

ALL OUR OWN WORK

Imagine if you will, how these words (this text which has been authored by LOW PROFILE) that you are reading now have been formed. Consider the process of jointly deciding how to approach writing this piece, agreeing content, propositions or structure and working out which words will articulate most accurately the ideas that swirl in our heads. We are two people, sitting beside each other, deciding on each line, working out the ideas, the strands, the lines of enquiry. We are also two people who sit at separate desks, starting at different arbitrary points, trying to get words on paper. The same people who then begin a process of swapping, re-writing and re-editing until it makes some kind of sense, until it says what we want it to and until it is very hard to decipher whose words are whose. We talk as much as we write - discussing, trying to understand and making new discoveries as the work takes shape. This process takes patience, trust, energy and time.

Our particular collaboration as LOW PROFILE is built on the foundations of shared experiences, shared histories and friendship. As a result of working so closely and so intimately, together with and alongside each other, for a sustained period of time (9 of the 12 years of our friendship), we have developed a language of shorthand, quick reference points, inside jokes, knowing glances, coded phrases and subtle exchanges. Sometimes we finish each other's sentences.

Over the years, we have developed a shared vocabulary (serendipitously) formed by the discourse that weaves in and around our friendship and our practice. This vocabulary (linguistic, aesthetic or otherwise) incorporates our shared concerns, the ground rules for how our work operates, the mottos we try to adhere to, the contexts we wish to work in and the words we use to explain, describe and analyse our work. It also runs in parallel with an ever-growing, honed collection of agreed/sanctioned material (and ways to employ this material) that allows us to make and show work together. As artists, we (LOW PROFILE) are purposeful magpies. We actively seek out and collect material from our lived experience and the world at large, always on the lookout for things to sample, steal and rework, as the fabric of our art practice. We store and share a vast 'bank' of texts, formats, aesthetic details and devices, pulled from the world to later be embedded somehow into our work (by various processes of editing, transformation, reframing, reformatting, being 'made use of', or otherwise drawing attention to).

This methodology of 'active sampling' has been refined and enhanced through the simultaneous development of our shared vocabulary and a specific set of concerns that surround our practice, centralising around an ongoing investigation into notions of preparedness. Like any artist who invests time in understanding, questioning and actively selecting the raw materials (art materials) that they work with, we carefully scrutinise, test, analyse and experiment with the 'cultural material' that we work with so as to gain a fuller understanding of its qualities, what it can

be used for and how it might react in different conditions and/or circumstances.

We take great care in how we handle our raw materials, considering all possible associations that this material already holds, as well as those that we can allude to through our specific treatment of the material. Isolating often commonly recognisable source material from the world and re-presenting/re-formulating/re-framing it draws attention to the material's history (its status as some 'thing' pre-existing), currency (the fact or quality of being generally accepted or in use) and its multiple denotations and connotations. In this way, we are reclaiming things that would otherwise be overlooked or forgotten about, as well as things that are over used, over familiar and over played.

In whatever way we treat the material (re-formatting, re-framing, re-working, re-wording, re-presenting) it is important that the material can still be identified as something pre-existent.

It is made evident that we are not attempting to plagiarise or pass this raw material off as 'our own work' (although we are purposefully inconsistent in referencing and directly crediting our sources). We take steps to ensure that this material cannot be misunderstood as something new, it must always remain recognisable, as its potency relies and depends on recognition and the audiences potential to see that this is something that has been extracted from the world¹.

The testing out and analysis of the raw materials (the process of bringing 'this stuff' into the studio and working with it) happens through conversation (spoken and written) and a continuous process of checking-in with the other, that allows us to jointly sanction and approve what is 'picked', worked with and made public. As part of this process (and to make the process more efficient), we develop shorthand to describe or allude to the specific characteristics of material (in terms of both form and content) that we are drawn to. This process of 'naming' the material is part of building and maintaining a set of mutual reference points – both a symptom and method of the continuous

¹ For example, while making one part of the performance *3 Short Essays On The 3 Fictional Characters That American's Would Most Like By Their Side In A Situation Of Emergency*, LOW PROFILE compiled all of the screams that Indiana Jones makes in the first two films in which the character appears. Hannah stands to the left of a mic stand wearing an imitation fedora hat. Rachel (who stands next to her) holds a dictaphone up to the microphone and plays the screams one by one into the mic. After each scream has been played, Hannah steps up to the mic and attempts to replicate the scream to the best of her ability.

Indiana Jones is a well-known fictional character (who features in a series of films directed by Steven Spielberg). The archaeologist-come-action-hero is known for his dry humour, fear of snakes, whip and brown fedora hat. For us, referring to Indiana Jones during this element of the three-part performance tells a story about the fragility of all human beings (whether they are action heroes or not). Simultaneously, we imagine how 'learning' the screams off-by-heart might act as a 'useful' training, for emergency situations.

AN EXPLORATION OF LOW PROFILE'S METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

TV SHOWS, FILM CHARACTERS, BOOKS, THE ROLE OF THE PROMPT IN A THEATRE, THE SHAPE OF SMITH&JONES ON STAGE, FACTS ABOUT SWANS, ANT & DEC, PUB ETIQUETTE, SPORTING TEAM PEP TALKS, THE PRE-MATCH ENTRANCES OF DARTS PLAYERS, A COLLECTION OF ALL OF INDIANA JONES' SCREAMS, TV ADVERTS, TOMMY COOPER, LEARNING AND RECITING LINES BY HEART, GILBERT & GEORGE, EMERGENCY DRILLS, SURVIVAL ADVICE, BREAK UP SONGS, TOP 10'S, THE PHRASE 'JUST IN CASE', LONELY HEARTS COLUMNS, MACGYVER, LONE TWIN, HUNT & DARTON, THE SHIFTING BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTION IN THE FILM 'LE DONK AND SCOR-ZEY-ZEE', THE FINAL DIALOGUE SPOKEN BETWEEN KATE AND LEO IN THE FILM TITANIC, CUPOLA BOBBER, THE DANCE ROUTINE TO THE POP SONG 'LET'S GET READY TO RHUMBLE', A LIST OF LOVE SONGS, MORECOMBE AND WISE LYING IN BED TOGETHER, THE TV GAME SHOW WIPEOUT, LOST CAT/DOG POSTERS, THE FINISH LINE OF A MARATHON RACE, PACKED LUNCHES, THE BRICK FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL LIFESAVING TEST, TIN CAN RADIOS, BOXING MATCH ROUND GIRLS, BOB MONKHOUSE, GALLERY COMMENTS BOOKS, SURVIVAL GEAR, THE BRACE BRACE POSITION, INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO FILL GAPS, NAME TAGS SEWN INTO CLOTHES, ALL OF THE DIE HARD FILMS, DOTTED LINES WITH SCISSOR DIAGRAMS, TELEPHONE BOXES, MESSAGES LEFT ON ANSWERING MACHINES, JOHN MCCLANE, LIFEGUARDS, THE TASK OF WRITING LINES ON A BLACKBOARD, FOOTBALL CHANTS, BREAK UP LINES, SCHOOL SPORTS DAYS, SEARCH PARTY, THE FILM COOL RUNNINGS, ADAM & JOE, BROWNIE BADGES, THE PHIL COLLINS SONG TITLE 'AGAINST ALL ODDS', COMPETITION ENTRANT FORMS, LOUD HAILERS, THE THEME TUNE FROM CHEERS, BOB & LEE, KENDAL MINT CAKE, ROSETTES, THE SONG LYRIC 'GOD ONLY KNOWS WHAT I'D BE WITHOUT YOU', THE BOOK OF SURVIVAL, INSTRUCTIONS FOR LIST MAKING, DISASTER BOXES, DOUBLE ACTS, BUZZERS, RAY MEARS, BEN & HOLLY, THE OPENING VERSE OF THE SONG 'ROAD TO NOWHERE', HIP FLASKS, MOTTOS, CLIPBOARDS, PEOPLE COUNTERS, CLUB MEMBER CARDS, CHALK, RUBBER BRICKS, GARY CARRYING GREGG ACROSS THE RIVER, A THREE LEGGED RACE, LISTS, GAFFER TAPE, ACTION HERO, MASTERS OF CEREMONY, FAUX PAS, PUB CRAWLS, THE ERASURE SONG 'A LITTLE RESPECT', BAD JOKES, BAD DANCE MOVES, MATHS GCSES, FIRST KISSES, PHOTOCOPIERS, KITKATS, ALARM CLOCKS, IKEA STOOLS, PAPER, MASKING TAPE, WALKIE-TALKIES, BETTING ODDS, WIKIPEDIA, THE 180 DEGREE RULE, LEARNINGTOLOVEYOUMORE.COM, SURVEYS, BADGES, SEESAWS, PIGGY BACKS, TANDEMS, POST IT NOTES, DRY RUNS, ANT & DEC PERFORMING THE PJ & DUNCAN POP SONG 'LET'S GET READY TO RHUMBLE' AS ADULTS ON THEIR LAST EVER SHOW HOSTING SMTV LIVE, CORPSING, THE BIT OF DIALOGUE IN LETHAL WEAPON 2 WHERE ROGER IS SITTING ON A BOOBY-TRAPPED TOILET, SIGNS HELD UP IN AIRPORTS, FIRE ESCAPES, BADGE MACHINES, PLEDGES, DIAGRAMS, ZINES, THE FORCED ENTERTAINMENT PERFORMANCE QUIZoola, THE LIVE PRESENTATION OF PEGGY PHELAN'S PAPER/ESSAY 'ON SEEING THE INVISIBLE: MARINA ABRAMOVIC'S THE HOUSE WITH THE OCEAN VIEW', SANDWICH BOARDS, GOLF SIGNS, THE SONG 'JUST THE TWO OF US', EMERGENCY SILVER BLANKETS, BULLDOG CLIPS, CONVEYOR BELTS, THE TV PROGRAMME 999 WITH MICHAEL BURKE, THE TV PROGRAMME 999'S THEME TUNE, THESAURUS, OVERHEAD PROJECTORS, TRUE IMAGE PROJECTORS, TORCHES, INSTRUCTIONS FOR BEING PREPARED, UNDERGROUND CAR PARKS, BRISTOL CREAM SHERRY, THE RECOMMENDED DAILY WATER INTAKE, ROSIE DENNIS, POPCORN, EMAIL TITLES, FINGERLESS GLOVES, DOUBLE AIR BEDS, DOUBLE SLEEPING BAGS, TWIN ROOMS

LOW PROFILE ART MATERIALS (RAW MATERIALS) 2003-2011 (AN INCOMPLETE LIST MADE ON NOVEMBER 25TH 2011)

re-negotiation that goes on in our practice (in search of mutual understanding and the creation of new meaning). This shorthand is not about simplifying (or making things simplistic) but rather acts as an important way to allow for a more complex investigation of ideas.

We are not discriminative in our approach to where we search (or undertake our 'magpying') for our raw materials. The cultural material that we encounter, discover, share and accumulate as LOW PROFILE is part of our individual (Hannah & Rachel's) particular lived experience. Therefore, the material is also particular to the cultural products

that we have access to and come in contact with on a daily basis, the things that we are aware of and can experience easily and freely.

When Bob Whalley and Lee Miller (who prompted us to write this text) made comments on an early draft of this essay, they were intrigued by the ways in which we move from talking about (or making reference to) high-cultural products and low/popular culture reference points with 'ease' in our work, our writing and our conversations. In our minds, in our shared discourse and in our co-developed values there is no such rigid separation or hierarchy. For us, there genuinely is not the distinction between 'high' and 'low', between worthy and undeserving of attention. We are, of course, aware that cultural products are read by others (and by society at large) through these lenses of 'high' and 'low' and are placed by consensus somewhere on this continuum. We have the ability to read these

use will always rely on the authority of the original (its history, currency, denotations and connotations as something pre-existent in the world), our intention is never to solely be nostalgic, to be 'referential' for the sake of it, to be retro, ironic or kitsch. In fact, we become annoyed with tactics that solely reward 'knowing' appreciation as these serve to foreground a hierarchy of knowledge (which assumes, expects and demands homogenous cultural knowledge and experience).

For us (and evident in the work we make/show), it is not important whether you have seen/heard of *MacGyver*² before. We know you might have. We know that elements of this cultural product have filtered into popular culture more widely, linguistically³ or via semi-oblique references in *The Simpsons*⁴. But, for you, as someone encountering the piece of work *DRY RUN part 4: MacGyver'thon*⁵ you don't need to have seen/heard of the TV series we use during the performance prior to that moment.

By viewing everything and anything as holding equal potential weight, possible usefulness, promise or capacity, we (quite casually) refuse established ideas of a hierarchy of knowledge of cultural products. In this way, our 'ease' and ability to dip in-and-out of the worlds of 'high' and 'low' cultural reference points (without apparent difficulty or effort, without rigidity or discomfort) and doing so with poise (in an elegant or graceful way) should not come as such a surprise. We do not expect (or demand) that those who encounter our work will have the same knowledge or experience of our selected cultural material as we do. Instead, we create situations where our audience can quickly (with ease) engage with what we are doing. We 'show' our audience what we are doing and why we are doing it BY doing it - the rules of the game/task/performance are laid bare. At the forefront of our decision to make a work 'public' is the question of how an audience will engage in, understand and experience the work that we produce. Throughout the process of selecting, re-formatting and re-framing the cultural material we select, we carefully consider, examine and test its value, meaning, resonance and relevance for others.

These notions of 'ease' or poise may seem at odds with the work that we make and show. In the situations we construct for the public elements of our practice (and the tasks we set ourselves), there is often an element of awkwardness or perseverance/

² MacGyver (lead character in the American TV series of the same name, created by Lee David Zlotoff, originally running between 1985-1992) is a laid-back, optimistic and extremely resourceful American secret agent who favours brain over brawn – always making the most of his scientific knowledge, the inventive use of everyday objects and his trusty Swiss-Army knife to escape (often extraordinary) life-or-death situations. In a survey conducted in August 2007, MacGyver out ranked Indiana Jones, John McClane from the Die Hard films and James Bond as the fictional character Americans would most want to be by their side in an emergency situation.

³ MacGyver/Macgyvering/McGyvered/MacGyverism - Through the popularity (and widespread reception) of the TV show, the name 'MacGyver' or phrases to incorporate the name Macgyver, such as 'Macgyvering', have been adopted and used as terms to explain a certain resourcefulness, creative problem solving or the use of something in an inventive or unusual way.

⁴ *The Simpsons* is an American animated TV series, (created by Matt Groening and aired around the world since 1989, becoming the longest running American prime time scripted TV series) which has mass popularity and a family friendly appeal. The programme frequently references popular culture by depicting famous bands/musicians, politicians as well as other fictional TV characters, including MacGyver. MacGyver becomes a re-occurring reference in the series, used by spinster sisters Patty and Selma as a generic heart-throb/idealised 'man'.

⁵ In *DRY RUN part 4: MacGyver'thon*, we (LOW PROFILE) embark on an 18 hour MacGyver marathon where we watch an entire series of the hit 80's TV show MacGyver, back-to-back, in front of an audience. As we watch, we attempt to catalogue 'useful information' including the countless rolls under a door, ways of escaping burning buildings, ways of fooling the guard, disarming the alarm system and essentially numerous ways to save the day. We deliberately do not view any of the TV show in advance of presenting the work to an audience, so that we are watching the footage for the first time together. We present/perform each series in chronological order and do not repeat series/performance that we have already presented.

perspiration (of graft/hard-work/doing things in clumsy ways/going about things in the 'wrong' way or in ways that might appear ridiculous or excessive). We make conspicuous choices to use lo-tech (employing less advanced, relatively unsophisticated or semi-redundant technology) and lo-fi (a more raw, lower quality finish or surface appearance) approaches and aesthetics over those that may appear to be more refined or slick.

Working as a 'two' (a collaborative duo) poses a challenge to the norm of solo artistic practice (where artworks have one author) that facilitates easy commercial exchange and the continuation of the myth of artist-as-solo-genius (virtuoso). The move towards a first person plural, this 'we' (as employed by LOW PROFILE), may also necessitate a shift in attitude and allow for a different thematic focus for the work produced. Assuming the position of a 'we' might signal a practice that is less concerned with the 'me, me, me' of late-capitalist consumption and more about exploring the notion of what 'us' might mean - the complexities of many different types of human relationships, the pitfalls of communication with 'an' other, the ties that bind us, and about how self-sufficiency might not be about isolation or individualism.

The notion of authorship becomes willfully confused in the work, not just because there are two of us, but also because of the 'massive cast' of LOW PROFILE that we draw into our work through the shorthand references we make to cultural products authored by others, each of which is steeped in (and exudes) its own cultural capital. We are involved in setting up situations (in which elements of our practice are made public) where we assume the position of nonvirtuoso - choosing not to reinforce a divide between artist and audience in terms of hierarchy (a gap to be filled or a ground to be made up), but instead reinforcing an equality of intelligences⁶. In the work that we make/show, the recognition (the action or process of recognizing, or identifying elements from previous personal encounters or knowledge) that goes on in the mind of an audience member is not reliant on (or rewarded by) 'getting' the references or allusions we are making. The sources (the individual logoshperes of both artist and audience member) are clearly not 'owned' by us (as LOW PROFILE) but are instead drawn from the world at large. They are common, both in the sense of being familiar (often encountered or experienced) and in the sense that they are shared by, coming from, or done by more than one person/place/locus. In our work, these sources are presented without much decoration or ornamentation and have the potential to be recognized with 'ease', but are not simple. Rather, they are compound – composed of more than one element and full of accumulated connotations, making it bewilderingly complex to identify a true locus of origin. In this way, our practice poses further challenges to the (comparatively) simple situation of identifiable authorship that facilitates easy commercial exchange and consumption by an audience.

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⁶ For further discussion of the term "equality of intelligences" see Rancière, Jacques (2007) 'The Emancipated Spectator' *Artforum International*, March 2007, pp 271 – 280 and Dobbs, Rachel (2010) *Untidy, Unwieldy, Unphotogenic: the novitruoso artist and non-spectacular (live) artworks*, MA Thesis, Dartington: Contemporary Arts Practice and Dissemination, University College Falmouth incorporating Dartington College of Arts [online] Available at: <http://rachel.we-are-low-profile.com>