

There is that moment when we stop looking at the painting itself and take a mental step back to consider instead the painting's frame and the wall on which it hangs. Suddenly the rich world *in* the painting goes flat and now we apprehend it as an object in real space. As we become aware of the painting's edges, the strings which hold it up and the wall which supports it, we wonder what forces brought us together, here, at this moment. As we reflect, we encounter ourselves as part of a bigger picture. We become self-conscious. We catch ourselves seeing. Peter Tyndall's work emerges from this moment.

□ is Peter Tyndall's prime symbol. It embodies this paradox: the picture is framed, distinguished from its surroundings, yet it is also dependent (for its meaning) on the institution of the wall, the gallery, and ultimately the whole culture on which it hangs. A painting comes with strings attached. Alongside the □ Tyndall has added many other elements. For instance, in the work illustrated opposite the □ s have been arranged into a formula; there are also images of a light bulb, a family and the words LOGOS/HA HA. (John Barbour has translated this, Tyndall's summa, as "reason founded on the brink of madness".¹) Such elements are combined and recombined throughout Tyndall's oeuvre to suggest relations between the work of art, other artworks, cultural contexts and the viewer.

Diagrams are used to simplify and clarify, but Tyndall's diagrams enmesh us in complexity. For instance, in the work reproduced opposite at least three distinct representational systems are at work: algebra — the □ s; imagery — the family; and words — LOGOS/HA HA. It is not clear how these elements relate, what common ground they might share. Are the family looking at the □ s, at the words or into space? A slash separates and relates LOGOS and HA HA; the same slash separates and relates the equation □=□=□ (implying closure) from □=□=□=□=□ (which suggests infinite interconnectedness and extension); the small girl is separated from her family though we recognise she also is related. As she looks into space, her mother's hand threatens to return her into the group focus. Papa is also off to one side. These separations-relations echo one another, but to what end? Is the domestic light bulb to be read as a literal light source or as a symbol? The word LOGOS comes from the Greek meaning reason or wisdom. In theology LOGOS is The Word of God, the-word-as-light that illuminates and creates the world. The Christian God is Our Father, always with us and yet separate, perhaps echoed in the image of the secular family. Perhaps. In the absence of a key which might stabilise and delimit its elements' references it is hard to determine precisely what is intended in the work. Instead we enjoy what we make from the play of many possibilities.

Tyndall calls his works "details", presenting them as related fragments of a larger project. Thus we might think to search through other works for clues as to how to read this one. But as we look for clarification in other works, more problems and complexities emerge. Each new work further attenuates Tyndall's idea (the □), stretching its logic, deferring its closure. Elaboration necessitates further elaboration, endlessly.

Tyndall's work reminds me of conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theorists read the world in terms of a hidden factor which underlies everything, finding the most benign and contingent occurrences as proof of something going on. In Tyndall's case the hidden factor would have to be the □ — it crops up everywhere. In Tyndall's *Culture corner with Uncle Pete* comic series, □ s are on the tip of every tongue. Elsewhere Noddy is surrounded by □ s, a shopkeeper paints a □ on his window and Christ carries one in lieu of the cross. Tyndall admits: "My work seems to progress from one mysterious recognition to the next".²

In Tyndall's Puppet Culture Framing System works the suggestion of a conspiracy becomes almost explicit. □ s hang on strings from puppeteers' sticks suggesting the deliberate and covert manipulation of our frames of reference. However nowhere is the conspiracy made *specific*, because □ is a generic conspiracy, standing in for all connections that have gone unacknowledged. So while conspiracy theorists argue total closure around their hidden factor, Tyndall's □ is frustrating or liberating in its openness, amusing and terrifying in its indeterminacy.

Tyndall might be cast on the side of the HA HA, as a humorist who would interrogate and outwit the authority of the LOGOS, its presumption to closure. Tyndall, however, shows the LOGOS and the HA HA to be inextricably linked and equally excessive. If HA HA is "a burp, a laugh, a fart"³, it is also the deadly serious Oedipal project in which the authority of the Father (the LOGOS) is contested by the father-to-be. The HA HA is also a light which illuminates its foe, providing the very flash in which the authority of the father is recognised. Significantly in Tyndall's work the LOGOS also becomes the HA HA, as he frantically strains the sober logic of the diagram to absurdity. There is method in his madness, and madness in his method.⁴

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¹ John Barbour "I lead it astray" *Art and text* 14 Winter 1984. p59.

² *Double crossed again* daadgalerie, Berlin, 1992. p18.

³ *Power works*. p50.

⁴ With apologies to Ngaio Marsh and Stuart McKenzie.