

#.doc

zimZalla object 10.2

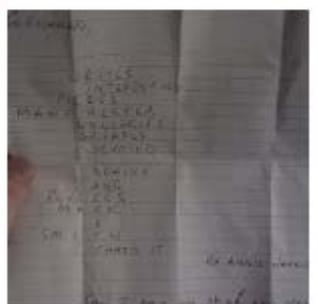
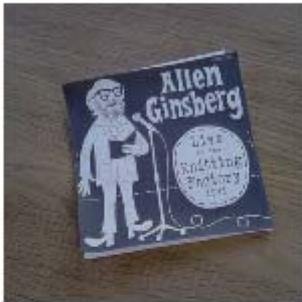
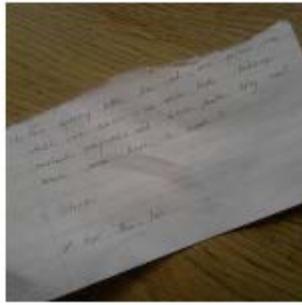
10.2.1 - introduction

was zimZalla object 10. # is a treatment of selected text output from the @_M_I_A_ Twitter feed by Richard Barrett. Using instinctive interventions, the original text has been transformed to create a new artefact. Echoes, repetitions and ghost-motifs occur and re-occur throughout #, laying trails true and false, with the # symbol doubling as medical shorthand for "fracture". For distribution, the complete work was split into fifty micro-texts of which only a single version exists, each presented in a labelled vial and accompanied by a bespoke extraction tool. # can be owned individually only in part and totally only in common. Each micro-text object was available in exchange for a gift, which could be in a physical, digital, verbal, gestural, symbolic or any other form. Use and exchange value were entirely irrelevant.

10.2.2 – catalogue of gifts

- # £0.22
- # a "high five"
- # a copy of *The Persons*
- # Allen Ginsberg CD - *Live at the Knitting Factory* 1995
- # anecdote in which a maintenance man hoovers up a live mouse in a library, told orally
- # apple-shaped poem
- # copy of a poem
- # copy of Gerry Loose's 'less'
- # copy of *the fleetingest* and 4 poem cards
- # copy of *Thinking Inside The Box*
- # custom built acrostic
- # double thumbs up
- # fact (100 million neutrinos pass through your fingernails every second)
- # firm handshake
- # flexible black plastic straw
- # golden egg overlaid and another egg mislaid
- # indicative gesture towards a significant text
- # information that the number 18 has magical properties
- # invitation to help oneself to peanuts
- # Invitation to help oneself to peanuts
- # invite to the launch of the next issue of Long Poem Magazine
- # key card to a room occupied during Sound Eye festival in Cork
- # left-handed handshake
- # look through a copy of the Hadith
- # notebook fragment
- # one English pound
- # one third of a bag of Caramel Nibbles
- # origami frog
- # pamphlet
- # pencil drawing of Homer Simpson
- # piece of eight
- # postcard bearing the word PROXIMAMENTE
- # previously enjoyed bottle of Pepto-Bismol
- # purloined, slightly weathered drawing pin
- # RAF cadet Record of Service book, 1962. Joe Burke (deceased) artist and good friend
- # resonant sound of glass against glass
- # retrospective lime and soda
- # set of *Positivity Postcards*
- # Seville orange Jigger
- # sheaf of poems
- # *Star Wars* theme tune played on pub piano
- # story about being told the word 'slash' meant 'piss' in England
- # tax disc surround
- # *Text 1* by James McLaughlin
- # the dope about Ed Dorn
- # tin of inaccessible corned beef
- # two lines of poetry: "and we wait indoors / for something good to happen."
- # unopened bag of Salt 'n' Shake

10.2.3 – gift images



10.2.4 – Richard Barrett interview

#1: Those of us familiar with your work will note that # is very different, both in form and in content. Could you talk about the project and the concept underpinning it?

I wanted to do something musical, in the sense of constructing an extended piece with a rhythm as strong and as clearly defined as I could make it. And in the early stages of thinking about all this I realised using material somehow or other connected to music would add another layer still to what I was hoping to achieve. Eventually I found my way to MIAs twitter stream.

Initially, 'trying to say something' just wasn't part of my plan at all. I only wanted to construct something which rose and fell and moved at varying paces and did everything else a piece of music does. I began to understand 'meaning' though as being consistent with the musical aims I'd set myself. 'Meaning' would establish itself via the repetition of motifs and themes – as in a musical score.

The decision to use MIA's Twitter was just to do with me being a massive fan of her music. If I was going to spend x-number of months putting together this text I knew I'd have to be working with material from an artist I liked.

And I was aware as the project progressed just how much my status as a fan of MIA was informing what I was doing with the text. I think, really, the piece works on two levels. Firstly, it's a fan-letter from me to MIA and, by extension of that, an examination of what it means to be a fan. Secondly, and related to the first point, it's a look at celebrity. More specifically it's a look at the space wherein superficiality and earnestness meet. In this case the 'earnestness' being to do with what I believe are MIAs deeply felt political pronouncements and actions.

#2: What methods did you use to produce the finished text? I'm thinking both about how the source text was actually manipulated and how you decided upon which sections to select and where to place them.

The first thing I did was copy and paste MIAs entire Twitter stream to a Word doc. Now I've just had a look to see if I still have a copy of that – sadly I don't. What I do still have though is the document that I reduced that initial document down to – once I'd removed all the MIA hash-tags and the date lines and pictures etc. And that document comes in at 38 pages. I think the original thing was about 80 pages long. Reading through the Tweets I realised they could be organised by theme – so I did that next. Groupings such as 'MIA on music'; 'MIA on celebrity'; 'MIA on Sri Lanka'; 'MIA on the United States' etc, etc. So, at first, the project was all about breaking that huge mass of material down into smaller and more manageable chunks.

I worked firstly on the individual groupings of Tweets I'd made – cutting-up and rearranging those. Guided solely by the musicality of the new word combinations I was making I was trying to apply to the material the Plunderphonics theories of the composer John Oswald (Plunderphonics being, basically, all about fucking around with and re-arranging songs – kind of like a very extreme form of the re-mix). Then, once I had a certain number of pages of those, I began to work towards running everything together.

10.2.4 – Richard Barrett interview

There were two major difficulties I encountered in putting together the first draft of the full text. The first, and less problematic, was simply how time-consuming what I was attempting was proving to be. For example, in order to place a new section on maybe the 6th or 7th page I had to read all that preceded (and often several times over) in order to discover how the proposed new bit sounded following what already existed. And that really did take ages. And reading something which didn't make a traditional linear sense so frequently at times began to affect my reception and processing of information away from the project. Immediately after switching the computer off and starting to watch TV or something, say, I'd realise I was struggling to take in really basic stuff! Thankfully I was able to readjust back to normality relatively swiftly!

The second, and more significant problem, involved what I called MIAs 'Sri Lanka' tweets. And perhaps naively it wasn't a problem I'd anticipated. The nature of those Tweets – addressing that country's civil-war – initially put them for me in an entirely different category to the other Tweets. At first, I wasn't sure whether I even had a right to use the Sri Lankan material. Then, if I decided I was able to use that material the next question involved the most appropriate way to treat it. I considered having no references at all to Sri Lanka in the piece. I considered including all the 'Sri Lanka' tweets whole and untouched. The point I eventually arrived at, given my aims for the project (in effect, to produce a textual response to MIAs music and to produce a piece of work which was an homage to MIA), was that it would be wrong to treat the Sri Lanka material in any way differently to the other material.

#3: In his Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing, Kenneth Goldsmith says: "In conceptual writing the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an author uses a conceptual form of writing, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the text. This kind of writing is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless." Do you see # as a conceptual piece, either in part or as a whole?

I've always thought it important to write regularly rather than only when inspiration hits or whatever (even if what's written often ends up being abandoned). With # though, instead of that view just kind of vaguely floating around the back of my mind as I reckon had largely been the case with previous projects it became an aim that I decided very much to foreground. I wanted, very consciously, # to be something I could work on anytime. Something I could, in a sense, clock on and off for. I was trying to make the process of composition as mechanical as possible.

Rather than that having anything to do with me being guided by a particular concept though it was more about me having in mind Mayakovsky's *How Verses Are Made* where he talks about poetry as an industrial process. I just wanted to put some of the ideas I found in that book into practice – to explore their meanings and implications.

So I'd say, yes, my experience of composing # did feature some often quite strong echoes of Goldsmith's definition. In choosing not to privilege any particular aspect of the project over any other and instead allowing the different aims of the piece to exist simultaneously I don't think it could be said to be a conceptual text though – I think the very intense focus such texts display is very much, and intentionally so, absent from #.

10.2.4 – Richard Barrett interview

#4: # is presented in a non-traditional way, i.e. not on a page, but as a series of unique microtexts, each housed in a plastic vial. As I understand it, the text was written before these presentation decisions were made. Has the manner in which the finished work is presented altered your perspective on it and if you had the eventual format in mind when creating #, would it have affected either form or content?

With the finalising of the publication plans # definitely became for me something bigger than I'd first envisaged. Initially my focus was solely text directed – getting that right and producing something which worked as a text. I only began to see the further possibilities of the project slowly.

I think there could be said to be a number of models for the distribution method finally settled on. Perhaps one of the most obvious is the piece Yoko Ono performed where she invited audience members to cut sections from the dress she was wearing.

So although in answering the previous question I said truthfully that there wasn't a conceptual basis to the production of # I would definitely argue that there was a conceptual edge to the way the text ended-up being distributed.

Also, spending as long as I did on the project to be left, finally, with no complete text simply seemed very funny to me. Even though I can't really make sense of why that should be!

And besides making me laugh the more important aspect of the chosen distribution method, I think, is that it's a shout in favour of common ownership - which, with a nice symmetry, is a principle MIA herself has at times indicated she has a certain amount of sympathy with.

Finally, with each micro-text being no longer than the length of a tweet it seemed to me that I was returning the text to the condition in which I found it. And I found that circularity kind of pleasing.

Regarding would I have done anything different if I'd had all of the above in mind during the production of # - I don't know. My suspicion is that I may have been tempted to work towards the micro-texts each containing their own discrete meaning. And if I'd done that # would look completely different to the way it ended up looking. Not necessarily better or worse – just different.

If I had gone down the route though of, in effect, producing 50 very short poems I think, for me, a lot of the things which are maybe most interesting about # would have been lost.

10.2.4 – Richard Barrett interview

#5: A # microtext cannot be bought and is available only in exchange for a gift, the monetary value of which is irrelevant. Does this, for you, affect the overall nature of the work?

Initially, all I thought about was the text. As the project progressed though I realised the text was only part of what I was doing – just as important was the method of distribution; I mean, the vial and the fact that the objects could only be acquired in exchange for a gift. For me, now, the gifts must absolutely be thought of as part of the project. Much as chance played a part in the composition of the text I like how each vial could then cause a chance reaction of its own: exchanges often depended on what people had to hand.