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Introduction

This paper details a teaching model used to deliver a portion of the Site-Specific Sculpture elective unit offered to second- and third-year students enrolled in Adelaide Central School of Art's Bachelor of Visual Art program. During a five-day intensive field trip overseen by two lecturers, students undertake work in the field, using only materials sourced from the site. The collaborative aspect of the unit manifests not only in the team teaching model but also in the projects themselves, many of which are designed for groups of two or more students. The purpose of the field trip is to develop agility in the act of thinking and making, which is applicable not only to work in the field but also to more discrete, studio-based practice. Although the outcomes are considered for three-dimensional space, it is hoped that the thinking and strategies can be applied to the development of artwork in any medium and indeed, to broader creative pursuits, not necessarily limited to the visual arts. The paper will survey a number of key aspects of the unit which we hope will be of interest to other visual art educators including, but not limited to, those involved in spatial and site-specific practices. It will be clear that this field trip focuses on a formal language of materials and material thinking which we see as a necessary substrate for the articulation of broader ideas.



Figure 1 Lucy Bonnin and Glenn Kestell, project work, 2010

Situating the unit within the Adelaide Central School of Art BVA Structure

As it is currently structured, the Bachelor of Visual Art course at Adelaide Central School of Art includes a number of semester-long, sculpture electives which are available to students at Levels 2 and 3 of the three-year long Bachelor degree. The field trip is one part of one such elective unit. This unit comprises eight weekly classes and a five-day intensive field trip conducted during the mid-semester break. As a whole, the unit teaches practical and conceptual strategies for making artwork that addresses specific sites, considering, for example, landscape, architectural sites and body as site. Generally speaking, the weekly studio sessions will emphasise the broader cultural, historical and functional understandings of a site whereas the field trip tends to focus on a more physical negotiation of a site.

The focus of this paper is on the field trip component which deals with projects in which the site is considered as both the context and material for the work. The sites have varied over the years from the industrial to the natural, however, for the last nine years we have made use of a particular property that encompasses a wide variety of naturally occurring terrain as well as traces of human intervention in the form of dams, fences and roads. As a means of reinforcing the idea of the site as both context and material, students are only able to work with materials found in the general vicinity of the site in which they are working. No additional materials can be brought on to the site and students are only allowed rudimentary hand tools such as pruning saws, secateurs and shovels. These limitations facilitate a particular kind of material handling and manipulation that involves spatial and ergonomic considerations such as repeated actions over time, taxonomical rearrangement of extant materials and construction and fabrication using unorthodox or deliberately inefficient approaches. The intention here is to engender sensitivity to materials, an understanding of the role of human action as agency and perhaps most importantly, the ability to be responsive to the work during its development. The specific parameters of the field trip are clearly indebted to the strategies used by such elder statesmen of site-specific sculpture as Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long.

The unit has proved to be a popular elective for students engaged in other visual art disciplines, not necessarily three-dimensional in nature, and is usually re-attended by graduates and third and fourth year students involved in more self-directed studio practice.



Figure 2 Lauren Anderson and Sally Parnis, project work, 2007

Mode of delivery

While it is not the purpose of this paper to lay out a purely documentary account of the unit, some description of its delivery is necessary.

On arrival, on the evening prior to the first day of project work in the field, there is a presentation which establishes expectations, responsibilities and the general approach and protocols. Importantly, a range of student works from previous field trips are included in the slideshow. The purpose of this is not to hold up examples of particularly successful works but rather to give an overview of the kinds of visual devices are effective in the field. This practice can be problematic in that it can lead to derivative work on the part of the students as well as potentially pre-empting ideas and approaches that students might otherwise have come to on their own terms. However, since we have started showing examples of past work, there has been a marked improvement in the students' ambition, speed and ability to articulate the visual devices at play. As everything has to be made from the ground up there is no loss in the experience of making, but having a sense of the possibilities of the application of various visual devices avoids unnecessary 're-inventing of the wheel'.

Most importantly, the examination of previous students' work opens a rich vocabulary of visual possibilities.

The following five days each consist of two discrete projects, each of which is three to four hours in duration. The project briefs are delivered immediately prior to the commencement of work. This is a deliberate strategy which denies the opportunity for the participants to pre-plan work. Conditions of secrecy and anticipation, as well as a degree of theatricality, surround the project briefs. We have come to see these devices as useful for engendering a state of readiness in the students and a sense of urgency in how they undertake their work.

Once assigned a site in the field, students work in relative isolation with only the material and spatial possibilities that the given site has to offer. With no prior planning, the work has to be devised and carried out in the time given. Again, this is a deliberate strategy that collides thinking more overtly with the material investigation. The emphasis at the outset is an examination of how one might approach the thinking/making process of a work. Important here is the learning of practical mechanisms to generate unexpected possibilities in the development of a work as well as utilising the generative potential of the highly stripped back and limited conditions offered by the given sites. It should be stressed that the project briefs are constructed to elicit a speculative and propositional approach. In a sense there is a 'holding back' from generating fully resolved works in favour of remaining in a speculative space. In examining the play of thinking and action we attempt to merge the two, treating thinking and action as some kind of common state.

Throughout the day we as lecturers will circulate, discussing the progression of the work. At times, we may strategically interrupt the process of the brief with additional conditions, in order to shift or accelerate the development of work. At the end of each project, we thoroughly document all student works.

After dinner, there is a critique of the day's work by way of the photographic documentation. The students increasingly drive the discussions as the week develops, the focus on process over result being at the forefront in everyone's minds, due mainly to the strict time parameters they have been working with. These sessions encourage the students to talk through their approach to the works, leading into an open discussion of the results and speculation on possible variants to their

particular strategies. As the week progresses, we invariably see an increasing sophistication in how students will reflect on and modify their previous approaches.



Figure 3 Patrick Cassar, project work, 2013

Risk and uncertainty

While students have to work safely, they are encouraged to take risks in the development of their work and ideas. This is partly to generate unexpected possibilities and partly to teach a level of swiftness in unearthing and acting upon possibilities.

In keeping with this sensibility, we also operate with a degree of risk. While we have a repertoire of open-ended projects that loosely guide the structure of the field trip, we are only one step ahead of any particular event. This allows us to be more responsive to circumstances as they unfold and, to some degree, puts us on an similar footing of 'risk' with the students. We make it clear at the outset that we will be working this way and students are quite aware that planning of upcoming projects is continuing at all available times during the day. We will occasionally speak about the development of a recent brief during the discussion sessions and share some of our

strategies for generating projects with the students, this being pertinent to the development of projects in general.



Figure 4 Claire Patton, project work, 2014

Reflections on the collaborative teaching model

As referred to earlier, there is a strong element of theatricality in not only the day-to-day organisation, timing and announcements but also in the delivery of each brief. The delivery of briefs, the designation of physical sites and the announcement of collaborative teams are carried out with a degree of performance on our part. This approach has embedded itself in the field trip less by design and more through a gradual process of evolution. Given the gruelling schedule of sixteen hour days, maintaining the overall morale of the group is crucial, and facilitating a lively and playful atmosphere has proved very effective. As an immersive experience, the field trip allows the artwork to remain central to everything.

An essential task in designing and delivering collaborative projects is establishing the collaborative student teams. As all the students attending the field trip are at least in the second year of their Bachelor of Visual Art, it is generally the case that both lecturers will have worked with all of the participants prior to the trip. To greater or lesser extents, we have a sense of their personalities, aesthetic sensibilities and, importantly, how they respond to risk and uncertainty. Broadly speaking, when pairing or grouping students for collaboration, we consider the following:

- Firstly, minimising the likelihood of conflict within the group and maximising the likelihood of a productive outcome.
- Secondly, grouping students with distinct approaches and aesthetic sensibilities. Arguably, some of the most interesting results emerge from the pairing of two or more students with 'compatible' personalities but wildly different approaches to thinking and making. While the description of specific examples is beyond the scope of this paper, these instances frequently exemplify the generative (as opposed to compromised) nature of collaboration.
- Thirdly, attempting to get the students to collaborate with as wide a range of other students as it practical.

Our choices are not always optimal, but are rarely uninteresting.

Another common practice we make use of in the development of project briefs is the writing of lists. These lists are usually generated in response to a succinct heading that states the motif, theme or desired learning outcome of a particular project. Through a process of both literal and lateral verbal association with the list heading we attempt to broaden the scope or interpretation of a particular idea. This iterative process is elegantly exemplified in literature in Raymond Queneau's 1947 work *Exercises in Style*, in which an account of an incident on a bus is rewritten ninety-nine times, each time using a different literary convention. The generative potential of lists has also been more recently explored by Umberto Eco in his 2009 text *The Infinity of Lists*.



Figure 5 Leah Craig, project work, 2013

A simple taxonomy of projects

At this point in the paper, we will outline a loosely defined taxonomy of various kinds of projects used on the field trip. The matrix below indicates some of the basic qualities that tend to characterise the exercises used within the subject unit. The x-axis divides projects into those with a largely formal emphasis and those with a broader scope for interpretation and conceptual development on the part of the students. The y-axis refers to the broadly defined physical and spatial parameters of a given project.

	Fundamental formal exercises in three-dimensional visual languages using site as material and context	More poetic, expressive, interpretive and/or communicative applications of three-dimensional visual languages using site as material and context
Singular objects constructed in a given site, with appropriate consideration given to the relationship between the object and the site.	<p>Project example:</p> <p>Create a sculptural object based on a wedge form. The object should be scaled in relation to your body (i.e. as tall as you are and at least twice as long as you are tall). In addition to embody the wedge as a form, the work should suggest the directional thrust and action of a wedge.</p>	<p>Project example:</p> <p>Create a work that makes a lateral response to the notion of a 'flying machine'. The work should be conceived and scaled to notionally propel one human being from one side of the dam to the other, embodying or suggesting a kind of visual trajectory.</p>
Multiple-element works made for a given site, with appropriate consideration given to the relationship between these elements as well as to their relationship to the site.	<p>Project example:</p> <p>Create a work on site that shows evidence of one thousand repeated actions. Such a project might be informed by notions of devotional labour, embodied in the work of an artist like Wolfgang Laib.</p>	<p>Project example:</p> <p>Populate a given site with a series of miniature forms that use the scale and conventions associated with architectural models. Such a project might be contextualised by the collage works of David Thorpe or the vocabulary of modular forms conceived by architect François Blonck.</p>

Figure 6 Taxonomic breakdowns of projects

This taxonomy of possible projects is crude and it should be stressed that the four categories it posits are not mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, it helps us loosely define and communicate to one another the kind of project that the student group might best benefit from at any given time.



Figure 7 Bernadette Klavins, project work, 2014

Strategies for work in the field

Expanding on an example from the table above, each student or collaborative group might be asked carry out one thousand repeated actions as a generative strategy. These might be one thousand identical gestures, conjoinings or manipulations of materials on site. Out of necessity the decision about what form this might take will have to be decided quickly after a short period of testing various possibilities. In many ways the testing and decisions must be expedient and made with the sense that, with more time, something better might have emerged. The important thing here is entering a position of risk and beginning to see the instability and uncertainty of a move as a potentially useful state. By stripping down the developmental strategies through conditioning action, material and time, one develops an acute awareness of any available new possibility. The apparent limitation of only being able to work with materials sourced on-site necessitates the use of basic visual devices. This is particularly so in the case of predominantly natural sites in which the materials are the same as the context. Visual devices such as elevation, repetition and contrast become important, as does the visual trace evidence of human action and placement.

In addition to these elemental visual considerations, one of the guiding principles of the field trip is the notion of time as material. This notion might be experienced through the viewing of a work that shows evidence of a time-based accumulation or through explicitly ephemeral aspects of a work. Equally important is the way in which students become increasingly aware of how they might pitch their level of ambition and endeavour to an available timeframe.

In order to facilitate fruitful collaborations, pairs or groups of students are often given a range of process-based strategies that attempt to generate possibilities rather than accommodate compromise. For example, the roles and responsibilities of individuals within a group might be periodically shifted in accordance with a strict timeframe. A collaborative project might begin with a period of 'research and development' conducted by individuals, followed by a group discussion about viable options and possible hybrids of forms and approaches generated thus far. Students are encouraged to exploit the opportunities offered by the collaborative process, such as the increased scope and ambition offered by many hands, the increase in energy and morale and of course the peer learning (in the form of the broadening of technical expertise and challenges to established and familiar ways of working). Moving between solo and collaborative modes highlights the working methods and developmental approaches; noticeably, it is a large part of the dialogue during critique sessions at the end of the day. Typically, the field trip will conclude with a solo project as this offers students the opportunity to bring to fruition a visual language that has been developed over the course of the intensive. Wherever possible we try to conclude any unit of study with a project that entails a higher degree of authorship and ownership on the part of the students and in our experience this singularity of vision can often result in superb outcomes.



Figure 8 Bernadette Klavins, Claire Patton, Jane Skeer & Timmi Tsapaliaris, project work, 2014

Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to condense the overall approach taken in this teaching unit with a particular emphasis on aspects that may be of interest to fellow artists and educators. While the material outcomes from the unit often fall within apparently narrow parameters, we suggest that the modes of thinking and experiences that the field trip offers might be broadly applicable to creative, studio-based practice more generally. We have also surveyed some of the strategies used to facilitate effective collaborations, both between students and through our team-teaching model. Throughout the paper we have attempted to convey the overall philosophical position that underpins the unit which might be summarised as a commitment to developing students' agility in thinking and action as a means to heighten their articulatory in visual language.



Figure 9 Patrick Cassar & Glenn Kestell, project work, 2013

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