporary ecological concerns of today (post 2000) is relevant for my study. My investigation into an anti-commodity art that is also ephemeral to the point of not always being maintained beyond a first showing is central to my topic. Mentors who refer to the transient nature of the material are most significant for my discussion of art and ephemera.

Kastner (2006) discusses contemporary artists’ working projects, such as a Guantanamo Bay site, where artists Christoph Büchel and Gianni Motti, in *Guantanamo Initiative* (2004 - 2005),

…suggest the variety of ways in which the notion of landscape and its site-specific use and meanings have continued to provide inspiration for artistic interventions (Kastner 2006, 28).

Büchel and Gianni Motti (2004 - 5) highlight the conditions under which the US government came to control the land where the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and base are located. In 1959 the Castro Government tried to cancel the USA lease and when the US government would not relinquish the land the Cubans stopped cashing USA nominal rent cheques. Kastner (2006) states

It is into this legal lacuna that Büchel and Motti’s project looks to intervene, proposing that the treaties be null and void [so that a third party (the artists) might challenge US occupation] unencumbered by the political stalemate that characterises US-Cuban relations (Kastner 2006, 28).

Similarly, Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s work, introduced in Chapter Eight, shares a similar backdrop zone, a US colonial and military context in the
Caribbean, seventy percent of which was occupied by US navy as a bombing range between 1941 and 2003. This resulted in considerable contamination and health concerns. One of three projects, described here for *Land Mark (Footprints)* (2001 - 2004), is where they

…worked with local people and activists to design special shoe soles that left personalised slogans and symbols as participants trespassed on the then off-limits sand on their legendary beaches (Kastner 2006, 28).

Andrews (2006) relates everyday practice and ecology with art and state of mind. Sinclair (2006), co-founder of ‘Architecture for Humanity’ (AfH) in 1999 with Stohr, stated that it is the world’s first – and now largest – humanitarian architecture network (Schmelzer 2006, 68). Sinclair, now executive director, discusses quiet change, and this resonates with my thesis:

There are two things we adhere to. One is that quiet change matters. So we don’t make a big deal out of it. And also, small projects can have really big impacts. We focus on very low-cost small projects, not because we want to help one family but we want to set a base to change policy (Sinclair interviewed by Schmelzer 2006, 69).

In Sri Lanka, AfH developed ‘transitional schools that collect rainwater and use solar technology and, in one instance, wind generation for energy’ (Schmelzer 2006, 69). AfH provided design services and funding for reconstruction in India and Sri Lanka following the 2004 tsunami. In this work the communication of the work online is potentially a key strategy for the artists, in relating the activity and idea to an audience.

The development of my thesis proceeds with my realisation that the connection between art, natural environment and ephemera is where I can best contribute to change of attitude about issues threatening the natural environment. Many people know what has to be done for a better natural environment through education for knowledge about skills, technology and commerce, but cannot accomplish this with limited access to human and financial resources. This is especially so where an individual tries to act, for instance in the domestic setting. Awareness through art and ecology can assist communities to engage in adopting a new perspective and demand ways to achieve these changes. A number of keynote speakers in the 2007
Environmental Research Event (ERE) made this evident. Guest speaker Russel Fisher, from Environment Victoria, spoke about local initiatives to educate about environmental literacy. Fisher asked ‘Why with all of the knowledge that we have, do we fail to act?’ (Fisher ERE 2007)

The Stern Review (2007) also addresses this difficulty with reference to a discussion on the hypothetical Kuznets curve where a higher income population might be related to a reduction of heavy metal emission or pollutants. Stern (2007) states:

… in the case of climate change, there has been little evidence of large voluntary reductions in emissions as a result of consumers’ desire to reduce emissions as they become richer. That may change as people’s understanding of climate change risk improves, but the global nature of the externality means that the incentive for uncoordinated individual action is very low (Stern et al. 2007, 206-207).

In the Stern Review and conferences such as ERE it is obvious that most people, especially scientists, have the facts available to contribute to reduction of climate change and related threats to environment (Stern et al. 2007). The issue is the implementation of the policies and procedures required to overcome impending catastrophe. How to do this was not so easily recognised or demonstrated at ERE 2007. This implies the necessity for cultural shifts and relates to my themes for art and ephemera to interact with small communities where reflection may facilitate action.

In the ERE 2007 conference, some research scientists were very specific about perceived problems and finding answers to these, but not always clear as to how their particular problem linked to the bigger issue of adopting strategies where small communities and the individual could pursue their own solutions for climate change. This was addressed partially by some investigation into protecting habitats of endangered species. An issue I raised in my presentation was how I as an individual would like to contribute and act on lowering consumption of fossil fuels through regional and / or home-based systems. Importantly how can individuals and small communities adopt low cost strategies to act? Artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija
(2005), has demonstrated ways to implement home-based alternatives to power consumption. The work of Rirkrit Tiravanija (1998) and ‘the land’ is on the website, and provides this background:

Initiated in 1998, the land (more direct translation from Thai to English would be, the rice field) was the merging of ideas by different artists to cultivate a place of and for, social engagement. The land is located in proximity to the village of Sanpatong, a twenty minutes drive from the centre of the provincial capital Chiang Mai. As some rice farmers are having difficult times in the area, due to the levels of floods and high water level, rice farming has not been very productive. Because of this, some rice fields in the area have been offered for development, as the rice farmers are looking to find better areas for the fields (www.thelandfoundation.org).

Though at first the actions to acquire the rice fields were initiated by two artists from Thailand, ‘the land’ was initiated with ‘anonymity and without the concept of ownership’ (www.thelandfoundation.org). In this way ‘the land’ was to be cultivated as an open space, though with certain intentions towards community, discussions and ‘experimentation in other fields of thoughts’. Tiravanija’s land art is based on low environmental costs and this is significant for art and ecological considerations.

Plate 10.1 Rirkrit Tiravanija (2005) Untitled [Guggenheim Museum
http://www.guggenheim.org/]

Guggenheim Museum website (2008) refers to Tiravanija’s Untitled (2005) (Plate 10.1) ‘a self-built low-power television station,’ awarded the Hugo Boss Award for a significant contribution to art with an ecological interface …Tiravanija
'demonstrate[s] that individuals can be active contributors to their own media culture, rather than mere consumers of it' (www.Rirkrit%20Tiravanija%202005-7/Guggenheim%20Museum%20The%20Hugo%20Boss%20Prize%20Rirkrit%20Tiravanija.html). Tiravanija’s implementation of low-cost, local alternatives for energy consumption and the website for distribution of information, could be mentoring for a number of viable organisational procedures. In this way, low impact and ecological considerations can be strategically placed within art.

Strategies

Artists such as Natascha Sadr Haghighian (2006) not only view art as potentially ephemeral, but also see resources undergoing major contemporary shifts, and apply their art to the inherent issues brought about by the re-positioning of such resources. These issues require new strategies to communicate messages through art about resources, such as oil. Sadr Haghighian (2006) in ‘Not about Oil’ reveals how the global money market is currently based on the oil market, rather than as previously on the gold market. Her investigation is into the relationship of oil, money, power, knowledge and art. Sadr Haghighian states:

So-called immaterial labour is based on changing conditions of production within this relocation. The main resource is not land, natural resources or labour anymore, but knowledge (Sadr Haghighian 2006, 41).

And further in Sadr Haghighian’s discussion the extensive changes escalated by crises make it necessary to look

… not only at the Bretton Woods system and the role of the US dollar in the global economy, but also at the rebounding cultural discourse of the impairment of the object and the growing interest in ideas of immateriality and dematerialisation (Sadr Haghighian 2006, 41).

Sadr Haghighian (2006) claims that different levels of power ‘constitute the paradigm shift towards immaterial and dematerialised production’ (Sadr Haghighian 2006, 41). Thus, like many other artists she finds the ecological message and environmental wellbeing are a driving strategy for the artwork. These messages go global with new discourse and techniques for communication.
The following recommendation from Hefele, that an interdisciplinary educational model is also a place to search for and find new paradigms, concurs with my idea that in visual arts and digital media, research artists can contribute to ecological alternatives and outcomes that will be environmentally ‘light,’ with less demand on finite resources. Hefele (2005) stated that we must develop new ways of teaching ‘that will cultivate a desire for healing the nature-culture relationship and promote long term sustainable planning’ (Hefele 2005, 225). She continues:

Whether we like it or not, it seems as if we have entered an era of participatory ecology. We have fallen into ownership of natural systems through use and abuse, and are now faced with significant and troubling responsibilities. New models of perception, understanding, and interaction are needed to acknowledge and act upon those responsibilities (Hefele 2005, 225).

I considered the models suggested by Hefele, as well as Collins and Goto’s (2005) findings about ways to change attitude through new models, rather than supplying numerous statistics on the technology, or lack of it, to address climate change. Collins and Goto (2004) also discussed an emergent practice by examining the public realm as a setting that defines and focuses ecological and social questions. Their defining of ‘post-industrial’ demonstrates a shared concern for artists and scientists:

Post-industrial refers to the shift from carbon based industrial power and production towards a computer based economy of information, goods and services that began in the late 1970s. The post-industrial condition includes a pervasive legacy of human produced pollution that affects air, soil, water and ultimately the climate of the planet (Collins and Goto 2005, 89).

Many authors and artists have discussed alternative strategies to deal with the concerns raised by the post-industrial condition. Danto (2006) and Gablik (2006) developed arguments that contributed to art’s social and ecological engagement. These led to some obvious questions and answers about the adoption of alternatives in art’s production and presentation. One strategy is to use the Internet as earlier twentieth century artists used manifestoes. This is taken up in my next section.

contributing to the manifesto and publication. Buskirk’s (2005) emphasis on the
document, as a significant contribution to the meaning and sometimes the value of
art, contributes to the consideration that textual explanation is important for visual
arts. In the discourse, issues related to copying or rote mechanical repetition of
something to be remembered, although not necessarily understood, are relevant to
the discussion of acquired information processes on the Internet. How and when is
the digital used as a tool or technique to access and present relevant and necessary
information for visual arts? For art and ephemera, as for most contemporary art,
textual literacy is not only vital, but also critical in facilitating questioning through
the text. The Internet provides a democratic means to approach the promotion of
this textual and visual literacy.

10.2 Web Pages and Regions
In this study I recognise that web sites comprise contemporary art practices in
formats that carry messages about art, ephemera and environment. Further to the
idea that specific regions and their art praxis are significant for art and ephemera,
artists can have a voice within the centre. Bourriaud (2002) discusses Tiravanija in
‘Relational Aesthetics’ arguably working across the periphery and the centre. The
point for artists interested in art and ephemera, as regional practice, is that the
Internet, unlike many earlier forms of communication, can disseminate information
from outside the Euro-centric, New York-centric and Australian-capital-cities-
centres where much cultural promotion is traditionally concentrated.

Shohat and Stam (1998) and RAQS Media Collective www.raqs.org New Delhi
(2007) discuss the potential for the regional to be part of a global network. This is
partially addressed in recent exposure of regional practice in large events, such as
the Asia Pacific Triennials (APT) Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), and Gallery of
Modern Art, (GOMA), Brisbane. Concurrent with 2007 APT was Multimedia Art
Asia Pacific MAAP (2006) in Queensland State Library, and this showcased
regional digital artworks. Though the technology is available to present much of
this work in regional centres, it is the larger centres that traditionally afford the
publicity and high profile venues necessary to bring such work into a large public arena.

My strategy, to produce three major visual art projects for this study in a regional centre and develop supporting online material for these (www.annelord.com) is evidence that artwork can contribute to visual arts discourse from a periphery. I argue that this is an important aspect for promoting art and ephemera. In 2007 my practice of providing ephemeral sculptures obtained responses from local audiences. Responses at times exemplified a paradigm shift in thinking about why I could make something that would be gone within the same day it appeared, instead of its being an archived and expensive commodity or artwork. In reaching the decision to make ephemeral art pieces I had also looked at the number of issues facing the public, each of us, about climate change. The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review (2007) provides copious information from many institutions and researchers, about the current state of affairs for the global situation with reference to nature, environment and requirements for responding to the threat created by climate change and global warming. Stern et al. (2007) provide an abundance of reasons for artists, including me, to develop a thesis and artwork about lowering impact:

We use a consistent approach towards uncertainty. The science of climate change is reliable, and the direction is clear. But we do not know precisely when and where particular impacts will occur. Uncertainty about impacts strengthens the argument for mitigation: this Review is about the economics of the management of very large risks (Stern 2007, xiii-xiv).

Though artists do not benefit financially from creative and economic risk taking they often approach problems through issue-based art for the sake of portraying an urgent message about the world we live in, and place demands on. It is not within the scope of this thesis to explain the significant findings scientists have contributed to in the last decade about the potential damage and harm already done by humans to the natural environment. However the information accessed during my study, from work such as the Stern Review and the responses by artists to these
contributions to knowledge is crucial to appreciate and empower art and ephemera. Artists can and have responded constructively to issues in many ways.

Where scientists discover new approaches to combat these issues, artists have an advantageous position as visual communicators to point out the need for sacrifices to avoid unsustainable environmentally demanding lifestyles. Creative artists’ engagement with new interpretations of the dematerial and immaterial may contribute partially to revised attitudes to consumerism and reading art. For instance Lippard’s (1974) ‘dematerialisation of art’ as a conceptual genre in art has evolved, significantly for this study, to recycled and ecologically sensitive materials for art, often with limited life expectations. Similarly, the new arena of ‘immaterial’ with Krysa et al. (2006) blends conceptual areas in digital ephemera and contemporary art. For Lillemose (2006), immaterial advances ‘conceptual art and more specifically a rereading of the notion of dematerialisation’ (Lillemose 2006, 114). Lillemose argues that his ‘frame of reference,’ is taken further than dematerial addressed by Lippard, and refers to Atkinson who questions the ‘correctness’ of the word dematerial in relation to the artistic development that Lippard described. Where Atkinson (1968) found that the art works Lippard referred to were ‘still objects in some form or another and therefore not – literally speaking – dematerialised,’ Lillemose (2006) states

Atkinson (1968) … misses a basic point by analysing dematerialization as an exact – almost scientific – term, not as an aesthetic concept that contains or rather builds on contradictions (Lillemose 2006, 115).

The slippery nature and schisms of the conceptual as well as innuendoes in art contribute to understandings that are about questioning our relationship with the world. Lillemose’s statement and my previous reference to Lippard’s acknowledgment that artists are good at slipping between ‘institutional walls’, concur with my development of a broad terrain for art and ephemera: one that is not based on science but backed up by scientific information about issues. The language of art, in art and ephemera, is about professional and creative visual art, and is in many instances supported by the art industry, directors, curators and writers. In my thesis I provide ways to consider the importance of this professional
area of art. The diversity of practice possible for art and ephemera, referred to earlier, also requires reminders from art industry personnel that contemporary tangents to art and ephemera can appear in the form of conceptual, immaterial work and literally earthy and site-based work.

The de-material and immaterial in relation to an art of ephemera contribute to my analysis, where the implications for change move from a Fine Art parameter to one of multi-disciplinary and alternative methods. This move contributes to a reconsideration of the way we use commodity and resource. Metaphors are visible in the overlay of information, where the recycling and disintegrating material of art corresponds with issues of water and environment, land and place. When people talk about a shortage of water they are really talking about the ways we want to access, and disrupt, the water cycle. I also consider, ‘If we knew how to increase the rate of water returning to the land and had to make substantial sacrifices to our immediate life style, would we in fact try to do more about it?’ Local council enforcement of water restrictions suggests guidelines have to be imposed for sustained water supply in urban places. These issues provide reasons to create something that is returning to the local.

Mentioned above, were ERE participants (2007) who presented some alternatives for the general public to address these issues. They raised questions about our commitment to changing the problem and adapting lifestyles. Responses to some difficult questions about what we do and how we do things emerged. My presentation included artists’ collectives that demonstrate ecologically sensitive alternatives in art practice. This was new to many people from a science background.

New models for ‘Ecology, Art and Ephemera’ have emerged with organizations such as RAQS Media Collective (2008), founded in 1991 in New Delhi by artists Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi and Shuddhabrata Sengupta:

RAQS Media Collective is a collective of media practitioners that works in new media & [sic] digital art practice, documentary filmmaking, photography, media
theory & [sic] research, writing, criticism and curation (http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/).


In these installation pieces (Plates 10.2 and 10.3) the street provides the place for another contribution to an issue-based practice that leaves behind no saleable object.

Stickers on the streets and underpasses "Entry Permitted. Access Denied" were pasted in the languages Hindi, English, Turkish and German – ‘bearing cryptic texts that suggest a tension between contemporary city spaces and how we inhabit them, [and] leave a trace that points to the installation 28°28’ N / 77°15’ E ::’ (2001 - 02 RAQS Media Collective, New Delhi).

The installation was described as ‘An Installation on the Coordinates of Everyday Life in Delhi’ (RAQS Media Collective 2002).
In relating ideas of the periphery and centre (my reference is to blurring boundaries) RAQS Media Collective refers to ‘translocality’ and questions the dominant positioning of a ‘center.’ Their work assists ways to look at art with a new perspective, desirable for art and ephemera, as one that re-visits the entire picture of global life style. Similarly in Queensland, the Change Agency (2007) is ‘now working with the Queensland Conservation Council to support and energise Brisbane communities around climate change’ (http://www.thechangeagency.org/01_cms/details.asp?ID=73). Significant for this study, the Change Agency website (2007) states as its fourth objective to

…bridge the gaps between grassroots and NGO activists, between environmentalists and other citizens concerned about climate change, and between the rebels,

These support networks provide some infrastructure for artists. This opportunity provided by the Change Agency offers artists an alternative potential to contribute to what Bourriaud discussed as ‘relational aesthetics’ (2002). The blurring of function and aesthetic is also apparent in Sri Lanka, where the group AfH developed ‘transitional schools’ (Schmelzer 2006, 69).

Similarly the commitment from RSA is for a mission of social change. They organise a network of Fellows, and RSA’s branch for art and ecology has substantial links to sites with shared concerns. Some sites referencing art and ecology include www.social-ecology.org, aligned with education of art and ecology; www.tacoma.washington.edu/ias/, working with Interdisciplinary Arts and Science; www.artsforchange.org, a small site promoting arts for change; and www.platformlondon.org a large and well organised site ‘PLATFORM works across disciplines for social and ecological justice.’

Linked by art and ecology, these organizations list their agenda on web sites, for instance, Platform has current projects, ‘Unravelling the Carbon Web Research’, for advocacy and public education on oil corporations. With a particular focus on Iraq, the former Soviet Union and Nigeria, Platform’s website (2008), states that they combine ‘the transformatory power of art with the tangible goals of campaigning, the rigour of in-depth research with the vision to promote alternative futures’ (http://www.platformlondon.org/bodypolitic.asp). One of Platform’s current projects on the web is to ‘Remember Saro-Wiwa,’ a Nigerian writer and activist. Interviewed in 1994, Ken Saro-Wiwa stated:

It’s not an ego trip, it’s serious, it’s politics, it’s economics, it’s everything. And art in that instance becomes so meaningful both to the artist and to the consumers of that art (http://www.remembersarowiwa.com/).
Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni colleagues were ‘…executed by the Nigerian state for campaigning against the devastation of the Niger Delta by oil companies, especially Shell and Chevron’ (http://www.remembersarowiwa.com/).

Saro-Wiwa was another artist and consumer finding ways to combine issues and art. In the intangible - tangible Internet, issues in art and ephemera, and the action taken by various art groups, through production of manifestoes about topics such as economic and environmental issues, are important for my thesis. They empower people to comment on issues that are beyond, across or outside traditional disciplines.

The Manifesto Then and Now

In this study, the power of voice, as text embedded in art, becomes more significant as a tool to highlight processes in art and ephemera. An empowered text emerges with evidence of more sophisticated technology, available to a larger percentage of the art population, than the printed ephemera of the mid-twentieth century. In the contemporary age of fast information sharing, this concept expands from printed manifesto through democratic voices and accessible budgets, to an international Internet population.

Thus the emergence of the digital as manifesto since the latter part of the twentieth century has increased the capacity artists have in the twenty-first century to publish web sites and communicate through ‘blogs,’ along with presenting visual artwork. The easily accessible digital imaging and desktop publishing formats enable many artists and groups of artists to develop comprehensive statements about their work and concepts. RAQS Media Collective, www.raqs.org and ‘the land’ www.thelandfoundation.org as well as RSA www.rsa.org.uk have developed their web sites with significant links to supportive institutions and projects.

In Australia, Museum and Gallery Services Queensland manage The GEO Project (2008), a web site www.geoproject.org.au launched in August 2008. Project
Manager, Jodi Ferrari (2008) emails that it ‘… offers an approach to public and educational programming by exploring the connections and differences amongst a suite of touring exhibitions that all engage the theme of “art and the environment”’ (Ferrari, 23 July 2008 6:33:41 PM).

In July 2008 exhibitions included

… *Intimate Transactions*; an interactive cyber environment installation where participants communicate with their bodies to generate a screen image; *Antarctica – A Place in the Wilderness*, silver gelatin photographs and soundscape of Antarctica by Judy Parrott from an Australian Antarctic Division Arts Fellowship; and *Replant: a new generation of botanical art*, an investigation by six Indigenous and non-Indigenous printmakers and a photographer into the remarkable world of plants in the Northern Territory (Ferrari, 23 July 2008 6:33:41 PM).

*Habitus Habitat* was added to the site in August 2008 and includes my work *Peg 2 Yellow Ochre dk* and *Impossible bucket* at URL


http://www.geoproject.org.au/geo/01_cms/details.asp?ID=433. This is an important opportunity for my work *Impossible bucket* to be shown as a piece that only lasted for a limited time. Internet documentation of this piece extends the message to a regional audience, and these opportunities are addressed in the next section.

**Making and Sending a Message [From Print to Digital]**

The printed book was used by artists as a means to communicate ideas, for instance, artist Ian Hamilton Finlay created gardens, arguably ephemeral, and prints, to disseminate information about concepts related to his art, garden, environment, place, history and politics. Similar strategies of easily accessible reproductions such as manifestoes were employed by the Futurists, Dada, Fluxus and Arte Povera artists to communicate concepts in artwork. For some artists, the ability to provide a readily accessible publication involved the democratic nature of the print medium. Hamilton Finlay’s (1987) *Poursuits* and Boltanski’s (2002) *Scratch* continue a tradition of the more accessible mass-reproduced artists’ book. Whereas the commercially produced books developed by artists were readily available, the
Internet provides a more accessible means to distribute artists’ information. The equivalent of the ‘Manifesto’ for many artists has also become a written paper published in journals, e-journals, blogs and web sites. This strategy allows the artist working in remote or isolated regions to contribute significantly to practice in larger centres. In this way I contributed about issues in art, climate and place, in December 2005, for the Murray Darling Palimpsest (MDP) web site (http://www.mwaf.com.au/old_sites/palimpsest/html/annelord.html) http://www.mwaf.com.au/old_sites/palimpsest/index.html. The MDP conference provided another opportunity to address the way art has the ability to work with areas of concern and to highlight issues. Similarly in 2007 the Environmental Research Event, (ERE) published findings from my thesis, about links between art and ephemera, and art and environment. Significantly for my quest, this publication was primarily DVD with a small amount of printed material.

Strategically important for my argument to present regional ‘art and ephemera’ to a broader public is the launch of ‘artpost’, ‘an interactive website and short video series for TV broadcast, which showcases artists living in regional and remote parts of the country’ (ABC Media Release 17th November 2008). The Media Release continues:

Peter Garrett, the Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, launched artpost at the Art at the Heart Conference, in Alice Springs [16th November 2008]. The centrepiece of www.abc.net.au/artpost is a digital interactive arts map of Australia where you can watch artists at work in their studio - from Toowoomba to Lightning Ridge, from Broome to Strahan. The site provides the tools for students, teachers, art lovers and artists to create short videos about who they are and their work, for inclusion on the digital map. In five easy steps, a video can be created and uploaded directly to what will become a living art gallery of all corners of Australia. These videos will also be broadcast on ABC1 and ABC2.

The intention is that the videos will grow ‘until the digital map is coloured in with pockets of creative communities’. Dalton, Director of ABC TV, said ‘artpost, through its online platform and its digital broadcast, can provide artists with significant national exposure, providing opportunities to reach new audiences and to expand and develop into new markets’ (ABC Media Release 17th November
2008). This statement by Dalton relegates the art opportunity more to a commodity-based one, than potential for art and ephemera in the regions.

The media release also acknowledged that artpost is a partnership between ABC and Regional Arts Australia (RAA) a national body that supports, promotes and advocates for the arts across regional Australia. RAA President, Haslehurst, said:

Distance will no longer mean isolation for our artists – their stories and their work will now be there for everyone to see, either on the web or on ABC TV (Haslehurst 2008).

The potential to create ephemera for a large audience from a small ‘centre’ is part of the consolidation of art and ephemera as a viable contemporary professional practice, pertinently also one with a light environmental footprint. Mitchell (2002), discussing Benjamin’s famous article ‘Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1935), states that ‘Benjamin concluded his meditation on mechanical reproduction with the spectre of mass destruction’. For Mitchell:

…The dangerous aesthetic pleasure of our time is not mass destruction but mass creation, the fantasy of unlimited and uncontrolled production and reproduction, accompanied by an ever-widening spiral of consumption. The epithet for our times, then, is not the modernist saying, ‘things fall apart,’ but the even more ominous slogan: ‘things come alive.’ Artists, technicians and scientists have always been united in the imitation of life, the production of images and mechanisms that have, as we say, ‘lives of their own.’ Perhaps this moment of stillness in history, when we feel caught between the utopian fantasies of biocybernetics and the dystopian realities of biopolitics, between the rhetoric of the post-human and the real urgency of universal human rights, is the moment given to us for rethinking just what our lives, and our arts, are for (Mitchell 2002, 17 http://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=200203377;res=APAFT).

Mitchell’s reference to ‘spiral of consumption’ is relevant for my thesis and ‘rethinking’ what art and ephemera are for. Lillemose (2006) contributes to my contextualisation of stillness referenced by Mitchell between biocybernetics and biopolitics, where ‘…immateriality is evidently a relevant notion, as it quite accurately designates significant and extensive changes in contemporary art’ (Lillemose, 113).
Lillemose (2006) makes conceptual art and a rereading of dematerial to immaterial in the digital, a frame of reference in his analysis. For my analysis, digital can add to art and ephemera as an approach. It is not a new idea, however the context of digital as an alternative to more expensive labour-intensive methods of reproduction, has only existed in the last five decades, and this is significant for artists and their issue-based art. Access to mass-produced printing formats was common to Fluxus and Arte Povera artists, whereas for this study the evolution to *blogs* facilitates an art and ephemera *code for low impact*, even as a lessening of transport and freight. In this section I have provided some examples of strategies to make and send messages for art and ephemera, irrespective of periphery or centre. In the next section some problematic instances that can occur as a result of technology are highlighted.

**Homogenising Technology, Printouts and Alternatives**

In contrast to the wealth of opportunities which the personal computer and digital technology offer for storage of information and ideas, printouts from digital sources as a popular way of viewing art, and even projections in video art, have a homogenising aspect. This is partly due to commercially available substrates and loss of tangibility in the digital print and images on monitors. Alternatively, an ephemeron offers a phenomenologically exciting aspect or viewing of the creative product, and an investigation and participation that involves the hands-on, and a reading, not only of ephemeral states but also of tactile surfaces, and occasionally the sense of smell.

The loss of texture or widely differing surfaces in most digitally printed images is addressed by many artists who manage to create alternatives for visual display beyond these commercially available substrates or printing surfaces. My questions, from the perspective of an artist most interested in pursuing a light environmental footprint and anti-archive, as a serious and valid option, relate to the capacity that digital has to facilitate visual and textual literacy as a tool for communication about the ephemeron.
The digitally printed image that so many artists are using for their artistic output can be an aesthetic leveller, though seductive in colour and gloss. A large percentage of 2007 art in *APT5* and international biennales was digitally based installation, either still or moving imagery. Viewing art on a monitor potentially removes a layer of creativity for the artist and viewer, where the choice to make and read, or respond to material texture and sensual experience beyond sight, has been reduced. Installation of the actual disintegration on site or in a venue is a challenge I propose for more artworkers and artists.

Contradictions arise in this area relating to the potential in digital, especially where the digital can arrest the image as the performative object merges with the environment. Digital monitors and digital printing are part of a revolutionary and democratic means of contributing to output, and though the conceptual content varies significantly, digital is one of the most accessible means of publishing personal creative work and ideas that can challenge a status quo.

The digital output is designed to be one of many commercially available products for the consumer. Artists as consumers have been caught up in a wave of obtaining access to digital print products. In my search for art and ephemera I found key creative artists who rejected the homogenised output stripped of creative tactile options in their installations. Rather, for the output of their work, artists often took up the option of producing work that would not last. Alternatively, artists design work with display alternatives, significantly taking the digital back to the material and occasionally the ephemeral. My qualitative research project argues that the proportion of digital versus performative object is not as significant as the fact that artists are given the choice to present the ephemeral object and / or the digital record of the process.

Various responses as alternatives to homogenised digital print ephemera have been documented in this thesis. An artist sometimes decides that the most common
method of reaching a broad public has a desired outcome and is important because it is such a democratic medium, even though it is also a homogenised one. Therefore, many artists accept that digital offers a way of presenting creative output, and artists find this, and the accessibility of the output, suitable for their production of creative artwork. In the creative art industry, artists find other ways of production that go beyond the monitor or the printer so that projection and return of the image to another material, support or substrate, also becomes a major creative output. Though this was available with pre-digital film products, the artist has more control over the digital projected image through advances in technology, and this becomes an alternative for art and ephemera.

Immaterial

Further opportunities arise for presentation and dissemination of art and ephemera. Lillemose (2006) discusses the increasingly significant notion of ‘immateriality’ and says, ‘…the notion refers to the new conditions that the digitisation of artistic and cultural practices in general has prompted’ (Lillemose 2006, 113). Similarly, Merewether et al. (2006) and Lippard (2006) have revisited theories of archive and de-material. In the development of this thesis on art and ephemera, and dealing with issues to take ownership and responsibility for material waste, it is important to recognise further contributions related to the immaterial from Krysa et al. (2006), Lillemose (2006), Sadr Haghighian (2006) and Machan (2006).

The immaterial, discussed by Krysa et al. (2006), relates to the digital and less tangible methods of dealing with art. Lillemose (2006) discusses ‘Immateriality as a prevailing notion…on art in the context of new media and information technology’ (Lillemose 2006, 113). Both concepts of the de-material and immaterial are relevant in theorising about ephemera as a metaphor for environmental health and change, on personal and global levels. Thus the concepts discussed in this thesis concern lifestyle and change of attitude, particularly where this impacts on sustainable ecological considerations. In this regard Carter and Geczy (2006) contribute to new methodological processes for producing art. Their
recognition of the digital and immaterial to replace the sole author of artwork was introduced in Chapter Two. Significant for this thesis is their finding that collaboration or teamwork since the 1990s, is a tendency that contributes to ‘artists recast[ing] their own position with regards to authorship, agency and their egos’ (Carter and Geczy 2006, 230). Additionally when artists let go of the ephemeron, this is to do with giving and this act relates to blurring boundaries. The act suggests that a person – artist, is part of or belongs to a place, and cares for that place.

Alternatively, digital provides opportunities in relation to new methods of distribution and joint authorship. For art and ephemera, authorship takes a new meaning when images and art present strategies for sustainable living, or are conveyed on a mobile phone. Digital applications for art making and showcasing have expanded to include phone art and mobizones http://www.mobizone.com/. Apple University Consortium (AUC) and the Create World Conference (2006) referred to the potential for digital art to be available for people to connect artwork to a large audience through mobile phone usage. Leigh (2006) discusses usage for digital and art published online (http://www.auc.edu.au/Wheels+for+the+Mind). Similarly strategies or opportunities presented by networks such as Facebook, Myspace and You Tube, not to mention email, are democratically available, particularly for most people in developed countries, such as Australia. Thus when a group of people combine to make art as a strategy to support ecologically sensitive programs, the digital as provider of the image is another creative, perhaps responsible, option and a tool.

Responsibility
The collated data on artists who produce work with an interest in anti-commodity as well as art and ephemera demonstrates an informed response to how we can take greater responsibility and highlight the harm caused. For Ashton (2007), where 1970s ‘children of the earth’ could relish the natural environment, the twenty-first century person may have to relinquish that sense of innocence and know that our actions are responsible for creating stress on that same environment (Ashton

An artist advocating an ephemeral art practice has the option of taking meaning from the contemporary, and processing relevant information in order to create responses to issues. These could be those perceived to be important to the communities of a place or region. In developing a body of visual artwork, the concept and practice are developed in tandem with a search for the methods and means of construction and presentation. Methods and means are linked to the artwork concept and practice. In my engagement with concepts about art and ecology, I respond to the issues that I am concerned with through images I make, irrespective of whether they will last. These invite responses from audiences who appreciate and acknowledge the lesser environmental impact of the artwork in relation to these issues. The installation, Tools of Change (Lord 2007) included objects that were instrumental in acting as vehicles for the idea of change and ephemeral art, though they were not art objects. Putting objects instrumental in making the art, even when they are eroding visibly, in a display case and into the public view via galleries, as well as creating catalogues, positions the artist in an arena for critical feedback. Thus, comments from mentors, peers, critics, audiences and students are valued for their diverse perspectives and for evidence that the intended message is being successfully conveyed.

Some of these perspectives are derived from organizations showcasing their work through the Internet. The scope of the ‘land, art’ movement of the second millennium, and other organizations working to involve notions of land, ecology and art, is such that it involves ideas reaching from the material to concepts about no material and includes Internet developments to reach audiences. It might not be a movement about material at all, and in acting out their belief about art and ecology, these artists, working in collectives, provide an extension of the thinking
discussed in Chapter Six about connections between spirituality, life, art and ecology.

Inquiring artists do not accept all, but question what they see, and become agentic for visual arts and society’s potential adoption of new ways to look and see. Asking new questions, or for Ann Hamilton (2004) ‘knowing what question to ask’, assisted my critical analysis as a new learning experience about art and ephemera. In relation to attitudinal change, Youngblood (1970) stated in reference to Krishnamurti … ‘One of the fundamental causes of the disintegration of society is copying, which is the worship of authority’ (Krishnamurti referenced in Youngblood 1970, 62). I concur with Lippard, Pollock, Youngblood and Krishnamurti and their addressing the importance of questioning dominant discourses and entrenched status quo. Therefore my adoption of an art form that does not preserve the canon, but questions how this operates for archival art, provides agentic challenges to outmoded power relationships. This theoretical process, and post-structuralist critical alignment, assisted my response to questions such as ‘When does art require a preserved and long standing aesthetic object?’ It underlies my questioning of an authoritative and traditional contemporary art that can often deny ephemera the status of valid art.

In concluding this chapter I reiterate my priority for issue-based art, and the strategies used by artists in these circumstances to apply ecologically friendly outcomes through art and ephemera, or use detritus as a practice. In many cases the digital realm has been favoured as a documentation process. Arresting imagery as an outcome, not always as a goal, was addressed through my theme for the dichotomy of documentation and photography as art, and / or photography as a recording tool. This was referenced in relation to memory and disintegration as Küchler and Melion (1991) discussed how the Malanggan pass on memory through an object especially carved for a transitional process. There is no recorded documentation prior to retelling a story for artefact and place. It lives in memory.
In a developed world, democratically accessible and popular digital documentation frees artists to re-produce art and ephemera through capturing the image. Digital acts as a memory trigger for the piece, though it does not necessarily lead to any strong practice of art and ephemera. Alternatively this digital realm can lead artists to adopt dematerial and immaterial processes.

Being able to arrest imagery at a crucial visual point of disintegration into the surrounding environment was initially a starting point for my new work. Capturing or arresting the changing visual, that is, the figurative, animate or inanimate object, and its relationship to the environment through a new aesthetic, was integral to the impact of the visual artwork. Taking this to an online production is not new, though it offers a viable approach for disseminating the process of art and ephemera.

Artists who have responded to issues about environment through their art have commonalities with ‘relational aesthetics’ and ‘land, art.’ My creative artwork and conceptual development for art and ephemera are discussed briefly in Chapter Eleven, in relation to garbage. Here the art object is often found, as Duchamp’s objet trouvé was and is given up with the intention of provoking a response to environmental issues and waste, as a reason for concern, and acting for these causes.
Chapter Eleven

11.0 Ethics of Waste and Aesthetics of Garbage

Introduction

Recycling, garbage and transformation are *conceptual precursors* that artists have applied to art projects relevant to art and ephemera. In this chapter I discuss a number of projects arising from these common issues, and provide a link to a number of my art projects, which are significant as an artists’ tracking in this developing theme. Concepts from Hawkins (2006) about ethics of waste, and Muecke’s ‘ethical forces asking us to consider what we do’ (Muecke 2003, 126) align with concepts in Shohat and Stam’s (1998) aesthetics of garbage. In these discussions the authors make use of binaries and agentic action to contribute to a broader discourse about waste and what we do with our waste. I consider garbage and waste and Rogoff’s (1998) suggestion that visual culture provides potential opportunities to ‘rewrite’ through ‘our concerns.’ Rogoff states

…we have been trying to wrest representation away from the dominance of patriarchal, Eurocentric and heterosexist normativization, [and that] visual culture provides immense opportunities for rewriting culture through our concerns and our journeys (Rogoff 1998, 16).


Where Buskirk (2005) and Rogoff independently question inherited categorisation and offer alternative visual interpretation, their authorship assisted my inquiry and what I searched for in visual artwork. For instance, Buskirk’s (2005) departure from strictly chronological genres supports new parameters for rewriting art, and Rogoff states:
While deeply rooted in an understanding of the epistemological denaturalization of inherited categories and subjects revealed through the analytical models of structuralist and poststructuralist thought and the specific introduction of theories of sexual and cultural difference, these new objects of inquiry go beyond analysis towards figuring out new and alternative languages which reflect the contemporary awareness by which we live out our lives (Rogoff 1998, 16).

I argue that our contemporary culture of waste could adopt a consideration of earlier cultures and their beliefs, in order to appreciate the depth of concern raised by climate change experts (Stern et al. 2007), (Karoly, 2008). Perceptions vary greatly in relation to how rubbish is viewed and Kraft’s (1997) appraisal of Buddhist teachings is that ‘No waste’ usually has two linked meanings in these contexts: ‘do not waste’ and ‘do not perceive anything as waste’ (Kraft 1997, 280). The perception is critical for the following discussion about artists working in proximity to a personal place and about land use. Mentors Rirkrit Tiravanija and Mierle Laderman Ukeles provide connections between ecology and art.

**Tiravanija’s ‘the land’ and Laderman Ukeles’ garbage**

Tiravanija’s adoption of the lower case for ‘the land’ resonates with the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Both artists work with quotidian acts of maintenance, visible as concerns for ecology. Shohat and Stam (1998) refer to the development of this work in recent decades by artists Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Christy Rupp and Betty Beaumont, named ‘garbage girls,’ who ‘deploy waste disposal as a trampoline for art’ (Shohat and Stam 1998, 41). Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ art event *Touch Sanitation* (1984), where she shook hands with every garbage worker in the department (Plate 5.16), according to Morgan (1996) is where Laderman Ukeles

…acknowledged the tasks of maintenance as a liberating idea, a context for her art which she identified as a feminist position. As this position extended from the household system to that of public sanitation, the artist performed in museums and office buildings and eventually in the streets of New York City (Morgan, 1996, 179).

Laderman Ukeles’ work ranges from a humble manifesto *Manifesto! Maintenance Art*, to a choreographed ‘street ballet’ of garbage trucks (Laderman Ukeles cited in Burnham 1971, 40-41). This impacted on my recognition of artists who use art and street or public
space as a site for interaction with a general public. Humble acts of cleaning and communicating are relevant to the art and ephemera I promote.

In relation to the artist’s referencing mundane material and being involved in the daily relationship of human to base infrastructure, Morgan (1996) found that Laderman Ukeles ‘...wanted to emphasize the basically human side of the operation, that the activity of picking up trash is essentially no different from the disposing of it; the process is, in fact, a cycle’ (Morgan, 1996, 180). Owning our relationship to garbage is a responsibility that we all need to take on, and as Morgan (1996) relates for Laderman Ukeles, ‘Waste products are not created by “garbage men” but by individuals who designate leftovers as trash’ (Ukeles cited in Morgan, 1996, 181). Similarly, Kraft (1997) linking Buddhism and ecology, states that ‘karma doctrine’ is one domain that reveals potential gaps between past teachings and present circumstances. He explains:

For someone interested in nuclear-waste issues, the topic of waste offers another example of apparent discontinuity. In Zen, monks and other serious practitioners are not supposed to waste anything or treat anything as waste. The instructive stories are graphic: a novice is scolded for discarding a single chopstick; a monk runs alongside a mountain stream to retrieve a single piece of lettuce; Zen master Dogen uses only half a dipper of water to wash his face. [Mentioned above and in context here is Kraft’s statement] “No waste” usually has two linked meanings in these contexts: “do not waste” and “do not perceive anything as waste” (Kraft 1997, 280).

Kraft (1997) discusses the teaching by contemporary Zen master Morinaka Soko, who declared, “Roshi’s words that originally there is no rubbish either in men or in things actually comprise the basic truth of Buddhism” (Morinaka Soko cited in Kraft 1988, 17). These connections between Buddhism and ecology, introduced in Chapter Six, together point to a contemporaneous reformulated attitude and awareness to address global environmental concerns. This awareness could be agentic towards wellbeing in the natural environment and offers options for art and ephemera.

Schroeder discussed Laderman Ukeles’ (1997) Unburning Freedom Hall, a major project including peace talks at the Hearth, in the exhibition Uncommon Sense, Museum for Contemporary Art Los Angeles, March 16 - July 6 1997. The installation, created as a response to arson, and ‘peace talks,’ included ways to conceive peace: in the family,
inter-religious peace, inner peace, Pan-Asian / African American peace, city work as peace building. *Unburning Freedom Hall* is an impressive orchestration of events and gives a clear message within her art. It is a conceptual artwork I admire: art with the potential to mend rifts in communities and bring harmony back to a place where this has been threatened by actions such as a history of violence and misunderstanding.

Artists have accepted responsibility in various art projects linked to the natural environment and ecology. These are numerous and have been written about with connections to global awareness since the 1970s. In this investigation I identify areas of work where artists have adopted a more ephemeral material and an attitude to their work that enables it to be less precious or not precious at all. For my work, the return of the work to the natural environment is a major aspect of this study, due to the various issues discussed by many protagonists working closely with the natural environment in the second millennium. The connections I make between ephemera, waste and a consideration of place are a response to the issue of environmental devastation. Then the local place becomes my art site.

**Things Left in Gutters and in Pristine Places**

Things left in gutters and on beaches do form part of our recent history and they also show signs of disintegration. A banana skin, gum leaves, mango leaves and ‘bottle brush’ flowers ‘contained’ in the perimeters of gutters, are evidence of our natural history. My common strategy in *Fold*, (Lord 1997), *Flotsam and Jetsam* (Lord 1999 - ongoing, *The Strand Re-development Project*) and *Urban flags* (2001) was to search for the iconic things people left behind as pieces of garbage. These objects, later to become my icons, had either been dropped in the sea, and washed ashore on an urban beach, or left on The Strand and in city gutters.
Similarly the discarded Coke bottle made into a bong\(^1\) contributed a message about remains or leftovers from a party on a city beach. For my art and research projects about environment and change, beauty is discovered in the object that is close to regeneration. The capacity to regenerate might be through the aid of environmental factors and the flora and fauna that make up the ecology of the locality. The new shiny soft drink bottle, the ubiquitous Coke, has no capacity to regenerate or nourish. The half-destroyed and submerged coke bottle or rusted tin *does* have an identity within the surroundings through the act of disintegration and / or integration with its physical environment. The photograph of the coke *bong* bottle was re-used in the two walls of glass bricks *Flotsam and Jetsam* (Lord 1999 - ongoing) in The Strand Re-Development Project opened in late 1999, (Plate 11.5). The images explicate to the viewer the status of rubbish we leave behind and included a heel-less stiletto with a bird’s feather caught in the bow, a complete crumpled bed-sheet, a trashed wallet, a wine bladder displaying an osmotic fill of sand, and a white bird strangled by a white plastic bag. The images formed literal and theoretical images of folds for the exhibition in 1997 and said something about our habits of leaving things behind. These images on paper were initially floated on water inside a

\(^1\)Sealed bottle with water and garden hose to allow smoke to cool before inhalation.
glass brick (Lord 1997 Fold Plate 11.3) and exist on metal in Flotsam and Jetsam Lord (2000 ongoing and preserved as public art in glass bricks, The Strand Re-development Project, Townsville, Plate 11.6). The bird feather caught in the front bow of the shoe implies further impact on fauna and environment, than just the remains of an object on the beach. The performative object provides a tangible connection to ephemera as in a corroding element returning to the earth. It has natural imperfections much like the objects revered through the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi.

Plate 11.2 Lord Heel-less stiletto (1997 - ongoing) disintegrating object from my collection of flotsam and jetsam, photograph

Heel-less stiletto has been re-photographed and incorporated into different works. The stiletto from the fragile ecology of the city beach is an example of my pre-occupation over a decade with the relationship and identification of ephemeral objects in natural environments. The image presents dichotomies of waste and want, litter and environment.

These ideas have been refined in my current research for art and ephemera through the act of taking the object to the next stage of a material change, and through that process to transformation.
In the installation *Fold*, glass bricks were half-filled with water and oil or caustic soda, as intentional erosive elements. These materials referenced the fragile and eroded city beach. The bricks housed micro-environments and as moisture heated and formed droplets against the glass ceiling, it also rained and cleared (Plate 11.3). In this installation and in *Absence* I have repeated the strategy of placing pieces close to an entrance. People were then compelled to walk past or over them to view work.

This ongoing work is a key to the research question: ‘How art and ephemera might assist in illuminating environmental fragility?’ My 1997 series of images in glass bricks employed water and caustic soda to impact on artwork inside each brick. This work led to a challenging invitation to produce work for a public art piece *Flotsam and Jetsam* (Lord 1999 - ongoing). The challenges were twofold, how to have images about refuse accepted by local councillors, and secondly, how and why should this work become ‘permanent’? Certainly the eight months of presenting ideas and going through decisions about potential ‘public art work’ provided huge dilemmas for my consideration of the difference between ‘Public Art’ and ‘art and ephemera’. The projects that reference these issues in my own work are linked in the next section.
Claiming the Gutters

Throughout the development of this practice-led research and art projects I have looked at objects left behind by people as a way to reflect on contemporary society and the way objects can tell a story about our collective culture and record of place, or our presence in a location. The story is not just about a person leaving an object somewhere, such as in a gutter, but how these objects and icons tell a new story about our cultural habits in the local environment and in communal locations outside the domestic space. My 2001 work identified change in visual elements as a component in this study, and by 2005 I had resolved ways to make something more literally in touch with my theories, which were emerging as ‘art and ephemera’.

Common threads emerged in my collection of images as iconic references to garbage and the changing natural environment. My visual arts practice adopted new strategies of making, arresting, eroding, dissolving and letting go of the work, and this process relates to practice-led research. In the early stages of this research project my work for the exhibition Urban Topologies (2001), was to claim the gutters as repositories for images of neglect and waste. Ten artworks in this exhibition for the series titled Urban Flags (2001) were instrumental in development of my ideas for emerging aspects of this research. This work contributed to the formulation and addressing of my second research question, ‘How might art and ephemera assist in deeper understanding of environmental fragility and change?’ My investigation of things left in gutters for the series of works, Urban Flags (2001) led to adopting a certain approach to seeking images from gutters that could make a statement about our use or abuse of the environment. Creative development for Urban Flags was integral in leading to the research question, ‘What does my praxis of art and ephemera reveal about my commitment to the issue of environmental crisis?’ These pieces were evolving towards acts of letting go.

Urban street gutters contributed key iconography and strong horizontal elements. The icons I photographed were structured by juxtaposing four images taken from gutters to
form *urban flags*. I responded to the curator Adlington’s rationale for *Urban Topologies* by searching for images in the urban environment and identified local stories through marks, items and debris from street gutters. Stages of the work involved the capture of images from gutters near The Strand, then to go further afield into shopping centres and streets of Townsville looking for urban detritus. Initially I considered satellite imaging of the location, then macro images provided sections for the flags with relevant references for litter in gutters.

I was probing for the area of work I needed to investigate. Ann Hamilton (2006) stated that making her art required knowing what question to ask. Although I knew my quest was about change and detritus, I had not formulated the experience of art and ephemera as a possibility for my artwork. My statement for the series of photographic screen prints, *Urban Flags*, extends the idea of digital as an archive and at times a record of the ephemeral, Lord (2001):

> Photographs of borders were put together in a group of four. Each set made an urban flag, the title for this series. The images in each flag link ideas from urban issues. Some were about personal issues, some public. For example the combinations of things from items found beside and in gutters provide imagery that is about discards and the trace of human impact. Others show human traits about border issues and others just shadows from a presence, the nearness of an urban person. Sometimes what is left behind accidentally is more interesting than intended marks and reminders (Lord 2001, 9).

These precursors to my 2005 ephemeral pieces were instrumental in developing concepts about the ephemeral nature of things, especially our detritus, where it comes from, and where it goes. Adlington (2001) curator for *Urban Troposphere* wrote ‘…Anne Lord approaches the exhibition as if Townsville is no different from any other urban or regional centre.’ Adlington’s reference to my ‘ephemeral photographs’ was eluding more to the way my photo-screen prints were presented as layered images on organza, than to disappearing artworks. These ephemera were to replicate a transient monitor image. Adlington continued:

> The imagery focuses on gutters, borders, markings, and, in the words of the artist, “things people leave behind.” Lord is particularly interested in the refuse that gets left behind from people just living their lives, with the gutters acting as catchments for this collective experience. The physical act of photographing detritus such as this lends the object a greater value (Adlington 2001, 6).
Adlington’s reflection on aspects of the work have been important in the development of my ephemeral practice for and about the natural environment.

The most striking thing about these works is the strong geographic element. The homing in of the camera lens abstracts the subject matter, with coloured road markings such as these, whether ‘official’ road markings or the act of an individual, hint at many levels of experience with, and multiple acts on the environment. This is magnified by the way Lord has printed the works on layers of fabric, with the colours combining to form the final image. When the work is installed the slight shifting and movement of the fabric allows the image to separate from itself, forcing the viewer to slowly meditate upon the work and lace it together. These works soften what would ordinarily be considered either repellent or banal (Adlington 2001, 6).

In future, commentary on the concept of borders and how these enter into discourse about urban ~ rural divides, resources ~ waste, and cultural ~ racial divisions, could be a strategy for artists and curators in addressing aspects of the natural environment. For me it might be about how the blurring occurs. For instance, Davidson (2003) discusses the dynamics of how states map themselves ‘vis-à-vis the limits or enforceable boundaries of their power’ (Davidson 2003, 5) and the changing national frontiers in ‘literal and figurative senses.’ For me the issue is closer to ‘home,’ for, as Hawkins finds, what we leave behind shows us who we are. Thus the issues include the increasing pressure on less obvious concerns such as water as a resource, who owns it, where it comes from, and how the issue might be addressed. For Adlington, ‘A number of artists … address the division between the city and the surrounding environment. The new suburbs on the fringes of the city stop suddenly, to be confronted by the dry expanse of the natural landscape’ (Adlington 2001, 6). This forecasts my 2005 use of survey pegs removed from their status as ‘original peg,’ a vertical position, and figuratively unmapped when placed in a horizontal position, discussed in section 11.3.
Plate 11.4 *Urban flags* - *Burnt split* photo-screen print on organza layers, aluminium fastened at top [photograph Rob Parsons]

The ephemeral basis for *urban flags* (2001) was strongly linked to my earlier work for the exhibition at Umbrella, *Fold* " (Kirby and Lord 1997) and The Strand Re-Development Project *Flotsam and Jetsam* (Lord 1999 - ongoing). These shared a similar inquiry into the stories told by what people leave behind in public suburban places. Though public art is designed to be more permanent than what I produced for *Fold* (1997), the images in these projects were addressing the challenges of how inadvertently dropping rubbish impacts on a locality, and especially on the fauna. In *Flotsam and Jetsam* a key image is the white bird strangled by a white plastic shopping bag (Plate 11.5).
Plate 11.5 Lord (1999 ongoing) *Flotsam and Jetsam* public art (detail 20 x 20 cm) 
white bird strangled with a white shopping bag UV cured images on metal in 
glass bricks

The image of the bird strangled with a white plastic bag caused concern for some local 
government councillors, however they accepted that these images form an artist’s 
perspective and could be included in the public artwork. What I was presenting was 
challenged again, when a number of labourers were finalising the placement of my 
images into glass bricks on The Strand Fishing Jetty for The Strand Re-Development 
Project. One of them said to me that the images are ‘just about rubbish’. For the people 
working on the site, that was a way of looking at the objects left by other people, but 
perhaps the depiction of these images as so-called art was either too close to reality or so 
irritating as signs of garbage, as to be a nuisance in relation to memory and place. 
Another perspective was gained from a visitor appreciative of the image ‘red pants 
washed up on the beach’ (Plate 11.6). Augé’s (1995) ‘contemporary science of 
anthropology’ links such objects as the artefacts that identify the cultural and social 
habits of a society. Like many other objects photographed on the strip of city beach, they 
were part of my visual data to make images about the fragile coastal environment. In the 
permanent work for The Strand Re-Development site these images were collated with my 
intention to say something to the passing public. Taken from ephemeral installation 
images they are reproduced and literally installed into two public toilet walls, a suitable 
site for this work.
Inherent in all these images is the acceptance of the natural environment, re-claiming the icon. The strangled bird is already returning to a natural graveyard of watery sand. The plastic bag is not so easily absorbed into this return, and this problem contributes as a crux in my thesis.

Items such as bottle tops, squashed caps, plastic seals, tins, cartons, bottles and broken plastic and glass of all colours also show signs of returning to the ground where they are found. In my desire to do something about the environment, I employ these items we leave behind to comment on the time it takes for things to erode and return to the ground, to be consumed by the earth. Some of these items closer to parks might be absorbed in
the humus. It is not so easy for things in a city gutter to go back to nature, but the odd car
tyre driving over a bottle top does wonders to change a three dimensional object to flat
and crumpled beauty. Eventually, some oxidation, some rain on tin or paper, provide the
mark or indent that initiates the journey back to earth and revegetation. In this way the
sign of erosion or decay becomes a positive sign of return to nature. My working title for
this thesis was ‘Trigger by Sight: Culture in Nature’ and indicated underlying messages
about the visual image and the capacity an image has to trigger memory and impact on
our appreciation of, and capacity to care for, the natural environment. These icons of
erosion are instrumental in consolidating my research findings and valuing the ephemeral
icon.

Watching and waiting for things to happen in order to make use of an ephemeral process
leads to photographic capture or drawing. Waiting may be an attribute that enhances the
findings of the research for I do not want to deliberately destroy anything for art. This is
an important aspect of my philosophy about environment, and especially living things,
the flora and fauna. Hence I found that explosive ephemeral material is contrary to my
concerns for this study. However when an object made from a semi-permanent and
fragile material disintegrates, it behaves in a beautiful way as it morphs into the
surrounding environment. Digging in the garden, planting and growing are related to the
way my work references gardening. This involves senses other than sight, for instance the
earth smells fresh with rain on it and the waste in the compost smells differently from the
earth. These are important considerations for this investigation.

Image, object and senses (smell, taste, sight, hearing, touch), are modes to trigger
memory. In opposition to this is the historical precedent in which Aesthetics ° chosen by
the dominant group were archived. On the other hand, the (Anti-) aesthetic ° as opposed
to the Aesthetic can be a problematic concept in relation to waste and compost, or art and
ephemera. However, the concept that senses can be stimulated by ephemeral processes,
from perfume to garbage, assists in revising the idea that all good things are sanitised, a
post-structuralist agentic reversal of binaries (Table 11.1).
Table 11.1 Revising perceptions / prejudices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aesthetic</th>
<th>(Anti-) aesthetic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfume</td>
<td>Garbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good bad, sanitised</td>
<td>Good bad, not sanitised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problematic for art and ephemera, as a supporting practice for a light environmental footprint, is the constant and aggressive marketing to instil the idea, that clean is good, healthy and antiseptic. This is where anti-aesthetic can be considered as a challenge to the canon. Antiseptic as clean, without a consideration of recycling, promotes throwaway products and does not consider the potential to reuse containers or recycle rubbish as compost. The potential to reuse is represented in my work as the eroding icons I see as aesthetic: coke bottles, heel-less stilettos and other throwaway items (Plates 11.1 to 11.5). I concur with Hawkins’ (2006) and Simons’ (2004) investigations and serious consideration in support of garbage and compost.

My understanding of the relationship of people, their identity and connection to place with objects left in gutters resonates with concepts addressed by Shohat and Stam (1998). Recycled material and reclaiming garbage for art have been discussed from a number of perspectives; that is, how re-use of material has been adopted by marginalized people and picked up by ‘high theory and cultural studies,’ and ‘visual culture.’ In Shohat and Stam’s (1998) ‘Polycentric Aesthetics,’ many alternatives for disintegration and aesthetics, potentially, art and ephemera, present themselves:

Another feature of alternative bricolage aesthetics is their common leitmotif of the strategic redemption of the low, the despised, the imperfect, and the ‘trashy’ as part of a social overturning. This strategic redemption of the marginal also has echoes in the realms of high theory and cultural studies. One thinks, for example, of Derrida’s recuperation of the marginalia of the classical philosophical text; of Bakhtin’s exaltation of ‘redeeming filth’ and of low carnivalesque genres; of Benjamin’s ‘trash of history’ and his view of the work of art as constituting itself out of apparently insignificant fragments; of Camp’s ironic reappropriation of kitsch; of cultural studies’ recuperation of subliterary forms and ‘subcultural styles’; and of visual culture’s democratization of the field of art (Shohat and Stam 1998, 41).

The democratisation of art as visual culture is agentic in disturbing that part of our environmental problem where the collective attitude is often against a lowly subject such
as our waste. Artists have been using garbage assertively for art material for well over a century. On the contrary, desire to create the ‘Limited edition’ print on new heavy expensive cotton paper can be related to a problem of the elite and traditionalist, archival discourse. Though many prints are art, and I still aspire to create some, many imprints can be related to a desire for a reproducible, saleable product, not necessarily to art as communication of ideas. Thus the process can be a commodification of the image, irrespective of its bearing on art. Similarly, advertising, with its agenda to create obsession with having the ‘latest model,’ opposes creative activity in art and ephemera. On the contrary, art and ephemera can disrupt the belief that new manufactured materials are best.

Major art institutions support the dominant practices of creating and owning the new and preserving the product beyond the life of the artist. Institutions may even attempt to preserve ad infinitum those items made for practise in an art school. These practices position the acceptance of resource-hungry, elitist art techniques without considering the problem for environment, and belong to a capitalist discourse. Hawkins (2006) refers to a system of binaries for the purpose of seeing what we do and the potential repercussions:

What we want to get rid of tells us who we are. …But what we want to get rid of also makes us who we are. Social constructionism generally begins with the binary of waste versus human; these determinate forms are the starting point for analysis (Hawkins 2006, 2).

Suggestions made by Hawkins contribute a response for potential changes in an accepted ritual of garbage construction and removal. I support this in my thesis, and address the potential for people to claim greater responsibility in their response to the organization of waste. There may be a place in culture where people commit their actions to the direct benefit of their surrounding environment. So instead of rubbish being the end of the connection to recycling and regeneration, it becomes a step in the recognition of new growth and wellbeing. In my praxis and research I strive to make this explicit.

My rationale for working with an art of ephemera and considering its relationship to current discourse led to questions that could be asked by the artist or artworker. ‘What is important? What is to be saved, recycled, neglected or replaced?’ Given that some artists
aspire to beauty in ephemera – no waste – no want. Other questions are ‘How to achieve less of an environmental footprint from a desire to produce artwork?’ ‘How will I ~ we live my life, our lives?’ In this research, I pay respect to Andrews et al. (2006) for knowledge collated about art and ecology. I ask ‘What tools, what art, will help artists to answer questions about how much we want and waste?’

Where my art praxis has developed in response to art and ephemera and to pressures on environment, I found I could make a statement through art and deterioration rather than through art made to be collected and archived. There are many ways of incorporating ephemera, in art practice and theory, and I have investigated some tools for an art of ephemera and methods for collecting aspects of ephemera that can be allowed to regenerate. For art and ephemera there are examples of art as symbols and metaphors. My investigation of various artists and communities to find their methods and some answers to how art and ephemera can be incorporated, has led to new discoveries about artists who are prepared to work with ephemeral materials. Andrews (2006), Lacy (1995) and Schemelzer (2006) write about the seamless nature of art and life. Artists, who incorporate this seamless nature in their art and the relevant years for this work, include, Ross Gibson (2008), Tosi Lee (2004) and Ann Hamilton (1999). Long-surviving and sustained cultures provide examples of how people find ways of working with and adopting processes of decay and disintegration. They incorporate methods for adoption of waste as another provision of want. They demonstrate an ability to incorporate the wasted into the wanted.

Recognising that my work is almost the exact opposite of artists who work with glossy materials, such as computer-generated forms in plastic, I also realised that I use a particular form of searching for a recycling element. I address questions about the ephemeral nature of things through my art practice and theorising. This leads to my discussion about my response to the question, ‘What tools could help me realise my work in art and ephemera, that is, to find the relationship between valued waste and waste as commodity?’ This became my praxis.
Tools of Change (2007): Metal Objects in Earth

Discussed earlier, the studio garden is where I found metal objects by digging in the earth. The objects are lost, decomposing and sometimes useless old tools. I prepare gardens and dig with a favourite tool, the mattock, to turn up areas of earth. Sometimes, during a break from work in the studio or on the computer, I think it would be good to find another implement to draw. On many occasions when I dig with the mattock, I almost immediately find old tools or steel fragments in the alluvial soil, something uncovered or discovered in these diggings. It is not like the activity of an archaeologist, but it is the artist’s work and the result of knowing that something is in the ground and that this will be a record of the immediate environment and the past occupants, though these artefacts are only European. Often the metal is significant as a sign of erosion in time and objects become my artefacts to study. They include steel spikes, a hammerhead, large nails and axle (.5 cm by 50 cm rusted steel). The onionskin weathering on parts of this and many other metal objects is important for me in the development of the relationship between long deep time and change.

The significance of a rusted metal tool is that the time for metal to change in such a way is substantial in comparison to the time a leaf or piece of bark would take to do the same thing. My reflection on the items found in the soil led to more developments in the acceptance of humus as a material for art. Metal and humus as a gauge of time have very different inherent processes. The uncovered, rusting or decaying objects or tools are from a previous time. Objects I have found, metal axe heads, hammerheads, long nails, pieces of long steel, an old car spring or axle, have been photographed and turned into drawings. Some were re-photographed as drawn objects in shifting light. Transience, both real and implied, enters my work, significantly in digital photography. Thus the implications of passing time relate to shifting light on eroding objects.

There is a correlation between viewing the fading photograph, An 1890’s Portrait (2006), projected as a digital ephemeral piece, and other work I developed for Tools of Change (2007) containing eroding metal. These connections are in the idea of the change process and the way things fade or disintegrate with time. In particular the fading image in silver
bromide, *An 1890's Portrait*, is a disappearing image dependent on the trace of metal for its survival (Appendix XXIII). My transition of images in the projection in *Tools of Change* (2007) was used to alternately enhance and fade the image, based on digital capture of the original photograph. Small, previously unseen, features emerge in the enhancement of the image. It was as if some things remained hidden until the technology could bring the features into greater contrast or saturation of colour. Thus certain abstract coincidences occur in the colours that are found in rust, and in the enhancement of the portrait, visible in *Tools of Change*, where both were installed. My interest in natural phenomena was developed in work with chalk and ochre as a temporary drawing process, surrounding horizontal survey pegs on site (Plate 11.7). These are talked about in the next section, where the site impacted on what could happen, or could be presented, in an installation.

**Getting to Chalk, Ochre, Survey Pegs and Un-mapping**

Practice-led research and artwork for this current study involves subtle and carefully orchestrated time-based change and natural phenomena, potentially visible during an exhibition / installation. Whereas my artwork (1994 - 1999)² employed impact from natural elements, such as rain, sun, and disturbances by animals (domestic or wild) to disrupt or change the site work, my new work is almost self-destructive.

The 1990s artworks provided a point of departure for the current study. My 2001 to 2004 work was pivotal in adopting erosion as a tool for change and loss. From 2005 to 2008 my adoption of the performative object includes the humus bucket, for me the epitome of this work.

Chapter Eleven   Anne Lord

Plate 11.7 Lord (2005) Horizontal peg on disused step, Wallaman Falls National Park (Appendix XIV)

My work with the eroded survey pegs, instruments for marking boundaries and delineating land, is ongoing at this point. This work has implications for future artwork. The surveyor’s skills, recognition, license and equipment are necessary to identify old and rotting survey pegs in the environment and to relocate or put in new pegs to replace such pegs. Cleve McGuane my husband, a cadastral surveyor, has presented over fifty old survey pegs to me, initially saying that he thought they were relevant for my artwork. Some of these pegs are over 100 years old and have various signs of age. McGuane removes survey pegs from the ground in order to replace them with new pegs. My horizontal placement of the ‘original replaced survey peg’ (term provided by Cleve McGuane 7th September 2008) places both tree and peg in horizontal positions. A survey peg lying on its side has no value as a survey mark. Similarly the rotting log Plates 9.16 and 9.17 is of less value than a tree for shade, but does become recycled, as does the wooden peg. The new and precisely positioned vertical peg is a place-locating device for mapping of a boundary, whereas the pegs given to me are placed in a non-functional,
horizontal position and documented or drawn as icons of change. Visual clues from the disintegrating stages of the survey pegs were useful in showing stages of ageing, and were developed in some of the artwork, for instance *Peg to no peg* (2005) and *Peg for Non-site* (2006). There were pegs that did not fit into a series, and they showed the effects of other important factors or inherent visible change agents, such as white ant or termite-ridden logs, water or dry rot, and salt or claypan soil. These contributed as signs of ‘material change’.

The important point for my art is that the removed pegs are no longer playing a part in the mapping of the environment and in fact the removal places these pegs in a position of unmapping, and makes them impotent as markers. The dis-placed pegs became icons of change, and for this reason the pegs were interpreted through different visual media or disciplines such as printmaking processes, such as screen printing and lithography, prior to my clarification of the performative object. The eroded surfaces and disintegrating pegs were instrumental in my realizing the capacity that the performative object has to create a metaphor for change in the natural environment. These old displaced pegs are yet to act as performative pieces in an installation and for future research.

Inherent in my 2004 to 2007 work, where I was prioritizing ephemeral objects, is the capacity to engage a public audience to reflect on this change and our part in it. This hurdle, to know and understand how I could engage the audience, was one of the most difficult to overcome and was resolved with the action of the performative object. In concluding this chapter, I acknowledge that resolving the artworks has provided a trajectory for my practice-led research and thesis. In Chapter Twelve these are positioned as a seamless part of my findings and recommendations.
Chapter Twelve

12.0 To the Future, Conclusions in the Interim of Change

In this chapter I highlight my findings for ‘art and ephemera’. Issues that have been raised as concepts and practice in this thesis involve significant links for artists who work within the area of art and environment. My recommendations from strengths in the research are addressed firstly, in response to the research questions. My conclusion is an interim one in a thesis that is about cyclical action and return. An end is another beginning, and this topic invites ongoing interaction from artists, academics, curators and education institutions, not least, the art school.

My thesis provides reflection on art discourse, through investigating widely differing phenomena. The variant practices include agentic action for environmental wellbeing, and thus, for humanity. Throughout this study I investigated artists who could empower an alternative and convincing manner of portraying the performative object with a strong message for humanity about the natural environment. These mentor artists, and their communities, engendered personal concern in their work for what happens to our environment when we ignore warning signs about impending global catastrophe. Their artworks are subtle and well researched, and this is evident in various artists’ concepts investigated in the thesis. They have assisted my adoption of ephemera as concept and process in art. These mentors provide exemplars for further development in the field. In this way artists, as mentors who show us new ways to look and think about the world we live in, have informed this study.

My quest, to research how visual art and ephemeral material could be briefly arrested in an evolving process of recycling, and then allowed to return to the natural environment,
was introduced in Chapter One. My background and first hand experience of erosion, drought and water shortage contributed primary data through collections of images and objects. Artists’ commitments to making art that is not intended to sell have been identified as significant contributions to culture and inform my work.

Responses to Research Questions and Findings

I set out to find data in response to my research questions; and for the genre of presenting a thesis, I have rigorously revisited the data and made links clear in this conclusion. The research questions were developed to seek new insight and morphed with the revealed artistic concepts and practices. My methodology allowed for my adoption of new areas of practice and theory to emerge in the study.

In response to the first research question, ‘What artistic means could illuminate environmental fragility?’ my theorising built on prior recognition of beauty in fragile artwork, through sustained investigation into precursors, models and mentors. Precursors included fragile Tang and medieval icons, identified with the help of Duchamp’s concept of the ready-made. Models included artworks, such as Laderman Ukeles’ Manifesto for Maintenance Art as Installation in a Reconstruction Site: In Up Out Up (1978). Mentors for this research and ongoing influential artists are Rirkrit Tiravanija, Wolfgang Laib, Gustav Metzger and Sheela Gowda. My artworks, the impossible bucket, ice sculptures and eroded survey pegs, are in accord with metaphors revealed by mentors and models. The artistic means are identified in exemplars linked with my aims in Chapter One. Identifying art and ephemera as a topic, already inherent in my earlier work, enabled me to see an artistic means for my new work. It was precisely the ephemeral nature of the material in the work that could perform, and often is intended to fall apart in its own installation. This involved a change of attitude to what we consume and how much.

Chosen works discussed as models have relationships to cultural beliefs, and I referenced different societies’ concerns for wellbeing in nature and culture. My praxis demonstrates material processes that represent and feature natural environmental change. Introduced in
my discussion of eroded icons as *ready-mades* for art and ephemera, it encompasses the idea of eroding icons as digital ready-mades, used in *Absence* (Lord 2004).

My first question was partially resolved for question two with data showing aged icons. I realised that these icons inherently provide an aesthetic of age relevant for ‘art and ephemera’ and thus untapped riches for my investigation. These icons of ephemera assisted my response to ‘How might art and ephemera assist in deeper understanding of environmental fragility and change?’ I identified many artists working with the intention of considering the plight of the natural environment. This was through the focus of the study, art and ephemera, and the concepts inherent in the ability to let an artwork go. Many artists’ adoption of the anti-archive as material was evident in their conceptual rationale, and I found and presented mentors and models (key artists and artworks) for agentic repositioning of art and ephemera. In particular I searched for those mentors who would be engaged in compassion. These assisted my theorising about artists and art, as well as my own practice. In identifying mentors, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, I presented their deep understanding and accomplished work in connection with environment and ‘relational aesthetics’ (Bourriaud 2002). In developing a better understanding of how art and ephemera can be agentic in portraying a message, I created new artwork, for instance the *Impossible bucket* 2005 (Plate 9.24), as a metaphor for environmental fragility.

In response to my third question ‘How can a post-structuralist theoretical perspective with attention to discourse analysis illuminate the juxtaposition of art, ephemera and ecology, as a twenty-first century concern?’ I applied post-structuralist theorising to illuminate agentic praxis emergent in art and ephemera. This revealed the existence of binaries in discourse analysis. By doing this I also challenged the hierarchical power positioning of dominant and archival binary conventions. The glossary for art and ephemera invites ongoing discussion and communication about this research topic through presentation of examples and theorising. I positioned ‘art and ephemera’ as a legitimate twenty-first century environmentally sensitive practice, and acknowledged the relationship between this practice and an economics of waste and want. In promoting non-archive and site (beyond the gallery) I have given agency to alternatives in art with a
lighter environmental footprint than, for instance, archival bronze sculptures. I validate this through ecological imperatives. Further to this, my inclusion of various voices for a perspective that invites pluralist, cultural concerns was crucial for a broad acceptance of this topic in visual arts and contemporary culture.

Research question four, ‘What does my praxis of art and ephemera reveal about my long-term commitment to the issue of environmental crisis?’ allowed me to address continuation of my practice to let an artwork go, in art and ephemera. In this way I could highlight the issues and promote the genre. Presentation of my findings at conferences (cross-disciplinary forums) and publishing articles for research, art and education audiences, can lead to further deployment of the issues raised in this thesis. Significantly, the workshop *Leave no trace* (2005) instigated important processes and methods for artists in North Queensland and is now promoted on ‘The GEO Project’ website [www.geoproject.org.au](http://www.geoproject.org.au) (launched August 2008).

The necessity to empower alternative practice has been discussed in the interface between art and ephemera, and pedagogy. For instance, two key events in regional Australia that promote art and ephemera or artworks that are not intended to be kept in archival surroundings, or maintained by the institution after the event, are *Strand Ephemera* in Townsville and *In Site Out* in Orange. My participation in and observation of these two events led to my conviction that art and ephemera was not always actively engaged as *ephemeral* or with the specific intention of low impact on resources or environment. This could be promoted more effectively as a viable alternative art practice. Where large-scale iron and sculptural pieces require a botanical garden or large beachfront to be of interest to the public, my thesis promotes alternative low impact materials. This leads to my recommendation to consider art and ephemera, for variance of scale, time and placement, as critical to present a lighter environmental footprint, one that many artists are using in their art.

Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, took school children and groups on tour to view the artwork in *Strand Ephemera* in 2007. This created an important insight into how
primary and secondary students experience the idea of art and ephemera. Many *Strand Ephemera* and *In Site Out* artists had works that could not disappear or erode during the events. This archive amongst ephemera may impact on audiences’ perceptions about what Townsville and Orange offer as regional and innovative practice for impermanent art. Diminished options such as these, through responses with semi-permanent art and ephemera, suggest I should continue to strengthen my pedagogical application of practice-based research into art and ephemera. I aim to continue this, via the academy and key research contexts. These options are addressed in Future Directions, along with the digital promotion of art and ephemera that can be developed to promote understanding and interpretation.

My response to question five, ‘How might this research inform artistic directions, cross-disciplinary considerations, and inspire further research in this topic?’ was addressed in a number of chapters through artists’ engagement with ecological issues. The ideas are extended in future research and directions. Presentation of theorists and research options, in Chapters Two and Three, provided a focus and precedent for other researchers - artists to contribute via similar perspective and methodology. Specifically some methodological strategies address the potential to apply qualitative research to art and cross-disciplinary areas. My interpretation of Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy’s (2006) figure for epistemology, theory and methods leading to methodology has been useful in visual arts research presentations to explain my topic. This application from my research and responses from early researchers demonstrate my potential for higher degree supervision. These are important outcomes in line with the currency of my research.

In Chapters Eight to Ten, I expanded on art and ephemera through links with ecology and environment to show that art is not just about visual presentation and can be a powerful force to activate thoughtful responses from audiences. Artists have the capacity to change attitudes and question archival practice, as well as the wisdom to adopt the ephemeral object, irrespective of financial reward. Discussions instigated in the *Leave No Trace* workshop led to new dialogue with artists and artworkers - and included Australian Aboriginal artists. This was an important event for recognizing the potential for artists to
create new dialogue. My recommendation is to implement workshops such as these, where artists have more opportunities to discuss and implement new ideas, based on interaction with environment, in their artwork.

The development of a textual device, the ‘Glossary for Art and Ephemera,’ promotes a common language for art and ephemera, and is a tangible and substantial contribution in Chapter Four. It assists with recognition of vital discourse for art and appreciation for lessening impact on resources. I invite further discussion in this area through art practice and discourse. In the context of my emergent topic, illuminated by my autobiographical and regional focus, it is important to encourage other voices to contribute through new and sustained national and international dialogue. For further potential research I offer this glossary, and invite others to build upon it. I will promote this process in online blogs for individuals and communities to have ongoing conversations about this practice and ‘letting go’ of art objects. The potential to do this expands with the November 2008 launch of www.abc.net.au/artpost, for regional art exposure.

My responses to research questions addressed in this conclusion simultaneously fulfil aims of my study. My praxis through the thesis has grown with reciprocity and reflection, reaching new conceptual thresholds. My new knowledge will impact on my communication with visual artists and industry, tertiary art students, academics and the public. In this way a structure of inequality, that is, emphasis on a privileged precious commodity or archived object, was challenged by a creative alternative with a pragmatic basis. My study was designed to involve art practice and theory and thus contribute substantial information to empower an alternative art practice. The practice is one that not only lessens environmental impact, but also creates reflection and community responses to the way we care for place and natural environment. Thus I develop and promote the ability to defend and elaborate on my praxis. Potential further dialogue about art and ephemera will be invited through future conferences and exhibitions referred to below.

In this thesis I discussed varying situations, and the motivation for a number of key artists to express their attitude about early twenty-first century concerns through art and
ephemera. I appreciated Lippard’s (2002) and Buskirk’s (2004) approaches to investigating visual arts without genre or time-based constraints, and followed this strategy rather than attempt to homogenise, or lump together, artists who have some common discipline or material elements in their work. Artists are renowned for implementing difference through acts of defiance, and this was identified in my exploration, particularly in relation to surrender of archival practice.

Hughes (2008), when considering the artist Morandi, professed that everybody could create his or her own aura through an impermanent artwork. In contrast to archived artwork, the aura of the ‘performative object,’ such as an ice sculpture, is not to fade with the melting or disintegration of the performative object but actually strengthen through memory. Natural environmental rhythms in time are discussed by Shohat and Stam (1998) and celebrated in the performative object. This contributes to arts discourse in future research.

Memory is theorised as a cohort for ‘art and ephemera,’ and advances my thesis in response to ‘What artistic means could illuminate environmental fragility?’ Though the ephemeral photographic image is similar to the ephemeral material previously used as a metaphor for environment and change, it is the impact on memory that creates a significant contribution to this area. It requires the considered artistic means of mentors, such as Sheela Gowda (2007) with *Collateral* (Plate 7.4), Sakarin Krue-On (2007) with *Terraced Rice Field Art Project* (Plate 2.2) or Wolfgang Laib (2005) with *Pollen* (Plate 1.10), to provide the mentoring and models that resonate with memory. Similarly, Küchler and Melion’s (1991) discussion of Malanggan people, who portray and remake significant imagery by the retelling of ancestor stories, assists in recognising the artist’s ability to convey important relationships and territorial rites through memory (activated by ephemeral artefacts). Prior to 2000 the developed world adjusted to digital reproduction of text and image to remind us of the content or concept of an artwork. Digital text and image, as trigger for memory, was explored for the potential to promote and communicate art and ephemera.
I recommend that more opportunities for the performative object should be encouraged by the art industry, not just as a community engagement, but also for quiet reflection on what the ephemeron can represent. The ephemeral art object celebrates regeneration and ritual, as well as acknowledging communities as significant players in the field of creative arts. It can sit alongside the precious object where economic discourse has been prominent in contemporary visual art. In this section I conclude that the plethora of archive and the dearth of ephemera, in relation to art, are in need of a new balance in the art industry. Dichotomies emerge even in a conclusion. The icon made from humus, or pages made from plant fibres, do not require an electric current for the production of image or recognition, whereas the digital does. It is worth considering that when ‘art and ephemera’ is committed to memory it does not necessarily need to have a record or image capture.

In Chapter Seven, I critiqued the idea of growing plants in an installation as artwork, especially when the work failed to survive. This gave me reason to investigate alternatives, that is, art and ephemera as a viable practice. From the artists I investigated, and my practice, it was and would be, possible to allow a new stage of the process to happen, as a continuum, as traces of the act. This is ongoing in Rirkrit Tiravanija’s (1998 – 2008) work and website, www.thelandfoundation.org (Plates 6.1 and 6.2). I considered performance of disintegration and regrowth in order to incorporate these into concepts about regeneration. Though my identification of the first stage or process of decay could be seen as nihilist or negative, I found this aspect of a cycle in nature and its potential in culture to be a major redeeming feature of ephemera as art practice.

Social Contexts for Issue-based Art and Ephemera

During this inquiry I found that artists who maintain a stance for ecological engagement in their work have been included in the biennales of the mainstream art world. High profile work includes Sheela Gowda’s (2007) Collateral made from incense material (Plate 7.4), Tiravanija’s the land (1998 - ongoing) and Avital Geva’s (1993) Greenhouse installation successfully growing plants in the Venice Biennale 1993 (Plate 9.6). These
were key pieces from the last decade that demonstrated successful engagement with both art and ephemera, and ecology, through issue-based practice. Artists who work on the fringes and in ecologically successful projects, such as a part of Tiravanija’s practice, demonstrate how they can act within a relational context, and still have a democratic voice and connections to those very problems they would be removed from in a traditional gallery space. This evolving situation in the first decade of the twenty-first century lies at the basis of entering the canon for many artists wishing to enact praxis in art and ephemera.

Carter and Geczy (2006) (Chapter Two) and other contemporary authors make allowances for an art that does not have to be archived in its material state. This facilitated my reflection and re-positioning of the value of the ephemeral art object. In discussions with Ashton (2006 - 2008) I learnt that dominant discourses, or aspects of the hierarchy, are notions that can be challenged in post-structuralist theorising. In my response to, ‘How can a post-structuralist theoretical perspective with attention to discourse analysis, illuminate the juxtaposition of art, ephemera and ecology, as a twenty-first century concern?’ I argued against dominant discourses that maintain the status quo, or a hierarchy. Rather, for an art of ephemera, there can be respect for ‘descendent’ discourse, which resonates with rhythms where there might be no end point, but simply a continuum. The ideas were emphasised by Hawkins (2006) in The Ethics of Waste, in Simons’ (2004) ‘resurrection through compost,’ and Sengupta’s (2003) ‘connective models’ and ‘translocations’ (Sengupta, http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0303/msg00165.html). I addressed the issue of the escalation of want ~ waste through a consideration of managing waste and recycling. This was assisted by my quest for artists’ awareness of human impact on environment, and the way to take action to reduce this impact.

Throughout the thesis I have referenced the potential for digital photography and online reproduction as an interface for ephemera and art. This interface supports my decision to assist in deeper understanding of environmental fragility and change. I promote an art and ephemera that is environmentally friendly, and digital photography as a medium capable
of carrying a message through documentation. I found this concurs with options for art and ephemera and promotes discussion about art and memory.

In my analysis of the documentation quandary where photography can be art and/or documentation, it is critical for my thesis that ‘art and ephemera’ is not replaced by copious digital printouts or souvenirs that tell us what we might have missed, or what the performative object was enacting. Thus, in art and ephemera, actions are more important than products. In this concluding chapter, the digital is reinforced as a tool for online distribution, and seen more in that respect than as a creative, tangible option for art and ephemera. In the relationship of image and web, the Internet is the preferred medium for exchange of ideas about the ephemeron. In this thesis this leaves the initial tangible, performative object to be the crucial act of creative work, and the digital, simply a documentation process.

Contradictions arise in my practice; and for an artist who wishes to speak her mind, the touring of the Habitus Habitat exhibition 2008 to 2011 does hold some challenges. The touring exhibition contains archival work and certainly not the little humus bucket that has returned to mulch. I thought it would be important to have a digital image of the bucket included in the exhibition, however the curator decided this image could be on the web site. In fact this decision concurs with my thesis that the ephemeral object belongs to dialogue on the Internet, rather than being reproduced as a digital print product. The GEO Project, introduced in Chapter Eleven is at http://www.geoproject.org.au and briefly identified in Appendix XXIV. In addition to online opportunities there are choices for education across schools and industry.

Potential Contribution to Policy for Education
Potential new policies for pedagogy and industry emerge from my study, through recognition of value in theory and applied practice of art and ephemera. In this respect, the process and identification of art practice as research is integrally involved with theory and contemporary issues. This was embedded in the perspective and analysis for my
thesis. My study concurs with Sullivan (2005) and Thompson (2006), who argued that there are ‘…profound implications for the justification of art education as a priority in contemporary schools and societies, and for the advocacy of particular forms of art education’ (Thompson 2006, 4-5).

Methods available through art and ephemera are potentially viable for various levels of education, industry training, and social engagement. They can provide new engagement opportunities for people concerned about the natural environment, on sites that can be made meaningful through praxis of art and ephemera. From my experience of site events, artists appear to facilitate this education process. Education opportunities for improving understanding of the natural environment and our place in it, and for the maintenance of the ecology, emerge in creative pedagogical practice (Miles et al. 2005). Hefele (2005) states:

We must develop new ways of teaching that will cultivate a desire for healing the nature-culture relationship and promote long term sustainable planning. The planet’s collective future depends on it (Hefele 2005, 225).

An application of my research is to offer new subjects in diverse education contexts informed by the development of this topic. In this study, suitable content emerges for areas such as university subjects on-campus and online. New subjects would include activities via Internet and web page contributions, such as Wikis. Tertiary visual arts education courses could facilitate the provision of alternative strategies for pedagogical models which prefer anti-commodity processes. In this way a structure of inequality, that is, emphasis on a privileged precious commodity or archived object, could be balanced by a pragmatic art with a creative essence that resonates with ephemera as beauty. It would also have an economically alternative outcome.

Ephemeral artworks in the last sixty years, their influence and their capacity to extend art praxis were the focus of the thesis and my new work. I found that strategies for interpreting art and research could be useful for tertiary pedagogical outcomes. Industry applications could also be derived from my work, through social activity and engagement for learning. Therefore, from my research, the eroding of any object and the engagement
with the process and ideas inherent in observing the process can be a visual metaphor and also a pedagogical tool. The pedagogical tool could be applied at school level, to tertiary education and or to industry, to discuss and act creatively on contemporary issues of over-consumption. The ephemeral object is the cue that these artists would act on and with. For instance, dialogue with audiences about my work in *Strand Ephemera* (2007) produced responses showing participants’ connection with my topic.

My study is a rich resource for syllabus and offers an alternative to practice where demands on materials could be lighter. My recommendations for curriculum take into account what people in schools or regions can access. It would be limiting creative options to allow only one format or discipline in an art school, thus art and ephemera is only one alternative. This diversity of playthings and of materials with which to integrate creativity and learning can work in many ways and directions. This is a suggestion to consider the argument that not every child is a computer buff, and not every child wants to get their hands on dirt, to use two seemingly disparate areas of art practice. Some alternative creative application to a temporary product can relate to both the ephemeron and the digital application in art, and education.

Queensland Studies Authority 2007 Visual Arts Syllabus, ‘approved for general implementation until 2014,’ was used for the first time with Year 11 students in 2008 (Queensland Studies Authority). The only mention of ephemera in this document is in relation to materials for theatre. With this in mind I propose that the potential in the thesis *Art and Ephemera*, from cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary exemplars, could be consulted as alternate means for students and teachers to consider.

Davis’ (2008) report for Visual Education promotes the necessity for visual culture and recognises that learning must equip people for new technology. Creative practice for the student needs to be identified as a hands-on activity, as well as a visual reading. In this regard the technological revolution is intrinsically related to tools for certain functions, learning to communicate, taking advantage of more pathways and quicker access to information. But does that imply that students are learning about creativity? Many
Information Technology and computer programming people will tell you that their job is not creative, that is it is mundane and involves tedious amounts of technical detail. In the aftermath of a report such as this I argue that getting the students’ hands into tactile material and encouraging them to look at how the ephemeron can be an aid to making and destroying in a healthy and creative manner are activities that bring with them creative decision making and learning. Through the development of this thesis about the disintegration of an art object as metaphorical information beyond the aesthetic, and as knowledge construction, I have arrived at an artist’s resolving of major conceptual developments for art and ephemera.

Participants provided some potential for new study in the way further data could illuminate how attitudes might change with time and impact on future policy for environmental sustainability. This position has been arrived at through investigation and then reflection on humans’ capacity to act positively for the environment. These actions have been evident within the art industry, as well as in community activity beyond the arts, often occurring where impact caused by unnecessary growth for profit is beyond the capacity of the environment to redress the imbalance. Therefore the conclusion of this thesis recounts the illness of contemporary places as a symptom of the policies made to advance growth, rather than an economy based on a sustainable pattern of acceptance and affordable ecological management. The rationale for growth is based on an outmoded system of administration and policy to drive the wealth of a few rather than the wealth and health of a community. Therefore ongoing discussion and debate over this topic is encouraged, and new projects and processes of ephemera considered as below.

A New Project – ‘letting go’

My thoughts about artwork are continuously engaging with this topic, and my inquiry and question now leads to ‘…and what we do to let the cycle continue?’ In this conclusion the new project for me is to find a new way to ask questions, as Ann Hamilton stated, ‘not the right subject or form or “aboutness” of the work, but the question to prod and rub up against’ (Hamilton interview in Jacob 2004c, 179).
In my investigation of what art and ephemera could be, or encompass, it became clear that there were opportunities to move forward, from utilising a specific object or idea of an object, to encompass the idea, to become more aware of the uncertainties of life. In this way the activity and conceptual rationale are more occupied with the moment and contemplation, than with the object. Thus ‘letting go’ is possibly similar to the emptiness revered by Zen and the creation of the Om – a circle of endless or eternal return.

I stated in Chapter Seven that a potential outcome for the thesis would be to engage artists and writers to create in a conceptual and ethical manner, from an understanding of interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving. My new projects and my recommendations are to organise occasions near venues, as off-site locations for art and ephemera, for activities and temporary display. Activity could be facilitated in or outside visual arts venues and other cultural meeting places, such as theatre forecourts, administration centres and leisure sites. The publicising of these events is essential for audience development and resulting participation, and requires the support of the arts industry, particularly at administration levels. Media releases, invitations and online focus for this activity would facilitate community engagement in the arts. Activities bring the engaged artist new realisation of the surrounding environment and what this event has been designed to do or activate. Therefore the ‘Media Release’ requires statements to highlight the empowering nature of ephemera, for instance, ‘This is an exhibition / installation that is also about raising awareness of the environment and ecology, through practice with sustainability as a basis for materiality.’

**Future Directions: New Work**

In developing future work from my topic ‘Art and Ephemera,’ the literature about artists from the 1970s to the 2000s not only places in context the artists who were at different stages of adopting a practice using ephemera, it provides ideas and strategies that are still being taken up, as new areas of investigation. Ephemera and art is taken up in opposition to the commercial pressures that many art industry experts tell artists they should be
responding to. Advocacy organizations such as National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and Queensland Artworkers Alliance (QAA) promote options for career and commerce, however they also offer websites and blogs for artists, like me, for their ideas as *Internet manifestoes*. I contributed my image of the *impossible bucket* and produced a blog on NAVA (2007) about the research project and making art that does not have to last.

I assessed whether artists’ responses to art and ephemera resonated with sustainable practice, either unknowingly, or as part of a practice about making less impact on the earth. I found that both happened, and it was crucial for this study, in light of current climate challenges, to re-present the ability artists have to implement art and ephemera as a viable option in art. Thus my commitment to the study is to curate future site events for the performative object. Various projects are currently being discussed with artists and art institutions. Investigations into art and ephemera from 2000 to 2008 exposed new methods used by artists, and some key pieces where ephemera or changing material in artwork was adopted. In order to implement my findings, the theories I referred to from mentors have been instrumental in my visualising and theorising about new opportunities for art and ephemera.

**Implications for Future Practice-based Research**

Installations, including projections and hanging panels, have been produced for this research project in *Absence* (2004) and *Tools of Change* (2007). These were partially suitable models for my work, for though they contain ephemeral elements they include a traditional wall display. Floor work was also developed, and is to be reconsidered for potential disintegration display in new installation and site work.

Developmental work notes, such as one written on 23 September 2006, suggest new areas for work: ‘I realised I have the elements of the work that is ephemeral by light. It exists in the shadows that I have been photographing’. These include shadow-hand, rephotographed (2006 - 2007), night chairs (night time photography) and folds in hanging
items of clothing (an opaque Driza-bone coat and soft transparent garments). These shadows seem to accentuate the transient nature of life and many other things. This work could be unframed to work with light such as backlit hangings. Projections and floor pieces contain the elements of disintegration and change, and these presentations are envisaged across different spaces or sites, not solely as digital but in tandem with ephemeral elements.

My conclusions are related to the idea that the investment of huge amounts of money in the built environment feeds on a culture of waste and environmental neglect. I considered whether it was possible to give something back to the environment we have partially destroyed. The response to this quest shares the idea of the carbon sink and planting more trees, and re-establishing flora and fauna habitats. Further to the question about re-creating environments is another question, ‘Is it possible to re-establish the millions of trees that have been felled in a moment, when the ecosystem that supports these took millennia to establish them?’ The huge log (Plate 9.16) is evidence of the cycles required in nature to support the flora and fauna of a region. These cycles have been disrupted, the flow interrupted, and I must find how to explicate this for new audiences: this generates new imagery for my next phase of art making.

Artwork may not do anything tangible for sustainable practices in environmental wellbeing. However, it may challenge attitudes and force reconsideration of the alternatives to unsustainable growth. Many artists work with a sensibility and awareness of ephemera on a humble scale, in contrast to 1970s mainstream artworks on a grand scale. I accept that both employed some ephemera, though many recent acts of art and ephemera are more significant ways of working and dealing with an art product. Their subtle means promote art and ephemera as a concept over the less accessible precious object. Significantly, this research shows many contemporary artists are interested in working with material that will not impact on the environment in a major way.

In this thesis espousing the cyclical nature of many things, my conclusion allows for change processes and a capacity to take further what ‘art and ephemera’ initiates and
provides. What is unambiguous is the capacity for the area to generate work that can act as a metaphor for gentle and insightful methods of art production, and, importantly, reflection on the current state of environment change. Like humus and nutrients in the ground being taken up and used by plants, praxis in art and ephemera can be taken up and used by people.

The End is a Beginning – Publication

My contributions to publications, conference presentations and exhibitions draw on my findings. Additionally, these contribute to web sites such as the JCU home pages and devolve the issue to other researchers, curriculum writers and other artists.

From the thesis findings I plan to continue publishing in cross-disciplinary areas, such as environmental journals with cultural insights into issues in common. These include ecology and socio-economic forums, state and national art education (peer reviewed), publications and articles for curriculum audiences. Some work published during the development of this research is in Appendices XXIII and XXIV.

The Scope of the Study and Limitations

This study was not intended to be exhaustive, rather pertinent examples from the data were presented. My methodology was to choose key examples for theorising about contemporary art practice and discourse. While many artists are contributing through art with lesser environmental impact, my study has shown a pragmatic as well as a consciously derived decision to practise in this way.

The scope of the study, to empower art and ephemera, resisted conventions of accepted practice and archive as a normative approach to art making and the unquestioned preservation of such practice. In doing so my study was not a chronological or historical survey and my choice, as artist ~ researcher, to work outside a single prescribed genre enabled a new perspective for inquiry into creative arts.
One defining feature of the research was acknowledging that, even though some artists will take ownership of responsibility to act out of concern for the natural environment, there are also artists who do not show interest in this area and wish to preserve their art product as a significant archive for posterity. A consideration to be addressed in ongoing research is to increase potential support and acknowledgement by the art industry for art praxis that creates with ephemera from, or with, instability of icons.

Artists discussed in the thesis, interested in forms of art and ephemera are also aware of needing to have a low environmental impact. They acknowledge that some art does not have to last. Strengths of theorising interconnected with practice were grounded in practice-based research (alternating practice and theory), a method already strongly advocated in sciences. A further message relayed by this thesis is that human attitudes to ownership are crucial to how we might correct and avoid further environmental damage.

Ideology in many cultures speaks of compassion, and the responsibility of the human to look after land and environment. Wars over land and economic rights illustrate too painfully that aggressive conflict impacts on environment, not to speak of the flora and fauna, as devastatingly as on people’s lives and wellbeing. I recognise that human large-scale conflict disrupts natural processes of ephemera, from a time-driven process or cycle to one of aggressive change, one that does not provide any capacity for healthy regeneration in the environment.

My study set out to ask what goes where, that is, our responsibility for unwanted products, or waste, was questioned as a part of this study. Our responsibility is to take notice of what we put out in garbage, or art, and to enhance the capacity of our garbage to regenerate into something in the short term, or to return to some cycle as quickly as possible for the current – next generation and not in some distant future. A significant way to communicate this message in art would be to promote how people can connect with a natural cycle.
The development of this thesis has led to an interpretation of the way artists can make use of art and ephemera. When explaining the concept to people outside the arts, it is firstly important to compare the idea of ephemera with that of traditional archival art, and explain that this is an alternative. Creative artists and designers can contribute to the development of new attitudes amongst the public and in industry. There are also many ways for small groups and individuals to lead decision-making about locality. My thesis proposes changes to attitudes that accept fast food, throwaway items and the failure to plan for a sustainable future. Fisher (2007) from Environment Victoria stated that understanding and acting on these issues are vital in science and art, though we don’t do this (yet).

Discards, humus and mulch are part of my conclusion for this thesis. Simons’ (2004) and Cundall’s (2008) dedication to the importance of mulch is timely for people who have never thought of their potential to contribute their kitchen recycling to a garden rather than to a petrol-driven garbage truck. Laderman Ukeles’ *Touch Sanitation* (1984), an artwork to shake the hand of every garbage worker in New York City Sanitation Department was about promoting understanding of and responsibility for our garbage. These activities, like art and ephemera, are practices involving people and impermanent culture.

Throughout this thesis I have promoted an acceptance of an art form that does not have to be archived. This was not to argue for the abolition of any other art form but to discuss a viable alternative for certain modes of expression, that all artists could at some time make use of. The converse argument is that everything will get mulched somewhere, including the garbage dump, and that everything is ephemeral. This thesis demonstrates public interaction and has the potential to change attitudes in a consumer-driven society. I discussed the need to rethink the way we consume and how artists have questioned how much we need to consume. McLuhan (1967) discussed these issues decades ago, in the context of global village concepts. I triggered momentum through assisting to reinvigorate ideas about the shared materials in a world of finite resources. In my work *the impossible bucket* (2005), there is a focus on the incapacity to hold water.
In this thesis, I deliberately chose an autobiographical voice, and applied this to accumulation of data from an eclectic mix of visual arts, an appreciation of old cultures and their art, and my weavings from knowledge about environment and ecology. Thus I developed a strategy for an appreciation of the things we often discard, and recognised the importance of placing these things strategically and with responsibility. In this way even those things we don’t appreciate can contribute to a cycle, and no waste. We live in a consumer-driven society that extracts wealth from the earth through a process of valuing commodity, some of it a basic requirement of people’s lifestyles. Now it is time to value our discards as another commodity, a way to maintain health through increased responsibility and knowledge about our actions, referenced earlier as emerging from, and against, a culture of consumption and neglect.

While artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles started a performative process of valuing the people involved in the process of garbage collection and mundane maintenance in the 1970s, my new findings from visual arts and ephemera over the past sixty years have enabled me to emphasise the way artists reference broad multi-disciplinary areas of research, and contribute to reflection and the capacity to invest in new attitudes. Through this study I have realised that it is more urgent for artists to have a voice and to develop their strategies to empower the humble and non-commercial aspects of art-making through their conceptual realisation of, and focus on, projects. The language and vision that the Visual Arts provide in the broadest sense about community, aesthetics, communication, knowledge and processing of information were paramount in this work. It is in the arena of Visual Arts practice, an important area for me to investigate and tease apart as a researcher, that I contribute to most in this debate. The exposure of the quest in a university environment also led to investigation beyond art to the disciplines where there is an opportunity to debate the schisms between art and science. Therefore broader debates about the natural environment and our role in taking responsibility for our actions have also fuelled this study.
The intention of this research was to highlight the ability of the disintegrating object to create and change attitudes in consumerist activity, including art practices, from favouring the unsustainable to promoting more sustainable activity. Where audiences may have been consuming without consideration of their action, this thesis argues that previous habits of the consumer ~ artist need to be reconsidered. The *Stern Review* (2007) is a significant compilation of contributions to the ways and means to do this.

The things I did that were different from past practice and theory were to accept new considerations about visual arts and the capacity mentor artists have to interrogate current living practice and adopt new methods in response to current issues. The questions I raised at the outset, through arts practice, presented new areas that I allowed to enter the study. It may have seemed obvious that presenting the ephemeral art piece in a digital format could be an outcome for everybody, but computers and digital printing are not usually accessible to those in disadvantaged regions, or social groups struggling to make a living or to keep food on a table. Therefore some ephemeral art stays in the field, so to speak. It remains an object of disintegration and returns to the earth, without further record and does not have to be archived even via a digital format. In this respect discourse and memory become the vehicle for telling the story of ephemera, and of the capacity for ephemera to record, to maintain memory of, and to know society, rules of survival and maintenance of place. In this way any person and any child can make their own ephemeral art and be confident to know that in memory this work is important to their place, and to the memory of their place. It enables individuals to claim their own recognition of place and their own creativity to make something on the ground. This may be a literal or a metaphorical ground, but also one that is allowed to disrupt the archive.

**Conclusion for Art and Ephemera: In the Interim of Change**

My research located examples of contemporary ephemeral practice and developed a critical document about the working of art and ephemera as time-based change, showing concern for environment. Many people have developed critical investigations about change, culture and environmental issues. The links between culture and various
disciplines have contributed to my artist’s perspective and development of concepts, as well as my writing about relationships to global environmental concerns. The concept of linking cultures was used to relate to events or elements that are common to people in different places and countries, and facilitated a post-structuralist investigation. Mentor arts writers referenced work across genres in order to discuss common themes, elements and concepts in particular works from chronologically different art periods.

In addition to creating objects and images about and in the process of ephemera and change, my practice contributed to a refining of ideas and a crystallisation of the initial ideas about time-based change through ephemera, and eventually to the notion of renewal. The quest, which started as a process-driven project to adopt ephemera in art, led to new considerations of the ephemeral condition in diverse cultures and places. Where the initial project had a basis in the traditions of the west and a Euro-centric appreciation of art, the thesis provided a broader investigation of older art forms and the ability to capture time and ephemera in humble materials, such as earth and humus, or rust from metal and earth.

Burns (2003), in concluding her thesis, raised the question of how to create ‘with an identity without creating uniformity’ (Burns 2003, 355). I concur with Burns to broaden the scope of future work and to investigate how identity can be created without strict conventional guidelines or unnecessary uniformity. This idea resonates with my thesis to address the power imbalance in the binary of ephemera~archive, in art.

My focus concurs with James Cook University’s research strength to support the ‘dynamic, contemporary interplay between the individual, social, cultural, technological and environmental values and practices of northern Queensland and the Asia-Pacific region’ (PIP). This assisted my recognition of the importance of place in research and local, regional practice alongside international and national examples.

Zhang Huan (2004) stated

Buddhism for humans is a dream. Buddhists can’t change anything. It is just a dream…but it is a good dream. A human is a human, always the same as before. If people live in
Buddhism, they can make life better for themselves, calm themselves down, clean the mind. They can help other persons, finally everyone…I hope…to forget himself or herself (Zhang interview in Jacob 2004b, 247).

In making art with ephemera, similar ideas can apply. To ‘calm themselves down’ has parallels in society. Politicians spoke of slowing the economy in 2007, and supporting the economy in 2008, and people take ownership of their responses to the way things are.

Artists don’t necessarily change things, but I hope that our actions might change something, such as the attitudes that govern our activities, in response to the natural environment. Our responses are capable of making a change. Adopting a practice that combines and considers community and artist, students and teachers, artists and scientists is a well-timed start.