

**Better living everyone.**

**Robbie Handcock**

...given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will.<sup>1</sup>

To participate in an activity as slippery as talking about art, certain tools may be required. Often, that means tools beyond colloquial English's capacity to describe colour, form and content in regards to their greater historical and cultural contexts. Unlike forms of popular entertainment, such as cinema or pop music, a university education might be helpful for even a casual visit to an art gallery. In this way, the art world can be an uninviting place for non-art world participants.

Based on an analysis of exhibition press releases produced by the New York-based magazine *Triple Canopy*, Alix Rule and David Levine wrote about the curious lexical, grammatical and stylistic features of what they coined International Art English (IAE). For example, 'IAE rebukes English for its lack of nouns: Visual becomes visuality, global becomes globality, potential becomes potentiality, experience becomes... experiencability.'<sup>2</sup> These tropes make for easy mocking, poking fun at pretentious linguistic tendencies but also highlight IAE's potential to skirt around any definite meaning at all. As an art school graduate, I often fall back into the comfort of such a dialect for its familiarity and sense of inclusion—it's a way to feel like I'm saying the right things. While IAE works to sort and unify a community of users, Rule and Levine identify it as something that also alienates. Its foreignness is cultivated and can ultimately work to exclude a wider, general public from accessing art.

Access and language are focal points of Elisabeth Pointon's practice. Self-identifying as a double agent, working as both an artist and for a luxury car company, she's also a double agent in the sense that she makes work about the institution of big business and translates it for the institution of art. Pointon often lifts common advertorial language and forms one might associate with a car yard to inform video works and public interventions. [A Guide To: Effective Implementation of Self-service](#) (Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017) features an inflatable waving man in a car workshop and [WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT.](#) (Play\_station 2019) consists of a plane-towed banner

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reading 'spectacular'. Instead of targeting the kinds of people who might be customers at her day job—that is, people with wealth—Pointon opens up what might look like a marketing ploy to target everyone and anyone. She uses the tools of advertising and distances it from its ability to profile specific audiences. Importantly, she takes away its monetary connotations in order to create a conversation that hopes to include a range of different audiences.

*Better living everyone.* consists of two components. One is the third and final iteration in a series of blimps; in this case an inflatable zeppelin reading 'everything must go'. The second is a video of the artist blowing up the zeppelin with her mouth accompanied by a guided meditation based on a family practice of pranayama, a nod to Pointon's Fijian-Indian upbringing. Like a lot of Pointon's work, words and phrases are afforded multiple meanings. For many New Zealanders, 'better living' is probably most associated with television commercials for GLAD cling wrap and other kitchen storage solutions. These advertisements were a way of establishing their products as essential to running a healthy household. The ways in which health and wellness are commodified in order to sell products can be seen at a much larger scale with Gwyneth Paltrow's natural health company Goop. The company's use of language evades the fact that it exists to make money. Describing itself as a modern lifestyle brand, it could be seen as an infomercial in the expanded field. However, the way its commercialisation is veiled is what makes Goop dangerous: while its subscribers are trying to live better lives, Goop's net worth stands at \$250 million as of 2018.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, 'everything must go' is a familiar phrase often heard in frantic clearance sales. The imperative is to 'get in quick' so you 'don't miss out'. It promotes a feeling of urgency that requires you to part with your money sooner rather than later. While the zeppelin itself most obviously references the advertising of tyre brand Goodyear, its pairing with meditation reclaims the phrase for something else entirely. In pranayama, a practice of breath control, to exhale signifies the giving up of name and form, the body and the world. In Pointon's work, 'everything must go' is imbued with spirituality and cultural identity as a means to combat the impersonality of hard sales.

In Samuel R. Delany's text *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, he makes the argument for a kind of relationship he calls 'contact relations'.<sup>4</sup> As opposed to relations built on networks, either through work, school or family, contact relations are more based on happenstance. They occur in mostly

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public places, such as parks, in line at the supermarket or spaces without any set criteria for entry, and can produce unexpected and fruitful relationships between individuals. Delany holds that institutions that restrict access are responsible for limiting the potential for interclass contact. Semi-public spaces, such as bars or gyms, where one might expect to meet new people are regulated by financial means, meaning those frequenting that place will often share the same kind of pay bracket and therefore move along similar social strata. I believe it can be useful here to think about Pointon's loftier questions: How does one seek out such contact in institutions that hold power?

Pointon's subversion of advertorial language doesn't act merely as a critique of the workplace or capitalism more generally, it upends meaning in order to associate it with something more hopeful. 'Better living everyone' is said here with genuine intent, and I believe it is honestly meant to be for everyone. Her work invites people in, and then asks how we might share something meaningful together. If money and language can be used to regulate access, Pointon considers both a different kind of value system and way of talking to propose alternatives to how we relate to each other. Pointon shows us in her video, after pulling out an electric pump to finish blowing up her zeppelin, that there's always another way of doing things.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 111.

<sup>2</sup> Alix Rule and David Levine, 'International Art English', *Triple Canopy*, accessed 22 March 2019. [https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international\\_art\\_english](https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international_art_english).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Morris, 'Gwyneth Paltrow's Company Goop Is Now Valued at \$250 Million', *Fortune*, accessed 22 March 2019. <http://fortune.com/2018/03/30/gwyneth-paltrow-goop-series-c-valuation-250-million>.

<sup>4</sup> Delany, *Times Square Red*, 123.