

* Quarterly journal (ent), Vol. 45
A\$20.50 (incl. GST) No. 4
NZ\$22.50 (incl. GST)

* ün-a-fīléd, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *file* (q.v.).] Not de-

* ün-a-frāid, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *afraid*.] Not af-

* ün-ag-grēs-sīv, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *aggressive*.] Eng. *aggressive*.

* ün-a-grēe-ā-ble, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *agreeable*.] Eng. *agreeable*.

* ün-a-grēe-ā-ble-nēs, s. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *agreeableness*.] The qual-

* ün-a-grēe-ā-bly, * ün-a-grē-ā-adv. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *agreeably*.] Eng. *agreeably*.

* Winter s. [From Lat. *unus* = one, pluralist.]

* ün-al-lāyéd, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *alloyed*.] Unalloyed; not mixed with alloy, as *alloyed*.

* ün-ag-grēs-sīv, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *aggressive*.] Eng. *aggressive*.

* ün-a-grēe-ā-ble, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *agreeable*.] Eng. *agreeable*.

* ün-a-grēe-ā-ble-nēs, s. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *agreeableness*.] The qual-

* ün-a-grēe-ā-bly, * ün-a-grē-ā-adv. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *agreeably*.] Eng. *agreeably*.

under-sky, s. A lower sky; the lower part of the atmosphere.

under-sparre, s. A lower spar; the spar nearest the keel.

under-sphere, s. A sphere beneath another.

under-stated, a. [Pref. ün- (1) and Eng. *stated*.] Stated beneath the truth.

under-stock, s. A stock of goods or provisions.

under-ty, s. A lower ty; the ty nearest the keel.

1. To support, to endure.

2. To bind underneath.

3. To bind, fasten, or tie together below.

4. To support, to endure.

5. To bind, fasten, or tie together below.

6. To support, to endure.

7. To bind, fasten, or tie together below.

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17. To bind, fasten, or tie together below.

18. To support, to endure.



16th Sydney Biennale issue
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev
William Kentridge

ate, fāt, fāre, amāst, whāt, fāl, father; wō, wēt, hōre, ... or, wōre, wōf, work, whō, sōn; mūte, cūb, cūre, unite, ...

Stuart Ringholt

Conceptual Artist Meets Girl:
Stuart Ringholt and the art of self-improvement

Sarah Tutton



One night, at the age of twenty-three I wanted to have sex with my mother. I lay in bed next to her with the urge but didn't act on it. You might be thinking that I am a deviant but on that night I was hearing voices and I was sick.¹

Stuart Ringholt's self-published autobiography *Hashish Psychosis: What It's Like To Be Mentally Ill and Recover* was launched at the Journal Café in Melbourne in April 2006 and has been exhibited as a photocopied manuscript as part of a larger installation in 'NEW05' at Melbourne's Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) and displayed on a plinth in front of a Brett Whiteley painting in the group exhibition 'Warning – Smoking Has Been Linked to Some of the Most Powerful Images of the Twentieth Century' at the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery in 2006. The book recounts Ringholt's drug-fuelled descent into madness, his long road to recovery and discovery that 'conceptual art can improve your life'. Ringholt takes his reader on an intensely personal journey that starts in the comfortable suburbs of Perth, travels through Australia's Top End, the United States, South-East Asia, India and finally comes to rest in Melbourne. Told with an unnerving honesty, it is a story that is alternatively confronting, sad and hilarious. The reader follows Ringholt as he drinks bhang lassis and smokes hashish in the Indian hill towns of Manali and Vaschist, suffers chronic diarrhoea in Delhi, hides his stash in his didgeridoo in Chandigarh, meets an assortment of sadhus and tricksters and suffers serious delusional and grandiose hallucinations and a bulging messiah complex. By the time he believes he is a monkey and that his father is Rod Stewart we know that this young man is in serious trouble. Ringholt's narrative is interspersed with excerpts from his medical files describing states of disordered and delusional thought, memory loss, disinhibition, agitation and aggression, and cataloguing a litany of psycho-pharmaceutical medication. Ringholt was diagnosed with Organic Psychosis or Hashish Psychosis in Perth in 1994.

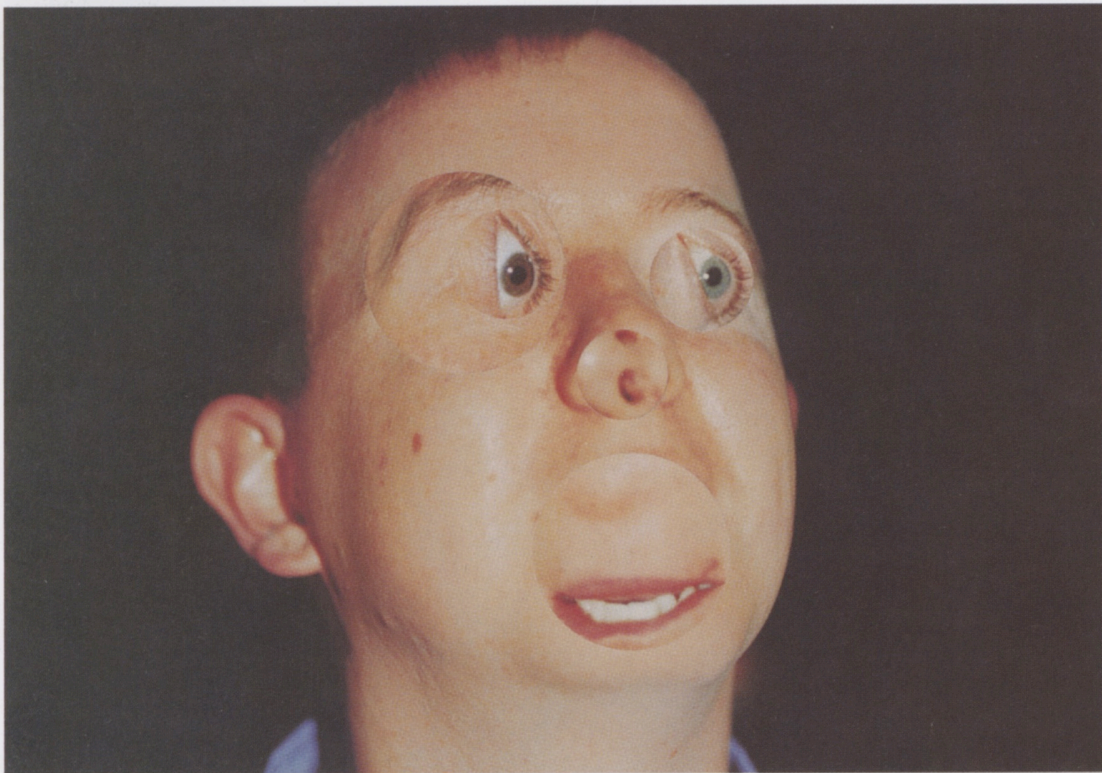
Ringholt was originally based in Perth where he studied graphic design before moving to Melbourne in 2002, dedicating himself to a series of projects that focus on consciousness – the nature of it and how to improve it – and an exploration of the functionality of contemporary art. Working on projects in parallel over a period in time, Ringholt's practice is often performance-based, process-oriented and reliant on audience participation. Documentation of these performances and workshops is often exhibited in the form of books, sculpture, photography and painting. Ringholt blends a wild brew of eastern philosophy, celebrity culture, self-help therapies and art history, mixed up at

times with his own, very personal, stories, to create a diverse body of work that succeeds in taking on a psycho-social utilitarian and experimental bent. *Hashish Psychosis* provides a useful key to Ringholt's wider practice, not so much for its emphasis on the details of Ringholt's illness – something that occurred over fourteen years ago – but rather for its emphasis on function, form and the ways in which the personal and the political inevitably collide.

Rather surprisingly, the controversial Indian spiritual leader Rajneesh Chandra Mohan Jain, also known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and later as Osho, provides an interesting entry point into Ringholt's practice. As Ringholt recounts in *Hashish Psychosis*, he first encountered the Bhagwan (sanskrit for the exalted one) at Club Zorbas, a new-age dance venue in Fremantle, 'where a large picture of Bhagwan with his diamond studded wristwatch watched over proceedings'. As many will remember, the Bhagwan made headlines in the 1980s with his large number of followers, known as the sannyasins or Orange People (named for their ascetic orange robes), his enormous collection of Rolls Royces, his ashrams – firstly in Pune and later in Oregon – as well as allegations of criminal and sexual misconduct. Lampooned in the western press for his often outrageous statements about sex and inflammatory jokes, the Bhagwan's syncretic teaching (combining Zen, Hinduism, western philosophy and psychotherapeutic approaches) continues to influence the new-age movement and has had a significant impact on Ringholt's practice. The Bhagwan was nothing if not practical and used any means, including crude and offensive humour, to achieve his goals and make his philosophical arguments.

Like the Bhagwan, Ringholt is focused on the practical aspects of living. He wants his work to be useful for himself and others as a means to improve life and raise consciousness. Each work, moreover, is part of an overall experiment to test his hypothesis that art can be used to impact personal and social change. Ringholt is comfortable taking whatever is at hand to make his case, adopting structures and frameworks from different disciplines to achieve certain goals, whether it is a therapeutic workshop, an autobiographical novel or a prefabricated play gym. The latter example refers to a sculptural work created by Ringholt in Perth in 2001: the children's play equipment, including monkey bars and swings, was exhibited in its box and installed at a women's





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Stuart Ringholt, Untitled (Iraq, Barbie, fashion), 2007, book detail, 21 x 28 x 3 cm, courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Sydney.

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Stuart Ringholt, On Saturday he stood with toilet paper dangling from his pants, 2001, performance in Florence, courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Sydney. Photograph Paul Moneta.

opposite

details, **Stuart Ringholt, Circle Heads, 2005**, book, 22 x 30 cm, courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Sydney.

refuge at the end of the show. Similarly, the juxtaposition between comedy and seriousness is central to Ringholt's practice. While his work deals with issues that are of personal as well as communal and political importance, humour is never far from the frame. It is often difficult to be sure whether Ringholt is joking or deadly serious; where reality ends and fantasy begins.

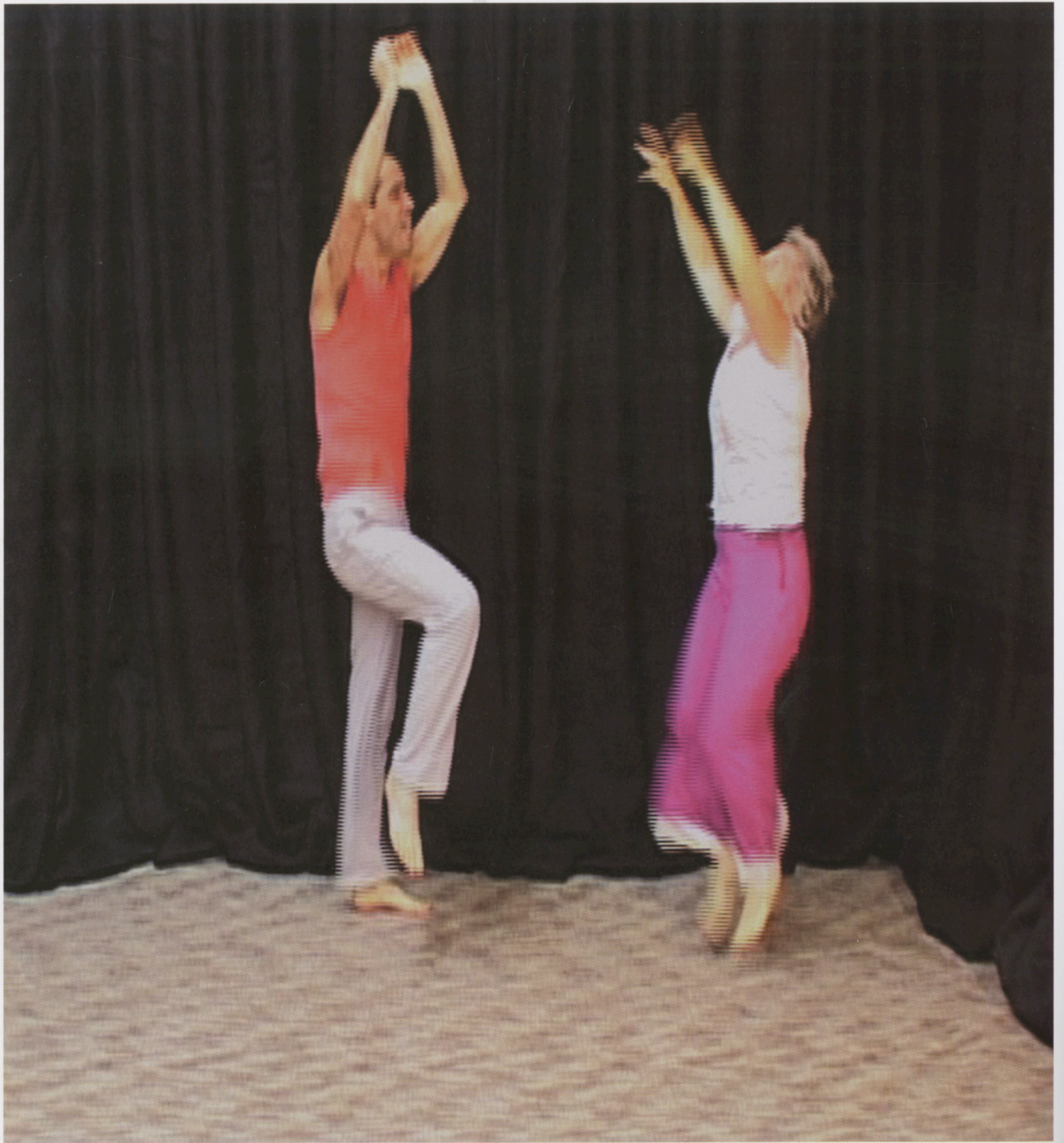
Ringholt's most recent work, *Anger workshops*, 2008, commissioned by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev for the 2008 Biennale of Sydney, continues his interest in participatory, open-ended projects that aim to offer a service to audiences. A purpose-built carpeted room provides a private space for Ringholt's workshop. A large black-and-white poster on the inside wall quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness' and invites potential participants to 'attend a 20 minute neuro-cardio workshop within these walls and find techniques for managing stress and anger in kinder ways'. Inside the room a television monitor plays looped footage of a man and woman performing AUM, a ritualistic, twelve-stage meditative, therapeutic process developed by Veeresh D. Yuson-Sanchez, follower of the Bhagwan and founder of 'The Humaniversity', a new-age organisation based in Holland. AUM is described as a 'holistic synthesis of western psychotherapy and eastern approaches to meditation' and is an exhausting process lasting up to two-and-a-half hours, therefore demanding enormous commitment and energy from participants. Ringholt has edited his footage down to five minutes, focusing on two key phases, anger and love. Facing each other, the couple rants and raves, venting their frustration and anger, pounding their fists in the air. Above the din of their shouts an audible 'fuck you' can be heard every now and again – comical, clichéd and slightly jarring in this quasi-spiritual setting. This footage acts as a guide as Ringholt steers his participants through a process that aims to expel anger and negativity from their lives.

Funny fear workshop, 2004, initially staged at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne as part of Ringholt's 'Crimes of the Apple Worms' exhibition and later exhibited at ACCA, is a similar work that also aims to provide a useful service to gallery-goers. Ringholt invited potential participants to attend a workshop to expunge the fear of embarrassment from their lives.

Each participant was invited to embarrass themselves in public (the means and duration of the act was determined by individual participants) and to discuss their experiences with the group. Seventeen people participated in the two-day workshop. A three-hour discussion preceded the practical component of the workshop on the first day. Only one person returned on the second day but was unwilling to literally embarrass themselves – instead they spoke with Ringholt for several hours. Ringholt produced an edited book that included visual documentation and a transcript of the discussion.

Anger workshops and *Funny fear workshop* both comment on the climate of fear and anxiety that has emerged in Australia and overseas over the last decade. Ringholt is particularly interested in the ways these emotions have been harnessed by politicians to bolster political gain and to garner an almost hysterical fear of difference, at the same time as dumbing down the discussion of these complex psychological states. By raising a discussion about anger and fear within the context of contemporary art, Ringholt attempts to foster a dialogue about these emotions that isn't reliant on clichéd, politically motivated definitions but rather focuses on some of their more subtle, complex (and at times positive) aspects. The juxtaposition of new-age philosophies, self-help methodologies and contemporary art effectively reframes this discussion.

Embarrassed, 2001–03, is another work that provides a background for *Funny fear workshop*. For this series of ten performances in Italy, Switzerland and Australia, the artist intentionally embarrassed himself in public. The series, described by Ringholt as a 'research project', began in 2001 when the artist decided to stand at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence with toilet paper dangling from his trousers, a friend photographing the performance from a distance. The performance reenacted a particularly humiliating moment a few months earlier in Australia when Ringholt had walked through a crowd of teenagers with 'a fifty centimetre strip of torn toilet paper dangling down the back of' his pants. As he recalls in *Hashish Psychosis*, the dangling toilet paper incident had a 'profound effect' on him and he 'remained shaken a week later'. He took it upon himself to intentionally embarrass himself in order to combat these feelings. The lengths he went to in order to confront these feelings of fear are



Stuart Ringholt, Anger workshops, 2008,
proposed poster design, 120 x 84 cm, courtesy
the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
and Sydney.

impressive: wearing a prosthetic nose, wiping snot on his face, placing white thread in his beard, a red Texta mark on his cheek, chewing a pen on the train so that green ink went all over his lips and teeth, wearing an 'I am stupid' Post-it note on his back, a small piece of rubbish on his beanie, a jumper with a large op shop price tag hanging off the back and a large apple down the back of his Speedos at a public pool. In undertaking these performances Ringholt observed a link between embarrassment and fear, in his case a fear of women. Having performed this series of embarrassing scenarios, Ringholt found that he was able to free himself of his fear and eventually ask a woman on a date. As with other works, Ringholt brings together performance art and therapeutic regression techniques, reenacting real and imagined moments of personal significance. In *Celebrity twins*, 2001, he reenacts his experience of psychosis; in this performance, identical twins, Superman, a security guard and a footballer all make an appearance. *C3PO at North Innaloo Primary School*, 1995, a three-minute film of the artist standing naked and still outside his old primary school on Australia Day reenacts memories around the death of his sister Susanne when he was a child. Such reenactments have meanings beyond the personal and allow Ringholt to highlight issues such as mental illness, grief, fear and shame in a way that links the personal with the communal.

Unlike much of his other works, *Circle Heads*, 2005, and *Untitled (Iraq, Barbie, Fashion)*, 2007, do not refer to past performances or workshops but instead take as their starting point images from popular culture. Alternatively surreal, unnerving and laugh-out-loud funny, these works maintain the sense of humour evident in other works and highlight an overtly political edge within his practice. Both works are books repurposed from existing documents collected via the internet. In *Circle Heads*, photographic portraits have been disfigured, with perfect circles cut from their faces and replaced by a segment of another face with disrespect for scale and gender. The effect is unsettling. The wholeness of the image is destroyed, maimed and literally pierced by the artist's hand. This cutting is symbolic as well as actual. In *Untitled (Iraq, Barbie, Fashion)* Ringholt juxtaposes the images of the work's title: war in Iraq, Barbie dolls

and fashion models, each double-page spread jarring, slamming the images together.

While at first glance Ringholt's work invites a psychoanalytical reading – dominated as it is by recurring images of and references to Oedipal scenarios, dismembered bodies and disfiguring faces, holes, cuts and incisions – to lock a discussion of his work into such a framework would be to miss much of its lightness and humour. Despite the obvious narcissistic elements within Ringholt's work he is careful not to sink into a practice that is absurdly self-referential or self-pitying. His curious mix of pathos and comedy, heightened by an almost evangelical desire to help others, takes Ringholt's practice into another dimension that clearly links the personal with the political and raises a discussion about functionality and purpose. As Ringholt explains in his introduction to *Hashish Psychosis*, his motivations for writing the book were utilitarian. While he admits that the process of writing about, and therefore in many ways re-living, his experiences of madness and recovery had a therapeutic effect, he was also driven by the need to share what he had learnt along the way with others suffering similar problems. As he states: 'This book is for everyone leaving hospital who needs information. I have some useful tips for anyone who sees the same need to get off drugs'.

Ringholt would like his art to be useful. Not in the way that we usually think of art as being useful – as having a use value on the market for instance – but rather as being useful to himself and to others as a means to improve life and raise consciousness. As Ringholt answered when asked how his art is practical:

*I don't know if it is but I am interested in finding out. I am interested in finding out whether art can be super practical beyond the immediate visual and sensory experience ... Can art literally improve my life on an interpersonal level? Surprisingly I discovered it can.*²

1 Stuart Ringholt, *Hashish Psychosis: What It's Like To Be Mentally Ill And Recover*, Melbourne, 2006
2 Stuart Ringholt, 'Crimes of the Apple Worms', Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, 2004.

