

Unkept Appointments, Liner Notes

Stephen Hennessy

Unkept Appointments make something of the memory of things that failed to take place or perhaps never happened. They are interior fixtures, attached to the wall like minimalist sculpture but overlaid with arcane and sentimental illustrations and photography that undermine the assumed autonomy of each piece.

An appointment registers time prior to a meeting or event. An appointment is not a keepsake but a call to arrive and fulfil the contract, enact a meeting, make a social or business exchange. It's usually a formal agreement, when unkept the diary entry drifts into oblivion, a time not worth remembering. So why am I making space for a non-event?

Drawing on Hal Foster's idea of 'the traumatic' in 'Design and Crime', I use his sense of the traumatic as an experience that is not punctual, that is delayed; coming too early or too late to be registered consciously, that can only be repeated compulsively, or pieced together after the fact. The narrative may run in reverse or move erratically, and the peripeteia is an event that happened long ago or not at all, in keeping with the ambiguous nature of trauma as real or phantasmic. (1)

The 'appointments' here are sites of trauma, visual dysfunction and unreliable memories. They register psychological time, a terrain of non-synchronous moments of recognition – shock felt in disparate pictorial media then made into sculpture. In the process of making these works and after the fact I realised that turning the images into grey/green was coding a space as a hereafter, or as Foster has said a 'space for living on' after the moment to realize it was missed.

The founding piece *Appointment 1 (On the Beach)* takes a newspaper cut out and makes a sculpture out of the end of the world. The TV schedule is like a diary of human dramas, but somehow Ava Gardner's cool presence belies the dread of the caption 'waiting for the end of the world'; the urgency of 'now' is drowned out by an array of choices and multiple channels. The piece opens like a book and remains creased like a folded note of currency

The year 'On The Beach' was filmed in Melbourne, 1959, was the year my father died as a young man in a level crossing smash. For me this piece of cut out time was significant and even painful. So, it was the end of the world, the end of my world. This memory started a train of associations and more personal juxtapositions.

Appointment 2 (Unseen Train) begins a series of viewing boxes which piece together incongruent things that only partially reconstruct what you know, what you think you remember, and what you may have seen but not really. The illustrations substitute graphic reality and turn into a fable of the perpetual scene. The immobile model car is a useless double of the one broken down on the tracks. The unseen train makes me shudder at the thought of it and I go over the scene time and time again. To make an appointment at the scene of my father's death is helpless and horrifying. I wasn't there, and can never be. In any case, why would I want to be? It's him I miss, not the scene.

There is no supplement here, no joy. In the works photography and sculpture do not support each other; they maintain a distance and tension, more ghost presence than three-dimensional authority; sometimes reflected, sometimes absorbed. The elements fail to combine and the scenario remains as both mausoleum and cartoon. Words too find another meaning beyond the role of caption. But what really matters is how time is suspended in these works to allow memory and association to mix and stay for a while to follow other trajectories not strictly visual.

For the first time I could contemplate that traumatic event with a degree of black humour and an imminent sense of events occurring outside my control and outside the scope of art.

Hazy reflections from the sides of the box exacerbate the foggy atmosphere and evince the terror of not seeing that train. All is paralysed but already in our imagination we can hear the roar of the unseen train, which, we feel sure is relentlessly approaching!

Every blind wandering ends in a circle. One thing leads to another and the works can be made to link up. An arrow here penetrates the skin of the canvas, and eventually finds it's mark in another work; an 'X' marks one traumatic spot and then another. Repeated but futile attempts have led me back to the point from which I set out, like the bears in *Appointment 4 (Picnic Place)* there is no safe place to settle.

There is also no comfort in facts. I find a model of the car for *Appointment 2 (Unseen Train)* but my mother tells me it's the wrong green, I thought I remembered it right. And the scale replica looks more like a Holden FX than an FJ, so it could be the wrong car. So, the silver grey of my dioramas is misremembered according to family facts, but it is enough to key the car to the cartoon and consign both to the role of melancholy signifier.

Restless agitation and misleading memories give structure to these and other works. Images are folded and bent into telling interruptions and falsifications. Narratives can run in reverse or threaten to break into folds, a silvery shadowed world of potent but incomplete scenes.

And beyond that hereafter, there is the here and now. Sometimes, through dark humour and narrative twists we know that the present is better than an illusory past. *Stuck in a Hackney Cab* on the way to the airport with my young family offers a long tracking shot - a 'self-editing' shaped piece of actuality filmed as a London cab negotiates the breaks and pauses of heavy traffic. It is an extended trip full of passers by and reflections, the stop and go, which anticipates a journey home, forward to a different hereafter - a welcome appointment.

Stephen Hennessy 2007

(1) Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)*, Verso, London, 2002 (page 131)

Liner Notes

Unkept Appointments 2007

Blindside Artist Run Initiative,

Stephen Hennessy©

LIST OF WORKS (h x w x d)

Appointment 1 (On the Beach) 2005-06

aluminium, digital print on canvas

600 x 300 x 225mm

Appointment 2 (Unseen train) 2005-06

aluminium, digital print on canvas, model car

150 x 450 x 300mm

Appointment 3 (On the Beach Again) 2006

aluminium, digital print on canvas

150 x 450 x 300mm

Appointment 4 (Picnic place) 2005-06

aluminium, digital print on canvas

150 x 450 x 300mm

Appointment 5 (Fresh window - Closed shop) 2006

aluminium, digital print on canvas

300 x 600 x 200mm

Appointment 6 (Valley to X) 2006

aluminium, digital print on canvas

150 x 450 x 300mm

Appointment 8 (Permanent burnt shirt) 2007

aluminium, digital print on canvas
475 x 290 x 100mm

Appointment 7 (Oblique Parentage) 2006

aluminium, digital print on canvas
triptych, 300 x 1350 x 285mm overall

Appointment 9 (North-facing block) 2007

aluminium, digital print on canvas
300 x 750 x 340mm

Appointment 10 (Blind Man's Bridge) 2006

aluminium, digital print on canvas
100 x 190 x 145mm

Stuck in a Hackney Cab 2004-2006

Mini DV transferred to DVD, 17mins full version
soundtrack includes: diegetic sound, Duke Ellington excerpt.

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