This essay addresses a simple question: What takes place in the life-drawing studio? More specifically, what does an artist do with a model, and what does a model do with an artist in the life-drawing studio? To clarify the problems embedded in these questions, this paper will approach life-drawing methods somewhat unusually; it will invoke the cultural rhetoric of the zombie. As I will show, the zombie is an ideal vehicle by which to illuminate the structures, theatrics, and technologies of life drawing. Inviting the zombie into life-drawing practice, or revealing its occluded presence there, can provide the educator, student, model, artist, and spectator with a reformed strategy for understanding what takes place in the life-drawing exchange.

This research into life drawing is informed by emerging concepts of narrative inquiry and narrative methodologies in arts-based research (Connelly and Clandinin 1990). Using a fantastical construct in a theatrical matrix—the zombie in the life-drawing studio—immediately engages fiction, storytelling, re-enactment, and play as strategies of inquiry and interpretation. In Method Meets Art, Patricia Leavy addresses fiction as a methodological tool:

Fiction is one lens or tool that can be used to shape narrative inquiry ... the elements of narrative, fiction, and autobiography can make their way into research projects in many different ways, spanning a continuum from mostly 'found' or 'co-created' data, to that which is largely fictionalized ... fiction can be expressly used as both a part of narrative practice as well as the form representation takes. (2009, 43, original emphasis)

Although Leavy’s focus is short stories and fictional writing, her framework applies equally well to synchronic, diachronic, and interactive visual narratives. While I will argue that many functional aspects of the zombie are directly implicated in the ways in which artists and models interact in the life-drawing exchange, I will freely mix the metaphorical and the literal as can only be done in narrative arts-based research. The structures of life-drawing performances will be entangled wholeheartedly with the myths and tropes of zombie culture. The use of such an overtly fabulated fictional method can yield insight into the life-drawing process that would be impossible using any other methodology.

Life drawing suffers its own cliché: a ragged arc of mute watchers draws the strained and static body of a poorly paid performer. This circumstance is repeated daily in thousands of grimy studios all over the world. Life drawing persists in recreational art, professional practice, and university arts curricula. For such a ubiquitous form, it has received scant critical examination until recent times. In my twenty years of practicing and teaching life drawing at universities in America and Australia, I have had innumerable conversations about the (ir)relevance of life drawing, most of which have revolved around either the pathological absence of a critical discourse in the studio on labour, gender, and skill, or the dread inspired by the casual use of adjectives such as ‘academic’ or ‘traditional’. Yet, life drawing endures—in many cases, as a form that has largely unchanged since the 1950s. It is already tempting to invoke a zombie metaphor in the same manner as applied in ‘zombie capitalism’ and ‘zombie computers’. Perhaps life drawing has been dead for years, but is still shambling around, infecting hobbyists and art students. Perhaps it is kept in a barely animate state by an entrenched coterie of instructors and stalwarts who wield a debased ‘power’ to command models and render the human form on paper. Or, perhaps it was never fully alive or fully dead, but something else:
something for which the binary metaphor cannot account. Margaret Mayhew’s 2010 PhD thesis on life drawing contains a thorough analysis of the stereotype of life drawing as an inherently ‘rear-guard’ practice. Through texts and interviews, it provides a detailed account of the proclaimed ‘death of life-drawing’ at the hands of contemporary theory and practice (Mayhew 2010).

This instinct to critically re-evaluate life-drawing practices is gaining momentum in disciplines ranging from medical anatomy and psychology to performance studies, art education, and interactive technologies. Over the past twenty years, a number of scholars and artists have directly and indirectly attempted to fill the substantial gaps in life-drawing research. Articles and papers with titles such as “The Monstrous Model: Shape-Shifting in the Life-Drawing Space” (Grey 2002) and “Human-Computer Interaction in Life Drawing, A Fine Artist’s Perspective” (Kane 2014) have joined a body of feminist literature related to life drawing, modelling, and posing. Emerging in these studies is a specific critical examination of studio methodologies rooted in pedagogical conventions. This discourse requires expansion and direct implication in the drawing studio if life drawing is to be unbridled from its prosaic conventions of teaching and practice. As well as referring to my own classroom and studio practice, this paper will discuss works by Dana Lawrie and Zoe Porter—contemporary Australian artists whom I have known as fellow students and colleagues—to provide evidence for this inquiry.

Life drawing necessitates a particular kind of studio transaction. In theatre, this would be called a ‘two-hander’—a production featuring only two players. In the drawing studio/theatre, the conventional roles are ‘artist’ and ‘model’. This matter is complicated in circumstances in which the artist casts the self as model—relying on an apparatus, such as a mirror or camera, in order to sever the two performances. Each role, however, remains articulated, and the method of life drawing remains indistinguishable from transactions involving separate bodies. Whether employing a model or using the self, the representative function of the model is clear; the model poses experimentally, according to experience and convention, in anticipation of the desire of or at the direction of the artist. The artist then confronts the pose in the graphic act—experimentally, according to experience and convention, in anticipation of the desire of or at the direction of the model.

The poses are usually faux-static. The body cannot be utterly still, so a rigorous contortion is performed to create the illusion of stasis. Increasingly, lens-based referents are used to amplify this illusion of immobility. In the past, devices such as looped ropes and hooked props were employed to relieve the pressure on the model’s body and further mortify the silent pose. From my undergraduate years, I recall the drawing resource cage at Pratt Institute, which contained the strange crutches and dusty harnesses of decrepit life drawing. Now, steel stools and chairs, tatty sofa cushions, and foam mats are the props of the life-drawing dais. It has also become fairly common in contemporary drawing pedagogy to employ movement in the pose. Kinetic poses can be overtly performance-based—narrative theatre, dance, acrobatics, burlesque—or can be subtle repetitive tasks, such as walking or simply changing positions. Whether it is static or kinetic, the pose is the phenomenon with which the artist and model transact, and it is neither completely inanimate nor completely animate. Additionally, whether vigorous or mortified in the pose, the facial expression of the model typically remains unchanged, hovering somewhere between the stoic and the vegetative. The blankness of the expression amplifies the pose’s uncanny, insensate quality.

Observations, drawing practice, and drawing classes have led me to further investigate the opacity, stasis, and silence of the life-drawing exchange. I recently conducted an experiment with a life-drawing class in which I illuminated the model on the dais with a split-screen video. One half was a cold white screen that projected a bright pixel grid on the model. The other half was a video capture of ‘Zoe’, a digital avatar designed at Cambridge Research Laboratory to pantomime emotion and provide personality to synthetic, voice-based mobile assistants such as Apple’s Siri. In the exercise, the model recited dialogue from one of Zoe’s promotional videos, including Zoe’s demonstrations of happiness, sadness, and anger. While the life model repeatedly said “I can be very angry!”, Zoe mouthed the words...
silently, her face morphing into a strange, waxy pantomime of emotion. This produced an unusual effect in the students’ drawings, with an emphasis on the model’s mouth, and vectors around the mouth manifesting in their works. Students who normally rendered the entire body of the model began drawing only large mouths and sets of teeth. The performance of speech and emotion, filtered through the simulation of speech and emotion, radically altered the students’ relationships to the model’s acting body. The model was reduced to a static, synthetic fragment rent from the mortified body.

Whether static or kinetic, performed for the lens or the easel, the pose is both a counterfeit of life and of death. It is a performance of body that may feel more-or-less ‘convincing’ or ‘good’ in each of its manifestations, but, like Zoe, it can never fully cross over into the living or the dead. The defining quality of a ‘good pose’ is its mimicry of vigour or cadaverousness. I have participated in countless drawing groups in which some enthusiastic draughtsperson has complimented the model on a ‘dynamic’, ‘energetic’, or ‘expressive’ pose. These compliments are made with no consideration for the cramping and straining model who has, for the last twenty minutes, been trying to hold a pose that simulates activity. However, if the model had actually moved in the ‘energetic’ pose, grumbling and dissatisfaction would have quickly emanated from the group. Paradoxically, then, a deathly stillness is essential to the theatre of vitality. Unfortunately, the taboo of death is almost never broached in the life-drawing studio. Zombies can be introduced into this open space. The functional circumstances of zombies can help to illuminate some of these strange life-drawing conditions and transactions. For example, zombies move and yet they have no sentence. The pose is a peculiar condition to which phrases taken from zombie narratives, such as ‘undead’, ‘living dead’, ‘walking dead’, and ‘reanimated corpse’ seem applicable. Marc Leverette suggests, however, that we forego phrases such as the ‘undead’ and ‘living dead’. He argues, “A better way to write it may be life/death, as we are essentially left with an aesthetics under erasure” (Leverette 2008, 193). This erasure of the life/death binarism is fundamental to understanding the nature of the pose. 

depends on a reformation of the very nature of the life-drawing exchange. Life drawing is an oddly unfixed and transgressive practice. Mayhew claims life-drawing classes may inhabit “liminal spaces where the boundaries between art and sex, education and recreation, and between various cultural milieux claiming an affiliation with ‘high’ art are actively produced and contested” (2010, ii). I would extend this comparative structure to assert that life drawing exists between professional art and dilettantism, between subject and object, between voyeurism and exhibitionism, between master and slave, and between guts and technology.

Zombies have been staggering across the pop cultural landscape with an ever-increasing frequency since the turn of the millennium. These are typically not the Haitian-Voodoo zombies of the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean, but the infected and reanimated flesh-eaters of George A. Romero’s 1968 film Night of the Living Dead. While this movie is credited as being the one that introduced audiences to the concept of the cannibalistic, infectious, living-dead zombie, the word ‘zombie’ is not applied to the creatures within it. Once a low-brow, splatter-fest creature of the horror genre, zombies are being deployed across practices and disciplines, from flash mob protests and performance art to philosophy, epidemiology, and genetics. There are several explanations proffered for the ubiquity of zombie culture. Common among them is the assertion that the zombie (apocalypse) is a convenient canvas on which to paint a range of imperialist, dystopian, and social-critical pictures. Nick Muntean and Matthew Payne write, “However blank the zombie may be, it is nevertheless a culturally productive and expressive vacuity. Indeed, it is this very blankness that perpetuates the creature’s sustained cultural relevance” (2009, 242). But this essay isn’t concerned with the why of zombies; rather, the specific how. How do zombies operate, and how can this operation reveal both the malfunctions and the potentials of life drawing? In philosophy, a construct called a p-zombie is employed as a foil in discourses about physicalism, volition, and consciousness. Daniel Dennett’s (2005) sceptical appraisal of the invocation of zombies in philosophy is an excellent primer on the phenomenon. I propose a new construct—the d(rawing)-zombie—that can be
employed as a foil in discourses about life drawing, liveness, and posing. As drawing is predicated on the performative action of its processes and the physical movement of the drawing body, it follows that deploying an acting corporeal construct such as the *d-zombie* can be an effective strategy in the investigation of life-drawing exchanges.

**REFERENT/REVENANT**

Assumptions about the necessity of a live model and a live artist in a life-drawing exchange reveal a specific privileging of bodies in a shared space. The ‘liveness’ of the performance asserts the dominance of our notions of Western individualism and subjective expression. Liveness is a topic that circulates most prominently in theatre studies and is often framed by Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) and Philip Auslander’s *Liveness* (1999). Phelan posits a fundamental disparity between the live and the mediatised, whereas Auslander argues for an inextricable relationship between them. Although corpses, casts, and mannequins have a particular pedigree within the life-drawing studio, the reciprocal liveness of the acting/posing model and the acting/posing artist is traditionally held as irreconcilable with mediatised imagery. The paradox of the life-drawing exchange is that the posed model-body in the studio is no more ‘live’ than ‘live television’ or a ‘live’ zombie. Moreover, the defining attributes of the living individual—such as politics, sexuality, identity—are absent from the pose to allow for a slippery transformation from body to picture. In her work on horror films, Patricia MacCormack describes zombies as having “no race, no gender, no sexuality, just baroque fleshy unique viscera-configuration” (2008, 104). The privileging of the meat-body-referent erodes the vivifying forces of the self. The human referent dies off but remains on the dais. The pose both destroys and reanimates the revenant model. How, then, is the artist to approach this dangerous and threatening performance? If Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik’s account of one of the pathologies of life drawing is accurate—that the ‘aesthetic distance’ created between artist and model pollutes the transaction—then specific strategies are required of the artist and model to participate explicitly and honestly in the zombification of life drawing.

Bostrom and Malik define aesthetic distance as the traditional approach to the nude in which the model is treated “as an arrangement of formal elements … exempt from common human behavior” (1999, 43–44). The environment of life drawing should be one in which infection, death, appetite, proximity, transmission, and action become dominant considerations. Furthermore, conventional considerations, such as decorum, distance, silence, stasis, antisepsis, and passivity, should be discarded.

Zoe Porter’s performance drawings evince the peculiar and uncanny nature of the zombie-Other. Donning elaborate costume-bricolage, Porter stages loud, dark performances in which she typically turns her back on the viewing crowd and aggressively gestures in drawings of chimeras, zoomorphs, and zombies (figure 1). The costumes she and the other performers wear—a blending of Surrealist counterculture, Mad Max-wasteland-chic, and prog-rock assemblage—speak the language of a civilisation reframed by anarchy and apocalypse. Porter often works in collaboration with her sister, a circus performer. Porter draws while her sister, also in costume, poses, prowls, and menaces the audience (figure 2). By acting/posing/drawing the zombie, Porter stakes herself out as both a voyeuristic object of loathing and desire—a ‘fleshy unique viscera-configuration’—and a rebellious hyper-identity set against the mob. Her works actively transgress the binarisms of self/other and life/death that dominate life-drawing practice. Porter’s method is participatory and performative. She begins as one of the infected—in post-apocalyptic community with the models and spectators. Her drawing materials, surfaces, and bodies are undifferentiated from the shabby environments she inhabits (figure 3). The drawings have no distinct edges and no discernable organisation. This dis-ordering of the acting body is crucial to zombie culture, and it signals alternative methods for approaching the life-drawing exchange. MacCormack refers directly to ‘gore’ and ‘disorganisation’ in her analysis of the body in zombie narratives, particularly in the films of Lucio Fulci (MacCormack 2008).

In most life-drawing circumstances, a fairly conservative conclusion may be made about the animating force of the macho genius observing
Figure 1 Zoe Porter *In a Landscape No. 2* 2012, performance from Current Rising Festival. Photographer: Eli Illis. Image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2 Zoe Porter and Olivia Porter *Strange Playground* 2011, performance from Woodford Folk Festival. Image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 3 Zoe Porter *In a Landscape No. 2* 2012, performance from Current Rising Festival. Photographer: Eli Illis. Image courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4 Zoe Porter *Untitled (Couple)* 2011, found photograph and ink, 20 x 12cm. Image courtesy of the artist.
the passive fleshiness of the model-object. It may be tempting to invoke the Haitian Voodoo-zombie master/slave dialectic and conclude that the mark of the artist contains the resuscitation and mastery of the model-body—a posed body from which the self is absented. In his essay on the ontology of the zombie, Kevin Boon shifts emphasis from death to this lack of self:

A zombie lacks conscious experiences separate from physical processes ... Zombies cannot retain a sense of self—a unique, human consciousness. This defining characteristic is often muddied in literature and film, but it is more central to the zombie myth than death, as you can have a zombie who isn't dead, but you cannot have a zombie that retains its sense of identity. (2007, 36)

The zombie may lack consciousness, but the revenant-zombie is not a passive agent. The zombie hungers. The zombie seeks to impose its pure-body on the conscious flesh of the living, obliterating it. The zombie also rejects a stable identity that precedes life-death. Films, video games, and literature often try to impose a fantasy of identity on the zombie through photographs, memories, places, and objects. What all of these dreary reminiscences really indicate is the pervasive absence of a stabilising self in the person of the (still) living. In Porter's work, the monstrous bodily forms are often imposed on ephemera—bits of torn books, newspaper photos, magazine spreads—in a gesture of grotesque reorganisation and effacement of objective and aesthetic distance (figure 4). Porter's performance drawings suggest the aftermath and detritus of revolution and catastrophe.

Zombie scholar Sarah J. Lauro describes the paradoxical complexity of the zombie construct in regards to rebellion and revolution: “A figuration of both the slave and the slave rebellion, the zombie always connotes the annihilation of revolution at the same time that it embodies revolutionary drive” (2011, 225). The banality of violence, mayhem, and extinction in zombie narratives exists to the point that anarchy, revolution, and liberation become defunct, but the zombie also images the pre-apocalyptic presence of the mob, and its implicit threat of becoming an invincible horde. Confronting the passive conventions and aggressive rebellion of the d-zombie should constitute the core of life drawing. Instead, we are often presented with rote gestures, photographic illusions, or the pale shadows of clever mimesis. The revolutionary d-zombification of the pose is necessary to reveal its established limits and open them up, like soft flesh. Peter Dendle argues, “Zombification is the logical conclusion of human reductionism: it is to reduce a person to a body, to reduce behaviour to basic motor functions, and to reduce social utility to raw labour” (2007, 48). It would be all too easy to remove the word ‘zombification’ from this sentence and replace it with the phrase ‘life drawing’. Porter’s performance drawings demonstrate that the establishment and acknowledgement of the zombie-revenant-pose, which erases the social and institutional constraints of conventional life drawing, can move the practice beyond academic mediocrity and into a dangerous, unpredictable and performative sphere.

Dana Lawrie actively courts pale mimesis and photographic illusionism in her drawings. Her use of the conventions of academicism and photo-verity allows a subtle revelation of the pose. Lawrie works her paintings and drawings from the digital and the photographic. She deliberately employs methods that facilitate the easy exchange of the graphic and photographic in order to expose the fissures in life drawing practice into which death and disorder can creep. In Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes (1981) expresses his anxiety about the presence of his self in the photographic exchange. Barthes describes “the whole photographic ritual: I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing, but (to square the circle) this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality: what I am, apart from any effigy” (22). He laments the lack of a “neutral, anatomic body” that could liberate the self from the pose (Barthes 1981, 22). Like Barthes, Lawrie pursues a transhumanist fantasy of a body from which the self has been emancipated. She draws uncanny, prosthetic bodies—bodies that cannot be corrupted or annihilated by the lens, nor reduced to mythic ideal by the academic drawing process (figure 5). The zombie-body, unlike the
self, is not vulnerable to the mortification of photography. The revenant zombie-body can survive its death-by-picturing. The process of picturing that Lawrie initially employs—the ‘self-shot’—yields a photograph, but the photograph is not the referent. The referent is the pose, or, more precisely, the aberrant nature of posing.

Lawrie utilises analogue and digital projection techniques to begin marking her large surfaces. Specifically, she works with pencil and oil washes on prepared panels in a method that mimics an effect most commonly associated with ink and transparent watercolour on paper (figure 6). The linear contour in Lawrie’s paintings signifies the photographic. Precisely rendered, the silhouette of the photographic figure and the contour line mirror one another. The line, that fundamental graphic abstraction of edge, denotes the limits of the body—that which the lens can detect and abstract. The outlining of the body then comes to symbolise the lethal vector of the photograph. The relationship between photography and death has been widely discussed; Amelia Jones refers to the photograph as a “death-dealing apparatus” (2002, 949), Susan Sontag calls the portrait-photograph a “soft murder” (1990, 14–15), and Maurice Berger calls the portrait “photography’s little murder” (1995, 92). The metaphors of ‘shooting’, ‘firing’, and ‘capturing’ are thinly veiled sublimations of the aggressive vector of the lens. Washes, however, are visceral and unstable. The wash disorganises the surface and the body in fluid creep and transparency.

The relationship between the wash’s dysgraphia and the d-zombie is clarified by MacCormack’s work on gore. MacCormack reads Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s radical critique of the semiotic ordering and control of the body, its ‘legibility’, through the zombie films of Lucio Fulci. MacCormack (2008) argues that opening the flesh, and exposing and spilling the organs ‘detrimentalizes’ the body, liberating it from its organisation. She writes, “The horror of gore films comes from the horror of viewing the illegible ‘human body’—therefore the Body without Organs is inhuman” (MacCormack 2008, 103). Lawrie’s method of rendering simultaneously dematerialises the skin, seeming to expose a rough ecorthé of her body, and amplifies the surface—an impenetrable ‘skin’ stained pink and green by the cadaveric body. Rather than penetrating the skin with prick and gash, Lawrie’s bodies egest and congeal. The paintings also specifically depict faces and specifically efface genitalia. Just as zombies have no sexual organisation, legibility, or humanity, but require a face by which to hunt and infect, Lawrie’s bodies indicate a pathological life-drawing code—faces ruptured from their sexed and human bodies. In many of her works, Lawrie eliminates or erases the cranium to the point of invisibility, retaining only the face. This is a potent gesture of the d-zombie. The face and de-sexed body remain, but the seat of consciousness is absented. Lawrie’s methods offer a specific critique of the values and standards of conventional life drawing in which effects of surface, anatomy, and graphic dexterity actively resist critical inquiry.

Picturing the d-zombie is particularly problematic because, unlike in the movies, this zombie is not Mom, or the neighbour, or some other stable character transformed into
a maybe-fast or maybe-slow monster. In life
drawing, the zombie is the act of drawing. The
act is all post-mortem twitch and bloat. It is the
performance of the posing model intersecting
with the performance of the posing artist. The
d-zombie informs the action of life drawing but
is not a product of the action. The zombie can
indicate the pose and the drawing act but cannot
substitute for them. In late 2013, I was invited
to participate in an exhibition in Brisbane that
surveyed international performance drawing.
Titled Drawn to Experience, the show was curated
by Kellie O’Dempsey, an artist and lecturer who
specialises in drawing. This exhibition was the
first in which I presented a coherent collection of
d-zombies. Consisting of an installation of three
videos on mobile TFT screens, thirty instant
photographs, and over fifty drawings ranging in
size from a few square centimetres to over three
square metres, the work was the result of a pair
of performances enacted in a hired studio space
(figure 7). In each performance drawing, the
models and I play-acted the dramatic clichés
of zombie iconography and re-enacted several
well-known scenes from zombie cinema, while
dragging our charcoal lumps and charcoaled
bodies across the papered floors and walls (figure
8). One outcome of this work is an untitled
instant print of the model and I racing around
the studio in mock pursuit while the unfortunate
cameraperson pedalled backwards (figure 9). In
zombie drawing, as in zombie narratives, a tension
exists between the performance of conventions
and the engrossment—usually as a result of terror
or tedium—of the players in the action. The terror
of the zombie attack is not in being consumed—
the wet pain of disgorged bowels—but rather in
being transformed. There is always a gap in the
transformation from the living to the zombie.
Zombification isn’t instantaneous. Like the instant
print, there is a pause filled with concealment,
infection, transference, and reification.
The physical and temporal gaps between
the living, the dead, the posing, and life/death
manifest in four primary ways in the performance
drawing of the d-zombie: in the gap between the
performing artist and the performing model; in
the gap between the documentary camera and
the performance arena; in the gap between the
liveness of the encounter and its presentation; and
in the gap between meat-space and simulation.
My current inquiries are directed towards
developing and testing studio methodologies that
interrogate and exemplify these gaps. My goal is
not resolution, but reformation.

It would be amiss to conclude this essay on the
doings in life drawing without mention of the
heterosexist frame in which life drawing operates
(Nead 1992; Mayhew 2008). Although the potent
critiques of the life-drawing exchange offered
by those such as John Berger and Lynda Nead have had some influence on the implementation of performance and a gender discourse in the life-drawing studio, the form remains largely unchanged from its mid-nineteenth-century structure. Although women artists now outnumber men in many contemporary life-drawing courses, the structures and preferences remain for employing female models of a certain age and morphology. Zombies have been proffered as de-sexed and de-politicised creatures of ambiguity and disorganisation. On the whole, however, zombie narratives are every bit as heterosexist as conventional life drawing. Examples of the most well-circulated visual zombie narratives of the twenty-first century—*World War Z* (2013), *The Walking Dead* (2010–), *Game of Thrones* (2011–), *28 Days Later* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004)—all share the same central theme: paternalistic male heroes attempt to reassert themselves as the dominant centres of failed societies in which their power and privilege have been marginalised.

There are certainly exceptions to this template, as there are in life drawing, but the popularity of these narratives coincides with the resurgence in so-called *atelier* life-drawing groups, classes, and texts that attempt to re-enact eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academic modes of learning, seeing, and drawing production. Arguably, zombie narratives and atelier models both signal the same sense of longing to resuscitate a flatlining macho framework. As such, the forms of zombie narratives and academic life drawing offer an ideal framework from which to subvert this persistent pattern from within.

Whether binding the artist and model together with gore, utilising de-centred, web-based lensing, repeatedly reprising re-enactments, or freely mixing avatars, cyborgs, and zombies, an active participation by the immense collective of life-drawing practitioners in *d-zombie* methods can begin to construct a new knowledge base from which conventional and experimental life-drawing exchanges can be examined. The
Figure 8 A/M Zombie Drawing Performance 2013, still from single-channel digital video

Figure 9 Untitled [A/M Zombie Drawing] 2013, instant print, 10.8 x 8.5cm
question of what is or is not being done in the life-drawing studio does not demand answers as much as it signals the feeble critical position of life drawing—a position that we are obligated to reform. Contemporary life-drawing practices and pedagogies require further experimentation and ongoing communication between instructors, artists, and models if such a coherent reformation of life drawing is to occur.

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In the twenty-first-century context of an increasingly pressured, changing, and complex world, there is a disquieting recognition of the plight and struggle for survival that plants and animals endure. This sense of disquiet underpins the individual practices of artists Robyn Glade-Wright and Barbara Dover, who both engage with aesthetics in a distinctive manner for similar ethical purposes. Their aim in making art is to engender reflection about the kind of life we impose on sentient beings and the impact of human agency on the habitat of living species. As this paper will demonstrate, Glade-Wright’s and Dover’s works of art suggest a sense of disagreeable horror in an agreeable or palatable form. Their conflation of beauty, precision, and horror provokes further contemplation of these terms, along with a reinterpretation of notions of the sublime. Significantly, the deep moral concerns at play in their works of art belie their delicate and alluring forms.

In broadening the concept of aesthetics in relations to the realm of the ethical, philosopher Paul Crowther argues for an idea of critical aesthetics, which he sees as a striving for objectivity in aesthetic judgement that can, in turn, facilitate the deepening of aesthetic experience. Moreover, critical aesthetics construes art and the aesthetic “as modes of synthesis”—in the sense of actively bringing together different capacities, in relation to different sets of objects” (Crowther 1993, 26). This involves keeping the aesthetic domain in proper social perspective through grounding judgements in historical knowledge, and being “... squared off against complex ethical and political considerations” (Crowther 1993, 210) to inform the subjective or felt character of the experience of art.

Objectivity in aesthetic judgement, Crowther argues, is a case of offering an artwork from which others can learn, and presenting a critical assessment that enables people “to experientially appropriate the aesthetic object ... in a new way” (1993, 209). Such an approach focuses on the way art and aesthetic experience “involve an interplay between what is constant and what is historically determined in our engagement with the world” (Crowther 1993, 206). Crowther suggests that reciprocity of the visible and invisible is basic to the structure of perception itself and, importantly, is an essential feature of all art by virtue of being a perceptual object; therefore, art has the capacity to disclose different aspects of our most basic contact with the world. However, there are also numerous other constants involved in art and aesthetic experience. Central to aesthetic empathy, Crowther maintains, is another constant, which ... is our need to recognise and articulate what we are as individuals through recognising, identifying with and learning from the achievement of other people. The work of art facilitates all aspects of this, in so far as it involves the creation of a sensible manifold inseparably bonded to a symbolic content. It draws on capacities for synthesis such as imagination and rational comprehension which are necessary features of our cognitive relation to the world. More than this, it places such capacities in a mutually enhancing reciprocal relation. (1993, 207)

This reciprocity between the viewer and the work of art is central to the process and aims at play in Glade-Wright’s and Dover’s works of art. While aesthetics—and ideas of beauty in particular—might be intrinsic to their art, these artists do not necessarily create aesthetically pleasing works of art to incite pleasure and delight. Rather, their aim in making art is to focus attention on the predicament and survival of both plants and animals. To achieve this, Glade-Wright
and Dover press aesthetic forms to function as an enticement to attract the attention of others. This attention might lead to new ways of imagining and feeling about the changes in the environment in which people live and the life that humans afford other animals.

For example, the merging of deep moral concern and beauty is evident in Glade-Wright’s *Exodus* (2014, figures 1–3), exhibited at KickArts Contemporary Artspace, Cairns, in 2014. *Exodus* was produced in response to the knowledge that half of the coral in the Great Barrier Reef has been lost over the past few decades. This majestic reef has been silently dissolving as millions of tiny algae, which once lived in a symbiotic relationship with the coral providing nutrients and much of the vivid colour to the reef, have died. These microscopic algae are sensitive to increased sea temperatures, with rises as small as one degree causing heat stress, and prolonged exposure potentially killing them. With the death and exodus of millions of live algae, the coral is starved (Sheppard 2014). Devoid of life, the reef bleaches: there is a loss of life and a demise of natural beauty. *Exodus* is a symbolic representation of bleached coral that takes the form of a long boat or canoe, spanning eight-and-a-half metres from bow to stern. The boat form floats quietly in the gallery, carrying its cargo to an unmarked grave. The white-washed forms in *Exodus* recall Arnold Bocklin’s painting, *Isle of the Dead* (1880), in which a shrouded white form ferries a recently deceased soul, human cargo, to its resting place. The boat form used in *Exodus* suggests the passage of coral to an imagined watery ossuary.

Figure 1 Robyn Glade-Wright *Exodus* 2014, vegetation, paint, nylon, 90 x 880 x 20cm

Figure 2 Robyn Glade-Wright *Exodus* (detail) 2014
Through *Exodus*, Glade-Wright poses the following question: Can a work of art with a beautiful form be beautiful when it represents carnage on the reef? In *Exodus*, Glade-Wright’s representation of a bleached coral reef, while beautiful in form, evokes an awareness that the fragile beauty of the reef, suffering from heat stress in a warming global climate, is collapsing in an underwater wasteland. *Exodus* raises the spectre of beauty but menacingly fuses this beauty with its immanent loss. Those of us who deride the loss of life are plunged into an unpleasant quandary: a disagreeable horror. Glade-Wright thoughtfully and purposely uses beauty as a method of articulating her concerns and generating a moral call.

Glade-Wright premises her aesthetic on a theory by Immanuel Kant, who writes that judgments of beauty are mediated by our moral nature. Kant writes that judgments of beauty are located halfway between those of the “logically necessary”, such as a mathematical theorem, and the purely “subjective”, such as a preference for a certain colour (quoted in Whewell 1995, 251). According to this view, judgments of beauty are not merely subjective because when the view is expressed that a thing is beautiful, it is assumed that others will understand what is meant, even if they do not agree. Therefore, such a claim for beauty is made with the demand for universal assent (Whewell 1995). In an effort to explain this curious double nature of judgements of taste, Kant postulates the notion of a sensus communis, or common sensitive nature, among people. Kant claims that “we cannot understand aesthetic experience except by relating it to our moral natures as followers of universal principles” (quoted in White 1995, 293). It was only through linking the moral and the beautiful that Kant could “justify the demand for universal agreement that aesthetic judgments bring with them”, and claim that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (quoted in White 1995, 295). Therefore, aesthetic judgements are not only subjective judgements; they are also mediated by our moral nature as followers of universal principles. This raises the question: Can a work of art be beautiful if it is judged to be morally wrong?

This linking of beauty to justice is not unprecedented. For Plato, beauty was inseparable from justice.
from goodness. The philosopher Paul Guyer reminds us that aesthetics has been both integral to, and yet under attack by, philosophy from the beginning, when Plato initiated Western philosophy with an assault on Greek assumptions about the cognitive and practical value of the creation and experience of art. Yet, in so doing, Plato was also aware of the compelling nature of beauty and, as Guyer observes, attempted to guide our admiration of earthly beauty into an admiration of a higher kind of beauty otherwise inaccessible to the senses, such as “... the Form of Good or Justice” (Guyer 2005, x). Nevertheless, Guyer argues, the questions that Plato raised in the third to fourth centuries BC, such as

... what is the nature and value of beauty? what is the connection between art and knowledge? and what is genius, the source of artistic inspiration? ... have always remained at the heart of aesthetics, no less so when aesthetics became a recognized academic discipline early in the eighteenth century than before, and no less now than at any other time in modernity. (Guyer 2005, x)

Elaine Scarry is a more recent writer who is convinced of the compelling connections of ethics and aesthetics. In her book On Beauty and Being Just (1999), Scarry argues that beauty can lead to justice. She claims that both beauty and justice are available to the senses but justice cannot be seen as easily as beauty. On the one hand, the beauty of the sky is widely available to all people at most times. Justice, on the other hand, is not as readily accessible. We might observe, for example, that people in cars are obeying traffic rules; however, generally, we do not see justice because it is too dispersed over an area much larger than a car, such as a whole city (Scarry 1999).

Scarry writes that when both aesthetic fairness and ethical fairness are present, a stable situation exists. However, when one of these terms is absent, “the term that is present becomes active, insisting, calling out for, directing our attention towards what is absent” (Scarry 1999, 109). Therefore, when beauty is present and justice is not, beauty may act as a lever in the direction of justice. Moreover, Scarry maintains that during the stasis of an experience of beauty, a radical decentring occurs. At this time, a person undertakes a cognitive journey through which they cease to stand in the centre of their own world, and the cluster of feelings that normally promotes the ‘self’ dissipates. The space formerly used for self-protection is now available to serve another cause, and “a more capacious act is possible” (Scarry 1999, 113). In Exodus, Glade-Wright employs this notion of beauty acting as a lever in the direction of justice. It is hoped that the work of art will initiate a process of decentring that might trigger moral justice for other living entities.

A further facet of Glade-Wright’s use of beauty is the recognition that people value and actively seek beauty out. This explains why people want to live in beautiful places, find beautiful partners and visit beauty spots while on vacations. Philosopher John Armstrong writes that “Awareness of beauty makes the ugliness of existence all the harder to bear” (2004, 84). It is hard to fathom how the beauty of a reef might be replaced by an unbearable ugliness. Exodus aims to elicit a response of beauty along with an understanding of loss and, in doing so, becomes a plea for the consideration of the moral and ethical consequences of human impact. Works of art such as Exodus seek to foreground instances of loss to create a means of recognising, imagining, and feeling the changing nature of our environment.

The value attributed to beauty has been associated with a form of stewardship, which is a “reciprocal welcoming” or salute to the dignity of the other, between the observed and the observer (Scarry 1999, 95). This might seem to be a curious standpoint; for example, how can we imagine that an object such as an urn could be capable of saluting another? Armstrong offers an explanation of the power of beauty that might explain the idea of a reciprocal welcoming to the dignity of the other. He writes of beauty in terms of a physical/spiritual binary, arguing that human life is experienced in two guises: the physical and the spiritual. In similar fashion, beauty is both physical, “(the qualities inherent in beautiful objects)”, and spiritual, “(the intuition at play when we experience beauty)” (Armstrong 2004, 163). For Armstrong, the experience of beauty consists of finding “spiritual value (truth, happiness, moral ideals) at home in a material setting (rhythm, line, shape, structure) and in a
AN UNBEARABLE BEAUTY: THE CALL OF BEAUTY AND THE SUBLIME

Figure 4 Barbara Dover And No Birds Sing 2014, deconstructed book, found feathers, acrylic, 135 x 100cm

Figure 5 Barbara Dover And No Birds Sing 2014 (detail)

Figure 6 Barbara Dover And No Birds Sing 2014 (detail)
way that, while we contemplate the object, the two seem inseparable” (Armstrong 2004, 163). Therefore, Armstrong provides a metaphorical thread that ties the idea of stewardship, or the reciprocal welcoming or salute, to the dignity of the other to the realm of the possible.

If we accept Armstrong’s notion of a physical and spiritual binary, then Scarry’s idea of a link between beauty and stewardship becomes more acceptable. The point of stewardship is that it elicits a desire to protect and nurture existing beauty and to bring new beauty into the world. The desire for stewardship and to protect the beauty of the reef and the life it nurtures are part of the motivation for Exodus. Armstrong (2004) writes that an experience of beauty involves a sense of kinship between an object and one’s soul, and that people find purity, perfection, harmony, and order in physically beautiful objects. The loss of perfection, harmony, and order apparent in a bleached coral reef can sever the kinship we share with other sentient beings. This disruption of perfection, harmony, and order can upset one’s soul. In this way, beauty is pushed into a subversive role that foreshadows a dire end.

This dissenting beauty also underlies Dover’s work. And No Birds Sing (2014, figures 4–6), exhibited at Canopy Art Space, Cairns, in 2014, is a lamentation about the pressure that human activities put on animal life. Constructed with a sensitive aesthetic and principled beauty, it is concerned with the absence of animals. It references the clearing of land for human use, which has an untold impact on birds (among other species) and their habitats. In some cases, it has meant the loss of bird species. And No Birds Sing imagines a world without birds, a place devoid of the sounds of their rich and varied vocalisations that are taken so much for granted; a world where all that is left in ordered libraries and museums are written words and records that these birds, and their sounds, once existed.

Dover reflects on contemporary dilemmas, particularly concerning animals with which we share this world, by considering our moral responsibility for them. Her work intentionally intertwines moral principles and ethics with aesthetic principles. These principles are expressed in And No Birds Sing by seven transparent acrylic shelves on which sit slightly crushed small boxes, filled with small white feathers, constructed from the pages of a taxonomic book of bird species, titled The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Birds. The work is fragile and delicate. Text of the calls of various birds is faintly etched on the shelves, barely visible, but seemingly floating beneath the boxes. And No Birds Sing suggests a quiet urgency for the animal life that is fading away, barely being noticed. The kind of beauty aspired to in this work is one of restraint, subtlety, and refinement, interlocking with imaginative insight and with such ethical principles as responsibility, moral reasoning, and empathetic agency.

During the construction of the work of art, Dover considered the importance of cognitive implications of the links between aesthetics and ethics and morality. Dover’s decision-making processes were directed towards realising both aesthetic and conceptual intents, and connecting these with the material chosen for the work as seamlessly as possible. For example, the deconstructed book was the source of information on the sounds and calls that various species of birds make as well as the physical material for the construction of the boxes. The bird call text was digitally and graphically converted to a finely graded sandblasted adhesive lettering, which was subsequently applied to the seven transparent acrylic shelves, in an apparently random arrangement. This text on the shelves, then, became a background to the text boxes. The boxes were crushed gently after construction to imply the crushing of the habitats/homes of the birds (signified by feathers).

The text boxes themselves were filled with small white feathers collected from beneath roosting trees used by flocks of cockatoos and ibis. These fallen feathers were from the birds preening themselves each night before resting. The small lidded boxes were placed at precise and regular intervals on the shelves. Some boxes were taken out to create gaps, that is, space for absent boxes. Like other such works focussing on vexing moral issues as that of animal mistreatment, this work suggests foregrounding such qualities as force, direct confrontation or discord. While qualities of beauty and subtlety appear to be the antithesis of confrontation, they have the capability, albeit
covertly, of embodying the potency of moral opposition and ethical resistance.

The idea that we could all soon live in a world where no bird sings points a sharp and exacting focus on the vulnerability of animals and a worrying suggestion that our future might be diminished. There is a perturbing realisation that the natural world we have known in our lifetime might not be robust in a climate of change. Furthermore, on an individual level, we might feel seemingly powerless to halt the demise of the environment and life it has supported. A world bereft of birds evokes an experience of terror. Far removed from the delicacy of its form, the meaning of *And No Birds Sing* is chilling and capable of instilling a sense of fear. Eighteenth-century British philosopher and theorist Edmund Burke argued that the sublime is in some way terrible and, hence, capable of instilling fear (quoted in Gardiner 1995, 56). Similarly, a sublime terror lies behind the delicate facade of *And No Birds Sing*.

Glade-Wright’s and Dover’s works of art present a dialogue between a delicate beauty and the fear at play in the sublime. This use of beauty in combination with the sublime reunites the division in aesthetics instigated by philosophers such as Burke and Joseph Addison in the eighteenth century (Mothersill 1995). The aesthetic realm was subdivided into those of the sublime and the beautiful, with the sublime the dominant member, and beauty the diminutive member. The sublime was considered to be masculine, principled, and great, while the beautiful was cast as “female, small and charming” (Kant quoted in Scarry 1999, 82). By the twentieth century, the term ‘sublime’ was entrenched in aesthetic discourse, with artists such as Mark Rothko claiming that paintings must be capable of “overwhelming the senses with works of sublime directness” (quoted in Read 1974, 290). While achieving a sense of the sublime became the goal of many artists at this time, beauty languished and was cast into the shadows.
The modernist reverence for meaning and privileging it over the suspicious nature of beauty continued until the late-twentieth century, when the writer David Hickey questioned its exiled position. Hickey claimed that art professionals, those benevolent wardens of the public institutions, contended that they “must look carefully and genuinely care about what artists ‘really’ mean—and therefore they must mistrust, almost of necessity, distrust appearances, distrust the very idea of appearances” (1993, 16). The mistrust and suspicion of beauty in art during the mid-to-late-twentieth century was, in part, due to its capacity to sell, which was a problem, according to Hickey, who noted that “if it sells itself, it is an idolatrous commodity: if it sells anything else it is a seductive advertisement” (Hickey 1993, 16). In this milieu, beauty was seemingly abandoned (Steiner 2001, xv). However, Hickey’s comments instigated a re-evaluation of beauty in the visual arts from the mid-1990s onwards, leading to a contemporary aesthetic landscape that could embrace beauty (Brand 2000).

Thus, the former division of the sublime from the beautiful and the privileging of the sublime over the beautiful have been reassessed in the contemporary arts landscape. Indeed, in his essay, “Overflow: Tales of the Sublime”, writer and curator Daniel Palmer argues that while the sublime might be viewed as, in his words, an unfashionable term, it has contemporary relevance and is a big concept. Notably, he contends that “The aesthetics of the sublime have always been associated with confusion in the face of destruction” (Palmer 2014, 70). Palmer points to the need for “a more complex understanding of ‘nature’, seriously complicating traditional formulation of the sublime” (Palmer 2014, 70). Relevant to and evident in the work of Glade-Wright and Dover, Palmer reasons that “a more radical eco-sublime is required to imagine new ways of feeling” and “new forms of collective empathy towards all manner of human and non-human others” (2014, 70).

This contemporary understanding of the term ‘sublime’ that Palmer makes a case for—that is, one that coincides with global environmental disasters in the name of progress—might well apply to Glade-Wright’s work of art, Vulnerable Animal Egg 1 (2011, figures 7–8). This is a fine, transparent, large yet delicately embroidered, egg, whose very material of white silk thread and white organza conveys an air of fragility; it might float away into nothingness at any minute. This work was part of an exhibition entitled Red Listed, which comprised digital and embroidered images of extinct and vulnerable plants and animals from across far north Queensland. The embroidery work, finely and skilfully made, is beguiling because of its beauty. However, on looking upon it, one realises that its precariousness on the gallery wall is suggestive of the existence of many plants and animals across Australia and the world. Reflecting on Vulnerable Animal Egg 1, the viewer considers the chilling thought and the gravity of the decline and loss of species: it tugs our conscience and wrenches our hearts. It is indicative of the concept of eco-sublime suggested by Palmer, seeking to create new ways to imagine and new ways to feel about the vulnerability of human and non-human others. The delicacy of
Vulnerable Animal Egg 1, and its borderless form, symbolically unites the idea of the individual egg with new life. The idea that this egg—and, indeed, all eggs—may be vulnerable beauty becomes an unbearable one. The horror of the eco-sublime might become a contemporary equivalent of sublime suggested in the past and illustrated by Milton’s hell.

Palmer’s attachment of the prefix ‘eco’ to the word ‘sublime’ catapults the outmoded term most powerfully and convincingly into contemporary relevance. Moreover, the further attachment of ideas of uncompromising in his use of the word radical with eco-sublime propels beauty straight into the realm of ethics and morality. It is within this way of thinking about the sublime that we might understand an alternative perspective on nature; hence, we might imagine then, as Palmer argues, “new forms of collective empathy towards all manner of human and non-human others” (Palmer 2014, 70). It is here, within these complicated and complex connections with nature and the animal world that Dover considers and creates her works. For example, her work Barrier (2003, figure 9) might well be viewed from the perspective of a radical and, indeed, a visceral eco-sublime.

Barrier discloses a darker side of beauty and sublime. It tackles the dichotomy inherent in human attitudes towards those animals seldom considered as being part of nature: farm animals. Barrier reveals the beauty of cattle through the realia (tail hair) of this animal, carefully placed in a clear, clean, and clinical format—a transparent acrylic tube—so that the exploitation and dreadfulness behind the beauty of the soft and subtle hues of the hair unfolds slowly. The form of Barrier—ten one-metre tubes placed horizontally, one above the other—suggests enclosures, railings, fences, or the trucks that transport cattle from the farm to market to slaughterhouse. The work unambiguously interrogates our relations with another side of nature, those hidden animals we eat. Barrier engages with, as Palmer contends, “...alternative ways of thinking about our contingent place within “nature”” (2014, 70).

The prospect for art to raise awareness of the eco-sublime within a beautiful, ordered aesthetic can reveal a range of new understandings, with ethical implications for both the artists and the audience of their work. This capacity of works of art is noted by the philosopher Karen Hanson, who writes,

Art’s capacity to keep alive certain moral perspectives, even if these views diverge radically from our present moral outlook, can help us remain alert to life’s possibilities and our own potentialities. This is a benefit that is neither merely aesthetic, not solely moral: it is both at once. (2001, 222)

The capacity for art to integrate moral concern with aesthetic form is the labour many contemporary artists undertake: they are cognisant of the potential of conflating beauty and the sublime in art to address ethical concerns. In coalescing aesthetics and beauty—and, explicitly, a more contemporary perspective on the sublime that Palmer puts forward, an eco-sublime—within the ambit of wider considerations of our experience of and interaction with the natural world, both Glade-Wright and Dover seek new ways of thinking about the present existence and place of plant and animal life with which we share this planet. Palmer’s words that “art that renews our vision in the process of moving us beyond ourselves, a sublime realisation if ever there was one” (2014, 71) resonate with the works by Glade-Wright and Dover discussed here.

These artists’ works deliberately and simultaneously critique ideas of beauty, the sublime, and ethics. Glade-Wright addresses the tragedy of extinction and, more urgently, the vulnerability of species in a beautiful and yet sublime form. On the one hand, for Glade-Wright, stewardship of the natural environment is a pressing ethical concern. Glade-Wright addresses the tragedy of extinction and, more urgently, the vulnerability of species in a beautiful and yet sublime form. On the one hand, for Glade-Wright, stewardship of the natural environment is a pressing ethical concern. Glade-Wright’s works of art attempt to create a reading of beauty and terror to raise an awareness of the options, possibilities, and potentialities for the future of life. These possibilities may be “good or bad, better or worse, closer or distant from an ideal” (Wittgenstein quoted in Budd, 446). The crucial aspect for Glade-Wright is that these options, possibilities, and potentialities are openly revealed and assessed. On the other hand, for Dover, the fundamental basis of the work is the equal consideration and recognition of the sentience of non-human animals. Ethical questions and drivers...
are at the centre of her work and are closely tied to and, indeed, are a part of the aesthetics of the work. Without doubt, moral responsibility for animals and ethical issues regarding animals are paramount at all levels of the work, from the conceptual underpinnings to the technical and creative decision-making process. The works of art by Glade-Wright and Dover ask uncomfortable questions that might provoke contemplation and a renewed vision about ourselves and the potentialities for the future of life.

ENDNOTE

1 As this paper discusses the artists’ works individually, it is written in the third person.

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Barbara Dover is a sessional lecturer and PhD Advisor in the College of Arts, Society and Education, James Cook University. Her academic research and contemporary art practice focus on the ethical boundaries of human–animal relations within the understanding of animals as sentient individuals whose moral status, interests and lives matter.

Robyn Glade-Wright is a senior lecturer in the College of Arts, Society and Education, James Cook University. Her research interests include imaginative significance, beauty, and the visual communication of concerns about vulnerable species and the loss of species due to extinction.

Guy Keulemans is a designer and researcher, currently artist in-residence at JamFactory Contemporary Craft and Design Centre in Adelaide.

Andrea Pagnes, a Venetian artist and writer, has been working with German artist Verena Stenke since 2006 as VestAndPage, generating art in the mediums of live performance, filmmaking, and creative writing. They are the idea makers and independent curatorial force behind the biennial live-art exhibition project Venice International Performance Art Week.

William Platz is a lecturer in Drawing and Art Theory at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. An American-Australian artist, educator and writer, Platz is interested in pedagogies of drawing, life drawing and portraiture with an underlying focus on the studio transactions that occur between artists and models. This research brings theatrical and performative frameworks into alignment with conventional frameworks of skilfulness, material processes, and drawing artefacts.

Donald Welch is a senior lecturer in Design at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. Specialising in visual communication design, he has been researching and teaching ways to enhance creative thinking for over a decade.