

**'Memory and the Myth of Communication -  
"DataFlower for Dunedin" 1998 -  
Adrian Hall in the Octagon.'**

September 2012.

12.00 hrs TWELVE BELLS CHIME - GO!

*The Clock Tower, Dunedin Town Hall.* The artist was on a residency at the Dunedin School of Art, twelve years ago. He was primed to fulfil a number of expectations on his visit to New Zealand, lectures and specific exhibitions elsewhere North and South. What he had not anticipated was the lure of the dizzy heights of the Octagon Clock Tower - neo-Renaissance, neo-Baroque to boot - way over the head of the bronze Burns in Dunedin, not too far from the South Pole.

*The artist measures. Measurements taken, relayed by radio mike to a P/A with a line in to a Powerbook running a Voice Recognition Programme - verbal to text conversion displays text. To any interested audience.*

What impressed him first, was the ready willingness of the Dunedin City bureaucracy to engage in conversation and enjoy the notion of an event which in the end caused the Keeper of the Clock, Graeme Renton, to offer to turn the clock off for two hours while the artist busied himself with abstruse activities and arcane technologies, to the large mystification of the public. Prior to the event, he had purchased in Australia rudimentary software that had been produced for the Mac platform which could read text in various synthetic voices, and more importantly also take dictation. What quasi-ju-ju magic! Having glimpsed spruikers and slithery-sales people at work on American TV shows the notion of a radiomicrophone arose. A head-set. Going to a teevee: Ab-Fabs and VundaBrass. WhipStirs and StirFriez - these are a fugue of our wonderful things. All those confabulations gelled into a public event which would test himself firstly, the radiomicrophone range, the software, and particularise the clock-tower as an historic fount of unalienable but fallible information - there in the public domain, and up there, where the wild waves live. Up the wooden stairs - more than three hundred of them to the highest balcony. Together with a humble builder's tape measure.

12.15 hrs QUARTER IS CHIMED

*More measuring. More memories. More words. Somewhat garbled text appearing on monitor 350 feet away on the pavement. Due to rude invisible physics. And the wind, weather, accent and so on, and in the changes of pattern of my own voice over the past year since I first taught it my accent and usage. As close to the intrinsic moral majority California Americana as it was given, as Silicon Valley could synthesise.*

As his notions coalesced, further morsels of serendipity manoeuvred into place to reinforce his conviction that those simple feelings of curiosity were indicative of much more to come. More structuring became necessary, duration in time and yet more fragile clues declared themselves: the Town Hall as a fount of diktats - of one-way communication - emerged, against the more benign notions of 'prevailing democracy'. The fact that the artist was interviewed, on the cel-phone of his guide and minder par hazard, whilst the car was circumnavigating the Octagon itself and the Clock Tower. He was watching out of the car window up at the daunting structure of the tower while fantasising what might take place and vamping justifications to a reporter of the Otago Daily Telegraph. He was reading off the time from the giant clock-face remembering Buster Keaton, and realised suddenly that there were less than twenty-four hours to go before a small posse of helpers gathered with odd collections of technologies, borrowed from and volunteered by strangers. He was talking to a reporter.

12.30 hrs CLOCK TURNED OFF

*"Geoff, donut time on the half hour , two donuts past the hour" Jam donuts on the half hour, receipt - more data for broadcast. G. takes donuts to the artist in the tower. G. documents with Coolpix digicam.*

He was conscious that only a few days before he had been sweltering in Sydney, Australia, and that this arbitrary welter of citizens here in the centre of Dunedin all possessed similarly varied loci: histories, and futures of movement. He became thrilled by the unknowable logic of the Atoms at play and wanted to enter the quantum of energies existing in that municipal space with radio waves, with vibrations of his larynx, with porta-power packs which powered his PowerBook; by mysterious codifications of machine-code transmitting and transmuting, one wave into another, across another, and one sense into something else. Puncturing the space above with the body from below. Penetrating the perihelion with knees wobbling. By power plugs in the paving, yellow, orange power-leads everywhere and a monster television monitor naked on the sidewalk and large amplified stereo speakers.

By coasting close to sentiment, memories and to nostalgia - by allowing himself to remember that his Father had encouraged his 'wonder' and his hands, to understand how things were: how they became. And how these things, these great and large things became made, the clocks; their mechanisms, their hands, the towers, the great buildings and their Victorian echoes, Baroque echoes, Renaissance echoes back through to Classical times. With the hands and the simple logic of people, curious, inventive and imaginative. One sense - into nonsense: one sense might also test the enormous trust in that quantum, a leap into a very chaotic cauldron to see if other more filters existed - to govern all that which was at play, maybe - out there in the agora. For that is only ever how we learn - the contemplation and actuality of a large jump of some kind. A large jolt.

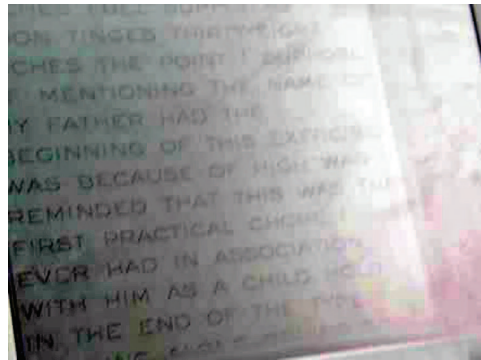


Figure 1. October Dataflower for Dunedin. for the Fringe Festival, Dunedin City Town Hall, Clock Tower, New Zealand. Two hour live action with radio microphone, voice translation software, Powerbook public address system and multi-media. 2000.



Figure 2. Adrian Hall relays measurements of Dunedin's Town Hall clock tower to a computer system in the Octagon . Photo Gerard O'Brien. Image courtesy of the *Otago Daily Times*.

*12.45 hrs*

*13.00 hrs CUCKOO.*

*13.15 hrs QUARTER PAST. CUCKOO.*

*13.30 hrs HALF PAST DONUT.*

After the action, after that day, after the facts; he saw the Otago Daily Telegraph staff photographer - a long lens looking up, 132 feet up (165 feet to the base of the flagpole), into the hypostatised recollecting of a middle-aged man dwelling on his childhood memories. Of the man who then when the tower was even taller; was his middle-aged father. Who instructed him into the small knowledge of finding one's place in the world at that time, with a ruler. The man with the ruler, who knew no more than he did now - with radio and computer and digital documentation, alone in the middle of the agora - way up in the air, surveying all before and behind and way back when. He knew that he the son, also knew no more than the father, even though he might be advantaged by unknowable forces but truly unfathomable things. The noises to emerge when they had tried to talk so long before were no more coherent than the machine-code, than the concrete poetry, than the transmogrified word-salad blown about in a West-Country U.K. accent not West-Coast U.S., blown by vertiginous winds, punctuated by nasal mucus, to appear and entertain and confuse the strangers in the Octagon on the C.R.T. monitor below.

*13.30 hrs HALF PAST DONUT*

*Artist descends, still measuring to Power book in the park, with P.A . Unplugs it, retreats again to clock tower, telling compass directions into the P/A VIA RADIO MIKE. FOLLOWED BY MOBILE VIDEOCAM - KIM PIETERS. The camera follows artist and Powerbook back up ladders, and the clock workings, the wondrous cabinet work, and the great tonnage of bells. He resumes broadcasting from*



Figure 3. Town Hall at the Octagon in Dunedin, Photo contributed by DLiebisch on de.wikipedia.

*the balcony by reading the transcribed text of his measuring from the previous ninety minutes. The donut time and data. Chewed but flowing.*

The Clock Tower has been there a while - it was not tendered for, and it appears that the decision to build it had already been made as that same day, 20th. August 1879, a letter was received from John Hyslop, a Dunedin watchmaker, offering to supply a clock for the new Municipal Chambers clock tower. Five days later he submitted a design drawn by Alexander McArthur to complement architect R.A. Lawson's clock tower. It had then been even grander, but as is the way of Councils and public opinion, both caused a reduction in stature - because of a bottom-line of course and some rot in the structure. For a while there was an aluminium hat on the reduced tower, from 1963, which became known as the 'meat safe'. Then that too was replaced, together with a whole spread of modifications beneath: Stage Two. Importantly though the stairs, structure and workings of the clock - of local design have all remained pristine, while the other extensions to the Town Hall have been cunningly homogenised by the efforts of the architect - in Stage Two and during refurbishment in 1991. The clock mechanism has a 450 pound pendulum with a two-second swing - twice as long as the usual, and a 75 gram double three legged escapement. Similar to the heraldic badge of the Isle of Man, U.K.. Four years ago in 2008 the 450 pound pendulum ceased in its swing - to be later restarted; having been jolted by the first recent Canterbury earthquake, three hundred and more miles away.

All thanks to the Municipal Council for cooperation at that time, 2000, Geoff and Kim back then, and recently to the D.C.C.website for historical information. Also such as this: *'The term "Dunedin Town Hall" now came to be used in its official sense but also specifically for the main auditorium by itself and frequently too for the whole extended building. In the 1980s the official name for the second stage additions was changed to "The Dunedin Centre" but few people know exactly what that refers to . . .'*