

Studies in Material Thinking, <http://www.materialthinking.org>
 Vol. 5 (December 2011), ISSN 1177-6234, AUT University
 Copyright © *Studies in Material Thinking* and the author.

Melissa Laing

ST PAUL St Gallery
 AUT University
 mlaing@aut.ac.nz

Abstract: In December 2010, Australian artist Ruark Lewis installed *In My Empty House* at ST PAUL St Gallery One, Auckland, New Zealand. It employed the twin gestures of the processual emptying of a family home and an intimate examination of the theoretical work by Vivienne Kundos, to build a complex meditation on how time and meaning slip as households and ideas are transposed. This essay discusses how *In My Empty House* mobilises a series of durational concepts including biographical time, artistic and theoretical oeuvres and the interpretive, performative space of the installation to create an exhibition that pays homage to a lifetime of intense engagement through a moment of transition, a break in its flow.

Key words: Ruark Lewis, Home, Transcription, Duration

In My Empty House — Ruark Lewis with Loma Bridge

Introduction

Again a question.

How to categorise indifference?

And present in images and sounds,

A surrender of our body?

Ruark Lewis, *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues*, ST PAUL St Gallery, 26 November 2010



Figure 1. Lewis, R. *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues*, ST PAUL St Gallery, 26 November 2010

In December 2010, Australian artist Ruark Lewis installed *In My Empty House* at ST PAUL St Gallery One, Auckland, New Zealand. This was the first iteration of a new major work by an artist who has plumbed the depths of textual transcription and (post)colonial Australia's evolving relationship to 'home' since the mid 1980s. The exhibition *In My Empty House* mobilised a series of durational relationships including Lewis and Bridge's personal friendship with Alex and Vivienne Kondos, the Kondos' intimate history with their Darlinghurst home, their professional engagement with Nepal since the 1970s, and Ruark Lewis' ongoing engagement with the use of text, transcription and transposition. It employed the twin gestures of the processual emptying of a family home and an intimate examination of the theoretical work of Vivienne Kondos to build a complex meditation on how time and meaning slip as households and ideas are transposed. This essay is an attempt to unpack how Ruark Lewis utilised these multiple durational relationships to create an exhibition that paid homage to a lifetime of intense engagement through a moment of transition, a break in its flow. The essay will first discuss the questions of household and transcription before drawing them together in an analysis of their durational capacities.

In My Empty House drew on, and included, the work of video artist Loma Bridge, sound artist Rik Rue and theorists Vivienne and Alex Kondos. It compiled, sorted and arranged text, video, structures alluding to architecture, sound and the performing body into an environment that demanded from the viewer a specific durational, often performative, relationship in its reading. Ruark Lewis wrote of the exhibition:

although the St Paul Street Gallery piece is termed an installation by many, I prefer to think of this as more of a display or a chamber work. I think of it as being a set for performance. That fact that the audience is immersed into a greater sense of the round in such atmospheric and multi-layered environments is important to our collective experience today (Lewis, 2010).

Acting on this conviction Ruark Lewis presented a performance, or reading of the work at the opening, *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues* (fig 1). Divided into an overture and four acts the performance traversed the exhibition, crossing from its opening position under a slow moving video of a light to the four corners of the architectural structure of the *Interventions*, four stencilled timber works forming lintels, support walls and expanding horizontally out into the gallery floor, framing possible rooms. At each station Lewis delivered spoken epigrams derived from Vivienne Kondos' essay *A Triumphant Woman?* (2004) ascending into glossolalia between movements. In his performative reading of one strand of the whole Lewis enacted a diagram or guide to the interpretation of the work. A guide, which advocated for movement through the space, and the cumulative reading of each piece against the whole in a manner that constructed new text, preferably read out loud.

Antecedents

In 1995 Ruark Lewis collaborated with Paul Carter to create *Raft*, 'a craft of translation' (Carter and Lewis, 1999, 22) composited out of 24,696 characters on wooden beams. The characters, spelling out St Paul's Acts of the Apostles 27 and 28 in Greek, Latin, German, English, Arrernte and Diyari, were accompanied by sound scapes, paintings and contextual writings. The work is one of Ruark Lewis' most explicit examination of the acts of translation and its role in the history of colonisation. According to Philip Jones, "At [*Raft's*] heart lies a reference to the death voyage of the missionary Carl Strehlow (himself a translator)" (Carter and Lewis, 1999, 17). It is filtered through the work and writings of his son,

anthropologist and linguist Ted Strehlow. In *Raft* we can see the appearance of ideas which are retraced in *In My Empty House*, the practice of anthropological engagement, the interpretation of the customs of others, the in-depth involvement with an individual's life work as well as the interruption of the fixity of home as an idea and experience.

Underpinning this work, and others since it, is a concept of transcription as a productive activity. It is a concept productive in the sense of being a creation of alternate and allusive meanings. Lewis' practice of transcription can be considered akin to Gilles Deleuze's practice of re-presenting philosophers' ideas. In his attempt to understand the philosopher's theories Deleuze rewrites their philosophical positions, using their own words to do so. An activity which Deleuze likened to coupling with the philosopher to produce a bastard child, "The child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed" (1995, 6). As a result the origin and fidelity of concepts cannot be determined or tracked down a linear genealogy. Lewis, through transcribing fragments of text from a greater body of writing, both elicits the intentions of the writer and produces a child from his interactions with the textual body. Importantly Lewis creates transcriptions through visual and oral means, which are more concerned with the poetic and formal capacities of language rather than its explicative qualities.

Home, Household and Homelessness

In My Empty House began when internationally known anthropologist Vivienne Kondos, and sociologist Alex Kondos, put their Paddington terrace house on the market undertaking two processes of emptying. Or rather the work began at a dinner party, one of the many Ruark Lewis had participated in at the Kondos' house. At this dinner Vivienne Kondos spoke of her real estate agent's suggestion that they 'declutter' their house for sale, a process that involves stripping back the lived environment so that potential purchasers can imagine themselves in it. This emptying process strikes to the heart of what a home is, where the acquisition and display of belongings are a result of personal choice and negotiations within a family — home acting as a repository of relational histories. It has long been recognised that our possessions are an integral part of the construction and preservation of our identity. Yet for the real estate market the trove of objects, and their intimate relationship to the Kondos' history becomes superfluous clutter. To choose what belongs in a home on the basis of generic appeal as opposed to personal preference is to begin a process of erasing one's presence in the world. This kind of erasure, perhaps a routine aspect of shifting house in a mobile property market, is not insignificant when read against the thirty years of residence by the Kondos' alongside the failing health of Vivienne Kondos as that primary impetus for moving. The initial decluttering, and subsequent move was filmed and photographed by artists Ruark Lewis and Loma Bridge over a short period of five weeks. Captured in their images is a process that turned a home, filled with the accumulated ephemera of living and the patina of over thirty years of anthropological and social research, into an empty house.

The accumulated ephemera is documented in Bridge's video which tracks the removal of possessions from the house and Lewis' photographs which capture the minutia, the accidental corners and crevices of lived environments as well as the planned arrangements. The photographs range from the accidentally trapped teaspoon under a water jug on the kitchen bench and the accumulated dust where a mirror hung, to the careful choice of a brass jug and leather stool brought back from India or Nepal. All of these images capture small, often overlooked things telling a story of the construction and dissolution of place in small increments. They are placed around the gallery in careful relationship to the painted text works, transcriptions of Vivienne Kondos' analyses of the households

of others. The paintings create a visual and audible poetics using words from three essays in her book *The Ethos of Hindu Women* (2004) – these being *The Enigma of Sati*, *A Triumphant Woman?* and *Fire*. Anchoring these arrangements is the architectural structure of the *Interventions*, four stencilled timber works forming lintels, support walls and expanding horizontally out into the gallery floor, framing possible rooms (fig 2).



Figure 2 Lewis, R with Bridge, L. (2010), *In My Empty House*, ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland. Installation view including *Interventions 1 - 2*

This relationship between painting and photograph within the frame of the house signals two parallel conceptions of household that is incorporated in the exhibition. The first engages with the Australian house of the Kondos', alluding to the idea of home ownership as a core concept within Australian culture. Writing on the global financial crisis, Australian theorist Fiona Allon reminds us that home ownership is the cornerstone of a contemporary western society focus on acquisition, with Australian politicians such as John Howard "defining home ownership as part of the transition 'from a welfare state to an opportunity society'" (2004, 375). This interest in the practice of the Australian home and house is given significant articulation in Lewis' earlier work with Rainer Linz *Banalities for the Perfect House* (2005). Reuben Keehan asserts the work "took on the clichés on which bourgeois democratic society, particularly Australian society, is built - the family as basic social unit, the home as castle - and exploded them spatially" (2006, 26). The spare framing forms of *Interventions I - 4* allude to the performance chamber created by the artists for *Banalities for the Perfect House* which utilised the architectural forms of doorways and windows as framing structures.

However, the centrality of the idea of house and its accompanying conception of home is signalled to the viewer before they even encounter the *Interventions* by a graphic rendition of a *House* (fig 3) occupying the exterior window space of the gallery. This space, a window in the façade of the building that looks onto the road, is isolated from the gallery. It operates on a different duration from the traditional gallery space, being accessible twenty-four hours a day. Much like the façade of a real house viewed in passing the graphic representation intimates the

interior without revealing it. The graphic form of this work refers back to Lewis' 2009 public interventions *Housing the Seafaring Nation*. *Housing the Seafaring Nation* are a series of works that addressed the issue of homelessness caused by government sales of public housing in traditionally low income areas, which have subsequently become gentrified, such as Millers Point in Sydney where the work was situated. The homelessness referred to in both 2009 and 2010 works is not literal, in the sense of being without shelter, rather it refers to the severing of individuals from a place and community they have longstanding ties to. The dispossession referred to in *In My Empty House* is one caused by aging and ill-health, not the shifting of public priorities from social welfare and the preservation of communities to the promotion of the market led speculative economy. However, both are the result of the evolution of the individual and society over time.



Figure 3 Lewis, R with Bridge, L. (2010), *In My Empty House*, ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland. Installation View including *House*

The second conception of household examined here is the gendered one described by Kondos' research in Nepal and India. While Kondos' subjects include ideas of daughterhood, ritualistic play and sexual desire, the three essays that Ruark Lewis utilises focus on violence towards the self or other within the context of the marital and familial relationships. The essays are examinations of the performance of extreme emotional, philosophical and physical instances. These extremes are most explicit in the case of Roop Koonwar who committed Sati in 1987, the ritual self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. Such representational extremes are also expressed cinematically in the films of *Bandit Queen* (Kapur, 1994), which dramatises the life of Phoolan Devi an Indian bandit who had been a child bride and rape victim, and *Fire* (Mehta, 1996), a film's portrayal of an intimate relationship between two women in the same household. These instances have provoked much dialogue in both Hindu and Western popular and academic culture about the complexities, power dynamics and gender roles that structure the experiences of women in Hindu and Nepalese culture.

In Kondos' essays *A Triumphant Woman?* and *Fire*, the house figures as site of an

insecurity which is destructive, yet enables transgression or a contestation of social roles. Pivotal to each essay is the ongoing enactment of active choices in the face of moments of significant break in the flow of a Hindu woman's life (either real or fictional). While the choice made for self-immolation, violent revenge, or turning to another person for support is problematised, the idea of transitioning towards an untried option with unknowable outcomes is framed within a discourse of agency. In her essay titled *Agency, Structures and Constraints* in the same book Kondos defines agency as the individual capacity to "[take] action despite the unpredictability of outcome" (2004, 54) in the face of risk, and in subversion of the constraints of habitus. She identifies four strategies of resistant agency: direct conflict, subterfuge, flight and resilience, providing concrete examples of each through her book (2004, 44). Instances of these forms of agency, conflict, subterfuge, flight and resilience, appear respectively in her essays, *A Triumphant Woman?*, *Fire*, and *The Enigma of Sati*. This is where the subject of Alex and Vivienne Kondos' personal resilience in confronting the necessity to leave their house, and as such transition towards the unknown future, meets with the subject of Vivienne Kondos' intellectual engagement. Their move is both bowing to processes of aging and a resistance to its paralysing impact.



Figure 4 Lewis, R with Bridge, L. (2010), *In My Empty House*, ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland. Installation view including *The Enigma of Sati* and a film by Loma Bridge

The construction of house and home as sites for agency and the negotiation of significant change can be read in the figure of the Hindu Goddess Kali through her transposed appearance in Loma Bridge's film (fig 4). Bridge's film, which anchored the far corner of the gallery, introduces us to the Kondos' almost emptied Victorian terrace house, allowing us only a glimpse of the couple as they box items and discuss their possessions with Ruark Lewis. Switching from solarised ghostly footage of the removal men carrying boxes out the door to black and white, the video pauses on a wall hanging of the Kali held up for discussion. This pause is not incidental, for the imagery of Kali has been an important post retirement research area for Vivienne Kondos. While often associated with anger and violence, Kondos describes Kali as "the active, destructive force of time, and her consort is Shiva or Kala, the generic term for time" (2001). If we consider the

initial event that provoked the work, the emptying of the house, as standing for the active destructive force of aging condensed into one specific moment, then the artwork appears here under the auspices of Kali.

Kali's active destructive energy is the force of a break, but importantly it is also the force of a transition which liberates and offers rebirth, and so becomes the energy of creation. This idea of the break or transition that offers rebirth is closely linked to what Kondos describes as a "Hindu mode of organizing reality that is envisioned as processual and accordingly discerns stages and developments" (2004, 2). Thus the coming to an end of one stage of living, in the case of Alex and Vivienne Kondos, their time in the house in Darlington, is followed by a new stage or beginning, and even the transition of death is not seen as final, rather as leading to the after life.

Transcription

While the subject matter of *In My Empty House*, is what I have outlined above, of equal importance in the making and interpretation of the work is the concept of transcription and its related, yet not identical endeavours of translation and interpretation. Paul Carter, writing on *Raft* (1995) focuses on the idea of translation stating "the true translation - the one that preserves a text's resistance to translation - necessarily departs from the original. It has to be other than the original if it's to carry over the otherness of the original without imitating it to death" (Carter & Lewis, 1999, 100). He suggests that given the structural differences between languages, the aim of translation is to create a version of the end language, foreign enough to fuse its new form with the meaning of the original text. As such translation is an act of interpretation that balances between transforming and destroying the original, between the creative and destructive energy of Kali, bringing into being Deleuze's monstrous child.

The process of intimately studying and interpreting a text has similarities to the anthropological endeavour, which aims "to try and make comprehensible, or less incomprehensible, what is unfamiliar" (Kondos, 2004, xiv). Both are long, slow, immersive processes that unpick the complexity of a language or culture to make it graspable in another context, usually the self-same context of the translator/anthropologist. Kondos writes in her essay *The Enigma of Sati* "I want to try to unravel some of the complexities of the sati phenomenon, given the enormous difficulties it poses ... I want to try to move somewhat to the side of clear-cut judgement, whether straight-out repudiation or endorsement. This is not so much to ignore such ethical considerations as to explore the complex components, which I think, constitute the workability of such a startling practice" (2004, 60).

It is this endeavour to understand, not only culturally different 'startling' acts or their representation in cinematic language, but also the vehement arguments that were provoked by the specific act of Sati and the release of the films *Bandit Queen* and *Fire*, that comes through in Vivienne Kondos' essays. It is the intensity of her striving to understand, and make comprehensible to the reader "the manner in which these ideas, beliefs and values embodied in each of these context has consequences for the lives of women" (Kondos, 2004, 60) that Ruark Lewis has focussed on in his transcription of partial phrases from these essays into paintings, sound compositions and performance. Her undertaking is reflected in Ruark Lewis' endeavour to intimately understand not only her work but her own household in turn, to act as both translator and anthropologist. A process he has not attempted in isolation from the author but rather in close dialogue with her and her husband, Alex.

However, Ruark Lewis specifically refers to his practice of selecting, editing, and painting or performing text as acts of transcription. His use of the term transcription does not exclude the act of translation, rather it focuses attention on the transposition of words and ideas from one medium to another. Lewis transcriptions are translations in which he uses no other words than what is found in the source text. He moves the substance of a text from the written word to the formal language of painting, and to the speaking of audible poetics. In doing so he causes the letters forming words to oscillate between their formal visual quality and their linguistic meaning, between their original use in the source context and the meanings they accrue through the material investigation of ideas.



Figure 5 Lewis, R with Bridge, L. (2010), *In My Empty House*, ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland. Installation view including *We Witness*.

The idea of transcription as translation introduces multiple referents into the work as evidenced by the painting *We Witness* (fig 5). In the painting the WE and the WITNESS operate as floating combinations of letters, stencilled with uniform spacing and contained within tiles. The phrase read as combined initially refers back to the source text where Kondos uses it to discuss the portrayal of witnessing in a dysfunctional household. 'We witness' also signals Lewis and Bridge's acts of witnessing, both of the Kondos' life, the longer and ongoing witnessing allowed by a durational friendship, and the emptying of the house, a witnessing of a break in time. This form of witnessing is reinforced by the close proximity of a photograph of Loma Bridge standing in the window of the Kondos' terrace house. The words we witness also speak to our operations as a viewer, where we witness the cumulative sum of an installation as set and the performance of viewing that occurs within it. However, the connection between the words we and witness seems tenuous, held apart as much as joined together by their tiles, create doubt as to the fixity of any of these possible readings.

The indexical we, which draws us as viewers into the active dialogue of the work is complemented by an I which invokes the agency of the author, the artist and

the reader in their pursuit of understanding. The painting *The Enigma of Sati* (fig 4) is punctuated by this indexical use of the pronoun I, marked in yellow against the blue of the remaining text. Like the 'we', the 'I' proposes multiple referents or speakers, among these multiple 'I's are: the 'I' of the anthropologist Vivienne Kondos; I, the artist/transcriber Ruark Lewis; I, the curator/writer Melissa Laing; and I, the reader/audience. In each case we can understand the following statements differently. Kondos, from whom the original statements are drawn, is specifically referring to the practice of Sati, but also to questions of agency for women, and the tricky path of attempting to understand Sati while withholding either an endorsement or condemnation of this polarising practice.

However, Ruark Lewis' 'I' becomes a statement of intent in the act of transcription, that interprets an existing interpretation, introducing misreadings and slippages into it. A close reading of the painting against the essay shows that Lewis has edited the texts, shortening phrases and changing tenses, for example "I want to stress that my discussion is concerned solely with the voluntary Satis, involuntary performances were tantamount to murder" is amended to "I want to stress involuntary performances are tantamount to murder." A minor change perhaps which does not significantly adjust the meaning as applied to Sati, but it also expands it to any involuntary performance, making murder metaphorical as well as literal. Later in the work Kondos' phrase "Nor would I want to deny such women the capacity to act as agents" appears as "I want to deny women the capacity to act as agents." This transcription changes the entire intent of the phrase (Kondos, 2004; Lewis, 2010).



Figure 6. Lewis, R with Bridge, L. (2010), *In My Empty House*, ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland. Installation view including *I Don't Want to Deny Women the Capacity to Act as Agents*

The practice of anthropology carries with it the danger of misinterpreting the meaning of what was witnessed in the past when interpreting it in the present. Kondos writes, "For me the risks for anthropology lie in its procedure (that is the necessity to reside in that particular milieu) and its project (that is, the attempt to grasp the intricacies of a foreign ethos). If field work involves instigating friendships, gaining people's trust, becoming acquainted with a range of different

local people, how is the situation compromised in the writing up?" (2004, xv). But this risk is a core tool in Ruark Lewis' practice as his work explores the impossibility of faithful translation and the gaps between conception, and reception. His [mis]transcriptions deliberately compromise the information entrusted to him. However, as this text suggests, reception, in its process of interpretation, always undergoes new meaning. The faithfulness of his transcription of words is matched by a faithlessness in his transcription of complete phrases. Diagonally facing *The Enigma of Sati* Lewis places the work *I Don't Want to Deny Women the Capacity to Act as Agents*. It is a work that restores the missing 'don't'. The work is hung in relationship to an image of Vivienne Kondos' hand gripping the edge of her seat. This couples the denial and the disavowal of the intent to deny, with the evidence of both a symbol for agency within an author, the hand that writes, and the diminishment of independence, or capacity to act through the withering of age and the slow move toward death.

In this analysis of the exhibition it seems easy to focus on the dense textual excerpts from Kondos' work. However, the exhibition is intersected by two large works, *Fire* and *Up my Noisy Theme*. The large-scale banners, *Fire* and *Up my Noisy Theme*, with a single letter per square, signal the three major forms of energy that permeates the exhibition. Firstly, fire as a recurring motif in Kondos' work, both literally in the sense of the combustion of physical materials and emotively in women's rituals of play and transgression. Where *Fire* alluded to the destructive element of time, *Up My Noisy Theme*, an anagram for *In My Empty House*, was a joyous and irreverent interruption of the seriousness of the academic pursuit of interpretation and transcription. It drags the dinner party that prompted the work back into the installation. The anagram refutes the tragedy of an empty house, suggesting instead a noisy, messy life full with social relationships and kinship groups as a life reflective of an intense interest in people. This is echoed in a soundscape by Rik Rue that fills the space with the sound of ethereal humming and jerky abstracted beginnings of sounds akin to partially formed words and (non)sense sounds. When taken as a whole exhibition it is noisy with the presence of the artists and their subjects.

Dialogues

It is in the moment of performance that Ruark Lewis' positioning of the exhibition as "a chamber work ... a set for performance" (2010) becomes clear. *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues* activates the exhibition as a document to be read, traversed and joined, to be communally discussed and even noisily misread. Where the paintings engage in minor slippages of meaning, in the performance, *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues*, the gaps become bigger and more slippery. *A Triumphant Woman?*, like the other two essays, speaks of the complexity and ambiguity of individual cultures through the agency of women and the articulation of their bodies. In this case the cinematic, narrativised body of Phoolan Devi, the central character of *Bandit Queen*, through instances of physical and/or sexual abuse and revenge. Lewis draws this out through combinations of epigrams such as:

*Not only do we see
A vision of violence
That gives great weight.
In the narrative.
Has impact.
The pain that's suffered
That has impact
That revenge may go on
Is a tactical observation*

*To be reckoned with
Where anger is the source.
We feel as injustice.
For the west -
It was Aristotle,
And, the potency of anger
About an action
And about the treatment of a dog
(Lewis, 2010b)*



Figure 7. Lewis, R. *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues*, ST PAUL St Gallery, 26 November 2010

Lewis is performing from a text that examines both the portrayal of the abuse and exploitation of women and the ambiguous reception that the film received by some Indian and Western feminists. In discussing the creative process of making the work, Lewis stresses the collaborative nature of the process in terms of regularly talk to Vivienne and her husband about "direction, clarification, ethical issues, the political and historical or philosophical potentials" (Lewis, 2010b). This was a collaborative process that walked a careful path between maintaining the integrity of Kondos' intentions and generating productive slippages of meaning through the process of transcription and performance. In the performance the slippage between the creator's intention and any reading of a text is underscored by Lewis' vocalisation of glossolalia. The abstract vocal expressions, derived from the textual architecture of *Interventions 1 – 4*, are striking in their immediacy. The sounds babble, yet despite their seeming senselessness they convey to us the human agency at the centre of Kondos' texts and Lewis works. The sound of glossolalia achieves this by explaining nothing, being incomprehensible, and existing unequivocally in the untranslatable here and now of the performance encounter.

Threads of Time

Threaded through Lewis' *In My Empty House*, and this essay are discussions of three kinds of duration, which are the processual material for making and interpreting the work. These include the materiality of biographical time, both the Kondos' life in transition and the Hindu and Nepalese women discussed in Vivienne Kondos' work. And further, it is this materiality that becomes the stuff from which art and anthropological theory are built. The biographical time (re)presented in the exhibition is one that is articulated through the moment of break and transition. This caesura is a (potentially ethical) moment of risk in which time can be like Kali, destructive and/or creative. Transition points between homes; movements towards resistant agency; slippages between meanings and the establishment of new patterns of behaviour; are all emphasised in this essay as significant movements within the cycles of life. Lewis combines this anthropological/biographical material with the interrogation of two oeuvres, Kondos' and his own, interweaving together both body and mind, personal and theoretical. While the mining of Kondos' oeuvre is more obvious within individual work discussed throughout this essay links are also drawn between *In My Empty House* and previous work by Lewis. His longstanding practice of transcription and concern with the poetics of home, anchor the works within his professional and personal biography.

The performance of *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues* draws together the diverse threads of time and durational relationships at play within the work and diagrams a way of reading the exhibition. In the performance the labour of interpretation is underscored by the physical restrictions of Lewis' body, walking occurs with the aid of two crutches. Each traversal of the room is therefore difficult, the connection from point to point not lightly drawn. In this manner Lewis mobilised his slow progression across space to articulate links between points of the exhibition. Lewis' traversal from one point of the room to another, the reading of text fragments in poetic combinations, and the commitment of time to the process, propose to the viewer that they read across the texts, images and spaces in an associative manner, also crisscrossing the space.

As Lewis wrote, he perceives *In My Empty House* as a chamber piece, an environment, which immerses the viewer in the noisy, complex life and work of Vivienne Kondos and in the multilayered process of interpretation. It positions the transcription, interpretation and translation of concepts and ways of living as durational endeavours that do not have stopping points. As such, it presents a challenge to the viewer to participate in these activities attentively. Ultimately, we become attentive to the impossibility of fidelity in translation through the gaps between conception, transcription, and reception. As stated earlier, the performance work encourages, in its liveness (its immediacy), a communal discussion of noisy mistranslations or mistranspositions. The longer we spend attempting to unravel the work(s) the more that these transpositions, gaps, lacunae and caesuras proliferate. In the end, the encounter with *In My Empty House's* multilayered and immersive environment reveals to us how time's (im)material force both destroys and creates agency, personal biography and creative / intellectual endeavor.

References

- Allon, F. (2010) Speculating on Everyday Life: The Cultural Economy of the Quotidian, *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, 366 – 381
- Carter, P & Lewis, R. (1999) *Depth of Translation The Book of Raft*. Burnley, Vic: NMA Publications
- Deleuze, G. (1995) Joughin, M (trans) *Negotiations :1972-1990*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Kapur, S (Director) (1994) *Bandit Queen* [motion picture]. India: Channel Four Films and Kaleidoscope Productions.
- Lewis, R & Bridge, L. (2010), *In My Empty House* [exhibition], ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland
- Lewis, R & Carter, P. (1995) *Raft* [installation], Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Lewis, R & Linz, R. (2005) *Banalities for the Perfect House* [Installation and Performance], Performance Space, Sydney.
- Lewis, R. & Linz, R. An interview with Olivia Kurts, retrieved from <http://www.rainerlinz.net/NMA/articles/perfecthouse/> (accessed 20 November, 2011)
- Lewis, R (2010a), *Epigrams and Defiant Dialogues* [performance], ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland. 26 November.
- Lewis, R (2010b) comment in Hurrell, J. *Art and Anthropology*, <http://eyecontactsite.com/2010/12/lewis-and-bridges-painting-and-photography#ixzz1ZWFLeI4X> accessed 3 October, 2011
- Lewis, R (2010c) personal communication to Melissa Laing, 11/8/2010.
- Keehan, R. (2006) Ruark Lewis and the Expanded Field of Language, *Eyeline*, 60, 24 - 27.
- Kondos, V (2001): An engagement with the forces of time: Worship at the goddess Guhyeswari temple, *Anthropological Forum*, 11:1, 93-108
- Kondos, V (2004) *On the Ethos of Hindu Women, Issues, Taboos and forms of Expression*, Kathmandu: Mandala Publications
- Mehta, D (Director) (1996) *Fire* [motion picture]. Canada/India: Trial by Fire Films Inc.

Melissa Laing
ST PAUL St Gallery
AUT University
mlaing@aut.ac.nz

Melissa Laing is a curator, artist and theorist. Her work explores ideas of belonging and national identity, (in)security discourses, and migration through the intersection of art and theory. In 2011 Laing has presented at Contact, the AAANZ annual conference, University of Victoria, Wellington, the Postcolonial Studies Research Network Conference, Citizenship in an Era of Global Crisis, University of Otago; the 6th European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) General Conference, University of Iceland; She also published writings on New Zealand artists Paul Cullen and Simon Glaister.

In My Empty House, Ruark Lewis with Loma Bridge