

Rendall & Spier How the Dead Live

September 5 - 26 2009

Gallery

How the Dead Live?

How the Dead Live first appeared as the title of an existential thriller by Derek Raymond, and was later appropriated by Will Self for his 2001 novel of the same name. Rendall & Spier have resuscitated the title as the proposition at the centre of their new exhibition at Conical.

Depending on your perspective on the afterlife, the statement *how the dead live* contains an irreconcilable paradox. Reason insists that an entity defined as being 'dead' cannot live, so that should preclude the need to ask the question. A paradox is a problem, and Rendall & Spier like to play with problems.

'The Essay' – exhibited at West Space in 2008 - dealt with the problem of modern life, and how to summarise the whole mess into a branded corporate manifesto. Solving that posed another urgent problem: *what next?* Submitting three blank spaces to the Linden Postcard Show proved only a temporary solution to that problem. Rendall & Spier then decided to consult a ouija board for guidance, and so here we are.

Most people would be familiar with the basic concept of the ouija board; that it is a machine for communicating with *the dead*. A group of people sit around the board with one hand lightly touching a *planchette* - they ask the board a question, and the planchette is moved by unseen forces to spell out the answer. It's a simple mechanism that requires no electronics or magic potions to make it work, but it does turn out to be a formidable problem of design.

The ouija board is a utilitarian object with a tumescent paradox at its heart. The design of a successful ouija board must be subordinate to its function. It presents problems of engineering, ergonomics, and typography. Reason and empirical study alone must resolve these problems, otherwise the ouija board cannot fulfil its function; if it hasn't been designed properly it will not *communicate with the dead*. Herein lies the problem; reason dictates that communication with the dead is a physical impossibility, therefore to design a ouija board properly is to create the embodiment of a paradox.

How the dead live is an experimental ouija board workshop, in which Rendall & Spier propose to prototype the perfect paradox. Of course, only independent testing can determine whether these prototypes have succeeded. So please, grab a friend, pull up a seat, and place your hand lightly on the planchette...

Keep in mind the possibility that there is no paradox at all, and that Rendall & Spier are actually toying with supernatural forces beyond their understanding. It is anticipated that many visitors to Conical may feel distinctly uncomfortable and conflicted about using a ouija board. As enlightened citizens of the 21st century you will want to engage with this important work of contemporary art, yet you may secretly dread the consequences of awakening the dead. Again, only reason and empirical study can resolve this problem; if you want to find out how the dead live we suggest you ask them yourself.

Bryan Spier and Steven Rendall started collaborating in 2003. Recent exhibitions in Melbourne include *The Red Lion* at O Projects and *The Essay* at West Space.