

scope

Contemporary Research Topics

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Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art) is peer-reviewed and published annually in November by Otago Polytechnic/Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Scope (Art) aims to engage discussion on contemporary research in the visual arts. It is concerned with views and critical debates surrounding issues of practice, theory, history and their relationships as manifested through the visual and related arts and activities, such as sound, performance, curation, tactile and immersive environments, digital scapes and methodological considerations. With New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours as a backdrop, but not its only stage, *Scope (Art)* seeks to address the matters which concern contemporary artists and arts enquirers in their environments of practice.

Formats include: editorials, articles; perspectives; essays; artist pages, logs and travel reports; reports on and reviews of exhibitions, projects, residencies and publications; and moving, interactive works (to be negotiated with the editors for the online version, with stills to appear in the hardcopy version). Other suggested formats will also be considered; and special topics comprising submissions by various contributors may be tendered to the editors.

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scope

Contemporary Research Topics

6	Leoni Schmidt	Editorial: Provocations
10	Morgan Thomas	Realism in Contemporary Art
19	Celia Morgan	The Ontolotask (Craft Task): Between Emptiness and Illusion
27	Josephine Regan	Interstices
32	Rose McLeod	Te Waka Me Te Haerenga: An Artist's Journey to Te Wāipounamu
42	Bridgit Inder	The Whole Is Not a Sum of the Parts – Thinking about Authenticity
44	Lamis Mawafi	Palestinian Women's Work: A Handmade Story
47	Jubilee Rajiah	India 1947 – 2007: A Reflection
50	Qassim Saad	Contemporary Iraqi Art: Origins and Development
55	Max Oettli	Lessons from an Emigré Photographer, Franz Barta
61	Reuben Moss	Of Two Buildings and the Space Between
68	Andrew Last	Archsmithing: Jewellers Who Make Buildings and Buildings That Make Jewellery
75	Angela Lyon	Help! A Picture Stole my Image...
86	Max Oettli	Postcards
88	Gavin Hipkins	Second Empire: Spots of Time
96	Liz Bryce	Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity

100	Brian Snapp	Mapping
103	Mary-Louise Edwards	Tapestry Terrain: In-Residence at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop
107	Victoria Edwards & Ina Johann	Investigative Strategies of Engagement
113	Don Hunter	Lines of Site
118	Wayne Everson	<i>Vanishing Ice</i>
128	Margaret Roberts	Art and the Status of Place
133	Ana Terry	<i>terra_data</i> and Other 'Lines of Flight'
140	Alexandra Kennedy	<i>terra_data</i>
142	Juliet Novena Sorrel	Dualities within Drawing and the Work of Artists in an Expanded Field
149	Peter Stupples	Ground
158	Felix Ratcliff	User-Permutations: Space, Place and Meaning in the Paintings of Jake Walker
162	Michael Greaves	Painting after Painting: Losing Faith in the History of Painting
168	Anita DeSoto	<i>Pie in the sky</i>
171	Leoni Schmidt	Anita Desoto: Beauty and Ugliness

PROVOCATIONS

Leoni Schmidt

This issue of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art)* includes varied contributions from staff members and senior students in the Otago Polytechnic Schools of Art and Design. Other contributions have come to the issue from colleagues in our wider research networks, both in New Zealand and Australia. The journal is starting to fulfil its promise, i.e. to be a hub for provoking debate around the issues which are important to artists, designers and arts enquirers in the contemporary arena. Although this issue is not themed, a number of crucial issues emerge from the mix of contributions and this editorial signposts these for *Scope (Art)* readers.

The first three contributions – by Morgan Thomas, Celia Morgan and Josephine Regan – consider modalities of subjectivity, of being in the world. Thomas frames her exploration through notions of the 'real' as proposed by Hal Foster and Nicolas Bourriaud, while questioning both via Norman Bryson's concept of "counterpresence". In juxtaposition, Morgan presents the reader with a seque between Buddhist and Neo-Shinto ideas to Beckett and Proust in arguing that the task of making is a facilitator only in positioning us in the 'middle' of experience. Regan explores the elusive nature of subjectivity through contrasting its modalities as posited via notions of autopoiesis (Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela), ontological reciprocity (Paul Crowther) and relational aesthetics (Bourriaud again). Reading these contributions, one experiences multiplicity, possibility, the shifting of perspectives. We are not dealing with defined terrain, but with the constant negotiation of subjectivities and their elusive limits.

A cluster of contributions which speak of subjectivities within very specific contexts include those by Rose McLeod, Bridgit Inder, Lamis Mawafi, Jubilee Rajiah and Qassim Saad. McLeod reports on her project after coming south in New Zealand to explore her Kai Tahu identity and of finding a scattered and decentred subjectivity. Inder thinks about cultural authenticity and makes herself comfortable in-between a Samoan and New Zealand European position. Through embroidery, Mawafi engages with the particular plight of Palestinian women after their diaspora in the Middle East, where the artist hails from. Rajiah writes alongside Jitish Kallat's *Public Notice* installation to indict the middle class in India sixty years after Jawaharlal Nehru's trysting speech to celebrate Independent India. Saad explores the various modernist art movements through which Iraq has reflected and critiqued its own socio-cultural situation since World War I. In all of these contexts, subjectivities are wrested from and constructed through the particular political scenarios presented or suggested.

Despite variances in register and practice, a third group of contributions have the archive and an overt exploration of materialities in common. Max Oettli reviews the Franz Barta archive in the Hocken and takes lessons from an émigré photographer who brought a very particular mid-twentieth-century studio materiality to New Zealand. Reuben Moss delves into the archives in the Hocken to investigate the material construction of two post-depression buildings in the Dunedin of the 1930s and leads us through their histories as exemplars of the capital enterprise of farming and the state operation of public service in this country. Andrew Last finds inspiration in the archival records of high modernist architecture – Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe – for his "archsmithing" in both jewellery and architecture, with scale being the variant between materialities. Angela Lyon reflects on her own archive of images and identifies specifically photographic strategies for thwarting and deflecting patriarchal viewing systems. Max Oettli presents us with photographic examples of his early responses to the materialities of Dunedin after living in Switzerland for more than thirty years; we can only share in a partial archive as many of this "postcard" series is now lost, mimicking the incompleteness of the archive.

Gavin Hipkins finds an archive in the nineteenth-century publications of The Religious Tract Society in London and augments this with an archive sourced from an Asian-produced catalogue of embroidery patches. He "cements

these two elements within an inseparable bind...[using] digital technologies to play with an ambiguity of medium: not quite painting, looking like etching, or woodcut, or perhaps embroidery...As unique-state stretched canvas though, the works take on the status of painting. I have yet to use the term photography...[he writes]". Here, one thinks of Andrew McNamara's recent questions: "Today, the ideal of medium-specificity is seen as a thing of the past, being firmly identified with 'high modernism'. But, do post-medium practices actually mark a return to earlier forms of modernist practice? Does their proliferation demonstrate the redundancy of medium as a category...or, is the medium, as some have argued, still crucial...?"¹ Further on in this issue, Ana Terry quotes Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari where they write: "You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems."²

During a recent conference in Birmingham³, many delegates lamented the loss of medium-specificity, the loss of "disciplines" in art and design schools. Discussion suggested experiences of the loss of something to resist, to overcome (Deleuze and Guattari again).⁴ At a time when our Schools of Art and Design at Otago Polytechnic are fiercely protective of disciplines (while understanding the politics and ethics of an a-disciplinary stance⁵), these issues need concerted focus in our seminars and upcoming conference (see next page). In the meantime, contributions to this issue of *Scope (Art)* act as provocations for such a focus as their hybridised *materialities* up-end high modernist notions of *medium* as essence. Jacques Rancière states: "...it does not matter how you are classified. What matters is what new lines you are able to trace between separate objects and fields: art and theory are about this framing of new landscapes of the perceptible and the thinkable."⁶

Following on from Hipkins's artist's essay, Liz Bryce reports on her project focused on the oxymoron of "becoming indigenous", for which archives of cupie dolls made from wax and sugar invaded places like small colonising armies. Brian Snapp combines clay, furniture, rock salt and other materials in his installations which create their own fabricated archives of information which can be entered and construed by audience members at their own slow pace. Mary-Louise Edwards reports on a residency at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, where she experimented with her own archive of materials scavenged from recycle bins while immersed in the particular sounds and activities of large-scale tapestry production. Victoria Edwards and Ina Johann collaborate with multi-media projects which incorporate writing, drawing, painting, photography, performance and installation elements.

For one of their projects, Edwards and Johann work in the gun emplacements at Godley Head near Christchurch, framing the horizon as a 360-degree panorama for the sighting of Japanese warships approaching the coastline, an approach that never eventuated. Mediation of place involves another cluster of contributions to this issue of *Scope (Art)*. Don Hunter explores acceleration of access to the highly mediated landscape of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. Wayne Everson reviews Jo Woolley's exhibition entitled *Vanishing Ice* for which moving image, digital animations, sculpture and sound mediate the landscape to create a 'cinerama' which bodily involves the audience in the effects of global warming. Margaret Roberts analyses drawings by Helena Almeida to re-value literal space in the face of the distancing and disembedding mechanisms of modernity as identified by Anthony Giddens. Ana Terry examines the difference between information and data in her project report on an exhibition called *terra_data*, which – to use Deleuze and Guattari's term – "de-territorialises" the archive of paintings in the Hocken Library Collection so that it becomes connected to other territories, to other places.

Alexandra Kennedy writes about the above-mentioned exhibition in terms of a "fracturing of established 'framings' of the landscape...[a] filmic 'slicing'...as a sequence of pleated surfaces endlessly producing folds, a mapping of one frame into another, a folding in on itself of representational space, in a continual movement between near and far, foreground and background." A folding in on one another of process and presentation, figure and ground, sign and gesture is explored in terms of drawing by Juliet Novena Sorrel where she discusses the untenability in practice of the binaries implied. Peter Stupples develops the multi-dimensionality of 'ground' further in a text which strains to encompass the complexities he wishes to convey until we can agree that there is now "...a richer range of senses of 'ground' than traditionally encompassed by art's history..." This is borne out by the dense permutations of ground and space in the paintings of Jack Walker as discussed by Felix Ratcliff; by the deft mediations of other painters' grounds in the work of Michael Greaves; and by the neo-romantic visions of Anita DeSoto where figure and ground are distinct in a refusal of the demise of figurative painting. A brief response to her work concludes this issue of *Scope (Art)* and emphasises the connections to tradition in her painting, especially those rich traditions mined by Umberto Eco in his editions *On Beauty* and *On Ugliness*.

This issue of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art)* is partially to be launched with *Scope: Art and Design Resource Reader* and *Scope: Art Works-Mahi Toi* (containing the programme and abstracts) at the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators Conference to be hosted by the Schools of Art and Design at Otago Polytechnic with Kai Tahu ki Arai-Te-Uru in April 2009. Themes for this conference are:

- questioning visual arts education: histories and futures
ka pātaitaka te matāuraka toi a whatu i nehera, a muri ake
- enhancing synergies across creative disciplines: links and diversity
whakatenatena ai kā oriteka mākā wāhaka hanga : te tātai me te rerekā
- travelling between arts education sectors: share and support
ka haereka ki waeka a matāuraka toi wahangu: te manaaki me te tautoko
- affecting the world through the visual arts: societies and politics
whakaawe te ao ma te toi a whatu: te nohotahi me te tōrakapūtaka

Simon Kaan's work entitled *Oil on Workers' Beds* (2004) is the signature image for the conference. In this work the artist traces lines between different subjectivities and travels between worlds; he explores materialities; he mediates our experience of the Otago coastline through enfolding near and far, background and foreground, past, present and future. The work is situated in a particular place and society and it affects the politics of this place where the conference is going to be held with Kai Tahu ki Arai-Te-Uru. Kaan writes: "*Oil on Workers' Beds* touches on ideas about locations. The landforms are a starting point, places we know and understand in various ways. The waka forms suggest shifting relationships between these forms and places. The work was completed in Beijing in 2004 and is painted on slat beds. The work is partly a response to the rhythm of the slats and partly to the conditions under which those co-migrants to that big city slept at night. I connected these new impressions to the Otago landforms so well known to me. The work thus became a joining together of two worlds."⁷



Figure 1: Simon Kaan, *Oil on Workers' Beds*, 2 x 2 metres, 2004 (courtesy of the artist).

The provocations presented in this issue of *Scope (Art)* will contribute to the context for the Art Works-Mahi Toi conference 2009 debates on visual arts and design education.

"A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another...A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee...language-speech is...the social event of verbal interaction..."⁸

- 1 Andrew McNamara, "Editorial: Post-Medium", *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Art*, 8 (1), 2007: 7.
- 2 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 161.
- 3 The 3rd International Conference on the Arts in Society, Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, July, 2008.
- 4 See endnote 2.
- 5 See "On Medium Specificity and Discipline Crossovers in Modern Art: Jacques Rancière Interviewed by Andrew McNamara and Toni Ross", *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Art*, 8 (1), 2007: 99.
- 6 Ibid., 106.
- 7 See Simon Kaan page by clicking on the signature image on www.anzaae2009.org.nz.
- 8 Valentin Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and IR Titunik (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929/1973) 94.

The article from pages 10 - 18
Realism in Contemporary Art
by
Morgan Thomas

Is available only in the print edition of this Journal.

THE ONTOLOTASK (CRAFT TASK): BETWEEN EMPTINESS AND ILLUSION

Celia Morgan



**making as a state of being
over doing pointing towards
the nothingness that *is* being**

Out of the void left from the removal of 'self' (or at very least a withdrawal¹ from the meaning attached to a 'self' concept), sprouts the ontolotask – tentative evidence of our inexorable facticity as matter and the

¹ This movement is also a retraction into the self away from the mask of persona and *into* the nothingness behind it, which is self.

paradoxical dialectic of overcoming this by embodying it. In short, the ontolotask is an iteration of being within the limitations of relativity. The ontolotask is a manifestation of relative nothingness which, though it can only ever be relative, can however point towards an absolute, notwithstanding that the making of *anything* denies any absolute that the ontolotask may presume to point towards. It denies it by diminishing it; it is in effect an anthropomorphisation and is inherently linked to the self or ego which is precisely what the ontolotask sets out to overcome.

If the terms of the absolute (set out here for the purposes of this argument) are stated as 'All There Is Already Exists', to re-present this by means of *making something* would be to stand in radical contradiction to those very terms. It would then seem more appropriate to *point out* this absolute where it *already* exists rather than create something specific, the doing of which would undermine the very standpoint being established. This is the ongoing conflict between the action of making and the purpose (which is in fact an utterance of meaninglessness) of the task. It is the very presence of this conflict that keeps the purpose of tasking active and vigilant. What a pointing out or towards does is recognise the absolute without attempting to understand it by means of a definition which is accepted as impossible and contradictory, without capturing it or colonising it through a process of rationalisation; in short, arriving at an understanding of non-understanding.

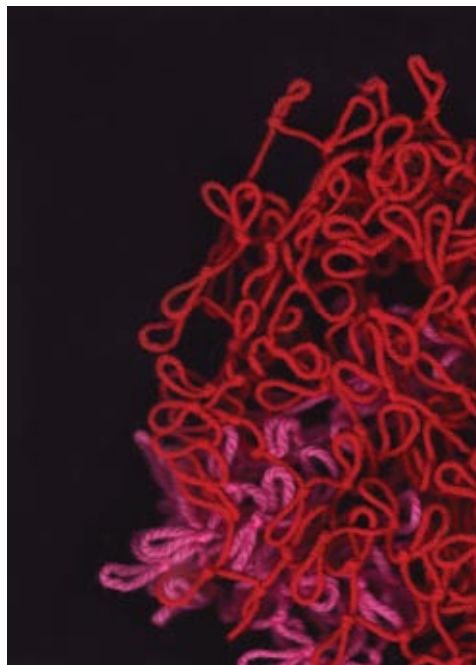
When Keiji Nishitani, a leading exponent of the (so-called for purposes of convenience) Kyoto School of Philosophy, poses the question "for what purpose is religion?" he poses the counter question: "For what purpose do I myself exist?"² the answering of which he presents as being the only way to answer the first. This is in fact a question that is present in all other questions and I think it is in itself an answer to all those 'other' questions. There is however not *one* answer to *that* question. It is suggested by Nishitani that the question "For what purpose do I exist?" is much more approachable after an edifying foray into the boundlessness of absolute nothingness. It is only when one has come face to face with oneself from behind that true understanding can begin. Once it is seen that not only is the self everywhere that one looks but it is also always the self looking, which means from the standpoint of the self or a "person-centred self-

² Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 2.

prehension of person"³ as Nishitani so aptly puts it, nothing outside of the self can be grasped, or perhaps even conceived of, unless it is in direct relation to the self, which makes for a fairly limiting viewpoint of the world. From a standpoint of absolute nothingness "for what purpose do I exist?" can be asked without withering at the idea of responsibility implicit in the question, the idea of being of use, to serve a purpose. If the responsibility is a Being rather than a Doing it has far more potential of being fulfilled. It is from here that one embarks upon the craft-task (ontotask) and by not trying to be anything or even become anything the task is able somehow to participate in a Being much larger than itself and thus breaks through the person-centred self-prehension of person which in this case is translated onto the object acting as an extension of self. The purpose of the craft-task thus has an overarching purpose far greater than the resultant object, the outcome of which can only be qualified in terms of the individual experience behind it. As may be apparent, the craft-task itself arises out of the very mode of being that engages with the question "For what purpose do I exist?" Taking Nishitani's enquiry into "What is religion?" which ultimately results in a metaphysical preponderance of Being, and applying the principles of the enquiry onto the ontotask, the same can be said here of craft-tasking as Nishitani says of the religious quest in *Religion and Nothingness*. Whilst setting religion apart from "things like culture" and recognising its somewhat diminished status in current times – "to judge from current conditions in which many people are in fact getting along without it, it is clearly not the kind of necessity that food is" – he affirms its importance as "a must for life" for "religion has to do with life itself".⁴ Overall his approach to religion is "as the self-awareness of reality, or, more correctly, the *real* self-awareness of reality." By this he means a process by which reality is at once realised and comes into realisation: "our ability to perceive reality means that reality realises (actualises) itself in us".⁵ Most importantly however, and most relevant to approaching or engaging with the craft-task, are his notes on understanding the essence of religion. It is here that he determines that the only way of understanding the religious quest is *through* the religious quest, in other words it cannot be understood from the outside. The understanding must come from within the individual and the approach is from the inside out. I do not wish to imply that craft-tasking is a quest to understanding religion, nor is it an

individual religious quest, but it can be read laid neatly out over what Nishitani sets down as the religious quest, as summarised above.

The task does not offer a conclusion (nor solution), it is an endless task, infinite, immeasurable, like a precarious bridge that floats unhinged, always between, suggesting a path but to nowhere, the only promise of fulfillment being to simply leap off. The task *itself* is neither the fulfillment of this promise nor its end point.



The ontotask announces its irrationalities in a formless form to iterate what it can only simulate and define by non-definition. It is the language of peculiarities that Paolo Zellini describes when he speaks of "configurations that defy any rational rigour".⁶ The

3 Ibid., 70.

4 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 2.

5 Ibid., 5.

6 Paolo Zellini, *A Brief History of Infinity* (London: Penguin, 2004), 78. Zellini, on the other hand, configures a rigorous circumnavigation of the infinite as it appears in its many varied reasonings and understandings of non-understanding throughout history's own many varied understandings. The above quote refers specifically to the "art of 'learned ignorance' espoused by Nicholas of Cusa" who, among others, (about 600 years ago) re-introduced infinitesimals into the language of mathematics and in so doing destabilised equational proofing and instead *pointed towards* "antinomies that form a continual reference to the ineffable absolute".

ontolotask has the ability to initiate a state of hypnotic reverie akin to a meditative daze (or transcendence depending on the single point focus ability of the tasker). The mind is aided by the continuous activity to actually free itself from the stultifying and unending dullness of mundane thought by occupying itself with an unendingly dull task. The result of the craft-task thus essentially becomes a state rather than an action or product although conversely both action and resultant product are needed to achieve this state. Doing has a transformative principle at work within it regardless of what is being done; it is a being-in-doing.⁷

Once the mind (task) has stopped its fruitless threshing around to grasp itself⁸, (“where, in our attempts to grasp the self, we get caught in its grasp”⁹) says Nishitani, explaining the turn away from a self-centred mode of being in order to re-orientate ourselves to the “middle” of things) it approaches a unity of being that extends out beyond itself and settles in a knowing of non-knowing. Boundaries wobble in a sfumato formlessness, a light of dappled dazzle soaks and absorbs, and our abiding and tenacious grasp is weakened as we dissolve into a form of non-form (all this from the ontolotask). As Derrida traces the origins of language through a lingering of carbon and a vestigial flotsam of the unspoken, he happens upon “a concentration of light as a result of seeing in order not to see”.¹⁰ Perhaps this is the light of true seeing, a light immanent in all things and that is seen only from the centre of the very thing itself, from its “middle”, which in fact cannot be seen, in the usual sense of the word, at all. This star of disproportionate magnitude, this concentration of light, that bedazzles us with its transcendent phosphorescence, also touches Nishitani’s knowing of non-knowing with its radiant glow. Indeed, for Nishitani, they are the very same thing: “What we call the knowing of non-knowing is, as it were, the gathering together and concentration on a single point of the light of all things.”¹¹ This *docta ignorantia* has associations with the thinking of Nicholas of Cusa in the writings of both Kitaro Nishida and Nishitani. Nishida applies the *via negativa* of Nicholas of Cusa to articulate a quality of absolute

nothingness in the idea of God. The *via negativa* works by the principle that everything that can be grasped or affirmed is finite, and cannot therefore perform the infinite activity of unifying the universe. Nishida is quick to affirm that this does not mean God is mere nothingness, but absolute nothingness.



The task is a facilitator only; when it is considered in isolation, in reference to itself and its own development etc., it is no longer relevant or useful. It becomes grounded in its materiality and ceases to point past itself and thus becomes an unsatisfactory means to get somewhere or gain something. The task as facilitator is positioned in the “middle” between illusion and emptiness. Here the distinction should be made between what Nishitani refers to as “middle” which is the homeground of being in one’s own “suchness”, where one would encounter a thing in its own mode of being and the illusion to Nietzsche’s “ring” to which this “middle” refers. The “ring” of Nietzsche is a boundary between nothingness that surrounds the “will to power” (the world within it). The ring itself is without will and is the “middle” between emptiness and illusion. The ring, according to Derrida, is also “the name Nietzsche gives to the possibility of this otherpossibility”.¹² This other possibility is a beginning, but an unending beginning, that of eternal recurrence.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, trans. and ed. by Ned Lu-kacher (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 6. Press, 1991), 6.

⁷ The term “being-in-doing” is here coined but is, however, a specific reference to the term “being-at-doing” of Nishitani Keiji which he thoroughly explains in *Religion and Nothingness*, and which I have also adopted, using it to fortify the nebulous question of what the ontolotask is and does.

⁸ Chikao Fujisawa, *Zen & Shinto: The Story of Japanese Philosophy*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971), 74.

⁹ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 140.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Cinders*, 75, see footnote 12.

¹¹ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 140.

It is not a foolish pursuit to think that tasking can lead to a transcendent state or command the mind to a degree that it overcomes itself, but it would be foolish to think that it is the resultant product or object of the task that achieves this. On the other hand, when the being of doing engages with the something of nothing then there *is* a chance. Thus it is the act that enables but only without attachment to the product, which is of potentially increasing challenge as its quantity increases respectively. The task thereby presents the challenge of non-attachment and as quantity and quality increases the more easily it disguises itself as something valuable and worthwhile and the more challenging non-attachment becomes.

The task *can* be an avoidance that guises itself as progress which is also addictive because of the phenomenon of physical attachment, but it can also be a means by which a complete and conscious awareness of the moment can be experienced: an eternal now, the atomic moments of eternity, or “suchness”. By “suchness” in this instance, I mean Chikao Fujisawa’s idea of an eternal now derived from a strictly Buddhist teaching which describes “suchness” in a context of spatial temporality, specifically where “the verticality of time convergingly meets the horizontality of space.”¹³ This differs quite dramatically from Nishitani’s usage of the same term, whereby he is referring to a quintessential being encountered at the core of all things. There is, however, quite a distinct correlative presence of the notion of “middle” in both uses of the term. In the Buddhist teaching that Fujisawa follows, the thinking behind “suchness” is an assertion of Naka-Ima or Middle-Now.¹⁴ For Nishitani, being in the “middle” is “a mode of being in which a thing is on its own home-ground”¹⁵, in other words, in its true suchness. The endless task can be thought of as a representation of life within the confining and distorting paradigm of space and time through which we normally see and experience everything. If one is able to be in the task, to encounter it in its “middle”, then it is a constant arrival rather than an infinite

¹³ Chikao Fujisawa, *Zen & Shinto: The Story of Japanese Philosophy*, 12. Fujisawa is a neo-shintologist, who, in an attempt to enlighten Western thinking bound by a historicised mythology laid down by a Judeo-Christian heritage, reveals his patriotic leanings towards the wisdom of traditional thought in ‘old’ Japan, along with a deep-seated cynicism towards Western philosophical endeavour, which he considers can only be overcome by “plucking from the refreshing fruits of eastern thought”. He considers the orientation of Western thinking that divides religious spirituality from scientific materiality a “fatal malady of schizophrenia”.

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 139.

avoidance. It is being-in-doing rather than doing-to-avoid-being, or doing-at-being.

What Nishitani calls being-at-doing, or “samskṛta”, is a condition of our nature of being in time. He adorns the concept in a heavy garb of tarnished mail that is, “an interminable burden”, indeed, “infinitely burdensome”; it is “an inexhaustible debt” with which we are “saddled” and if ever we manage to purge ourselves of one debt through sheer dogged obstinacy, it would only serve to change the scenery of our endless toil through time as “anything we do invariably results in a new liability and imposes the obligation of doing something else. Thus in the very act of working constantly to pay off our debt, another obligation is added on”.

It is not hard to read Beckett in this rather crushing dictum of our incarceration. Beckett is well aware that “there is no escape from the hours and the days”, and he too colours the view with a sombre palette in which we, the subjects, or “lower organisms, conscious of only two dimensions” are “victims and prisoners”.¹⁶ The idea of being-at-doing, which encapsulates the ineluctable perpetuity of existence on the converging axis of time and space, “together with the causal nexus it implies”¹⁷ and more precisely the constant doing that being in such a condition requires, are inextricably bound in what Nishitani calls (borrowing an expression from the “ancients”) a “causal kinship” at the bottom of which lies *incessant becoming*.

incessant becoming

By itself, the term, *incessant becoming*, is nearly enough to inspire apoplectic seizures of dread. How better to confess the sin of time upon being than with the word *incessant*? With what better effect could the interminable burden of being in time be disclosed?

Incessant becoming calls out in purgatorial camaraderie with Nietzsche’s eternal return which tortures the penitent with a cyclonic vertigo. It is a well-worn tirade that bemoans the on and ongoing, the bondage of diurnal routine, the sameness that seems to stretch out as far as history has stretched its mythical arm, but with a slight tweaking of hue, blood red to Moulin rouge. It is not, however, such a highway of travellers that take refuge on the way in “the *nothingness* that is

¹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Proust and 3 Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1965), 12-13.

¹⁷ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 221.

one with being within incessant becoming in time."¹⁸ Possibly because nothingness is not normally thought of in terms of a refuge, but as still further reason for despair. Despair is nothing but the flag bearer, a great luminous beacon sending out its warning signal that the gnashing crags of relativity are hidden in the tempest of its own doom. Relative nothingness is the forebearer of such gloom if it is contemplated in isolation, that is, without consideration of its *relativity*.

There is a purposefulness about the task's purposelessness. It is for this reason that the task can only point to what it is stating, for it cannot *be* what it speaks of. It is not pretending to be more (nor less) than it is, it must not.

As soon as the task presumes to be something it falls away from nothingness and into nihilism. The task is tentatively balanced between what it is not and what it can only suggest, symbolically and representationally, for absolute nothingness cannot be expressed **by** an object but only **through** an object.



It is not the working towards something, in general, nor a particular form of *thing*, that is the motivator or director of the task. It is more about enabling and allowing something else entirely to occur, and this may have absolutely nothing to do with the task at hand. This could easily be misconstrued as a separation that takes away from the presence of being in the doing as the task itself seems to be a guise or mask – but this is not at all so. It is often the distraction of doing that allows the presence of being to register. Nishitani would go so far as to say that “we are because we produce time ourselves as the field of our transitory becoming”. This field of our transitory becoming is nothing other than doing. What he is suggesting is that being and *doing* are intricately bound in a symbiotic determination.

18 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 241.

An active enquiry into, or experience of, the purpose of the task opens up a seemingly gaping void between an apparent meaning invested in **being** and a meaninglessness wrested from an **incessant becoming**. The leap from object to ontological enquiry is active in the ontotask because of its refusal to be object only, because it insists on being looked *through*. Whilst the task may imply an impasse it also provides a look-out. From a “person-centred self-prehension of person” beyond what one understands of the self one *cannot* understand, which is from whither the ontotask issues forth but also, where it is *away*ing from. What the task is looking out at or towards is a reality beyond empirical materiality, beyond causality and even consciousness, a non-objectifiable reality that is neither a subjective experience nor even an awareness that can in any way be directed back to a reflecting self, but more of an infinite void from which all impossibilities are made possible without anything actually happening or existing. A boundless dominion of shimmering isness that slips past the senses but imprints a seamless and seenless mark, a fluttering intuited through a peripheral guessing and “knowing of non-knowing” – a non-objective knowing.

To say the task is “looking out at” indicates that the task looks *out* from *within* itself. Firstly, when I speak of the task as if it is a subject looking out, that is because I mean to use it as a metaphor for the looking subject (though looking does not imply seeing, indeed, more often the contrary) and this also means the task is positioned, like the *cogito*, at the centre of its own world and is then inevitably eclipsed by its own reflection. Any pointing towards or looking out will therefore do no more than scribe a firm arc of rigid axis, unless the trajectory of the gaze is focused inwards to come out on the other side, truly leaving the self (task), so to speak, behind. Taking on the idea of an “existential conversion” that Nishitani advocates, which entails leaving behind the mode of being of person-centred person, the task (marauding as person), offers a passage that traverses the great vacant plains of “nothing at all”¹⁹ apprehended behind person to come up on the “near-side” of person from the “far-side”. Following the process of conversion, Nishitani explains that the “arrival at the far side” is preceded by a profound realisation of the emptiness of the self, and thus “we can maintain not merely a far side that is beyond us, but a far side that we have arrived at”, which he qualifies as “an absolute near side.”²⁰

19 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 70.

20 Ibid., 138.

In a poignant circumnavigation of himself within the world, Mr Palomar, the reticent protagonist of Italo Calvino's *Mr Palomar*, attempts to view the world from outside of himself, in other words from the far-side. Taken from "The Meditations of Palomar", the following passage uncannily describes an experience of what one might encounter when grappling with the existential conversion Nishitani requests in order to arrive at "an absolute near side".

But how can you look at something and set your own ego aside? Whose eyes are doing the looking? As a rule, you think of the ego as one who is peering out of your own eyes as if leaning on a windowsill, looking at the world stretching out before him in all its immensity. So then: there is a window that looks out on the world. The world is out there; and in here, what is there? The world still – what else could there be? With a little effort of concentration Palomar manages to shift the world from in front of him and set it on the sill, looking out. The world is also there, and for the occasion has been split into a looking world and a world looked at. And what about him, also known as 'I', namely Mr Palomar? Is he not a piece of the world that is looking at another piece of world? Or else, given that there is world that side of the window and world this side, perhaps the I, the ego, is simply the window through which the world looks at the world. To look at itself the world needs the eyes (and the eyeglasses) of Mr Palomar. So from now on Mr Palomar will look at things from outside and not from inside. But this is not enough: he will look at them with a gaze that comes from outside, not inside, himself.²¹

Sadly for Mr Palomar, after this Herculean effort, and in full expectation of "general transfiguration" he is greeted with "the usual quotidian grayness"²². It is this disappointment that spurns him towards a reconfiguration of the problem, resulting in the decision that: "Having the outside look outside is not enough: the trajectory must start from the looked-at thing, linking it with the thing that looks".²³ And in so deciding, he unwittingly expounds the idea of encountering something on its own home-ground, its "middle". Surely Mr Palomar would have been greeted with applause from his present audience of Nishida, Nishitani and Beckett. All of them in their own ways have taken a particular opposition to the

usual, albeit often oblivious, assertion of a subject-object dichotomy. However, even if Mr Palomar manages to look from the thing being looked at to the thing looking, presumably himself, which would indicate he has truly become one with the object, he has not actually arrived at the far side. In accordance with the concept given to us by Nishitani, the far side is an "outside" or "beyond", something unobtainable and unapproachable, so to *arrive* there already means it is somehow on our *near side*, which is, more or less, when Nishitani calls it "an absolute near side." It seems that this is what Mr Palomar intended to do, but his disappointment in the "usual quotidian grayness" is quite a clear indication that this did not happen. If he had arrived, there would certainly be no need for *looking* for a start, and the fact that he is gauging his success with the eye of an observer means that whether he had arrived or not, he wouldn't have actually intended to. Furthermore, in the echo of applause, his overcoming of the subject-object dichotomy has regrettably been less than convincing, for he has not managed to escape the *cogito*, or as Beckett puts it in *Proust*: "Nor is any direct and purely experimental contact possible between subject and object, because they are automatically separated by the subject's consciousness of perception."²⁴ However, (before I threaten to dismiss the metaphysical exertions of Mr Palomar altogether, which I simply never would), Mr Palomar does furnish us with generous provision of the substantial difficulties of looking through the self, so as to not be caught constantly in the mirror of its reflection. His enquiries are not in fact the pontifications of a solipsistic ascetic (as much as his apparent social ineptitudes suggest); they are speculations that travel in the company of many. It is a fine party of conjecture, hypothesis, experiment, prayer, klangs, bangs, poetry and above all, modern dance. Aristotle adds a fulcrum of thought to the precarious ledge of Palomar's window viewing:

...And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same.²⁵

Incessant becoming resides in every being as nothing less than life itself. In the words of Beckett "here is all humanity circling with fatal monotony about the Providential fulcrum", or in other words, the words

21 Italo Calvino, *Mr Palomar*, trans. William Weaver. (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1994), 102.

22 Ibid., 102.

23 Ibid., 102.

24 Beckett, *Proust*, 74.

25 David H Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 81.

of Joyce this time, the “convoy wheeling encircling around the gigantig’s lifetree”.²⁶



In *Nadja*, André Breton’s celebrated Surrealist novel of 1928, the image of “ghost” introduces the narrator as a haunting of his own being. A being that perhaps through the exigencies of an existence “whose true extent is quite unknown to me”, is whittled away by “a torment that may be eternal”. There is no sense of an infinite freedom that this constant re-newal could mean in the shadowy existence that Breton laments: “perhaps I am doomed to retrace my steps under the illusion that I am exploring, doomed to try and learn what I should simply recognise, learning a mere fraction of what I have forgotten.”²⁷

In Beckett’s trilogy of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, there is a progressive disintegration of characters, of persona, of the mask of persona. In the final novel, *The Unnamable*, Beckett over-writes the characters of the preceding novels, dismissing them as the fiction they are – destroying the superficialities of reality, which are all constructed fictions, to reveal the nothingness behind them: a place of non-identity. But it all stops there, this is not freedom; it is the ultimate entrapment, that is the despair. Lights go out, do not turn on, in *The Unnamable*:

And there is nothing for it but to wait for the end, nothing but for the end to come, and at the end all will be the same, at the end at last perhaps all the same as before...the nuisance of doing over, and of being, same thing, for one who could never do, never be.²⁸

The end is the greatest illusion of all though, and if ever we were to slither away momentarily from the trickle of infinity irrigating the finitude of life, so that each ending is but the seed of a new beginning, it would not be with the aid of Beckett:

You must go on, I can’t go on, you must go on, I’ll

26 Ibid., 25.

27 Samuel Beckett, “Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce”, 12.

28 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* from *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1976), 341.

go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me,...perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story...I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.²⁹

Maurice Blanchot says that perhaps Beckett’s work must exist always at a point somewhere between being and non-being where it is in a state of “perpetual unworkableness” where “the work must maintain an increasingly initial relation or risk becoming nothing at all”.³⁰ In this critique “becoming nothing at all” is still considered a risk and not an aim. This fear, yes, I will call it a fear, can only come from a perspective of relative nothingness, grounded in nihilism. What Blanchot is also saying is that as soon as the work becomes *something* it loses that insightful balance between becoming and being, that Delphic bridge between past and future. If, in the finality of a conclusive form, the work ceases to exist because it ceases to indicate, to initiate, then it would be nothing at all. For it is in his own “punctuation of dehiscence” (that Beckett attributes to Beethoven, where form destroys form), that the real somethingness of Beckett’s work lies.

From within the mode of being that is an incessant becoming, like a quiet but shrill drone of a dawn trumpet an epitaph of meaninglessness is re-membered to us, sent by the vaporous seraphim of nothingness whose call forever echoes in our doings. The ineluctable perpetuity, the sheer unabating existence of life itself, means that any doing whose ultimate value lies in an end or completion suddenly has very third rate seats, quite in the wings, hardly a view of the stage at all. The ontotask in a promotion of its own meaninglessness paradoxically assumes a role of preserving the dignity of all those engaged in meaningless activity, which from this viewpoint is in fact everybody.



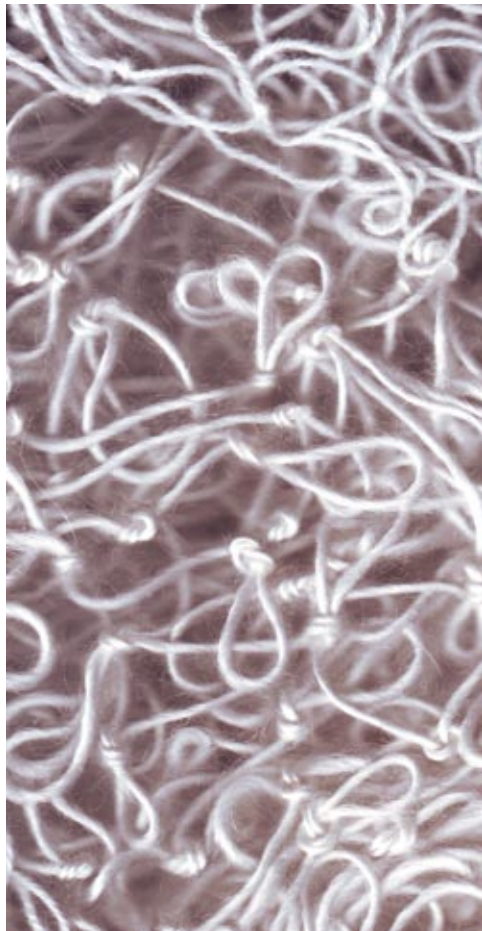
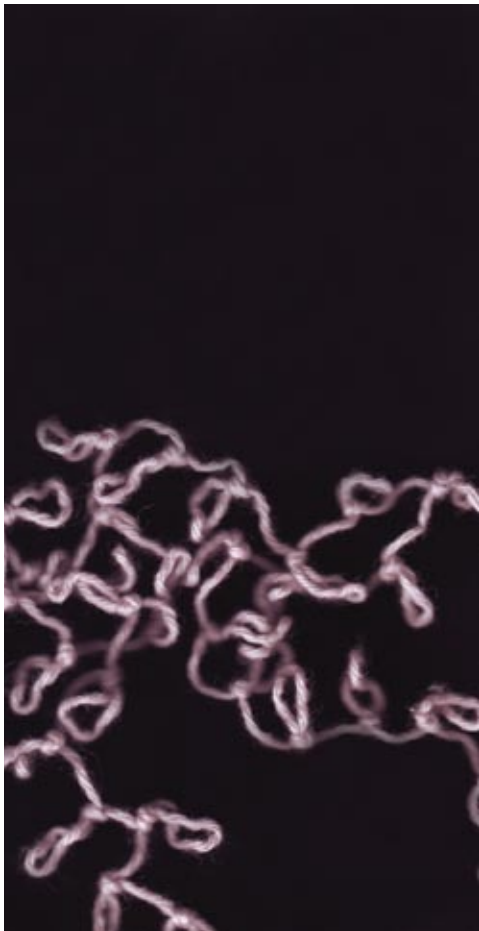
29 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* from *The Beckett Trilogy*, 381. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), 181.

30 See John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), 181.



“Where there are people, it is said, there are things”.³¹

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31 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* from *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1976), 268.

INTERSTICES

Josephine Regan

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the elusive nature of human subjectivity by bringing together three separate texts and placing concepts alongside each other from different authors and areas of knowledge.

The areas of knowledge include science, philosophy and art theory, and their shared concepts include the biological foundation of human consciousness; the formation of self and reality through shared language and cultural production; and the integral nature of the biological, psychological, social and cultural human being with the “other” of world. Each author approaches the topic from a particular professional discourse, using very different language and concepts. In order to conserve these varied identities and points of difference each text is presented here separately, so that readers may discern the overlaps and layer the three together for themselves to find the interstices between the texts.

My interest lies with the links across spaces rather than with contoured objects. Whilst the common subject might seem to be the human being, it is not the contoured human being of psychology, economics and legal responsibility; it involves a more dispersed conception of reciprocal self-with-other, subject-with-society, and shared language, culture and reality.

The first text discussed in this essay is the result of collaboration between Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (biologist, and cognitive scientist/epistemologist respectively), authors of *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*.¹ They write that the only reality known to humans is a jointly created cultural reality that is produced through a socially evolved and shared language, rather than through any material reality “out there”. The second text is from Paul Crowther, writing on aesthetics in *Art and Embodiment: from Aesthetics to Self-consciousness*.² He introduces the concept of “ontological reciprocity” as the reciprocally interactive nature of self and environment, and he discusses art as a “need” of human psychology, assisting us to “see our inner life reflected in, and acknowledged by” the world.³ The third text is Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*⁴ and engages with his eponymous concept, where he describes contemporary art as social practice, concerned with “the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt”.⁵ Relational art extends the traditional avant-garde critique of society into a proactive search for new ways of knowing and being, and of re-inventing subjectivity.

“reality” as jointly and culturally created: how to survive, and how to change the world?

In *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, Varela and Maturana introduce the concept of *autopoiesis*, meaning a self-sustaining system. All living forms are *autopoietic systems*, from the single cell through to complex mammals, because they all maintain their biological unity within an environment by replacing their own components. To not do so would be to die. Autopoiesis is therefore a definition of life, and describes the continuous adaptive activities and modifications that all living things must constantly perform in order to stay alive within an environment. Maturana and Varela take this discussion well beyond self-organisation at the biological level however, extending it through the social behaviour of various species to the emergence of human consciousness, language and culture. From this they draw two main conclusions: one, that the only *reality* we as humans can know is a cultural reality; we have no direct access to any sort of external reality. Two, that the only reality we can have is a *shared reality*, constructed with others, through language. There is no such thing as a human reality that is not shared.

For Varela and Maturana, evolution is wrongly understood as “*survival of the fittest*”, with its implications of competition and violent struggle in a hostile environment.⁶ An organism is in fact not separate from its environment. It is integral to it, and both the organism and environment have evolved together, and would not have evolved as they did without each other. The environment, however, does not directly influence an organism's activities. Environmental change may *trigger* a reaction in an organism, but the type of reaction is determined solely by the organism. It must react adaptively to an environmental trigger (or *perturbation*), or it will fail to survive. This replaces the combative understanding of survival with a *conservation of adaptation* which is not intentionally competitive, and living entities establish a *structural coupling* with their environment, constantly seeking to adapt, rather than struggling against it.⁷

From the point of view of the organism, any “other” beyond itself is part of the environment – and perturbations from other organisms cause reactions similar to environmental perturbations. Mutually congruent structural adaptations therefore occur between living beings, at all levels and in many ways, from the cellular to the social. Coupling occurs minute-by-minute in the living organism in response to the complexities and temporality of its lived experience, including multiple, barely noticeable changes such as movements or moods.

This conservation of adaptation leads to the formation of relationships and groups. In the case of simple organisms, cells may either establish symbiotic relationships, or become a structural part of a larger shared organism, both of which create shared benefits. In a similar way the social behaviour of animal and human groups assists both the individual and the group. Organisms and societies are therefore considered to belong to a single class of *metasystems*, the main feature of which is the stability of this larger *unity* in an environment. *Conservation of adaptation* now occurs at the level of this more complex unity or system, as well as within the individual organism.⁸

This ongoing *conservation of adaptation* causes a *structural drift* in the organism or the system, by which progressive adaptive changes take a particular direction. In humans, the plasticity of a complex nervous system has extended structural drift to the development of language. One might ask why only humans would develop this particular, extraordinary drift, and the reason given is the nature of early human groups, whose *natural drift*⁹ had already led them to develop more open group structures than other primates, with more opportunity for individual mobility within and between them. These loose social groupings found the coordination of cooperative group behaviour more difficult, leading to a natural drift towards language.¹⁰ Linguistic behaviour is therefore a form of structural coupling, and the primary purpose of words is the conservation of adaptation through coordination of behaviour; the word's meaning is only secondary. However, beginning as a mode of coordinating action, language became a mode for describing and reflecting on that action, because the categories that were developed to assist in group activities became the categories through which the external world was understood. These categories constitute culture. They also resulted in consciousness, because to reflect or to speak, one must have an “I” from which to do so. The increasing complexities of language led to the development of a *linguistic environment*, in which individuals must also survive, so that structural coupling must also be practised within the language environment. Language itself became “a refined choreography of behavioural coordination”.¹¹

Since language is said to generate consciousness, it is also said to generate mind; because mind is socially constructed through language and does not simply reside within an individual brain. The identity and perceptions of an individual are constructed socially through language, so that a sense of self, as well as the world or “other”, are socially constructed through language. The result is that the reality we know is one entirely *brought forth* in coexistence with others.¹² Language has become the environment in which we live, creating our reality, and we do not have access to any unmediated, external, objectively observable world. We have no external point of reference from which to view a reality, and the only world that we have is the one that we *bring forth* together in language, through the actions of our coexistence.

Maturana's and Varela's conclusion is that the only method of survival on this planet is to engage in structural coupling – which must include social as well as other environmental coupling. The authors state that to co-exist with others, each has to accept the other's truth as being equally legitimate and valid – or we negate the other and are failing to couple. We are unavoidably engaged together constantly in “*bringing forth a world*” through the process of living: a world which will only become different from what it now is if we jointly live it differently.¹³

human “being” as self and otherness: art for survival, and as a meeting place for embodied minds

In his book *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, Paul Crowther presents two main concepts. The first is *ontological reciprocity*, which concerns the issue of a subject’s relationship to the other/world. The second is the suggestion that art is the most effective means of expressing and recording human embodied experience and ontological reciprocity, as well as being an important ecological *need* of human consciousness. It should be noted that “art” in this text means “artefacts”.

Crowther begins with a notion of human embodiment based on the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He describes the human subject as one amongst other beings and things in the world, with which we are in constant reciprocal interaction. Our embodied condition means that experience is not merely cognitive, but sensory, and we do not merely *gaze out* on the world from within our human form, but *inhere* in the world as embodied subjects. The body with its sensori-motor capacities operates as a *unified field*, which becomes more unified with the development of language and social interactions, and from this, a sense of self and consciousness arises – which “is both stimulated by, and enables us to organise, the spatio-temporal diversity of Otherness”.¹⁴ This embodied, sensory relationship with otherness is an “*ontological reciprocity*” – “ontological” as in relating to the nature of “being”, and reciprocal with the external other. However, we can never fully understand or grasp this other/reality due to a constant moment-by-moment change, both in the world and in our sensory experience of it, as we engage in continuous reciprocal interactions. There is *always more*.¹⁵

To complicate this further, Crowther notes that subjective experience also includes many non-immediate experiences, such as memory, ideology, motivation etc.; so that even the simplest experiences are interwoven with non-immediate emotional, rational and cultural elements.

The result is that an *Experience* is actually made up of many different, contributory experiences from various sources and senses, and if any one contributory experience were removed, the overall *Experience* would be a different one. This situation effectively removes human embodied experience from the possibility of analysis, because a philosophical exploration of *ontological reciprocity* will inevitably be a translation of actual embodied experience, through reflective cognition and language. Philosophical analysis and description of sensory experience can only dismember and translate it into something other than itself, so destroying the actual experience.¹⁶

Crowther considers art to be a partial solution to this difficulty, because art is “the making of symbolically significant form out of, or into, sensuous manifolds”.¹⁷ Art, in other words, makes use of, and stimulates, a variety of embodied senses. Art, therefore, is the best method that we have for successful reflection on ontological reciprocity, through using those same sensory modes that were stimulated in the original embodied experience and thus avoiding translation and dismemberment in language. Art, therefore, performs a *conservation* of human embodied experience in material form, enabling a shared experience through art, embodied knowledge of it, as well as through reflection and dialogue.¹⁸

However, Crowther goes further than this conservation use for art, by also considering art to be an ecological *need* of human beings. Ecology is normally considered to be a biological relationship between an organism and its environment. But in the case of humans, consciousness creates additional psychological needs, so that a balanced and harmonious human relationship with the world must also include the fulfilment of consciousness needs; primarily, a satisfactory sense of self. We need “to see our inner life reflected in, and acknowledged by, Otherness”;¹⁹ to recognise others, and to receive recognition from others in return, through an externalisation of self. The making of artefacts, the completion of projects and the shared appreciation of these, are therefore considered to be important elements of human ecology.

The conclusions to be drawn from this text are: that not only does philosophical knowledge need art as a mode of understanding the ontologically reciprocal situation of humanity, but that the embodied subject, which inheres in the world as a *unified sensory field* with a consciousness of self, also needs art for a satisfactory human ecology. Art is able to express the multiple aspects of embodied experience, and the human satisfaction and realisation of “self” through this activity is social and reciprocal, and contributes to reflective activity.

Finally, to combat the perception that he might be proposing a universalising solution in these postmodern times, Crowther writes that historical conditions and cultural attitudes do change, although human beings are structured around biological constants, and “ontological reciprocity itself is the very root condition of human being”; therefore if “certain kinds of artefacts fulfil these needs” we should consider them of “universal significance in the ecology of human experience”.²⁰

contemporary art as social practice: the proactive search for new ways of knowing, being, and reinventing subjectivity

Bourriaud defines the *Relational Aesthetics* of his book title as: “aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt”.²¹ He explains that all works of art produce a model of sociability, though works may be more or less democratic. Forms produced in a totalitarian regime are more likely to be closed, with predetermined meaning, while more *democratic* forms will allow dialogue, and meaning is open and formed through interaction with the viewer.²² Relational art, however, intentionally creates new models of sociability that are not only open to dialogue but include the viewer in the making.

Bourriaud believes that critics have failed to fully appreciate art from the 1990s onwards because they have asked the wrong questions of it. Contemporary art, he writes, is interested in “interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts”,²³ which reflect changes in human relationships that are occurring in society. He specifies two (somewhat contradictory) sources for this change: first, change is due to modern technology and capitalist modes of exchange, which have caused relationships to be encountered as *spectacular* representation instead of directly experienced, because relational situations are increasingly imposed upon us or mediated by marketing, purchasing activity and electronic media.²⁴ This suggests that our sense of community is worse than in past times, with which many writers would not agree. The second reason for relational change is our increased urbanisation, with more intimate living conditions, greater mobility, and the growth of mediating technology creating a “system of intensive encounters”.²⁵

These changes have led to art forms focused upon inter-subjectivity. Art that previously emerged from an “independent, private symbolic space”²⁶ is increasingly relational and concerned with the realm of human interactions and its social context. Many contemporary art activities and performances are open-ended and occur in real-time, with the collaboration of viewers or audiences in the formation of the work, not merely as negotiators of meaning, but as participants in the work which would not exist without them. Bourriaud feels that instead of criticising contemporary relational art as a weak and élitist form of social and political comment, it should instead be understood as an attempt to invent models of sociability through *form*.²⁷

An example of relational art used by Bourriaud early in the book is by Rirkrit Tiravanija, who has created several impromptu meals within gallery spaces, installing a gas burner and cooking instant Thai soup to share with visitors. Due to its location within the artificial environment of the gallery space, and the usual audience of gallery visitors and collectors, this has been criticised as élitist and failing to address issues of community spirit or alienation in the real world. Bourriaud argues, on the contrary, that the work creates a real affect of community spirit in the moment of its performance, that the conviviality is not the *purpose* of the work; it is the *form* of the work. The work experiments with ways of being together, and with *forms* of interaction and acknowledgement, and as for other works of art the *form* is of primary importance rather than any possible political outcome. The work’s location within an art gallery is therefore not inappropriate for the work of art.²⁸

Bourriaud notes that there are no forms in nature. Form is entirely created by human society, and what was previously unrecognised develops as form through communication with others.²⁹ Form produces understanding, and passes it into everyday life,³⁰ which makes form *relational*, resulting from “perpetual transactions with the subjectivity of others”³¹; “the enemy” he says, “is embodied in a social form”, implying that we need to invent new forms, because the supplier/client relationship has spread to every aspect of human life, and “tacit contracts define our private life”, as we accept and conform to normalised behaviour and comply with social structures.³²

Bourriaud’s closing chapter references Félix Guattari and his concept of creating new forms of subjectivisation, and intentionally changing our subjectivity as opposed to the usual evolution of change emergent from economic or political conditions. Subjectivity is not created at the individual level, nor is it fixed and unalterable. It is produced

collectively, in human groups, and is affected by changes in context. For changes to occur in contemporary society, new forms of subjectivity must first be collectively produced; and “art is the thing upon and around which subjectivity can reform itself”.³³

Works of art give material quality to existential territories. Relational art simply uses other forms, related to other strategies for existence. All art preserves moments of subjectivity associated with singular experiences, but contemporary art expands on the material form by becoming more dynamic. It expands upon the traditional avant-garde project of “transforming attitudes and social structures”, attempting to create new ways of living and new modes of understanding. “Nothing is possible without far-reaching ecological transformation of subjectivities”.³⁴

On the penultimate page of his text, Bourriaud includes a quote from Félix Guattari – with which I will conclude this essay. Guattari writes that “the only acceptable end purpose of human activities is the production of a subjectivity that is forever self-enriching its relationship with the world”.³⁵

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- 1 Humberto R Maturana & Francisco J Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1998).
- 2 Paul Crowther, *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
- 3 Ibid., 6.
- 4 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les presses du reel, 2002).
- 5 Ibid., 112.
- 6 Maturana & Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge*, 197.
- 7 Ibid., 75.
- 8 Ibid., 198.
- 9 Ibid., 115.
- 10 Ibid., 192-3.
- 11 Ibid., 233.
- 12 Ibid., 234.
- 13 Maturana & Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge*, 245.
- 14 Crowther, *Art and Embodiment*, 2.
- 15 Ibid., 1.
- 16 Ibid., 3.
- 17 Ibid., 4.
- 18 Ibid., 7.
- 19 Ibid., 6.
- 20 Ibid., 9.
- 21 Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 112.
- 22 Ibid., 109.
- 23 Ibid., 8.
- 24 Ibid., 9.
- 25 Ibid., 15.
- 26 Ibid., 14.
- 27 Ibid., 81 -2.
- 28 Ibid., 82-3.
- 29 Ibid., 19-21.
- 30 Ibid., 83.
- 31 Ibid., 22.
- 32 Ibid., 83 -4.
- 33 Ibid., 97.
- 34 Ibid., 95.
- 35 Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 103 referencing Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1995).

TE WAKA ME TE HAERENGA: AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY TO TE WĀIPOUNAMU

Rose McLeod

In 2005 I relocated from Waiheke Island in the Hauraki Gulf, Auckland to Dunedin, a major transitional shift in my life. My studio work is an investigative exploration of my journey to Te Wāipounamu, reconnecting with my Kāi Tahu whānui and whakapapa.

I work with material responses to particular places as part of a broader exploration of the notion of navigation. My current art project is centred on a connection to place, Pari kiore, Clay Cliffs, Omarama, in the upper Waitaki basin in North Otago. I felt a connection to this place to be a mediating link between the past and present and also between myself as an individual and as part of my larger tribal identity. I use this particular place – which physically embodies many of the implied fears and attractions of my experience of navigating and belonging – as an anchoring device.

Early Southern Māori travelled the inland streams and rivers on a craft called a 'mokihi' or 'mogi', which they constructed with raupō (bulrush). They encountered raging torrential rivers and strong current flows as they navigated the inland routes. The mogi was constructed where the need arose to cross the inland waterways, and it was made on site and then left behind as they navigated further inland. I constructed a bicultural mogi with materials



Figure 1: Pari kiore, Clay Cliffs, Omarama (photograph by the artist).

sourced during a trip to Wanaka, using willow branches and other introduced prunings, harakeke (flax) and tikouka (cabbage tree) leaves, with some gifted raupō, as a cultural indicator to metaphorically express my inner journeying. The significance of this is that it links my own individual path with that of the collective, my iwi.

Kāi Tahu people were involved in a political struggle, Te Kerēme, the Claim, which bound them together for one hundred and fifty years. This came about “due to the Crown’s failure to provide the lands and resources promised to Kāi Tahu in the negotiation of the land purchases between 1844 and 1863, and the way in which the purchases were conducted. Due to these unfulfilled promises Kāi Tahu became the most landless tribe in the country and sank into poverty.”¹

“The loss of land placed enormous strain on tribal unity. Land had been the basis of the tribal economy and society; without it the collective was unable to function communally as it had done for centuries. Efforts to best use what little they had left were also crushed by the Government, who decided for Kāi Tahu and other Māori that the tribal institution itself had to be destroyed if they were to be civilised and be rid of their ‘low Māori habits’.”²

“They [the government] urged that each Māori should be put on a separate plot of land. By this means, they believed, the influence of the tribe would be lessened, individual competition would be encouraged, and Ngāi Tahu in spite of themselves would come to live more like Europeans.”³ “However, the importance of the tribe did not die in the minds and hearts of Kāi Tahu. Although they had been effectively excluded from participating in the southern economy of New Zealand, the tribe remained the focus of their identity and collective struggle to regain their position in the south.”⁴

My own spiritual development has been a conscious one, which began with the unexpected premature death of my father. How can someone you love be with you one moment and then gone the next, I asked myself, as I began to reflect on the nature of Life and one’s existence at a very young age in my life. I, too, have had to work extremely hard in this endeavour to arrive at my own personal place in my life. Such a process has been described from a



Figure 2: Rose McLeod , *Mokihi*, 2007, 200 x 50cms, willow, harakeke, tikouka (photograph by the artist).

Western perspective by Rudolf Steiner:

The fact of reincarnation lies at the heart of the anthroposophical view of human existence. Without it, it is hardly possible to conceive an evolution of the individual human being within the context of the history of mankind on earth. The continuum of history is normally seen as being founded in the life and progress of humanity as a whole and not in the individual. As individuals we take part in only a tiny fraction of history...the individual human being participates only briefly in the overall course of human evolution. Evolution is of the human species and not the individual.

He goes on to say that,

"if, over against this, we wish to see meaning and purpose in our individual life we have to seek it not in the evolution of the human species but in the evolution of each human being. We have to discern our present state in relation to the point at which we are in the overall picture of human development, accepting that as individuals we have shared in the whole of history and that we are responsible not just for our few years here but also for the whole of the future. Only then can we hope to understand the present, both in relation to where we as individuals are and in relation to where humanity is."⁵

This ties in with the Māori concept of being located simultaneously in the past, present and future. I and my work are centred on location, not just geographically, but also temporally in a wider process of both self and societal development. My art is an expression of the relationship between location and identity, but this location is not only physical, it is also cultural, societal and spiritual. The *mogi* in this sense is a metaphorical tool for navigation on all these levels.

My own processes of navigation have been practiced and learned over a long passage of time in my life, and have become quite finely tuned. The most important of these processes is that of attuning myself to my inner voice, otherwise known as Intuition. This is practised in relationship with people in one's life, experiences and situations and in relationship with the wider community and places in which we live. I have read many texts on the issue of 'place' and some of these are most meaningful for my studio work. One of these texts is Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather's *Embodied Geographies: Spaces, Bodies and Rites of Passage* in which she writes as follows:

...as we move from one location to another in the course of the day, we experience places as material, bounded realities...Such specific places acquire meaning for us, in many ways which phenomenologists have tried to tease out. The term 'sense of place' refers to this link between place and meaning – an existential quality, difficult to define, sometimes shared by many, sometimes different for each individual. 'Sense of place' sums up the unique character of some of the places that are part of our lives. We grow attached to such places – whether they are in the city or country – are defensive about them when they are threatened, and feel bereft when they are destroyed...In a sense, such places become part of us – of our identity. We regard the most special of such places as 'home' – an ideal melding of place, culture and beloved people.⁶

"Perhaps the most common concept of home is of a material, bounded place where our own activity spaces and those of people closest to us overlap. It is, ideally, where we are most comfortable with our positionality and our relationships with others; a place where we are accepted and affirmed as who we want to be."⁷ Kenworthy Teather continues:

The discipline of geography as we know it in the academy today began as a mapping project – to get to know and record the features of the earth's surface. Explorers and navigators brought back new maps and amazing stories from their journeys into unknown lands – journeys often undertaken with an imperialist, mercantile or scientific project in mind. [There is, however, another] sort of journey, equally rich in intriguing experiences and encounters, and undertaken by each one of us. It is a journey through time and space, from birth to death: a journey of personal discovery, during which periods of calm weather are interrupted by more tumultuous passages.⁸

"In using the term 'rites of passage' to refer to these life crises, we concentrate on the term passage. We interpret passage in the sense of transition."⁹ Kenworthy Teather then explains further: "Our passages, intensely personal, thread their way through, impact upon and are influenced by the institutional fabric of social life: home, work, school, family, religion, nation, for example. They make huge demands on our personal skills of navigation..."¹⁰

My father built our family home, on Auckland's North Shore, which we moved into in 1952, when I was aged five. It was very definitely 'our family's home', crafted with love and care on an acre of beautifully planted garden and it included a large vegetable patch, an orchard of fruit trees, chickens and shrubs, trees and flowers. This is where I grew up and I always had somewhere to call 'home'. My mother lived in it until she died in 1992, and then one of my brothers bought it and razed it to the ground in order to build eight townhouses on the property. I was devastated to visit one day and to find that not one single plant or tree remained of this beautifully mature, landscaped garden.

Kenworthy Teather reminds us that: "As a concept, home is inseparable from the concept of identity. When our home is destroyed, or irrevocably changed, or is inaccessible to us (after emigration, for example), it can seem as if we ourselves are no longer whole, or are suffering bereavement."¹¹ Having witnessed the razing to the ground of my family home, it made me realise that the concept of 'home' is not necessarily only the physical building or place. Later, my Waiheke home would become the first place in my life that I had purchased as an adult, created, lived in and cared for.

Other kinds of 'home' can, however, also exist. Joan Borsa writes about coming 'home' to one's practice as an artist and about how one's practice can be such a 'home' while one is moving between different localities.¹² Many acts are part of creating this 'home'. Gathering resources from the environment is one of these acts and is an integral part of my work. So, I set about collecting garments from my immediate surroundings for my clay slip work. Making this work also involved me in a process of thinking about the history of the land, and particularly of the area of Clay Cliffs. I thought of the people who had lived and perished in harsh circumstances there and in the greater South Island. I also thought of the earliest Māori, the European settlers and the goldminers who traversed vast areas of land, many of whom never survived. Initially the work took on a somewhat gloomy and despairing appearance, which was certainly aligned to those particular stories. The next step was to focus on a way of working with the clay so it did not become all dark and depressing as this is not how I wanted to speak of the issues I am involved with. I wanted to speak in terms of a more active mind-set and way of working of freeing up and allowing more bodily flow into the work to shift the reading of the work being produced towards a greater fluidity. I discovered that the use of my own clothing could become my personal connecting point as the memories and stories of these items of clothing have their own associations for me. Combining these highly personalised items with the clay slip in which I dipped them located my body physically 'in' the land, as it were. In relation to this act in my studio work, it is important to me that Jim Williams reminds us of the following: "The Māori word for land is *whenua*, the same word as for the placenta, which in most *iwi* was buried in the earth, at a place of importance to the *whānau* (often with a tree planted over it). At death, the body was buried in a place sacred to *whānau*, completing the circle. This symbolises interconnectedness between people and the land, which is the basis of the word for local people: *tāngata whenua*."¹³ Having been born into a family whose Māori ancestry was unknown for so long, my work only now takes on the symbolism of this custom.

Ka maumahama ai te whenua. The land remembers.¹⁴

Working with the garments and the clay slip was an experimental process: finding out how long things took to dry, what happened when different layers of slip were applied, etc. When building up the layers of the work, I became more actively engaged with the materials. The ways in which the garments hung, folded and developed new shapes became a sculpting process, linking my work to the natural formation of the Clay Cliffs. Hand work is another important aspect of my process as it involves physical engagement through all my senses, while my working environment and those from where the garments have come from and the land from where the clay comes all play into an experience of locatedness. I read the following and it relates to my own hand work: "Between myself and the material with which I create, no tool intervenes. I select it with my hands. I shape it with my hands. My hands transmit my energy to it. In translating idea into form, they always pass on to it something that eludes conceptualization. They reveal the unconscious."¹⁵

The paper clay slip, made from recycled shredded paper and other people's leftovers and remnants, sits very comfortably with me in a Western world of hyper-consumption. My process thus suggests an alternative to this hyper-consumption, while it also posits an alternative for the fast-moving life of people living in a Western context. As with my past hand-stitching practice, where every stitch counts, one at a time, I have found the moulding of

clay onto the garments a slowing down, grounding process which enables quiet contemplation. Julian Zugazagoitia writes of the work of Kim Sooja:

The act of sewing is one of intimacy, of withdrawing into oneself, close to symbiosis with a state of being that represents both tradition and family memory. This activity – almost passive, entralling – locks the artist into a sequence of slow movements that repeat to infinity and are conducive to meditation. It is to be one with oneself, the fact of saturating oneself in one's own history...It is the point of the needle which penetrates the fabric, and we can connect two different parts of the fabrics with threads, through the eye of the needle. A needle is an extension of the body, and a thread is the extension of the mind. The traces of the mind always remain in the fabric, but the needle leaves the site when its medialization is complete. The needle is the medium, mystery, reality, hermaphrodite, barometer, a moment, and a Zen.¹⁶

Whilst not using a needle and thread as I usually do with the felt and textile work, I experience the same intimacy and slowness of making when working with the clothing and clay slip together.

The next stage was firing. I was told not to have expectations as the firing process is always unknown and at times hazardous. On opening the gas kiln, I was, however, faced with a total collapse of the work, a kiln full of shards and fragments of the garments – all beautifully fired, but metamorphosed. I was horrified at the disaster, but quickly realised there was no time or space for lamentation. An instant mental transition was required – to see it not as I had planned or expected, but rather as the reality of what was in front of me: not necessarily the end of what had been, even though in one sense it was, but rather as a new beginning – new life contained within the old, only apparent after the ordeal by fire. More importantly, I could instantly make the connection with aspects of my own personal inner experiences after coming South. I had to allow myself to enter into an experience of relinquishing control of a situation, producing a result unable to be programmed or foreseen: moving into the unknown, taking risks, picking up the pieces afterwards in order to make some sense of and gain understanding from the experience. This experience involves seeing matters in a different light, in ways we have not been able to see them before. I had developed new eyes to view with after letting go of my original ideas. In this process the work came to speak succinctly of my experiences of partial identity disintegration after travelling South.



Figure 3: Shards of work in the opened kiln (photograph by the artist).

What was I to do with the work now? Further steps were required. I began to lay it out on a very large floor, exploring the readings that different placements and compositions suggested. One thing became very apparent and that was that the formality I chose in the layout took on the appearance of a large archaeological dig, with groupings of similar pieces together forming parts of a whole.

The work suggested to me that something had happened to it and it became my job to form a new relationship with it in its radically changed form. As in an archaeological excavation, the pieces were unearthed from the kiln and then examined for meaning and identification and understanding in their wider cultural, social and spiritual context.

In relocating to the South, I had no idea that a deeper level of my own residual fears and doubts would need to be unearthed and brought to the surface to be released through my inner journeying. Had I remained in a lovely warm island climate, these may not have surfaced quite as dramatically as they did. External circumstances and environments often are the trigger points for such surfacings and their concomitant transformations.

Diana Wood Curry, in an article entitled "The Archaeological Metaphor: a Personal Excavation", writes: "Sites and fragments also become a metaphor for personal pain and loss."¹⁷

And so, I return to the Clay Cliffs and why I chose this particular location to base my work on. In doing so, I am reminded of Ronda Cooper's paper presented at a Visual Arts Forum in Dunedin in 1992, in which she asked:

What are the qualities that give a place meaning? What makes a place special, a landscape important, valuable, unique? What makes a particular place worth caring about – worth caring for, and conserving for future generations?...Some places are obviously so distinctive, so extraordinary in their sheer physical insistence that they immediately capture our spirits and our imaginations...Many places derive meaning and significance from their ecology – their natural characteristics and values...There are also sites of exceptional archaeological importance, sites of pre-history which have value for scientific and palaeontological research – caves and cliffs with moa bones and older fossils...another, perhaps less easily quantifiable set of criteria [exist] for meaning



Figure 4: Practice layout (photograph by the artist).

in landscape - [for] places that have meaning because of cultural rather than natural qualities, places that are important for the human presence, places where something happened. The meaning of many landscapes requires us to ask questions about the past as well as to understand the physical realities of the location itself.¹⁸

I reflect back to my family home where I grew up. This place no longer exists. However, the memories are still there in the very structure of my cellular memory, quite vividly. Sculptor Michael Parekowhai says: "our meeting house in my iwi homeland has two sides and a ceiling. It's got no carving. It's just little. It's not used any more, but it is abandoned only in the physical sense. This is because we know we belong to this place. We carry its spirit with us, wherever we go."¹⁹

Ronda Cooper writes: "Place provides the basic framework for vitally important connections with ancestors and family, a person's essential identity as expressed in his or her whakapapa. Who you are, and who your family is and was, is a part of the place – a personal referencing and specificity not always so highly valued in European culture. And in turn, places are defined and delineated by the resonances of the individual people who lived there or passed through. Sites derive meaning from their inhabitants and their stories and actions – the first discoverers, the famous travellers and explorers, neighbours, allies and invaders, husbands and wives and lovers."²⁰

She writes of the concept of kaitiakitanga, guardianship of the land, conveying the sense of time future as well as time past, acknowledging that we are only caretakers of the land for the future generations. We are part of a continuum that stretches back to Rangī and Papa, and also move forward into the future. This is a most serious responsibility towards future generations.

The fired work, albeit fragmented, resembled the Cliffs' formation to my satisfaction and excitement. On taking some pieces down to the foreshore of the Pūrakaunui Estuary where I now live, I laid them out, documenting the effects of the tide's ebb and flow on them over the next few days and weeks. Not only were my own clothes and those of others in the work, transformed by fire, but the laying out on the foreshore gave me a very real sense of connection to this beautiful place.



Figure 5 & 6: Fired pieces laid out at on the foreshore (photographs by the artist)

After these experiments with placing the work in a natural environment, I then had to give serious consideration as to how to exhibit the work in a more public context as my journey did not only involve myself, but also my whānui and my relationships with other people outside that context.

Understanding and reading the work became part of the next task, and this engaged me in a process of exploring different compositional elements and placings which could suggest various interpretations and readings. I chose to use the horizontality of an archaeological grid for layout. Considering where my practice connected or intersected with a theoretical framework also became part of my next research task, as did studying other artists exploring similar territory. These artists provide me with a sense of artistic community and I identify some of them below, with the assistance of critical art writers Hal Foster, Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss:

For with the object often disturbed, if not dissolved, and the gaze of the viewer often diffused, if not deranged... a new configurative intimation of the body became possible. Early on, [Lucy] Lippard called this corporeal evocation (it was most apparent in [Eva] Hesse) a 'body-ego', more recently, critics such as Rosalind Krauss and Anne Wagner have discussed it instead as non-representational registering of psychic fantasies and bodily drives. It is these three dimensions that are distinctive to Process Art – a logic of materials, a field effect, and a phantasmatic corporeality – and they are probed most effectively by [Richard] Serra, [Robert] Morris and Hesse respectively.²¹

For Morris...process was a way less to continue sculpture than to move 'beyond objects' altogether. This 'beyond' was not, however, a conceptual reduction of art to an essential idea but an enquiry into its fundamental viscosity: 'to take the conditions of the visual field' as its 'structural basis'. To this end Morris would present an array of materials such as thread, waste or dirt that could not be grasped, in profile or in plan, as an image at all – less to set the viewer in motion (as with Serra) than to shift from a focal gaze on a specific object to a 'vacant stare' on a visual field...the process here concerns viscosity more than materiality. Or, more precisely, it concerns a viscosity that is at once materialised in stuff and scattered in space, decentered from any subject – as if to register that vision is somehow in the world too, that the world gazes back at us as well. Serra and Morris often force our bodies into a phenomenological confrontation with an object or a field that undoes any purity or stability of form. With Hesse, this undoing is also psychological: it is as if, charged in a strange empathy with her objects, our bodies are disrupted from within. Rather than painting or sculpture that reflects a proper figure, an ideal body-ego, back to us as in a mirror, Hesse evokes a body 'deterritorialized' by desires and drives that just might be our own.²²

My own work is a looping through of personal narrative and a more generic account of position and the way in which one belongs in the world and in places. I do not insist that my audience focus on any given object in my work. It is much more important to me that they experience a field of objects arranged in reference to an archaeological excavation with its careful attention to objects as part of a larger schema.

Thus, the work itself will have undertaken a journey of its own. I view it as a body with extended limbs, a body scattered in particular locations so that it can speak of a sense of place in relation to my own struggle for emplacement. The body of the work is not a single, not a centred, whole and complete unit. Rather, it is a fluid body in fragments, partly 'deterritorialized' in a scattered and decentered manner. Despite my struggle for locatedness and emplacement, I cannot ever reach this in a final and stable sense. Having come to my Kāi Tahu identity only at a late stage in my life, it is rather the process of trying to find a place – in the face of the impossibility of this task – than the arrival at a stable location which underpins my studio work.

Rose McLeod is an inter-media artist who works with textiles, found object assemblage, painting and ceramics. She is completing her Master of Fine Arts Degree at Otago Polytechnic in 2008.

1 Hana O'Regan, *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity* (Christchurch: Horomaka Publishing, 2001) 78.

2 Ibid., 80.

3 HC Evison, *Te Wāipounamu: The Greenstone Island* (Wellington: Aoraki Press, 1993) 396, as cited in O'Regan.



Figure 7: Exhibition, Whareenui Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka Ki Puketeraki Marae, September, 2008 (photograph by Max Oettli)

- 4 Hana O'Regan, *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity* (Christchurch: Horomaka Publishing, 2001) 78.
- 5 Michael Tapp, "Is Reincarnation a Christian Idea?", in *Anthroposophy at Work*, Number 1, 1994, *Journal of the Anthroposophical Society in New Zealand*, p.27.
- 6 Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather, "Introduction : Geographies of Personal Discovery", in Teather, Elizabeth Kenworthy (ed.), 1999, *Embodied Geographies : Spaces, Bodies and Rites of Passage* (London and New York: Routledge) 2.
- 7 Ibid., 4.
- 8 Ibid., 1.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., 4.
- 12 Joan Borsa, "Nomadic Locations, Travelling Subjects: Affirmation of Autobiographical Acts", in White, Peter (ed.) *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future* (Banff: Walter Phillips, 1996) 68.
- 13 Jim Williams, "Papatūānuku: Attitudes to Land", in Ka'ai, Tania M. et al, eds. *Ki te Whaiao: An Introduction to Maori Culture* (Auckland: Pearson Longman, 2004) 50.
- 14 Translation given to me by Dr Jim Williams.
- 15 Magdalena Abakanowicz, in *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago and New York: Abbeville Press, 1983) 102.
- 16 Julian Zugazagoitia, "An Incantation to Presence", in Thierry Raspail and Jean-Hubert Martin (Preface), *Kim Sooja: Conditions of Humanity*, (Catalogue Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, 2003) 57.
- 17 Diana Wood Cury, "The Archaeological Metaphor : a Personal Excavation", *Artlink*, 12 (20), winter 1992, 23.
- 18 Ronda Cooper, "The Why of Where, Meaning and Meaningless in New Zealand Landscape", in *The Body of the Land*, South Island Arts Project, Visual Arts Forum (Dunedin: QEII Arts Council, 1992) 32.
- 19 Michael Parekowhai cited in Jim and Mary Barr, "The Indefinite Article, Michael Parekowhai's Riff on Representation", *Art Asia Pacific*, 23, 73-76.
- 20 Ronda Cooper, "The Why of Where, Meaning and Meaningless in New Zealand Landscape", in *The Body of the Land*, South Island Arts Project, Visual Arts Forum (Dunedin: QEII Arts Council, 1992) 32.
- 21 Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh, Benjamin, *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004) 535.
- 22 Ibid., 536-537.

THE WHOLE IS NOT A SUM OF THE PARTS – THINKING ABOUT AUTHENTICITY

Bridgit Inder

Cultural Identity. For some this is a non issue, for some a notion of identity in New Zealand has been bandied about for long enough, thank you very much, where is the problem? For some this 'non issue' is resolved. But I would ask this, where do the interests lie for those people? What do they consider their cultural heritage? How can something as subtle and complex as cultural identity be resolved already in such a young nation as ours?

When it comes to identity, and more specifically cultural identity, authenticity is a hotly debated and a highly emotive topic. Who or what is authentic? Who decides? What does one have to do to be considered authentic? And what is the impact on a person's experience of self when their identity and right to it are being judged by another? Is there any other circumstance where an individual's identity is so challenged as it is when it comes to being culturally 'authentic'?

In February 2008 a half day symposium titled *Teutonic Plates: a Collection of Glimpses on Cultural Complexity* was held at the Otago Polytechnic School of Fine Art. During this symposium, I delivered a short paper – “Not a Real Samoan”, in which I discussed the issues of growing up in a society where, for me, my cultural identity was judged largely on my appearance. The tongue-in-cheek title came from a conversation with a colleague who deemed me not a real Samoan due to my mannerisms, superficial likes, dislikes and upbringing. Although it was intended to be lighthearted, it did highlight the issues for those of us who feel we must fight for and justify our right to something which is already ours. Often it is those of us who are in-between cultures – belonging to more than one, consolidating contradictions and conflicts, not obviously one or the other – who are most strongly challenged. Perhaps this is because we challenge the boundaries of cultures.

A person of mixed cultural heritage is not considered 100% anything, but, for example, in my case, 50% New Zealand European and 50% Samoan. It could be claimed, and has in the past, that I relate only to 50% of each culture. Now add my upbringing in New Zealand, take away, say, 25% of my 'Samoanness' for that, and suddenly I'm 75% New Zealand/European and 25% Samoan. I'm not sure how this works, but there are many who follow this line of thinking in relation to cultural authenticity.

Certainly I would hope that I identify with more than just 25% of what it is to be Samoan, or, more specifically, what it is to be a New Zealand-born Samoan, and I have definitely never felt less of a New Zealander because of my mixed heritage.

This may seem somewhat trite, but all too often this, or similar attitudes and stereotypes underpin discussions. It is unhelpful and belittles by trying to measure the immeasurable. Such an attitude also ignores the concept of dual ethnicity. Recently a friend signed up to the student job search program at Otago University. When ticking the 'which ethnic group do you belong to' box, she was confronted by the fact that she could only tick one; she was either one, or the other. According to the forms, she could not be both. Cultural identity is not a binary, it cannot be categorised into boxes, nor can the same set of criteria be applied to everyone.

A culture is a living thing, and, like all living things, a culture evolves. Yet the term 'authentic' is almost exclusively applied to non western cultures. It is as if only the west has the right to change and move on; while indigenous cultures – to be able to retain the title of 'authentic' – must stay static. This, by implication, means that they must not engage with the world in a contemporary sense; that they must stay out of the cities, and have to remain aware of the strong dividing line between traditional/authentic and contemporary/not authentic, or fake. This does not allow

for the interaction between contemporary and traditional, nor does it allow those of us with dual ethnicity to speak from a position of coming from more than one location. This also means that indigenous cultures are not allowed the freedom to engage internationally in a contemporary sense.

They, like every other culture on the globe, are subject to change and are changing constantly. I want to emphasise that such a thing as a Stone Age culture (static and unchanging) is a myth created by those who should know better. All societies and cultures change and adapt, and this is fact, not theory.¹

Those of us residing in a cultural in-between space may not wish to discard one completely for another, and in all likelihood, this is impossible to do. We may be quite comfortable in this in-between space, defining it ourselves. We are looking, observing, and have taken the power to define it for ourselves. We are just waiting for everyone else to evolve and to catch up. We are waiting for them to realise that when it comes to who has the right to what – when it comes to cultural authenticity – we do not need any more uninformed judgements.

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1 Mudrooroo, "White Forms, Aboriginal Content", in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) 228.

PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S WORK: A HANDMADE STORY

Lamis Mawafi



Figure 1: Lamis Mawafi, *Khiam el-Basha*, thread on fabric, 2008 (photograph by the artist).

*Sometimes you hear the news... and you know that there's a war going on...
you find the news unbearable... Yet you have to absorb it like a bitter drink...*

*Sometimes you think about the war and you wonder if humans
deserve to be called the best creation of God on earth...*

*Sometimes you think of all the olive trees in the Middle East and wonder how many
more you need to plant so that peace could exist... And you make yourself believe
that tomorrow will be better... although you know that this will happen again and again...*

Sometimes you wonder why anyone would want to destroy anyone?

Sometimes you look so calm while people in Gaza are butchered...

*Sometimes you wait for a reaction... You lose patience and curse... you breathe
with difficulty... and are puzzled: why have you not yet died from rage?*

Sometimes you feel guilty while having lunch... and you think of hunger...

Sometimes you have to admit that pain exists... and that you feel worn out...

Sometimes you avoid the news... and you say nothing... and do nothing...

*But at other times... you think of the children... of the women... sitting by the light of an oil
lamp... stitching... they let the stitches speak... there's love for life... and a desire to be alive...*

*In their patterns you never see death... but you see a flower, a tree... a sun...
a foreign moon... And birds waiting to return... you see belonging... and you let yourself
be embraced by the stitches... hearing their hidden language... and you admire these
women... and you decide to do something... to stitch...*

Embroidery can involve a private, quiet time for some women. But for Palestinian women, embroidery connects them to their history before the diaspora and their complex problems since the diaspora. Each motif has a name which links it with a particular location prior to the diaspora. In these patterns one can, for example, see an Olive Branch, the Key of Hebron, the Tiles of Bethlehem, and the Mountains of Jerusalem. Palestinian embroidery is not only a material practice, but also a way for the women to connect with their history, to keep it alive and to speak of their geopolitical loss. Through slow stitching which involves a contemplative state, they celebrate and grieve.

In 1967 my friend's mother Ghazieh was stitching a dress for herself in a village called Aldawaymeh near Hebron. Then the war happened and they had to evacuate their village and flee to Jordan, and she never had her dress finished. She only made the front panel which she wanted me to have when I got married and she said I will know what to do with it. This piece stayed in my closet for four years until my graduation last year when I decided to bring it back to life..

In her stitching Ghazieh used a few motifs: Eye of the Cow, Cypress Trees, a Saw, and Flower Pots. These are mainly from the Hebron area. But the shade of the red thread – which is a wine red – was used in the Jaffa area and not in Hebron.

The Cypress Tree motif is one of the most popular in all the areas of Palestine, and it takes a variety of forms in different geographical areas. The vast range of possibilities for arranging the stitches in so many different ways is really what the art of the needle is all about. It has rules of structure; it has stability; it has a system; it creates by using the elements of a language; it consists of signs and meanings which we can understand if we learn the code.

Inspirations for patterns have come from the most beautiful carpets, from mosaics and tiles, from ceramics, printed fabrics, and even from architectural motifs. Many of the names of the designs come from peaceful village life, examples being Bridal Comb, Bottom of the Coffee Cup, Chicken's Feet, Chick Peas and Raisins, Four Eggs in a Pan, Soap Slices, and Old Man's Teeth! Other names are deliberately humorous, with a social commentary embedded in them. Two birds facing away from each other could be "a young woman and her mother in law". And yet other motifs refer to millennia of foreign occupation: "Pasha's Tent" being a reference to Ottoman times; and "Officer's Badge" being a reference to British mandatory military uniforms. Often different generations and different villages use a different name for the same motif. A daughter, for example, could alter a pattern slightly and rename it for herself.

I have been stitching continuously. Sometimes I sit for hours and stitch until I become like a dervish – unaware of what am doing, unaware of time. I stitch till my fingers hurt and then I pause and I think of Palestinian women stitching... what do they think of? I think these women will be asking themselves while stitching: Who are we? Where do we come from? And where are we now after the Palestinian diaspora?

Stitching can be a way to heal... a way to mourn...or a way to erase that moment of departure... that moment when they had to leave. But also, the patterns tell of history and for Palestinian women they are like maps which pull them together, connecting them. Although something has been lost, the representation of loss can sustain them to some extent. This representation through embroidery is what they still have. For the older generation it speaks of a life, of a place, of stability, of geography. Now these things have completely disappeared. But the loss of the real Palestine has given birth to a Palestine of the imagination, a Palestine that can be materialised through the use of thread and needle. The women will always long for the real Palestine, but they will never lose the Palestine that exists in the inner world of their memories...and the importance of embroidery for them lies in how it helps to fill the gaping holes in their hearts and to clear the blurred images in their minds.

*We embroidered the side panels for such a long time!
remember Halimeh when we were pals?
We embroidered the chest panels for such a long time!
remember Halimeh when we were girls?*
Henna Night Song, Beit Dajan

Palestinian embroidery is not only unusually beautiful. It also tells stories. It is often assumed that Arab women have no say. But the women who have embroidered these dresses, who have chosen their own designs, have also chosen the statements their works make.

And also, there's something really positive about these women. These women do not give up, even though most of the world has given up on them. These women are saying something. They may not have the ability to make huge decisions, but they can still decide what colour to use, and which pattern works better with which design. These women are being creative even if this creativity derives from blurred memories of place or from dreaming of a better life. These women make a powerful impression on me...and I think I will be stitching for some time yet.

Lamis Mawafi immigrated to New Zealand from Jordan in 2003 and is a Master of Fine Arts graduate from Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand. She works mainly in the textile arts. She is currently involved in an embroidery project which identifies themes of peace and war by engaging with the plight of Palestinian women in the Middle East.



Figure 2: Lamis Mawafi, detail from an embroidery, thread on fabric, 2008 (photograph by the artist).

INDIA 1947-2007: A REFLECTION

Jubilee Rajiah



Figure 1: Jitish Kallat, 2003, *Public Notice*, burnt adhesive on acrylic mirror, wood and stainless steel frames, 5 panels, each 198.1 x 137.1 x 15.2, collection: Shumita and Arani Bose, New York, photographer Reena Saini Kallat, installation view at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai in 2003 (image courtesy of the artist).

Jitish Kallat's *Public Notice* (figures 1 and 2) is an apt symbolic depiction of India as it is today, more than fifty years after Independence. It is a work that is poignant and disturbing; distorted, mangled and warped, and yet large and imposing and gripping. The lofty ideals and inspirational themes burnt and inscribed on it were first proclaimed during the auspicious and momentous event of declaration of Independent India. Nehru's famous speech was delivered at midnight on the 14th of August 1947 when India gained independence after two centuries of British rule. India held its breath and throughout the land people waited with expectant anticipation for their beloved leader to deliver his speech. "And, at the stroke of the midnight hour, Nehru spoke. In English." Pavan K Varma points this out in his book *The Great Indian Middle Class*.¹

Nehru's speech was elegant and beautifully crafted, and is indelibly fixed in the memory of all Indians. It is etched in history just like other famous speeches by prominent and important statesmen and political figures. The striking contradiction and incongruity of Nehru addressing a newborn Independent India in English appears to have gone unnoticed and unremarked until Varma's study on contemporary India and its overpoweringly prominent middle-class. *Public Notice* powerfully, vividly and disturbingly illustrates India as it is today. It does in art what Varma has daringly and distressingly portrayed in his book.

Nehru's speech was inspiring and evocative. "Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will wake to life and freedom. A moment comes but rarely in history, when we step from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."

Sixty years from that night, Varma avers that India is still trysting. India has achieved and maintained its position as the largest democracy in the world. But what has happened to the Gandhi-Nehru legacy? What has become of the dreams and desires of the newly independent India? What is the reality for the people of India? Has India indeed woken to life and freedom? Varma's penetrating insight into the heart of India, its polity and its people is frightening and painful. His book confronts and challenges, and does not grant the average middle-class Indian any comfort or credibility. He traces the beginnings of the Indian middle-class to the time of British rule. He explores the creation of this élite group by the British, who chose them and cultivated them for their proficiency in the English language. They occupied important positions of civil office under the British, and they were the professionals and the educated who established themselves in a privileged and secure world.

Whilst the vision for Independent India focused on the poor and disadvantaged, and on rural India, this was eclipsed as Varma says by the stronghold of the élite who could not, and would not internalise the legacy that Gandhi and Nehru wished to leave for India. Gandhi's emphasis was on the upliftment of the poor and illiterate, the disadvantaged and disenfranchised; and Nehru's focus was on modernity, science and technology for the sake of loosening the hold that religion had on Indians.

Fledgling independent India grappled with these ideals but the élite and the middle-class feathered their nests, and did no more than pay lip-service to making this a reality. Economic reforms in 1991 saw a rapidly burgeoning and powerful middle-class and the ever-increasing prominence of India in the global arena. Varma demonstrates with utmost clarity in his book that modernity and progress for India have become synonymous with materialism, self-service and exclusivity, with a total lack of social sensitivity and concern for the majority of Indians who are poor, illiterate, hungry, and shackled by the issues of caste, creed and colour which the middle class sheds when convenient and holds onto when it suits their purposes.

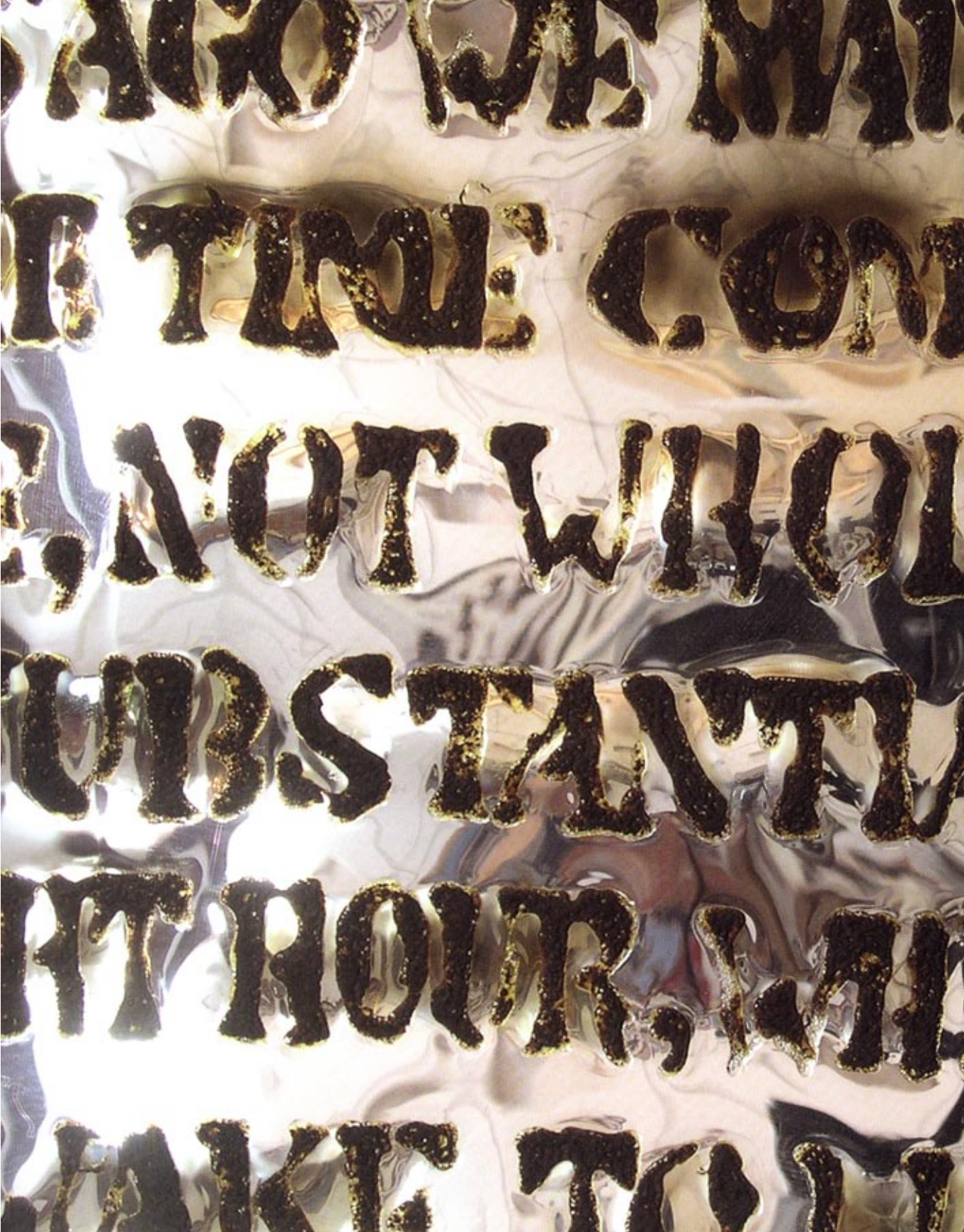
Varma's thesis fits perfectly with Kallat's installation. It is only élite and middle-class Indians who are likely to view this piece of art. Standing in front of the installation and seeing oneself reflected amongst the inscriptions forces one to come to the shocking and uncomfortable realisation that the broken, burnt and warped ideology one reads there is in fact a mirror image of oneself, of the destructive and twisted way in which Indians have actually lived and worked out their independence and freedom. The trysting with destiny currently entails despicable treatment of our poor and disadvantaged. Seen in this light, the inscriptions are a mockery when juxtaposed with communal riots, religious tensions, unimaginable disparity between rich and poor, and the tyranny of caste and class that continue to plague India.

Kallat, like Varma, convicts the educated, middle-class Indian and provokes intense shame and guilt. They are ruthlessly honest, and they are able to instruct and inspire. Perhaps the Gandhi-Nehru legacy will be rekindled, and perhaps India will truly wake to life and freedom for all its people?

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I Pavan K Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998).

Figure 2: Jitish Kallat, 2003, *Public Notice* detail, burnt adhesive on acrylic mirror, wood and stainless steel, collection: Shumita and Arani Bose, New York, photographer Reena Saini Kallat (image courtesy of the artist).



AND WE WANT
TO TIME CON
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CONTEMPORARY IRAQI ART: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Qassim Saad

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary art movement in Iraq began in the early 20th century, influenced by and interacting with the European styles emerging at that time, and with European methods of teaching and practising art. Later, with the “restoration” of ancient traditions from the golden age of Islamic art, a unique interplay was created between the rich artistic history of the region and the radical new possibilities offered by Modernism. The result was a flourishing and authentic contemporary art movement in the Arab world.

In the dynamic and unstable environment that has been Iraq from the mid-20th century to the current situation; the contemporary art movement has developed in part as a reflection of the socio-cultural situation in Iraq, and in part as a voice for criticism and comment on it.

This article will provide a glimpse at the development of this movement, which continues to evolve through the creative work of many Iraqi artists living inside and outside of Iraq, with special attention paid to the discourse of “restoration”, which forms a basis for some of the important recurring themes of recent Iraqi art. I will rely on demonstration; examining the work, aims, and cultural and artistic contexts of significant groups who helped to shape the unique direction of contemporary Iraqi art. As well as an introduction to these artists, this article will establish a basis for more in-depth future work.

FROM WORLD WAR I TO WORLD WAR II

Political realities in Iraq have long played a large role in shaping the social and cultural world. The media was the cultural phenomenon which played the largest role in presenting to Iraqi people images of the instabilities that afflicted their nation; war, peace, development and war again. These conditions are interwoven into Iraqi life, and have repeated themselves throughout history from ancient times to the present.

Early impulses towards modernity in Iraqi art were associated with the end of World War I, beginning with a group of Iraqi soldier artists educated in Turkey. They adopted the European academic convention of oil painting and applied it to local landscapes, military scenes and archaeological sites. Socially, these works attracted the patronage of the upper-class, who was attracted in part to its status as a new medium for delivering their conservative perspectives in political and religious discourse.

Government support for the arts in the post-World War I period was initially reflected in a number of sponsored scholarships for Iraqi artists, allowing them to study at fine arts academies in Paris, Rome, London and Berlin. These scholarships contributed significantly to establishing a solid base for a contemporary art movement in Iraq. The Music Institute was the first artistic institution to be established in Baghdad, followed later by departments for visual arts, drama, and design. Faiq Hassan (1914 - 1987) was Iraq's most prominent artist at this time, having completed his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. He was chosen to be the Head of Painting at the institute. The European discourse of Modernism was being promoted and enthusiastically received in the Arabic and Middle Eastern region. It was seen as initiating a radical new era after a long period of control by the Ottoman Empire and its conservative ideologies. The education system was also swiftly developing at this time to meet the requirements of building the new state of Iraq under British supervision.

In the early years of World War II, Iraqi artists found many opportunities to interact with international artists. The arrival of Polish soldiers in Iraq in particular inspired new ideas and directions for Iraqi artists, as several of these soldiers were also practising artists. They were increasingly inspired to “abandon the clinical, academic style of the past and explore new horizons,” and it was felt that “an uninhibited, personalised and emotionally involved vision should be sought, not necessarily based on naturalistic representation, but penetrating beyond objects and phenomena to seek their true essence”¹. Artists such as Faiq Hassan and Jewad Selim (1921-1961) were particularly inspired by these new, Modernist approaches and explored Cubism and Expressionism in their work. The nature of the post-World War II environment was later reflected vividly in Iraqi art, which addressed the suffering it had caused locally and internationally as well as its effects on social and political life.

THE PHENOMENON OF ART GROUPS

The groups of artists that formed early on in the Iraqi contemporary art movement were clearly influenced by European practices. These groups were established and led by artists who had completed their higher education at European art institutions. The roots of these alliances should also be viewed within the context of modernisation at the time, which promoted collective action towards improving the socio-cultural fabric of Iraqi life. As a matter of fact, these artists contributed actively in creating the cultural structure of their society.

Al-Ruwad (The Pioneers) was the first group, formed by Faiq Hassan in the 1940s. Their first group exhibition was in 1950. They developed a movement towards incorporating local phenomena into art, and rejected what they saw as the artificial atmosphere of the artist's studio by engaging with nature and traditional Iraqi life.²



Figure 1: Faiq Hassan, *Desert*, 1975, oil on canvas, 100 x 75cm (image courtesy of Rafa Al-Nasiri).

Jama'et Baghdad lil Fen al-Hadith (The Baghdad Modern Art Group) was established by Jewad Selim after he withdrew from the Pioneers group in 1951. For Jewad, “art was to be a tool to reassert national self-esteem and help build a distinctive Iraqi identity”³. He rejected Western imperialism and railed against its effects on life in Iraq and the Arab region. In Jewad's attempt to define Iraqi art, he drew attention to Iraq's unique artistic contributions to world art, from the products of ancient Iraqi civilisations to the miniatures of the Islamic golden age in the 13th Century. He endeavoured to restore many artistic practices from Iraq's history, and to reincorporate motifs from past eras into his contemporary work. According to al-Khamis, Jewad was “the first Iraqi artist to embark on a quest for national artistic identity within a modern conceptual framework”⁴. The seeds sown by the Baghdad Modern Art Group continued to grow even after the death of its main figurehead, with many young Iraqi artists, architects and designers building on the discourse it had created.



Figure 2: Jewad Selim, *Nusob Al-Hurreya (Monument to Freedom)*, 1961, Baghdad, Iraq.⁵ (image courtesy of Rafa Al-Nasiri).

RESTORATION

Iraq, being a conservative and religious oriented society, still harbours nostalgia for the artistic past in which symbols ornamenting objects held unlimited meaning. In Islamic art both the Arabic letters and the ornamental compositions (geometric and organic) which typically grace art works contain the power of divine symbolism in addition to their aesthetic values. This belief is based on the core position of the Arabic language in the life of Muslims, with the Quran miraculously utilising the language to present a precise description of religious truth⁶. There is therefore a strong societal inclination to present this discourse as an authentic context for art practice. This environment encourages what Jean Baudrillard calls the "nostalgia for origins and the obsession with authenticity"⁷. In the 1950s, when Iraqi artists engaged with restoration, which was becoming a driving principle in creating an Iraqi artistic identity, their efforts met with broad acceptance from society.

Jewad Selim initiated the move in this direction on the basis of his direct interaction with ancient Iraqi artworks (through his early experience of work at the Iraqi museum). Other members of the Baghdad Modern Art Society followed suit alongside a number of newly graduated architects who developed their own trends toward creating a national identity within architecture.⁸

This movement was supported effectively by Government policies initiated after the 1970s. These were designed to enhance the role of historical motifs and styles as well as Islamic symbolism in Iraqi art and architecture. This support began in the wake of the 1958 revolution, which created a socialist, republican government and ended the monarchy which preceded it. The Academy of Fine Arts was established, offering degree programmes in plastic arts, drama, design, cinema, and later in calligraphy. This institution contributed much to the promotion of political and social consciousness in art principles and practice, and formed the core training ground for members of the contemporary art movement.⁹ Government support continued and in 1962 the National Museum of Modern Art was established, with the aim of providing a supportive environment for artists and of facilitating national and international collaborations.

THE NEW WAVE OF ART GROUPS

The continued evolution of the work of Iraqi artists is reflected in the emergence of new kinds of art groups, presenting alternative theories of how to engage with "restoration" and its context. They emphasise utilising its content and the tools it has employed to address the rapid development of modern life. This second wave started at the end of the 1960s, initiated by young artists who had graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and/or European and Far East schools of art.



Figure 3: Rafa al-Nasiri, *Light from Darkness*, 2008, acrylic & mixed media on board, 120cm (image courtesy of Rafa Al-Nasiri)



Figure 4: Rafa al-Nasiri, *Light from Darkness*, 2008, acrylic & mixed media on canvas, 120x120cm (image courtesy of Rafa Al-Nasiri)

Al-Ru'yah al-Jadida (The New Vision) issued their manifesto in 1968, announcing their revolutionary vision: "We believe that heritage is not a prison, a static phenomenon or a force capable of repressing creativity so long as we have the freedom to accept or challenge its norms... We are the new generation. We demand change, progression and creativity. Art stands in opposition to stasis. Art is continually creative. It is a mirror to the present moment and it's the soul of the future".¹⁰ The members considered the development of new concepts and techniques in Iraqi art works to be a key objective and commitment, a commitment which persists still (albeit without the group slogan) through the continued output of these members in the current Iraqi art movement. Rafa al-Nasiri (living outside Iraq from 1991) was a member of the group, and is now a key figure in the Iraqi contemporary art context. He is dedicated to experimentation and the creation of new, innovative methods and techniques in his works.

Shaker Hassan Al Said (1925-2004) played an active role in the Baghdad Modern Art Group throughout the 1950s, enhancing the philosophical principles of the group. He was heavily involved in broad intellectual research into the discourses of Islamic Sufism and Arabic literature. He used this wealth of data as an inspiration for his work as a painter and art theorist, and became a founding member of *Jama'et al-Bu'd al Wahid* (the One Dimension Group), which presented its first exhibition in 1971.

EXILE IN RECENT DECADES

The wars and isolation which faced Iraqis from the 1980s to the present have affected the nation widely and presented a massive challenge to social and cultural life. Art during this time has often been utilised to promote political agendas and propaganda. This, of course, meant that the state did continue to show support for artists, and to show an interest in what work they were creating. A climate of volatility and suffering either encouraged or forced many artists and intellectuals to settle abroad. For these artists, the current period is one of exile, and of looking back with strong emotion at their homeland. They are also engaged in cooperative and collaborative efforts internationally, ensuring that exhibitions and art projects are telling the world about Iraq and their people.

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- 1 Ulrike al-Khamis, "An Historical Overview 1900s-1990s", in Maysaloun Faraj (ed.), *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art* (London: Saqi Books, 2000/2001), 23.
- 2 Shaker Hassan Al-Said. "The Iraqi Artists Groups", in Shaker Hassan Al-Said (ed.) *Dialogue in Plastic Arts*, (in Arabic), (Amman: Darat Al Funoon, 1995).
- 3 Ulrike al-Khamis. "An Historical Overview 1900s-1990s", in Maysaloun Faraj (ed.), *Strokes of Genius: Contemporary Iraqi Art* (London: Saqi Books, 2000/2001), 25.
- 4 Ibid., 25.
- 5 Ibid., 41. This artwork consists of 14 separate bronze castings averaging 8 metres in height. It spans a 10 x 50m slab, which is lifted 6m above a narrative of the 1958 revolution told through symbols meant to portray a verse of Arabic poetry, read from right to left. It is strikingly modern, yet pays homage to Assyrian and Babylonian wall relief.
- 6 Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005/1991), 59-75.
- 7 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 2002/1996), 76.
- 8 Rifat Chadirji, *Al Ukhaider and the Crystal Palace*, in Arabic, (London: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 1991), 329-379.
- 9 Qassim Saad, "Design Education in Iraq: Reflections on its Emergence, Development and Contexts", in "Narrative in Design and Development", (Online Collaborative Project, 2006), 3. http://thinkcycle.com/tc-papers/?topic_id=55705&type=all as last accessed on 10 October 2008.
- 10 Rafa Al-Nasiri, "The Iraqi Artists Groups", in Shaker Hassan Al-Said (ed.) *Dialogue in Plastic Arts*, in Arabic, (Amman: Darat Al Funoon, 1995), 68-69. Texts from the group manifesto in 1968 were in the Arabic language and were translated by the author.

LESSONS FROM AN ÉMIGRÉ PHOTOGRAPHER, FRANZ BARTA

Max Oettli



Figure 1: The Franz Barta signature on a presentation box (courtesy of the Hocken Library).

ÉMIGRÉ PHOTOGRAPHER AND MID-20TH CENTURY STUDIO PRACTICE

Franz Barta was active as a photographer in Dunedin from 1944 to 1975, and we have the privilege of having a substantial archive of his work in the Hocken Library. This archive is of interest on two levels: Franz Barta as an émigré photographer and concerning studio practice mid-20th century.

Firstly, the archive provides us with a very clear reading of how an émigré photographer established himself in this country. Born in 1907, Barta was of Hungarian-Austrian origin, and arrived here in 1939. He acquired an established Dunedin Studio Esquilant in 1944, and started a practice as a portrait and general commercial photographer. He would be identified as a “foreigner” and émigré photographers are a significant and important group within this category in New Zealand. Marti Friedlaender comes to mind, and more specifically Frank Hofman, Irene Koppel, Inge Byttiner, Gregory Rhiethmayer and maybe Theo Schoon.¹

These photographers have all left their traces on history's whiteboard, and brought a precious asset to our country,

broadening it culturally, and to some extent modifying the practice of the art of photography. Barta, whose background was partly Jewish, left Austria after the Nazi invasion, and was subsequently joined by his fiancée Hedy. His enthusiasm and experience as a mountaineer stood him in good stead. So, although being a “friendly enemy alien” under police observation he found work as a guide on the Fox Glacier; they called him the “Swiss Guide” complete with (somewhat incongruous) Lederhosen! He and his wife set up a darkroom there and photographed clients on the mountains.

Secondly, looking at the archive in the Hocken Library we are able to get a very clear reading of how a commercial studio worked at this time, the kind of work and clientele a busy photographer would be dealing with and the kind and quality of the production through his day to day activity. Given the crisis photography has gone through since then, this aspect of the collection is in itself worthy of study on the level of the history of the practice.

Hedy and Franz (then with two children²) moved to Dunedin in 1944 and purchased a Victorian-era Studio Esquilant.³ There was plenty of scope for updating. Barta rapidly acquired a reputation as a fine photographer, specialising in portraits in the manner of the Canadian Armenian Yousuf Karsh who sought a psychological depth and verity through a careful set up of lighting and a patient understanding of his subject’s intelligence and presence.

Franz’s studio, at the corner of Princes and Dowling Streets, soon became something of a landmark. His distinctive sweeping signature was on the outside of the building where the studio occupied the top floor. His staff included the then usual team of darkroom personnel and retouchers that formed part of a mid-20th century photography business. In later years, his wife looked after the reception, selecting sizes and frames, dispatching, and accounts.

Portraiture was the foundation of a reputation that extended throughout Otago and beyond. A portrait by Franz carried a certain premium in the days when professional photography was highly valued.



Figure 2: Two studio portraits from negative scans (courtesy of the Hocken Library).

This format was rather more suited to males, though in this case the woman’s independence and self-assurance is well highlighted by it. The originals were 4 x 5 inch, and the prints would, of course, be considerably richer on chloro-bromide (gold toned) paper.

In my arrogant 1970s youth we called the Karsh style "Stuffed Owl", and looked at a more spontaneous and quicker portrait style exemplified by Kertesz, Brandt, Newman, even Cartier-Bresson. We dreaded the must and dust and hot tungsten atmosphere, the fine rendering and the concentration of these "Dickie Bird watching Dead", as Dylan Thomas called them in *Under Milk Wood*.

Barta's best known portrait is probably of his countryman Sir Karl Popper, the famous philosopher who was already a friend when he also immigrated (first to Christchurch) before the war. Now Popper, as a quick Google search demonstrates, was no stranger to photo studios and countless photographs of him exist, as befitted his importance as a major contributor to the course of the last century's philosophical study. Contemporaries in exile, and friends over a long period, he and Barta would have chatted in German during his studio session and the two large prints that are in the Hocken show a relaxed, slightly ironic pose on the part of the subject, which the man behind the lens captures perfectly. Why aren't these in a databased archive?

Barta always insisted on working in the studio, including when photographing wedding parties. Later in his career, because he found that the members of a wedding party would adopt different personae, he refused to do weddings for people unless they had previously been clients. Sporting groups, arrayed in their customary rows, were also a rarity.⁴

From the late 1950s he also did a lot of work for commercial clients. These included food processor Greggs, for whom he photographed vegetables and fruit for labels. Another significant client who had an important place in the region at the time was Fontana Knitwear. Colour was available and enthusiastically used. And, at last we see some outdoor location work: Tony Barta remembers taking an afternoon off from school only to encounter his father posing a knitwear model on the golf course.

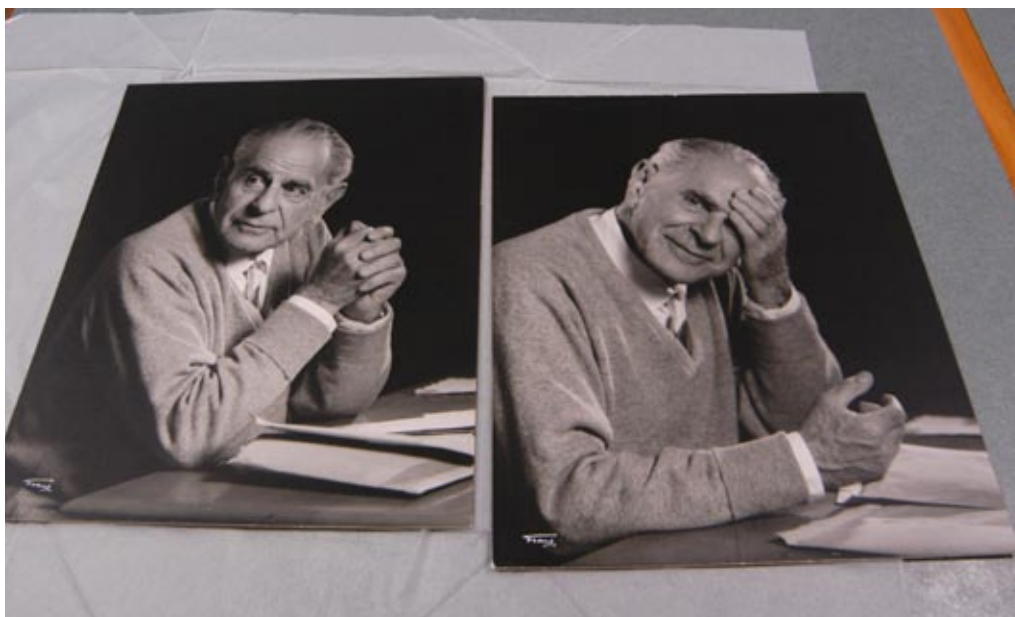


Figure 3: Sir Karl Popper, two Agfa Protriga prints (courtesy of the Hocken Library).

Barta also did a good body of work related to architecture. He seems to have cornered the market for Dunedin's grandiose Victorian and Edwardian monumental architecture. His views of the Otago University Registry building and Dunedin Town Hall with its original tower exist in countless forms.⁵



Figure 4: Alison Holst, early 1960s, on DNTV (courtesy of the Hocken Library).

Many of his photographs of contemporary buildings were for a building material manufacturer, Vibrapac, one of the pioneers of concrete block construction (figure 5). This would be a superb register for someone working closely on the history of NZ architecture.

Other work was presumably for architects and clients. There is a fine set on the Moana Pool in Dunedin with its splendid reinforced concrete structure, and also of the award-winning Te Anau Lodge. The work was usually large format with a careful correction of perspective, and with a good use of daylight and artificial light for interiors.

In 1967, after his children were grown up, he moved his business to a roomy house in Pitt Street, still under the name "Franz Studio", expanding the space on the ground floor to enable the business to have the room it required for displaying examples of his portraiture in the foyer.⁶

THE HOCKEN LIBRARY ARCHIVE

This archive is housed in some 30 boxes and contains, at a rough estimate, some 40 – 60,000 objects, mainly photographic negatives and prints, mostly boxed and sleeved. Some of the prints are obviously "second run" from orders.⁷ The negatives, from the late 1940s to May 1975, are mainly 4 x 5 inch cut film with a few glass plates, and some colour works starting in the late 1950s as far as I can date them from the boxes they are housed in. There are some 5 x 7 inch items, mostly in colour, and some 120 rollfilm negatives.⁸ There is no 35mm work.⁹

When it comes to the archive¹⁰ of Franz Barta's work, we are looking at a fairly typical production of a portrait and general studio of the post World War II years anywhere in the world. But the collection has a strong local flavour and should be a valuable research tool. We are fortunate that the collection boasts a handwritten index of exemplary clarity referring to the names of clients, obviously compiled at the time the work was done and filed in two "number" books. Assuming that almost all of the clientele was local, some kind of transfer of this to a simple database would be an enormous storehouse of memory for the population of Dunedin.



Figure 5: *Vibrapac Paradise* (courtesy of the Hocken Library).



Figure 6: *Moana Pool* (courtesy of the Hocken Library).

Max Oettli lived in New Zealand for 20 years. He studied at the University of Auckland and taught at Elam School of Fine Arts. He was an important New Zealand photographer in the 1969-75 period and then spent 32 years in Geneva, teaching mainly Architecture students. He is now principal lecturer in Photography at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art.

- 1 The best general work on German (and Austrian) immigrants in New Zealand in the 20th Century would be James Bade's compilation *Out of the Shadow of War: The German Connection with New Zealand in the Twentieth Century* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998). An article by Leonard Bell mentions Koppel, Byttner (whose Bettina studio was still active when I arrived in Auckland), William Sharrel (Schascherrl), and Gregory Rhiethmayer whom I had the privilege to know. Friedlaender is well documented; Frank Hofmann is mentioned in William Main and John B Turner, *NZ Photography from 1840 to the Present* (Auckland: PhotoForum, 1993) and in the more recent work by David Eggleston *Into the Light: A History of New Zealand Photography* (Nelson: Craig Potton, 2006). Theo Schoon has been looked at by Francis Pound in *The Space Between, Māori Motifs in Modernist NZ* (Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994), and extensively written about by Michael Dunn, notably in *Art New Zealand 1992-1994*.
- 2 I am very grateful to Marie Hinkley-Barta and Tony Barta who were kind enough to read through a draft of this text and make valuable corrections as well as providing some personal reminiscences.
- 3 It would seem that some of the Esquilant negatives were part of the acquisition; the Barta holdings in the Hocken archives contain work from the 1880s to the 1920s.
- 4 Early on, Franz made the mistake of sending an account to a rugby club that thought he would be glad to do the team photo for its public relations benefit. New Zealand sport culture takes a bit of learning, ask any European immigrant.
- 5 Notably in the John Stacpoole and Peter Beavan book *Architecture 1920-1970* (Wellington: Reed, 1972), the totality of photographs of Otago buildings are laconically credited to "Franz".
- 6 Tony Barta adds: "There were also display cases at the entrance to the City Hotel, then the classiest establishment in Dunedin."
- 7 These would be the only documents whose state of conservation gives rise to some worry as some photos have a very strong acid smell, and could contaminate work around them.
- 8 Tony Barta again: "In this format he experimented extensively with 'stereo' photography to be viewed in 3D, particularly for Arthur Ellis Ltd, makers of sleeping bags for the Everest expedition and feather quilts for suburban homes. These were photographed on a special camera with two lenses, now a great rarity."
- 9 Again according to Barta's son: "There exist hundreds of slides (recording holidays and travels) loaded into magazines for family viewing. He was an early admirer of the very small Rollei and Olympus cameras."
- 10 The archival numbers for the images used courtesy of the Hocken Library in this review are S08/087 a, b, c, d, e, f, g. I gratefully acknowledge the Hocken Library for usage of these images.

OF TWO BUILDINGS AND THE SPACE BETWEEN: A COMPANION TEXT FOR THE PROJECTS: *ANYWHERE, HOW TO GET FROM HERE TO THERE & A CORRIDOR FROM THERE TO NOWHERE*

Reuben Moss

Anywhere was an open public art project which took place in September 2007. I gave tours around the outside of the Post Office Building in Dunedin and told participants about the history of the façade. I also broadcast a radio documentary called "a brief history of the post office women's league" directly outside the building. The broadcast which I produced myself was in the generic style of a national radio show from the era in question. *How to Get from Here to There* dealt with the National Mortgage and Agency Building. Using the lure of incomplete sentences, I led people from gallery spaces to an open car park on the ground floor of the building with typed directions listed line by line. At the NMA Building I had installed, in the same manner, another incomplete sentence and directions back. The sentences were written onto scrap cardboard with a marker, and they loosely referred to the 1848 anti-establishment rebellion in France. The work has been installed three times this year in three different gallery locations, two in Dunedin and one in Hamilton, with different sentences used each time. *A Corridor from There to Nowhere* is still a work in progress. When completed, the corridor, in a 1930s style, will lead into a room in which I will build a cardboard train with help from the public. The train will then travel at an undisclosed date from the exchange through town along Princes and George Streets. This essay is a companion text for these projects. Whilst still allowing for open-ended work, it aims to add a particular content to the corridor through narrowing the context of the work historically and providing a platform for further discussion on public space in the city.

Dunedin in 1930 was a city affected by the first influences of the modern. In the central business district on Water Street, two buildings, or at that stage sites, would declare the times. The Chief Post Office was completed in 1936, the National Mortgage and Agency building finished in 1938. Both buildings were completed in the years after the economic crisis culminating in the 1929 stock market crash. The Chief Post Office was envisioned for a particular strategic purpose; it was to be the logistical centre for the Post Office and a central hub for all state agencies in Dunedin. The NMA building was head office for the National Mortgage & Agency Company, overseeing all of the company's national and international affairs, as well as being a store for agricultural supplies. These two buildings sit now, in opposition to one another, but it is wrong to say they always had. They now stand emptied and decaying in the former heart of the city with between them the sites of two city blocks long since leveled. To see them now is like viewing the site of a once epic battle. That is to say; for these two buildings at least, it is a battle which was fought and won long ago. However, what happened to these two buildings was not a battle between literal sites, nor between two substantial powers. These buildings are more the sites where, over an entire life time, one series of events gave way to another. They mark the transition of a certain type of aesthetic, social and political modernity in Dunedin.

The Chief Post Office was designed by government architect John T Mair and it was built in the years after the great American art deco skyscrapers culminating in 1931 with the 101 floor Empire State Building. Mair had studied architecture in the United States in the early part of the century and had continued to travel there after his appointment in 1922 to the position of government architect. Measuring less than a tenth of the height of the Empire State Building, the Chief Post Office was never intended to rival New York. It was, however, the largest and most modern building in Dunedin. Built entirely by and entirely for state agencies, it was and still remains, a monument to the beginnings of the modern state in New Zealand.

The year before the Chief Post Office was opened was the year of the historic 1936 Labour Budget. This document opened the gate for the development of public assets and agricultural subsidies which would underlay the economic

and social structure of New Zealand for the next fifty years. The Chief Post Office was the first large art deco building in Dunedin. Even though the building appears well embellished compared to today's standards, its relatively plain art deco style was considered by one local councilor¹, not to be grand enough to represent the Crown. Nonetheless, this was the new face of the state in 1936. The grand columns and plaster work had become a mere embellishment onto the greater structure and was confined to the front of the building. Columns – which had once been the symbolic load bearers of empire – no longer held the weight of anything at all. This was a building designed as much for functionality as for grandiose representation on its façade.

JT Mair's designs incorporated most modern facilities; there were elevators in each corner of the building, public on the Princes Street frontage and staff at the rear. The entire building was equipped with a telephone exchange as well as housing the machinery for the telephone and telegraph network of Dunedin. A new window system was designed specifically for the project and all furniture in the building was brand new in accordance with the overall style. Mair had a very specific idea of how things were to look; he personally designed all of the detailed bronze paneling adorning the windows. Initially Mair intended the eight foot bronze gates which guard each of the four corners, to be glazed. Unfortunately the bronze proved too weak and the glass broke in tests.

Underlying Mair's plans was a desire – fueled perhaps in part by what he had seen in Manhattan and in part by a social backlash against the depression – to construct a building emblematic of a new era, a modern building. This was by no means the ideological Modernism of the Bauhaus, Constructivism or Le Corbusier; it was rather the restrained functional Modernism which in reality existed in New Zealand in the 1930s. What is most amazing then is that seventy years later the building as the physical and symbolic home of this typically New Zealand Modernism sits in near ruin. It was, over time, to be replaced by a new ideology of freedom and superseded by new technologies of functionality.

The Chief Post Office building was built across Water Street from the Exchange Building. At the time of the opening of the post office this was the social and economic centre of the city. The Post Office became an integral part of the functioning of the urban community in Dunedin. Archived film footage of parades from the 1930s and 40s illustrates the central position, both geographically, and socially, which the Post Office held. The architecturally unique, particularly Manhattanist feature of the veranda acted as a natural stage for viewing community events and parades, and in turn for being viewed. The veranda opened through the bronze entrance way into the large atrium labeled as public space on the plans. This in its time would have been a spectacular space, covered in marble and native timbers and lit from above by the light well. The public foyer was the central public space for the entire Post Office. The arrangement of this space in comparison to contemporary post shops demonstrates clearly the changes that would occur over the next 50 years.



Figure 1: The Chief Post Office in 1937
(image in the public domain).

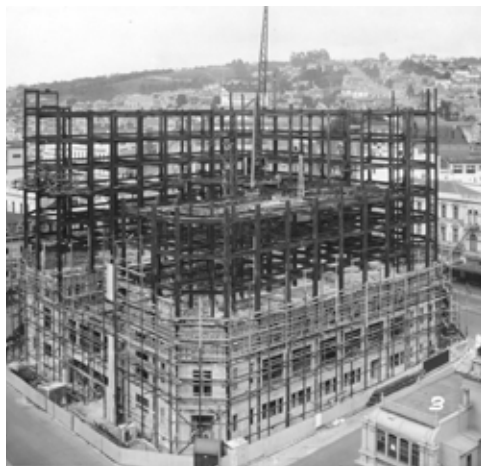
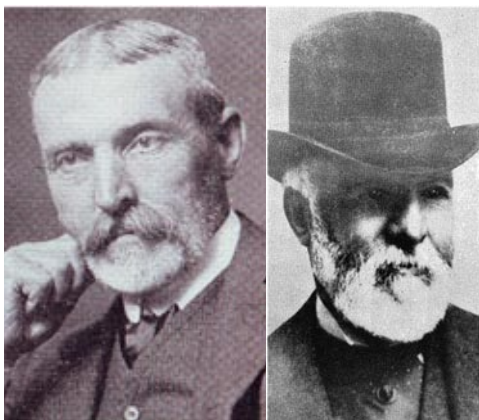


Figure 2: The Chief Post Office under construction in 1934
(image in the public domain).



Figure 3: Graffiti on the Post Office: "Blind kings led by tired hands", 2007 (photograph by the author).



Figures 4 & 5: John Macfarlane Ritchie, George Gray Russell (images from the Hocken Library, NMA Company of New Zealand Ltd. London Head Office Records 1877-1975 AG-133).

In the façade of the building today, and in the records of the archives, the building's monumental appearance is revealed. The building in reality was in constant disrepair, and faults and malfunctions appeared within its first year. From the first winter welds on the copper roof gave out causing leaking. In 1947 the internalised gutter piping began to leak through the wall on the seventh floor of the northwest corner. The specially designed windows were defective from the start; if they were not fastened properly they could be blown open causing glass to fall to the street below; this happened at least a dozen times. Each time the incident was recorded by a memorandum from the Chief Post Master to all departments, reminding staff to properly secure windows. These memos would in turn be initialed by all department staff and returned to the Post Master before being filed.

The greatest failure of Mair's design was the cladding; still visible from the Princes Street frontage. The original cladding was Putaruru stone. Unfortunately this material could not withstand Dunedin's cold wind and rain; the first cracks appeared on the building's southern face in 1957. The process of repair, culminating eventually with the re-cladding of the building, would take thirty years. The process of exchange between the building superintendant and the Chief Post Master, the department of works and the government architect is recorded in triplicate. This archive demonstrates the great achievement and in some ways the great failure of state organisation prior to 1986. The massive record (series 7) includes over ten thousand pages in total, in multiple colours and under changing letterheads. Every quote, receipt, drawing and remark is kept there. The purpose of this system was centralisation; all decisions ultimately rested with the heads of the varying government departments concerned. It demonstrated to the public the power of government in the most hierarchical way possible. Government could easily affect its departments and this control was always shadowed by a complex, functioning system of recorded exchanges. The saga of the Putaruru stone is the clearest example of what

the Chief Post Office now represents; the myth of its own modernist, functioning system. This system was in reality always on the verge of malfunction as its very processes of function doomed it to stagnation and inevitable demise in the face of neo-liberalism. The story of the Post Office's repair, modification and eventual decay mirrors the life of the political thinking which first led to its construction. When the Chief Post Office was finally re-clad in 1987, fifty years after first opening, it was in its final years as it was soon to become two separate state-owned enterprises: New Zealand Post and Telecom. It was the end of an era, and it is marked – in a twist of history – by the worst economic event to strike since the 1929 crash which it had begun with.

A few hundred metres along Water Street, beyond two empty parking lots, the National Mortgage & Agency Company Building sits. Aligned by the street grid mandated by town planners nearly two hundred years prior, it faces the Chief Post Office exactly. The building on the corner of Water and Vogel Streets was the third central office

of the company, all of which were located on Water Street, one of them being the now empty parking lot. The National Mortgage & Agency Company was formed in London in 1864 by two business partners, George Gray Russell and John Macfarlane Ritchie. Initially the Company acted as a brokerage between the Australia and New Zealand Land Company and farmers, but it subsequently became involved in all areas of the farming industry. The NMA records suggest the first shipment of mutton to England in 1882 was, at least in part, financed by the NMA or at least by its board members. The NMA were shareholders in the Longburn Meatworks and held the mortgages for tens of thousands of acres throughout the South Island. In 1974 the NMA Company merged with Wright Stephenson to become Challenge Wrightson, who merged with Fletcher Holdings Ltd. in 1981 to become Fletcher Challenge.

The NMA Building is fairly humble in comparison with the Chief Post Office: they share few features and in fact each typifies quite unique aspects of art deco design. But that it is still an art deco building is a strong connection. It means there must have been a point of decision – as with Mair's building, to move on from what had been the standard style for most of a century to something else. When the building was first occupied by the NMA in 1929 it had a Neo-Baroque façade and roof. This building was by far the most elaborate building to be headquarters for the company, yet within the decade it was completely refaced. When the current building is compared to the original, the magnitude of the change is clear. The contrast in style with the earlier Neo-Baroque and Victorian buildings must certainly have been a point of discussion. This aesthetic change suggests that another change had taken place. This involved an ideological change, not purely political but also in a social and conceptual sense which pointed to a future quite different to that imagined by the company ten years before. But was this the same future as envisioned by Mair's Post Office? Aesthetically the many small differences between the two buildings are overcome by their shared level of difference with the style of the rest of the city. The political, ideological structures which underlie them are varying and complex. While the NMA Company hearkened back to an age of pre-Keynesian economics the NMA Building was definitely rooted in a new post-mercantile, post-depression era. Each building in its own right is an exemplar of the two particularly modern structures of post-depression New Zealand, namely the *capital* enterprise of farming and the *state* operation of public service. This by no means suggests that these two buildings and their inhabitants were, at this stage at least, adversaries. At this point in particular the relationship was only just being established and the specific types of operations which occurred in these buildings or more precisely, the way in which they operated, was relatively new. When the NMA began trading in 1864 it was through a charter instigated directly by the Crown. The NMA was in effect a private enterprise acting as agents for the Crown, fulfilling a particular public necessity: the distribution of farming land. The modified mercantile system under which the NMA traded prior to the 1929 stock market crash meant a low level of public regulation of the economy, and this in turn meant there was little government protection for New Zealand's economy during the Depression.



Figure 6: The original façade of the NMA Building, which was built for the Union Steam Ship Co. in 1929 (image from the Hocken Library, NMA Company of New Zealand Ltd. London Head Office Records 1877-1975 AG-133).



Figure 7: The NMA Building decorated for the Queen's visit in 1954 (image from the Hocken Library, NMA Company of New Zealand Ltd. Records c.1861-1960 UN-028 Box 43).



Figure 8: Lord Glenconner and several secretaries during his visit for the centenary in 1964 (image from the Hocken Library, NMA Company of New Zealand Ltd. Records c.1861-1960 UN-028 Box 41).



Figure 9: The NMA Building lit up at night for the centenary in 1964 (image from Hocken Library, NMA Company of New Zealand Ltd. Records c.1861-1960 UN-028 Box 43).

By 1936 the effects of the Depression had hurt New Zealand particularly badly; the 1936 Labour Budget was a direct re-action to New Zealand's lack of internal regulation and a means to protect New Zealand industry from international effects. While it is true that the development of New Zealand's socialised assets was not purely the result of the first Labour government, by 1936 the NMA Company was operating in an economy newly regulated by state controls and this point, then, becomes crucial in understanding the shared history of the two buildings discussed in this essay.

The records of the NMA create the image of a company which could only have existed when and where it did. The various employees and managers fill the roles one could imagine for them in a film of the era. For Queen and country, this was a British Empire company, and a staunchly loyal one; a company that could not appear more different than the modern corporation it would become. In reality the NMA was still a multinational company operating on the same basis of investor profit as any company today. What appears distinct in retrospect is the approach to locality, the involvement and interest in the communities, rural and urban. This distinction may in fact have been more rhetoric than reality, but nonetheless it is such a distinction in the written, archived records. The NMA Company was historically a Dunedin company and on the occasion of the company's centenary in 1964, it donated 75,000 pounds to the University of Otago's fund for a new hall of residence. This community concern may not seem unusual as it is part of the marketing exercise of any modern corporation, but its spirit was unique to that era. Duty and great need are repeated motifs in recorded speeches. This was the particular sort of morality which developed along with the great cause of the commonwealth, a charitable nature that had gone hand-in-hand with colonisation and Empire. During the centenary celebrations in 1964 the then chairman of the board, Lord Glenconner, who was based in Britain, referred to the company's gallant efforts in the First World War: "The need to supply Britain with

dairy produce and meat during the years of the First World War constituted an exceptional demand which New Zealand was only too glad to meet. The rendering of this important service was all the more remarkable when we remember how many New Zealanders left the country to join the armed forces and how great a contribution New Zealand made, in relation to her wealth and population, towards the prosecution of the war."² The records of the events during the centenary provide the clearest insight into the social relationship between the NMA, its employees and Dunedin as a community. Along with Glenconner's speech, then mayor of Dunedin Russell Sidey referred to the long relationship between the city and the company and the central position agricultural business still had in Dunedin. This was a relationship and a community based on shared morality and a shared vision of the position of industry in New Zealand and the Commonwealth.

The future which saw the NMA Building re-plastered then, was superficially little different to the Post Office's.

The Chief Post Office and the NMA Building both relied on Dunedin as an urban centre of community and of commerce. The relationship between them can perhaps best be described as mutual, one of shared moral loyalty to the Crown and to community: an ideology of community rooted in an image of New Zealand as a farming nation born out of the mixed memory of dutiful allegiance to Britain through a World War and a Depression. Among the NMA Company members there was probably a measure of private ill will towards the new era of market regulation which the Post Office signified. In the written record, however, no such conflict is found. Loyalty to the Crown was an absolute for this kind of morality. In any official, archived records these two buildings and their inhabitants were allies for the greater good of New Zealand, looking towards a future based on primary production.

It is the somewhat bitter irony of this story that the future which both the NMA and the Post Office had envisioned was so very different. Even as early as 1964 the NMA had changed substantially, and in the fifteen years prior to this date the board had overseen the purchase of nine companies. The old rhetoric of commonwealth and community was, for the younger generation at least, beginning to be replaced by a new spirit which could be described as the beginnings of global economics. Director James Ritchie (the grandson of founder John Ritchie) said in the closing remarks of his speech for the centenary: "There is a little bit of nationalism creeping into New Zealand. I hope it will not grow into ultra-nationalism. We in New Zealand need overseas help and know-how, all New Zealand does, though we all agree companies ought to be New Zealand companies. I am confident that in 10-15 years this company will be opening branches in South East Asia. I have always been told good trade makes good friends. And good friends make peace and prosperity for all of us."³ Ten years later the company would no longer exist, merging with Wrights Stephenson Ltd. in 1974 and entering a new modern age as the Challenge Corporation. The archive of the NMA closes at this point; the building was never used as an office for Challenge, and the last sign of the company is a 1960s plastic logo still found on the rear of the building. It is impossible to say whether the rhetorical community spirit which underlay the NMA Company went with it. But it is hard to imagine notions of community loyalty and morality playing any real part in the operations of a modern corporation today.

By 1987 the NMA Company was completely subsumed into the Fletcher Challenge Corporation



Figure 10: James Macfarlane Ritchie (image from the Hocken Library NMA Company of New Zealand Ltd. Records c.1861-1960 UN-028 Box 41).



Figure 11: The rear entrance to the NMA Building, 2008 (photograph by the author).

and the building was empty. The Chief Post Office had begun the process of neo-liberal reform which would ultimately rationalise it away. A new political and economic era had begun and both these buildings now remain as artifacts from its precursor. The future for these two buildings is uncertain; numerous plans have been unveiled over the years for the redevelopment of the Post Office but none have come to fruition. The foundations of the Post Office are unfortunately in danger and the copper roof which always leaked has for the past ten years allowed water to seep in. This has slowly undermined the integrity of the concrete foundation and will eventually weaken it beyond repair. The NMA Building, apart from occasional residential tenants, has remained vacant for more than a decade and is in all likelihood facing the same fate as that of the Post Office. Whether these buildings should be preserved or restored was never a question intended to be answered in this essay. Rather, I hoped to present a brief history of these buildings through a glimpse of the political, economic and social history they shared. Their story is unique to Dunedin and they speak of the rise and fall of an era. This essay on their story is a companion text for my participatory projects through which I explore public space in Dunedin. Whilst still allowing for open-ended work, it aims to add a particular content to the train I am currently making for the project entitled *A Corridor from There to Nowhere* through narrowing the context of the work historically and providing a platform for further discussion on public space in the city. The train for *A Corridor from There to Nowhere* will travel along Princes and George Streets in Dunedin, inviting participants to consider the relationships between buildings, companies, moralities of an earlier era and those between their contemporary counterparts in our era of late-capitalism.

Acknowledgement: Photographs held in the Hocken Library (collection UN-28, boxes 41 & 43) are the property of the Fletcher Trust Archive.

Reuben Moss is a fourth-year student completing a BFA in Sculpture at Otago Polytechnic School of Art. He is primarily interested in participatory or relational modes of art which engage directly with the political through issues of urbanism and public space under the conditions of late-capitalism.

- 1 New Zealand Historic Places Trust Report on the Dunedin Chief Post Office building.
- 2 Lord Glenconner's speech to the company, 1964, Fletcher Trust Archive, Hocken Library.
- 3 James Ritchie's speech to the company, 1964, Fletcher Trust Archive, Hocken Library.

ARCHISMITHING: JEWELLERS WHO MAKE BUILDINGS AND BUILDINGS THAT MAKE JEWELLERY

Andrew Last

Colleague Col Fay and I have a handful of things in common. Among that list is a shared interest in architecture and jewellery. Col is currently a master of fine arts candidate in the Otago Polytechnic School of Art. Her research project "Body is Architecture" examines the human body as a central point of reference in both jewellery and architecture. I am currently the head of the jewellery department in the same institution. My partner Bron and I have just about completed our second owner-designed and -built house. This essay looks for common ground between two diverse jewellery practices within the context of the work on this house.

THE FUNCTIONALIST ARCHITECTURAL AESTHETIC

Two early 20th-century German writers, Adolph Loos and Walter Benjamin, wrote critically of the architecture of their time. In an excerpt from the journal *Neue Freie Presse* (1898), Loos wrote:

to the architect all materials are of equal value, but are not uniformly suitable for all of his tasks... The architect's general task is to provide a warm, homely space. Carpets are warm and homely. He decides for this reason to spread out one carpet on the floor and to hang up four to form the four walls. But you cannot build a house out of carpets. Both the carpet on the floor and the tapestry require a structural frame to hold them in the correct place. To invent this frame is the architect's second task.¹



Figure 1: *Last-Lowe House* interior (photograph by the author).

Bron and I have designed the Last-Lowe house to be warmed by virtue of its passive-solar efficient design. Our choice of materials reflects our ideas concerning sustainability as in this instance the interior walls are made of recycled carpets, over which an earth plaster will be applied. The design of the house is tailored to our specific requirements of a home.

The prominent critic Walter Benjamin wrote in observation of the late 19th-century bourgeois interior that “to live is to leave traces”². The work of both writers – Benjamin and Loos – is of a time and place concurrent with the advent of modernism. In 1929, Le Corbusier was completing what has become recognised as the embodiment of modernism, namely the *Villa Savoye*. This work can be seen as a response aimed against Loos and Benjamin’s observation of the architectural vernacular of the time.

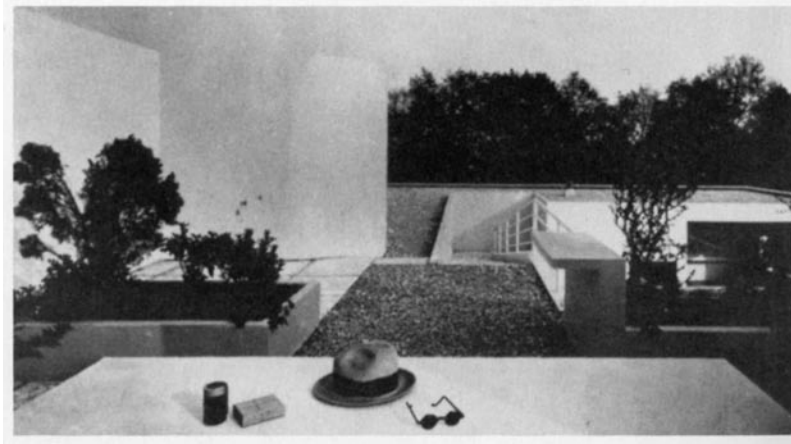


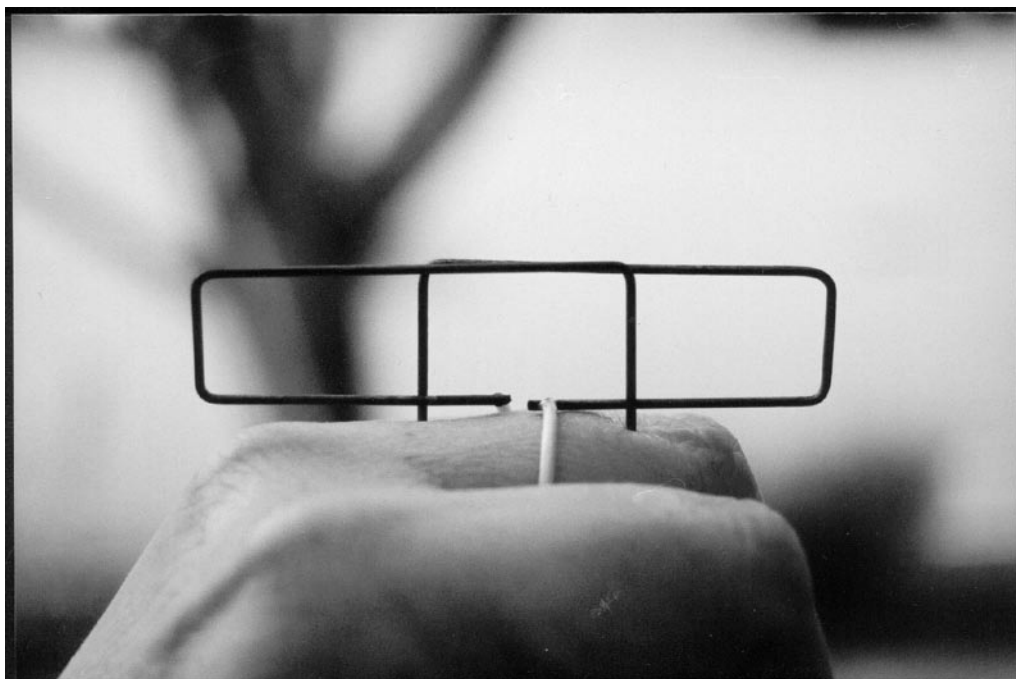
Figure 2: Le Corbusier, *Villa Savoye* at Poissy, 1928 (image courtesy of © Fondation Le Corbusier & Adagp – société des auteurs dans les arts graphiques et plastiques - photographie L2 (17)48 (c)FLC/ADAGP, 2008).

Le Corbusier considered himself to be first and foremost an artist³. His photographic representations of his architecture are therefore as much his artwork as the buildings themselves. In this photograph taken by Le Corbusier of the *Villa Savoye* roof garden, the trace of habitation was the only evidence allowed of the relationship between structure and occupant. For Le Corbusier purity of architectural form was valued well above the pragmatics of domestic utility. With this idealistic point of view the human presence was considered a ‘stain’ on the architectural form.

Like Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was one of the architects who defined the International Style. Van der Rohe’s *Farnsworth House* (1945-51), regarded as an iconic masterpiece of modernist architecture, is a domestic scale building also embodying the International Style. The steel beams clearly articulate the bones of the building’s structure and the glass walls constitute the skin.

Van der Rohe was commissioned to build the house by a prominent Chicago-based kidney specialist Dr Edith Farnsworth. Farnsworth briefed Van der Rohe to design the house as if it were for himself. Indeed, there is little concession to the needs of Farnsworth or of any human body. At the time of construction the house drew wide criticism, such as

...they [the architects in question] are promoting unlivability, stripped down emptiness, lack of storage space and therefore lack of possessions. ...so, you see, this well-developed movement has social implications because it affects the heart of our society – the home....three or four pieces of furniture placed along arbitrary pre-ordained lines; room for only a few books and one painting at precise and permanent points; no children, no dogs, extremely meager kitchen facilities – nothing human that might disturb the architect’s composition.⁴



JEWELLERY INFORMED BY ARCHITECTURE

In response to *Farnsworth House*, Col Fay's *Farnsworth Ring* reinserts the human body into the design. The skin of the hand confers an implied surface to the bones of the ring's or the building's skeletal outline. Col's work simultaneously acknowledges the attraction of pure modernist form and the problematics of modernist architecture when it comes to sheltering the human body.

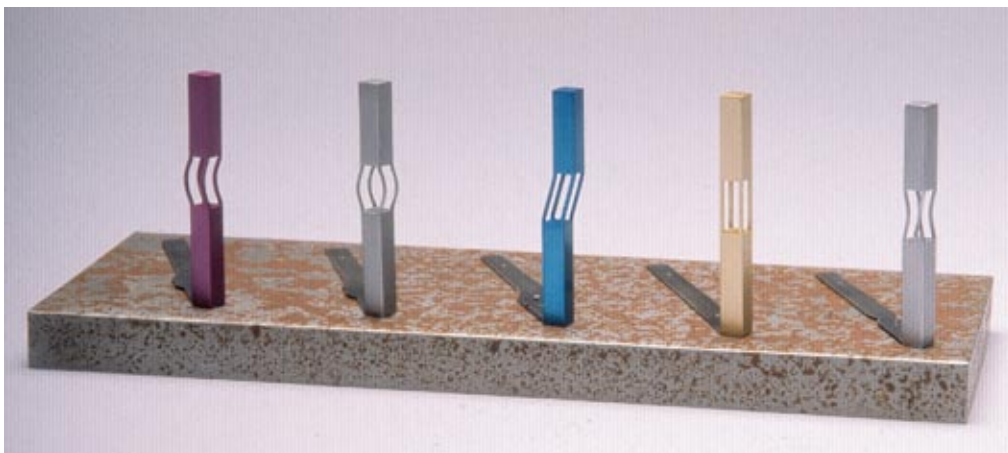


Figure 5: Andrew Last, *Building Brooches*, 1988, aluminium, steel and gold, 7 x 25 x 10 cm (photograph by James Cant).

My work entitled *Building Brooches* was made while I was working from a studio located in Melbourne's central business district. Similar to Col's *Farnsworth Ring*, the brooches respond to the sterility of modernist architecture, in this case the skyscrapers of Melbourne's cityscape. The archetypal rectilinear form is disturbed, anthropomorphising the form of the skyscraper into shapes reminiscent of stances of the human body.

MODERNIST INFLUENCES ON CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY (A PURSUIT FOR PURITY OF FORM)

My education at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology during the mid 1980s was derived from a model of arts education established by the Bauhaus and brought to Australia by predominantly European practitioners. The formal aesthetic of modernism were still palpably enshrined in the Gold and Silversmithing Department and the craft rigour of a rouge-polished surface was acknowledged but most often discouraged as a reflective distraction from the form of the jewellery. The human body was at most a peripheral reference alongside the almost totally self-sufficient, autonomous jewellery object.

Images on left

(top) Figure 3: Mies Van der Rohe, *Farnsworth House*, Plano, Illinois, 1945-51 (photograph by Jack E Boucher in the public domain, see: http://toolsserver.org/~daniel/WikiSense/CheckUsage.php?i=Mies_van_der_Rohe_photo_Farnsworth_House_Plano_USA_1.jpg&w=_100000).

(bottom) Figure 4: Col Fay, *Farnsworth Ring*, 2006, steel and sterling silver, 3 x 4 x 2cm (photograph by the artist).



Figures 6 & 7: Andrew Last, *Tensegrity Neckpiece*, 2006, aluminium and stainless steel (photographs by the author).

My *Tensegrity Neckpiece* of 2006 is a response to Kenneth Snelson's sculpture. Snelson developed the structural system from explorations into architectonic form in conjunction with architect F Buckminster Fuller. My work transposes a tensegrity structure into a jewellery form and format, a chain of repeat units assembled into a ring to be worn around the neck. The work exists primarily as a form in space. When worn, the body becomes a host to the work rather than being adorned by it.

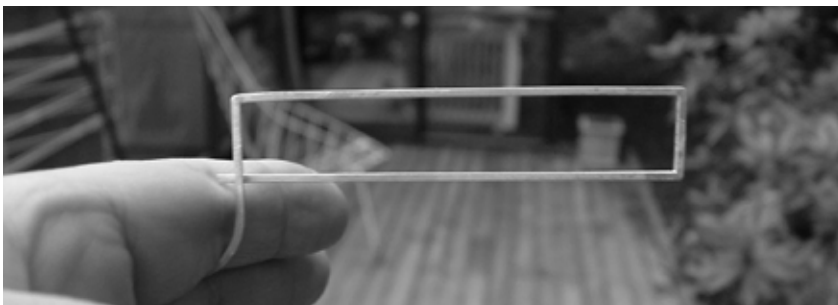


Figure 8: Col Fay, *Ring Departing the Body*, 2007, sterling silver, 3 x 5 x 0.2 cm (photograph by the artist).

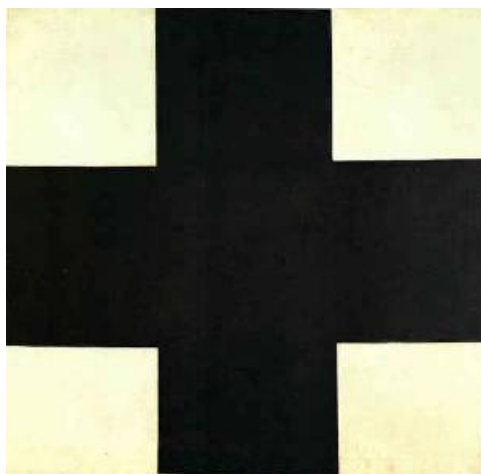


Figure 9: Kasimir Malevich, *Black Cross*, 1923 (Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, public domain, see http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Black_Cross.jpg).



Figure 10: Andrew Last, *Soft Cross Brooch* worn on the body 2004, aluminium, 5 x 5 x 0.5 cm (photograph by Col Fay).

Col Fay's *Ring Departing the Body* may be read as a jewellery work caught in the act of leaving the finger on its way to becoming an autonomous object. In a pursuit of absolute purity of form, Col has reduced the plan of *Farnsworth House* to its essential rectangle. The work questions the value of a jewellery object when considered in isolation from its fundamental role as body adornment.

JEWELLERY INFLUENCED BY SUPREMATIST DESIGN

Kasimir Malevich exhibited his Suprematist *Black Cross* in the 0.10 Exhibition of 1915 in Petrograd (now St Petersburg). His pursuit of form devoid of any representational association preceded similar concerns held by modernist architects. His ultimate aim was to reduce the form to such a condition of essential purity that it would become autonomous, leave the constraints of the canvas and exist in its own realm.



Figure 11: Andrew Last, *Soft Cross Brooches*, 2004, aluminium, 5 x 5 x 0.5 cm each (photograph by the author).

I made the *Soft Cross Brooches* with very little consideration of their form. The cross was an intuitive decision to expedite a technical investigation of welding on a jewellery scale. I had just purchased a very expensive welder and I wanted to play with my new toy. When I had completed the *Soft Cross* series I asked Col to photograph the work worn by myself. Although I was quite pleased with the work that I made, it was from a viewpoint blinkered by technical satisfaction. Col had always sensed that the series were strong jewellery works, somehow different to other works of mine that she had seen. During our collaboration for a recent seminar presentation, Col suggested we look again at this work and for the first time I 'fessed up' to the true origins of the work's identity. The form is an indirect reference to Malevich's *Black Cross* and the specific site on the upper arm is a reference to a colleague's self portrait with a black cross tattoo. The jewellery piece functions as a signifier of my belonging to a social order, in this case a group of visual artists who uphold Malevich as a hero. Col had interpreted the rouge-polished cross as something of a self-portrait. These were jewellery works responding primarily to me, the wearer. They spoke of me and for me.

During the course of her voracious scanning of any critical writing relevant to jewellery, Col became aware of Ted Noten, a Dutch jeweller whose work and writing are reaching contemporary jewellers across the globe. His manifesto of 2006 declares that "contemporary jewellery is dead":

It complains of a lack of attention, yet wilfully retreats into the shadows of provincial life. Here in the safe isolation of the artist studio, passions that run high are hammered into every square millimetre of material and moulded into shape. That process, characteristic for the creation of every piece of jewellery for thousands of years was kept in balance by the astute awareness of its actual calling: as an accessory that ultimately expresses the aspirations and achievements of the wearer, not those of the designer.¹⁵

While Noten's manifesto is laden with the invective typical of that format of writing it points at contemporary jewellery's lack of security as an arts discipline and suggests that jewellers should exploit that circumstance rather

than whinge about it. Col's positive response to my *Soft Cross* works may be born out by Noten's admonitions and advice to contemporary jewellers. The strength of the work is generated by its function as an adornment that, when worn, speaks of the wearer's place in society.

Col and my common interest in architecture, especially that of the modernist movement, has a clearly discernable influence on our jewellery; our work as contemporary jewellers share a quest for purity of form at the risk of dislocation from the fundamental referent: the human body. According to Ted Noten we may be contributing to the death of contemporary jewellery and we are victims of our discipline's lack of security within the context of the visual arts. Noten's call for jewellers to respond to the wearers of jewellery rather than the egotism of the designer echo critical observations of modernist architecture still relevant despite their age of a hundred years by now.

I have been asked whether I include my house building projects as part of my practice. Of course, my jewellery and architecture design are inseparably informed by the same understanding of form, function and making. As works of art the building projects reflect clarity of purpose in response to the needs and beliefs of their occupants; they reflect a functionalist architectural aesthetic. Perhaps my strongest jewellery works similarly depend on a functionalist jewellery aesthetic. I remain a modernist at heart.



Figures 12 & 13: Interior of a Col Fay house (photograph by Col Fay); and *Last-Lowe House* exterior (photograph by Vicki Watson).

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- 1 Adolf Loos, *Spoken Into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897-1900*, introduction by Aldo Rossi, trans. Jane O Newman and John H Smith (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987).
- 2 Walter Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century" in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 155-156.
- 3 *Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret: Oeuvre Complète de 1929-1934* (Zurich: H Girsberger, 1935).
- 4 Elizabeth Gordon, "The Threat to the Next America", *House Beautiful*, 95 (April 1953), 126-30, 250-51.
- 5 Ted Noten, CH₂=C(CH₃)C(=O)OCH₃ *Enclosures and Other TN's* (Rotterdam: Gert Staal, 2006), 113-115.

HELP! A PICTURE STOLE MY IMAGE

Angela Lyon

"Likeness does not make things 'one' as much as unlikeness makes them other."¹
Montaigne, in Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, 224.

"Facing the mirror, a mute witness of desires or fears and a theatre of face-to-face confrontation, the subject hesitates between projection and perception, between the inexhaustible images of the dream and the evidence of reality, and is obsessed with the distortion."²
Sabine Melchior-Bonnet: *The Mirror: A History*, 252.

This essay was first submitted as part of a dissertation to fulfil the requirements of a Master of Fine Arts degree in 2007. The Master of Fine Arts studio component played out as a photographic exercise in the collection and presentation of idealised images. Eight hundred snapshot-format colour images were exhibited all at once in the Rear Window Gallery of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. The mass of pictures presented an array where individual images fought for the attention of the viewer. Buffeted together, each picture promised everything, yet offered nothing.

THE SUBJECT AND ITS REFLECTION: THE OTHER

My dissertation entitled "Neither Here Nor There" established a position for the viewing and the presentation of images; images that influence the construction of the subject. Images, to sell lies to shoppers, often frame the female subject as an object. Alarmed at the imbalanced and overused same-image of women in the media and the mass-market use of the power of the image, my master's project was focused on the finding of an appropriate position for the female photographer/image maker. Here, in this essay I identify the self-image as having the potential of incompleting the subject. I refer to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage (as framed in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*) to assess how the subject observes herself and tries to understand herself as a reflection and as a subject. A key text for me is Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* analysis of looking at his own image in terms of desire, mis-recognition and the seeking of the ideal self. Addressing the shifting positions of self, other, subject, object, reflection, objectivity and subjectivity, I identify an incomplete desiring subject that functions in dual positions but remains split between subjectivity and objectivity. In the case of the female, the subject of Lacan's mirror becomes doubly defined. Firstly, she is an incomplete subject and secondly, she is a subject defined as an object/outsider/other for the male subject. Margaret Olin's essay entitled "Gaze" contributes to a discussion about the role of the gaze in the desires of the incomplete subject. I also refer to feminist readings of Lacan's subject by way of Elizabeth Grosz's *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* and *Space, Time and Perversion* where she promotes a new subject beyond power struggles and gendered identity. Grosz defines the subject by what it is not, not as "other", but by the changing contexts of a post-feminist time and place. I explore the potential effects that the idealised images of women in mainstream culture have on the perception of the female subject.

In his book, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes discusses the foreign relationship he feels when he sees himself in photographs:

[M]yself never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it) and myself which is light, divided, dispersed;...if only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomical body, a body which signifies nothing!...For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other. Even odder, it was before Photography that men had the most to say about the vision of the double.³



Figure 1: Angela Lyon, *The Sisters*, c-type print, 84 x240 cm, 2005, (courtesy of the artist).

Barthes writes about the dynamics of the subject and the photograph in this text. His images never coincide with his self, for it is his *self* that is not a locatable object but rather a sense, a feeling. Barthes identifies the difference he feels from that which he sees himself being portrayed as. Barthes is caught between two positions when he sees himself in the photograph: one where he sees himself as the subject and the other where he sees himself as an object, an other; as an unfeeling double. Barthes continues this observation as he sits for a portrait, stating: "I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art...I am neither subject nor object."⁴

Barthes' subjectivity is threatened when he is confronted with the view of himself from outside of himself, how, it would seem, others see him. This statement is central to this essay. Where is subjectivity and objectivity positioned when looking at your own image when the photograph functions as an object that presents and objectifies the subject? The subject's double-act between self-perceptions and self-projections resonate with Lacan's description of the mirror stage. Built on Sigmund Freud's formulation of the ego and ego ideal (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*)⁵, Lacan's mirror stage imprisons the subject in the mirror of their own image. The subject is dislocated from the self and resides only in the reflection of the mirror.⁶ Like Barthes' analysis of the subject in the image, Lacan's subject loses himself and is held only in the stubborn state where the subject can only see himself from a position outside of himself, the position from where others see him.⁷

In a sense, the mirror becomes a site of desire. As the mirror gives the subject the ability to see himself as an object, the subject realises that he is not whole as he is seen as represented only through the eyes of the 'other.' Lacan suggests a lacking subject, who is forever caught in the cycle of insatiable desire. In the mirror, the subject identifies his incompleteness and desires to fulfil it. Incompleteness is present from the moment that the subject looks at himself in the mirror and sees himself there. The subject, captive in the mirror, cannot be whole. Like Barthes' situation when seeing himself in the photograph, Lacan's subject sees that the stubborn and heavy image does not coincide with the subject's experience. The desire to return to completeness motivates the subject as he is bound to the fantasy of himself as whole. There is a desire to be as he was before he found his reflection.⁸ "By clinging to the reference-point of him who looks at him in the mirror, the subject sees appearing, not his ego ideal but his ideal ego, that point at which he has desires to gratify himself in himself."⁹

Unlike Narcissus, whose fate was sealed by his eternal separation from his reflection, Lacan's subject is always a reflection within the dislocated area of the mirror and forever stuck with the desire to be whole again. Beyond the glass, in a location that cannot be accessed, the subject is forever in the eyes of his 'other' and can only witness himself from the other side of the glass inside the mirror's inaccessible depths. The subject becomes a voyeur of the self.

Both Freud and Lacan use the male subject as a primary example in constructing their psychoanalytical perspective on the subject. In their definitions, the female subject is unimportant and the male subject is chosen to account

for the human subject in general. The defining characteristics of the subject as identified by these two men have been cause for much debate in contemporary readings of their theories. In 1933 Freud defended his position in presenting only the male subject. He wrote: "[T]o those of you who are women, this will not apply – you are yourselves the problem...It seems that women have made few contributions to the inventions and discoveries of the history of civilization."¹⁰

In the "Gaze", Olin argues that where the male subject is constructed through Freud's ego and Lacan's mirror, the female subject is constructed through the male gaze.¹¹ Freud and Lacan present no primary female subject but one that is seen to be defined as 'other.' She exists as a boundary beyond which the male subject is formed as he defines himself by what he is not: her. Where Freud and Lacan establish the difficulties that prevent the formation of a complete male subject, the gaze creates and adds further difficulties for the female subject in her pursuit of wholeness (at least within the psychoanalytical construct of the subject). In our late-capitalist world, she is often presented to society as both a marketing image and an object of desire and in these societal registers she is viewed predominately through the eyes of her 'other': him. Not having mastery over her own image means that the female subject is presented to herself as the female object. Like Lacan's subject located in the mirror of the mirror stage, she develops the ability to see the female subject from within the mirror. But is she merely a reflection?

Olin identifies the gaze as a double-sided term whereby there must be someone to gaze and someone to gaze back.¹² She cites Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" where Mulvey finds the male cinematic viewing of women in films as a play between narcissistic identification and erotic voyeurism. Olin connects Mulvey's definition to Lacan's mirror stage as they both present subjects that invest in the continual desire to be whole. The fate of women projected through this definition is grim in comparison. Olin states: "Her background is invisible, her face rendered hallucinatory by soft mists that play over it, her body parts isolated for loving perusal in close up. The gaze of the man active within the narrative stops on the timeless image of the woman. Woman is the image; man is the bearer of the look. Power is on his side."¹³

Olin highlights two important things when relating the gaze to Lacan's subject and "his" desire for completeness. Primarily concerned with seeing himself as whole, he uses his gaze to define himself through viewing his other, the female. This definition affects the female subject as she sees herself as an object for the bearer of the gaze, the male subject. Olin characterises this as follows: "There is a struggle over the gaze: one gets to look, to be the master of the gaze; the other (or Other) is looked at...The subject turned object sees itself as the other sees it: it internalizes the gaze."¹⁴

Therefore, the Lacanian subject becomes the master of the gaze and uses this to define himself by comparing himself to the subject of the gaze. The female becomes the object of the gaze defined in relation to the male subject's narcissistically driven self-definition. She is always defined only as what he is not. According to Lacan and Freud, her position is one of lack; a negative space in relation to his positive formation. The male subject desires what he lacks, and here, he lacks the female (or at least mastery over her). This does not mean that he desires to be female but that he desires to gain control over what he can as he desires to be whole (and self-defined). Seeing the female through the male gaze is a strategy within patriarchy which is driven to continue as it guarantees power.

So what are the implications of this in the psychoanalytical examination of the subject in photography? For Lacan and Freud, the incomplete subject develops his definition by his relations with the other and is narcissistically driven to control this relationship. In terms of the gaze, it is important for the subject to be the 'master' of the viewing relationship. To hand over the power of the gaze is to allow self-definition to be controlled by the other. Because of this narcissistic dependency on the female subject, the male subjectivity will change if she does, as she too, defines him. In the system of the gaze, the male subject is motivated to contain the female subject, not simply to keep her as his object of desire but because he relies on her to define his position: she is what he is not. In the photographic images so often seen in the marketing of popular culture, the female subject is idealised, objectified and presented as desired; her subjectivity is taken away when the photograph took her image from her and presented it as something else. She exists only as a fantasy, defined not by herself but as a tool to generate desire for capitalist gain. Whether for the purpose of the self-definition of the male subject or for the fulfilment of his desires, the control of her image empowers him.

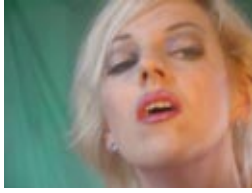


Figure 2: Angela Lyon, *The Face of the Familiar*, C-type print 124 x 84 cm, 2005 (courtesy of the artist).

So far in this essay I have discussed how the subject is an entity that is reliant on the definitions of the other. This is suggested in Barthes' frustration at the self image he sees in the photograph, in Lacan's subject held captive in his own mirror and in Mulvey and Olin's description of the gaze. In each of these systems there is a reflective process that mirrors that of photography. The subject is found on both sides of the lens, as self and as other. The other's influence on the subject's self-definition can create a disturbance in the formation of subjectivity.

"Man's desire is the desire of the other."¹⁵

Lacan: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 38.

Grosz analyses the theories of Lacan and Freud from a later, feminist perspective. She states in relation to Lacan's idea of desire, the subject and the other that: "Desire desires the desire of the other. Desire is thus a movement, an energy that is always transpersonal, directed to others."¹⁶ She goes on to say: "The lover transfers narcissistic self-regard onto the love object and is thus able to love himself, as it were loving the other."¹⁷

Grosz highlights a problem of the pre-feminist historical context in which these ideas were formed. In the theories of Lacan and Freud that define the subject, the other and its surroundings remain undefined. Grosz states that these things require re-evaluation in her contemporary context.¹⁸ Therefore the subject, as defined by what it is not, should be a changing and transient thing, as place, space and others surround and define it. While identifying the psychological viewpoints of the formation of the subject between mind and body, Grosz explores the individual and social inscription of the subject. She questions the dependence of subjectivity on the relationships between male and female subjects, identifying love as a provider of nourishment for the ego while unrequited love dampens the ego's self-esteem.¹⁹ So, for individuals investing in love between subjects, protection of the ego is important to the construction of subjectivity.

In psychoanalytical terms, two subjects in love are each narcissistically driven so as to receive nourishment for their own ego and each sees his- or herself as the love-object. Freud tells us that the subject posits romantic love as essentially a narcissistic relation: one locates and desires the ego ideal and attempts to position oneself in the most lovable way in relation to it. When desired by the other, the subject's ego literally loves being seen as the satisfaction of the desire of the other. Grosz explains: "Desire always refers to a triangle – the subject, the other and the Other. The other is the object through whom desire is returned to the subject;... The subject's desire is always the desire of the Other."²⁰

And, what about the other? What role can the 'other' play in the formation of the subject? How does the desire of others fuel a sense of self? If the 'other' provides a point of definition as a site for the subject to define what it is not, it is little wonder that the female subject remains caught up in a patriarchal system: not as a primary subject but as a viewed object. If it is important for the male subject to define himself by the female subject's position, it is logical for him to be reluctant to release the hold he has on her definition. The gaze and the perpetuation of the female ideal hold her in this safe (for him) position. However, this position becomes problematic when it is perpetuated by the female subject as a participant in the system of the gaze. Grosz says that for a female subject to be accepted as a love-object, she must conceal and reveal parts of herself to the male subject. This presents a narrow pathway for the female subject to follow in presenting herself as a desirable subject. Grosz explains:

She retains her position as an object of the other's desire only through artifice, appearance, or dissimulation. Illusion, travesty, make-up, the veil, become techniques she relies upon to both cover up and make visible her 'essential assets'. They are her means of seducing or enticing the other, of becoming a love-object for him... Ironically, in this aim of becoming the object of the other's desire, she becomes the site of a rupture ... idealized and debased, devoted to the masquerade (an excess) and a deficiency.²¹

According to Grosz, the female subject sits within a double-play system that debases her; on the one hand, she

must define herself aside from being seen as an object of desire, while, on the other hand, she desires to be seen as desirable. Within the patriarchal system of vision, the female subject's place is conflicted as her definition has been formed around her. Today, in the image-driven new media systems of the twenty-first century, the female stereotype still dominates. The role of her beauty has already been established and defined historically and it is perpetuated through the new media systems of photography in its digital profusion. How and why does "she" continue to be presented as a stereotype?

The 'other' that defines the subject has become the context the subject is positioned in. What does it mean for the female subject to sit before a camera or a mirror when she is thinking about the patriarchal systems of vision (e.g. the gaze) so central to photography? Must the female subject today create and apply a new system of vision to protect her subjectivity? Or has the photograph stolen her image for good? In the following section I explore how patriarchal systems of vision continue to thrive as fed by both male and female subjects. In conclusion, I then return to rephrase the crucial question posed above: *How can the female subject create and apply a new system of vision to protect her subjectivity?*



Figure 3: Angela Lyon, *In His Eyes She Saw No Other*, inkjet print, 12.4 x 8.4 cm, 2007, (courtesy of the artist).

THE FEMALE STEREOTYPE VERSUS THE FEMALE SUBJECT

"The myth of the strong black woman is the other side of the myth of the beautiful dumb blonde. The white man turned the white woman into a weak-minded, weak-bodied, delicate freak, a sex pot, and placed her on a pedestal; he turned the black woman into a strong self-reliant Amazon and deposited her into the kitchen... The white man turned himself into the Omnipotent Administrator and established himself in the front office."²²

As discussed, the female subject has been defined by the gaze and is located by psychoanalysis as the 'other' that primarily defines the male subject. I examined how the gaze plays a role in the self-definition of the female subject as she sees herself, not only as an incomplete subject but also as defined as the other and the subject of the gaze. Her purpose is twice defined, primarily for the male subject. Lesley Friedler writes: "All idealisations of the female from the earliest days of courtly love have been in fact devices to deprive her of freedom and self-determination."²³



Figure 4: Angela Lyon, *By Only A Tenderhook*, lambda print, 124 x 84 cm, 2005, (courtesy of the artist).

The system of the gaze presents the idealised female to society as an object of desire. This familiar system sets up and supports the use of the female ideal stereotype in society, by society. The idealised image of the female is used to sell products as a locus for patriarchal desire and fantasy. The prevalence of the use of the female ideal stereotype in mainstream media such as the television and the internet far outweighs the presentation of any other group. Her use is deliberately designed to harness the desire of both male and female subjects; for the male as an ideal other and for the female as an ideal subject that she may try to emulate. Referencing the historical presentation of the female ideal, the image of the female ideal stereotype dominates our screens today. Millions of similar images together provide one another with a kind of 'authenticity' and the frequency of such images make them difficult to ignore. The photograph's nature as a tool for representation claims a kind of 'truth'. Combined with the drives of the viewing subject, the image has power, but does the image deserve such power over the subject?

Jean Baudrillard says that the act of taking a photograph takes the subject of the image from its context and strips it of all of its dimensions, one by one: "weight, relief, smell, depth, continuity, and, of course, meaning."²⁴ He writes:

Every photographed object is merely the trace left behind by the disappearance of all the rest. It is an almost perfect crime, an almost total resolution of the world, which merely leaves the illusion of a particular object shining forth, the image of which then becomes an impenetrable enigma. Starting out from this radical exception, you have an unimpeded view of the world.

The frequency of the 'stripped' image of the idealised female stereotype normalises this image and holds a mirror up to the female subject for her to compare herself with the ideal, which, as Baudrillard argues, cannot be 'true' due to the very nature of the photograph: its meaning is "utter nonsense".²⁵ Take the 2007 Burger King advertisement that uses images of women, overtly sexualised, while the narrator, in a tongue-in-cheek 'effort' to overpower the presentation, talks about the women's successes as bank managers or lawyers. Here, the advertisers promote women as the object, pretend to show their success in a patriarchal system and take a dig at feminism at the same time.²⁶ A patriarchal system of vision is perpetuated in disguise. What is 'true' and what is 'nonsense' here?

Other advertisements use the female ideal stereotype to include the female viewer as part of the ideal. Rather

than putting forward what the female subject should desire, based on how she deviates from what is presented, marketers use the 'empowering' of the female viewer as a guise to activate her consumption. She is to think, "I'm like that so I should buy that...." This can be seen in the current advertisement for Olay Regenerist Eye Cream where the female ideal stereotype presented is slightly older than what is commonly used. The model acknowledges that she is aging (though only a little) and asserts that she accepts this but would like a 'helping hand' to remain as true to herself as she can be. Here, the advertisement claims to deny the female ideal stereotype by presenting a woman who, apart from a visible two fine lines, fits the idealised female stereotype, and even exemplifies it through air-brushing, softened camera focus on her face and a voice-over of her own.²⁷ It purports to support her subjectivity and the acceptance of her individual self-definition, acknowledges the stereotype, pretends to accept aging while openly fights it and all at once, invites other women to take the same position and open their purses to buy the product. The irony here is that if the advertisement activates the desire drive in the female subject, it could very well activate the same drive in the model, for she is idealised beyond the possibilities of her self as a subject.

Where does this leave the vision of the female subject, viewer and photographer? Must she deny the viewing systems she too has perpetuated, fuelled and understood?

"To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is to be killed. This is the moral of the fairytale about the perfect woman."²⁸
 Angela Carter: *The Sadeian Women*, 77.

"She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness."²⁹
 Angela Carter: *The Bloody Chamber*, 94.

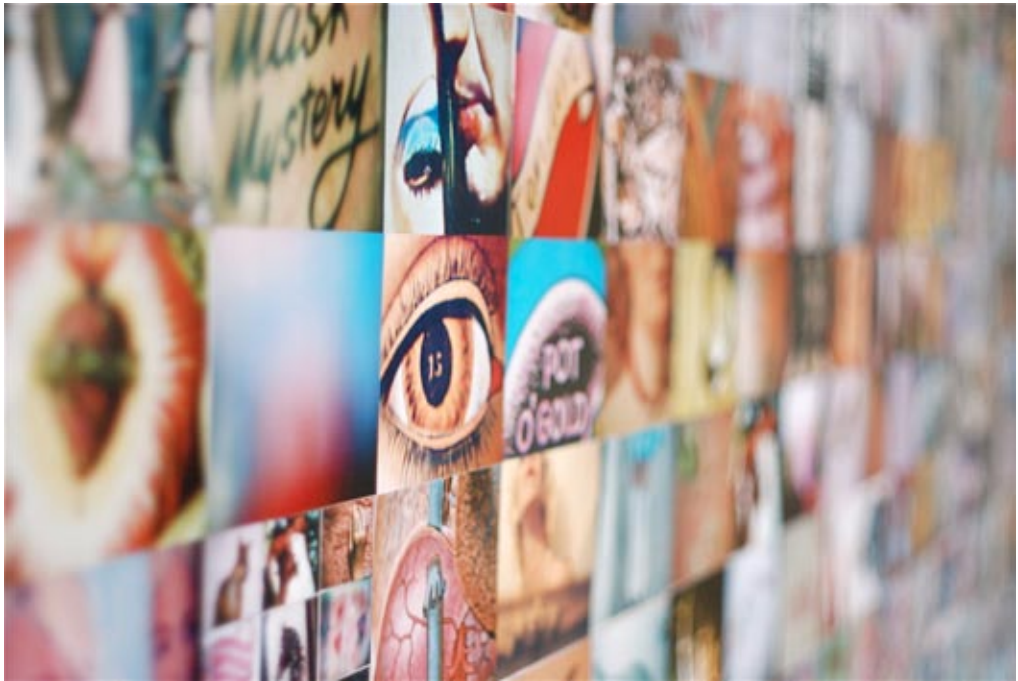


Figure 5: Angela Lyon, *Neither Here Nor There*, detail, 10 x 15cm c-type prints, 2007, (courtesy of the artist).

CONCLUSION

I return to my crucial question: in photography, how can the existing structures of vision be modified to better present and to protect the female subject, or for that matter, any other subject? Here I reflect on *Neither Here Nor There*, my exhibition in the Rear Window of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Therein lays a possible answer to my question. In reflecting on this exhibition, I can now identify a range of photographic strategies deployed in order to create and apply a particular system of vision through my own work. This system partly depends on the old patriarchal system I have identified earlier in this essay. The patriarchal system within which photography was invented and perpetuated underpins the way in which pictures are viewed and presents a starting point to work from in order to highlight and subvert the old system. In order to discuss these strategies, I firstly have to describe the contents of the exhibition and to present an overview of its operations.

The exhibition presented an edited collection of eight hundred 6 x 4 inch photographs chosen and collected for their idealising, romanticising and objectifying qualities, which I will identify presently. The sheer mass of pictures highlighted the temporary nature of the photograph by buffeting together many pictures, all fighting for attention.

As mentioned earlier in this essay, the photograph has the capacity to objectify its subject by stripping her of her weight and of other qualities. By using photography as the primary medium I acknowledge the existing nature of the photograph and historical systems of viewing the photograph (such as the gaze). Such systems of viewing create the context and the point from which my work may begin to address and subvert these very systems.

In order to achieve such a subversion, I use photographs to overwhelm the viewer and to this purpose I covered the wall with the mass of photographs already mentioned. Presented all at once in the same photographic format (6 x 4 inch), each image became part of a larger context. Buffeted together, the images cannot help but be compared to one another and the borders of each are visually interfered with by the images that surround it, making it difficult for the eye to rest on any one picture. With the whole wall covered completely, the Rear Window was full of pictures that animated and led the audience's view over a field of images, without making it possible to focus on any one at any given time.

The individual images were collected for the final exhibition to feature as episodes of visual contradictions that illustrate and extend the boundaries of the photograph. These images are contradictory through their references to text and image, some sourced from romance books, family photo albums and my own scrapbooks. By utilising images from a history of romance and by combining text and partial family portraits, the whole work in the Rear Window played out between the photograph as an index of history and the pictures that describe romance visually and historically through idealisation of the image. I employed characters and concepts in *Neither Here Nor There* that are related to the idealising qualities of the photograph. References to Narcissus and Echo, to Marilyn Monroe and Elvis presented the familiar system of viewing and at the same time they belied the objectifying nature of the image through their jostling for attention next to other images.

The composition of each image also caused the motifs to 'slip off' the format of the photograph and with the use of a short depth-of-focus and keyhole masks, only parts of the images were disclosed. In the mass of images shown together, text alluding to mystery, vision and romance were prominent, tempting the viewer with contradictory ways of looking at the field of work presented. The fragmented state of the photographs also illustrated the very nature of the photograph, namely its interplay between the 'truth' and 'untruth' as the images acted like scraps from a scrapbook.

Photography's knack of eliding – and also alluding to – missing pieces of visual information allows my role as the photographer to play, twist and use the photograph and the visual systems it is connected with to question these very systems. The various strategies that I employed in the Rear Window to highlight the constructed nature of the photograph do not create a new system for looking at photographs but they do suggest an adapted system of photographic vision. Highlighting the decontextualising nature of the photograph allows me to attempt to reinvest and extend the limits of vision. While *Neither Here Nor There* did not find a simple or straight answer to the

Figure 6: Angela Lyon, *Neither Here Nor There*, detail, 10 x 15cm c-type prints, 2007, (courtesy of the artist).



problematics of the photograph, it avoided providing the viewer with any 'truth' at all.

The strategies employed in the work played with our desire to trust the photograph. The profusion of images in a *field of images* constructed an adapted 'angle of view' whereby photography's failure to present its own wider context was identified and acknowledged. An awareness of our system of viewing became the necessary understanding through making this work; and its refusal to provide an answer to how we can adapt and develop a system to accommodate all viewers of photographs supported this understanding of the limits of photography. The photograph is just a photograph, and deserves to be treated as such. The power of the image falls flat when its failings to present its context are identified and acknowledged.

Returning to the patriarchal system of viewing highlighted earlier in this essay, I find that my practice is dependent on it. This dependence functions as a starting point which challenges me to find alternatives. The mass of images presented in the Rear Window allowed the subject to be more than a static image; it allowed the subject to be fluid and engaged with her environment, including other subjects. Reflecting on my work exhibited in the Rear Window at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, I am now starting to understand the intricacies of our viewing systems and how we could challenge them. In this process, we could allow the photograph to return to what it only ever promised to be: just a photograph. In the words of Jean Luc Godard, "Ce n'est pas une image juste, c'est juste une image."³⁰

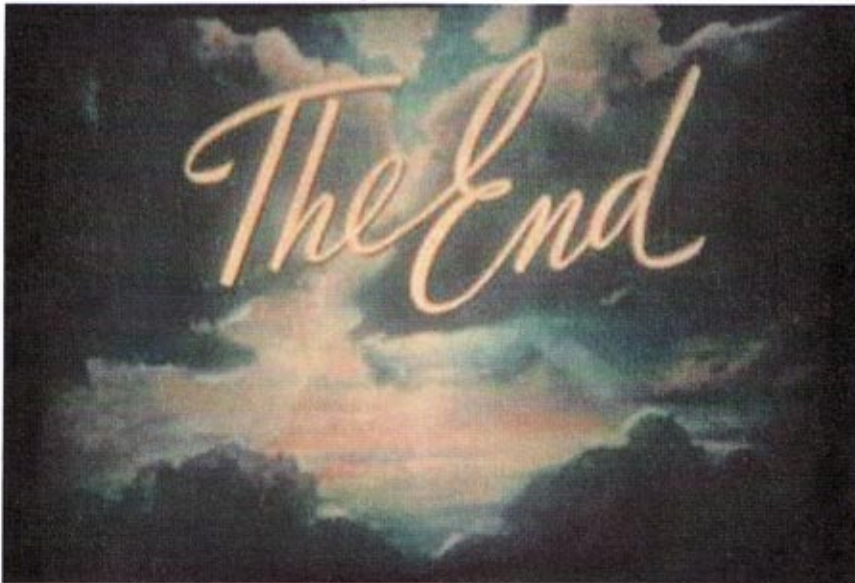


Figure 7: Angela Lyon, *This Is 'The End'*, c-type print, 124 x 84 cm, 2008, (courtesy of the artist).

Angela Lyon completed a Master of Fine Arts Degree at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in 2007. She uses fakery in photography as a way to flatten and combine the pictures she takes, makes and collects into fields of images in order to question the methodologies of photography as a studio discipline.

- 1 Michel de Montaigne, quoted in *The Mirror: A History*, by Sabine Melchior-Bonnet (London: Routledge, 2002), 224.
- 2 Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History* (London: Routledge, 2002), 252.
- 3 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984), 12.
- 4 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 14.
- 5 Sigmund Freud quoted in Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 23.
- 6 Written by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the subject's ego identifies and creates its ego ideal and desires to

- become its ego ideal. Lacan extended Freud's ideas in terms of the mirror stage, and the desire drive.
- 7 Robert King, *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, in eds. Hughette Glowinski, Zita Marks and Sara Murphy (London: Free Association Books, 2001), 115. The Mirror Stage: Jacques Lacan's mirror stage suggests a split in the subject between his image and his self and presents the subject as out of reach of the self in the mirror. Understanding that the subject is projected in front of the self has a dramatic effect on the subject as it sees itself from outside and as a separate entity. As he understands this new position he realises that he is in the mirror and, therefore, cannot be where he stands in his position facing the mirror.
- 8 Before encountering the mirror stage, the Lacanian subject is complete as he sees himself reflected through his mother's love. As the subject realises he is not part of his mother and dislocates himself from her, he encounters himself from this point on as from within the mirror (of the mirror stage).
- 9 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979) 257.
- 10 Sigmund Freud quoted in *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Techoculture* by Sadie Plant (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 23.
- 11 Margaret Olin, "Gaze" in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 208.
- 12 Margaret Olin, *Gaze*, 209.
- 13 Margaret Olin *Gaze*, 212.
- 14 Margaret Olin *Gaze*, 215.
- 15 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), 38.
- 16 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 65.
- 17 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 127.
- 18 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995) 100.
- 19 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 61.
- 20 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 80.
- 21 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 132.
- 22 Eldridge Cleaver quoted in *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970) 162.
- 23 Leslie Friedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 1979).
- 24 Jean Baudrillard, *Photographies*, see www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard-photographies.html as last accessed on 1 May 2007.
- 25 Jean Baudrillard, *Photographies*, see www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard-photographies.html as last accessed on 1 May 2007.
- 26 Since the writing of my dissertation, this advertisement has been pulled from television on the grounds that it breached an advertising code of practice forbidding the use of sex appeal to draw attention to a product. On Campbell Live (NZ TV 3), the female marketer said that although the advertisement was primarily directed at a male demographic of 16-35years, she also targeted the support of the female population, stating that: "young women today, have a sense of humour and see the advertisement this way." Two issues can also be discussed apropos the pulling of the advertisement: 1. the person who created it was a woman, openly using the objectified image of the female stereotype; and 2. the advertisement, although "frowned" upon by Campbell Live, was shown many times during the broadcast.
- 27 Advertisement for Regenerist Eye Cream, by Olay (NZ Television, 6-9pm 01/06/07), Channels 1 & 2.
- 28 Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 1992), 77.
- 29 Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), 94.
- 30 Jean Luc Godard, "this is not just an image, it's just an image", see Jean Luc Godard, see <http://elle-en-tout-genre.overblog.com/article-6371712.html> as last accessed on 20 October 2008.

POSTCARDS

Max Oettli



Figure 1: From the *Postcard Series*, 2007.

On the 26th of June 2007 I was spat out of a whale on Tomahawk Beach.

Seriously though, when I arrived in this chilly southern city, a migrant labourer, it would be mild to say that my emotions were mixed. They'd gone through the dirty cycle of an industrial washing machine, been wringed out with a few tears here and there, and then jumbled in a damp foetid tumble dryer that ran out of coins.

The light though in this chilly southern place grabbed me, caressed me; it is clearer, sweeter even than in the tepid north. Bright day and sodium vapour night.



Figure 2: From the *Postcard Series*, 2007.

Suddenly I saw again why Francis Pound and Terry McNamara had got into a fist fight over New Zealand light and painting (1988 court report *New Zealand Herald*).

Christ, a country that keeps its culture on the simmer and where people fight for the light is worth coming to. Boils over once in a while and messes up the stovetop (see above) but the energy is there.

My *Postcards* were the first couple of hundred grabby little digital photos I took, wandering about the place, looking into shop fronts and picking up on the city's signals. It's important for people to get my address



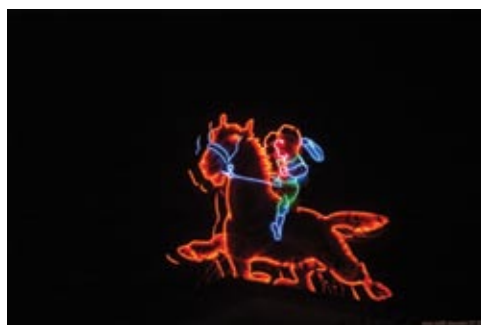
here. In Europe it was important to feel out directions in which I wanted things to happen; important – as a third drone string on my thin banjo – to get a few pictures made, to get a few pictures out there.

I chose sixty-four pictures, designed a postcard back and did them in an edition of three at ol' Uniprint, Dunedin. Then, I lost the file in a hard drive meltdown, so you won't see those sixty-four again.

However, the series goes on, with the odd spontaneous photo coming in, but there's little sense of urgency nudging me, and I'm also upping the quality so they will be slicker, choosier and maybe not necessarily as vital as those first urgent sixty four.

Max Oettli lived in New Zealand for 20 years. He studied at the University of Auckland and taught at Elam School of Fine Arts. He was an important New Zealand photographer in the 1969-75 period and then spent 32 years in Geneva, teaching mainly Architecture students. He returned to New Zealand in 2007 and is now principal lecturer in Photography at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art.

Images: From the *Postcard Series*, 2007
(courtesy of the artist).



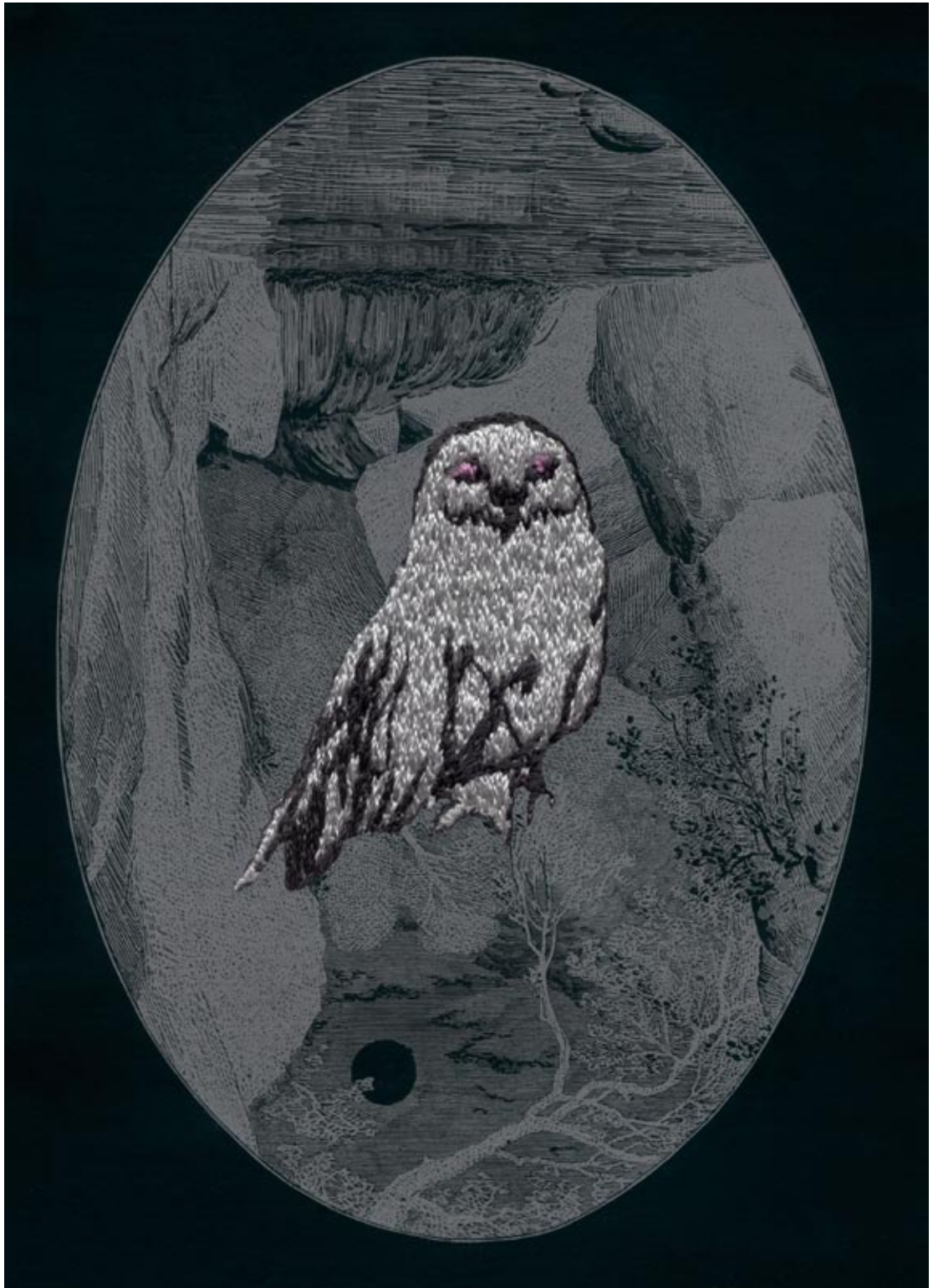


Figure 1: *Second Empire (Pool)*, 2008, 90 x 125cm.

SECOND EMPIRE: SPOTS OF TIME

Gavin Hipkins

"Animals (birds, ants), children, and old men as collectors."
(Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, H4a,2)

"Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower."
(William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*)

"Hiya! I'm headed for Camp Crystal Lake. Can you help me out?"
(Annie from *Friday the 13th*.)

I SECOND EMPIRE: DISTANT TRAVELS

In the 1880s, the London-based publishing house The Religious Tract Society produced a series of popular travel books carrying the common subtitle: *Drawn with Pen and Pencil*. Titles including *English Pictures*, *French Pictures*, and *Italian Pictures* feature line illustrations of landscapes and national landmarks from particular European nations, and are each accompanied by specific yet proverbial travel and historical commentary.¹ The majority of The Religious Tract Society's series charts historical sites, architectural features and landscape wonders from Europe including the Mediterranean, yet the string of books also comprises pictorial renderings of the new world such as *American Pictures*, *Canadian Pictures*, and closer to home, *Australian Pictures*.

My current body of work *Second Empire* takes its initial backdrops from this run of exquisitely produced books published in the late nineteenth century and digitally combines its plates with scanned patches that I have custom ordered. To date, with rare exception, the landscape backdrops in *Second Empire* are not only digitally inverted, but also rotated such that the landscapes appear upside down. With this device, I am interested in the imagining of landscapes literally 'from the other side of the world'. This somewhat 'dumb' strategy reflects on the childlike envisaging of a specific geographical location (moment and event) on the flip side of the globe, extending centrifugally out to space with trees, buildings, animals, people and debris fastened onto the earth, apparently upside-down.

Common to this series, as with precedents *Empire* (2007), and *Natural History* (2007-08), is the disruption of pictorial space with a centrally positioned and digitally scanned embroidered patch. With these elements, I am enticed by the formation of a hybridity and the tension between the patches and backdrops in the construction of narrative. In positioning these fused binary elements, I have called on Robert J C Young's timely evocation for postcolonial studies of Mikhail Bakhtin's persuasive argument that language "even within a single sentence" is frequently double-voiced.²

What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.³

Within single pictures then, stubborn pairings of late nineteenth-century etching plates with early twenty-first century embroidered patch design collide to produce a third meaning: a hybridity; digitally woven from an idiosyncratic charting (it would appear) of two discrete material elements, disparate times, conflated cultural and social meanings.

Once a work is complete, this time-travel-effect of borrowing scenes from the antiquarian section of the bookshop while adding a further layer both disrupts the pictorial plane and, at the same time, cements these two elements within an inseparable bind.

Following Bakhtin's line of questioning, how does the collision of these elements in the *Second Empire* series 'unmask' each other? Patches are generally worn by youth, they mark allegiances to packs and identify ideological leanings towards movements (hippydom, acid dance culture, death metal, hard core punk...), and at the same time, the very material act of wearing patches subscribes to a nostalgia for yesterday, at once evoking the counter culture movement or, at least, the fashions from previous decades.⁴ With *Empire* I bought such patches from local music stores and city markets. In *Second Empire* though, the current patches are significantly more rarefied. Chosen from an Asian-produced catalogue of some 1500 designs featuring animals, automobiles, and sports insignia – no band patches in this tome of a catalogue – they are more idiosyncratic in their selection.

Whereas patches for the earlier series were found in markets and boutique record shops, the location for buying patches used in *Second Empire* shifts to cleaner ground and embroidery kiosks stationed in ubiquitous shopping malls. The space between bohemian market and generic interior shopping street is akin to that now familiar flaneur's stroll in late-nineteenth century Paris when circumnavigating the old quarters to the new, bringing us to Walter Benjamin's beloved *ur-mall* of consumer culture: the arcade. Between my two coordinates – historical travel guide and contemporary embroidery – a portal is established which connects 1880s bookshops and early twenty-first century globalised shopping spectacle; amounting to the same thing in different forms: wish fulfilment.

2 SECOND EMPIRE: PEN AND PENCIL

An unmasking need to also take a reflexive turn to production methodologies, and to modes of gathering images. Travel and tourism have been common features of my growing archive of photos and exhibition output. Evident with the latest series is an apparent transition from my previous bodies of works whereby a traditional photographing in realist mode of an empirical world turns to one of flicking through books and selecting patches from bulky catalogues for sampling. In this manner, the collector stops archiving photos from outside and chooses to stay indoors; sourcing digital scans of elements for two-layered montage.

This shift of image gathering declares saturation, even boredom (albeit potentially temporal), with *photography* per se. Connected to this change of direction is a space of possible exhaustion for actual travel: a weariness of carrying camera to site in search of *something*. Consider then, for a moment, lassitude: a creeping sensation that finally engulfed the aristocratic Duc des Essintes in the 1880s and prevented him from boarding the train from Paris bound for London and his anticipated journey across the Channel. Here it is convenient to speculate on the prospect that Des Essintes had seen a copy of *London Drawn with Pen and Pencil*, or a similar travel guide, becoming as reader comfortably lethargic with an idea of London for the stay at home tourist.⁵

If *Second Empire* marks a shift from my earlier realist-based photographic series to appropriation-based camera-less image capture technologies and methodologies, then I need to remind myself that this is not the first time my practice has turned to strategies of borrowing and coupling. Among other projects, formative work emerging from art school in the early 1990s reflected its time and the full effect of postmodernism on a keen undergraduate student. My first one-person museum show *The Vision* (in 1995) brought together readymade door-size lush posters depicting waterfalls, sunsets, tigers, pantries, stable doors and life-size girlie pictures.⁶ This is how we worked under the tyranny of the shadow of Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author*; in the distant wake of defining practices by Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine: for then it seemed (as today), how else to make images but by sourcing and reframing?

In part, the cyclical return to an artist's box of tricks appeases current anxieties pertaining to recognition for the potential of my recent *modus operandi* being read as arriving squarely alongside mid-career status, and the common crisis frequently linked to the early stages of this period. Yet the new work distinguishes itself from formative practice by revisiting earlier avant-garde strategies of construction: simple cut and paste with the self-imposed constraint of two elements (playing with binaries), rather than playing with the laws of appropriation and a dutiful attitude to art history that distinguishes persuasive historical postmodern practice.



Figure 2: *Second Empire (Lake)*, 2008, 130 x 130cm.



Figure 3: *Second Empire (Forest)*, 2008, 110 x 110cm.



Figure 4: *Second Empire (Mountains)*, 2008, 115 x 115cm.



Figure 5: *Second Empire (Tree)*, 2008, 110 x 130cm.



Figure 6: *Second Empire (Woods)*, 2007, 120 x 165cm.



Figure 7: *Second Empire (River III)*, 2008, 125 x 170cm.

Despite these somewhat flippant – yet useful – historical references and negotiations, for me today though, *Second Empire* is more convincingly connected to pictorialism, faux symbolist imagery and aestheticism. The project empathetically leans towards an extraordinary, yet frequently overlooked, late-nineteenth century pastoralism pursued by pictorial photographers in search of a rural ideal.⁷ In this refined light, consider, for example, Peter Henry Emerson's genteel and best known photograph *Gathering Waterlilies* from 1886, dating from the same decade as The Religious Tract Society's series *Drawn with Pen and Pencil*. The common motifs from this genre of 'naturalistic photography' are revisited in *Second Empire* via, of course, reproductions of conventional peasant and rural scenes taken from the original travel publications published in the mid 1880s to early 1890s. Comparing the popular travel series with fine art prints from the period reminds us today of the key role photography played in the initial surveying and cross-medium rendering (mechanical and hand) of landscape in the late-nineteenth century. That The Religious Tract Society's series must be drawn in pre-industrial drawing tools of pen and pencil, as their titles testify, knowingly attempts to deny the plate's dependence on the camera at this time.

3 SECOND EMPIRE: LOST PICTURES

My ongoing body of work uses digital technologies to play with an ambiguity of medium: not quite painting, looking like etching, or woodcut, or perhaps embroidery... As unique-state stretched canvas though, the works take on the *status* of painting. I have yet to use the term photography to describe the medium of the pieces, preferring photomedia in defining the use of a flat-bed scanner as capture device of frontal surfaces including those of books and the fine thread of synthetic patch. With their medium ambiguity, these new works simply constitute 'pictures'. I like to think of these recent works as memories of photographs, alluding to the ubiquity of the landscape photograph and its exhaustion as stylised trope as well as to my own experiential and media-filtered travel experiences and dreamed memories.

In 2006 I completed an artist's residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program in New York City. During this period, I became very interested in painting, or at least in the status of painting. It was everywhere. In Chelsea today, this return-to-the-same-in-a-different-form dominates audience and market horizons. Epitomising this figurative painting revival, The Saatchi Gallery launched the three-part mega-exhibition *The Triumph of Painting* in 2005. Comprising more than 350 canvases, and placed alongside related media rhetoric and a beast of a catalogue, this event provides the springboard for reflections on the status of painting in contemporary art vis-à-vis photography and its apparent miserable failings. In an introductory catalogue essay for the show, Bary Schwabsky claims: "For although it was photography that taught us the modern idea of the image, it is painting that allows us to internalise it".⁸ Adjoining Schwabsky's text, Alison Gingeras argues that photography's indexical nature to the world today is so debased that the mnemonic insufficiency of the photograph has opened up a certain image-space that contemporary painters have identified and claimed as their own.⁹

Memory, and the ability to recall moments of heightened lived experience and wonders of nature are at the heart of William Wordsworth's philosophical approach to poetry and the transformative powers he identified as "spots of time". Conjuring up invigorating moments of beauty and mountain crispness could help to escape the burden of city living and the mayhem of the everyday. Remembering Wordsworth, while attempting to resuscitate photomedia's "mnemonic insufficiency", with *Second Empire* I would like to form my own little spots of time, filtered scenes of nature blocked by a centrally positioned shield alluding to the medium's limits: an opaque and immovable adhesive becoming blind spot.

4 SECOND EMPIRE: EMPIRE OF THE MIND

I was raised in suburban Auckland in the 1970s by a Catholic mother and atheist father. This enduring tension, and at times outright conflict, is one of the key personal undercurrents in all my work and surfaces with more force in *Second Empire*. As a teenager, I was introduced to the movie horror genre during video screenings in the church hall on Sunday nights. The organisation and selection of projected videos by older teenagers at the church lent itself to religious perspective horrors including *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, *The Sentinel* and other defining seventies and early eighties horror classics such as *Friday the 13th*, and *The Amityville Horror*. The popularity of the religious topic films during the seventies played on a guilt exaggerated by my Sunday evening sessions behind the local church; as film critic Alan Jones notes: "By playing on the theme of a lack of faith in godless times – the result of the



Figure 8: *Second Empire (Swamp)*, 2007, 120 x 110cm.

Vietnam War, racial tension and the quest for alternative spiritual convictions – back-to-basics religious shockers eventually became front-runners”.¹⁰ No doubt, my memories of this weekly immersion in the horror genre are today heightened, coloured by an idea of the proximity between Hollywood church scene and actual churchyard setting. How can art approach this first experience of the horror genre, of *real* fright, of virtual haunting?

At once both a flippant thrill factor, and at the same time a legitimate haunting (unable to get to sleep after the films late at night or the recurring nightmares that, indeed, mimic the surreal awake/asleep dream sequences that Wes Craven brilliantly intersperses in his influential *A Nightmare on Elm Street* from 1984). For all my enthusiasm and recollection of the horror films from this period, *Second Empire* hardly constitutes horror scene or slasher film still. As I have mentioned, pictorialism is too prevalent a factor in these pictures and the patches ordered from a catalogue of existing designs play out an aestheticised dramaturgy of colliding styles, times, and functions. *Second Empire* extends my engagement in landscape discourses. With the filmic horror genre as psychoactive mnemonic backdrop for these works, landscape is kitsch, but creepy. I lie on the studio floor, and look towards the ceiling in search of a spot of time and I picture a Hollywood set of cardboard props and camera lights where hockey-masked Jason stalks through the woods near the reopened lakeside summer camp in *Friday the 13th*. Wordsworth's spots of time become location sites of media memories from dense forest, quiet river, and murky swamp.

Gavin Hipkins is an Auckland-based artist and writer. Recent exhibitions include: *Shifting Light*, Auckland Art Gallery (2008) and *Tell Me A Story: Narrative Photography Now*, San Diego Museum of Photographic Arts (2007). Hipkins was the artist-in-residence at The McCahon House in Auckland in 2007/08 where he developed the *Second Empire* series. He teaches at Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland.

Images: Unique state pigment prints on stretched canvas, courtesy of Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington; Kaliman Gallery, Sydney; Starkwhite, Auckland.

- 1 For example, a description from *English Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil* reads: “A bend in the river between Shepperton and Walton is of historic interest, as there Julius Caesar with his legions forced the passage of the Thames, and routed the British General Cassivelaunus”. Reverend Samuel Manning and Reverend S G Green, *English Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil* (London: The Religious Tract Society, c. 1890) 27.
- 2 Robert JC Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995) 20.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Daniel Palmer, “Gavin Hipkins: Empire and Other Children’s Stories”, in Gavin Hipkins, *Empire* (Auckland: Rim Books, 2008) 32-33.
- 5 Alain De Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2002) 9-11.
- 6 Athol McCredie, “Yearning for the Infinite”, in Gavin Hipkins: *The Vision* (Palmerston North: Manawatu Art Gallery, 1995). My other major projects that have turned to the camera as tool for borrowing and repositioning found published material includes *The Stall* and *The Gulf* (both 2000-01). See Trevor Mahovsky, “An Excessive Economy”, in Gavin Hipkins: *The Stall* (Hamilton: Waikato Museum of Art and History, 2001).
- 7 For a useful introductory overview of European pictorial photography at the end of the nineteenth century, see Anne Hammond, “Naturalistic Vision and Symbolist Image: The Pictorial Impulse”, in Michel Frizot (ed.), *A New History of Photography* (Cologne: Kronemann, 1998) 293-308.
- 8 Barry Schwabsky, “An Art that Eats its own Head: Painting in the Age of the Image”, in *The Triumph of Painting* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005) 8.
- 9 Alison M Gingeras, “The Mnemonic Function of the Painted Image”, from *The Triumph of Painting* (London: The Saatchi Gallery website, 2005) www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/current/essays.htm as last accessed on 25 October 2008.
- 10 Alan Jones, *The Rough Guide to Horror Movies* (London: Rough Guides, 2005) 38-39.

BECOMING INDIGENOUS: THE IMPOSSIBLE NECESSITY

Liz Bryce

Sometime in 2005 an image on the front of a catalogue caught my attention. It had a chair in the middle of what looked like the Karoo Desert, a part of Southern Africa.¹ The image had an immediate visual impact on me. I liked the inference of remoteness where something happening is usually unlikely to be noticed by the 'art' world. I was privately intrigued with the thought 'what if there had been no photo?' or 'what if it had been viewed only by a passing tribesman or farmer or indeed only roosted on by wildlife?' Surely that small audience was as important as a gallery full of viewers. I liked the idea of communicating with those who inhabit or are familiar with a particular place. On these occasions the act of putting the work there could be likened to an unsolicited performance, an interference or intervention in a public place. It suggests through various iterations a possible inhabitation of a place by people who might represent different types of viewer. In Aotearoa New Zealand some of these viewers might be indigenous and some might be people who think that they could become indigenous. Yet another group of viewers might realise that becoming indigenous is an oxymoron, an impossible aim. Iterations using figures mimicking colonising actions were central to the project discussed below. The figures (dolls) sometimes occupied places singly like scouts or surveyors; often as small invasive columns of figures, like an invading army. They did not ask permission; they did not respect the values of those already there.



(Images left to right) Figure 1: Liz Bryce, *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Otago Peninsula, 2006.

Figure 2: Liz Bryce, *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Taiaoro Heads, Dunedin, 2006 (photograph courtesy of Jim Searle, Peripatus).

Figure 3: Liz Bryce, *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Haulashore Island, Nelson, 2005.

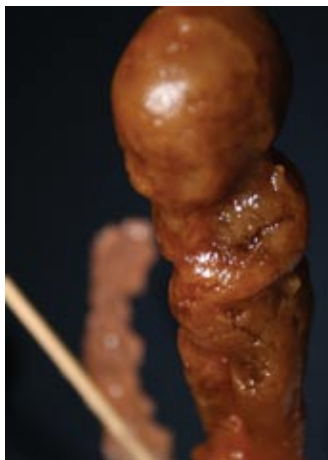
The notion of carefully considered art for an audience not readily perceived or identified became a priority that I explored during the project *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, a multidisciplinary and multi-outcome project that occurred during 2004-06.²

An apparent oxymoron driving the project was the desire of the coloniser to become indigenous. Canadian theorist Terry Goldie suggests that a feeling of "not belonging", of the alien within, is responsible for this very specifically post-colonial desire.³ The project also engaged with Rosi Braidotti's notion of "becoming" as an evolving state of nomadic thought and action. Braidotti refers to Judith Butler's notion of an alternative performance where identity is constructed through repeated behaviours, describing these actions as "iterations".⁴

Within the overall project, I produced work for public situations as well as gallery exhibition venues, using performative, sculptural, photographic image and digital formats. Each of the many iterations within the project was documented photographically and collated with narrative notes along with some of the theoretical frameworks that were important to each concept. Meta-documentation for the project was digitally formatted as a hypertext document, which encouraged a rhizomic reading experience through the related but changing narrations of the different works produced.

An important visual code that was repeated in various ways in the project was a small cupie doll originally of British origin.⁵ Over the years that the doll was produced (approximately between 1950 and 1970) there must have been several different production castings resulting in different shades and hues of pink. These cheap, plastic dolls became historically synonymous with the New Zealand A & P (agriculture and produce) shows as one could win the pink fairy doll on a stick at the fairground side-show. Later they were used commercially to represent many ethnicities. In the 1960s and 1970s some were painted brown and marketed as 'Māori' souvenirs and sold in Rotorua gift shops: Pākehā souvenirs of Māori.

I made multiple casts of the cupie doll form in wax and sugar. One edition had a wick inserted, turning the dolls into candles, referring to another souvenir trend in the 1970s. Further editions used a traditional recipe for toffee in both white and raw sugar. They were displayed on sticks like the fairground dolls. As the toffee disintegrated and crystallised, the work became lustrously beautiful and the substance changed state and form, from solid to liquid to crystal. In a neat kind of justification of the indigenous, the *white* sugar casts dripped and melted within a few weeks. However, the *raw* sugar dolls (containing a small amount of brown sugar) still exist in form, albeit in a fossilised-looking state.



(Images left to right) Figure 4: Liz Bryce, *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Waitangi Day, Octagon, Dunedin, 2006.

Figure 5: Liz Bryce, sugar casts following *Island (S)hopping* from *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin, 2005.

Figure 6: Liz Bryce, *Raw Sugar*, *White Sugar* from *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, 2005-07.

I experimented with colouring the wax so that the casts achieved different hues and mixes of pink, beige and brown. Some dolls had brown centres and white outsides; others had white centres and brown outsides, while some had patches of different colour. As well as contrived colouring, the wax naturally changes colour over time, gradually darkening.

Over the course of the project, wax doll candles performed ideas in public, by my repeatedly placing and leaving them in significant places. All these manipulations alluded to "becoming" and to perceptions of ethnicity. The



Figure 7: Liz Bryce, *Desire to Belong*, from *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Pavement Window, Peter Rae Gallery, Dunedin, 2006.



Figure 8: Liz Bryce, *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, Inside Pavement Window, Peter Rae Gallery, Dunedin, 2006.

allusion was used to enact unpublished colonisation stories. For example, in one publicly sited installation in Nelson, hundreds of the dolls occupied sites historically linked to immigration waves from Britain in the 1860s. Local people of Māori descent or connection understood the significance of large numbers of pale dolls waiting in that place to be carried ashore by a few darker dolls.⁶

The *Becoming Indigenous* project changed the focus in my practice. Things that now became important were the performative nature of the work, the non-authorial mark of the artist and the accessibility and participatory nature of the work for the audience.

'Performative' refers to work which "performs an action" rather than representing it.⁷ In their way, the materials of the cast dolls – wax and sugar – performed the concept of the project by changing colour and form. The changing colour and form suggested that becoming indigenous could be possible. However, the method used for the digital work mimicked or performed an impossible conclusion: becoming indigenous is an unrealisable aim. Another aspect of the project involved the tangible occupation of actual space by the dolls and the fact that the audience could perform various actions with them without the artist needing to be involved. The accessibility of work for the audience and its participatory nature has relevance today and is allied to a kind of democratic ethic as a key issue in relational artwork.⁸

Place and historical palimpsest is relevant here and has subsequently led me to work in collaboration with a group of other artists who are also interested in working with these notions. Our members have formed *activelayers*⁹ to continue to collaborate on experimental cross-disciplinary works that have layers of meaning and extend the boundaries of the different media involved. We combine our disciplines of theatre, dance, video and visual arts not only through digital media but also in the method of working with an idea. The artists involved are from different parts of the world and many of us have not met face to face, becoming acquainted only through digital media. We challenge ideas of location and 'site' using the places where we happen to be (local site) combined with a variety of media and performance software that allows us to work together in real time from our different physical locations and across different time zones.

I was introduced to the *Upstage* software that *activelayers* uses most during the *Becoming Indigenous* project.¹⁰ In this medium, the invisibility of the artist suits the nature of subversive, though not necessarily radical, work. The unpredictable nature of the audience and internet is part of the challenge. In a way – similar to an artwork in the Karoo Desert – do we know if there will be anyone there?

Liz Bryce also works as e.i.kapai and is a multi-media artist and designer. She is currently also a part-time lecturer in the Design Department of Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

- 1 The work was by Bharti Kher, Echo for "Violence/Silence", Pulse, South Africa, 2002, in "Shifting Map: Artists' Platforms and Strategies for Cultural Diversity", Edith Rijnja, Gertrude Flentge (eds), Reinaldo Laddaga, Charles Esche et al, RAIN Artists Initiated Network (Amsterdam: Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten & Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2004).
- 2 Elizabeth Bryce, *Becoming Indigenous: The Impossible Necessity*, unpublished dissertation, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2007.
- 3 "And the first felt need for indigenisation came when a person moved to a new place and recognised an 'other' as having greater roots in that place...a process which I have termed 'indigenisation'. A peculiar word, it suggests the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous." Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1989) 12-14.
- 4 Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (London: Polity Press, 2002) 42, referring to Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, Routledge, 1993).
- 5 *Kleeware made in England* is just noticeable on the back of the neck of some of the original dolls.
- 6 The place was Haulashore Island during *Terminus05*, a symposium of international sculptors working on two sites, curated by Ali Bramwell, 2005.
- 7 This concept was reinforced for me by Rosa Casado, a Spanish performative artist and dancer whose workshop "To Create in a Time and a Place: Strange Paradises", I attended during this research project. See <http://magdalena.actrix.co.nz/guests/rosa.html> as last accessed on 25 October 2008.
- 8 I refer to discussion and response around Nicolas Bourriaud's text: entitled *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les presses du reel, 1998, 2002 for the English translation) and Liam Gillick, "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*" in *October* 115, Winter 2006, 95-107.
- 9 *Activelayers* was formed in March 2008 by Liz Bryce, James Cunningham, Suzon Fuks and Cherry Truluck. See www.activelayers.net as last accessed on 25 October 2008.
- 10 *Upstage* is software developed by Douglas Bagnall for Avatar Body Collision enabling a group of people to create a real time cyberformance on the internet. The cyberstage uses 'stages', 'backdrops', 'avatars' and 'props' and now includes audio and drawing functions. Audience members may contribute to the real time performance online through a chat window. See www.upstage.org.nz as last accessed on 25 October 2008.

MAPPING

Brian Snapp



Figure 1: Brian Snapp, *Nearly South*, clay, nautical maps, rock salt, Finch Lane Gallery, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2001 (photographer Fred Wright).

"And what is space anyway if not the body's absence at every given point?" (Joseph Brodsky)¹

Moving from one point to another involves traversing space. Once you move closer to your destination you find yourself occupying another space, nearly there. And for now, that is as close as you get. In order to make this new space a place you give it a name. To fill the void created by leaving the familiar to live in the distance you consume the space, you fill yourself with it and you expand yourself into it, still, nearly there. Looking back to points of origin and away to other locations you see your absence. The map documents more of where you are not than of where you are. I am the space where I am. Stop, sit, take a moment.



Figure 2: Brian Snapp, *Untitled*, clay, coloured slip, 2001.

A chair When I look back and forth for the meaning to this series my mind drifts
 A place through images resembling the throne of Catul Hyuk, a Sam Malloof
 A position rocker and Joseph Kosuth's *Three Chairs*. The view, the comfort, the
 A ranking idea, the practicality, the elevation from the ground; all of these concepts
 Support cohere to the back, the neck, the legs, the feet and the butt. A room with a
 Dignity view, an angle of repose, the news of a loved one's death creates the need
 Solace for contemplation, a transfer of weight, focus towards transcendence.
 Power The quickest way from point A to point B is with your tray table secured
 Authority and your seat in its upright position. When I reminisce and project about
 Relax meaning for these objects I realise I'm just tired and need a place to sit.



Figure 3: *Curing*, installation with clay, coloured slip, chairs, rock salt, cable, meat hooks, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2006.

"When we recall the hours we have spent in our corners, we remember above all silence, the silence of our thoughts."²(Gaston Bachelard)

As we expand into new spaces we create corners. These corners form an oasis that Bachelard calls "havens for immobility."³ They create a focal point that narrows in and expands outward. When you step into your corner you begin to delineate space between inside and outside. As artists, we create within and traverse these boundaries, inviting others to participate in another new space. Mary Jane Jacob writes: "This space is located in between. It is a middle ground, a transition space, a place of pause, a place to wait, to test and then to move beyond."⁴ In this space we present ideas and ask the viewer questions like, what if, is this the way it is, is war the only viable option, can we live a more compassionate life? In order

to make larger shifts of consciousness in larger spaces, smaller shifts must take place. Before these smaller shifts can take place, curing must begin. Curing is a process of healing and refining. It is a process that takes time and is generally achieved through aging. The aging process can be taken to a point of refinement just short of decay. These ideas, peace, compassion, tolerance, have been curing for a long time but not beyond their usefulness. By building within corners, creating a space for contemplation, embellishing it with hanging signs, symbols and directives, corners disappear, the inside becomes the outside, smaller shifts begin and we find an "intimate immensity"⁵ to breathe in.

"If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace."⁶(Gaston Bachelard)

The corners have become a place of sanctuary, a home where space is divided into rooms. One room, the library, is used as a quiet place for research, contemplation and the formulation of ideas. The library is stocked with books, maps and other curiosities to expand understanding and to allow us to dream of new concepts and applications. These ideas, when presented by an artist through images and taken to the public, move the artist into the role of "public intellectual."⁷ Edward Said writes "that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing."⁸ To be present to the needs of others, to show a different way, to make gifts or resources available to



Figure 4: *Curing* (detail), installation with clay, coloured slip, chairs, rock salt, cable, meat hooks, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2006.

the individual or group without them having been consciously sought after is a way of representing ourselves. Presenting images, signs or symbols on clay for the public to take and use is my attempt to create a ripple that moves across space closer and closer to there, presenting possibilities for action in the present and the future; nearly there.



Figure 5: Brian Snapp, *Present*, installation with clay, coloured slips, wood, rock salt, Burien Art Gallery, Washington, 2007.

Brian Snapp is Associate Professor in Ceramics at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah. He holds an MFA degree from California State University Los Angeles and his work has been exhibited in California, Colorado, Texas, Washington, Illinois, Georgia, Italy and Korea. He was recently a visiting artist at Northland Polytechnic in Kerikeri and at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand.

- 1 Joseph Brodsky, *To Urania* (New York, Noonday Press, 1996).
- 2 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York, Orion Press, 1964), 137.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Mary Jane Jacobs, "The Space Of Art", in *Buddha Mind In Contemporary Art* (Los Angeles: Berkeley & London, University of California Press, 2004).
- 5 *The Poetics of Space*, 183
- 6 Ibid., 6.
- 7 Carol Becker, "The Artist as Public Intellectual", in *The Politics Of Culture: Policy Perspectives for Individuals, Institutions and Communities* (New York: The New Press, 2000).
- 8 Edward W Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, as cited by Becker in "The Artist as Public Intellectual", 241.

TAPESTRY TERRAIN: IN-RESIDENCE AT THE VICTORIAN TAPESTRY WORKSHOP

Mary-Louise Edwards

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Tapestry Workshop is a unique organisation in Melbourne, Australia, that facilitates the commissioning, management and construction of original, large-scale, hand-woven tapestries for public institutions and individuals across the globe.

An ex-knitting mill in the inner-city bayside suburb of South Melbourne has been home to the VTW for the past 32 years. The interior is atmospheric, its high ceilings embedded with clear glass windows that let in a constant level of natural light across the large, multi-purpose centre.

The building houses an open-plan work space with an array of standard and custom built looms, a studio, a library, shelves with rows of dyed thread, still others for samples and past projects, a gallery space, office space, a dye shop, a retail shop, a meeting place and the headquarters for many innovative public art projects.

The VTW tapestries are inventive and skilful translations of contemporary works designed by some of today's most respected artists across Australia, New Zealand and the world.

This text draws on thoughts and conversations that shaped my experience as artist-in-residence at the VTW over six weeks in February and March 2008.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The artist-in-residence program, now in its fourth year, is an initiative that supports the ongoing professional development of the weavers and staff at the VTW. It also offers visiting artists the opportunity to show and discuss their work while using the studio space for a time.

As a visitor, watching and listening to the making of the tapestries, I found the intense fields of colour,



Figure 1: View on the Victorian Tapestry Workshop.

the scale, rhythms and sounds initially overwhelming. I spent much of the first two weeks at the studio struggling to comprehend the processes and language of such ambitious and complex endeavours.

Through my first encounter at a working loom, however, tentatively weaving weft into warp, I realised how much the professional development experience can be a two-way street. At the monumental tapestry, *Into the Light*, designed by Leonie Bessant and destined for the Wangaratta Cathedral in north-east Victoria, I was encouraged by artist weavers Pam Joyce, Leonie Bessant, Louise King and Mala Anthony to consider the world from the weaver's point of view.

By the end of my sixth week I had responded through a series of ephemeral, layered, relief works, dismantled at the end of the residency, destined for re-working in my studio at a later time (see figures 2-5 overleaf). The works consisted of striped dishcloths together with cut and torn horizontal lines of second-hand fabric (readymade colour, stains intact, worn weave, faded dyes). I further explored forms made with pins, threads and cardboard, scavenged from the recycling bins. These processes of collecting and assembling caused me to reflect on the contrast between my practice – grounded in makeshift materials from urban environments – with concepts of permanence embedded in the tapestry works.



Figure 6: My studio with work in progress at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, March 2008.

WORKING SPACE

The studio space for guest artists is at the back of the building adjacent to the general meeting hub where many impromptu discussions take place. It is also behind a striking piece of engineering, the largest loom, where Chris Cochius and her team of John Dicks, Milly Formby and Emma Sulzer were weaving a 1.5 x 7.7 metre tapestry from a digital image entitled *The Visitor*, commissioned from artist Jon Cattapan for Xavier College, Melbourne. I worked behind this piece for six weeks. I also monitored and measured my time at the VTW by the rhythm and progress of the tapestry. The work was halfway through when I arrived and was fully completed during my last week as artist-in-residence.

While observing the lines of communication around this particular project, I could see how relationships between commissioned artist and weavers could enrich a work. Not to mention how consideration for the work's destination and surrounding architecture informed the development of the piece.

TRANSLATION

Another aspect of the weaving process that held my attention was the crucial act of scaling-up when making the shift from original artwork to the size of the tapestry. An arresting map-like drawing, the 'cartoon', is constructed and typically sits behind the strong vertical banks of warp on the loom where the weaving is carried out.

left Figure 2-5: Mary-Louise Edwards, details of work in progress during a Victorian Tapestry Workshop residency, March 2008.

The drawing becomes a primary guide for the main compositional characteristics of the image under translation. The whole layered, working scenario – the tapestry under construction – the cartoon, the loom, the interweaving of coloured weft with vertical warp – appeared to me like an expansive hybrid artform and a rather exciting sculptural work or a drawing in action.

I was also taken by associations with nature and the built environment when observing lines of colour; of weft becoming image. Rising, pass by pass, mark by mark across the emerging tapestry surface, the horizontal thread seemed part of an organic world in tension with the engineering of the loom.

Across the workspace Cheryl Thornton and Rebecca Moulton were working on a tapestry for the new Melbourne Recital Centre. This tapestry is based on the mural-sized painting *Dulka Wamgiid (Land of All)* in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria by Sally Gabori and her fellow artists, Netta Loogatha, Ethel Thomas, May Moodoonuthi, Paula Paul, Dawn Naranatjil and Amy Loogatha from Bentinck Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It tells of the women's connection to their land.

Among other exciting projects was a commission for the Queensland Art Gallery being woven by Sue Batten and Amy Comall, from the figurative photographic image entitled *Alice Bayke* by New Zealand artist Yvonne Todd. This showed how Medieval and Renaissance traditions of tapestry can successfully interpret images from our contemporary digital world.

I carefully watched this work under construction and thought about the levels of invention and skill engaged in translating across size and medium into a completely different set of formal parameters. As with all weavers working with big changes in scale, Sue and Amy created a new original artwork; activating the rich territory of tapestry weaving through their nuanced passages of texture and colour.

CONVERSATION

Valuable conversations emerged during and after my time at the studio. Some of the dialogue revolved around materials and methods; how the artists-in-residence used a diverse range of materials and employed different working methods. Other conversations, launched by particular exhibitions around town, opened out into broader areas of art



Figure 7: Studio conversation between Helen Fuller (left) and Cheryl Thornton at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, 2008.

history, art education and contemporary art practice in general.

The VTW community is comfortable in interacting with visiting artists. Many of the programming and administrative staff are artists, as are the weavers. Working with artists is what the VTW does well. I would argue, however, that the majority of interactions between the organisation and artists (often through necessity or circumstance) is through completed work, or with artists via a version of a proposed work (as is the case with commissions). This scenario is in contrast with the levels of visibility and exposure afforded by observing day-to-day processes in the studio. For me, the residency program balances this equation and opens up greater understanding of the less-than-straight line that is the reality of art making.

Inhabiting the studio made me feel part of the fabric of the organisation. I enjoyed varying degrees of contact over the space of a day, a week, a few weeks. I felt welcomed and free to be curious. But I was also aware of being observed myself and of the challenges of creating work in an open studio context.



Figure Figure 8: Choosing colours for *Dulka Wamgiid (Land of All)*, 2008, Rebecca Moulton (left) and Cheryl Thornton.



Figure 9: Alice Bayke tapestry in progress, Sue Batten and Amy Cornall from the original digital image by Yvonne Todd, 2008.

The residency experience poses unique questions and choices for the artist; whether to have a planned work to pursue, or whether to approach the studio with a fair degree of uncertainty and open-endedness. It can be an episode that is enlightening, demystifying and confusing at the same time as it necessarily depends on the provisional, the temporal, and the contingent nature of things in the studio.

I spoke with previous resident artists, Helen Fuller, based in Adelaide, and Sebastian Di Mauro, based in Brisbane, about their impressions of working at the VTW. Helen poetically described the soft, muffled, tugging sounds she noticed as the weavers passed their cotton and silk wefts through warp on the largest loom nearest the studio. She also talked about the fields of raggedy ends that make up the back of most tapestries, their bushy appearance reminding us again of the natural world.

Sebastian spent his studio time pursuing an ongoing project, cutting and slicing close-up digital self-

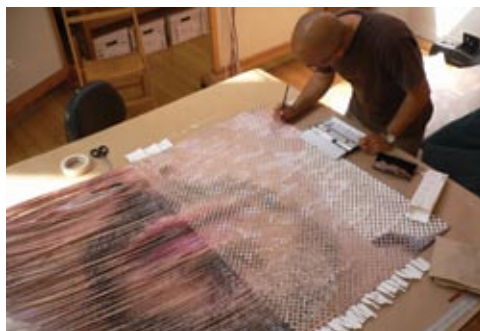


Figure Figure 10: Artist Sebastian Di Mauro in a Victorian Tapestry Workshop studio, 2007.

portraits, then weaving them back together, merging and overlapping separate images into one. Both artists remarked on how they enjoyed the experience of working away from their usual environments and both commented on the generosity of the staff and the artist weavers, and on the atmosphere and the culture.

Under the direction of Susie Shears (who has recently left the VTW) and Studio Manager, Sara Lindsay, the Victorian Tapestry Workshop had a lively pulse when I was there. When I now consider the number of projects underway at any one time – horizontal lines of weft moving constantly upward – I realise that the collaborative and optimistic nature of tapestry weaving makes it the perfect place for a rich and fruitful residency.

Mary-Louise Edwards is an artist working across sculpture, installation and painting on individual and collaborative projects. She was artist-in-residence at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in 2008 and is engaged in Master of Fine Arts research at Monash University in Melbourne, focusing on the ambiguous relationships between city dwellers and contemporary notions of land and ground.

INVESTIGATIVE STRATEGIES OF ENGAGEMENT

Victoria Edwards and Ina Johann
Collaborators



/intə'rupt/



/intə'sekt/



/in'tuhprɪt/



/ɪntə'pleɪ/

Space

Sites have an aspect of liminality; Beach as a liminal space, where nomads (passing through) these spaces. Temporary intervention in space: claiming spaces with particular emotional intensity (that we build on and work with), exciting spatial configuration like the circle/ellipse in which we embed the work, engage with the existing structure of the space to fabricate the work (outdoor Shakespeare/ Spanish bullfight/ theatre stage/ sports Stadium); Weather: Natural elements carefully considered like weather, light/ shadow/ wind/ blue sky in the clouds, colour palette of existing structures (natural and manmade); Site specific, site selected for its potential to play (out/with/against); Relationship to the space tightens and becomes more knowing and accountable as it progresses from performance in space to video piece.¹ Space in relation to trace that's left behind (rice); Costumes build for their sculptural and spatial potential (high hat, things that pierce the space – give the figures an alternative presence); Aspects of the costumes are a set of visual interventions like in the theatre to enable the figure to develop and engage its character through time and space; Core driver for ~~work~~ collaboration in this concept of unknown space – a questioning.

Drawing

Drawing in all its diversity is an integral part of our collective practice. It is a kind of drawing that corresponds without fear of touching or reaching into various media. It opens up potential and possibilities within our collective practice. Performance activates the space where without it the black tape is just material on a spool. The linear element of the ribbon, the black line, becomes an outline of a sculptural form fleeting and ephemeral in nature. We utilise existing fixtures and materials in these selected sites and our movement leave a trace by brushing rice across the floor with a broom or throwing flour. Our practice, including our drawing strategies, investigates methodologies of mapping the terrain. Play is an integral part of the activity of drawing during the performances and can link the space between the movement of the characters, the materials that we utilise and the ideas which evolve during the performance itself. "This room becomes a place of play and invention where the space of the studio and the space of the page become psychologically linked. In this arena, drawing and movement become work that is only fully realised in the process of it's own making. The choreography of what goes on is both research and event"²



Performance

The duration of the activity, the video recording and the adjusted/alterd/manipulated replays are shards or stations in our walking process. Role of performative action played out; navigation – slowness; engaging with place and memory of place; neither making nor thinking. "Walking makes one aware of one's own body in motion (kinaesthesia is the sixth sense) and accentuates all the other five senses." ³ Setting a framework: developing characters, researching a site, site selecting a site, pre performance which includes a test shoot (photo and video), costumes and props, recording equipment; not one heads but body to collect material (intuitive performance process); tapping into another space. Outside our own reality – creating a window to an unknown space that may be a thinking, poetic, emotional, philosophic and or historical space/place which may be experienced in various combinations of the above, not necessarily all at the same time

Human beings as part of this world, accidental communicators are looking at the world but are looking beyond the world as well, that our work evokes questions and the practice and resulting work does not attempt to describe or to provide answers or offer solutions. Our ancestors that are engaging with in the historical sense open new spaces and discussions around what is not known rather than what is known. "This form is content, content is form. You complete that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. The writing is not *about* something, *it is that something itself.*" ⁴

Tensions

The starting point - the intentional engagement between two characters. The arrangement of emotional space involves the found baggage of existing memories. This history of place and the two characters' interaction within the multiple possibilities of the construct is the site on which we play out our activities. We harness these tensions and utilise them to negotiate and pilot a new ground. Tension plays another character in the scenario. A deliberate meeting, resistance, negotiation, navigation and anticipation. ⁵ Tensions of the body in space are extended through the use of black bias cut tape. Here they are visible suspensions between things, frictions that can be felt. They interrupt, breaking in and through space. An engagement in the form of performative drawing, which shifts and changes space as this fragment of the work materialises.



Victoria Edwards is a New Zealand-born artist who has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally and has been involved in art education since the 1970s. She was awarded her doctorate in 2006 and is currently a full time practitioner living in Christchurch. She works primarily in new media as well as in drawing and photography. She has engaged in collaborative practice for a number of years. Edwards's work explores role play and social conventions in relation to individual and collective identity.

Ina Johann is a German-born artist. She uses a range of media from drawing to digital stills, photography and video to create multi-dimensional installations. Johann lectured for a number of years both in New Zealand and Germany and is currently a full-time practitioner living in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her work in the last five years has involved collaboration with artists, writers, poets and musicians. Johann has been exploring a form of navigation and mapping. As a migrant and traveller between cultures and worlds, she is working with strategies of surveying, observing and fragmenting. Her work reflects upon becoming and belonging, emptiness, loss, coding and de-coding.



All images from Victoria Edwards and Ina Johann, *Fishing in a Bathtub: Tormenting Luxury*, video installation in four chapters, 2007-08. A moving image file is included on the online version of this journal. See www.thescope.org

- 1 "...you realise, quite consciously, that what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity; a pointer to life." A Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (London: The Bodley Head, 1986), 117-118.
- 2 Rachel Gibson, "Archaeology: Drawing Interventions in Time & Space". See: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/perf/gibson.html> as last accessed on 12 April 2008
- 3 "It leads one, metaphorically and literally, through place and time; and is the most natural accompaniment to thought". Here Tony Godfrey references Janet Cardiff's "The Missing Voice" (Case Study B). See "Tony Godfrey Walks with Mnemosyne", *Contemporary Visual Arts*, 1999, 25: 44.
- 4 Samuel Beckett on Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*: Dante. See: [http://www.themodernword.com/beckett/beckett quotes.html](http://www.themodernword.com/beckett/beckett%20quotes.html) as last accessed on 14 April 2008.
- 5 "What is particular about drawing is the procedure of addition and erasure, of gesture and change, of instinct and thought." Jane Tormey, "How To Do Things With Drawing." See: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/perf.html> as last accessed on 14 April 2008.

LINES OF SITE

Don Hunter

In the beginning there was only darkness - long and perhaps cold - then a few lights began to appear. By 8am direct sunlight had reached the top of the mountain. Within two hours the place was a visual bustle. I could begin to imagine, to accelerate myself forward beyond that 'on screen' moment to a time when even more information would be revealed by the rise of the morning sun which might be warming the land. I scrolled the drop-down menu, clicking on 16.01 hours. A new image appeared; taken several days earlier and providing a further historical context to the view.

In my project I have been accelerating the verb (accelerate). In *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape Tourism and Identity*, Claudia Bell and John Lyall discuss our ever-accelerating access to landscape; a space ever-changing and dynamic, where all is provisional. To accelerate means to make quicker, to speed up process or access to information. Bell and Lyall define an acceleration of the touristic sublime, whereby we are no longer passive observers of the landscape but are rather active participants in an active environment. In the preface they write:

In this discussion the authors locate landscape as a dynamic, not static, arena. Ecotourism and adventure tourism are practices that (re)activate the sublime. The participants, descendants of grand tourists viewing the 'sublime' landscape, no longer meander but accelerate through an increasingly compressed and hyperinscribed space.¹

Acceleration in the context of my own research refers to the speeding up of information accessibility and delivery through such conduits as the worldwide web and the visitors' information centre. I will return to the term "landscape" later.

THE REAL

I'm also thinking about the 'real' in the sense that I am using web-generated images as a predictor of the future, accelerating a distant topography coming ever closer. I want to know what the weather will do and how it may feel against my body. 'Real', as my body knows cold, heat, rain and wind through the sense of touch. 'Real', as I look at webcamera images to help me imagine how my body might behave. My initial research had the 'real' and 'imagined' in two separate but interrelated camps, now I am not so sure anymore as I attempt to interpret historical images, forecast mappings and my own bodily experiences. Where does time exist in this continuum as I look at yet another website that feeds me a so-called 'real time' image that even allows me to move the camera from several hundred kilometers away to get a wider visual description of what the weather is doing. The experience of web technology and bodily experience becomes a relationship of accelerated interfaces: web camera, computer monitor, eyes, skin and imagination. I feel, I understand, I see, I imagine, I understand, I try to cross-reference this understanding by visiting another interface, this time a weather prognosis is viewed, looking forward rather than backwards.

Talking about 'topography' immediately raises the question of definition. The Princeton University online lexical database describes 'topography' as "the configuration of a surface and the relations among its man-made and natural features."² So, if we take this definition and tease it out a little we can surmise that topography is about a series of relationships between various objects; objects that when viewed through our eyes become a set of interrelated or configured objects. These relationships exist even if we cannot see them manifest on paper or screen as they nonetheless exist as concepts or codes of behaviour (I will also return to codes of behaviour later). The historical webcamera image and the weather prognosis image act as visual prompts to help me recall and predict. They produce a bodily topography that is not fixed, not even fixed in time but ever-shifting and negotiable.

I am creating through my action and imaging what the author Edward Tufte calls a "confection". In *Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative* Tufte writes:

And a confection is an assembly of many visual events, selected (at the red dots, for example) from various Streams of Story, then brought together juxtaposed on the still flatland of paper. By means of a multiplicity of image-events, confections illustrate an argument, present and enforce visual comparisons, combine the real and the imagined, and tell us yet another story.³

The various interfaces I engage with create an information system, a network for access to one of our major National Parks, Aoraki/Mount Cook, a topography or a confection with no fixed frame but flexible, negotiable and ever-shifting with our society – yet decidedly fixed to the planet.

An information system or network mediates entry into a particular space. Mediation in this context works on several levels. Firstly, on a practical level, mediation enables access to web-based technology. One must have economic access to the interface – to a personal computer that is web-capable and connected to a 'user pays' internet provider. Computer literacy enables the next level of access, and once gained allows us to search with ease. The second level of mediated entry involves an applied practice or codes of behaviour through knowledge gained, perhaps from online information providers. These codes of behaviour allow the visitor to conduct themselves in a socially safe and acceptable manner whilst in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park.

THE INFORMATION CENTRE (MEDIATION)

The building known as the Interpretive or Information Centre at Aoraki/Mount Cook is also a mediated entry point to the park where one's experience of nature is accelerated. The information centre is much more formal and explicit when compared with the internet where the range of sites vary from official governmental to commercial through to private individuals posting images of their holidays.

On one level a visitor's centre is designed to allow the visitor to experience a park from within a building as if through a portal. Portals here are referenced from three perspectives. A portal in an information technology sense is a customised set of online search engines, browser interfaces and databases designed for a specific audience or client base or to disseminate information on behalf of the host in ways favourable to the host's agenda. In a fictional sense, portals may offer an interface between two different locations, for example one can step through a mirror or looking glass as Alice did in Wonderland, and seemingly enter another world. In an architectural sense a portal can be a doorway or gateway, perhaps of monumental proportions, through which one passes perhaps to receive enlightenment or information as is the case at Aoraki/Mount Cook.

The Information Centre houses a description of why Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park is important from a sociocultural perspective, describing significant legends and stories associated with the area including important dates concerning development. A natural history is created through the use of stuffed animals, both native and introduced.

Figure 2: Possum (detail), Aoraki/Mount Cook Visitors' Centre (photograph by the author).



Figure 1: Aoraki/Mount Cook Visitors' Centre (photograph by the author).



A large diorama describes the physical geography of the surrounding park. One can move around and traverse the diorama while pressing illustrated information panels that in turn illuminate LED lights embedded at the corresponding locations. The visitor can travel over the landscape as if in a plane, marking off the points of interest deemed to be worthy of note as they activate the little red LED cairns.



Figure 3: Diorama (detail), Aoraki/Mount Cook Visitors' Centre (photograph by the author).



Figure 4: Aoraki/Mount Cook: a Mediated View; *en route* between Aoraki/Mount Cook Village and Twizel (photograph by Ana Terry).

The Visitors' Centre tour of Aoraki/Mount Cook (like my visit from the comfort of my laptop) becomes a virtual experience, except that from the Visitors' Centre one can purchase a t-shirt to say one has visited one of our great National Parks.

BEING THERE

How did I get there? I travelled to Aoraki/Mount Cook through my computer screen which protected me from the physical trials and tribulations of travel overland whilst accelerating the park experience. The screen mediated my experience. The information accessed was mediated; my view was limited by the search engines available, and of course by the authors of the websites visited. My wallet is a keen mediator, not so fond of spending too much on a broadband connection and even less fond of shelling out dollars by subscribing to 'user pays' weather information. This is my portal: a creation of computer interface and selected 'bookmarks' saved to my 'Safari' web browser.

Actual visitors to the information centre have had their journey mediated too. Most obvious is the screen that has framed their entire journey, sheltering them from the elements – the contemporary windscreen allows an air conditioned traverse, high speed, along paths of asphalt (another mediator) passing through extremes of temperature well beyond the human body's ability to survive unprotected by clothing or machine for as long as the journey takes. Their view is continuously

refreshed – not in a static sense as I experience it through the computer screen, but in a provisional sense – as they, the screen and the viewer, accelerate through the environment. The clear expanse of asphalt with roadsides cleared of vegetation provide a perfect foreground, accelerated so fast as to be blurred to allow the viewer to focus on and consume the magnificent middle and far distance: Aoraki/Mount Cook.

ART

My current art practice engages with the ideas referred to above. From a personal perspective, I am interested in territories relevant to leisure theory within Aotearoa/New Zealand; specifically in the spatial and organisational relationships we have with Aoraki/Mount Cook. Through performative engagement, through sculpture and moving image, I am questioning social and political constructs concerning access, or mediation of entry. I am interested in the various networks that exist to allow me remote access to Aoraki/Mount Cook. If we take the webcam at Aoraki/Mount Cook Village for example, I, like potentially millions of others, receive the image that has been generated from a camera at Aoraki/Mount Cook Village looking north towards Aoraki/Mount Cook (the mountain). What constitutes the room where the camera is sited? What else goes on in there? What sort of camera and computer are used in it? Who programmed these to take an image every two hours and send it down the copper-wire and fibre-optic network? What of the stories of those who laid those cables digging through the layers of road? Whose

property is this network running across, and how is the physical geography negotiated? I have accessed this website from overseas and wondered if the images came to me via the vast worldwide submarine telecommunications network of copper-wire and fibre-optics or if I viewed Aoraki/Mount Cook via satellite transmitters and receivers. Who made those, and what are their stories? Have these accelerated images in fact broken down social networks on a local level in favour of accelerated networking from a distance?



Figure 5: Swampy Summit I, line of sight en route between Dunedin City and Aoraki/Mount Cook (photograph by the author).



Figure 6: Swampy Summit II, line of sight en route between Dunedin City and Aoraki/Mount Cook (photograph by the author).



Figure 7: Swampy Summit III, line of sight en route between Dunedin City and Aoraki/Mount Cook (photograph by the author).

In response to these questions I have undertaken the task of creating my own network to accelerate the experience of seeing Aoraki/Mount Cook in real time from Dunedin city.

SPEED

In this context I need to define 'real time'. To do this I use the parameter of the speed of light, or the time it takes for light to travel from Aoraki/Mount Cook to Dunedin. This is not quite instant but as close as we can get for such a short distance, hence the term 'real time'. The speed of light is approximately 300,000 kilometres per second.⁴ For an image to be received in Dunedin from Aoraki/Mount Cook we are looking at approximately .000,002 of a second – that's quite fast!

To receive a 'true' (rather than mediated, or rather less mediated) image of Aoraki/Mount Cook in real time I propose building a series of mirrored repeater stations. The image received here in Dunedin will have been transmitted via this network of mirrored repeater stations. The repeater station site locations have been chosen on account of the need to navigate a clear line of sight around the physical geography of the land between Dunedin and Aoraki/Mount Cook. Obviously the mirror in this context still acts as a kind of mediator, as the image is reflected from mirror to mirror across the land and as close to real time as I can get.

The parameters of real time having been established, the next big issue is one of perspectival distance. Aoraki/Mount Cook is New Zealand's tallest mountain standing at 3764 metres. However, when seen from a distance of some 300 kilometres it appears to shrink. I have calculated the perceived height of Aoraki/Mount Cook as seen from Dunedin as being .005mm high. So what we will see is a very small image. I am working with a team to resolve this issue so we can receive a somewhat larger image (real size would be ideal but a bit beyond the scope of my

project). However, we are working on using magnifying lenses at the repeater stations to enhance the image size.

LANDSCAPE

So, in the process of constructing the repeater stations, and imaging their impacts, I have started to form a new physical network across the land. But more importantly, in a social sense this network forms a landscape. This is a new landscape that overlaps and is part of the existing landscape. My current project has led me to the first time I have directly used the word 'landscape'. Until now I have used the term 'land' to mean land as an object – existing in its own right with no social or cultural territorialising of that space. The way in which I now use the word 'landscape' is in terms of a constructed space, where layers of meaning exist and can be manifest as mapped. In *Landscape, Defence and the Study of Conflict*, John Gold and George Revill describe a perception of landscape:

We may think of individual 'landscapes' as being comprised, partial, contested and only provisionally stable as modes of ordering the world and our engagement with it. If so, this suggests that we should not think of individual landscapes as discrete pieces of territory because they are supported by, and help to sustain, the interests of mere sections of any given society. Alternatively, we might think of landscapes as being formed in relation to other landscapes and conceptions of landscape. In that case, perhaps also we should base our analysis in terms of the interconnectedness of landscape, its links with other landscapes, other geographies.⁵

Gold and Revill are writing an introduction to a collection of essays on landscapes of defence. Defence calls for a hardening of space and a reinforcement of boundaries where provisionality is tied to occupation. In this context, the map is a set of ideas, a topography, confection or network; the physical attributes become almost a secondary consideration – a site on which to build. Such building may involve a set of ideas experienced without necessarily entailing direct physical engagement with a landscape.

I will now return to Aoraki/Mount Cook as a site. In summary, I could suggest Aoraki/Mount Cook holds nothing inherently special in its own right. However, through a process of determining Aoraki/Mount Cook becomes defined as a space or set of ideas. Such a set of ideas involves multiple layers of networks on, around and through which we can create our own sense of what we value in and about Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. Complicit in this creation are codes of behaviour. The confection I am creating is by no means conclusive or definitive; this is not my intent. What I am creating in my project is a snapshot, a multiplicity of image events brought together for a moment in time in imaging Aoraki/Mount Cook as both an object and a site around which to create an image event.

Don Hunter works with industrial strength kinetic sculpture. He pursues and investigates the idea of function in his machines until it reaches the absurd. He thinks about power relationships, and the cultural and social impact of subverting factory standards. His inventions are perverse and willful; very often the idea of an operator is completely redundant. His slightly demented inventions promise action but seldom deliver what might reasonably be expected. During his fine arts study he undertook an exchange at Utrecht School of the Arts in the Netherlands, where he also exhibited. He is currently researching towards an MFA at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand, where he is also employed as a lecturer in the Design Department. Don – collaborating with Ana Terry – is one of two 2008-9 William Hodges Fellows at the Southland Museum and Art Gallery in Invercargill.

- 1 Claudia Bell and John Lyall, *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape Tourism and Identity* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), xii.
- 2 GA Miller, <http://www.wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>. Last accessed on 25 October, 2007.
- 3 Edward Tufte, *Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative* (Cheshire: GraphicsPress, 1997), 121.
- 4 MV Goldman, Physics-2000 http://www.colorado.edu/physics/2000/waves_particles/lightspeed-1.htm. Last accessed on 27 October, 2007.
- 5 Don Mitchell, "Cultural Landscapes: The Dialectical Landscape – Recent Landscape Research in Human Geography", *Progress in Human Geography*, 26 (3), 2002: 381-389.

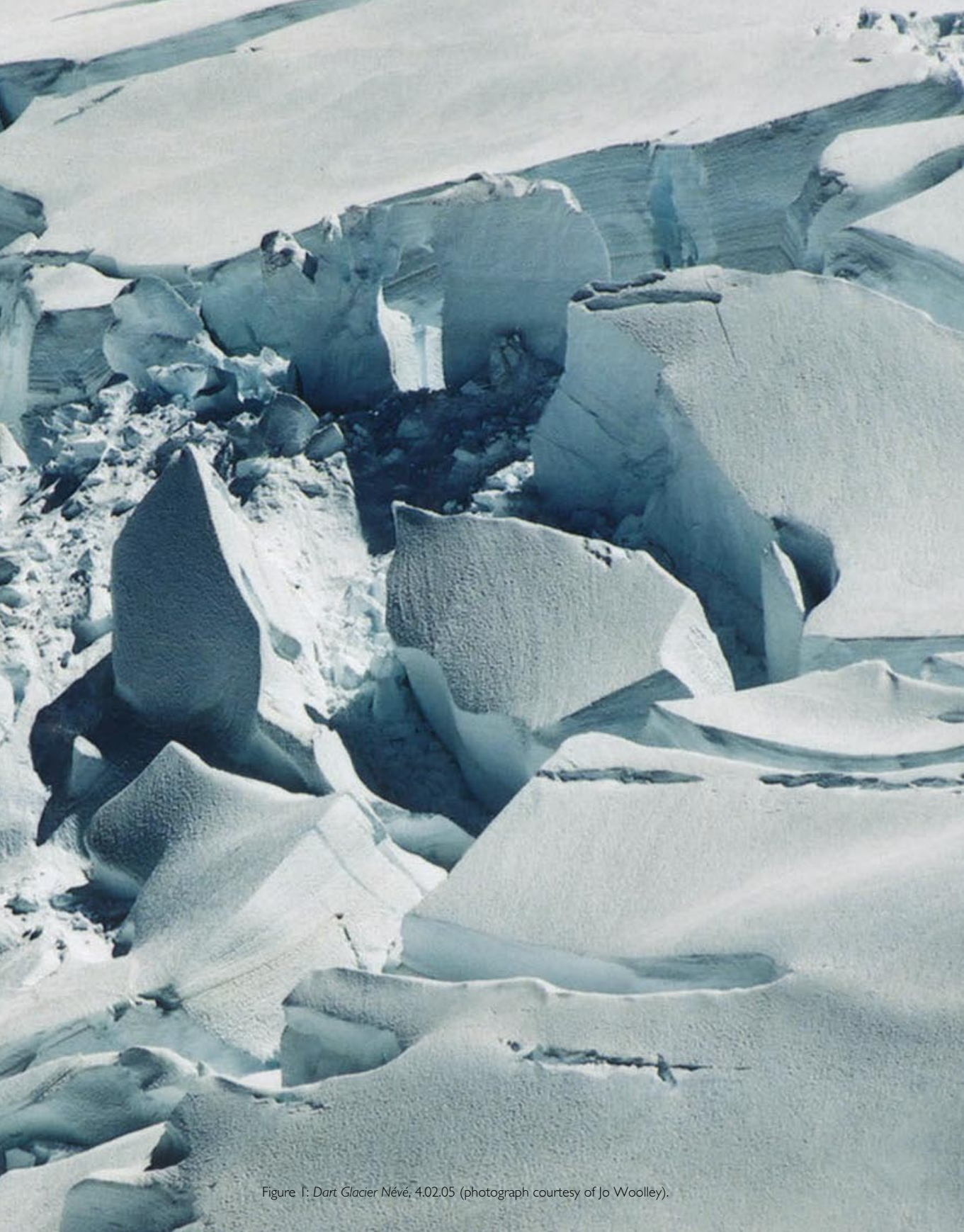


Figure 1: *Dart Glacier N  v  *, 4.02.05 (photograph courtesy of Jo Woolley).

VANISHING ICE

Wayne Everson

Jo Woolley was born in England but grew up mostly in Wales. In her late teens she was a Welsh international swimmer, later travelling widely throughout the United States where she taught swimming professionally. Returning to England to undertake a design degree at the University of Brighton in Sussex she completed a BA (Hons) in 1994. She worked briefly in France and following that an international design company approached her to work for them in London. At the age of twenty-seven, having spent three years in the London design context, Woolley decided to travel again. She motorcycled solo overland through Europe and Asia, arriving in Australia eighteen months later. In Perth she did freelance design work and later worked for a design company in Sydney. Discovering the Southern Alps while on a brief trip to New Zealand in 2000, she decided to stay and in 2004 became a New Zealand citizen. By that time her work had become three-dimensional. She set up a successful business making small scale design-based sculptural objects referencing land and bio-forms and doing larger commissioned works around the Wanaka and Queenstown area where she also pursued her passion for tramping and climbing. While working towards and graduating with a Master of Fine Arts Degree in 2007 from the Otago Polytechnic School of Art, her work has moved toward installation sculpture and new-media art.

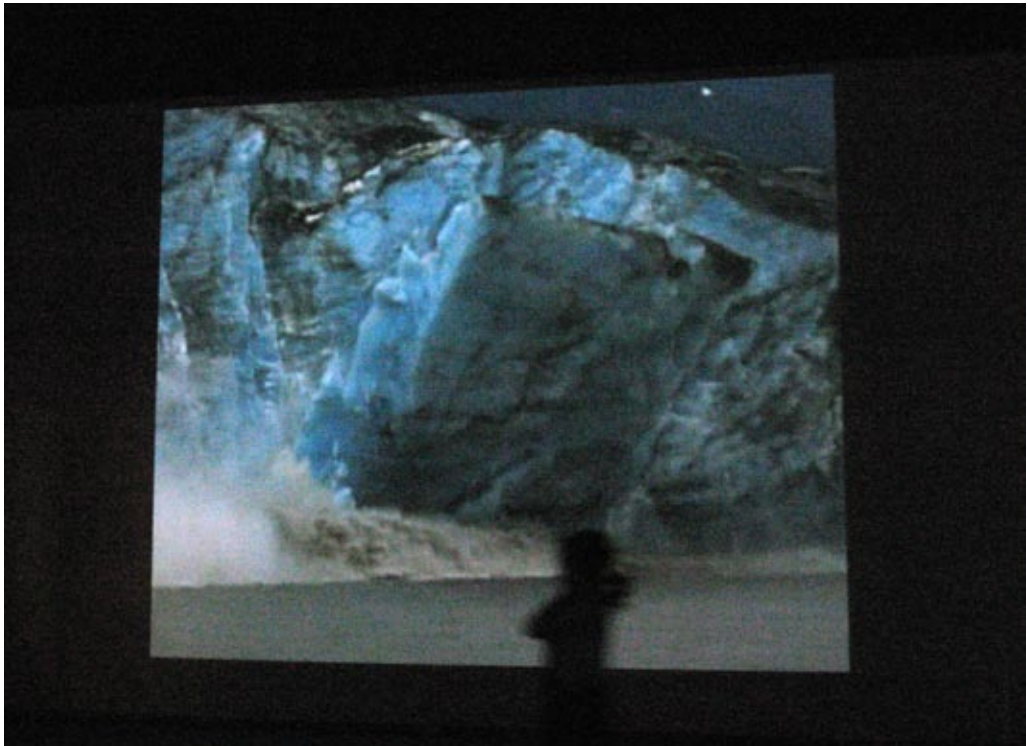


Figure 2: Jo Woolley, *Vanishing Ice* (detail), 2007, re-edited digital moving image (original source courtesy of Natural History New Zealand), Southland Museum and Art Gallery, New Zealand (photograph by the author).

Woolley's dissertation for her master's degree followed from her early fieldwork at the Dart Glacier in the Southern Alps of New Zealand and from her research into the effects and extent of global climate change. It begins by describing her time tramping and climbing in that alpine region and goes on to discuss her response to the mountains. She also reconstructs written and oral histories from that area. The 'mountain hut' is a major signifier in the 'text' of her new-media installation titled *Vanishing Ice*, and in her dissertation she examines the complexities in the psychological layerings of 'the intimate and the immense', which infuse 'the idea of hut' and 'wilderness'. Historical and philosophical concepts of landscape are paralleled with contemporary attitudes towards conservation, ecology and global warming. She concludes by looking at the origins and contemporary practice of installation art and discusses *Vanishing Ice* in the context of immersive new-media installation art.

Referring to the Romantics' preoccupation with wild, untamed, desolate regions and the mighty

natural forces that mould and 'inhabit' them, Kant, with elegant concision, called it the "dynamic Sublime".¹ To the Romantics, Nature was culture's mighty counterpoint. A mercurial and seductive muse; they invoked it as a greater reality, one which could perfectly silence all the arrogance and pretensions of civilisation. It was culture's shadow, the hidden presence 'out there' that implored all its darkneses, all the "...black horde of fears and sorrows that infest the soul..."² Irony aside, Nature is one of culture's enduring myths. Although turbulent with storm and volcano and brooding desolation, the Romantic repertoire is remarkably devoid of earthquakes and tsunamis. No "agreeable horror"³ there, just the numbing finality of anonymous death and meaningless suffering. Simon Schama's wry oxymoron posits a witty analogue to that cultural framing of Nature as an abstracted objectification: an intellectualised safe distance. Yet, with all our moral and rational, not to mention digital, greatness it can still rattle us.



Figure 3: William Bradford, *View of the Sermitsialik Glacier*, c.1870, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 76.2 cm. Old Dartmouth Historical Society, New Bedford Whaling Museum, Massachusetts (source: Eco, 2004, p.295, image now in the public domain).



Figure 4: Caspar David Friedrich, *Arctic Shipwreck*, 1824, oil on canvas, 96.7 x 126.9 cm. Kunsthalle, Hamburg (source: Helmut Börsch-Supan, 1990, p.145, image now in the public domain).

Moved by its magnificence and fearful of its power, Nature, for us, is more than just the Romantic touchstone against all the disappointments of civilisation or the equally idealised world of wondrous fascination, as framed by Science. Personified by poets and mystics (and even meteorologists), Nature's might is invested with what the Sufis call *jaldl* - all the attributes of Majesty - such as Wrath and Vengeance. Indeed, central to the contemporary debate on climate change is the fear that, having played the rapacious exploiter for so long, civilisation may yet again suffer Nature's 'unforgiving' Judgement. It has often been the nemesis of civilisations as Jared Diamond details in his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*.⁴ Or, is it that Nature has become our folly's scapegoat? Is there perhaps more to the contemporary preoccupation with environmental purity than mere decadent catastrophism and political moralism? Rousseauian evocations notwithstanding, a general consensus of scientists, politicians and environmental activists places the blame for global warming explicitly on industrial carbon emissions. Even the few brave heretical dissenters to this orthodoxy agree that the planet is getting warmer. On a planet whose equilibrium closely correlates with minor fluctuations in mean temperature, the current trend of global warming predicts some bleak future scenarios. Economics and politics are inherently tied to that ecology. Consequently, we may all find ourselves increasingly in harm's way as the compounding effects of ensuing instability begin to play out globally.

Woolley has always been one of those people that Lucy Lippard describes as having nervous energy to spare. Like them she finds tramping across wild backcountry and in the mountains to be a particularly compelling form of meditation that stills her internal dissonances. It was during one of her excursions into the Dart Glacier region that she happened upon the shattered remains of a mountain hut that had been destroyed by avalanche some years earlier. With the help of a group of friends and the Department of Conservation she recovered those hut remnants and installed them in her studio.



Figure 5: Jo Woolley at Dart Glacier Ice Face, 25.04.05 (photograph courtesy of Kelly Lindsay).

The rapid decline of the Dart Glacier and the recovered remains of the mountain hut became the nascent influences for her research into huts, wilderness and glaciers and later on for that which grew to encompass looking at the effects of global climate change. Woolley's research explores the glacier's recent accelerated deterioration and increasingly fragile ecology as being symptomatic of a system under critical stress. She contends not only that global warming is playing the central role in its decline but also that the mountain of evidence which now documents global warming presents us with a serious ecological dilemma. Retreating glaciers and melting ice caps, like the bleaching of coral reefs from growing ocean acidity, are barometers of global climate change. Global warming has become a global emergency requiring urgent intervention. Woolley's work entertains no false diversions of hope for a future filled with foreboding but seeks to indict the Western economic mindset, the industrial establishment and the myopia of economic and political self-interest for the collective and compounding role they play in contributing to the degradation of the global ecosystem. Her exhibition, *Vanishing Ice*, deploys a strategy of foregrounding the anthropogenic origins of global warming to agitate for urgent debate and this work unequivocally adds her voice to the chorus of dissent which aims to forewarn that the consequences of inaction may be nothing less than catastrophic.

Vanishing Ice is a synthesis of installation sculpture and new-media art. It consists of large-format digital moving image, animations and an interactive sculptural component in the form of a 'hut', a huge three-dimensional plug projecting into digitally dominated space: stark and uncompromising. Woolley activates immersive strategies of installation art, physically locating the viewer in the work. Her use of the cinematic dynamic of the darkened space facilitates sensory reduction, focusing the viewer towards acute self-awareness, priming embodied phenomenological

engagement with the work. Although not minimalist, the work firmly references that lineage with the clean aesthetic of the hut and in its bold scale. Minimalist sculpture is a visual and tactile reduction; it is a radical, austere innovation that has the paradoxical effect of focusing whilst simultaneously expanding the viewer's sensory awareness whereby the whole sensorium becomes stilled yet intensely activated. Less becomes powerfully more.



Figure 6: Jo Woolley, *Vanishing Ice* (detail), 2007, re-edited digital moving image (original source courtesy of Natural History New Zealand), Southland Museum and Art Gallery, New Zealand (photograph by the author).

Installation art is indebted to Minimalist sculpture, and to its reception by artists and critics in New York in the early 1960s, for whom the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty were a major influence. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argued that subject and object are not separate entities but mutually enmeshed in a reciprocal interdependence of affirmation "...the thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it..."¹⁵. Merleau-Ponty also argued in *The Primacy of Perception*, that perception is not just about the eyes but about mobilising the wholeness of one's being. "I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me"¹⁶.

In *Installation Art: A Critical History*, Claire Bishop writes that, "...installation art presupposes a viewing subject who physically enters into the work to experience it..."¹⁷. The innovative work of Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky illustrates this point, that... "space does not exist for the eye only: it is not a picture; one wants to live in it...so that space becomes not a pictorial abstraction but a real arena in which every subject must act. The implication is that 'keyhole' space for the eye alone – the perspectivalism of traditional painting – is synonymous with complacent bourgeois spectatorship, in which 'real life' is observed from a safe, detached and disengaged distance..."¹⁸

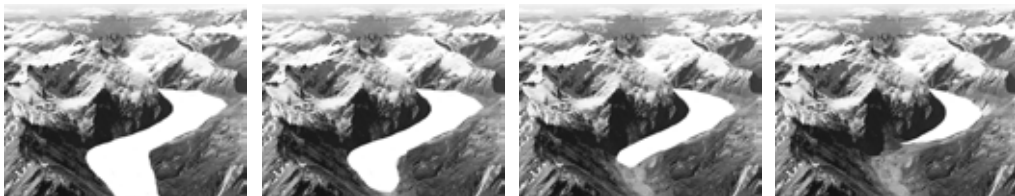


Figure 7: Jo Woolley, *Receding Glacier Sequence*, 2007 (original source: photographer D Homer, NZ Geological



Figure 8: Jo Woolley, *Vanishing Ice* (detail), 2007, digital moving image, Southland Museum & Art Gallery, New Zealand (photograph courtesy of Jo Woolley).

The weight that immersive installation art assigns to proprioception deprivileges ocular dominance. The viewer must physically negotiate the work, engage with it, thereby subverting traditional memes of ocularity, initiating a systemic chain-reaction destabilising established boundaries of spectatorship. The messiness of participation seeps into the clinical detachment of optic ordering, crumpling the clean laundered edges of objective certainty. In *Vanishing Ice* the inherent intellectualisation of objectification suffers displacement as cool dispassion struggles to maintain a footing in the increasing subjectivity initiated by multiple sensory engagements. By admitting proprioceptive, kinaesthetic and haptic modalities of perception, the ratios of perceptual bias embedded in the sensorial matrix are redistributed and reintegrated with memory and cognition, permitting a fuller consummation of awareness.

In his book, *New Philosophy for New Media*, Mark Hansen writes "...human perception takes place in a rich and evolving field to which...tactility, proprioception, memory and duration – what I am calling affectivity – make an irreducible and constitutive contribution."⁹ He sees the parts of the interactive perceptual whole as being "...inseparable from the cognitive activity of the brain."¹⁰ The interdisciplinary fusion of Woolley's immersive installation analogises the internuncial configuration of affectivity where visual authority is subsumed in a non-reductive gestalt.



Survey, March 1976, courtesy of the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, Dart Glacier File Archive).

Woolley's work is firmly contemporised by her deployment of new-media. Onto each of three walls is projected a digital moving image, two of which are animations. The third is a digitally reformatted and re-edited DVD of film and audio segments sourced from Natural History New Zealand of a glacier calving into the sea. The images are massive, spanning floor to ceiling or skewed across the entire length of walls displacing the traditional filmic frame and enacting the reflexive dynamic of scale.

With her hugely spatial sound track, which has links with bio-music and the expansiveness of soundscape, Woolley implements strategies to collapse the boundaries between viewer and artwork. Body becomes ear as sound is felt viscerally and through the soles of the feet. Reverberation effects an almost corporeal 'suturing' of the viewer's own physicality into the heart of the work. The hues and rhythms of memory and proprioception modulate in sympathetic resonance with sound and vibration, suffusing layers of embodiment in the enriched timbre of affectivity.



Figure 9: *White-out on the Franz Joseph Glacier*, 2006 (photograph courtesy of Ostiane Massiani).



Figure 10: *Crevassed Nêvé, Winter Evening Twilight, Fox Glacier*, 2006 (photograph courtesy of Ostiane Massiani).

The remastering of the sound track and audio mixing is meticulous. Sonic physicality is achieved more through the privileging of frequencies than by volume. Manipulating the diegetic flow of time-based media, Woolley overlays a sustained still image of an icewall with resounding cracks and deep thuds which advance with increasing intensity, ominously foreshadowing collapse. The sounds of disintegration invite interrogation of the image of the wall of ice. The disparity between passive image and active sound enlists the viewer's desire to resolve the dissonance of contradiction. This perceptual *déférence* captures the viewer in a noose of anticipation until a deep fracturing pop detonates the ice-face into a sustained cadenza of aural and visual collapse. That is followed by the film image of a colossal serac overbalancing into the sea in a sweeping silent arc of *sostenuto*, striking the surface with an erupting tympanic plunge. It falls the way only truly massive things fall, creating a displacement of time where every reducing second seems recalibrated into an extended deferment of climax.

Moving image, digital animations and sound track are looped to replay at slightly different intervals of around three to four minutes causing the 'cinerama' never to repeat with exact synchronicity. Referencing the voracious, vigilant eye of time-lapse photography, the animations transpose into human time the opaque imperceptibility of planetary processes that are obscured by the vastness of geological time.

Scientists studying the ecology of the glacier had used the mountain hut, parts of which Woolley discovered wrecked at the base of the Dart Glacier. In her studio Woolley constructed a hut following the exact dimensions of the original. Re-assigned as an abstraction into the syntax of the work, the hut serves to raise questions about sanctuary, safety, intimate versus immense and the psychology of space.

In the immersive space of installation both subject and object interpose, keying into the work, not just physically but textually. Appropriating the light beam from the projector Woolley activates the presence of the hut into the unfolding scene by silhouetting part of the hut against the animation of the receding glacier. Similarly the viewer's own revenant presence is confirmed, relocated in the mural projection. The shadows read like long late afternoon



Figure 11: Jo Woolley, *Vanishing Ice* (hut detail), in "Warming Inspires Warnings", *The Southland Times*, 7 September 2007 (photograph courtesy of Jill McKee).

shadows when slender fingers of light reach into shrouded valleys from behind mountain ridges. Reflective material covering the hut picks up light from digital projections, interpolating hut and moving image, blurring dimensional delineations. The hut's soft silvery exterior is evocative of a deflective shield, an emblem of scientific intervention, provoking questions about light and heat. Woolley symbologises material and process in parallel with content. On the inside of the hut door a sign in large red lettering accents the undertone of apprehension, intensifying the aesthetic of danger.

Elevated on hidden supports, the hut gives the convincing appearance of floating. Upon entering the hut one is assailed by text. The interior is not a place of stillness. Here is noise of another kind. The relentlessness of the text-covered walls confirms the prospect of shelter to be a mirage. There is no silence within and no platitudinous comfort. Peace of mind is denied in the growing disquiet that pervades the catalogue of uncompromising revelation. The text becomes internal noise, noise inside the head. Her method is *impitoyable*. The hut is an inversion, *not peace but a sword*.

The text consists of fully referenced news items detailing global climate change, collected over two years and chronicled on the walls and floor of the hut. As a portal to the pervasive and expanding debate on global warming, *Vanishing Ice* petitions the viewer to confront the obfuscations of time, text and politics that conspire to conceal the extent of global warming. There is so much text that it is impractical to read all in one go; yet this is unimportant, for as a device the text is not intended as a finite document but as an unfolding exposé. It is presented in a Chomskyan sort of way, bringing together isolated news items from the international media which, when viewed together as a broad collection, enables an entirely different analysis previously denied by their fragmentation.

The Moving Finger writes;
And having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a word of it.¹¹



Figure 12: Leonardo da Vinci, *Deluge*, 1514–1515, black chalk, yellow and brown ink, 15 x 19.3 cm. Royal Collection, Windsor Castle (in the public domain at www.aiwaz.net/gallery/deluge/gi948c42 last sighted 3.6.08).

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Vanishing Ice is a touring exhibition. The Eastern Southland Gallery in Gore (3rd – 26th August 2007), the Southland Museum and Art Gallery Invercargill (30th August – 31st September 2007) and Ashburton Art Gallery (17th May – 15th June 2008) have already hosted it. It will also show at the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (November 2008–January 2009).

1

2 Umberto Eco, 2004. *On Beauty: A History of a Western Idea* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004), 294.

3 Edward Fitzgerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, Quatrain XLIV (44) (London: A & C Black, 1909), 82.

4 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: AA Knopf & Random House, 1995), 450.

5 Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1998), 320.

7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", in *The Primacy of Perception*, JM Edie (ed.) (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1964).

8 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 6.

- 9 Ibid., 81.
- 10 Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004), 101.
- 11 Ibid., 3.
Edward Fitzgerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, Quatrain LI (51) (London: A & C Black, 1909), 91.

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ART AND THE STATUS OF PLACE¹

Margaret Roberts

This article takes a new look at minimalist and related spatial artwork, by arguing for its significance to the environmental concerns that have long been with us, but which have recently gained renewed urgency and clarity with the warnings that tolerance of historically current forms of human inhabitation may be reaching its limits. The enormity of the dangers of climate change means that a broad movement for social change is needed to avoid its worst effects, and it is worthwhile considering how art may contribute to such a movement. Because art's role is to engage in different ways with social meaning and value, this article will look at how art engages with the social value given to physical space. The role of the value of place – as sociologist Anthony Giddens terms physical locale – and its links to risks of climate change, is shown in his account of modernity and its consequences.² While Giddens' account makes no mention of the role of art in relation to the value of place, it is drawn on here to discuss the social and political meanings implied in the relationships artworks construct with the places in which they are located.

The minimal art of the 1960s and 70s is a key example to discuss in relation to the value of place, as it is credited with discovering a new relationship between art and its physical location. This new relationship is identified by Robert Morris by the way in which it "takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of [the] space" shared by the work and the viewer.³ He claims this as a major shift in the relationship, achieved through the construction of a "unitary form" whose closed gestalt prevents the viewer from being pulled "out of the space in which the object exists" and into the illusory space of the artwork, redirecting attention instead to the literal space shared by both object and viewer. By changing the relative value of each space in this way, this relationship proposes to overturn the convention of the spatially autonomous art object inherited from modernity. This alteration occurs because literal space is made a recognised partner with the artwork, instead of having the secondary support role it plays in the dominant mode Morris described as "default".⁴

This new relationship is illustrated in his own work of the 1960s, of which *Untitled (L-Beams)* is a good example. This work is composed of identical right-angled objects, referred to as *L-Beams*. One version of the work has two *L-Beams*, another has three. Each *L-Beam* is positioned differently from the other(s) – either sitting upright or forming an up-side-down V by propping on its two inner tips, or, in the three-beam version, lying flat on the floor.⁵ As the 'arms' of each *L-Beam* are both 8 feet (2.4 metres) long, and the 'thickness' dimensions are each 2 feet (60 cm), they have a scale that is not dissimilar to that of adult visitors. This is best illustrated by the three-beam version, in which visitors are taller than the *L-Beam* lying down, shorter than the upright *L-Beam* and about the same as the propped one.

The physical space occupied jointly by visitors and artwork is the subject of *Untitled (L-Beams)* because the work presents visitors with a spatial conundrum for which the place they jointly occupy is part of the answer. Viewers are invited to ask why the two or three right-angled objects that make up the artwork do not look the same, even though they can also see that they *are* the same. Visitors are thereby invited to think about the directional nature of the artwork in terms of its location in the literal place they also occupy, instead of being invited to enter an imagined or illusory space at the expense of the literal space they inhabit, as is more characteristic of the spatial relationship art inherits from modernity.

Despite Morris's emphasis in his "Notes on Sculpture" on the need for a gestalt to prevent the viewer being pulled into the default mode in which illusory space dominates, the relationship *L-Beams* constructs between the space of art and the literal space of its location does not require the former to be quite as closed off as he suggests in his writing, in order for attention to continue to be maintained on literal space. The multiple forms of *L-Beams* modify

the work's gestalt nature because, while they may not employ quite the same "illusionism" that Morris sees as the problem, they do offer the potential to be spatially rearranged in thought to test their relationships with each other and with their literal location. This invitation to conduct spatial thought-experiments to contrast and compare with the found spatial arrangement in literal space, gives *L-Beams* a little more in common with the 1970s work of Helena Almeida than Morris's writings suggest. Almeida's work explores spatial concerns that are similar to those of minimal art, but without employing the refusal of illusionism that Morris claims is so important.

In one of her bodies of work, Almeida employs photography to document and construct concise installations or performances by marking the 'edge' of literal space with matter such as hair or paint. The effect of placing these materials on the surface of photographic prints is to make the print read as a 'screen' dividing the represented space within the image from the literal space in which it is located. The works' focus on the 'screen' constructs a surprising two-way relationship between the image and its physical site. The surprise is that it acknowledges the visitors' side of the 'screen' as well as the illusory space on the other side. It is simultaneously photographic documentation of the artist performing in her studio, and a continuation of that performance into the live space of visitors.



Figure 1: Helena Almeida, *Inhabited Drawing* (10 photographs & horse hair, detail on right), 1975 (images courtesy of the artist).

One example from this body of work is *Inhabited Drawing* (1975, Figure 1), containing multiple images of the artist drawing, from her side of the screen, lines that are sometimes within the image, and sometimes on the viewers' side of the screen as literal horsehair, ink or pencil on the surface of the print. Not only can the figure in the image seem to miraculously puncture the 'screen' dividing the two spaces, she seems to regard both spaces as equally valuable for locating lines. The work suggests that, not only can something constructed in literal space be brought into represented space (as happens when something is photographed), but movement can also occur in the opposite direction, that is, something can be placed in literal space from a position within represented space. While the latter movement is understood as an artifice within the terms of literal space, it implies that the literal space in which visitors are located has value because its material language is used to complete an action apparently begun in the represented space of the image. It is also valued because it is seen as a desirable destination for the agency that is apparently located in the image.



Figure 2: Helena Almeida *Inhabited Drawing* (one black and white photograph and one horsehair), 1975 (image courtesy of the artist).

This point is made again in a different way in another *Inhabited Drawing* of 1975 (Figure 2), made up of just one image. One upturned hand holds a curved horsehair within the photograph, and the other holds a pen to the 'screen', at the tip of which is the end of another curved horsehair sitting on the surface of the print. Again it shows the possibility of two-way movement between the spaces. We don't know if the hair held within the photograph is waiting to be put on the surface next, or whether the hand is collecting the hairs that the pen is bringing in from the viewers' side. But it indicates the possibility that something constructed in literal space can be brought into represented space and vice versa, thereby implying a continuity or equality of value between spaces that are otherwise incommensurable.

The spatial incommensurability is revealed in the humour or trickery suggested by the fabrication of continuity. Just as the artist employs photography to construct this work, she also employs the viewers' ability to recognise the spatial incommensurability that is being so easily violated. The incommensurability can be understood in terms of the spatial needs of the body: viewers can be expected to recognise that interpretation of the space occupied jointly by viewers and artwork is relatively unambiguous because it is influenced by the spatial needs for orientation and safety of the living bodies of those who occupy what they are also interpreting. It contrasts with the open and ambiguous criteria available for the interpretation of the space of art and images precisely because it is not literally occupied in this way, giving it the potential to accommodate and employ multiple and contradictory meaning, including endless 'fabrications'. This incommensurability is not so much questioned in these works, however, as employed to challenge the different relative values of each space. In particular, it challenges the low value of literal space implied when an artwork's physical location is regarded as irrelevant to the success of the work, as is expected of autonomous artwork and images. This challenge is made through revaluing literal space by giving it a more significant role in relation to the space or content of the artwork. This revaluation is achieved through a type of immersion, but not in the usual sense of merging the space of art with the literal space in which it is located, as do many artworks of recent decades – ranging from Lucas Samaras's *Mirrored Room* in 1966 to Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* in 2004, for example.⁶ In their different ways, both *L-Beams* and *Inhabited Drawings* can be described as immersive only in the sense that they immerse visitors in a literal space that is altered by being noticed, and thereby revalued relative to the space constructed by the artworks or images that occupy it as well.

It is the social and political implications of such revaluations of literal space that I would like to focus on next. First, though, the meaning of place as literal space needs further clarification. Its distinction from the virtual space of the image has already been shown in the discussion of the two *Inhabited Drawings*. However, its relationship to the notion of place as a particular location is a different matter. In each of the artworks discussed so far, the literal space employed could be found anywhere. This contrasts with forms of site-specific art such as that referred to as institutional critique, which need to be sited in particular locations – such as a particular institution or city – rather than in what is being referred to here as literal space. This latter distinction may seem obscure because literal space is always also a particular location. However, it is not always the *same* particular location. Literal space is what all particular locations have in common, whereas what identifies a particular location is what makes it unique. Literal space enables movement between and across particular locations, whereas the artwork-sites that need to be particular locations because of the nature of the artwork, are more likely to be occupants of literal space that have been constructed or taken root in a place, such as a museum or other institution, or which have defined a location in some other way, such as an historic event or practice. Site-specific artwork focusing on such particular locations may use a different language to the one being discussed here, because, for example, they may be primarily concerned to comment on a museum or museum practices generally, or to draw on a history that is unique to one place. The relationships that artworks such as *L Beams* and the *Inhabited Drawings* construct with their locations, on the other hand, use a spatial language that draws on the common cultural knowledge of the meaning and value of literal space, the possible social and political significance of which can be drawn from the social theory of Anthony Giddens.

The 'place' discussed in Anthony Giddens's account of modernity is not a particular location in the sense discussed above, or at least is only a particular location in the sense that its devaluation is traced in Giddens's account through the spatial and temporal reach of modernity. In his account, modernity emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and became more or less worldwide in its influence, as time-space distanciation and disembedding mechanisms evolved and produced the dynamism and reflexivity characteristic of what he calls the "high" or "radicalised" modernity of today.

One of its consequences was to progressively reduce the status of place from its highly valued position in pre-modern times, when localised activities determined much of the spatial and temporal dimensions of social life. Forms of time-space distantiation were limited in pre-modern times to writing and the calendar, but this changed radically with the invention of the mechanical clock, and then its diffusion throughout key Western countries by the late eighteenth century. Radical change occurred because clocks displaced socio-spatial markers and regular natural occurrences as a way of telling the time. Time then became standardised, made uniform and 'empty' of place, permitting the division of the day into 'zones' undifferentiated by particularities like the weather or the season or the position of the sun. Worldwide standardisation of calendars in the twentieth century completed the separation of time from place by matching the uniformity of time measurement by the clock with the uniformity of the social organisation of time.

Place was further devalued through the separation of space from place. The status of any particular place or locale became determined by connections which occur at a distance, out of sight and hearing. So "what structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene". What occurs at a distance is made more important than what is present, than the "visible form" of the locale, which, in its turn, "conceals the distantiated relations which determine its nature".⁷ This separation is illustrated by universal maps produced by and for Western voyages of discovery, which represented space as standardised units without reference to a "privileged locale", dislocating space by making it independent of any particular place or region.

The separation of time and space prepared conditions for disembedding which enabled the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space.⁸

Disembedding shifts the basis of social activity and social relations from the trust involved in personal contacts between individuals or groups, to a trust in largely inaccessible processes and systems. Giddens illustrates this process with discussions of the disembedding mechanisms of money and expert systems.

Thus in Giddens's account, the social institutions of modernity are formed through processes (of time-space distantiation and disembedding) which devalue the concrete actuality of place, where space and time are one. Unburdened by place, the relative constancy and past-orientation of the institutions of tradition give way to the dynamism and future-orientation of those of modernity. His claim regarding the dynamism of modernity is not that there is no stable world to know [in modernity], but that knowledge of that world contributes to its unstable or mutable character.⁹

This knowledge and its potential effect on the practices in question, produces the open-ended constitutive reflexivity of modernity, in which "most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, [are susceptible] to chronic revision in the light of new information and knowledge".¹⁰

In Giddens's account, constitutive reflexivity creates the dynamism and instability of modernity because the other components of the model – distantiation and disembedding – have substituted expert systems of knowledge for place as a key factor determining social relations and value. There are two sides to this instability, but one is the high-consequence risks of the run-away juggernaut that he claims modernity has become. These risks are to the inhabitability of the planet through ecological decay or disaster, as well as the risks of large-scale warfare, collapse of economic growth mechanisms and the growth of totalitarian power.

The pessimism of this account is matched by an unexpected optimism regarding the possibility of "steering" the juggernaut away from its current direction. The optimism is the other side of the instability derived from constitutive reflexivity, described as a consequence of "the heavily counterfactual nature of future-oriented thought".¹¹ While, in Giddens's view of the "utopian realism" that he favours, the over-riding "realism" is the urgency of minimising the high-consequence risks of modernity, the redirection of modernity also needs to be achieved through its other important role of "envisag[ing] alternative futures whose very propagation might help them be realised".¹² His view is that future developments cannot be directed from any over-riding plan, envisaging instead a "constant signaling ... carried out 'on the ground' by low-input units, rather than guided from above".¹³

Artworks designed to revalue their physical locations can be counted among the many “low-input units” that envisage alternatives to the low social value that place has as a condition of modernity. While implicit in these proposals is a critical stand in relation to the spatial values of modernity, it is done by positive means – by proposing a revaluation of place that, in Giddens’s account, would need to characterise a post-modernity in which the worst consequences of modernity are avoided. This account enables both Morris’s *L-Beams* and Almeida’s *Inhabited Drawings* to be understood as employing visitors’ spatial imagination to focus on its relationship with their physical place rather than to participate in the “disembedding” of space from place that is encouraged when the interdependent nature of that relationship is overlooked.

Later strands of art practice that draw on the spatial discoveries made by artwork such as minimalism can also be considered within a framework drawn from Giddens’s account. For example, recent spatial artworks connected to “relational aesthetics” may also be enacting an anti-disembedding strategy. One such work is Lucas Ihlein’s project, *The Sham*, in which for two months in 2006 he restricted himself to the environs of Petersham in Sydney (the suburb in which he had lived for two years) as an experiment in “merging art and life” but in which the art retreated to being a temporal frame for an increased focus on the nature of his daily occupation of the literal space in which he lived.¹⁴ The spatial and temporal restriction of the project affected how he lived there, as, for example, it required him to source all his needs locally. Another is the 2008 work by John Alexander Borley, *Time and Again*, of eight one-hour walks through the streets of Melbourne. Each of these walks was with a volunteer companion and was repeated as exactly as possible, at the same time every week, for a total of eight weeks.¹⁵ Both these works are amply documented by texts that meet an expectation that temporal events such as these be recorded. However, these texts also have a randomness and incompleteness that shows a regard for the literal places that are important parts of the works but are necessarily absent from the documentary record.

Each of these works find ways to recognise and revalue “place”, as Giddens uses the term. They are “low-input units” whose socially critical nature does not depend on a consequent impact on the environment, even if it could be measured. They are better judged according to their refusal to participate in disembedding mechanisms that contribute to the low status of place in modernity, and consequently to its vulnerability to the neglect and damage that is linked to the risks of climate change.

Margaret Roberts is a Sydney-based artist working with installation and its documentation, whose work can be seen on www.margaretroberts.org.

- 1 This is an amended version of the paper presented at the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (NSW Chapter) 2007 conference, *Art and the Real: Documentary, Ethnography, Enactment*, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. The development of its ideas is indebted to ongoing conversations, in particular with artists Gail Hastings and Stephen Sullivan, and sociologist Denise Thompson (though any limitations are entirely my own).
- 2 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
- 3 Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture Part II”, *Artforum*, 5 (2), October 1966: 21.
- 4 Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture Part III”, *Artforum*, 5(10), June 1967: 25.
- 5 Images of Roberts Morris’s *Untitled (L-Beams)* are readily available in literature on minimal art. For example, for the 2-Beam version, see: Michael Benedikt, “Sculpture as Architecture” in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 83; for the 3-Beam version, see Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 52 and <http://www.burac.com/ah/45/45.htm> (last accessed on 30 October, 2008.)
- 6 <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/eliasson/default.htm>
http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Samaras_I.html last accessed on 30 October, 2008.
- 7 Giddens, op cit., 19
- 8 Ibid., 21.
- 9 Ibid., 45.
- 10 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 20.
- 11 Giddens, *Consequences*, 154.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., 164.
- 14 <http://thesham.info> last accessed on 30 October, 2008.
- 15 <http://www.timeandagain.info/> last accessed on 30 October, 2008.

TERRA_DATA AND OTHER 'LINES OF FLIGHT'

Ana Terry



Figure 1: Ana Terry, detail in *terra_data* (2007), plastic bird painted with stripes that camouflaged its form against a landscape.

In this practice report I discuss my recent work and provide samples from the series of projects my practice has developed into during my master of fine arts candidacy so far. These include curatorial projects, a site-specific project in Oamaru and, most recently, works exhibited at the Hocken Gallery in Dunedin.

As part of negotiating my practice as a series of projects I have loosely adopted geological and archaeological approaches as a set of tools. My methodologies have included mining for and stratifying material, and processes of repetition, collecting, archiving and distilling. Studio experimentation and outcomes have provided visual analogies and metaphors grounded in these processes, in some cases quite literally.

Writing this report has provided a plateau – a necessary hiatus, a space between things – to reflect on tracings and proposed mappings. Here, and in drawing on other disciplines through my studio practice I refer to key ideas suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*¹ and also by Simon O'Sullivan's book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*.² O'Sullivan experiments with the Deleuzian notion of de-territorialisation and demonstrates how to construct an active engagement between an arts practice and Deleuze and Guattari's suggested methodologies. De-territorialisation is a philosophical concept that challenges the boundaries of any given territory through resistance to the status quo. Deleuze and Guattari use geomorphic metaphors in describing these processes and this is akin to my own adoption of geological and archaeological analogies in my practice.

In my practice as a series of projects a constant tension exists between the whole being the sum of its parts and the parts reflecting the sum of the whole. I am negotiating between parts and whole, between one project and the others while trying to resist a totalising narrative. There are chasms and fractures but these are full of potential.

A tension also exists between my defining and therefore confining ideas to the point of exhaustion, or allowing processes to spill over and change course. A resistance to the latter is grounded in a fear of a lack of critical engagement. But I am also questioning this assumption and it seems to me that the process between outcomes actually requires perhaps a greater vigilance in its awareness of referrals, connecting threads and disjunctures. It is harder to talk about process than about outcomes as process is by its very nature amorphous. To quote Gregory Bateson – an anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, and cyberneticist – from his writing *Steps to an Ecological Mind* (1972):

We are better at nouns than verbs, better at referencing visual artefacts than organization with active parts, temporal components, or differential change...While a persistent desire for unifying theories parses the world into unities and universals, an alternative practice identifies its differentials and switches. It proceeds, not by recursive stories, but by jokes, involutions, and reversals – the special points of translation or exit between stories and logics.³

Applied to an arts practice, Bateson's ideas begin to extend boundaries, both conceptually and practically, with a specific emphasis on process. However, "jokes, involutions and reversals" will only exist in relation to a boundary or way station. Considering my own negotiation of processes, I borrow the Deleuzian notion of a plateau that provides multiple places to stand and edges that are provisional.

Deleuze suggests the necessity to find a consolidated base to work out from and against. He writes: "You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems..." In other words you need a territory to return to, a root from which to produce a rhizome, a point to move out from, and something to resist. Deleuze actually provides an instructive proposition where he continues: "This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantage point on it, find potential movements and de-territorialisation, possible lines of flight, experience them...have a small plot of land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight".⁴

In this lyrical analogy Deleuze moves from "a plot of land" to the idea of inter-strata. This seems to be a move from our earthly ties into something more akin to an altitudinal holding pattern calculated and monitored through a process of trigonometry that requires fixed geographical points while one's position between these points can shift. A holding pattern is defined by repetitive loops and returnings, strategies to which I will return later in this report.

With my project entitled *terra_data* the territory or strata I set out from was literally a selection of landscapes in the collection of the Hocken Library in Dunedin, New Zealand. These paintings are housed in an atmospherically controlled environment suggestive of a stratification in their arrangement within concertina racks which form what is known as 'the stack' (Figure 2). To me they needed excavating and reorganising; they needed to come into contact with other territories.

Confronted by the archive as both space and as an object in space my first impressions were of its vanishing point. Contrary to the ambient stillness of 'the stack,' the alignment of the archive suggested a potential temporality and velocity: a "dromoscopic" experience perhaps?

Paul Virilio discusses his invented term "dromoscopy" in an essay entitled "Dromoscopy, or the Ecstasy of Enomities" (1978)⁵. His focus is on the motorist's consumption of a territory through a series of vanishing points created by the parallel borders of a highway. Virilio explores the violence inherent in the crashing of data against the windscreen as one vanishing point is superseded by the next. His oculocentric experience of consumption of the landscape at speed is always through a screen and creates what he calls, "an accident of the body, a de-corporation".⁶ It is specifically through his idea of such a vanishing point that I became interested in the possibility of an embodied way of seeing or, as media theorist Laura Marks describes it, in "haptic visibility".⁷

Contrary to my former installation and site-specific projects I retreated to the edges of the gallery space for *terra_data*. I focused it as a wall work towards which the viewer would be orientated. This entailed a shift in strategy, away from my previous projects in which the audience's immersion in an installation was paramount. I needed to

resist the projects which preceded *terra_data*. To quote Deleuze, I had to find “something to turn against [my] own system” In *terra_data* a retraction of material to the edges of the room tested the notion of immersion as simulated through the visual. In my previous projects, the viewer had often been challenged in a very physical way by the arrangement of the works; now I wanted to see what the effects could be if the works were to be contained within the edges of the wall. This was contrary to the projects mentioned below as can also be seen in a sample image from one of my previous projects (Figure 3).

In *Marginal Errors*, over 2000 books were cut down and then formed into a floor to be walked over. Selected works in *PLOT* such as the *Bound* series were landscapes made of sculpted books protruding from their frames at eye level. And, in *Wall Stories* (2007), the viewer needed to negotiate guy ropes which stretched between the walls and floor. But, returning to *terra_data*: I had to deal with the institutional matrix that contextualises the collection in the Hocken Library. One of my concerns with this project was its potential to slip into the well-worn groove of landscape painting critique. Equally fashionable has become critiques of the archive, of the institution, of “representational totality” and of “institutional integrity” as discussed by Hal Foster in his article “An Archival Impulse” (2004). It is by now a given that the archive or museum as a coherent system has been unmasked.⁸ While I am not denying that this is a register of *terra_data*, it is not my primary concern. In line with Hal Foster’s “archival impulse” towards generating something beyond – but still in relation to – the boundaries of the Hocken Archive, ‘the stack’ remained a point of departure, a plateau to lift off from.

In terms of “lifting off” and coming into “contact with other territories”, it is worth noting the current ongoing construction of a meta-data for the Hocken Library’s collection that coincided with my *terra_data* project. This massive undertaking includes the digitalising of some two million photographs and over thirteen and a half thousand paintings. ‘The Digital Collection’ was launched in August 2008 on the University of Otago website. Images, including the landscape paintings I have used, are now in the processes of being disseminated through the web, crossing over and colliding with other data territories.

In *terra_data*, my strategy was firstly to wedge apart both the archival origins of the landscape and its ‘composition’ through a process of de-territorialisation, by literally infiltrating the collection with ‘outsider’ landscapes, gleaned from second hand dealers and from Trade-Me sellers.

I integrated mass-produced images such as a faded (anonymous) print of the Matterhorn with accentuated lofty snow-covered peaks and replete with a picturesque chalet, and intermingled this with a modest rendering of Lake Manapouri at dusk by painter Nicholas Chevalier. This strategy of sampling as based on composition, content and colour rather than on authorship diffused traditional archival paradigms and leant towards an abstraction of the material. The material’s reordering began to undermine origins and discrete boundaries. A process of collecting and re-aligning the contours of information suggested a distillation of sedimentary stuff – namely of *data* as proliferated within our mass media world.

Here, I would like to discuss what the word ‘data’ means. ‘Data’ and ‘information’ are terms often used interchangeably. I suggest there is a fundamental difference between these terms. ‘Data’ can only become ‘information’ once it is organised or codified in some form. Up until that point it is open-ended, fluid and full of potential. In my current practice I am exploring the edges between data and information, investigating possibilities between process (unforming and reforming) and object (outcomes or artefacts resulting from this process). Data inherently lends itself to digital environments. Mitchell Whitelaw, in his paper entitled “Art Against Information: Case Studies in Data Practice”, argues that data artists typically resist or defer information and seek out data’s potential for the autonomy of process and for the generation, rather than the finalisation, of outcomes. He discusses the work of Lisa Jevbratt who describes her data images as “abstract realism” and “objects for interpretation, not interpretations”.⁹ This involves a type of trans-coding between data-substance and sensory material. An uncovering of data and its potential operations beneath the information is abstracted in my Figure 5. The on-line site “Informe Imager” allows the user to create “crawlers” (software robots, which could be thought of as automated Web browsers) that gather data from the Web, providing methods for visualising both the collected data and its trajectory.

Taking information and de-coding it to find data is familiar territory to me. I both collect and excavate material. This impulse developed during my formative years living in the Middle East. In between my father’s tours of duty as an

observer for the United Nations on the Golan Heights and Gaza Strip, weekends were spent with the family visiting archaeological sites and going coin hunting in both Israel and Syria. Looking for patterns and recognising forms such as the curve of a coin's edge; finding pottery shards and fragments of oxidised glass surfacing from the arid terrain, became firmly embedded as part of my memory.

In this process of memory formation, I learnt that there is a fine line between something being embedded in and being camouflaged by geological strata. Indiscernible in its entirety, an artefactual fragment once prised from its earthly archive becomes recognisable as a sample of life generated through a process of geomorphic change.

On the Golan Heights and Gaza Strip, I also learnt the difference between a clean coin and one encrusted with dirt. The muted reliefs of dirt-encrusted coins are redolent with mystery and hidden data; their contours shrouded from direct viewing, enticing us to excavate their potentials, just as the archaeological act excavates them from the soil. The excavation process is time-consuming while the mapping of pieces of pottery shards together provides edges of possibility in their (mis-)alignment. Working with such kinds of delayering and types of puzzle pieces has constituted a parallel development during the making of *terra_data* (see Figure 6). Exploring the process of distilling information into data and shrouding information in the very material that generates its own camouflage became important to my practice in ways which had already been hinted at in my earlier projects.

Processes of cross-sectioning, cutting, scraping back, patterning, and accumulating material repeatedly appear in my projects. One of my concerns with the repetition of these processes of making is a re-articulation of the 'same' in different guises. My curation of an exhibition entitled *wee hiccup* as hosted by the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in late 2006 and my subsequent writing about this show published in *Scope (Art)* 2007, as well as discussions with other artists working with repetition have assisted in my enquiry into the issue of repetition.

I have discovered that registers beyond simple reiteration can develop through repetition. Deleuze discusses the possibility of *difference through repetition* using an evolutionary model. In *Difference and Repetition* he likens "dynamic repetition" to genetic action.¹⁰ According to Deleuze nothing can recur exactly, as everything entails an evolution of continuous becoming that breaks with the habitual. He suggests that there are two forms of repetition: repetition of difference (of that which cannot be represented but only repeated or reactivated) and the repetition of the same (i.e. through representation and resemblance).

Deleuze refers to the secret operation of repetition, demonstrating that the power of repetition is the same as in revolution. Using the paradox of festivals he says that they repeat an unrepeatable event: "They do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first to the nth' power". He thus suggests that events echo forward with gaining variance and strength.¹¹

Following Deleuze's lead, I have used repetition in *terra_data* to generate a sense of motion and temporality. This articulation also suggests the experience of multiple viewpoints, of a shattered mirror reflection of a given terrain as experienced at the high speed of dromoscopic engagement with the landscape. Cutting the landscapes into strips reveals differences. No two are the same. Singularly, each 'still' presents only a moment in time. However, arranged as a series, the structures of cinematography are connoted, suggesting a continuous reel of film. A sequential time-frame is implied. A sense of variation in space and time is generated through repetition. This kind of perception is filmic in the sense of montage, where material or data is juxtaposed against and after another.

Here, it is worth noting that landscape and travel and filmic experiences have a long conjoined history. In Lynne Kirby's book *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (1997), she points to links generated between the panorama and the railroad, and between later photography and cinema, these appearing most clearly in discourses around the "panoramic perception" made possible by train travel. The speed, velocity, and diminishing intervals between geographic points resulted in what became commonly referred to in the mid-19th century as "the annihilation of space and time".¹²

In *terra_data*, the vertical strips repeated form fence lines or suggest the metronomic strobing of telegraph poles as they mark the kilometres one travels by train or car. The final installation of the project thus references the panorama as well as early optical devices such as the zootrope. This latter device relies on vertical slits and the blank

spaces between them to generate a repeated flicker of information that creates a sense of movement. In *terra_data* the alternating of visual material territories generates this kind of 'flicker'. However, like Max Ernst's collage (figure 7), the viewer is inside the apparatus rather than outside of it; physically experiencing the movement, not only looking at it.

Although confined to a wall, a de-territorialisation of the material causes visual information to move in *terra_data* between folds of stratified hanging valleys, lake shores, and skyline ridges. This collection began to suggest something between data and information. I discovered during my play with the material that a strobic beat of information toys with our focusing between foreground and background, nearness and distance. This is generated by colour and detail variations on each strip in relation to the next and engages an embodied looking as we become aware of the mechanics of perception.

An embodied way of looking is what Deleuze describes we experience as "smooth space".¹³ Smooth space is haptic and localised. It envelops one in a force of sensation. The space cannot be distanced and objectively observed because our sensation of the space is paramount. Smooth space continuously involves a shifting of our orientation with regard to landmarks as linkages and multiple directions operate 'step by step' as strobes that prevent us from seeing only one discrete object or outcome. Engaged in a fluidity of experience between one step and the next involves the 'being-in-the-world' of the phenomenologist.¹⁴

In *terra_data* the processing of pleated surfaces of colour and texture provides endless curvy folds which twist, turn and extend territories: fold over fold, a mapping one on another and one into the other. This project is aligned to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas as proposed in *A Thousand Plateaus* and also to Deleuze's writing in *The Fold*.¹⁵

Thinking about these sources has been inspirational for *terra_data* as against my earlier projects. As O'Sullivan proposes, Deleuze and Guattari offer tools for expanding not only the notion of how an arts practice can operate but also of how we might live in the world: between what is inside and outside and along our own edges. I near conclusion of this report with a final quote from Deleuze:

An art practice is a fluid, dynamic system always in connection with a number of different regimes and registers and always in contact with an outside...What an art practice 'is' then is defined by its outermost edge, its boundary line or simply its line flight, understood as its furthest point from within its territory...Indeed the artist...is this line of flight, or more accurately operates on this line and at this edge.¹⁶

The projects included so far in my master of fine arts practice aim at questioning how I can work and thus, how I can be in the world. With *terra_data*, this aim has stepped into new territory for me: the de-territorialisation which Deleuze and Guattari suggest as a strategy towards achieving "smooth space" and experiencing a "haptic visuality" through strobic repetition.

Ana Terry is a multi-disciplinary artist. She responds to found materials and often to a given location from which to draw out ideas and metaphoric associations. She was awarded the William Hodges Fellowship with collaborator Don Hunter in 2008-09. She has been lecturing in project drawing and digital media since 2000 at both the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic School of Art. Currently she is based in Vanuatu as a volunteer working with the Wvan Smolbag Theatre as a visual communications and design advisor while completing her Master of Fine Arts.

- 1 Gillies Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- 2 Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).
- 3 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) 27.
- 4 Gillies Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 161.
- 5 Paul Virilio (1978), translated by Edward R. O'Neill, "Dromoscopy, or the Ecstasy of Enormities", last accessed 1/10/07, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wide_angle/v020/20.3virilio.html.

- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensory Theory and Multi-Sensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 18.
- 8 Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October*, 110, Fall 2004: 5.
- 9 Mitchell Whitelaw, *Art Against Information: Case Studies in Data Practice*, last accessed 1/10/08, http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue11/issue11_whitelaw.html
- 10 See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/deleuze.htm#SH4c> last accessed on 4 October 2008.
- 11 Gilles Deleuze, cited in Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). 134.
- 12 Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). 48.
- 13 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 70. Accessed in "Repetition and the Scientific Model in Art" by Ellen K Levy, Spring, 1996, *Art Journal*. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_n1_v55/ai_18299598 last accessed on 24 October 2008.
- 14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). In this essay, Merleau-Ponty develops an alternative to the representationalist's view of perception by extending Heidegger's notion of human reality as 'being-in-the-world'. He does this by proposing an embodied way of seeing.
- 15 Deleuze, Gilles, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, translated by Tom Conley, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 16 Simon O'Sullivan, 32.



Figure 2: 'The Stack', Hocken Pictorial Collections, Dunedin, 2007.



Figure 3: Ana Terry, *Marginal Errors* (floor detail of installation), 3.0 x 4.0 metres, 2002.



Figure 4: *terra_data*, detail of a 28-metre wall work installed at the Hocken Collections Gallery, Dunedin, December 2007 – March 2008.

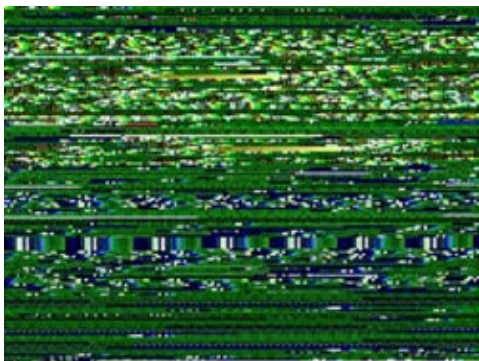


Figure 5: Ana Terry, image created on Saturday, 3 November, 2007, 21:17:10, with the "Informa Imager" (<http://infome.net>).

This image is an abstraction of an internet crawler's journey through 300 websites that have the word 'edges' embedded in each website's html tags and http headers. The image was generated by Crawler: ID2401.

Figures 1-6 courtesy of the author.



Figure 6: Ana Terry, work in progress, 'exploding' pieces from a 2000 piece jig-saw titled "German Country Cottage" 2006 – 2007.

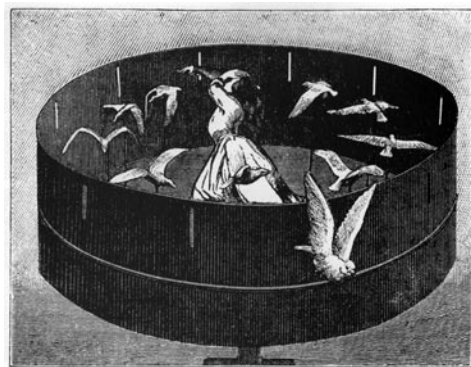


Figure 7: Max Ernst, *A Little Girl Taking the Veil*, collage, 1930 (image in the public domain).

TERRA_DATA

Alexandra Kennedy

terra n. *firma*, firm ground,
incognita, unknown or unexplored region,
data n. *information*

MINING THE ARCHIVE

Here, the archive is the site for a particular kind of dig. It is a mining of coded information in a search for raw data. The archive presents information – meanings made, histories and organisations – so how to extract the data? The intent seems to be a freeing of substance from signification so that it is active, temporal, and differential, continually in the process of becoming. There is a “de-territorialisation” occurring of the territory of the archive. The archive is one root of a rhizome, a “point to move out from” and “something to resist”.¹

Ana Terry's project *terra_data* takes images from ‘the stack’ within the Hocken Collections as one of its territories. Indeed the stack itself is a territory, as is the archive. Together, the stack and the archive invoke both an ambient stillness and an immersive, temporal experience through time.

Stasis and temporality are further invoked in the cinematic slicing and montage of the landscape images to resemble a filmic sequencing and movement, in a fracturing of established ‘framings’ of the landscape. Singularly, each ‘still’ presents a static moment in time. One is reminded of Paul Virilio's ideas concerning the consumption of the landscape at speed.² Virilio discusses this experience in terms of a continual unfolding in the filmic sense, one which involves singular moments where each moment is overtaken by the previous moment to create a dynamic, immersive experience. An experience in which – via the sense of sight – the haptic, the whole body, is involved. The filmic ‘slicing’ also operates visually as a sequence of pleated surfaces endlessly producing folds, a mapping

of one frame into another, a folding in on itself of representational space, in a continual movement between near and far, foreground and background.

LANDSCAPE AND TERRITORY

Another way of ‘seeing’, and another territory here, is the genre of landscape itself. The material of *terra_data* is the commodified landscape – whether this is a carefully preserved artifact (here an image of the Mount Cook Range by the 19th-century painter Walter Deverell) or a cheap mass produced reproduction (a faded blue print of some far off place). The ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari could apply to Terry's interpretations of the landscape, in the sense that there is a relative de-territorialisation and a re-territorialisation³ occurring. That is to say, both forms of representation of the landscape could be viewed as a taking of control from a place (a territory) or land via the imposition of a particular set of values in the manner in which the landscape is framed. Hence there is an undoing of a prior set of values and the imposition of new orders – a replacement with an alternative set of values or concepts. They represent different forms of Eurocentric commodification of the landscape. So, while occupying very different positions in the territory that is culture, there is sameness in their difference. But Terry's concern is not for the position of the landscape within the cultural psyche, nor with creating a new frame for the New Zealand landscape. She wants to effect her own de-territorialisation/re-territorialisation and she does this by taking the image of the landscape as a cipher for other territories – the archive as a framing territory, the territory of oculocentric experiences and the haptic, the territory between data and information, and of code, the territories of time and space, the territory of seeing. It

becomes another of many possible points from which to move out from – another root of a rhizome – “A rhizome never ceases to connect...”⁴ Terry’s intent is to effect a “de-centering...onto other dimensions and onto other registers”⁵ These are what Deleuze and Guattari call “lines of flight”⁶, a viral-like growth or evolution.

TERRA INCOGNITA

De-territorialisation and re-territorialisation can refer to the breaking down of connections between culture and place, to the spatial and temporal dislocation of cultural objects. In this sense also Terry is enacting her own form of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, to break down or “...to wedge apart...the archival origins, the landscape and its ‘composition’...”⁷ Her strategy is, as we see in the work *terra_data*, to disrupt the territory through the vertical slicing of reproductions of landscapes and to reassemble them, re-stratifying sections of landscape from different sources in what can be read as a visual analogy to geological core sampling. The work suggests new scopic regimes, ones which are not stable, in the process of taking apart old ones. Terry’s stated aim is not to present a critique of representations of the landscape, or a critique of the archive and its narratives. Her motivation is an attempt to “generate something beyond but in relation to the boundaries of the Hocken archive; the archive as a point of departure. A plateau to lift off from”⁸. But there is more than one archive here. Each is several, so there are quite a few, there is multiplication and there is a re-territorialisation, “there are lines of articulation or segmentation, strata, territorialities; but also...movements of deterritorialization and of destratification.”⁹ There is no terra firma here, no single fixed position, but maybe there is some terra incognita.

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- 1 Terry’s discussions about *terra_data* has been influenced by Simon O’Sullivan’s book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*. O’Sullivan experiments with notions of de-territorialisation and demonstrates how to deploy Deleuze & Guattari’s suggested methodologies in an arts practice. Terry states “Deleuze and Guattari use geomorphic metaphors in describing processes akin to my own adoption of geological/archaeological methodologies and analogies in my practice.” See Simon O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 33-37.
- 2 Paul Virilio, *Dromoscopy, or the Ecstasy of Enormities*, trans. by Edward R O’Neill, (Wide Angle, 20.3, 1998), 11-22. Last accessed 12/11/07 via http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/wide_angle/v020/20.3virilio.html
- 3 See endnote 1.
- 4 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, ‘Rhizome’ in *On the Line*, trans. by John Johnstone (Semiotext(e), Columbia University, New York, 1983), 12.
- 5 Ibid., 13.
- 6 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, ‘Rhizome’ in *On the Line*, trans. by John Johnstone (Semiotext(e), Columbia University, New York, 1983), 20.
- 7 Ana Terry, “terra_data and other Lines of Flight,” unpublished notes from a research seminar presented on 7 November 2007 at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art, Dunedin.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, ‘Rhizome’ in *On the Line*, trans. by John Johnstone (Semiotext(e), Columbia University, New York, 1983), 2.



Figure 1: Ana Terry, detail in *terra_data* (2007), plastic bird painted with stripes that camouflaged its form against a landscape (courtesy of Ana Terry)

DUALITIES WITHIN DRAWING AND THE WORK OF ARTISTS IN AN EXPANDED FIELD

Juliet Novena Sorrel

Today drawing is no longer merely a preparatory aspect of an artist's practice but a recognised art discipline with artists making and exhibiting drawings as complete works of art. In their attempts to define drawing, and in the way that art writers talk about different aspects of drawing practice, there is a tendency to identify dualities and some of these are explored in this essay. Although it can be useful to define what something is by what it is not, the result can be a limiting paradigm. These dichotomies may provide neat categories for the art writer, but do not necessarily match the diverse works of artists. In this essay it is argued that drawing becomes more interesting when it occupies a place between the binary positions established by art writers. The following sections will examine several definitions and theories of drawing and how they relate to the works of four contemporary artists, including my own work.

PROCESS VS PRESENTATION

Two predominant alternatives have been identified by Laura Hoptman within the history of drawing – process-based and presentation drawing.¹ For the former, she cites as an example the process works of the 1960s and 1970s. These works are the result or evidence of actions, whereas the presentation drawings of the early 18th century are examples of works which were collected as mounted and finished works independent of a process and valued as art in themselves.

Hoptman observes that drawings of the 1980s and 1990s span a broad spectrum of style, medium, scale and technique, yet all resist the categorisation of process-based works. What they do have in common is a sense of autonomy, representation and finish. Hoptman quotes writer Yve Alain Bois² who describes contemporary drawings as “projective” works that “depict something that has been imagined before it is drawn as opposed to being found through the process of making.” It could be said therefore, that contemporary drawing has more in common with 18th century presentation drawing than the process works of the 1960s and 1970s.

Hoptman's definition of drawing includes the influence of forms of popular culture such as illustration, applied decoration and also architectural drawing which further distinguish these drawings from process-based work. Hoptman concludes that current drawing is not a verb but a noun. It is not the means, but an end in itself. This conclusion and the polarisation of drawing into process and presentation works is problematic, however, as there are always exceptions within each period of art history.

Artist and curator Avis Newman observes that drawing by nature is intimate because the eye and the hand are perpetually engaged in the space of action and event.³ Drawing embodies or reveals many layers of thinking. It demands an intimate engagement with the work and subsequently brings us as close as possible to the thought process of the artist. Whereas Hoptman defines the new mode of contemporary drawing as a noun, as leading to finished autonomous works, Newman's idea of drawing is based on act and process.

Bernice Rose suggests drawing encompasses not only finished drawings which are made to be independent and complete works similar to painting, but also fragmentary works such as observational, preparatory drawings and designs for further work.⁴ Fragmentary work often connects drawing to the participatory aesthetic and the gestural act in performance.

Rose claims that post-modernism has brought about a changing role for drawing. It has achieved a new status as a discipline in itself, as well as a medium which interacts with other mediums. It no longer serves only as a preparatory function for other disciplines such as painting or sculpture, but has become part of a new type of visual language. The interaction of drawing with other disciplines has blurred the distinctions between those disciplines. This has created new ways of understanding drawing, resulting in work that utilises an expanded field of operations.

The multidisciplinary relationship of drawing to sculpture has been an important contributor to the development of an expanded field of operations with both the process of drawing into new spaces and the experimentation with new materials in drawing. Interdisciplinary work involves not only the mixing of media but also elements from outside the normal confines of art and its disciplines. Rose argues there is an inherent balancing act between written language, visual language, and body language to which drawing is pivotal.

A new perspective is outlined by Emma Dexter that identifies two aspects of contemporary drawing.⁵ Firstly, the conceptual and theoretical where line is an abstract mark that relates to the ground, creating a symbolic potency. The second aspect is not based on theory but on human experience. Dexter defines this type of drawing as a feeling or attitude conveyed in its making and materials. These two elements in drawing can also respectively be described as semiotic and nonsemantic.

My work, *Island People* (2005, Figure 1), is an example of what Hoptman calls a presentation work. It is not a preparatory work for sculpture, performance or painting, but a direct expression of a preconceived idea. The drawing uses charcoal and coloured pencil on board and depicts a group of figures on a headland with islands in the distance. This work tells its own story, creating an imaginary scenario built on a personal narrative. It is informed by observational drawing but is not an observational drawing in itself.

Drawing is central to all areas of my practice and serves several roles. As well as complete works, of which *Island People* is an example, I use preparatory drawings in the exploration and development of ideas for sculpture and performance. These drawings can be described as fragmentary. I have also used the act of drawing in performance. These are both examples of the process-based work referred to by Rose. This shows how an artist can incorporate both process and presentation drawing in their work.

FIGURE AND GROUND

An examination of the underlying principles of figure and ground theory is useful in understanding drawing. In the history of art the relationship between figure and ground has been explored as one of the basic principles or foundations of picture making. Figure and ground theory is an idea that has been developed in many different disciplines aside from art, including philosophy and psychology.

Figure and ground is a fundamental element in drawing that signifies a contrast between one thing and another. Contrast creates meaning and therefore the theory of figure and ground helps us to explore the idea of meaning in art and drawing. Bouman⁶ identifies the qualities of ground as “form(less), loose, empty, less articulate, less dominant, soft, receding, enclosing, concave, primitive.” If the figure is to be seen as ‘other’ this establishes, by way of opposites, the qualities of figure. These could be imagined as form, control, positive, articulate, dominant, hard, aggressive, convex, and developed.

Collier bases his idea about figure and ground on technique in drawing.⁷ He discusses how differing figure and ground relationships can create various effects in artworks. Collier uses three examples of figure and ground relationships. Firstly, when the ground is behind the figure, no competition is perceived between the two. Secondly, when figure and ground are on the same plane, there is a balanced interaction. Thirdly, figure and ground are interactive and compete with each other. The viewer perceives tension or struggle between the two. Collier allocates to each of these possibilities various moods or differing energies, respectively: neutral, a sense of resolve, and disturbance.

In support of Collier, Harlan elaborates on the relationship of positive and negative areas in design where there is equal interest in the shape of background as in the figure itself.⁸ Where figure and ground compete, he argues that the viewer is forced to participate to make sense of the work and identify what is figure and what is ground. He

describes the work as a struggle between aggressive and introvert, active and passive. This concurs with Bauman's explanation of a figure and ground duality which also underpins other competing binary metaphors such as male and female, or mind and body.

When considering the differences between figure and ground it is easy to see how a hierarchy has developed where the active quality of the figure has become more important than the neutral or passive background. Rose, however, contends that modernism challenges the hierarchy of figure and ground, claiming the lower element (ground) is essential to the status of the upper (figure). What becomes interesting is the negotiation within these dualities or the possible relationships that they can represent, and how these relate to drawing. As Elkins says, it opens the field of drawn figures and ground to "metaphorical exploration".⁹

In the 20th century pictorial space was compressed and organised within the picture frame, but Rose explains that over time the figure was expelled from the frame to eventually enter the space occupied by the viewer, that is, the gallery space. The resulting space – the ground – became an expanded field where the viewer, as a physical presence, became the figure in the ground relating to the other objects and elements in the space. Rose describes this as the displaced figure which has become both the subject and object of the work. This notion has brought about a new way of seeing the figure and ground duality with all the existing ideas of separateness, interaction, conflict and emergence, taking on new possibilities.

Rosalind Krauss's version of modernism rejects the idea of background as solely a setting or surrounding for the figure and establishes the ground as equal and co-dependent with the figure.¹⁰ She demonstrates new ways of dismantling the conventional figure/ground oppositions by taking into consideration the place of the viewer and other disciplines. Krauss argues that the expanded field is generated by setting up problematic situations between oppositions. New relationships are created, for example, when the artist interacts with the work as material or tool, the viewer as participant becomes the figure in the 'ground' or the use of time delays the resolution between figure and ground.

Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang's art practice opens the field of drawing into the disciplines of sculpture and performance. Through his work he explores the body as figure, and our relationship to the environment as ground. Guo-Qiang works with a diversity of media and art forms. He uses, for example, the medium of fireworks to make large-scale drawings. By experimenting with the effects of gunpowder on paper, canvas and walls, he has created images which look like aerial maps of cities or war zones. In *Fetus Movement II* (1991), the ignition of gunpowder on rice paper leaves a residue of marks and lines.¹¹ The resulting work, designed in response to a specific location, uses new materials for drawing in an expanded field of operations.

Guo-Qiang overlays the image of his drawing onto the surface of the land. According to Merewether, he explores the land as a form of draftsman's ground, similar to a piece of paper.¹² The initial drawing on paper becomes part of a process that extends the concept into a new field on which to draw. Excavations into the earth and the detonation of firework trails replicate the image in larger scale on the ground. The drawing on paper, even though it is a preparatory drawing, exists as a permanent record of an event that has happened in a brief moment in time. Guo-Qiang considers his proposal drawings, even if not realised, as independent works instead of a means to an end. In this way he crosses the boundaries between preparatory and autonomous works.

In my work *Untitled* (2006, Figure 2) the field of drawing is expanded into sculpture. The drawings were made on tissue paper then laid on to a relief of a face. The face is a paper cast that creates an illusion of solidity. Through the use of wash a sense of depth in the form is created, yet the surface drawings ignore the three-dimensionality and appear as if on a flat surface. This creates a tension between the different types of marks on the work and the way in which the figure appears to emerge from the ground. The relief becomes a figure in the expanded ground of the gallery wall. The work occupies the position of both drawing and sculpture.

FROM SIGN TO GESTURE

Within drawing another duality exists between the act of drawing and the content of the work. These can also be described as gesture and sign or nonsemantic and semiotic. Semiotic elements are defined by Elkins as those that



Figure 1 (top): Juliet Novena Sorrel, *Island People*, 2005, charcoal and colour pencil on plywood, 38 x 110 cm, private collection (image courtesy of the artist).



Figure 2 (left): Juliet Novena Sorrel, *Untitled*, 2006, papier collé, ink and wash, 23 x 14 cm, private collection (image courtesy of the artist).

Figure 3 (below): Juliet Novena Sorrel, *Animal*, 2005, charcoal, pencil on plywood, 10.5 x 14.5 cm, private collection (image courtesy of the artist).



are prone to systematic, linguistic, and structural descriptions. It includes elements that convey specific meaning, signs and symbols. The nonsemantic, or non-semiotic, involves gesture, the mark, line, smudge and stain. Elkins claims pictures are simultaneously semiotic and nonsemantic.¹³ He comments that pictures are partly inside and partly outside logical structures of meaning and that what happens in the space between understood representation and the non-semantic makes images more interesting than when they are seen solely as a set of symbols.

Avis Newman defines drawing as the embodiment of thought by the gestural act. She states that gestural marks are nonsemantic because they are non-verbal and supplement the language of image and text. She implies they have no meaning in themselves, yet believes they are as important to communication as spoken or written words because they contribute to our understanding of the overall text or image. According to Newman, this is an example of how drawing extends the boundaries of language¹⁴.

Michael Newman questions the idea that the mark is meaningless and claims that drawing "enacts a becoming".¹⁵ The mark, when seen in context with other marks, constitutes its own meaning and becomes part of a visual language. Elkins also argues that graphic marks are not meaningless or beyond analysis and that they add to, but do not produce, signification.

In the 1970s the mark and the process through which it was made became the subject of drawing and the conceptual and mark-making aspects of drawing merged. The work of Sol Le Witt is an example of the use of gesture and isolation of the line as a conceptual device. According to Rose, Le Witt's drawing occupies a position between gesture and concept.¹⁶ This duality becomes apparent in his wall drawing where both mark and design are present.

The title of Le Witt's work, *All Possible Crossing Combinations of Arcs, Straight Lines, Lines Not Straight, and Broken Lines* (1972), reads like a list or poem, but it is also the instructions for the work to be carried out by the draftsman. The directions are brief and uncomplicated. According to Michael Newman, Le Witt believed the resulting lines did not represent anything but themselves and were the residue of a process which transferred a concept from text to image.¹⁷ Although Le Witt intended the work to be non-gestural, Godfrey claims that the authorial gesture was not ruled out and that the resulting drawing was influenced by those who drew it.¹⁸ In effect, Le Witt transferred the authorial gesture to those who carried out his instructions.

Godfrey describes Le Witt's work as the opposite of the abstract expressionist idea of line where the impulse to draw is determined by self-expression and gesture.¹⁹ In contrast, Le Witt's work is ordered and coherent, premeditated and executed within defined parameters. Drawing to Le Witt is non-gestural, a system and a method. Rose describes it as an affirmation of the consistent and universal nature of language.²⁰

The art of John Reynolds bridges the gap between the nonsemantic world and that of semiotic representation of real maps. His work, *Western Springs/Bloody Angle* (1998), employs the semiotic language of maps with nonsemantic gestural drawing to communicate a personal understanding of time and place. Two roughly drawn maps overlay the surface of an old mobile chalkboard. The first, which overlays this ground, is of Gallipoli Peninsula, the place of the Anzac battlefield in Turkey. The second map is of Western Springs, a suburban New Zealand park, which evokes other places through its borrowed English place names, while Gallipoli bears the Anzac names superimposed on the ancient Mediterranean landforms. The work communicates a connection to place through the recognised symbols and signs of maps. The gestural marks, made by oilstick, add a sense of emotion and immediacy which convey grief and loss. This results in a sense of rewriting history and reclaiming landmarks and places. It is a work of multiple layers that Reynolds calls "overlayed geographies" which exist as part of a continuum of repeated reinterpretation of sites.²¹

The gestural marks in Reynolds drawing contribute to the meaning of the work. As Elkins explains, graphic marks are inconsistently semiotic and nonsemantic, which means they cannot be overlooked in favour of pictorial signs when looking at works of art. Elkins concludes that semiotics is an inadequate tool for deciphering art works because it overlooks the otherness of marks. To speak only of what exists in spite of marks, or of the represented figure, is to avoid the illegible and incomprehensible as valid elements in the understanding of an artwork.

CONCLUSION

Amongst different theories about drawing a pattern emerges where art writers create dichotomies to define and discuss different aspects of drawing. Hoptman identifies process-based and presentation drawing, while Rose refers to fragmentary and finished works and this idea is expanded upon by Dexter. Further dualities have emerged in our exploration of the theories of figure and ground, and semiotic and nonsemantic. However, both the artwork of Cai Guo-Qiang and my own work, show how artists can work across both process and presentation drawings even within a single work.

My work *Animal* (2005, Figure 3) is an example of a fragmentary work in that it is one part of a series of small images exhibited as a group. However, because this particular work has been sold and separated from the group, it could now be considered an autonomous work. Its new context changes its definition. This work is also an example of how several dualities can exist within a drawing. The work is a charcoal drawing on plywood. The grain of the wood, which is the ground for the drawing, affects the application of the drawn marks of the figure. The conflict between figure and ground suggests a sense of impermanence or temporality in the image. The small criss-crossing lines in the upper right quarter of the work seem meaningless when isolated. Yet when seen in relation to one another they create meaning in that they could signify a receding flock of birds or swarm of flies. The deliberate, yet non-specific, marks create a dynamic where semiotic and nonsemantic co-exist.

The problem with the above-mentioned dichotomies is that they tend to define drawing within one position or another. Drawing, however, should test rather than exemplify these theories. What makes drawing interesting is the place it negotiates between the binary positions. This is described by Harlan as a struggle between positions.²² What engages the viewer and encourages participation or a sense of blurring, merging or emergence is the negotiation within the dualities or the possible relationships between them. This is evident in Reynolds's work which creates new meanings by bridging the gap between the semiotic and nonsemantic. As Elkins points out, the dynamics of all the elements which make up an individual artwork often do not fall neatly into one side or another, but somewhere in between.²³

The traditional relationship of drawing with other disciplines has been changed by the work of artists in an expanded field. The work of Le Witt, Guo-Qiang, Reynolds, and Sorrel show how artists can use the expanded field to shift drawing into other disciplines, creating new directions for their work. This is evidence of an interaction and hybridisation between disciplines where drawing plays a vital role in the interdisciplinary practice of contemporary artists.

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- 1 Laura Hoptman, *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions* (New York: MoMA, 2002), 11-12. Hoptman's polarised positions of process and presentation works attributed to each period are artificial constructs that do not always match reality, 11-12.
- 2 Yve Alain Bois, in Laura Hoptman, *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions* (New York: MoMA, 2002), 12.
- 3 Avis Newman, "Conversation: Avis Newman/Catherine de Zegher". In Catherine De Zegher (ed.), *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (London & New York: Tate Publishing and The Drawing Centre, 2003), 93-111.
- 4 Bernice Rose, *Allegories of Modernism: Contemporary Drawing* (New York: MoMA, 1992).
- 5 Emma Dexter, *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (London, Phaidon, 2005).
- 6 Jan C Bouman, in James Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91.
- 7 Graham Collier, *Form, Space, and Vision* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972).
- 8 Calvin Harlan, *Vision and Invention: A Course in Fundamentals* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
- 9 James Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91.

- 10 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", in *Modernity and its Discontents* (1979), 281-298.
11 Cai Guo-Qiang, *Cai Guo-Qiang* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002).
12 Charles Merewether, in Emma Dexter, *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (London, Phaidon, 2005), 48-49. ames
13 James Elkins, (1998), 4-6.
14 Avis Newman, (2003).
15 Michael Newman, "The Marks, Traces, and Gesture of Drawing", in Catherine De Zegher (ed.), *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act* (London & New York: Tate Publishing and The Drawing Centre, 2003), 93.
16 Bernice Rose, (1992), 14.
17 Michael Newman, (2003), 95.
18 Tony Godfrey, *Drawing Today* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1990).
19 Ibid.
20 Bernice Rose, (1992), 14.
21 John Reynolds, "A City Street. A Sign. Dusk," in *SUMWHIR*, 51-57 (New Plymouth & Auckland: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery & Artspace, 2002), 55.
22 Calvin Harlan (1970).
23 James Elkins (1998), 4.

GROUND

Peter Stupples

In 1913 the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich participated in the production of a Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*, designing the set, costumes and lighting. He drew sketches on paper with either Italian pencil or black chalk. On some sheets he drew a free-hand square in which he inscribed ideas for a curtain or backdrop. In the wide margins he made notes – the number of the scene, colours, and titles. He made a clear distinction between an image within a square frame, free of notes, and the ground – the paper outside the depicted square on which he, and others, felt free to add numbers or written comments.¹ Both the artist and others acknowledged, clearly understood and respected, a difference between 'picture' – a form, a visual concept/metaphor² and ground – formless, carrying no transcendental hooks for meaning, available only for marks of historical information.

In order to be able say we see anything on the sheet of paper, apart from its whiteness and the constantly altering shadows cast on its surface, there has to be a mark of some sort. Whatever that mark might be will act, in the first instance, as 'figure', the mark bearing potential meaning on the meaningless ground: Ehrenzweig, Krauss and others have emphasised that seeing is selective, "a conscious gestalt compulsion makes us bisect the visual field into significant 'figure' and insignificant 'ground'."³ We attend to the concrete 'thing-object', the object with perceptual form, and are blind to, or even repress, other material lying in the same field of visual attention. In a logical sense, both Malevich's drawings and their surrounding notes, are 'figure' and the paper 'ground', but in a psychological sense, the designs are the 'thing-objects' and the notes are rendered 'secondary', both not-figure and not-ground, thus establishing a hierarchy of visual attention.

This division of what we see, when confronted by the opacity of any artwork, into figure, ground, and not-figure-not-ground, is the result of a range of factors, among them a psychologically conditioned will-to-see-form, a craving for meaning – the separation of the meaningless from the potentially meaningful, as well as the visual conventions of our culture.

One of Malevich's sketches for the fifth scene of the second act of *Victory Over the Sun* (1913, Figure 1) contains a square within a square.⁴ The diagonal lines from each corner of the frame to the corresponding outer corners of an inner square give rise to a perceptual ambiguity. Do these lines indicate that the inner square is to be read as the top of a truncated pyramid, the bottom of a pit, the rear wall of a theatre stage, or something else? In addition the inner square is roughly divided into two triangles, one black and one white, but there is a distinct, if accidental/casual, suggestion that the diagonal line marking the two halves of the inner image is slightly curved. Given the context of the opera, the triumph of the realism of space-time, of an expanded perception, over the narrow and false sense of our place in the universe – through our dependence on clock-time regulated by the sun – there may be a suggestion that the viewer read the black as outer space, and the white as the turning edge of the planet lit by the sun, which will be captured by the opera's heroes, the Future-dwelling Strongmen.

So we have a ground, lines to indicate a box within a box, gestalt with an image that might suggest the edge of a planet against the infinity of space. But of course any 'reading' of this drawing will depend upon at least three conditions: our form-seeking gestalt, the conventions of reading images developed by our upbringing, education and culture, and our knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding the creation and reception of the image. In the glare of these three sources of illumination, some of which might be strong, others weak or even switched off, the mind will create the foundations of an ahistorical myth, the foundations of a 'meaning' to satisfy a ganglion of our current desires.

The form-seeking gestalt, the desire to grasp the 'thing-object', is ruthless in its repression of logic to attain optical coherence, to impose a perceptual order. In Malevich's sketch the paper of the ground is the same unmarked paper that forms the body of the larger square and the inner triangles: the body/ground of much of the image is the very same as the paper outside the image. The black pencil lines that mark the boundaries of the image – the frame – gives us a picture to look at, to read both literally and with the advantage of historical information, as well as a visual hook⁵ to speculate about meaning – allegorically, metaphorically, intuitively. Those who wrote the notes in the 'margins', including Malevich, subscribed to these conventions by respecting the picture space, though it was simply a sketch of an idea – even the person who, in child-like Cyrillic, pencilled their opinion that the image was 'stupid'. The writing is on a ground that is unseen, that is, to which we are normally blind, but the image is on the same ground, now turned into the conventional body of the image (the image-ground-together), but may also/simultaneously appear to be sides of a truncated pyramid, the wall of a pit, or the floor, ceiling and sides of a theatre set. We are both, and simultaneously, blind to the paper which is there, and yet blithely, recklessly creative in 'seeing', in a variety of senses, what isn't.

Stemming from his engagement with the set designs of *Victory over the Sun* Malevich developed ideas, and a visual apparatus with which to illustrate/explore them, that would soon lead to Suprematism, publicly heralded by the black and red squares, painted in 1914-15. *The Black Suprematist Square* (Figure 2), simply labelled *Quadrilateral* in the catalogue of the show in which it first appeared, is painted in oil on canvas, measuring 79.6 x 79.5 centimetres. The *Black Square* is brushed on to a white painted ground, which can be glimpsed these days through the cracked black pigment. When first exhibited it was hung close to the ceiling across a corner of the gallery. In a Russian context it thus suggested an icon placed in the 'red', or 'beautiful', devotional corner of a peasant's wooden house.

If being a black square was so significant, the very reason for the painting, the key icon of a new visualising system, Suprematism, why didn't Malevich simply present a canvas painted black all over? Is the white necessary as ground (and of course we are blind to the canvas) to highlight the black square as the subject of representation? Or is the white not ground, but part of the representation, the black square lying in white space, suspended, as it were, in a void? Western art has a long-established convention that a 'picture' acts like a window, showing part of a scene that lies in the world of fact, myth or the imagination,⁶ and that, in order to concentrate our eyes and mind on a significant part of that world (the 'thing-object') a frame is placed around it and, when we look at the picture, we become blind to all else. We repress the space in which the picture hangs and in which we, momentarily, have our being. The frame – the edges of the pictorially-designated space – invites the viewer to focus concerted attention on the image, rather than simply look at it. Focal attention, more deliberate than looking, needs some visual hook, must satisfy some temporarily aroused desire, in a Freudian sense, to engage our primary processes, to be sustained. Almost simultaneously that momentarily sustained attention tries to wrest a meaning, a form-satisfying, desire-assuaging, acceptable perception, from that effort (Freud's "secondary revision"). Malevich's black square is not simply blackness, but black on a white ground. In turn the white ground is, may be, could be, must be, part of the 'picture'. If the white is not simply ground what could it be? Simply whiteness? Or the conventional frame for focused attention? A conventionally bounded space, but suggesting an otherwise unlimited, even infinite (who is to 'tell?') universe in which the black square floats, sits, lies, simply is? Our mind, our attention, immediately takes off into the almost unbounded realms of metaphor: the ego is pierced, the unconscious breaks through the cracks, subject only to the irksome restraints of the superego. Though the image may seem an autonomous object we, intuitively, because of the nature of our being, put ourselves 'into the picture' by means of metaphorical speculation.

From the first Malevich emphasised the metaphorical nature of suprematist images, at the same time insisting that they were simply black or red pigment on canvas, and therefore 'real' paintings – we are not blind to the nature of their being what they are, but at the same time they were also, for him, essentially signs of a new way of seeing out from the world into new realities of space-time, they were the Royal Infants. They were both in two dimensions and, simultaneously, in four, in a 'state of rest' and in 'movement'.

For example, by placing the coloured elements in *Suprematism (with Eight Red Rectangles)* as reproduced in Figure 3 on a diagonal axis we are tempted to read 'direction' as they drift, say, from bottom left to top right, but also 'distance' – away from the picture plane, advancing towards the viewer, or receding into the space denoted by the ground. (To give the rectangles a greater sense of solidity, Malevich underpainted them with a pink-flesh tone that is not entirely contiguous with the red rectangles, leaving them with a slightly shimmering *orlo*, a mysterious underlit

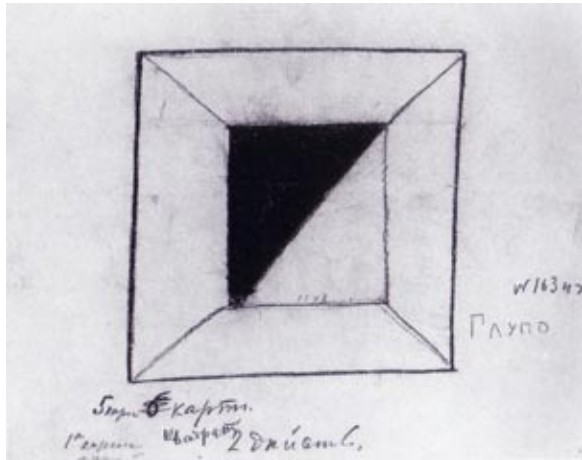


Figure 1: Kazimir Malevich, *Sketch of Décor for Deimo (Act II, Fifth Scene, Victory Over the Sun, 1913*, Italian pencil on paper, 21 x 27cm (courtesy of St Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Musical Art).



Figure 2: Kazimir Malevich, *Black Suprematist Square, 1914-15*, oil on canvas, 79.6 x 79.5 cm (courtesy of the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow).



Figure 3: Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematism (with Eight Red Rectangles), 1915*, oil on canvas, 57.5 x 48.5 cm (courtesy Collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam).



Figure 4: Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Eleonora Duse, 1891*, charcoal on canvas, 108 x 139 cm (courtesy of the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow).

two-dimensionality that takes the mind into the fourth dimension). In this reading the now dirty white canvas ground is the space in which the red rectangles process. That space, in the logic of the world, comes to an end with the edge of the canvas. However, for the imagination of the viewer, the space, the ground, of necessity for the mind, must be/is unlimited. There is an ever-unfolding ground of which we have an essential, even if invisible, sense. The image becomes not what we literally see (whilst remaining insistantly that) but becomes an idea, a suggestion, a concept, speculation. It is not simply red pigment on white ground, but something almost animated, having a life, unfolding, becoming, a syncretic vision. Though there is the ground of the picture – the canvas, to which, because of the nature of our cultural social engagement with images, we are blind, and the ground of the posited space – the dirty white paint, which has an ambiguous status – seen as confined to the canvas on the gallery wall, but reaching in the mind to infinity, acting as the viscous ground of a visual life – there is also the ground on which we, the viewer, stand, to which we are temporally blind, looking at the image.

Of course this conundrum has always been so. For the most part we give these considerations no thought. We see a picture. The picture normally takes up the whole paper or canvas. The space and ground of the picture are one and the same, traditionally closed off from our world, separated off for our perusal, by a frame.⁷ The three aspects of our temporary engagement – static canvas, image energised by the mind, static social space of looking – cannot readily be accessed together at one and the same time, our attention is usually directed first to one, then to another: when looking at the canvas, as canvas, on the wall we do not see the picture/image; when looking into the picture we do not see the 'canvas'; when mentally engaged with the image the social ground of our being is not in focus.

Ehrenzweig elaborated this concept of what he calls "differentiated attention", where figure and ground are seen as separate ideas, forms, things. The creative mind, he argues, is also capable of dedifferentiation, of seeing syncretistically, of seeing the picture-ground-will-to-meaning as a whole, of scanning the data present irrespective of ontological status.⁸ Missing from his schema is any sense of the social space of looking.

Ehrenzweig understands dedifferentiation as a positive quality of the creative mind, capable of diffusing attention across vision and mind, to scan for relationships, contiguities, potentialities, that might otherwise, in too rigid a manner of looking, escape attention and potential comprehension. He might argue that Malevich's immersion in the production of *Victory Over the Sun* allowed his mind to wander into unfocused imaginative space, a not-figure-not-ground pulsing with intermorphing, unfocused, visual/mental potentialities, from which he could emerge back into the world with the concepts he would elaborate into Suprematism.

Georges Bataille introduced the concept of *l'informe* to stand for a less positive interpretation of dedifferentiation.⁹ As Joseph Nechvatal describes it, *l'informe* "is pure destructive action", it is "what indifferenciates and confuses the world of meaning and form and its clear-cut differences".¹⁰ Figure, in the hands of an artist, is a source or cause of meaning, is a declaration of the intention of meaning. In order to see an image for what it is, to declassify (*déclasser*) it as art, to see the opacity of figure and ground, Bataille invokes the action of indifferenciation (*l'informe*), de-forming an image, stripping it of intention, decategorising figure and ground, meaning/meaninglessness, inside/outside the frame, purging the mind of history, the will to myth and interpretation, cutting off the signifier from any links with signifieds, from fragments of potential meaning, indeed seeing the world, finally, as banal and empty of sense or meaning. What the operation of *l'informe* does do is to highlight the operation of its opposite, the mechanisms of differentiation, their basis, their groundedness in culture, psychology, history, myth and metaphor, the modalities of the-will-to-alteration.¹¹

It is precisely the delight in playing with the differentiation of figure from ground, in seeing marks as both altering the classification of ground into mythical figure, and, simultaneously to see them melding back towards ground, the becoming and unbecoming, that catches hold of the trained/conditioned, the perceptive mind confronted with sketches, drawings, the intentionally 'unfinished' work, the *non finito*: "a deliberately cultivated effect, sought out for its intimacy, its sensitivity to the artist's slightest thoughts, and its capacity to surpass the most polished works in expressive force", according to the obviously engaged desires of James Elkins.¹²

For example, in his charcoal on canvas *Portrait of Eleanor Duse* (1891, Figure 4) Ilya Repin used cross hatchings of various degrees of intensity to bring us a woman relaxing in an armchair, but fixing us with a gaze that is far from

relaxed, that seems to penetrate, to question, even to doubt our very authenticity, whilst asserting her own, even superior sense of being intensely real in all its complexity. We are, as it were, commanded to silence, before such a gaze. The ground is canvas. The charcoal marks scud across the canvas, thinly around the edges, allowing the canvas to be seen, showing the drawing as charcoal marks – we can even follow the artist's hand as it quickly fills the ground with zigzags. This is Derrida's *arche-trace*, the origin of the origin of the figure, evidence of both the existence and the erasure of difference between ground and possible figure. A meaning is becoming/dissolving, is being developed on that ground, that contains within itself the inevitability that it will as-if (if only because it never was) recede into the ground, the ground now being understood as the picture plane; or it comes towards us out of that plane, meaning inhabiting a symbolic, hypothetical space between picture plane and viewer; any final meaning of that ontologically unstable image (unstable in the sense of it having any/many meaning(s) for the viewer) being always deferred.¹³ We can also make out the *contorno*, marking the edge of the chair back, the ending of a sleeve, the left-hand side of the face. Flat ground becomes embellished with charcoal marks, their intensity increasing to become a suggested wall, a right side to the armchair, suggesting that ground is now metamorphosing into three-dimensional space and then intensifying in effect to suggest a body and, most triumphantly, a face and gaze with every necessary attribute of character, of personality, capable of disturbing the equanimity of the viewer. Yet at the same time, the viewer is precisely enchanted by the figure-ground relationship: the artist leaving the ground present, thus enabling him with greater bravura to demonstrate his skill at working the trick of turning the drawn trace of charcoal into enigmatic but absorbing image.¹⁴



**But enough of mud, molluscs, and fish. The rain
came down on me one morning so that I shouldn't
have been surprised if whales had dropped out of the
sky. The river was whipped with such fury that the
splash of each splash splashed back again. The surface
was like boiling mercury. The rain ran off the sides
of my canvas cover like the fountain which played
around the Sultan of Cheribon's couch to keep the poor**

On page 66 of *Sweet Thames Runs Softly* Robert Gibbings embellishes his verbal narrative of a passing, but violent, summer storm on the river with a woodcut of black clouds, pregnant with rain, a barn and trees on the far bank, and a row of water plants waving in the foreground, blown by the approaching wild weather. The ground is the paper of the page, to which we are blind, reading the printed words – themselves a complex image forming themselves into lexical marks that become words, which, through the rules of syntax become language that creates an ever-becoming narrative image in the mind, itself invested with our own experiences and feelings. That narrative is arrested, wrested from our personal imaginary, by the black lines that use the same paper of the page as the ground for the words: that paper is now sky, clouds, water, a barn roof. There is the same ability of the mind to shift from one mode of apprehension to another as there was with the portrait drawing of Eleanora Druse.

I would also argue that there is another, an intermediate, ground belonging to images. The trace of charcoal, the passage of paint or a ceramic glaze, for example, whilst being on a structural ground – paper, canvas, clay – is also part of another ground, a ground on ground, as it were, the mass of marks that coalesce in the eye-mind of the viewer as a figure. This pigmented ground becomes starkly apparent if we come close to the image, push into it with our eyes, look at it through a magnifying lens, where we are awash in a sea of marks acting as a ground upon which

or out of which the figure begins to float ontologically the more securely as we walk back away from the surface to grasp the syncretistic image: Malevich's *Quadrilateral* is comprised of a field of black, cracked (always cracking?) paint, a field/ground of pigment, out of which we extrapolate a squarish figure on another similarly constructed ground of off-white pigment of varying thickness and having a varied surface texture, with fugitive highlights and shadows, depending upon the intensity and direction of light playing on the surface.

For some viewers the figure of, say, Kandinsky's elaborated works of 1912-13, sometimes referred to, with tragic reductivity, as 'abstract', but more tellingly as 'non-objective' or 'non-figurative', is a very picture of this intermediate ground, a visual chaos that, the closer we get in, the less we are able to extract from it any sign with which we can either culturally or safely identify.¹⁵ It becomes Bataille's coloured mess. In the opinion of Rosalind Krauss, this is the very essence of modernism, the burden of her complex study *The Optical Unconscious*.¹⁶ 'Background', the pictorial ground against which the major subject of the image acts, is inscribed, a setting for the figure, is now rejected. Ground is instated, ground and figure merge. Any ontological pictorial difference between figure and ground is erased. Yet the same logic applies: the complex figures of such non-figurative works, exfoliate, as Elkins describes it, into a field/ground of more or less congealed marks, the one overlapping the other, spreading across each other, losing all the ontological stability with which they might become endowed when seen as 'figure', the subject of the work of art from the viewer's general perspective. For Derrida this ground on a ground is essentially aperspective.¹⁷ This experience of seeing the intermediate ground of pigment itself, a readjusting of our attention, of our focus to the world of the marks, is not confined to modernism, of course, but to any art – Ehrenzweig closely examines the palette and artist's hand in a Rembrandt self-portrait.¹⁸

These aspects of the relation between figure and ground, in all their complexity, have been elaborated in many books on Western art, from Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960) to James Elkins's *On Pictures and the Words that Fail Them* (1998), with his eloquent plea to see images for what they are – both as signs and as not-signs.

These ideas can also be used to create an understanding of the way some non-Western art practices can be seen as a way of transforming the banal into the transcendental. For example, we may see the skin as ground in body art. Marks of scarification or tattooing, painting the body, are figures literally raised upon the ground, yet are also contiguously and essentially part of the ground in an even more intimate way than charcoal 'resting', as it were, on canvas.

The visual is everywhere a form of socialisation, here the marking of territory, there a demonstration of status, everywhere the communication of historically specific, culture-saturated messages, couched in formal systems (even when seeming most informal) created to sanction the expression of boundaries of belonging and exclusion, of histories and futures, and the safe public expression of the most wilful subconscious drives. The ground of the skin is simply another medium upon which to denote visually meaning-bearing marks of social and metaphoric discourse,¹⁹ giving rise, as Malevich was anxious to demonstrate, to an order of thinking-through-the-visual that is different to, may go beyond, written and spoken language.

I have configured these aspects of ground, in slightly different contexts, in order to present them – the ground of marks and images on a ground –, to use them, in their turn, as the ground for further speculation on other aspects of seeing, that somewhat shifts the ground of my own narrative.

In our own relations to images there is both what might be called a social and a psychological ground of looking. They are not at any time separate, but interactive and reflexive. For the sake of clarity they can be treated first apart and then brought together through the examination of a single set of images.

I have been looking at Malevich's *Quadrilateral* and *Eight Red Rectangles*, at Repin's portrait and Gibbings's woodcut, as reproductions in books, sitting in my study, cooled by an autumn gale chasing the treetops outside the window. I have been looking at them with intent, with the knowledge that I want to use them to make an argument for the subject of this article, to expand the ground of visual (dis)apprehension from its traditional treatment into a wider field of understanding in relating to art. The room of my study has been the social setting of my engagement, my focused attention. The reproductions of these images existed themselves, as I worked, within a singular context, the

social ground for their apprehension – on the pages of books, the books resting on other books, the books on my desk, surrounded by other paraphernalia, shelves, a lamp, prints on the walls, grey light over my right shoulder, this complex ground itself existing in time and a greater space – after mid-day, in early autumn, in a quiet hill suburb of Dunedin, a city in the South Island of New Zealand. That social ground of apprehension could change – to the walls of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam where Malevich's *Eight Red Rectangles* is normally housed, to the Tretyakov Gallery on the south bank of the Moskva River in Moscow where Repin's portrait and Malevich's *Quadrilateral* usually hang.

'Being in my study', 'in the gallery spaces' of the Stedelijk, for example, is for each and every viewer, on each and every occasion, a unique psychological ground. We may bring with us to such spaces a prior determined intention to give focused attention to images – not to all those present, but to a select few, selected by us and others – curators, gallery directors, patrons, information leaflets, audio guides, internet searches, newspaper articles, television programmes, word of mouth, a vague network of general knowledge – often many of these, in varied combinations of attention and chance encounters. We bring ourselves in all the current complexities of our presentness – including mental absence – our minds being elsewhere and everywhere –, but ostensibly engaged in focusing attention on specific images. We are present most especially in Lacanian terms, as egos sensitive to every nuance of being-seen – standing before the image, trying to look attentive, intelligent, engaged, smart, or sitting back, feeling tired, not fully focused, but looking around, being seen as looking around and unengaged, taken less seriously, slackers, feeling like hiding, running away, becoming belligerent, regressing, wanting mother, fearing father, having a tantrum – here and now – NOW!

When we engage with an artwork this psycho-social ground, because they have now, inevitably, become cohesively conjoined, indeed can never be split apart, is often ignored, as our overt manner of engagement is always the same – obedient, ego-suppressing, bland. What the exterior doesn't always present is the existential mechanisms of being, the essential ground of our experiencing – remembering, forgetting, casting into the future, relating, responding to the being-seen, subject to the engine of our metaphors – in which the unconscious constantly interferes, intervenes with hopes and fears, desires and their suppression. This we may designate as the ground of our-being-in-the-world which will be the platform from which we see Malevich's *Quadrilateral* – 'it's stupid', morbid, the death of art, cracked paint, anyone could do it, am I to take this seriously, The Royal Infant, how long do I have to stand here, what do you think, they think, am I supposed to think, tonight I must..., this morning I should..., there's an itch.²⁰ 'Seeing' as Lacan suggested, is not a simple act, but chiasmatic in its complexity.²¹

This psycho-social ground might seem banal, it usually is, but it is the ground out of which we draw, but briefly, our focused attention to the figure and ground of the work, to the intermediate, Derrida's aperspective ground. It is the ground, simultaneously absent and present, that gives form to the metaphors of our mental states. It is the ground of our reality.

Our perception of figures and ground are more problematic when we confront contemporary interactive video installations, such as *Elle* (Figure 5), conceived and constructed by Catherine Ikam and Louis Fléri together with a team of technologists. In a darkened room visitors/viewers see an image on a screen of the animated face of a digital android looking like a real-life woman. The android's face moves across the screen making a melodic noise that might be called music. The screen is fitted with motion detectors. When there are several visitors in the room *Elle* picks one out and appears to make eye contact, coming closer to the screen plane, smiling and then withdrawing. There is a microphone available into which visitors might speak or sing. *Elle* appears to listen, and her singing voice is re-synthesised to the tone of the speaker. Mads Haahr describes her as "a slightly sleepy Mona Lisa doing an endless dreamy dance through bitspace".²³

In *Elle* the originary ground of the image is the digital video film unseen by the viewer, for whom the actual ground of perception is the video screen. Despite modern technology, however, *Elle*'s animated face moves against a background, a dark cyberspace, that acts as the groundspace of her apparent being. Only by interfering with the technology can the viewer see the pixels that form the aperspective ground of the image. The psycho-social ground is a darkened room which the viewer shares with others in a quite uncanny relationship: each can only dimly see the other, as they move in and out of shadow. Visitors²⁴ are acutely aware of a novel sensation that has little to do with *Elle* – the image is incidental: the anxiety of not knowing if they are being seen, an acute self-consciousness that



Figure 5: Still from Catherine Ikam and Louis Fléri, *Elle*, virtual reality installation, realised 1999 (image courtesy of Louis- François Fléri).

makes focal attention so different in an interactive environment to one where, as it were, and only by comparison, the viewer is anonymous, present but not seen by other gallery visitors, part of a ground outside their attention.

In the darkened room, where interactivity might be suddenly and publicly expected of the visitor, focal attention becomes accentuated. The novel, and somewhat uncomfortable situation, brings that attention to a pitch of intensity. There is the possibility that it is you who might be picked out/upon by the android for her virtual attention and smile, and that if you 'speak' to her, as it were, your own voice will modify the singsong of your virtual interlocutor. The psycho-social ground is somehow both real and unreal: it may go through stages of development and change, not too dissimilar to the confrontation with a more traditional art form – first acquaintance, feeling your way into what a thing is/might be, how you feel you should stand and act in its presence, a growing familiarity with the image, seeking a meaning for it/of it, of your relationship to/with it, of your presence in this space at this time, and then a gradual separation, a feeling that you have exhausted, for the moment, the possibilities of that engagement, a loosening of the focal attention, a gradual but insistent interference with the experience of the image of feelings and mental images from outside, from the past and potential futures, before a final disengagement.

There is then a richer range of senses of 'ground' than traditionally encompassed by art's history, a theoretical range of modalities not solely connected to the exegesis of individual images. This range of modalities has become more apparent, if not always readily comprehensible, through the writing of Krauss and Elkins in recent years.²⁵ The social aspects of apprehension, however, in my opinion, have often been out of focus and not brought within the general frame of apprehension. This article is an attempt both to clarify and to enlarge that field of engagement.

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further paper on "The Vestimentary and Identity: British Pop Art" is under consideration by another journal. Stupples has also curated art exhibitions at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery: November 2004 – July 2005 "Sites for the Eyes: European Landscape in the Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery"; April 2006-July 2007 "War and Peace". He has two further curated shows under consideration. He is currently engaged in writing a four-part study of *Art: Culture and Society* – two parts of which are completed: Vol.1 *The Social Life of Art* and Vol. 2 *Pre-Modern Art: Making Social Sense*.

- 1 Museum staff added accession numbers, others added various cryptic notes.
- 2 I use words conjoined with a slash to signify a combined meaning, a verbal clutch of senses, not unlike the visual 'combines' of Robert Rauschenberg.
- 3 Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (Frogmore: Paladin, 1970), 35; Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1993), 303-307
- 4 Kazimir Malevich, *Sketch of the Décor for 'Deïmo' (Act) II, Scene 5, Victory Over the Sun*, 1913, Italian pencil on paper, 21 x 27, St Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music.
- 5 I am using 'hook' here with at least two meanings: as barb to catch at our gestalt and as an image on which to hang the current shreds of our desire – a meaning.
- 6 In Russian the same word is used to designate both 'picture' and 'scene'.
- 7 By frame I do not here literally mean a wooden frame around the canvas. Malevich did not frame, in this sense, any of his works before the 1930s, by which time not- having-a- frame was seen as potentially subversive.
- 8 Differentiation and dedifferentiation are not discrete experiences, but are dependent for their actuality on the nature of the conscious tasks we are engaged in at any one time, as well as on our own ego-functioning. See Ehrenzweig: 1970, 35-59. Paul Klee speaks of a developed sense of multi-dimensional attention in *The Thinking Eye* (London: Lund Humphries, 1961).
- 9 Georges Bataille, 'Informe', *Documents* 7, December 1929, particularly 382.
- 10 Joseph Nechvatal, "Review of *Formless: A User's Guide*", Centre George Pompidou, 1996, in *Thingsreview* (New York), 27 October 1996.
- 11 Krauss: 1993, 152, 166-167.
- 12 James Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 76.
- 13 This passage owes a debt to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 62, 132.
- 14 This process James Elkins describes as "transcendental", see Elkins: 1998, 19-20, where he uses Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), especially 45-56, as the basis for his own elaboration of this process and as a critique of Derrida's more oblique prose.
- 15 Our psychological safety is at risk. The ego's will-to-form is threatened by what appears to be the chaos of a rapacious, destructive subconscious.
- 16 Krauss: 1993.
- 17 Derrida: 1993, 45.
- 18 Ehrenzweig: 1970, plates 13-14.
- 19 See, for example, Terence Turner's classic statement of the case, "The Social Skin", in *Not Work Alone: A Cross-Cultural View of Activities Superfluous to Survival*, edited by Jeremy Cherfas and Roger Levin (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980), 110-140.
- 20 This approach follows the well-established ideas outlined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).
- 21 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (*Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*, vol. 11, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*), translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 91-104. For an interesting commentary on this passage see James Elkins's draft chapter on "The End of the Gaze", <http://www.jameselkins.com/Texts/visualculturegaze.pdf>, downloaded 23 April 2008.
- 22 I would like to thank Sue Novell, one of my postgraduate students, for drawing my attention to Catherine Ikam's work, as well as to the essay by Mads Haahr.
- 23 Mads Haahr, "The Dreams of an Accelerated Culture", *Crossings: eJournal of Art and Technology*, 1.1, 2001: <http://crossings.tcd.ie/issues/1.1/Haahr/> last accessed on 30 October, 2008.
- 24 The word 'visitor' seems to fit the role of the viewer better than any other to describe those choosing to look at an artwork in these social circumstances.
- 25 See, in particular, Elkins: 1998, "Modes of Figure-Ground", pp. 113-125.

USER- PERMUTATIONS: SPACE, PLACE AND MEANING IN THE PAINTINGS OF JAKE WALKER

Felix Ratcliff

Globalisation – despite its seemingly all-encompassing nomenclature – may be more properly understood as a series of local effects played out and experienced on a range of socio-cultural levels. Evidence of this challenging process and dynamic is, arguably, perhaps nowhere more plainly visible than in the sphere of the contemporary visual arts.

At this current historical juncture, that sphere appears predominated by a process-heavy, academically informed conceptualism that privileges text-book identity-politics over form, and cerebral processes over material strategies. In almost all 'corners of the globe', a research-driven orthodoxy which begrudgingly privileges visual skill and breadth of vision dominates the trans-national circulation and exchange of images, ideas and ideologies.

Within this contemporary cultural climate and marketplace, the very practice of painting arguably becomes a palpable form of identity-politics itself. This becomes particularly apparent when such a purportedly obsolete medium is employed as an archaeological tool to assist the excavation and exploration of the traces of one's formative years, family history and broader cultural sources – art history and personal narratives alike.

Such is the current project of expatriate New Zealand painter Jake Walker, whose recent works find him revisiting and referencing his own generative sources and pivotal periods of personal and artistic development on both sides of the Tasman Sea.

Over recent years Walker has focused broadly on painted works based on the architecture produced by his father, Roger Walker, but has more recently and intensely re-explored the interiors of another architect's work. In particular, Walker has focused on *Athfield House* – a fascinating structure situated in Wellington on New Zealand's North Island – at one time physically inhabited by Walker as a child, and psychologically inhabited by him thereafter. Designed and built several decades ago by once reviled and now revered New Zealand architect Ian Athfield, *Athfield House* – like Walker's contemporary painting oeuvre – is a highly nuanced series of spatial arrangements and configurations that has developed via the vigorous exploration, reformulation and mining of rich veins of source material.

Like Athfield's approach to the built environment, Walker doesn't simply layer the physical supports upon which he builds his curious and beguiling images so much as he *customises* his surfaces, source materials, cultural expectations and extant artistic conventions. By this I mean that historically emergent genres and traditionally accepted symbol systems alike are materially reshaped, re-combined and fluidly melded to suit each artist's own conceptual designs and intentions.

Structures such as *Athfield House* represent Athfield's idiosyncratic synthesis of the functional requirements of Wellington's meteorological specificities and the generational struggles between traditional and experimental architectural practices extant still in the New Zealand capital. His early domestic works in that city graphically constitute a bold regional response to local conditions with their muscular functionalism being playfully softened and rounded with visual humour as well as through the twin lenses of modernism and vernacular tradition.

Similarly, Walker's paintings share integrated lexicons rich in allusion and illusion, with spatial exploration also being his forte. For one enthusiastic commentator, Athfield houses: "surprise close-to, they surprise inside and they continue to surprise as you poke around exploring all the nooks and crannies."¹ So too the painted works of



Figure 1: Jake Walker, *Athfield Interior I, Version 2*, watercolour on paper, 42 x 59.5cm, 2008 (courtesy of the artist).



Figure 2: Jake Walker, *NZ*, watercolour on paper, 42cm x 59.5cm, 2007(courtesy of the artist).

Walker, irrespective of their ostensible subject matter.

In one sense, the work of both Walker and Athfield – in particular the earnest manner in which the former engages with the latter – may be fairly regarded as proof of Juhani Pallasmaa's contention in *The Eyes of the Skin* (2005) that: "Our domicile is the refuge of our body, memory and identity." We cannot separate, – Pallasmaa insists – "the image of the Self from its spatial and situational existence."²

Here Pallasmaa echoes Gaston Bachelard (1964/1994) who wrote that: "Our soul is an abode. And by remembering 'houses' and 'rooms', we learn to abide within ourselves."³ Nostalgia for our early generative and formative environments – contended Bachelard – is a crucial and continuing shaper of identity throughout the life journey and strongly impacts on our choice of shelter and home and our psychological responses to the same.

No simple renderings of an obsessed or disturbed fan however, Walker's paintings of familiar interiors – replete with multi-layered associations and hidden codes – function similarly to the canvases of the late Francis Bacon: prepared surfaces that Michel Leiris (1988) has defined as "a theatre of operations for the assertion of certain realities".⁴

Thus, in Walker's renderings of interiors from *Athfield House* such as *Athfield Interior I, Version 2* (Figure 1), the curved interiors depicted and the composition itself operates as a proscenium arch functions in the theatre: as both a window to a stage and as a structural barrier and metaphorical threshold simultaneously separating the audience/viewer from the drama and/or action being physically and psychologically acted out.

This psychological element is heightened when, after closer examination of his painted interiors, subtle anthropomorphic elements become visible in Walker's compositional structures. A keen eye may thus recognise the subtle selection and arrangement of architectonic elements which, when taken collectively, suggest faces such as those one might variously identify or discover in knots of timber or the grain of finished wood. Given the history behind these interiors, it would not be stretching the metaphor to describe the various visages discernible as being redolent of theatrical masks used throughout history to represent conflicting human emotional states.

In these deliberately staged and re-costumed – yet no less authentic – compositions, Walker retreads the bricks and boards of his middle childhood and – in a revisionist mode – populates, decorates, and augments walls and interiors with miniature representations of his own recent works. Via a historically informed personal lexicon of painted marks, Walker both signals and affirms his ongoing presence in, and relationship with, such resonant spaces.

Given the photographic provenance of much of his source imagery, and via a tripartite process of revisitation, reinvestment and re-inscription, we as viewers are presented with multilayered and value-added mnemonics: images of images with additional images added – all intended to be regarded afresh.

In this and other recent works Walker places himself and his contemporary vision and practice into the very cultural and environmental contexts he physically inhabited and resided in many decades before. Literally 'making a name for himself', Walker re-writes himself into and onto the planes, spaces and structures that were home to childhood and adolescent pantheons of significant artists and architects – shapers, modifiers and alchemists of space, place and meaning alike.

Despite the ongoing importance of specifically New Zealand sources to his work, Walker wears his expatriate heart less overtly on his sleeve than some of his fellow artistic travellers. Rather than casting himself as a cultural nationalist, Walker continues to draw heavily on Pākehā and received traditions whilst remaining strongly interested in the manner in which mid-to-late twentieth-century modernism was and continues to be received in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Even *NZ* (Figure 2) – one of Walker's many text-based works – with its overt allusion to place and nation – similar states of mind – is a distillation and continuation of many earlier works that utilise a hand-drawn and multi-sized dot scheme to create overlapping graphic spheres that, when seen together, spell out all manner of phrases that bear a personal relationship to the artist or that have become important to him. Many of these, as in the given example,

are highly evocative even to those unfamiliar with their natural referents.

In a period of ceaseless circulation and seemingly rudderless navigation where firm understandings of personal and cultural identity become increasingly uncertain amidst the relentless process of globalisation, Walker's works are both personal and cultural anchors. Rich in elegiac qualities, they also simultaneously perform a dual function for both the artist and his audience as contemporary records of both 'then' and 'now'.

In keeping then with the temporal aspects of the current historical epoch, the dominant dynamic at work and omnipresent in Walker's work – like that of globalisation itself – is one of time and space telescoped, compressed and then re-released with subtle shifts and wilful distortions – not unlike the process of memory-retention and recall itself. Within such a context, Walker's images function personally and culturally as powerful sites of re-engagement with, and sublimation for, the loss of a now – in the temporal sense – fugitive past.

Rather than being elements of a romanticised backward-looking project of evasion however, Walker's recent works powerfully acknowledge loss and the inexorable pull of a present and future over which one can never have complete control. Faced with the increasingly contingent, anonymous, mono-cultural spaces of globalisation however, Walker offers up instead idiosyncratic memory-spaces built on a rich armature of historical specificity.

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- 1 Melling, Gerald, *Joyful Architecture: The Genius of New Zealand's Ian Athfield* (Dunedin, New Zealand: Caveman Press, 1980), 30.
- 2 Pallasmaa Juhani, *The Eyes Of The Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2005), 64.
- 3 Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964/1994), xxxvii.
- 4 Leiris, Michel, *Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 6.



Figure 1: Michael Greaves, *Stadium*, oil on linen, 137 x 130cm, 2006 (courtesy of the author).

PAINTING AFTER PAINTING: LOSING FAITH IN THE HISTORY OF PAINTING

Michael Greaves

"Painting now seems always in crisis, always in need of some appeal to a higher power to keep it alive, yet always somehow able in the end to summon up one more breath, to keep going like Vladimir and Estragon, if not Lazarus."¹

As an artist who has studied the history of painting, but who is also a painter today, I wonder: How might one come to begin to make sense of painting? The painted image belies what the surface holds; bubbling underneath is a cauldron of derision, enlightenment and subversion, but most of all a lie. Painting can never be what it intends. It is always mediated, always constructed, always comes with baggage. How then can you even begin to approach painting without faltering at the first step? If I were to construct a history of painting, the movements, the 'triumphs', I might find cursory threads that seem to tie some of it together in a digestible way. What is more than likely to happen, though, is a continual refocusing, an overhauling at nearly every moment, a plethora of opinions leading to a continual 'kicking against the pricks', a definitive 'word-jam', that in turn denies and undermines any history that may possibly be written. Sure, there are moments of lucidity in the 'description' of what painting might mean to a particular audience at a particular time, but as Suzi Gablick has pointed out, "everything is empty at the centre."²

I often read about the futility of painting, its 'holes', and its problems. I feel painting's limitations, its containment and concealment of the 'truth', its lack of possibility in providing something other than a 'surface'. What truth is there in painting if there is no explicit correlation between the visual experience and the painted image? There may be a relationship to the form or impression of the visual, but it is always a construction. I have felt that in many cases the writer(s) of articles/treatises on painting – from the earliest attempts at defining the painter's craft³ to more sustained attacks on the particularities of painting so common in the 1970s – were and are correct in their descriptions of painting as a practice, as a process, but only in terms of its comparative relationship to a defined history.

Painting in this sense as a medium has developed a self-styled jacket, reminiscent of Jasper Johns's *Target Paintings*, a claim of superiority, of rightness, of hierarchy and anti-democratic process, a fetishisation of skill, *col cervello* (of the mind). The arguments for and against painting have staked out a claim; have set painting itself aside and apart from other forms of art making. Painting has been seen as an 'end' and not a process, and throughout history this distinction has 'acted' on painting in a less than favourable manner. British artist Damien Hirst, for example, has commented on his fear of the "VOID"⁴ of painting. His stance echoes a long-held notion that the authorship of painting and of the painted image is somehow separate from other art-making processes, somehow more elevated. Contemporary writers on painting, however, find the unstable position of painting's history one of power and not of fear. In the essay titled *Painting in the Interrogative Mode*, Barry Schwabsky addresses how painting's foreseen limitations and shortcomings can in fact open the possibility for the painter to articulate what the image cannot. Today, the definition of painting is being less focused on in favour of consideration of painters' relationships with their own interpretation of 'history'.

Schwabsky makes special reference to a lecture that Frank Stella gave at the Pratt Institute in 1960. Stella spoke of two distinct concerns that in Schwabsky's view are central to the approach and practice of contemporary painting: what is a painting, and how does one make a painting?⁵ These concerns, although raised more than forty years ago, have had a profound impact on the way in which contemporary painting practice has continually, but not necessarily purposefully, distanced itself from the progressive and linear narrative for painting championed by Clement Greenberg in the 1940s.⁶

Stella spoke of the direction that a painter should take, about the act of imitation, of learning “about painting by looking at and imitating other painters.”¹⁷ In a sense Stella was advocating the act of copying, of repeating from another source, which I read as ‘looking for models, for images’. Although Stella is largely concerned here with the technical and formal problems that need to be solved by individuals considering painting, his discussion opens a dialogue that inextricably ties the act of image-making with its sources, most notably with the mediated and often photographic image. I entered into Stella’s game via a different route as I interpreted him from a somewhat biased angle to begin the process of legitimising my practice, a process which has provided me with a welcome release from the history of painting.

Within my own practice I began by taking Stella’s advice and imitating painters who I considered were involved in the constant struggle to continue within a medium that at any stage might breathe its last. I found paintings that I wished I had made, and I re-made them. One of the first paintings that I chose to ‘re-paint’ was of a small portable record player that had originally been painted by Gerhard Richter as part of the series of paintings called *October 18, 1977* (1988).

Richter could be considered as purposefully sidestepping the impossibility of rendering a painting as a photograph. He has spoken of photography as “void”¹⁸, and while Richter credits photography with the ultimate art historical Excalibur to render painting unusable, he in turn affords painting the ability to utilise photography as a genuine possibility towards answering a question. What Richter is describing is a procedural usage. Photography should never act as a surrogate for painting, and it should never define its parameters. Painting’s use of photography can only be another possible route towards the inevitable, the act of painting.

What Richter’s approach reinforced was the falseness of a claim that painting could somehow be indexical to the object/subject it depicted; that the painted image could stand in for a kind of reality, or have a direct relationship to the physical world. This would be absurd. A painting can never represent reality, and it can only act as a representation of experience, if that. Painting can never be an indexical image. It can never represent what it intends, be this an attempt to render visual sensation passed off as a type of ‘reality’ (for this is impossible) or an articulation of a spiritual or philosophical notion (equally absurd). Painting can only act as a manifestation of a substantive act.

In Richter’s work *Untitled* (1964) his obsessive over-painting of a photographic image of a little girl’s face can be read both as an expression of the futility of painting and of its persistence. The thick and directly applied paint over a printed photographic image points out the unmistakable materiality of paint. Paint can be nothing more than paint; it is the viewer who projects their desire for paint to become something else, to transcend itself. Richter’s continuing use of photography as a source for his painting creates a kind of distance from the act of representation – as this is the role of the photograph – and allows him the possibility of exploring other promises that painting may hold up its sleeve.

In making the painting of the record player from a photographic reproduction of Richter’s painting I acted on an intentional decision to play with paradox. Richter had gathered the source imagery from a photograph published in a newspaper. This photograph had a considerable history attached to it, yet as I approached it via the painting I was looking for something other than homage to Richter. I wanted to ‘use’ the image without using the meaning that the image brought with it. My intention was to make a painting, to reaffirm my role as a painter, to suggest what I think painting is all about.

The resultant work, titled *Record Player and Little Owls* (2006, Figure 2), a diptych, concentrates its focus on the quiet observation of both an event that has been (Richter’s painting of a record player), and on the ‘impossibility’ of my own personal response to the image’s ‘original’ status. The jarring juxtaposition of the little owls with the record player questions any possible relationship with Richter; yet it establishes a connection: between a young painter and a giant.

The second painting that I chose to repaint was a work by Belgian painter Luc Tuymans. *Chalk* (2000) was part of the series titled *Mwana Kitoko* shown at the Venice Biennale in 2001. Both Richter and Tuymans were attempting to relocate their experience of history through painting. The story behind Tuymans’s *Chalk* is an anecdote of the



Figure 2 (top): Michael Greaves, *Record Player and Little Owls*, oil on canvas, 35x46cm, 2006 (courtesy of the author).

Figure 3 (middle left): 5: Michael Greaves, *My Name is Takashi. I am 23, and I am a Painter*, 33 x 27cm, 2008 (courtesy of the author).

Figure 4 (middle right): Michael Greaves, *All I Can Offer*, oil on jute, 40.5x40.5cm, 2006 (courtesy of the author).

Figure 5 (below): Michael Greaves, *The Ethnography of an Image*, charcoal on paper, framed in re-used art gallery frames, each 64 x 54cm, 2006. From left to right: *The Representation of a Kitchen Chair*, And I'll Die When I'm Done, *The Pioneer*, *Double Portrait* (courtesy of the author).



involvement of Belgium in the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected prime minister of the Congo. The story read that the colonial police officer who made Lumumba and his cabinet ministers 'disappear' removed two of his teeth and later threw them into the North Sea before he himself died.⁹ I found this image – of hands outstretched and holding two incandescent white objects – very profound, and in some ways innocent. In repainting this work my intention was to re-present the possibility of the process of painting to contain a narrative action of my own direction, to suggest the inability of painting to comprehend the anecdote behind the image.

I entitled my work *All I can Offer* (2006, Figure 4) in an attempt to reaffirm the commitment, often physical, I find myself making in attempting to continue to paint. The relationship sounds quite trite, but in order to consider painting one must approach the image in painting as if it were open, as if it can be used as a possible answer to a question and not just as an assimilation of a set of visual experiences. I was trying to render my own physical struggles with the impossibility of painting an image that seems already to have an ethnographical lineage. Are these possibilities – painting and ethnography – mutually exclusive?

In discussing these paintings, I find myself substituting writing for the physical position of the artist. That is, when writing, the painting not only acts as an image but as a passage in which justifications about the validity of the painter's process are questioned. A painting then no longer acts as a reference point to something that 'actually' exists, or can 'actually' be related to, but as a kind of encoding of its own media. Painting is then no longer a total self-referential exegesis of something pure and essentialist. In a sense the painted image acts in terms of its relationship to a mediated construct, whether photograph, text, or moving image (as when Tuymans includes a painting as one item within a sequence of multiple frames).

In a series of drawings titled *The Ethnography of an Image* (2006, Figure 5) I sought to consider the possibility of a group of images that question my belief in the act of painting. These images can no longer merely act as a reflection of the subject matter. Any recollection of a motif is subsumed through prior experience on behalf of the audience, not intertwined with any form of 'reality', or a kind of "superficial representation."¹⁰ The works are charcoal representations of Gerhard Richter's *Kitchen Chair*.¹¹ A New Zealand falcon, a Pioneer turntable and a neo-lith skull and one of modern man have been sourced by me from the internet. Richter's kitchen chair is included and all the images are placed in 'museumic' frames recycled from a public art gallery where they had been continually re-used for the display of 'artefacts'. Each of the drawings is intended to be paintings, yet each painted image is unrealised. The works are suspended in time and refer to the possibility of an ethnographical collection that can never be complete and thus can never represent the promise of a pioneering 'expedition' aimed at establishing a kind of 'Western truth'.

The fundamental premise of the representational image that has dogged painting since the Renaissance can shift sideways, thus allowing the painting process to exist in its own right. By removing a particular way of 'decoding' the painted image, painting today then acts without an overreaching commandment, namely that the work 'must' refer back to something, the subject matter or its own history. Rather, source material is taken for what it is, and repositioned or transposed to signal painting's superficiality to the viewer. Painting then begins to act as if it is a 'monument' to its own history rather than playing into that history. In Michel Foucault's view, it becomes a "motionless trace...[an] object without a context...[not a] symbol of something else...something that ought to be transparent, but whose bothersome opaqueness we often have to traverse in order to[...]reach the profundity of the essential[...]"¹²

Painting becomes a speculation, and not a fact. The multiplicity of engagements with the visual image that the painter now has access to defines the painter's current historical position. Russell Ferguson strongly affirms this multiplicity of painterly access to and intervention into the realm of the image. He refers to painting as unmistakably PAINT in the text accompanying his 2004 exhibition entitled *The Undiscovered Country*. He continues to define painting as representation but insists that "at the point where the represented image meets the materiality of the painted surface, representation *always* breaks down."¹³ For Ferguson, the physicality of the painting and the process that goes into the construction of a painting need to be asserted so that the painting continues to assert its own integrity as a particular act.

What becomes apparent in considering recent shifts and claims as to the nature and status of painting and its

position is the inability of painting to be a sustainable and viable means of representing human experience, whether visual, emotional or conceptual. There always seems to be another means which is more logical, more 'truthful' and more exciting. Painting does what it can; it has no higher position in any hierarchy anymore, and a certain freedom and release from expectations accompany an acceptance of this.

I continue to struggle with the history of painting that has come before me, but I try to do so in a way that retains a certainty of painting's possibilities as an act and of its formal challenges, as well as of the performative action that is associated with its making. The images I use may still have links to the history of painting, but not so much with its history of representation as rather with its consciousness of itself. "Painting can combine representation with the tactile and the formal in ways still unavailable to other media...The word 'painting' implies both a finished object and an ongoing activity"¹⁴, an activity far from being only associated with its own history, its own past.

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- 1 Russell Ferguson, *The Undiscovered Country* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2004), 32.
- 2 Suzi Gablick, *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 17.
- 3 Alberti's work *De Pictura* (1435) in Latin and *Della Pittura* (1436) translated into Italian was an attempt at rationalising painting and the problems facing a painter in representing visual experience. Alberti arguably began a period of rationalisation of the picture plane to more accurately represent human visual experience, a journey that was to define painting for almost 400 years. This treatise can be seen as an early painters' handbook.
- 4 Damien Hirst, unattributed 2004 "Originally I wanted to be a painter. But I could never do it because of the idea of PAINTING BEING LIKE A VOID. I could never decide what to put in the picture or where, given the infinite mass of possibilities and places." The challenges that Hirst finds in painting are common. The image, he notes, is a constructed thing and needs an active engagement from the maker. The idea or concept is tied up in this process but is not initially the main problem.
- 5 Barry Schwabsky, "Painting in the Interrogative Mode", in *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting* (New York: Phaidon, 2003).
- 6 Clement Greenberg, "Towards a New Laocoön" (1940), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: A Critical Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 1992), 554-560.
- 7 Frank Stella, "The Pratt Lecture", in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 113.
- 8 "There's almost nothing left to say about photography because it is so obvious that photography has taken away one important part of painting: the function of portraying, depicting." Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 227.
- 9 Yasmine Van Pee, "Un-Natural Resources: Luc Tuymans on Fighting the Literal and Mistrusting Images.", *Modern Painters: The International Contemporary Art Magazine*, October 2007: 72-73.
- 10 Knut Ebling, "The Painting of the Men from Mars", in *Painting Pictures: Painting and Media in the Digital Age*, (eds) Annelie Lutgens, Frank Reijnders, Walter Seitter and Gijs van Tuyl (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2003), 36.
- 11 Gerhard Richter. *Kitchen Chair*, 1965, oil on canvas, 100 x 80cm, Kunsthalle, Recklinghausen, Germany.
- 12 Michael Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972), 147.
- 13 Russell Ferguson, *The Undiscovered Country* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2004), 23.
- 14 Ibid., 114.

PIE IN THE SKY

Anita DeSoto

Nothing is what it seems.
Perception is coloured by desire.
Whether we are naïve or cynical,
our needs dictate our impressions.
We can project onto others to our own disappointment.
I like to paint people shinier than they really are.



Figure 1 & 2: Anita DeSoto, *Holy Smoke I* and *Holy Smoke II* (diptych), oil on canvas, each 70.5 x 91 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).



Figure 3: *The devil you know*, oil on canvas, 190 x 76 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).



Figure 4: Anita DeSoto, *Ways to leave your lover*, oil on canvas, 110 x 120 cm, 2008 (courtesy of the artist).



Figure 5: Anita DeSoto, *Still-life*, oil on canvas, 60 x 76 cm, 2008 (courtesy of the artist).



Figure 6 (left): Anita DeSoto, *Limbo*, oil on canvas, 198 x 76 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 7 (middle): Anita DeSoto, *Holy Water*, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 91 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 8 (right): Anita DeSoto, *Pie in the sky when you die*, oil on canvas, 198 x 76 cm, 2008 (courtesy of the artist).

Acknowledgement: Beckford Ritchie photographed all the works included in these artist's pages.

Anita DeSoto completed a BFA (2000) and followed this with an MFA (2003), at Otago Polytechnic School of Art. She is now a lecturer in Drawing and Painting at the same school. She finds people and their lives endlessly fascinating, and draws inspiration from the idea that with people, nothing is what it seems.

ANITA DESOTO: BEAUTY AND UGLINESS

Leoni Schmidt

pie in the sky was exhibited at a time which saw the recent publication of Umberto Eco's edited book *On Ugliness*, following his earlier *On Beauty*.¹ It seems apt to mention these two texts in relation to DeSoto's work, as the conjunction of beauty and ugliness is one aspect which makes her paintings performative of the neo-romanticism which they seem aligned to.

Eco's compendiums show us many examples of bodily beauty as based on harmony, elegance, appropriate proportions, smoothness and idealised limbs – the kind of beauty her audience has come to expect of DeSoto's seductive bodies in poses often implicitly sexual. Even her infants recall Baroque *putti* or Eros with his arrow or the pre-pubescent nudity of the urinating Belgian Manneken Pis.

Urine as a sign of abjection which disturbs order² and the socially acceptable beautiful body signals that the ugly is also present in DeSoto's work. We also recognise it elsewhere: carcasses of dead birds, severed body parts, a viscious black dog. But the carcasses are exquisitely beautiful; the body parts are dished up as exquisite fare or elegant wrist shrouded in a white cloth; the black dog is contrasted with clean linen and glass. Indeed, beauty and ugliness frame each other. Eco reminds us of the witches in MacBeth: "Fair is foul and foul is fair..."³

Neo-romantic⁴ painting in its present guises draws on the tradition of interspersing the ideal and the fearful, youthful beauty and heroic death, the beautiful and the sublime, the soothing and the unsettling – often through the use of juxtaposed fragments. DeSoto presents her models as if through eyes which desire their beautiful bodies *and* the cruel ecstasies they may harbour or inflict. The paintings remind one of a fragment written by an earlier romantic: Alfred Tennyson's lines⁵ in a poem for Eleänore:

*I would I were
So tranced, so rapt in ecstasies
To stand apart, and to adore,
Gazing on thee for evermore.*

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- 1 These texts have respectively been published in 2007 and 2004 by Harvill Secker, London.
- 2 See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
- 3 Umberto Eco, (ed.), 2007. *On Ugliness* (London: Harvill Secker), 20.
- 4 See the "Encyclopedia of British Neo Romanticism" at <http://www.neo-romantic.org.uk/whatisneorom.html> as last accessed on 30 October 2008 for artists, images, key factors and strategies.
- 5 "Eleänore", in *Poems by Afred Tennyson, D.C.L., Poet Laureate* (London: Edward Morton, 1982, digitised on 9 October 2007), 78.