

THE  
TOO  
SHALL  
PASS



**B-Theory**  
**Sebastian Henry-Jones**

In 2021 I facilitated a crit session concerning the development of *This too shall pass*, at Tributary Projects, on Ngunnawal Country, Canberra. Along with thirty or so others, we began by describing the physical properties of the work to each other, before offerings of where the intention might lie, and the ways by which we felt it communicated.

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On first knock, the exhibition contrasts the lightness of some materials with the heaviness implied by others. Paper files, documents, receipts and manila folders made fixed, set into thick, monolithic concrete blocks. An industrial haulage strap bears the relatively minor weight of a human body (a performer, shiftworker, present in the space from time to time); which is to say - it is designed to hold much heavier things. The pressure to support itself against the rugged strap, unsurprisingly, is so much so on the body that the performer must take regular breaks.

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Within bureaucratic systems of management, the fluidity and nuance of living, the depth of an individual's humanity and the complex relations that we build with each other over time are reduced to discrete categories, units of information to be transmitted, received or indeed, broken down into even smaller parts.

*You are insignificant*  
*A small piece, an ism*  
*No more, no less*

A waiting bell rings every 15 seconds or so. In a gallery context it isn't so much a means by which to draw attention or assistance...without any reply it becomes a passive strategy to measure the passing of time. In the bureaucratic archive, life is parsed as information, vulnerable to a form of capture that creates a neat document of our lives, a document that is given precedence over the dynamism of living itself. What could visually describe the logic of documentation better, than a photograph of a pile of administrative documents? A file of a file, reduction upon reduction. An abstraction of an abstraction of reality. In earlier iterations of this body of work, the crucified, human form of the

haulage strap performer was substituted for a photograph. The human disappears, replaced by a sign. We live our lives formally free, but the spiritual toll of the archival impulse on our collective body persists.

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How might the gallery space itself - as an architectural and aesthetic expression of institutionalised, Modern thought - also perpetuate the inhumane logics of capture and documentation? The materiality of these objects themselves are rendered intangible by the rules and logics of the exhibition space they're in, which implicitly rules that one cannot touch, must only know by looking. Understanding becomes a cerebral, intellectual exercise. On second knock, what becomes clear is not so much the distinction between light materials and heavier ones, but the way that their unmissable materiality gives form to what are abstractions of the human experience. Individuation is the process of putting legal and material classifications around living phenomena so that they may be easily understood, organised and controlled - a largely automated process whether carried about by humans or machines.

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Taxonomic systems can only ever create a record of life that doesn't take temporality into account. Operating on the frozen, arrested time of the archive and of institutional thought, the bureaucratic archive is populated by proxies of real living things, which continue to make their own lives, unknown by and outside of the administrative framework.

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A small piece, an ism  
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**Sebastian Henry-Jones** is a curator and writer led by an interest in DIY thinking. He looks to embody these ideals in a practice that centres the needs, ideas and requirements of those that he works with, and so his practice is informed by striving for a personal ethics with sincerity, generosity, honest communication and learning at its core.