INTRODUCTION
Modern design communication no longer engages our tactile senses. Eighty-three percent of the sensate signals that humans process are delivered to their brain through their eyes and ears, and, perhaps because of this, the digital revolution gives preference to sight and hearing over the remaining three senses. Graphic communicators have to ask “what about the remaining seventeen percent?” (Witham 2005, 6) If they fail to ask this question, they miss out on delivering some valuable sensory information, removing touch from the communication equation.

Along with this loss of an emphasis on touch, the digital revolution, which began around 1980, has been responsible for a loss of creative freedom for many designers and typographers. Since the introduction of the desktop computer in the late 1980s, graphic design has also undergone a revolution where the need for traditional skills—such as typesetting, paste-up, and finished art—have all but disappeared. What was once a profession reserved for a few is now available to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection (Cole 2005). Royalty-free stock images, free fonts, and professional-quality templates have enabled anyone with even basic skills to create ‘designs’ as competent as any pre-computer designer (Austin 2002). As a result, graphic designers are seeking new ways to express themselves creatively and uniquely, and there are few designers who work exclusively in typography.

My studio research seeks to discover whether engaging with touch is an effective way for graphic designers to reinvigorate their creativity and produce innovative communication within the digital design landscape.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH
Design theorists agree that the digital revolution has changed the graphic design landscape forever, with the widespread use of desktop computers and the Internet having had the most impact (Heller et al. 1997; Heller and Ballance 2001; Cole 2005; Oxman 2006; Armstrong 2009). However, there are divergent opinions about the future of graphic design. Some argue that the computer is an essential ideation tool for all design domains (Jonson 2005), and others view new technology not as the cause of the problem but the solution (Noble 2003). Yet another authority, Steven Heller, one of the leading exponents of graphic design theory and history, insists that the computer is simply an aid to the design process and that the future of the discipline lies with the designer’s ability to innovate (Heller and Talerico 2008).

While the full effect of this digital revolution on the field of graphic design is still being debated, it is clear that the fate of typesetting was decided in the 1980s (Bigelow and Day 1983; McCoy 2001; Spencer 2004). As an arcane art form, traditional typesetting barely exists and digital typesetting is the widespread practice (Heller and Meggs 2001). Regardless of the technology used, however, the fundamentals regarding the use and handling of typographic conventions appears to have remained intact, and the theoretical underpinnings of typography, in terms of history, are as valued today as they have always been (Gill [1931] 1993; Stockl 2005; Lewis 2007; Lupton 2010).

THE DESIGNER AS VISUAL ARTIST
Because of the changes in the digital design landscape, in many cases, the role of the graphic designer is now more passive, one of “consulting, styling and formatting” (Cole 2005). Many graphic designers are also creating their own visual art and self-initiating projects to help build their profiles as visual artists, but also to reinvigorate their creativity within their commercial work (Austin 2002; Wragg 2011).

One such designer/artist, Troy Archer, describes himself a “night illustrator” (2010), in reference to the time of day he is able to work on these self-generated projects. This need for Archer to ‘invent’ a term hints at a deeper issue, and the interchangeable
vocabulary in use—including ‘designer’, ‘fine artist’, ‘visual artist’, ‘illustrator’, ‘typographer’, and ‘commercial artist’—demonstrates the desire many graphic designers have to define these terms for themselves (Heller 1997; Lionni 1997; Fegan 2008; Sagmeister 2009; Bantjes 2010; Boccalatte 2011; Little 2011). Indeed, an argument could be made for the introduction of a new expression that describes the ‘designer “slash” artist’ as occupying a hybrid space between the ‘designer-for-hire’, who works to a commercial brief, and the ‘fine’ artist, who creates work to satisfy their own brief.

The “designer as entrepreneur” (Heller and Talerico 2008) is a well-established term, used to describe a cross-section of graphic designers who develop their own products for sale, with the companion term “designer as author” (Rock 1996; Heller and Lutig 2011) also gaining traction. The School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York has been running its graduate program for the ‘Designer as Entrepreneur’ since 1998 (SVA 2011) and program chairs Steven Heller and Lita Talerico have championed the concept ever since.

Apart from creating their own products or working beyond the brief as a way to reinvigorate their creativity, a growing number of graphic designers are advocating a return to the tactile, handmade, and bespoke in reaction to the generic, machine-made, mass-produced offerings of twenty-first-century digital graphic design (Witham 2005; Perry 2007; Wray 2009).

Rather than rejecting the computer outright, many theorists and graphic designers argue the case for combining the computer with the tactile qualities of handmade elements (Associates, Millman, and Chen 2006, 2007), and most designers would regard ‘tactile design’ as a combination of both word and image. When I began to research the area, I discovered the lack of any serious investigation into tactile design within academic discourse; publications on the topic are primarily design showcases and ‘coffee-table’ books filled with images and cursory introductions. Any formal research into the subject of ‘touch’ tends to take one of only two approaches (discussed below), and very little of it addresses design or communication in any way other than to discuss learning aids for the vision-impaired.

TOUCH AND THE HAPTIC

The first group of ‘touch researchers’ examines vision-impaired people and ways to increase their sensory awareness through touch (Schiff and Foulke 1982; Edman 1992). The second group examines the psychology of touch and cognitive processing in sighted people, often regarding childhood development (Zigler and Northup 1926; Bliss and Crane 1965; Lederman 1983; Loomis and Lederman 1986; Loomis et al. 1991), with psychologists Jack Loomis and Susan Lederman leading the field in this research.

The terms haptic and tactile appear interchangeable in everyday language, due in most part to a misunderstanding of the actual meaning of the terms, but when authors address the haptic, they usually specify a form of nonverbal communication (McLaughlin et al. 2001; Tiest 2010), often using machines. Haptic sensory information is formally defined as being either tactile or kinesthetic (Youngblut et al. 1996, 117) and so, while my work might rely on a certain apprehension in the haptic sense, without any actual movement or physical interaction, it remains (for the moment) purely tactile and visual. All researchers agree, however, that some form of touch is vitally important in developing one’s understanding of the world and aids in communication—both verbal and nonverbal—and Suzette Elgin’s (1997) research demonstrates this is especially so for people she defines as “touch focused”.

THE NEW AESTHETIC

An emerging group of visual artists currently exploring the haptic possibilities of ‘machine vision’ are known as the ‘new aesthetic’. New media artist James Bridle pioneered the idea of the new aesthetic, and coined the term while curating an online gallery in 2012. Cyberpunk author Bruce Sterling became the primary advocate for the new aesthetic when he wrote a rambling 5000-word essay for WIRED magazine (2012) after attending a South by Southwest Panel discussion that Bridle chaired.

Sterling’s article, which describes the new aesthetic as an “eruption of the digital into the physical” (2012), instigated a wide range of lively, positive online discussion and responses (Cox 2012; Rhizome 2012; Sefton 2012)—as well
as some less-excited responses (Jackson 2012). Nevertheless, all the responses recognised that a body of visual art that recreates the digital aesthetic in the tangible world is already seen in fashion, sculpture, and homewares, but the graphic design field, and typography in particular, has yet to capitalise on this new aesthetic, and this is something my work seeks to address.

The surveyed body of literature would suggest that graphic designers are struggling to adapt to the changes to their profession, and a way forward might be to develop a range of ‘designed’ products under the guise of ‘creative entrepreneur’, or work to self-generated briefs under the guise of ‘visual artist’. The goal here would be to raise their profile and regain control of creative outputs, as well as inject newfound creative energy into their commercial work. There also appears to be a return to the handmade as an antithesis to the slick, on-screen aesthetic, but the new aesthetic makes light of this dichotomy by staging one unexpectedly in the realm of the other.

In response to some of the issues raised by changes in the digital graphic design landscape, I plan to build a profile as a designer/artist and create pieces of tactile typography that encourage audiences to touch them both in a gallery context as well as in print or via online platforms. By producing pieces of graphic communication that are ‘haptic’ rather than purely visual, I am hoping to reintroduce touch into the communication equation.

THE DESIGNER/ARTIST

My studio research into tactile typography began in 2009 and has undergone three stages or phases of evolution since then. The first stage explored the ways graphic designers find new expression for their work through visual art and considered how this research might inform my own studio practice. This initial research resulted in the second stage of my work—a body of visual art that was purely typographic, a reflection upon the unique perspective of a ‘graphic designer as visual artist’. The work also became handmade and tactile as a result of positive audience engagement with the work. These and the third stage will be discussed in more detail below.

Suzanne Boccalatte (2011) suggests artists and designers are different because of who their work is for—artists make work for themselves, and designers make work for an audience—and this is an essential difference when classifying visual artists into groups. Celebrity graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister looks at this division another way: “Artists look down on designers and designers don’t care about artists” (2009, 179). If this is the case, people trying to work within both spheres could well find themselves isolated from both, and indeed this emerged as the crux of the issue for the majority of designer/artists I researched.

Heller addresses this issue in his introduction to Design Culture (1997), arguing that graphic design occupies some kind of ‘netherworld’ between art and commerce. My own initial research was not concerned with one sphere versus the other; it tried to find a place or identity for the group of people who belonged, in part, to both. While celebrity graphic designers such as Sagmeister have managed to build careers where their self-initiated creative work is essentially subsidised by their clients, for the majority of contemporary graphic designers, this is simply not an option. Commercial work often comes with a set of inbuilt conditions brought about by the whims of clients, tight deadlines and budgets, and marketplace demands (Lionni 1997), all of which make it a limited platform for self expression to appear.

The result of this change brought about by the digital revolution is a new group of creatively frustrated graphic designers who seek to indulge in ‘design for design’s sake’ to enjoy their craft without a budget or client in mind. Discussing Edits by Edit, one such self-generated project, Nicki Wragg (2011, 22) argues that this process of designing for the sheer joy of it results in a playful experimentation that “liberates the mind and frees the soul”, and ultimately filters creativity back into the designer’s commercial projects.

Illustrator Ian Noble (2003) suggests that illustrators and image-makers can use new technology to not only explore how it affects the construction of images, but also to produce, promote, and distribute these personal creative projects that do not originate from a commercial brief or client. This approach is advocated by the aforementioned SVA program; in the introduction to his book The Design Entrepreneur (2008, 10),...
Figure 1 Flat, White, and Spaces 2011, vinyl on white MDF, triptych, 90 x 40cm each (details)
Figure 2 We Are All Part of the Same Thing 2011, pin and string, 90 x 40cm
**Figure 3** Relax and Unwind 2011, pin and string, 120 x 90cm
Figure 4 I Could Do Anything . . . 2011, pin and string, diptych 90 x 40cm
Heller declares: “The computer age has made the design entrepreneur possible.” Entrepreneurship is not a new idea, but the combination of graphic designer with new technologies and the know-how to conceive of a wide range of marketable ideas — then fabricate and produce the products themselves — is revolutionary.

While the ‘designer as author’ idea is a useful one, and something I plan to return to at the conclusion of my doctoral research, these self-generated design projects are primarily driven by commerce and entrepreneurial spirit rather than a desire to communicate ideas to a wider audience, which, at the time of discovery, did not relate to my research. The ‘graphic designer as entrepreneur’ is widely recognised as a separate genre, as is the ‘graphic designer as illustrator’, but the ‘graphic designer as visual artist’ is not, and establishing the need for this as a separate genre, even if only for my own purposes as a methodology, was something I felt was worth investigating.

**STUDIO RESEARCH**

One of my first forays into making work for exhibition, rather than brief-driven client work, came about because of an invitation from Flat White Spaces, a pop-up design collective, in April 2011. The group organised their first exhibition and invited myself and twelve other designer/artists to produce work for their launch show. In the absence of any brief, I made typographic pieces inspired by the title ‘Flat White Spaces’. Due to the large scale of these works, they couldn’t be printed at their intended size, so the individual pieces were cut out of vinyl and manually applied to wooden boards instead (figure 1).

The result was a subtle, low-relief texture, and the use of resilient materials meant the pieces appeared ‘safe’ to touch in the gallery context. Indeed, the audience found themselves drawn to wanting to touch these objects. As a graphic designer accustomed to making works for the screen, I was inspired by the direct audience response and interested in discovering what it was about the pieces that made them inviting to touch. There were many other multi-dimensional pieces in the show, but this was the only work people felt compelled to engage in this way (albeit with my permission).

My research into the ‘designer as visual artist’ evolved at this point to ask a new question: in an age where digital technology and mass production has instigated a return to craft and the handmade, how will audiences respond to typography-made-tactile?

In her introduction to *Handmade Graphics*, Anna Wray hypothesises that the highly polished images produced by designers working on computers occur because the elements of chance, materiality, and texture are lost within the new process, and asks, “with the digital aesthetic becoming the norm, could it simply be that creatives are growing tired of staring at screens?” (2009, 3) Wray’s question addresses the reasons designers are craving a return to craft, but what about audiences’ desire for the unique and handmade? Is it due to the ubiquitous nature of digital communication or the homogenisation of global brands?

While text has been the focus of numerous visual artists, typography as an art form is unique to graphic design. The majority of other forms of visual art draw heavily upon image and abstraction, whereas graphic design relies primarily on typography (Stockl 2005). My studio work tends to focus exclusively on typography, and it evolved to becoming ‘tactile’ because of the positive audience response I received to my analogue outputs.

My studio work examines ways to make typographic messages engaging by re-imagining the digital aesthetic in unexpected ways. The visual language of the digital interface is something so familiar to modern Western audiences that often people don’t realise what they are looking at until they see it presented out of context. I find that using unexpected materials generates revived engagement with the pieces, and the tactile stimulation I get from each new work encourages play and experimentation.

As my research has progressed, a subset of designer/artists have emerged who combine analogue techniques with their digital work to give three-dimensionality to their gallery pieces, rather than exhibiting the digital works themselves or printed reproductions. I gravitated towards creating pieces where the work is first created in a digital environment but then produced as a
physical ‘analogue’ object; the result is a unique, ‘one-off’ piece.

Using this methodology, I produced a series of experimental tactile typography pieces for competitions and group exhibitions from April to December 2011, resulting in a haphazard body of work. Surprisingly, some of these pieces were popular with people frequenting websites, such as Tumblr, Pinterest and Facebook, and several of the pieces became ‘shared’ by thousands of people. In particular, We Are All a Part of the Same Thing (2011, figure 2) was ‘shared’ on Tumblr by over 22,000 people in one instance, and over 15,000 times again just recently (Tumblr 2011).

Further analysis into this phenomenon revealed that the work that gained the most exposure on the Internet due to ‘sharing’ were those that said something the audience could relate to—We Are All a Part of the Same Thing, Relax and Unwind (2011, figure 3), and I Could Do Anything . . . (2011, figure 4), in particular—but they were also pieces in which the tactility is visibly evident.

In a digital photograph, subtle textures and low relief are difficult to translate. I realised that, when faced with the actual work, audiences want to touch my pierced and vinyl pieces the most, but the nail and string pieces—where the tactility is evident in the visual—are more widely shared on the Internet, as evidenced by a survey of Pinterest in 2011.

After a while, I became influenced by reading online viewer comments and found myself producing more of the work that was most popular in order to keep the impetus going. As a designer, it is only natural to want to improve audience response and interaction—after all, the feedback loop is an essential component of how designers are trained to communicate. However, for a visual artist, this process can be distracting. I was more concerned with exploring new materials, but the Internet audience indicated one material was more popular than the others and this began to influence my studio practice.

GOODBYE HELVETICA

These tactile typography ‘experiments’ culminated in a milestone exhibition in February 2012. I was asked to propose an idea for a solo show in a refereed research gallery called T-Space at the Surfers Paradise Transit Centre. The space was
a deconstructed, newly refurbished, glass-and-concrete construct within the transit centre, and the show coincided with the end of my own year-long project (for which I had made a public declaration) of devoting myself to one typeface and one typeface only—Helvetica.

I proposed an idea for a show called Goodbye Helvetica, a unique typographic installation, and love letter of sorts, with the various pieces relating to what I did and didn't like about Helvetica and how I felt about the ‘relationship breakup’ (figures 5, 6, and 7). I was concerned that the audience would be too scared to touch the work in a gallery, so I made an installation instead (Goodbye Helvetica, 2012).

The installation took five weeks to complete and was well received among my peers as evidence of how graphic design can transcend a gallery space by way of typographic installation. It was rewarding to see visitors in the installation space interacting with the pieces, but their response to the tactility was not what I had expected. The projection piece elicited the most interaction, and the floor piece, by its very nature, was walked all over, but the ‘visual art’ nature of most pieces failed to engage the audience to touch them at all. I had mistakenly thought it was the gallery construct that prevented people from touching the works, but the audience was still reluctant in a deconstructed installation space.

As T-shirt designer Eddie Zammit (2011) observed when he visited the designer/artist Jeremyville’s ‘salon’, most galleries are quite literal in format, even though the works contained in them are not, and, as I discovered, the audience is prepared to revere any work as ‘art’ no matter what it is or where it is displayed.

**Reflective Praxis**

My experience revealed that when faced with a work of art, the audience responds best when they feel it is ‘safe’ to touch the pieces. The Internet audience appears to respond best when they can see a piece is labour-intensive and visibly tactile, though there may be other, unspoken, responses that the audience is unlikely to comment on in a blog format. I personally respond best to a piece when it is enjoyable to make because of my own tactile response to the materials.
This left me with a choice. Should I make work where touch was the paramount concern for the audience, such as clothing, furniture, or textiles? Or should I make work where I enjoyed the sensation of making it, and disregard the importance of the audience touching it? The haptic apprehension experienced by the audience when viewing digital reproductions of the work was an unexpected outcome and has subsequently afforded me a degree of freedom when it comes to displaying the work.

As a result of this reflective process, I was reminded that the computer is just a tool, part of the creative process, something I knew as a junior designer, but forgot as digital technology evolved. As I looked around, it seemed that designers everywhere were also starting to realise this and I began to witness a return to the hand-made in design (Perry 2007). However, a return to the analogue that rejects the digital outright is foolish and is akin to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. To be clear, I am interested in revisiting the tactile and hand-made from the perspective of the digital.

It also became evident at this point that the Internet audience was gravitating towards my pin-and-string pieces; even though there were thirty assorted works on my website at this stage, many people sifted through the works and curated their own virtual galleries of just the pin-and-string pieces (Deny 2012).

The audience response to tactile typography as an art form has been very positive, with many hundreds of such images being ‘shared’ on image-sharing websites since I coined the term in 2011. The most popular of these pieces appears to share common attributes: the audience can relate to the words within the piece; the tactility of the materials is evident; and the work appears to be labour-intensive.

I was fascinated and surprised by the interest shown by audiences in how time-consuming my piece was. There has been recent media coverage of the idea of “slow media”, and professor of journalism Jennifer Rauch suggests that we are “observing a moment of transformation in the way that many people around the world think about and engage with mediated communication” (2011). The term slow is widely understood as a reminder to take our time with things, such as the
The new aesthetic is a burgeoning art movement in which the digital aesthetic is reproduced using analogue, three-dimensional techniques. The work produced by this group of artists is highly relevant to the digital-communication culture that graphic designers currently work within (Sterling 2012). However, as typography is notably absent from this body of work, I feel my tactile typography work within the digital aesthetic is well positioned to make a significant contribution to the new aesthetic movement as a whole.

Founder James Bridle sees the new aesthetic as “a blurring between ‘the real’ and ‘the digital’, the physical and the virtual, the human and the machine” (2012). He discusses at great length his thesis of “machine vision” and the idea that art should be the result of the partnership between artist and machine. According to David Cox (2012), “The New Aesthetic invites us to have fun with urban space; to instantiate bits of virtual vision into it.” In his interview with Bruce Sterling, Cox argues there has always been a move to the physical, ever since there were media (2012).

There is potential here for a new phase of development in my work, for it to become a series of touchable objects, rather than visual art hung on a wall, since, traditionally, the gallery or installation environment discourages touch. Despite my best efforts, treating tactile pieces in the same way as traditional visual art distances the audience, and tactile typography needs to be handled in order for audiences to experience its full effect.

The majority of current new aesthetic works produced by others would fall into the categories of sculpture, fashion, textile, and object, rather than traditional visual art, but as a graphic designer, I feel most comfortable producing pieces within my own sphere of reference, such as books and soft furnishings.

THE WAY FORWARD
The final body of work for my PhD therefore will most likely be tactile, typographic, and presented in a traditional gallery, but in a way that encourages touch (an analogue representation of a digital typographic aesthetic); for example, a book and series of objects in an environment that encourages interaction. Part of the challenge for me is to break through the boundaries...
contained within the traditional gallery construct and engage the audience to touch the pieces. I am undecided whether this is a doomed task that distracts me from the research focus, as demonstrated by my previous endeavours, and whether it may be easier to stage the exhibition outside of a traditional construct.

By referencing the digital aesthetic in the work, but making it clearly non-digital in its output, my work makes a clear comment on their relationship. The visual joke is something that is enjoyed in person when people ‘get it’ and something that is enjoyed over the Internet as a ‘shareable object’.

Touch itself will most likely be the subject matter for the new works I am creating. They will be statements about the demise of touch or the relationship between touch and the digital realm, or simply be touch-focused statements that allow for the viewer to draw their own conclusions about the importance of touch.

Very few visual artists explore tactile typography in its analogue form, with reference to the digital aesthetic of new media artists in the way that my work does. Evelin Kasikov is the only other visual artist that I know of who explores digital typography in an analogue format, and her recent work is moving away from typography towards the visual image (2011).

My studio practice has recently evolved to examine how digital technology could be used in partnership with the artist in the way that Phillip Stearns’s does. He employs a hands-on approach to creating works using electronics. His Glitch Textiles (2011) are of particular interest because their random patterns are generated using rewired or broken cameras and output as textiles.

**CONCLUSION**

The introduction of the desktop computer has been responsible for a wealth of changes to the graphic design landscape, in particular, the decline of the graphic designer’s inclination to stimulate the tactile senses. Instead they favour the convenience of keyboards, trackpads, touch screens, and smooth coated papers that promote anonymity.

Typography as an art form is also undergoing reinvention as a result of the digital revolution, but the use of type is still embedded within graphic design as a primary tool of communication. If it is to be preserved, the art of typography must have a clear and renewed focus as a visual art form.

According to my research findings, online audiences appreciate written messages more if the typography is executed in a way that is clearly time-consuming, creative in its use of materials, and exhibits a visual tactility rather than being solely digital in its appearance. Touch, it would appear, is not solely for communicating with the vision-impaired.

In the digital era, graphic designers have demonstrated a need to creatively express themselves outside of their commercial work and tactile typography is emerging as a unique form within the field of graphic design—fuelled by the popularity of online image sharing. My research sets out to discover if engaging touch is an effective way to reinvigorate communication and my own creativity. At this early stage, the results are overwhelmingly positive.

Over the last two years, I have established the term ‘tactile typography’ (see Google) within the online design community, and built a new body of visual art that has raised my profile as a designer/artist considerably. I seem to have straddled the divide between graphic design and fine art.

There are many graphic designers working within the companion areas of typography and fine art, writing their own briefs to reinvigorate their creativity and raise their profile as visual artists, but none of them are using tactile typography specifically to reinterpret the digital aesthetic in ways that can be touched and experienced. This gap is one my studio research aims to fill. By referencing the digital aesthetic in the real world, my ‘slow’ tactile typography gives new appreciation and awareness of typography as an art form to an audience over-saturated with ‘fast’ digital messages. The resulting body of work fits within the emerging confines of the new aesthetic: time-consuming artefacts of the digital world made real.

**REFERENCES**


Rivers are often contested zones. They are used to demarcate territory, separating states and countries; they offer precious resources in the form of fresh water and transport; and they bring the aquatic and the terrestrial into close proximity, connecting inland areas to the sea. Through two works of my own and those of several others, this paper examines works of art that address the roles a river is perceived to perform for a city. In particular, my work examines the context of a river in flood, and when flooding causes the “use value” of a river as a waste-disposal mechanism to be reversed. Underscoring this is the role of risk, and how risk underpins the perception of a river as a contested place.

To understand the riparian—the river’s edge—as an area where the social construction of nature can be summarily challenged, one only has to read Val Plumwood’s account of her close encounter with a crocodile, “Being Prey” (Plumwood 1996). As an artist living and working in Tasmania, I am aware of the role that rivers have played in the formation of the state’s self image; they are necessarily part of reflecting on Tasmania as place, as is mindfulness of the state’s social and economic divide in relation to ecological issues. Tasmania’s contested relationship to its natural environment is well known, particularly regarding forestry, with the Tasmanian Forestry Agreement Bill having stalled in the Upper House of Tasmanian Parliament for some months (Howard 2012; The Wilderness Society 2012). However, its most infamous contestation regarded a river—the struggle to keep the Franklin River from being dammed in 1983. With the close proximity to wilderness being a key reason to live and practice in the state, many Tasmanian artists address issues of ecological debate or sustainability in their work, including Bea Maddock, David Stephenson, Neil Haddon, and Ray Arnold. Since returning to live in Tasmania after a twenty-four-year absence, my practice, long based on the social construction of nature, now engages with the concept of the river as a rich locale for re-evaluating the nature/culture interface.

Underpinning my research is that which Klaus Eder, author of the book *The Social Construction of Nature*, terms the “use value” of the natural world (Eder 1996, viii). Rivers have a clear use value, providing avenues of transport, water to drink, waste disposal, and irrigation. These functions are highly regarded by Western industrial culture, more so than other value systems, such as those that acknowledge the aesthetic, recreational, or ecological implications of the place made by a river. These qualities were highlighted in the struggle for the Franklin River, and are central to key environmental “river” texts of the international ecological movement throughout the twentieth century, such as John Graves’s *Goodbye to a River* (Graves 2002).

While many artists seek to reinforce notions of the aesthetic and communal benefit of rivers, my interest lies in the idea of its use value, its social construction, and what happens when that use value is interrupted. Since moving to a flood-prone area, my particular interest is in what happens when a river floods and its “resource” as a site of waste disposal is reversed, with contaminants and sewage coming back into the urban area that produced it. It questions human agency in relation to nature at several levels: who lives by the river and is most directly affected (who is “at risk” and who “takes risk”); who dumps in the river, perhaps miles away from the problem (who “creates risk”); and who is responsible for keeping rivers and people separate, and rivers themselves clean (who “manages risk”)?

There are other artists who have investigated such interruptions. For example, Olafur Eliasson challenged cultural ennui with natural forces through large-scale public “intervention” works in the urban context. In one of his best-known works, *Green River*, Eliasson put a harmless bright green dye into the rivers of cities such as Los Angeles, Stockholm, and Tokyo, creating a