

# Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture

LIQUID STATE

ISSUE/04 2010





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ISSUE/04 **2010**

*Edited by Christina Barton,  
Natasha Conland and Wystan Curnow*

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**Cover image:**

Bettina Furnée  
*Lines of Defence* 2005  
Bawdsey, Suffolk,  
October 15, 2005  
38 appliquéd flags  
on posts, year-long  
web-cast, photo archive,  
time-lapse film  
[www.ifever.org.uk](http://www.ifever.org.uk)  
Photograph: Bettina  
Furnée/Dylan Banarse

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# Foreword

*Catherine Hammond*

Marylyn Mayo as  
a child with her  
mother Mavis Mason

Dr John Mayo established the Marylyn Mayo Foundation to benefit a number of causes, including the advancement and wider appreciation of the visual arts. The Foundation's support has enabled the Auckland Art Gallery to establish two major initiatives: the Marylyn Mayo Internships and *Reading Room*. The journal differs from other Foundation projects in that its establishment is in memory of both Marylyn Mayo and her mother, Mavis Mason, in recognition of their shared interest in the visual arts.

Born and raised in New Zealand, Marylyn Eve Mayo had a lifelong interest in education, law and the visual arts. Her academic career established her as a legal pioneer in Australasia. Marylyn was one of fewer than two dozen women law graduates when she completed her degree at the University of Auckland in 1960. Her legacy is honoured at its Law School with the Marylyn Eve Mayo Endowment Scholarship and the Marylyn Mayo Rare Book Room. Marylyn's parents, Mavis and Sydney Mason, moved with her to Auckland when she began her university studies. Mavis Mason was an artist and the move to Auckland enabled her to develop this talent: in the 1960s she studied painting with one of New Zealand's most celebrated artists, Colin McCahon. Mavis's interest in art was imparted to Marylyn who was a regular visitor to the Auckland Art Gallery and, from the time she was a recent graduate, collected works by contemporary New Zealand artists including Colin McCahon, Don Binney and Richard Killeen.

In 1969, Marylyn moved to Australia to teach law at the University of Queensland's campus in Townsville, soon to be known as James Cook University. It was here that she met and married John Mayo in 1970. In 1974, Mavis joined Marylyn and John in Townsville, and remained in Australia for the rest of her life. Marylyn's vision to establish a separate Faculty of Law at James Cook University was realised in 1989 when she became the Foundation Head of its newly established Law School. She retired in 1996 but her links with the University remained with the establishment of the Marylyn Mayo Medal and the Law Students' Society's annual Mayo Lecture.

# Introduction

*Christina Barton, for the editors*

The idea for this issue sprang from a throwaway remark made by Peter Brunt during preparations for the round table on the state of art and discourse in New Zealand published in *Reading Room 3* “Art Goes On” (2009). He reminded me that the Pacific could not be thought of as a nation because it did not claim an identity in relation to a landmass. The image of the Pacific as the “hole in the doughnut” with the ocean serving as the medium that connects dispersed peoples stayed with me, chiming suggestively with a growing awareness of the fluid conditions in which we are all living, as well as the dangers we face from having too much or too little water. It is from these almost accidental beginnings and mindful of the topic’s generative potential that *Reading Room 4* “Liquid State” has been developed. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman’s “liquid modernity”, Epeli Hau’ofa’s “ocean within us” and Allan Sekula’s “ocean swimmer” it addresses our “liquid state” as a problem and a possibility and as a counter to “solid” thinking.

The editors sought contributions that treated liquidity as a tool to rethink nation, as a means to envisage new notions of connectivity and mobility, as a metaphor for being, or quite literally to focus on water as both medium and resource. In response we are pleased to present a collection of essays that variously cross oceans, navigate waterways, follow shorelines and stand on beaches, which address conditions in real geographical locales, revisit and re-envisage history, and posit grim and hopeful futures. With a brief that was completely open-ended writers have engaged with a wide range of subjects that elicit commentary on everything from global flows and immaterial pixels, to bodily fluids and liminal states. Yet to our surprise (and pleasure) a current runs through the whole that situates the discussion in or on the Pacific, which would suggest, as Sean Cubitt does in these pages, that this non-place offers a perspective from which to reconsider the “order of the world”.



# JULIAN DASHPER, 1960–2009

## *A Tribute*

*Edited by Simon Ingram with Wystan Curnow*

UNITED  
MILES  
193, 796  
8/12/08



TOP  
A notation of Julian's  
United Airlines air miles  
in late 2008

ABOVE  
Studio shot showing an  
art material made by the  
company "Generals" known  
as "Charcoal Chunk"  
Photo: Marie Shannon

LEFT  
Andrea Gaskin  
*The Dashpers* 2009  
Silk screen printed t-shirt,  
made as a fundraiser in  
memory of Julian, to benefit  
the Melanoma Foundation  
of New Zealand  
Photo: Jennifer French

*The Julian Dashper Gate Experience* is a piece of noise music in four parts. It is Dashper's first 7" single and was recorded with Michael Morley at his Dunedin studio in 1992. The work gives literal expression to what might well be metaphorically described as the characteristically electro-acoustic non-objective nature of Dashper's work. The title calls out to Colin McCahon's 1961 black and white abstractions as well as to the band Jimmy Hendrix formed in 1966. Both stand with other transmitters in the field of forces that accrues around the objects and actions Dashper put into the world – where "the art" was often as much, if not more, in the field surrounding the things than in the things themselves. For instance, it is important to know when taking in a Dashper from his 1980s "expressionist" phase, that these were the kind of paintings the artist said could be painted in a three-piece suit, and that other smaller paintings were made on the steering wheel of his taxi cab while waiting for the next fare. It's equally important to know that Dashper, who flew more international miles than any other New Zealand artist, was also more often than not there when his son Leo came home from school, a son who on occasion would choose colours for the drum heads and who shares his given name with New York's most famous art dealer. Julian once made a sound recording of the car ride to the airport at the beginning of a trip to the other side of the world, while his work with telephones makes "distance look our way" in a way that outclasses and outwits brand New Zealand while effortlessly opening a conversation with Piero Manzoni's *Socle du Monde* (1961). It is a fact that Dashper was a committed painter who had not painted since 1992 but whose work became a subject for a young Parisian photorealist artist committed to what she refers to as "hyper-rockalism", and one whose fascination with art materials had led him to buy something called a "charcoal chunk" that sits in his studio resplendent in its branded clear plastic bag to this day, practically a work in itself. Each of the contributors gathered here has in some way engaged the Dashper experience and has encountered the thresholds it traverses.

**Stephen Little**  
*A Life More Ordinary*

Julian Dashper was an artist of the first order, an artist who was compelled to make art that challenged as much as it engaged. His work reflects a quiet directness acquired through simple means. When it came to his art he walked a straight line and left his ego at the door. This was part of his charm, as was his honest curiosity for just about everything and everyone. Julian also appeared to be in a perpetual state of transit. He was an avid traveller who seemed to spend a lot of time in the air but always made time for others and this is one of the qualities that made him so endearing to so many.

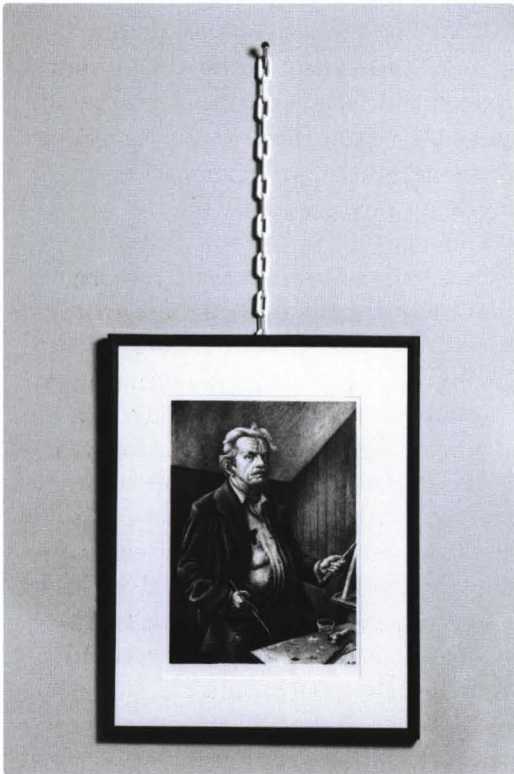
His work could be described as an unusual collection of every day curios. For example, a plastic chain, a sleeve of slides, a CV, a phone call from New Zealand to a country whose time zone was hours behind, drum kits, advertisements in art magazines, a napkin, or a sound recording of people looking at Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*. In this his work carries something for everyone – sculpture, painting, commodity, the art object, immateriality, the readymade and the everyday or non-artisanal. It also comes with a healthy and matter-of-fact contrariness on his part where anything appears possible and where anything, in his hands, could end up as art. Similarly, the material constitution of his practice overlapped with his working methodologies, critical reflections and his ability to draw on everyday commonalities, associations and family resemblances so as to constantly initiate intelligent and engaging dialogues with the viewer. That said, there are multiple points of entry into Dashper's work, too many to do real justice to here.

What is worth noting is how down to earth his processes are and how refreshing it is to be reminded that we are surrounded by art every moment of our waking lives, all Dashper asks

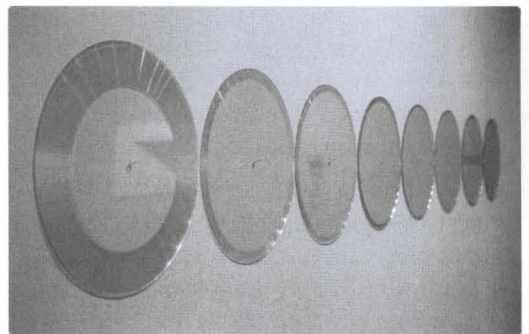
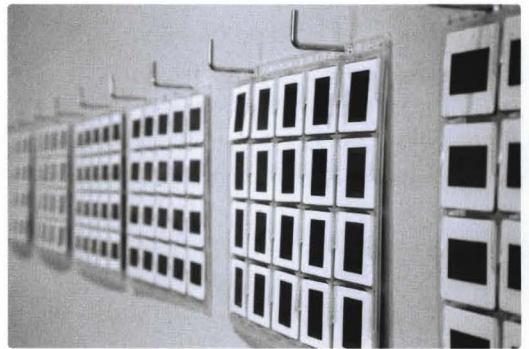
is that we acknowledge it. This seems particularly pertinent in a time of global economic meltdown when the artist as provocateur takes a well-placed step into centre stage, for example Damian Hirst with his diamond clad skull or Marc Quinn's gold statue of Kate Moss. Their timing was impeccable. In the week the recession became a reality in the UK these artists sensation-ally made headlines with works that seemed wildly overblown and decadent. By comparison Dashper's practice is much quieter in its provocation and is perhaps all the more surprising because it often initially appears so utterly *un-extraordinary*. The economy of means used to make his point is also little short of breath taking when viewed against the seemingly increasing production costs normally associated with much art making today.

Dashper didn't set out to create discord by provocative means. What he did do was to engage with contemporary mainstream concerns from the periphery. The distance this offered allowed him to assess and address those concerns on his own terms and to then enact an appropriate response. I am reminded here of parallels to the huge sum of money NASA spent designing a pen that would work in zero gravity only to find the Russians had side stepped the problem by using a pencil. Such is Dashper's practice. It is the mixture of seriousness and light-heartedness, of trying things out, throwing them up in the air and seeing where they land that is, for me, ultimately what gives him the edge over many of his contemporaries. Never content with following a simple formula, he took risks and surprised us in ways we probably wouldn't have expected. This showed us a number of things, among them, that we can still be surprised at being surprised, and that our expectations may have become a little more focused and prescriptive than we might normally care to admit. It was this

freshness coupled with the apparent ease with which he could transport his ideas into different contexts that gave his practice currency and vitality. This was not about production or even exporting culture, it was merely about people, communication and circumstance and his down to earth attitude, his good nature and friendship brought arts professionals, art lovers and people from all walks of life together in the spirit of collaboration and exchange.



ABOVE  
*Untitled*  
(*English White Chain*)  
1992  
With Thomas Heart  
Benton's *Self-Portrait*  
1972



TOP  
*The Drivers* 1992  
Enamel on drumhead  
with drum kit  
Chartwell Collection,  
Auckland Art Gallery  
Toi o Tāmaki

MIDDLE  
Detail of *Untitled*  
(*Slides 46–65*) 1980–90

BOTTOM RIGHT  
*Blue Circles (1–8)*  
2002–03

## **Rob Gardiner and Sue Gardiner, Chartwell Trust**

### *In Conversation...*

**Sue Gardiner.** Chartwell first purchased a work by Julian Dashper, *Cass Altarpiece*, in 1986. How did your interest in Julian Dashper's work develop?

**Rob Gardiner.** My attention to Julian's work would have come out of my general interest in reductive art, its place in New Zealand's art practice and his open, enthusiastic and generous sharing of thoughts around the conceptual structures which supported his work. The opportunity to follow the practice of an artist of his generation and stature was engaging and rewarding for me.

**SG.** When did you first meet him?

**RG.** It was during the acquisition of *Cass* at New Vision Gallery, Auckland in 1986. I remember the challenge for me in reconciling my limited knowledge and expectations of abstract expressionist painting with the deliberate mark making he used in the work that proffered a somewhat tongue-in-cheek revelation of that practice. Later I became more attuned to his methodologies and the depth of his thinking and intentions and found that I acquired a much deeper understanding of the *Cass* work as my appreciation of it has grown over time. Synergies between music, especially its recording and links with the visual arts later expanded the conceptual resources in his work.

Then, in 1992, Chartwell purchased *The Big Bang Theory* and celebrated its joy in honouring New Zealand artists of importance within the rich idea of a series of drum kits, using found musical instruments as art works, providing a frame/facility for active promulgation of a visual artist's works and practices to a wider audience whilst making comment upon New Zealand art criticism at the same time. Then in 2007, *Untitled, (The Painter's Mistake)* joined *The*

*Big Bang Theory* in the Collection and enabled revelation of the significance of the participating spectator, in this case, Hamish McKay, his Wellington dealer. Julian always had an awareness of the means by which his work was presented to the audience. In this case the work was extended by video recording and signalled his increasing interest in that medium.

**SG.** The reception of international visual art practices via reproductions runs as a thread through New Zealand art history, from Colin McCahon's interest in imported art magazines to Julian's playful interaction with *Artforum* through the placement of text and images in an issue of the magazine. How has his approach interested you?

**RG.** I found Julian's approach of significance from an early stage because he responded to the issue of distance as a New Zealand artist by active consideration of the phenomenon of art reproductions and their importance to the shaping of art knowledge in New Zealand. His realisation that those slides and reproduced images themselves were a medium that allowed him to reveal their objectness on the gallery wall and at the same time empower them to carry form and idea beyond New Zealand. We shared a belief in New Zealand as a place in which an artist could make art, find an audience and have a career, whilst maintaining a transient, global practice shared intimately with others principally through a network of artist run spaces and galleries. He was an artist who totally identified with, and responded in partnership with, the ideas of a selected group of artists who were important to him, both in a contemporary sense and in the history that informs the practice of reductive art today. I think I was prompted to consider more deeply the ideas and beliefs he shared with certain artists, honouring them

in the process. This process also involved an increasing awareness of the nature of trans-Tasman reductive art practices, including artists such as John Nixon, George Johnson, Justin Andrews, Rose Nolan and many others.

Julian encouraged the collecting activities undertaken by the Chartwell Trust and understood that it was a means towards understanding and sharing knowledge about contemporary art making. He had an active interest in exhibition design and curatorial functions and was bubbling with ideas about showing work which revealed space/wall qualities and meanings whilst allowing an empowering focus on the work. He always seemed to be generous in his interest in and support of other artist's work and that was distinctive and impressive to me.

**SG.** In his practice, the formal and conceptual underpinnings of his work were reductive. In a set of acquisition notes titled "It is what it isn't", he noted "Take something away to make it stronger."

**RG.** He loved contemporary thought and researched intensely. For Julian, each visual element was given status and strength to be, and was respected for its identity as a carrier of meaning in itself. In this way his forms created an intense merger of intellectual idea and historic form. His rounded square paintings series which began in 1999 is a good example. Again in some acquisition notes, he himself explains that having first seen the MCA's 1998 Yves Klein show in Sydney, Australia, he considered Klein's monochromatic paintings to be the first truly abstract work in the world. He noted that Malevich had painted a white frame around the suprematist black square, concluding "therefore that the painting was still 'representational' in some sense." Julian then set

about to make his own series of paintings based on the notion of the painted white frame. He wrote: "Make that the subject ... the 'thing' that you never ever actually consider when you look at Malevich's infamous work... Of course, to make a painted white frame of something one first needs a space inside to define the outside. So I dreamt up more or less on the spot that very same day the shape of the rounded square ... a shape whose sole purpose was, in my mind, simply to define a white frame around itself."

Basic forms and ideas continued to evolve like this in provocative, creative ways over time as he emphasised clarity, restraint and simplification, reduced means, reduction of form, primary shapes, restricted colour and even restricted medium and touch. Thus his practice was influenced by modernism, minimalism, non-objective art, conceptual art, post-modern multi-media art, and generally practices that restricted representational images. His stories were art history stories embedded in those practices and his own.

**SG.** He once published a booklet of the art reviews that T.J. McNamara had written about his work in the *New Zealand Herald* over the years and sometimes made works that linked to his own birth date, 1960. How was his biography and career as an artist shown in his work?

**RG.** Of interest for me was Julian's linkage between his practice and his own progressive history as an art maker. He once said in some gallery notes on *The Morphine Paintings*, via email with Hamish McKay and provided to Chartwell as acquisition notes, that "everything I do as an artist is always intertwined with me as a person." Thus his understanding of himself within the artwork as an autobiographical form was recognised ultimately by the use of and

publication of the CV as a work in time worthy of material presence as an exhibitable object on the gallery wall. Ultimately one followed and responded to the progression of his thinking within the forms of work he investigated. This was the challenge and was a big part of the interest in the works, watching and considering how they fitted within a personal practice and the New Zealand art environment. As a person, his interests in art, artists and in art history, particularly that of New Zealand art history, were embedded in the way he lived his life as a sharing, interacting communal human being. Communication and shared thinking completed the portfolio of his practice.



ABOVE  
Julian installing work in the exhibition *The Painting Part 1978–1989*: Philip Clairmont, Mark Adams, Julian Dashper, 3 July to 27 July 1990 at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, New Zealand. Photo: Centre For Contemporary Art Archives 1990



TOP  
Exhibition poster, *The Painting Part 1978–1989*: Philip Clairmont, Mark Adams, Julian Dashper, 3 July to 27 July 1990, South Gallery installation view, Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, New Zealand. Photo: Centre For Contemporary Art Archives 1990

ABOVE  
Centre for Contemporary Art Director Rob Gardiner (left), Julian Dashper (centre), Mark Adams (right) in front of work by Philip Clairmont in the exhibition *The Painting Part 1978–1989*: Philip Clairmont, Mark Adams, Julian Dashper, 3 July to 27 July 1990 at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, New Zealand. Photo: Centre For Contemporary Art Archives 1990

**David Raskin**  
***Illiquid Dashper***

Julian Dashper's works of art polarise artistic tropes and cultural idioms, frustrating our habit of setting aesthetics against critique. *Untitled (The Warriors)* (1998) is a case in point; it graced the cover of the catalogue to Dashper's retrospective exhibition, which toured the United States in 2005 and 2006. The work is a four-piece drum set, complete with a bass and pedal, snare, tom, cymbal, and two hickory sticks. Junior-sized, it is a toy, a beginner's instrument, and something that will soon be left behind. The drumheads are printed with coloured concentric circles making them reminiscent of the stained canvases of Kenneth Noland, an "American-type" painter celebrated by many. The bass is smudged because the pedal might have been pushed a little too enthusiastically. The title helps give equal treatment to Australasian icons, since the Auckland Warriors (now, Vodaphone Warriors) is a team renowned for its aggressive play in the National Rugby League, a sport foreign to American-type eyes.

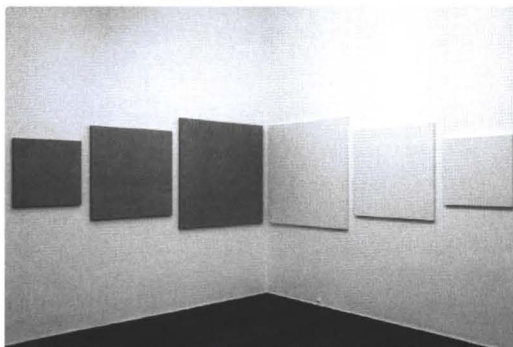
*Untitled (The Warriors)* creates a cycle of illegible analogies that structure an uncertain future from an undecided past. It articulates an escape from the entrapping speed of modern society by rejecting the premise that life is liquid. "Liquid life," Zygmunt Bauman formulated, "is consuming life. It casts the world and all its animate and inanimate fragments as objects of consumption: that is, objects that lose their usefulness (and so their luster, attraction, seductive power and worth) in the course of being used." In contrast, Dashper's art is twice removed – it is, he explained, "A word that expresses the idea of an action." The work creates transitions rather than meanings, denying culture the permanence we crave. It is credible in the sense that while it offers no new beginnings it rewards the right to believe. We add its indeterminacy to the universe we

live. This action is a fact and a value, and it is the productive consequence of Dashper's art, which transforms realities into possibilities and keeps existence open.

*Future Call* (1994) is a piece that reappeared during the US retrospective, and it too can never be consumed. Here, Dashper dialled yesterday from tomorrow, playing with the absurd consequence of the International Date Line. The phone rings and rings and rings some more; no one ever answers. *Future Call* draws a line in time and space that disputes conventional distinctions. The art is arbitrary, insistent, and imaginary, and these disjunctions vibrate both materially and immaterially. Dashper explained the missed connection, the lack of closure, in these terms: "Same moment, different time. A very simple idea, but that is what I like to say that my work is usually about." Dashper's cycles are literal and figurative, and it is his work's wholeness that keeps them in motion.



Against Bauman's position, Dashper's art adds to reality. No work demonstrates this articulation more clearly than *Untitled (off white)*, one of the 40 "morphine paintings" from 2006. Sold by the metre, this wall painting exists as an unlimited edition in unlimited colors. It extends forever. "These paintings are a summative statement," Dashper wrote, happy in assessing their action as "to morph." The only possible fixity might be legal, but even then the possibilities are ceaseless.



PREVIOUS PAGE

Opening at Esso Gallery  
New York 2006 for the  
show *Julian Dashper:  
Future Call 1994–2006,  
Untitled (CV) 1979–2006*



RIGHT

*Future Call 1994–2006* in  
the exhibition *Midwestern  
Unlike You and Me: New  
Zealand's Julian Dashper*  
at the Ulrich Museum of  
Art, Wichita, Kansas, US



TOP

Installation view showing  
six paintings all *Untitled  
2006*, morphine on  
American acrylic primed  
jute in the exhibition  
*Both Sides Now*  
Hamish McKay Gallery,  
Wellington, New Zealand

ABOVE

*Future Call 1994–2006*  
at Esso Gallery New York  
2006 in the exhibition  
*Julian Dashper: Future Call  
1994–2006, Untitled (CV)  
1979–2006*

## Moreno Miorelli

### *The Border*

“The border? Those rocks are the border?.... Incredible! Incredible! Where we live there is no border, there’s the sea which is in no way a border.” Such is my first memory of meeting Julian, in the winter of 1993. We are at Topolò on a cold grey day with Barbara Strathdee and Odinea Pamici. For the artists this is their first survey of the place that would become, from July 1994, the site of *Stazione di Topolò*. Here they would work with difficult, tough themes: an extremely serious border area between “East” and “West”, lost to mountains, ethnic hatred and poverty, where making art would be to walk barefoot over broken glass.

To do so, you need to be very respectful of the place and its wounds. Instead of shouting “Look at me, I am here!”, as so many artists do, you have to allow yourself to listen, cast aside your own ego, walk on tip-toe. In this Julian was perfect. He never relinquished that lightness that allowed him to investigate the depths of a situation without the work becoming heavy and sad.

For us, who have lived on one of the darkest borders in Europe, under surveillance and militarised to the point of obsession, a border that divided us even within our houses, and which is the main reason for our existence, to have artists from New Zealand, from the opposite part of the earth, was already an event in itself. It was like running out of a burning house and taking a deep breath. To have proof that that we weren’t alone obsessing about our problem, but that the world is large and that all you have to do is climb a tree or onto a plane to see over the barbed wire. Conceptually speaking, Barbara and Julian were an art operation in themselves, by simply being here: two Martians risen out of the ocean to saunter along the lanes of Topolò! The first time ever!

Julian was not in the slightest bit interested, as I remember, in the age of the walls. Here any building at all was more ancient than the oldest in Auckland. Here every wall bears centuries of history on its shoulders. For Julian this held no importance. He stopped to examine the electricity poles, the telephone cables, the aluminium boxes which house the gas connections. Above all he was amazed at the sight of so many closed-up dwellings, uninhabited, left to fall into ruins. We wandered through a village that seemed like a deserted film set. No sound, only that of the stream far below. A few old people, who poked their noses out of the doors to watch these foreigners climb to the top of their village. I related to Julian and Barbara the history of Topolò, its tragedies, the emigration which had reduced the place from 400 inhabitants to 50 in a few years. Those few people remaining waited eternally for letters and phone calls from relatives in Belgium, France, Australia. And it was at this moment Julian had his inspiration, standing here in the Topolòs tiny piazza.

The notion of waiting for a distant voice as the only sign of life came to him as the pivot for his art piece. He would telephone, from the future (*Future Call* is in fact the title). Five in the morning of the next day would call five in the evening of the previous day. Replying to that call would be too banal. Because it was absence, the forced emigration from these lands, which also should be remembered. For this reason the telephone would ring for 10–15 minutes and no-one would lift the receiver. When it happened for the first time, the day of the grand opening, the surprise was enormous. The Mayor of Grimacco made his welcoming speech as the telephone continued to ring just a few feet away from him! The following day towards five o’clock, the old women of the village carried their chairs out into the piazza

“because at five will come the telephone call from the future.” And they watched over that telephone resting on a low window sill, so that no-one should attempt to reply. For many of them it was a deeply shocking, and without knowing why a couple of the women wept. Another had to leave she was so disturbed, not understanding her own reaction. This is how it went every Saturday and Sunday for 45 days at Topolò in 1994.

Julian was at home, at night, his shoulders covered with a blanket, on the other side of the world, dialling the numbers every minute or so, because after a minute the satellite connection broke.

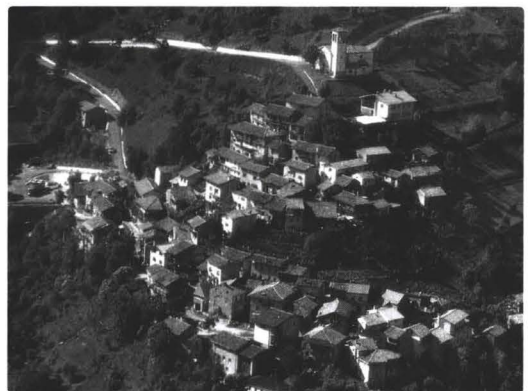
But if there is a place in Europe where Julian Dashper is one of the family, that place is Topolò; the other is the home of Jan van der Ploeg in Amsterdam. Jan was brought to us, in fact, by Julian, like many other artists. Every year he recommended an artist, signing his letter “your brother from the future.”

The night of 31 December 1999 Julian telephoned my house and made a recording of my voice on a 45rpm disk. By then he’d been in 2000 for several hours; we were still in the past, a century behind. On side B of the disk was the voice of Auckland, recorded at the exact same moment. A record with two faces: one in 1999, the other in 2000, yet they register the same minutes!

He came to spend his holidays in Topolò, for him winter and for us the summer ones, with Marie and Leo.

The New Zealand – Aotearoa Embassy, opened at Topolò on the 21 July 2007, has a plaque inscribed with the names of its two ambassadors: Barbara Strathdee and Julian Dashper.

Sit tibi terra levis, Julian.



TOP  
Topolò area map  
Photo: Andreas Mesham,  
2005

ABOVE  
Topolò Village  
Photo: Andreas Mesham,  
2005

## Elodie Lesourd

### *Modernism – Rhythm-keeping for the Culture*

Often seated at the back of the stage behind the other musicians, the drummer is rarely in the spotlight. He is a solitary figure, ignored, unappreciated and ultimately forgotten. And yet he is the one who leads the dance, who defines the contour of each piece, who determines the tempo, whose rhythm is pivotal, almost primal.

Julian Dashper, although not a musician himself, was hugely interested in this most versatile of instruments. He used it as a ready-made to provide the structure for a discourse that mixed issues of identity and cultural heritage. Its low-profile status made it the perfect allegory for works like *Big Bang Theory* or *Untitled (the Warriors)*. With its undertones of inferiority, isolation and frustration, in his hands it became a symbol of reserve. And the drumheads provided a new and fertile support for pursuing his dual analysis opposing abstraction and popular culture.

Drum kits have been used a number of times in contemporary art, producing some memorable rim-shots (Oldenburg, Marclay and Koh spring to mind). But Dashper, with his destabilising detachment and intellectual agility, triggers serious ontological reflexion. So it was only natural that I decided to take my turn on the drummer's stool and re-play his work.

The methodical application, at times indirect, of ideas that are essentially aesthetic forms and the recurrent use of abstraction – common to us both – was central to Julian Dashper's work. For my part, through a neo-conceptual interpretation of the codes and modes related to rock culture, I distance myself from the subject for the purpose of semiotic analysis. But, although this process is aesthetically close to Julian's, it's not the one that led me to his work. My access to his form of conceptualism was via another

mode of expression – what I have termed “hyperrockalism”: the transfer into painting of installations by other artists whose work is inspired by music. This then is the context in which I transposed two of his works, the ones mentioned above, painting *The Dashpers* and *You May Know Him*.

### Cover version

Questions of the original, the copy and the multiple, primary precepts of this process, are clearly linked and form an integral part of Julian's work. He loved to dig through art history, so it is only fair that I in turn use *his* work to reclaim the aesthetic potential of the referent. Appropriation, which is always idea- or concept-driven, proposes a distancing from art, but the filtering-in of music widens and deepens the discourse.

Julian wove into his work a web of references, his attachment to artists like Donald Judd and Dan Flavin served to structure his discourse and gave direction to his art. He assumed his role as heir with pride. The homage is subtly visible in the use of quotations. And homage, heritage, critique, and quotation are key elements in both our practices.

But over and above this notion of referent, analysing the status of painting was also a common concern. I paint life-size, free hand, with no mechanical aids or back projections, so self-implication comes from the actual execution of the painted work. The concept of the author, the death of the author (Barthes), disappearance, dilution, was something else we both addressed but in opposite directions. The work in question was not about re-painting an installation but about re-painting a painting (the drumhead was the canvas) – a real *mise en abîme*.

### **The Dotted Note**

Transforming installations by other artists into paintings confirms the concept, renders permanent an artwork that is ephemeral, and fixes it in time. The work of Julian Dashper is truly fluid and, as such, to a degree omnipresent. This transposition is essentially the prolongation of the original work.

In order to be part of this conceptual continuum I have to interact and discuss with the other artist so that he fully comprehends what I am doing and what is involved. Julian subscribed to the project immediately, was there when it was executed, and saw for himself his piece morphing into a flat and cold one-dimensional image. There is cohesion to his enthusiasm. For the *mise en abyme* of his work inevitably reveals its essence. Wasn't this after all what he really wanted – to be in his turn quoted, to become the referent, to go down in history?

Photographs of some artworks come to be prized by artists as virtual traces of the original in documentary form. Installations are dismembered, broken up; they are no longer three-dimensional; they are transformed and impoverished. Their transient status makes them fragile, dooms them to destruction. For what is left of an installation once the show is over? The paintings give Dashper's pieces a new lease of life. They are reincarnated in new works that will be preserved and frozen in time. Propagation as prolongation.

The piece *You May Know Him* is seen through the eyes of the musician not those of the viewer. Reborn through the sacred art of painting the drum as metaphor – silent in its abstraction – becomes an active force in the discourse. This process of freezing, of stopping something that is moving, might appear to run counter to the “liquid modernity” inherent in Julian's work, to be in direct opposition to his amazing vitality. But the

contrary is true. Imposing a specific format makes diffusion easier, gives the work extra momentum.

### **Wave Field Synthesis**

Julian questioned the value of isolation. His aim was internationalism and the breaking-down of boundaries. And in a way my work is proof of his success. The Internet widened his horizons, there were no limits to communication, his works could travel freely, the world was his oyster. In this new order everything could be transported, even stripped of its material form. This process of dematerialisation made possible by the Web can be reversed by painting, which restores the digitised works to life-size. Propagation by allograph is like the current running through an electric guitar. The guitar can work without it but, as soon as it is plugged in, the interpretations are endless. Mutating, the work becomes communicable, exportable, recognisable, even at the other side of the world – like a refrain.

This notion of rhythm, change, and movement is the “rock” I found in Julian's art.

### **Blast Beat**

My interest in the work of other artists is a function of their association with music in general and rock music in particular. I tend to work with artworks produced recently, sometimes less than one year after their production. The more recent an artwork is, the more ambiguous its status and the more interesting it is to me. Music as raw material has endless conceptual potential when we make the effort to reveal the recurrent and intricate mechanisms that govern it. Rock music also epitomises youth, effervescence – life itself.

So the dialogues I have had with the artists on whom my work is based are lively and intense, rooted in reality and anchored in the present, a present that totally excludes distance and death.

Now, of course, Julian's entire oeuvre is perceived differently, viewed with a degree of empathy. And, by the natural phenomenon of contagion, mine too. Quoting Pliny the Elder: "Cessavit deinde ars" ("Then art disappeared"), I wonder whether it is possible for me to carry on after his death ... to pursue my project on his work.

The drums at the heart of Julian's art perpetuate this game of thrash and silence. Composed of different elements (polymorphous), stemming from different origins (international) and oscillating between the archaic and the rigid, the drum is emblematic of his work and of his way of thinking. Associated with modernism it is

now postmodern, imbuing one work after another in a continuous wave inspired by the same conceptual questions. Our works may be dissimilar in terms of sensibility, but in concert they have a certain power, with Julian infusing both sense and sensitivity.

For Julian, the drummer was the musician in the background, a simple timekeeper. But did it occur to him to what degree he, as the drummer, imposed his own unique, timeless rhythm, a basic beat on which to build? He is and always will be the leader of the band *The Dashpers*.

Translation: Anne M. Buckingham

Eloïde Lesourd  
*You May Know Him* 2009  
 (courtesy J. Dashper)  
 Acrylic on wood 128 x 94.7cm  
 Exhibition view  
 IAC, Villeurbanne  
 Photo © Blaise Adillon



## John Nixon

### *Julian Dashper, John Nixon and Circle Records: A Chronology*

**1989** John Nixon meets Julian Dashper and Marie Shannon in Auckland.

**1992** JD records first 7" single, *The Julian Dashper Gate Experience (parts 1-4)* with Michael Morley in Morley's Dunedin Music studio using his equipment.

The single is released on MM's label "Precious Metal". The record is lathe cut on clear polycarbonate by King Records International in GERALTON, New Zealand.

JD is included in *Headlands, Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (curated by Robert Leonard and Bernice Murphy) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

JN meets up again with JD and they begin to meet up on a regular basis in Sydney, Auckland and other European cities when travelling.

**1993** JD exhibits his TDGE record at Apartment 9, an independent art space in Sydney organised by JN.

**1994** JD exhibits at CBD Gallery in Sydney organised by JN.

**1996** JD exhibits at Sarah Cottier Gallery in Sydney.

At the initiative of David M Thomas, JD + JN along with DMT record together in the basement of CBD Gallery which DMT had set up as a music studio using his own equipment.

JN + JD decide to release the recording as a 7" single. The names MILKSTAR (for the band) and CIRCLE RECORDS (for the label) are agreed upon by JN + JD. The cover is designed by JN and the circle motif on the record is designed by JD.

This first CIRCLE RECORDS 7" is released using King Records International to manufacture the record on clear polycarbonate, the format subsequently used for all CIRCLE RECORDS releases.

It is thought to develop the record label to also include musical projects by other artist friends. JN forms SCALA with Marco Fusinato.

**1997** JN + JD hold their first two-person exhibition which features both independently produced work and collaborative diptych paintings at Laure Genillard Gallery, London.

The 7" record *JOHN NIXON/JULIAN DASHPER* is released on this occasion with cover design by JD. It is the fifth release by CIRCLE RECORDS.

JD begins to release solo recordings and recordings with artist friends, leading for example to the 7" series of records *STUDIO SONGS* in 1998.

JN continues to release recordings with MF under the group name SCALA and then SOLVER. (These recordings also include other artist friends.)

MF begins to release solo recordings.

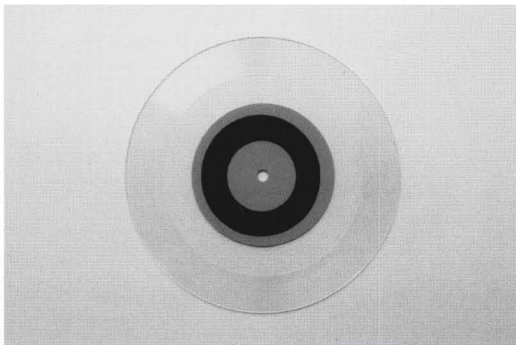
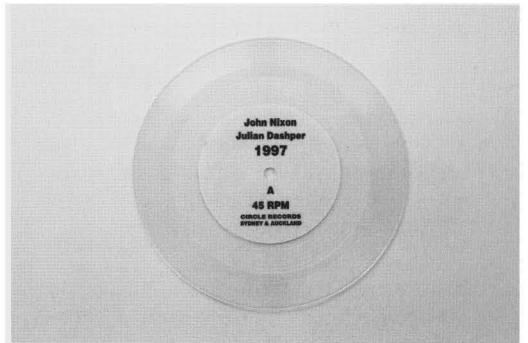
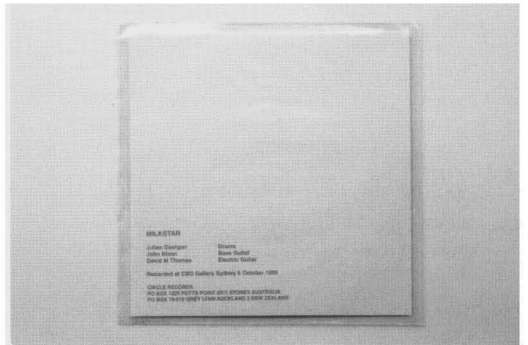
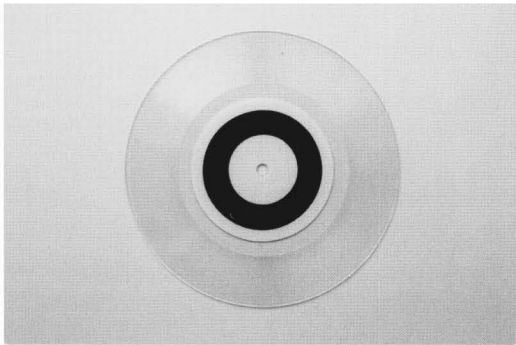
**1999** An exhibition is held at Artspace in Sydney of the first twenty 7" records of CIRCLE RECORDS.

**2000** JN, JD + MF continue to release recordings on CIRCLE RECORDS, each taking responsibility for the development of the cover designs for their own records. The label effectively becomes a three-part project.

JN + MF continue to release experimental noise music and JD begins to use the form of the 7" and 12" to record various art-world events he is involved with. These recordings are not of music but are more like sound documents.

**2001** Whilst the label closed down around 2001, CIRCLE RECORDS was the impetus for the continuing importance of "recording" in all three artists' work. This interest continues through the records and CDs they have released on different self-initiated and independent labels.

**2004** *JULIAN DASHPER/JOHN NIXON: THE WORLD IS YOUR STUDIO* (curated by Ben Curnow) opens at the Gus Fisher Gallery in Auckland. This exhibition emphasises JD + JN's collaborative work and includes a vitrine with various releases from CIRCLE RECORDS.



**Barbara Strathdee**

***Stazione di Topolò – Postaja Topolove***

Julian was in Trieste in 1993 to mount an exhibition with me at the Nadia Bassanese Studio d'Arte. (*Pilot Essay* was interrupted after two weeks to allow Leo Castelli –Triestine by birth – to document the history of his New York galleries, then reinstalled for another month). During Julian's stay my studio colleague, Odinea Pamici, took us to the opening of an installation event in the Dolomites. There we met Moreno Miorelli, a poet from Biella (and colleague of New Zealand artist Chiara Corballetto) who was living in the valley behind the historic town of Cividale, on the border with Slovenia.

The Natisone Valley is populated by the "Venetian Slavs" (the Benecian). They arrived in the 600s,

fought the Longobards, and were included in the Venetian Republic during the centuries in which Yugoslav lands were incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Topolò is the highest village in the hills of that border region.

Moreno discovered Topolò through friends. He found the people demoralised, poor, and mostly elderly. They had returned to their village on retirement from employment as tram drivers in Turin, in Belgian mines, or in domestic service throughout Europe. The mood was about to change: Topolò was planning to celebrate its 1000th birthday in 1994. Moreno persuaded the villagers to accept a group of artists who would make site-specific

Installation view of  
*Future Call* 1994  
Stazione di Topolò –  
Postaja Topolove, Italy .  
Photo: Moreno Miorelli



works in the month of July when the village celebrates its annual religious festival.

It was hard work – with Julian we visited the village the following week and heard more stories about its history. Ten minutes walk from the border (which until recently had been part of the Iron Curtain, cutting off the Slovene inhabitants of the village from their relatives in Slovenia) it is itself a divided village (for political reasons) – with two parts: the lower and the upper. The lower village was particularly hostile to us artists and to the whole idea. Odinea and I in fact made several visits over the next six months to develop relationships which would allow us to proceed.

Julian understood the situation very quickly. Few of the houses had telephones in them. A public telephone is situated in the residents' carpark beneath the village at the end of the road – the village is pedestrian only. He thought about how life had been for those who had resisted the fascist era, the wars, the poverty – relying on subsistence farming only to have their young ones leave for schooling and then find work elsewhere. So he thought up *Future Call* – the expats ringing home, and the sense of anticipation of those in the village waiting for the telephone call to come... Moreno said, "Julian's absence will be a presence."

Julian made a test call from New Zealand to Moreno on Sunday 26 June at 17.00 (3am in New Zealand). For Julian an important feature was that his telephone call was being made from the future. The call would be made every day of the art event at 17.00 (5pm). But it couldn't be made to the public phone in the car park because there nobody would hear it. Julian left Italy before it was decided which house and which telephone number he would call at the appropriate hour from Auckland. Eventually,

Moreno found two villagers (Emilio – who had worked in Belgium – and his wife Romilda) who were prepared to place their phone on the window sill of their house in the small piazza in the centre of the village. This is where all the speeches and choir music would be performed during the opening, with heavy foot traffic throughout the weeks of the event.

The opening took place on 2 July 1994. There are no shops in Topolò but for the opening somebody opened a temporary bar. It was about 32 degrees Celcius and the piazza was crowded.

This is from a letter I sent to Julian, 6 July 1994:

*A huge group of people in costume arrived from the surrounding villages: the choir. At 5 pm, when the loudspeakers, mike, vice-mayor and choir were ready and anxious to commence, the phone began to ring. We all waited and listened until about ten minutes past five. People talked quietly: some said, answer the phone and others said, no – it's part of the exhibition. At ten past the choir started singing. Every once in a while someone, feeling irritated, would pick up the phone. They were told off each time by the locals.*

*Next day the phone was left inside the house with the windows open and at 5pm there was more music in the square – this time a piano accordion with singers: polka, waltzes and partisan songs. The vice-mayor spoke again, and the Slovene consul. The ringing continued in the background. A group of women guarded the phone. Moreno leaned in the window and told them they could pull the connection from the wall after 15 minutes. They were horrified. Later Moreno told me that of all the works (there were 16 artists) this piece held the most meaning for the locals – the very work Moreno had thought would be considered the most difficult.*

*...the women of the village were the most touched: the thought that their village mattered to someone who*

*lives so far away. And that Julian would ring not just the day of the opening, but every weekend until the exhibition closed on 15th August.*

Topolò 1994 received national coverage on radio and TV in Italy, and public funding has been less difficult to find as the event has grown in fame. Since then both the village and annual event have changed enormously. *Stazione di Topolò – Postaja Topolove* is rigorously bilingual. There are more video and sound works, a library of books gifted by artists, and the European Union has underwritten the renovation of many of the previously empty houses, with the owners collecting rent from the tourists who visit Topolò, and, after eight

years, taking charge of their property, moving in themselves if they wish.

The selection of works has always been through artist recommending other artists they consider suitable for the social character of the site – it is not a place for making a career, but for making work that in some way has a connection to the people of the place, and for interacting with artists from around the world, many of whom stay a week or more. Julian undertook a subsequent Topolò project. Marie (Shannon) also exhibited there, and Moreno continues to curate *Stazione Topolò – Postaja Topolove*, as well as other historical memory projects.

Julian with Leo Castelli,  
Nadia Bassanese and  
others at dinner in Trieste  
Italy, 1993



*Odineo Julian Dashper Leo Castelli Nadia & Pietro C.*

## Rudi Fuchs

In the late 1990s I came to Wellington. Paintings from the Amsterdam collection were exhibited at the National Art Gallery in Wellington. Mondrian in New Zealand, possibly for the very first time, said curator Paula Savage. Kind friends then took me to the South Island: from the soft hills around Christchurch to the dry land of Mackenzie Country and down to pretty Queenstown. We saw spectacular landscape and some artists and a southern sky of incredible clarity. Clouds and shadows of clouds on the grass. For the first time I saw paintings by Colin McCahon and because their mood and darkness kept haunting me I returned the next year – mainly to Auckland this time to start the exercise (difficult as it turned out) of organising an exhibition of the elusive master in Europe. I remember Jenny Gibbs taking us to a beach of black sand to look at the ocean where McCahon had also been. In the glorious light shining on the lush green, and most of the day talking about the painter with Wystan Curnow (and then meeting his father, the great poet), it was difficult not to be led astray by the romance of the country. The year before, in a lecture in Wellington, I had deplored the exclusivity of the modernist tradition and the absence in that context of a painter like McCahon. Jenny Gibbs then agreed to lend us a small *Otago Landscape* to hang, as a guest, in the exhibition in Wellington. For once his painting could be seen surrounded by contemporaries like Karel Appel and Asger Jorn, William DeKooning and Jackson Pollock – where I thought it belonged.

I was then, happily, saved from succumbing to my own drifting sentimentalities by Julian Dashper. His freshness of mind and his wonderful laconic artistic attitude put me back in the real world of modernism. I was immediately taken by those light unframed paintings I saw in Sue Crockford's gallery: weightless and ironic.

They had a lightly brushed O-shape in the centre, in dull orange, simple and straightforward as a traffic sign. One could easily fold them and carry them in your hand luggage on a plane. That was Julian's practical way to overcome the distance between the hemispheres. I acquired one: if I had brought the first Mondrian to New Zealand then I could repay the hospitality by taking the first Dashper to the museum in Amsterdam. It was obvious that Julian not just lived in Auckland but had become one of those travelling modernists, someone like his example Daniel Buren – at home in the world. For that adventurous attitude and an impressive artistic independence he was important – and for his wit and energy and, I remember, his optimism. Eventually the painting with the O-shape was joined in Amsterdam by the *Otago Landscape* when Jenny Gibbs donated the little McCahon jewel to us. Thus the circle was completed.



Installation view showing  
*Untitled (O)* 1990–1992  
Acrylic on linen in the  
exhibition *Thin Ice*  
Stedelijk Museum  
Amsterdam, 1999  
Photo: Jan van der Ploeg

## Jan van der Ploeg

In 1992, the so-called Abel Tasman year, I was invited to visit New Zealand with a few colleagues as part of a cultural exchange between New Zealand and the Netherlands. We were toured around the country by Luit Bieringa and spoke about our work in public galleries and art schools in Auckland, Wellington, New Plymouth, Christchurch and Whanganui. On the way we were introduced to many people from the New Zealand art world: collectors, curators, gallerists and artists.

One night in Auckland, Luit arranged a dinner party at a small Italian restaurant on Ponsonby Road to meet with John Reynolds, Julian Dashper and their partners, Claire McLintock and Marie Shannon. We had a great evening; we spoke about our work and Julian invited me to visit his studio the next day. The visit was very good, we had a great conversation and I was impressed with the works Julian showed me.

Back in Amsterdam we kept in contact via fax. Our interest in each others' work grew and a year later I invited Julian to come to the Netherlands for a two-person exhibition at Stelling Gallery in Leiden. The works in our exhibition were Julian's cut drumheads, plastic chains and a fly curtain in combination with my "Cage" paintings. For the exhibition Stelling Gallery published a catalogue and the idea was that the show would go to Auckland and that I would visit New Zealand once more. In 1994 Julian organised a residency studio for me at ASA School of Art and our exhibition was the opening show of ASA Gallery which was located across the street from the Auckland City Art Gallery. Many visits to New Zealand and Australia followed and Julian often came to the Netherlands to show his work at PS project space in Amsterdam.

Julian has always been very good and loyal in sharing friendships, interests and information, and in bringing people together. He introduced us to his colleagues and students; he encouraged them to travel and promoted their work. We met a number of them in Amsterdam and with many we still maintain good contact.

Through the years Julian and I would meet around the world at different places and in different countries to exhibit our work or to go and look at other people's work: Topolò, Venice, Ljubljana, Basel, Zurich, Düsseldorf, Brussels, London, New York, Beacon and elsewhere. I have very good memories of all the times we met. In Texas I visited Julian, along with Marie Shannon and their son Leo, during his residency at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa. I was given a guest apartment to stay in with a beautiful, simple Donald Judd-designed table, chair and bed. In the mornings we would take a walk with Leo to the railway to watch the trains coming through the town and would put coins on the track to create "souvenirs from Marfa" to take home for my two sons. Leo would bring his rattlesnake stick to protect us when we walked through the fields to have a closer look at Judd's large outdoor sculptures. One evening in Marfa we all cooked a meal together for when Robert Irwin came to visit. We sat along the long tables in the Arena building.

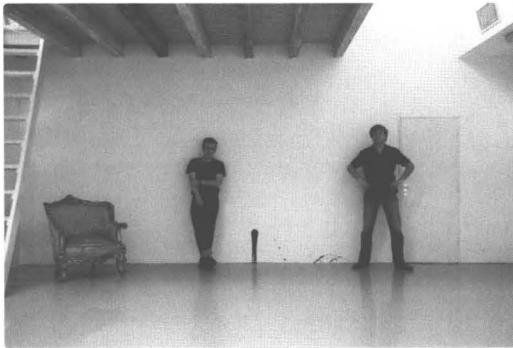
In Italy we shared a very special and intense moment together, the first time we visited Stazione di Topolò. During the opening weekend we watched various concerts and performances. At midnight all visitors were invited to walk up the hill past the chapel to the cemetery. An artist had installed a telescope in between the graves. Julian and I both felt that we were looking straight into heaven, and together we remembered the close relatives we both had recently lost.

Through the years Julian made many friends in Amsterdam and the Netherlands. His work is very well respected and it was a great moment when Rudi Fuchs bought his work for the collection of the Stedelijk Museum and prominently showed his painting in the *Thin Ice* exhibition alongside other great and famous international artists.

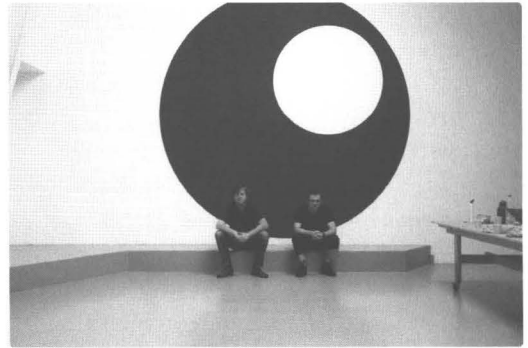
Where ever we went we would always have a lot of fun together and something would always happen. One day, years ago, the two of us went on a trip to Utrecht for a tour through the Rietveld Schröder House and to visit the pavilion with Rietveld furniture designs in the Centraal Museum. Walking through the exhibition I got ahead of Julian and was in another room when I heard a guard saying, “excuse me sir, can you please come away from

underneath that chair.” Julian was so impressed with what he saw that he felt he needed to photograph the Rietveld tables and chairs from the top, side and below.

Being so far away from each other we would often e-mail, sometimes more than once a day. We would know what the other was up to whether we were at home working in our studios or travelling around the world for exhibitions. Then, in mid-July 2009, my e-mails didn’t get Julian’s response any longer. Marie contacted me to explain that Julian was seriously ill, and I was on a plane to Auckland the next day. We spent a week together with Marie, Leo, his family and his friends. Saying goodbye to Julian when I had to go was probably the most difficult thing ever, knowing that I would never see again my best friend and colleague Julian Dashper.



Julian and Jan after installing the exhibition *Julian Dashper – Jan van der Ploeg 1992–2007* at artspace RC de Ruimte June 2007



## Dane Mitchell

### One.

It's hard for me to consider Julian's influence on my work; I find it easier to think of his influence in other ways, such as his generosity and enthusiasm in connecting people in all corners of the world. One such incident had me heading to a small village, population 31, in the northeastern corner of Italy. I was living in Melbourne at the time and I thought I'd attempt to locate this village on a map before making my way there. In the Victoria State Library Map Collection with the help of a librarian I checked current maps, historical maps, indexes, encyclopedias and databases, yet there was no mention of this far-flung village anywhere. It did not exist in this library basement stacked with topological renderings and encyclopedic lists of the world. I called Julian to ask if he was absolutely sure this place, which he had visited several times, really existed; that it wasn't imagined. Julian was fond of such slippage – that a corner of the world may have gone undetected, and I think he liked that I was calling to confirm he was sending me somewhere real. It was in this village Julian had once carried out *Future Call*, so it didn't seem unreasonable to me to assume that just as the phone endlessly ringing somewhere in the village – a call from New Zealand 12 hours ahead – was a call from the future, that perhaps the village too may have been a village of the future. Julian was also fond of this small village for its proximity to borders. He had once shown me photos of the invisible line separating east and west Europe – one foot in Italy, one foot in Slovenia. Julian liked the contorted logic this presented someone from an island in the middle of an oceanic expanse.

### Two.

I was reading the other day about modernism and thinking about Julian. He'd just passed away, and I was a long way from home, unable to attend his funeral. It is certainly the case that Julian was

on my mind: I saw references to him in the discarded frames that lay over the top of one another in my studio – they appeared interlocked, forming a chain. Something in the text I was reading reminded me of Julian's ease of movement between frames of reference, tools of the trade, airports and the cities they connect. The text suggested the notion of alternative modernities, existing like a series of sub-species, in which one can fashion one's own modernity (a Latin-American kind, a Pacific kind), problematic for any potential power modernism has had to contain all such conversations under a single unifying umbrella. Regardless of whether one argues for modernity as a single project, or whether one affirms modernities in the plural, I wondered as I read whether or not Julian had operated in the gap between one notion of modernism and many. In retrospect, the comingling of conventions in his work – frames, devices, references to the canon and allusion to local art history, resumés, slides, telephones, drum kits, chain-links – seem to repel and attract modernism in the singular and plural sense.

### Three.

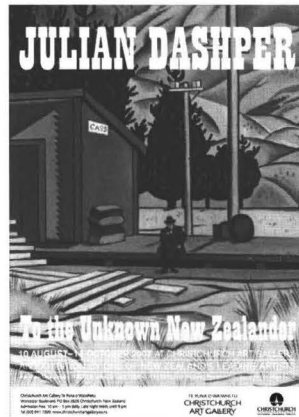
Time has a complicated relationship with the museum and the white cube. At one moment these spaces suspend work in a timeless void, yet they are also the storehouses of time – marking it and reminding us of its passing – this is something I have tested in my own work, and something I believe Julian was also interested in. I think Julian was interested in permanence, in time. I see evidence of this in the lengths of pine – the stretches leaning against a wall. To my knowledge Julian made the first of these works when in Marfa as artist-in-residence at the Chinati Foundation, where he was struck by the immutability of Donald Judd's project – that any (formal) gesture could be preserved in perpetuity. These works toy with the question

of how something that relies on an unaltered environment endures. To own this, to live with it, collect it, to consider its life beyond the exhibition throws up all sorts of interesting problems – does the work exist when not installed? Is the work located in the relationship between the object, the wall and the floor? Is the shadow part of the work? Is gravity listed as a material? It is certainly the case that these works operate, on some level, as a provocation of permanence. The temporal action of leaning something against a wall (an act that is simultaneously understated and overstated) flexes time – and now that Julian has gone, these works gain further significance in their poise, heightening our awareness of time passing.

#### Four.

Cass is the name of a small settlement in Canterbury in the border region of the Arthur's Pass National Park. Julian and I often shared photos and information on Cass as we gathered it. According to *Wikipedia*, it is referred to as the smallest town on earth, population 1. Cass is also the title of a 1936 painting by Rita Angus, and although I don't trust TV polls, it was voted New Zealand's greatest painting in 2006. Since the mid-1980's Julian had circumnavigated the work, the location and the artist in various ways – most recently with his exhibition *To the Unknown New Zealander*. The title refers to the lone figure (population 1) sitting on the train platform, waiting. A featureless face, no mouth, no eyes – nothing. The act of rendering the figure mute tells us Angus was clearly interested in the landscape and the landscape alone. It certainly speaks volumes about the absence of “us” in the representation and interpretation of landscape in New Zealand's art history. For Julian I suspect his recent focus on this figure came from his own surprise at having viewed Angus's *Cass* many times – having visually

quoted it over the course of 20 years in his work, and only really *seeing* the lone figure now. I could of course be off the mark, but I like to think of this as an example of an artist continually finding new things in his own work, and the work of others – of an artist's ongoing line of enquiry. It also seems to me that in focusing on the lone figure in the work after having centered his early Cass works on the landscape and the small station, Julian was also making a statement about twentieth-century New Zealand art history's focus on the unpopulated landscape and the need to read the landscape as representing the psyche of its invisible inhabitants. He turns our attention away from this obsession – this obsession with ourselves, and refocuses it on the lone figure who was there all along, sitting, waiting, travelling and thinking.



LEFT  
Poster for the solo exhibition *To the Unknown New Zealander* Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, 2007

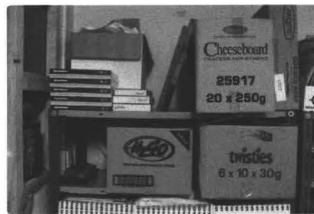
BELOW  
Installation view of *Locker Plant Locker Plant* at The Locker Plant, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, US, 2001  
Photo: Julian Dashper



## Marie Shannon

### *What I Am Looking at at the Moment*

Nine copies of *Speculation*; three empty CD size Handi Boxes; two joined stretchers of Belgian linen which may or may not be painted with morphine; a box of brochures from the 1997 and 1999 Venice Biennales; correspondence 1989–1992.



A tall thin box containing press kits from European art fairs 2002; an exhibition poster; an A4 envelope containing maps, itinerary and various exhibition cards and invitations from Amsterdam; a *Sunday Express* article on Stonehenge, or perhaps on football; two proof sheets of photographs of sky; an empty paper bag.



A vinyl travel wallet containing: an itinerary from May 2002, Auckland/L. A/Frankfurt/Amsterdam/Frankfurt/Singapore/Auckland; a passenger arrival card; another passenger arrival card; boarding passes; ticket stubs; duty free discount voucher; another copy of the itinerary.



Other boxes containing wrapping paper from a shop in Venice; a newsletter from the Anglican Parish of Warkworth; a 1000 lire note; an Atomic Espresso machine brochure; a child's drawing; a photograph of a Christmas tree in Italy; a book of child's drawings; a photograph of Julian Schnabel's driveway.

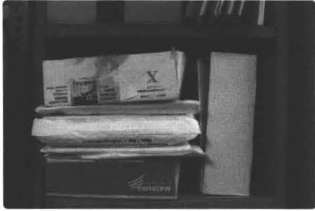


The order of service from Derek McKendry's funeral; a recipe for the homeopathic treatment of arthritis; a plastic bag from a shop in Venice; a description of the Alexander Technique; a letter from ACC; a photograph of a swimmer; a palm frond cross; a colour slide of four paintings.



A letter from Jan asking, "How is the baby?"; a postcard from the Anne Frank House; 13 copies of an exhibition invitation; a press release from the Stedelijk Museum for the exhibition *Thin Ice*; an empty envelope; directions for getting to the Lightning Field; letters of support for a funding application.





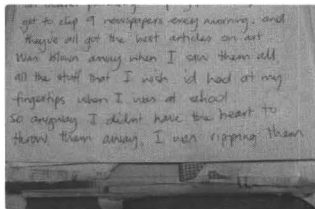
Three pieces of cardboard; a list of record titles; an invitation to Daniel Malone's Teststrip show, December 1992; the timetable for the airport bus from New York to JFK and La Guardia; the words "pill" and "hinge" written on a Post-it note.



I am looking at boxes of correspondence: Joyoti Wylie; Richard Walker; Manukau Institute of Technology; Teststrip; Sue Crockford; Hamish McKay; Mark Kirby; Sarah Cottier; Melissa Chiu; Waikato Polytech; Manawatu Art Gallery; D. J. Simpson; Waikato Art Museum; Judith Gifford.



Guy Ngan; Blue Oyster; Art Gallery of New South Wales; Greg Burke; Dilana Rugs; Studio Ceramics; John Nixon; Trevor Smith; Barbara Strathdee; Stelling Gallery; Luciano Inga-Pin; Denise Kum; Stedelijk Museum; Leo Castelli; Bill Wright; Lara Strongman; Simone Horrocks; Bill Milbank.



Imants Tillers; George Hubbard, Monique Redmond; Jan van der Ploeg; Peter Robinson; William McAloon; Peter King; The Warriors; Ian Jervis; Laure Genillard; Ralf Brog; Jim Barr and Mary Barr; Moreno Miorelli; Angela Merrie who sent newspaper clippings she didn't have the heart to throw away.



Allen Maddox  
14 Burlington Rd  
Napier  
4/6/85

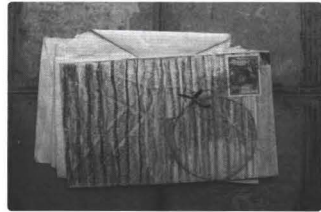


*Dear Julian,*  
*I received an invite today for your show at Real Pictures – Photographs! – well quite a departure from the paintings of yours I saw at Peter's. I liked the paintings – nice and loose, and certainly not like photos. It's nice to just work and let the idiom become apparent.*

*A comment – one of the paintings had ultramarine blue tracery travelling down the picture in sort of (lazy) zig-zags. I found that you hadn't put it on solid enough for me, in short, it didn't cut up the white space properly and didn't generate the right spatial relationship, as there was white peeping through the structure of the brushstrokes.*



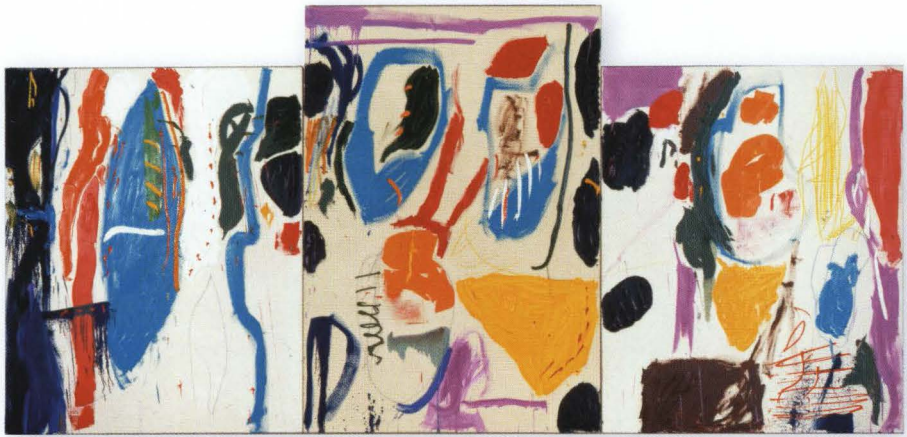
*The casual technique wasn't strong enough for the white (coming through the blue) to be significant – a little sloppy. What I did enjoy was the really sloppy overpainting (was it yellow over blue or blue over yellow, I can't remember now) – You are prepared to get into a muddy puddle – man you paint with shit, and that's good. Anyway, I hope you don't feel my comments are patronizing – I enjoyed seeing the works that Peter had. I show with Peter in November, and am working towards that. If you felt inclined, you could drop me a line sometime. Hope this finds you well. Good luck for your show at Real Pictures.*

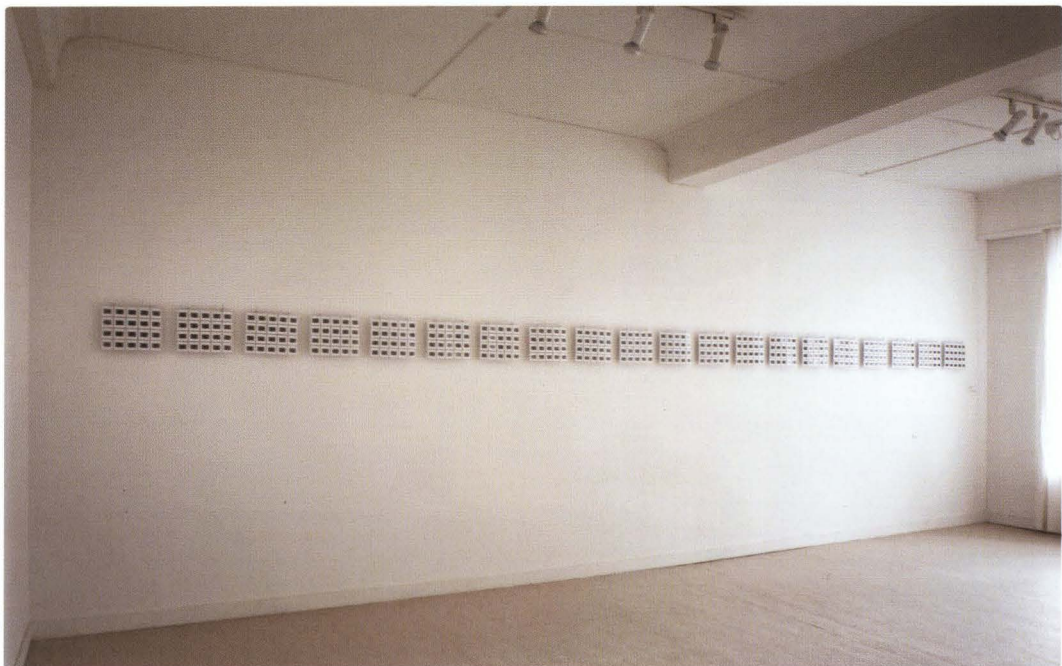
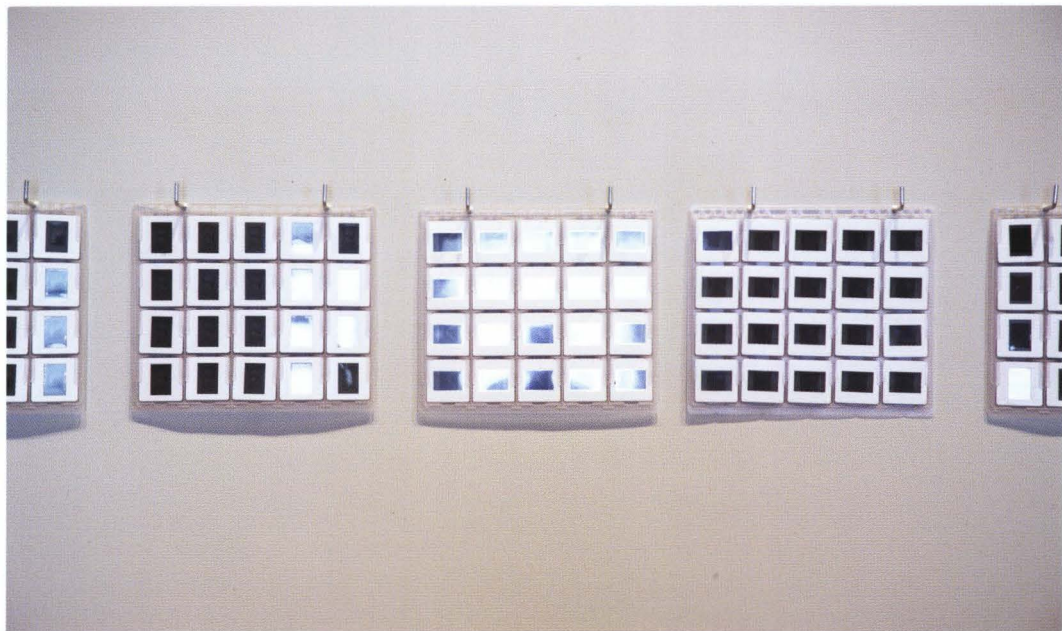


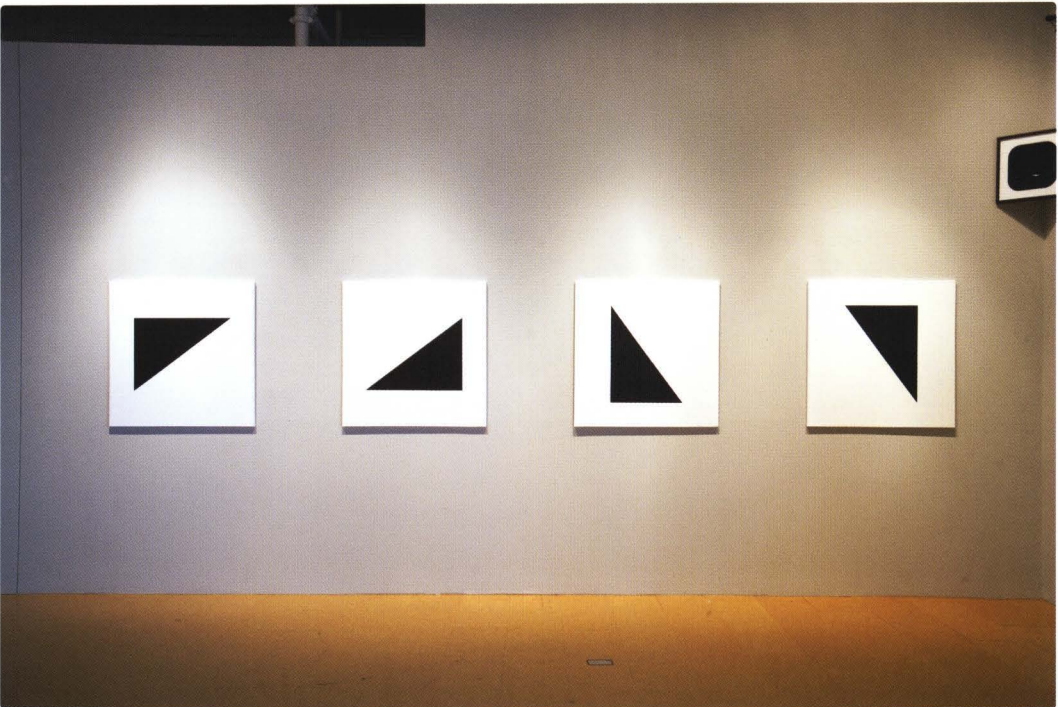
*Warm regards,  
Allen*

The editors wish to thank Marie Shannon for her guidance and help putting this section together. Knowing where in the archive to put one's finger on a particular image has been of immense help.

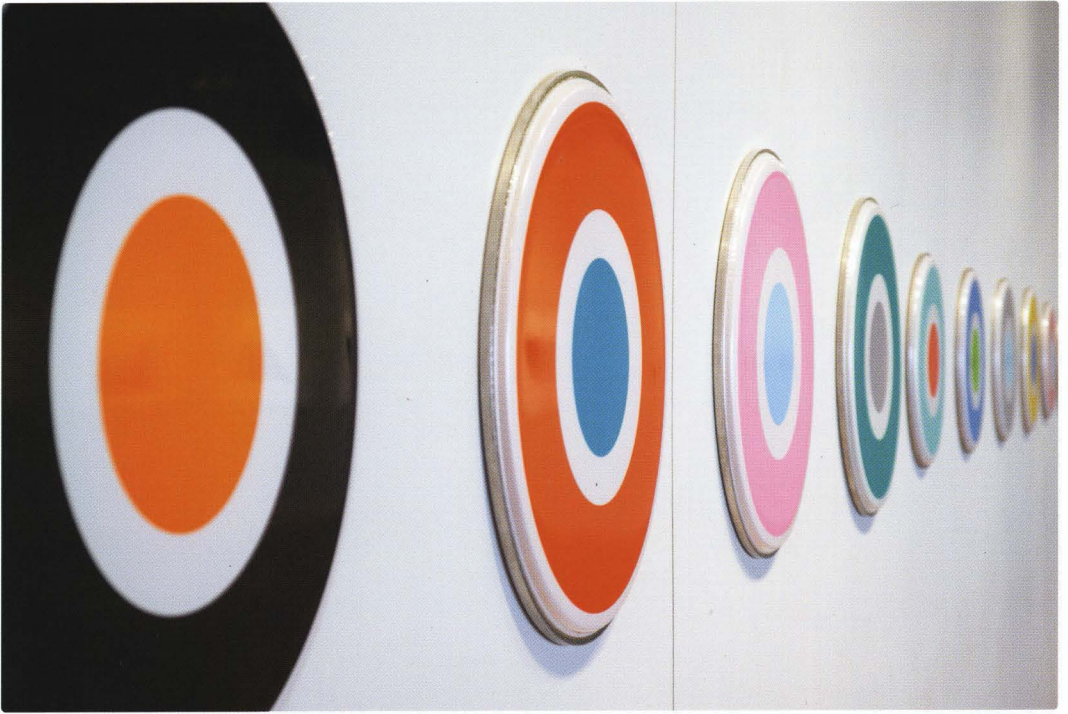




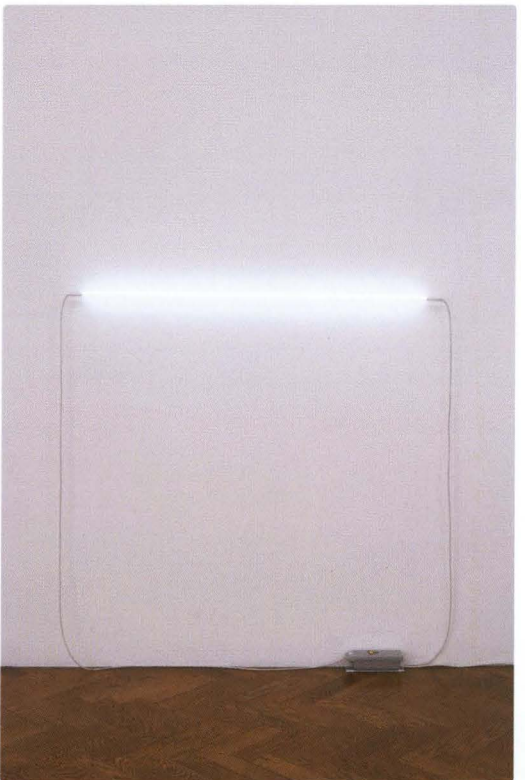
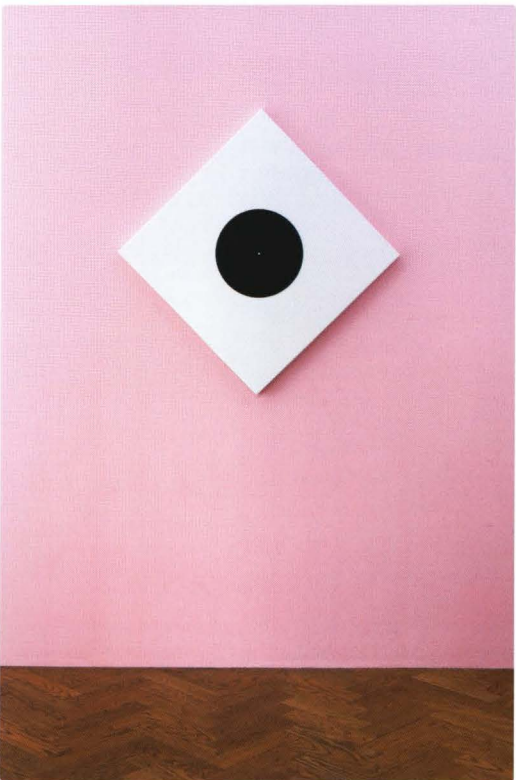
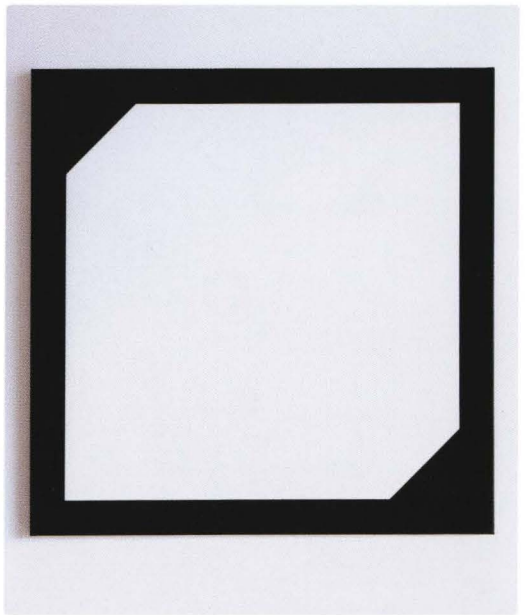
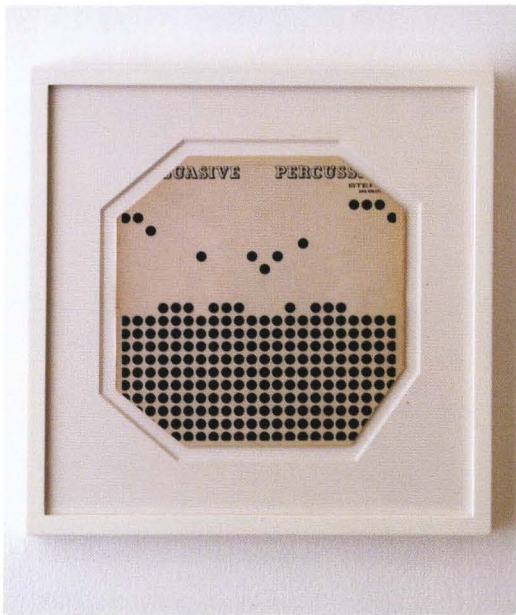












p33  
*The Anguses* in Smith's  
 Bookshop (opposite  
 Brooke/Gifford Gallery)  
 Christchurch  
 Photo: Peter Bannan

p34  
 TOP  
 Julian Dashper  
*Cass Altarpiece* 1986  
 Oil on canvas  
 2100 x 4515 mm  
 Chartwell Collection,  
 Auckland Art Gallery  
 Toi o Tāmaki

BOTTOM  
 Julian Dashper performing  
 in the Toss Woollaston  
 retrospective exhibition,  
 National Gallery of New  
 Zealand, February 1992

p35  
 TOP  
 Julian Dashper  
 Detail of *Untitled*  
 (Slides 46–65)

BOTTOM  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (Slides 46–65)*  
 1992  
 Exhibition view  
*Resource Proposal*  
 Sue Crockford Gallery,  
 1992

p36  
 TOP  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (1991)* 1991  
 Installation view  
*Midwestern Unlike You  
 and Me: New Zealand's  
 Julian Dashper*  
 Sioux City Art Center  
 Sioux City, Iowa, US  
 2005

BOTTOM  
 Installation view  
*Midwestern Unlike You  
 and Me: New Zealand's  
 Julian Dashper*  
 Sioux City Art Center  
 Sioux City, Iowa, US  
 2005

p37  
 Installation view showing  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (O)* 1990–1992  
 Acrylic on linen in the  
 exhibition *Thin Ice*  
 Stedelijk Museum  
 Amsterdam, 1999

p38  
 TOP  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled* 1996  
 Installation view  
*Midwestern Unlike You  
 and Me: New Zealand's  
 Julian Dashper*  
 Sioux City Art Center  
 Sioux City, Iowa, US  
 2005

BOTTOM  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (The Warriors)*  
 1998  
 Michael Lett Gallery,  
 Auckland

p39  
 TOP  
 Mark Kirby and Julian  
 Dashper in the exhibition  
*Dashper Again and Again*  
 Aratoi Wairarapa Museum  
 of Art and History  
 Masterton, 2006

BOTTOM  
 Elodie Lesourd  
*You May Know Him* 2009  
 (courtesy J Dashper)  
 Triptych  
 Acrylic on wood  
 420 x 170 cm  
 Exhibition view  
 IAC, Villeurbanne  
 Photo © Blaise Adilon

p40  
 TOP LEFT  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (Persuasive  
 Percussion)* 2009  
 Framed record cover  
 in the exhibition  
*Julian Dashper*  
 Sue Crockford Gallery,  
 2009

TOP RIGHT  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled* 2009  
 White on black square,  
 acrylic on canvas  
 1000 x 1000 mm  
 In the exhibition  
*Julian Dashper*  
 Sue Crockford Gallery,  
 2009

BOTTOM LEFT  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (2007–2008)*  
 2007–2008  
 Acrylic on canvas with  
 pink wall in the exhibition  
*Pretty Minimal*  
 Sue Crockford Gallery,  
 2008

BOTTOM RIGHT  
 Julian Dashper  
*Untitled (Neon piece)* 2008  
 Neon light and electrical  
 wire with transformer  
 in the exhibition  
*Pretty Minimal*  
 Sue Crockford Gallery,  
 2008

Fig. 1  
Michael Stevenson  
*The Gift (from 'Argonauts  
of the Timor Sea')* 2004–06  
Aluminium, wood, rope,  
bamboo, synthetic polymer  
paint, World War Two  
parachute and National  
Geographic magazines  
400 x 600 x 300cm  
Queensland Art Gallery,  
The Queensland  
Government's Gallery of  
Modern Art Acquisitions  
Fund, purchased 2007



# Acquiescence: Fluid Realities and Planned Retreat

*Nigel Clark*

## **Adrift**

It's a bright, balmy Sunday afternoon and I'm driving through the western outskirts of Auckland, New Zealand, the kind of place you never see on a postcard. No majestic mountains, no improbably green pastures – just a bland tangle of shopping malls and suburbia. I follow a dead-end street, past a rubber plant, a roofing company, a drainage service, and a plastics manufacturer, until I reach a white building behind a chain-link fence. Inside is a kernel of a nation within a nation – a sneak preview of what a climate change exodus looks like.<sup>1</sup>

So opens a special report by journalist Rachel Morris for *Mother Jones*, the influential left-leaning United States political magazine. The article, coinciding with the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, went on to speak about the church which is the hub of a migrant community of Tuvaluans, and about the predicament of the people who are now widely acknowledged as the world's first official climate change refugees. It was an apt choice. The tiny nation of Tuvalu, some 10,000 people living on six atolls and three reef islands, punched way above its weight at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15). Bringing a strand of negotiations to a halt, the Tuvaluan representatives led a coalition of small island states and least developed countries to propose what became known as the Tuvalu Copenhagen Protocol: the demand for a legally-binding deal on emission levels and for a 1.5 degrees Celsius target as the upper limit of tolerable warming – rather than the 2 degrees accepted by most of the rest of the world's nations.<sup>2</sup> Though the proposal was unsuccessful, Tuvalu attracted extensive media coverage and environmental activist support, a status reinforced by the island nation's own plan to trump the developed world by going fully carbon neutral by 2020.

As predicated sea level rises occur, low-lying Tuvalu and its neighbour Kiribati are expected to be among the first places to be rendered uninhabitable. Basic physics suggests this may already be inevitable. Because of its “thermal inertia” water takes longer to heat up and cool off than air does, so that even if greenhouse gas concentrations could be stabilised at their present level, the earth’s oceans would continue to warm and expand for at least another century.<sup>3</sup> As Kiribati President Anote Tong put it recently: “We may be at the point of no return”, before adding, “to plan for the day when you no longer have a country is indeed painful but I think we have to do that.”<sup>4</sup>

Tong’s announcement, made at the 2008 United Nations World Environment Day in Wellington, was intended to put pressure on Australia and New Zealand to accept his people for permanent resettlement. With a population some 10 times that of Tuvalu, Kiribati is in a precarious situation. It’s a dilemma that’s also profoundly problematic for much of the rest of the world. Beyond the immediate need for a future homeland, representatives of nation states like Kiribati and Tuvalu – which have made negligible contributions to atmospheric carbon dioxide levels – know that the charges they make against heavier carbon emitters are effectively unanswerable. As COP15 made apparent once again, there is as yet no effective and binding decision-making mechanism for dealing with the way that the actions of some people in some parts of the world are jeopardising the existence of others elsewhere. This is an ethical and political fault-line running right through the heart of the globalised modernity we have constructed for ourselves over the last few centuries. A crack that’s deep and inescapable. Or, as philosophers like to say, *abyssal*.

So much for flux, flotation and lightness: this is “...the sea whose sentence strikes like a leaden wave”, as poet J. R. Hervey put it –for unrelated reasons – back in the midst of our cultural nationalist phase.<sup>5</sup> Like it or not, that “sea-coast stuff” is back,<sup>6</sup> in a very different way, but once more posing questions of who “we” are, how we relate to land and ocean, who belongs and who are the strangers, and how we will encounter each other on our figurative and literal criss-crossings of the beach. The islands and landfalls theme is recuperated and re-imagined in expatriate New Zealand artist Michael Stevenson’s *The Gift* (2004), *Rakit* (2005) and *Argonauts of the Timor Sea* (2007): his series of playfully meticulous reworkings of an infamous voyage from Australia to the Indonesian Archipelago. In 1952 the successful but footloose and impecunious Australian-Scots painter Ian Fairweather made a solo crossing of the Timor Sea, setting out from Darwin where he had been dossing in an abandoned ship. On a self-assembled raft, poorly equipped, with no more than a library-acquired knowledge of navigation, Fairweather commended himself to the perilous currents and tides of the Timor – and rather miraculously washed up, 16 days later, on the small island of Roti. Here, the exhausted “argonaut” was taken in by villagers and nursed back to health.

At the heart of these shows is a serviceable reconstruction of the vessel *Fairweather* cobbled together out of driftwood and scrap, its flotation provided by empty fuel tanks from Japanese fighter planes, its sail a cast-off parachute (Fig. 1). No mere museumification, Stevenson surrounds the raft – “*rakit*” to the Roti Islanders – with an inventory of recreated documentary and ethnographic artifacts – which serve as navigational aids helping to bring this postwar Oceanic adventure into an open-ended conversation with the very different currents and flows of our own era. When *Fairweather* made his voyage, his requisitioning of World War Two flotsam for peaceable purposes may have had a certain swords-to-ploughshares ring to it, in our own climate jittery century, the recycling of aviation fuel containers to float a wind-powered vessel suggests another, just as recklessly hopeful, reappropriation.

As well as speaking to art’s own fraught negotiation between market forces and gift relations, Stevenson’s project raises broader questions about the turbulent interplay of tides and currents and winds, and how people respond to these elemental uncertainties. Aside from the pleasures of an improvisatory aesthetic, the real joy of Stevenson’s historical-ethnographic recuperation lies not only in the vehemently non-commercial logic of *Fairweather*’s travel strategy and of his economically marginal existence more generally, but in the island hospitality that appears to have saved his life. Today, its oil and gas deposits have turned the Timor Sea into contested territory, while the Australian navy and coast guard patrol these waters in order to thwart the boatloads of undocumented migrants who attempt the hazardous crossing to Australia. As Stevenson’s documentary evidence suggests, these desperate journeys not only reverse *Fairweather*’s passage, they also retrace the maritime migration of the very first settlers of the Southern continent. The difference being that today’s voyages usually end in arrest and detention.

But if the Timor Sea is already a site of life and death struggles to make landfall, if our Pacific neighbours are currently entreating us for new homelands, then what is likely to become of our encircling seas and beachheads when the hard-core realities of climate change really start to weigh in?

I was drawn to what Emma Bugden had to say in the previous issue of this journal about the concern with carbon emissions meaning that distance will likely matter for New Zealand cultural producers in new ways.<sup>7</sup> I also liked what Robert Leonard added a few paragraphs on: “With globalism, distance hasn’t gone away but been transformed, from something sublime and abstract to something concrete.”<sup>8</sup> I want to build on these observations by adding the further “concreteness” of another globality; one which not only cuts across but subtends the one we’ve been weaving together over the last few centuries.

Over much the same span that social thinkers have been finessing their theories of globalisation, geoscientists have been composing their own concepts of global interconnectedness. They have been developing a vision of the earth as a

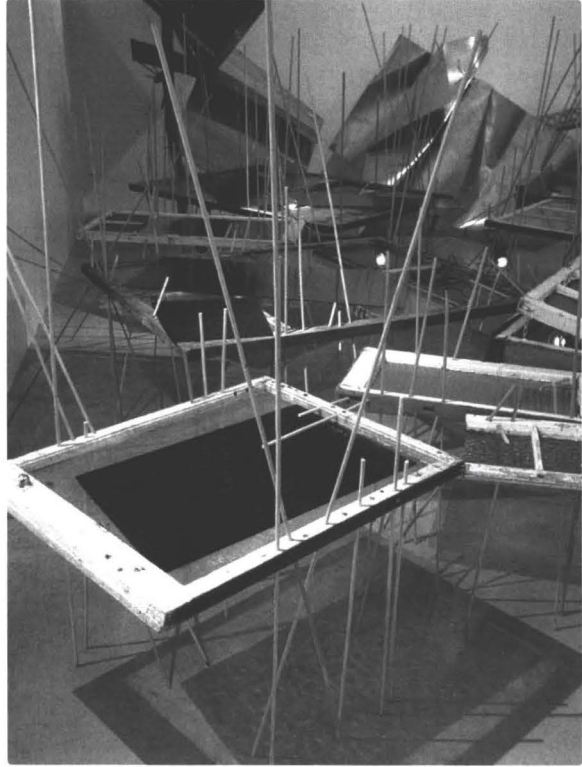
single, integrated and dynamic entity, a planet of rhythms and periodicities, thresholds and singularities. One in which here and there, now and then, are linked by vast circulations, conveyor belts and teleconnections.<sup>9</sup> The issue of climate change brings these two globalities – the deeper, much more ancient physical one and the newer, shallower social one – into proximity. However much it muddies the polemics of climate change politics, earth science cannot but help reminding us that anthropogenic inputs make a difference only because climate systems are inherently shifting and changeable, and that global climatic regimes have tipped and see-sawed many times in the human and prehuman past.

This is “the hulk of the world’s between” then, not as sublime artefact but as a body of substantive and dynamic forces.<sup>10</sup> On a planet where sea level periodically rises and falls by hundreds of metres, beaches and coastlines are not only symbolically-charged liminal zones but materially precarious junctures where rock, water, sunlight, air and life meet, sometimes violently. Which means that for the earth’s human inhabitants, the condition of being a “stranger” is not simply one that comes about as a result of our own mobility across the earth’s surface – Fairweather on his raft, ancestral Polynesian voyagers, today’s boatpeople – it is one which can occur as a result of the ordinary, ongoing transformations of the planet itself. Estrangement, that is, as an effect of the earth’s elements recomposing themselves while we try to stay more or less in place. And what kind of welcome, I want to ask, awaits those who have this sort of strangeness visited upon them?

### **Blue Displacement**

I was starting to think through the issue of climate change in relation to islands and coasts before I left New Zealand just over a decade ago – in the context of a little online show I put together called *Shrinking Worlds*.<sup>11</sup> Because there wasn’t much explicitly climate change-oriented art around then, I tried to assemble a story out of works with other aspirations. Though the results were mixed and the impact barely discernible, a few fortuitous juxtapositions nudged my thinking along. In particular there was a conversation between some “digital sketches” John Lyall generated while he was working towards his installation *Towards a Hyper-feral Art, Aotearoa: Picketing the Sublime; Given Both a Blue Displacement and an Illuminating Vessel* (1997) and the digitised versions of Michael Shepherd’s *East of Greenwich* (1996) and *Watermark (Tangaroa)* (1998) paintings. (My own spin on the sort of animated exchanges Lyall and Shepherd get up to in real life). In their own very distinct ways, both artists were engaging with the media through which Pacific islands were materially and symbolically constructed in the European expansionist phase, both probing the complicity of wide-eyed imaginings and hard-edged reason. Lyall’s images explored multiple facets of the idea of displacement, including that of marine vessels and of the painterly trope of a blue-green atoll – capable of being conveyed from one part of the globe to another (Fig. 2, Col. pl. 1). Shepherd’s

Fig. 2  
 John Lyall  
*Towards an Hyper-Feral  
 Art, Aotearoa: Picketing  
 the Sublime; Given Both  
 A Blue Displacement and  
 an Illuminating Vessel*  
 (detail) 1997  
 Installation view  
 Auckland Art Gallery  
 Toi o Tāmaki  
 Photograph: Jennifer  
 French



faux renditions of colonial documents spoke of an ordering imperative that charted, surveyed and stamped the South Sea Islands into officialdom even as it traded in the fantasy of a radiant paradise.<sup>12</sup>

In my own overheated imagination the “Savage Island” of Shepherd’s *East of Greenwich* – Niue as named and mapped by Captain Cook – and Lyall’s aquamarine displacement fused into a story of the gradual undoing of Pacific islands by the fallout of the same ordering and accumulative drive that saw their incorporation into the Western ratio. Cook had learned his trade serving on coal-carrying ships, and both the *Endeavour* and the *Resolution* were converted colliers – sturdy, shallow-drafted vessels designed to heft a good cargo. His voyages set out literally from the birthplace of the industrial revolution, from the time and the place of the coal-fired take-off which we now know to be the beginning of a self-reinforcing unearthing of sequestered carbon that would come to transform the globe in its entirety. Cook’s maps were so accurate that it is said that they are still used in more remote reaches of the Pacific, suggesting a representational currency that will remain sound all the way until global heating transforms the contours of sea and landform. And so, it seemed to me, there were two shock waves simultaneously unleashed from the epicentre of



industrial modernity, but moving at different velocities, one mapping the world into order and intelligibility, the other generating the disorder and unintelligibility that would one day render these same maps obsolete.

I was quite pleased with the idea of seeing the ocean as a medium of two distinct but implicated waves of transformation that ebbed around the earth and washed up on “our” beaches and coastlines. But already those insights feel like they belong to an earlier, simpler era, one in which the hard new facts of human-induced climate change seemed to declare the need for an about-turn in the destiny for our modernity, a time when we could point the finger unambiguously at the biggest, heaviest carbon emitters. This is, understandably, still the message of progressive climate change politics, and it still holds a lot of water. Anthropogenic climate change is indeed significant, and its causes are profoundly uneven in their historical, geographical and social distribution. The more complex picture, however, is of a global climate with cycles and rhythms and jitters at every conceivable spatio-temporal scale.

It’s a vision of islands which erupt, accrete, erode; continental landmasses that tilt and move and subduct beneath the earth; sea level that rises and plummets and is not even globally uniform at any one time. Perhaps the most disturbing revelation of the last decade or so in the earth sciences has been the gathering evidence of the speed at which climate has changed in the past. Each long wave movement in and out of an ice age now turns out to be rent by multitudes of rapid warmings and coolings that saw the temperature in some parts of the world shift by up to 15 degrees Fahrenheit (9.4 degrees Celsius) in a decade, and global weather tipped into a completely different state in as little as a few years. As glaciologist Richard Alley sums up: “for most of the last 100,000 years a crazily jumping climate has been the rule, not the exception.”<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 3  
Bettina Furnée  
*Lines of Defence* 2005  
Bawdsey, Suffolk  
February 12, 2005  
38 appliquéd flags on  
posts, year-long web-cast,  
photo archive, time-lapse  
film, [www.ifever.org.uk](http://www.ifever.org.uk)  
Photograph: Bettina  
Furnée/Dylan Banarse



Fig. 4  
Bettina Furnée  
*Lines of Defence* 2005  
Bawdsey, Suffolk  
October 15, 2005  
38 appliquéd flags on  
posts, year-long web-cast,  
photo archive, time-lapse  
film, [www.ifever.org.uk](http://www.ifever.org.uk)  
Photograph: Bettina  
Furnée/Dylan Banarse

“All a rubble-rattle at Time’s glacial push.”<sup>14</sup> ... There is evidence too that rapid climatic fluctuations contribute to other extreme earth processes. By reorganising the global distribution of water and ice, changes in climate can significantly alter the loading on the earth’s crust, adding to the stresses and strains that are always already present – and thereby increasing the likelihood of volcanoes, earthquakes, and the submarine landslides that trigger tsunamis. Even without abrupt climate change, we have had some reminders lately of these ongoing forces of the earth: the subsidence of a section of the ocean floor bigger than half the planet’s nation states that cost 300,000 lives, a hurricane that drowned a major city, a cyclone that left 150,000 dead, another that destroyed an entire coastal economy and damaged or destroyed a million and a half homes. These are human tragedies but they are also unexceptional sea-coast stuff, what happens habitually along the land-sea interface on a dynamic planet.

Even here in the UK where I now live – far from tectonic plate junctures, tropical cyclones and the climatic pulsing of the El Niño Southern Oscillation – the waterfront is a troublesome and insecure zone. On the southeast coast the land is naturally sinking as a long term response to the last glacial period. The thick ice sheets that covered the northerly reaches of the British Isles depressed the earth’s surface, and even though they have been gone for over six thousand years, the land is still rebounding. As the north of the islands gradually tip back up, so the southeast correspondingly drops down, resulting in ongoing encroachment by the sea. Bettina Furnée’s filmed installation *Lines of Defence* (2005) captures this process in action.<sup>15</sup> The work consists of 38 flags, each a metre apart and bearing a single letter that spells out the phrase “Submission is Advancing at a Frightful Speed” (Fig. 3, Col. pl. 2). Sited on a stretch of eroding beachfront on the Suffolk coast, the five rows of flags run inland from the cliff face. Photographed every 15 minutes for a year beginning on January 15 2005,

the resulting time-lapse film tracks the progressive advance of the sea and demise of the flags. The last one falls on September 16, marking the permanent loss of 14 metres of land in just eight months (Fig. 4, Cover image).

### **Global Flow, Planned Retreat**

“Planned” or “managed retreat” is the technical term for an environmental management strategy of permitting an eroding shoreline to recede at its own pace, sometimes involving deliberate breaching of former retaining walls and relocation of built structures.<sup>16</sup> Understandably, a policy of letting homes or settlements subside undefended into the sea is controversial, especially for those living on the front line. Here in England, as in Byron Bay in New South Wales, Australia and many other places on the global littoral, those whose land and lives are left unprotected tend to feel abandoned, and some residents have taken coastal defence into their own hands.

But if this is a big issue even before the oceans have manifest significant sea level increase, what can we expect with anticipated rises of up to two metres over the rest of this century, and the very real possibility of a seven metre rise if things go downhill rapidly in Greenland or West Antarctica? The concept of planned retreat, I want to suggest, might well be bound for a much broader applicability than current coastal management. The predicament of the people of Tuvalu, Kiribati and other low-lying islands will also be shared by millions living in deltas and other low elevation coastal regions.

Elsewhere even hastier retreats are being considered. A geologist colleague is currently working on an evacuation plan for the city of Padang on the west coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Padang recently suffered a devastating earthquake, but that wasn't the “big one” that earth scientists believe to be overdue. That fault-line where the India tectonic plate meets and slips beneath the Burma plate – the one that generated the Indian Ocean tsunami – is still “ripe” for further readjustment. Pressure continues to mount in the fault which runs along the sea floor off Sumatra and when the next subsidence event takes place, it is predicted that the citizens of Padang will have about 30 minutes to evacuate before the first tsunami washes over their city. Last time a killer tsunami struck, in 1797, Padang was a small village, and two people lost their lives. Now it's city of 750,000 people. My geologist friend is not optimistic.

Unfortunately this is not an unusual predicament, especially if cyclone surges are also taken into account. The same decades that have witnessed the emergence of an integrated model of dynamic earth processes in the geosciences have also seen unprecedented urban growth. Today over 630 million people live within nine metres of sea level, and this is where two-thirds of the world's cities with populations over five million are sited. Such expansion is a gamble on the stability of the earth, but the geological eye-blink over which these massive changes in human settlement patterns have occurred gives us no kind of proxy

for the full range of physical forces and dynamics operating in each region. In many cases, it's a wager that looks like it can't be won, making the need for hasty or gradual evacuation likely to emerge as one of the key urban issues of coming decades.

Planned retreat, along with its unruly near-relation, unplanned, chaotic or catastrophic flight, I want to argue, raises a whole set of issues for modern life that have until now been bypassed, downplayed, or treated as exceptions. Modernity, it hardly needs to be said, is about forward momentum, a uni-directional, linear advance. In classic modernity – during its “heavy” phase as Zygmunt Bauman refers to it, “all that is solid” might be made to “melt into air”, but it was assumed that things solidified again – in a new and improved way.<sup>17</sup> Only in the more recent “light” or “liquid” modernity, he suggests, is there a move away from assumptions of a single trajectory, as extensive advance and unending accretion gives way to more mobile, less enduring, more multi-directional transformations.

But liquidness is looking like an unfortunate figuring for an era when one of the most hardcore and intransigent forces we face is rising or surging sea level. The trouble with the narrative about modern individuals and organisations growing ever more fleet and flexible is that it's all about moving across the surface of the earth. Even if it's a decentred story, it still attributes most of the meaningful action to its human protagonists, leaving the ground they operate on out of the picture. Bauman's “capricious and whimsical powers of wind and water” are metaphors rather than substantive and momentous planetary forces.<sup>18</sup> And this means that his account is still far too heavily invested in the *social* visions of globalisation, and not conversant enough with the globality of the earth scientists. Those in the humanities who look also to the physical sciences know that flow is primarily a condition of the earth, the ground, the cosmos. As Gilles Deleuze put it some decades ago: “the hardest rocks become soft and fluid matter on the geological scale of millions of years.”<sup>19</sup> It's an idea he and Felix Guattari later began to develop into a fully-fledged “geophilosophy” – around the notion of “an earth (which) constantly carries out a movement of deterritorialisation on the spot”,<sup>20</sup> though they were unable to complete the planned project. Or as my colleague Doreen Massey explains, looking past the current enthrallment with human migration and interconnectivity – and on to the ancient manoeuvring of life, water, air and rock – this is “a planet that has ever been a global mobility.”<sup>21</sup>

On an earth that does its own deterritorialising, we don't simply skim across the surface, but must go with the flow, move with the rhythms, just to hold our ground. Furnee's *Lines of Defence* grasps this newer sense of the inherent flux and contingency of terrain, while also gesturing back at the classic modern adherence to permanence rather than permeability – with its duty to defend territory at all costs. “The erosion also threatens military installations built to repel German

invasion during World War Two, and the text makes clear the connections between the invasion of waves and the invasion of a nation,” as Bradon Smith and Benjamin Morris observe.<sup>22</sup> But as days and nights, tides and seasons flash past in Furnee’s film, and the sea relentlessly gnaws at the land, it is the older commitment to solid, bounded and enduring terrain that comes to appear precarious and provisional. As the flags fall, it is displacement that rules, and acquiescence that appears as much a part of life as advancement, laying claim or holding fast.

Acknowledging the need for planned retreat at a range of sites, scales and velocities is about confronting events far beyond our control, even beyond our comprehension. It’s about coming to terms with earth processes whose normal operation makes our tenure on the land intrinsically insecure, confronting forces and energies to which we must attune ourselves – and not the other way round. It’s a little too obviously a reversal of modernity’s forward drive – simple inversion being only the crudest form of deconstruction. But for the moment, the focus on retreat (whether planned or haphazard) works as a provocation. It speaks of losses that are not redeemable into new gains or opportunities, of limitations that cannot simply be overcome by lightening up and playing fast and loose. Most of all it affords flow a weightiness of its own, gives liquidness the depth and imponderability it deserves.

I think Robert Leonard is right about distance being transformed from something sublime to something concrete, and that goes as much for flow, mutability, becoming, and all those other currently popular process words. It’s worth remembering too that the very notion of sublimity, at least in its Kantian guise, may well have started out as a foil to the cruellest, harshest concreteness that the cosmos could throw at vulnerable beings. Long before his esteemed critical phase, Kant launched into commentary on the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, that fatal combination of seismicity and tsunami that demolished the Portuguese capital and sent literal and figurative shudders through Europe.<sup>23</sup> Considered at the time the most momentous event since the fall of the Roman Empire, the Lisbon disaster caught Europeans at a critical juncture when the old faith in the divine ordination of the world was growing shaky, and the modern sense of “sovereign” self was new and fragile. Kant himself felt the shock profoundly, and it has been argued that his later reprocessing of the encounter with extreme natural forces into the notion of the sublime was a way of redeeming the physical horror of Lisbon from a nihilating experience into an affirmative one.<sup>24</sup> Or to put it another way, the subject which Kant helped engineer started out as much a quivering refugee from volatile earth processes as a bold exponent of self-determination. Wild sea-coast stuff, we might say, sedimented into modernity at its core.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Portuguese capital was a European headland in every sense, with its cultural riches, cosmopolitan population, and strategic importance for the world’s seaways. For Enlightenment Europe, Lisbon’s fate mattered in a way that outweighed the destruction wrought by the tsunamis in

Morocco, the Madeira and Azores Islands or across the Atlantic in Antigua, Martinique and Barbados. At the other end of our modernity, the convergence of socio-political globalisation and physical globalism has helped democratise the shockwaves of a deterritorialising earth. Tuvalu and Kiribati can attract global attention, partly because the right for a nation-state not to be laid waste by the actions of others is at the heart of modern geopolitical lore, and in part because the fate of these islands is a premonition of trouble ahead for the rest of us. But this does not mean that distinctions between centre and periphery are melting away. At least not yet. In much the same way that the depths of floodwater during Hurricane Katrina uncannily followed the contours of the New Orleans' deepest poverty, the predicted effect of gradual global heating is to etch still more deeply the existing uneven geographical distribution of human life chances and vulnerabilities. According to simulation models, the loss of agricultural production due to excessive heat and drought will fall hardest on South Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Mexico and on the arid regions of Africa, while the already wealthy northern temperate regions look set to actually gain in productivity.<sup>25</sup>

Turn to the possibility of passing over a threshold and careering into a whole new global climatic regime and predictions get a lot more hazy. And grim. According to Gaia theorist James Lovelock, one of a growing number of scientists who believe that it may already be too late to avoid dropping over the tipping point, New Zealand looks like one of the best places on the planet to be. Temperate, isolated and relatively thinly populated, these islands are well-positioned to sustain viable agriculture and settlement, and could therefore function as a "lifeboat for humanity".<sup>26</sup> Once more it seems, we are to be "banned by tides from the sorrows of continents".<sup>27</sup> But as Lovelock warned in a recent lecture, the world of abrupt climate change will be one of massed and desperate displacements, so New Zealanders and other fortuitously placed peoples had best be ready to defend their borders.

Or as Allen Curnow once put it: "Always to islands danger/ Is what comes over the sea".<sup>28</sup> And so the old island and landfall topos lives on. One way or another New Zealand's insularity, its global positioning, its terrestrial and marine contours look likely to matter afresh, if in ways we cannot predict. But all that antipodean yearning for belonging, security and identity was fraught enough the first time round, without redeeming it for an apocalyptic and survivalist agenda. "Man alone" possessing and possessed by the land like a jealous lover was one thing but a whole nation alone in a hostile world, defending to the death its accidental geographical gifts is hardly a future to relish. And feels a little too much, in its yawning catastrophism, like another bout of sublimity. This is when Michael Stevenson's take on one very alone man and his fate emits its gentle signal of hope. An emaciated and wild-eyed stranger comes to an island from somewhere over the sea, unanticipated, uninvited, barely able to stand upright. But he is looked after, made welcome, offered a place to stay while he gets his bearings...

### **Exorbitant Generosity: Looking Out, Giving Way**

“Hospitality is culture itself”, Jacques Derrida once said.<sup>29</sup> It is a theme he returned to in response to the welcome he received on a wintery afternoon in August 1999 at the Waipapa Marae at the University of Auckland. “As soon as you authorised me to cross the threshold I had a feeling that I experienced a moment of hospitality which is for me absolutely unforgettable”,<sup>30</sup> professed a visibly moved Derrida in his reply to the tangata whenua (hosts). In recalling the powhiri (welcome), Lawrence Simmons, Heather Worth and Graham Smith aptly remind us of the welcome that the French explorer de Surville and his scurvy-ailing crew received from the Māori community 230 years earlier. “It is easy to imagine the joy felt by our unhappy crew at finding themselves among people who had already treated us with humanity”, as one of de Surville’s officers recorded at the time.<sup>31</sup>

Today, in political discourses around the environment, it is the offer of a new home to the Tuvaluan people by the government of New Zealand that grabs the attention. This reception is referred to again and again as the first official acknowledgement of the plight of climate change refugees – thus setting a precedent for responding to the many displacements to come. It would be gratifying, of course, to be at the cutting edge of hospitality in the era of accelerating anthropogenic environmental change. If I’m not mistaken, however, Tuvaluans actually enter New Zealand selectively and very conditionally, as part of the small annual quota under the Pacific Access Category, which nowhere mentions environmental refugees.<sup>32</sup> To be eligible for residency, individuals must be between the ages of 18 and 45. Given that children and the elderly look to be left at the mercy of the elements, it’s a long stretch to read this as a political or ethical breakthrough.

Meanwhile Kiribati’s petitioning of New Zealand and Australia for the provision of a new home has so far been unsuccessful. It’s important to add that the people of both Tuvalu and Kiribati are uncomfortable with the label of “refugees”, partly because of its connotations of persecution – and hence disrespect for their own governments – and in part because of the way it is taken to be suggestive of victimhood, passivity and helplessness. The refugee-asylum rhetoric has been further tainted for the Tuvaluans by the unpopular and rejected proposal of the Howard administration to locate an Australian offshore detention centre on one of their islands.<sup>33</sup> For the moment, the preference in Kiribati and Tuvalu is to build up social and economic networks in potential host countries. More so than seeking refuge, this is seen to be in keeping with the mobility and networking, that, as Epeli Hau’ofa showed so eloquently in *Our Sea of Islands*, has always played a significant role in Pacific social and material life.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly for these island peoples and their supporters there is trade-off between the punchy, sound-biting story about big greenhouse polluting

nations rendering their homelands uninhabitable, and the more complex tale of ongoing environmental variability, ancient histories of migration and adaptation to changing conditions, and the mixed motives of contemporary migrants. There is another tension, however, which may ultimately be even more consequential. At global forums like COP15 all negotiating parties are compelled to play a numbers game, to partake in discourses of per capita emission, gross domestic product, greenhouse gas levels, carbon trading and capping, technology transfer and the like. It is this commitment to calculativity, this economic logic of linking causes to effects and inputs to outputs that is perhaps modernity's most definitive trait – the disposition that transcends any distinctions between heaviness and lightness, rigidity or flexibility. And nowhere is the cost-benefit analytic more pervasive than in the arena of climate change politics: the realm where every quantum of energy expended, every atmospheric particle set in motion calls for quantification and apportioning.

But this is where the notion of an inherently dynamic planet and the idea of hospitality might be brought into a strange and hopeful proximity. As even the most number-crunching geoscientists readily admit, this planet of ours exceeds all attempts at calculation and prediction: its tangle of feedback effects, singularities and emergent properties generating an eventfulness that will forever surprise us. Our planet, in other words, is ultimately unknowable because it is constantly inventive. Likewise, theorists of hospitality and generosity speak of the arrival of a stranger as an event that overflows all programmatic understanding, the incoming of the other breaking through our familiar circuits of knowability and anticipation. Moreover, if discourses of hospitality confound economic logic with the incalculable advent of the stranger, so too do the new contemporary earth sciences trace the contours of a world whose variabilities and volatilities will sooner or later give rise to “estrangement”. And perhaps this is why those who live habitually with the irregular rhythms and precariousness of oceans or deserts or ice floes tend to make such a virtue of hospitality, of welcoming those who are strange or estranged.

This then, is my other *acquiescence*: not just giving ground to the inevitable upheavals of the earth, but giving way, giving in, being moved by the predicament of others under duress. There is, of course, no easy fit, no necessary complicity, no obligatory passage between a convulsive planet and a warm welcome. It is just the scene of another invention, one more reworking of the materials offered by real and imaginary reefs and floating islands. Today, the sea-coast, the global littoral, appears more than ever the site of contestation, of uncertainty and of perplexing encounters. Even if the actual meetings rarely occur literally on the beach but are played out in suburban streets, in detention centres or immigration departments, at conference negotiating tables or on Internet bulletin boards.

The old literary and artistic culture of outcast eyes looking longingly seaward, as Francis Pound pointed out, tended to be as much about craving for an answering gaze or voice than it was about really getting to grips with ocean, winds, rocks and stuff.<sup>35</sup> It was about the need to be recognised by the rest of the world, a desire always ensnared with a yearning to be appreciated on the domestic front: about a dual alienation of cultural producers feeling unloved at home and unnoticed abroad. It's that link between insularity and estrangement, between the specificities of landform and the complications of landfall and arrival that I want to hang on to: to ratchet up rather than let go. By making an issue out of the concrete, dynamical and precarious nature of the interface between land and sea, by stressing that this blue-green planet unsettles as a matter of course (and may now be in the process of unsettling more than ever) we return to the figure of the stranger.

Putting vulnerable bodies and volatile earth processes in proximity takes us back as much as forward, reminding us that the oldest gift, the most enduring of all gifts, may be the offering of a stable ground, a place to rest for those whose worlds have let them down. It's a reminder not only that the gift is always embodied but also that the bodies which give and take are always more or less "earthed". As Alphonso Lingis puts it, the primordial act of generosity or hospitality is the welcome offered by one who still stands upright to another who has lost their footing: "The fatigue, the vertigo, and the homelessness in his or her body appeals for the force of terrestrial support from those whose earthbound bodies have the sense of this earth and this terrain to give."<sup>36</sup>

But the whole question of hospitality, its convoluted ethics and politics, is never simply a matter of those who are grounded and secure welcoming the bereft and the groundless. For one thing, it is the act of offering hospitality, of being able to welcome others, that helps makes us feel we are at home, and that the ground we inhabit is indeed "supportive". Which makes giving way part of the trick of standing upright here – or anywhere. But then again, playing host to a stranger or one who has been estranged by events is also a reminder that all of us are vulnerable and exposed, and that being at home, having terrestrial support to offer, is always to some degree provisional. And that the roles of host and guest are not fixed for all time but apt to change places.

As we well know, European explorers – Cook, de Surville and many others – relied heavily on local hospitality to stay upright and afloat in the Pacific, as did so many later visitors and settlers. There is no region with a prerogative on generous gestures, as Michel Serres has noted in relation to the pronouncements of Marcel Mauss and other ethnographers of the gift: "Was it necessary", he asks, "to wander three centuries over the glaucous eye of the Pacific to learn slowly from others what we already knew ourselves, to attend overseas the same archaic spectacles we stage every day on the banks of the Seine...?"<sup>37</sup>

Mauss's point was that the gift relations of the Pacific set in train relations of reciprocity or counter-giving: rendering them less an alternative to economic relations as a primitive precursor of rational, calculated exchange.<sup>38</sup> Which once again leaves Europe the cultural-economic headland and the rest of the world playing catch-up. But the circuits of gifting and exchanging that Stevenson traces and enacts around the globe know of no such centre. Just as the islanders divided up the aluminium tanks and other raw materials of Fairweather's original "rakita" amongst themselves, so too has Stevenson's reconstructed raft been sold on to a German collective, who will themselves be breaking it up and distributing it amongst their members. And in this way, both gift and economic exchange play through each other, neither being privileged, just as centre and so-called periphery meet, transact, change places. Serres's musings, too, are perhaps less an insistence about what Europeans should have learned at home, and more an admission that there are concepts of giving and exchanging that are capable of travelling – practices that might bridge the geographical divide between the old metropole and the Pacific. Or so we might surmise, knowing that Serres is a former sailor whose feel for the ocean and the generative force of its wanderings is perhaps unique amongst contemporary philosophers.

Today, back in the aquamarine eye of the Pacific, a blue displacement is in process that in its own way promises to perturb the closed circuitry of exchange and the obsessive accounting for debts and liabilities. Without yet any firm offer of a new home, and believing increasingly in its coming demise, Kiribati has made a gesture for which there can be no reciprocation. The Pacific nation recently created the world's largest (and only deep ocean) marine reserve. Covering 410, 500 square kilometres – more than double the area which the Kiribati administration pledged to set aside at a 2006 United Nations biodiversity conference – the protected zone contains some of the planet's richest coral reef ecosystems.<sup>39</sup> Oceanographer and climatologist James McCarthy described the establishment of the reserve as a "remarkable gift to the world", while Kiribati President Anote Tong said of the decision: "It was an opportunity to make that last stand. It was our contribution to humanity."<sup>40</sup>

Next to the parsimonious and instrumental parleying that predominates in global climate change politics, Kiribati's prodigious bequeathing of marine real estate breathes a new logic. While the gesture may not be entirely devoid of self-interest but there's something excessive and profoundly an-economic about responding to the prospect of territorial loss with an ever bigger territorial offering. "And whatever islands may be/Under or over the sea,/It is something different, something/Nobody counted on."<sup>41</sup> A giving away rather than a giving in, Kiribati's perpetual endowment flips planned retreat into abyssal generosity: giving back the un-territorialised sea that the first Pacific argonauts once criss-crossed into known existence – the welcoming ocean in which Fairweather still put his faith.

Again, it's not a world away from Paris. Or at least not from the most contrary leanings along the Left Bank. Georges Bataille, for one, would have loved it. As Allan Stoekl has recently argued, in a long overdue revisiting of Bataille's work for the age of ecology:

Just as in *The Accursed Share*, where the survival of the planet will be the unforeseen, unintended consequence of a gift-giving (energy expenditure) oriented not around weapons build-up but around a squandering (give-away) of wealth, so too in the future we can posit sustainability as the unintended aftereffect of a politics of giving.<sup>42</sup>

What Bataille might not have guessed was that such an extravagant act of generosity would come from one of the "poorest" countries on earth. That exorbitance would erupt from the periphery. But at a time when the juncture between land and sea is becoming ever more agitated, it might just be those places whose histories are already deep in wild sea-coast stuff who are most willing to let loose, those who are most familiar with the ebb and flow of terrestrial boundaries who might just dream up some forms of give and take fitting for the age of acquiescence.

For those of us sojourning on the bigger islands to the south, there was a time recently when new forms of connectivity and reciprocity had begun to look favourably our way. But just when "those endless seas were starting to shrink" in a metaphorical sense,<sup>43</sup> we discovered that climate change was literally expanding the oceans. What forms of home-coming and estrangement, what relationships between hosts and guests will emerge from this liquidation of our modernity remain to be seen, but it looks like our tendency to be "teased into inventiveness by the sea" is only just warming up.<sup>44</sup> Stevenson's beguiling inventory of oceanic gifts and maritime improvisations keeps this imperative alive and buoyant. But the "in-vent-ion" he affirms above all else is a literal in-coming. Not another "local production" like the old self-possessed nationalist striving, but the event of a visitation from beyond, a never-fully-foreseeable arrival from elsewhere. Fairweather's initials emblazoned on the parachute sail (that other cipher of dropping in from nowhere) are a bold and simple "IF", pointing at the very possibility of another future: "providing you open yourself, trembling, on the 'perhaps'."<sup>45</sup> To commend oneself to the uncertainty of the elements and to welcome the stranger are both primordial ways of embracing the unknown. And today they are back, together, and with a blazing new intensity, as we all face the monstrous "if" of unstable ground, heavy weather and rising seas.

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5. J.R. Hervey, "Two Old Men Look at the Sea", in *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, ed. Allen Curnow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 130.
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35. Francis Pound, "Silence, Solitude, Suffering, and the Invention of New Zealand (A fictitious story)," *Interstice 1* (1991).
36. Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 128–9.
37. Michel Serres, *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 13.
38. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (London: Routledge, 2002 1st 1950).
39. David Fogarty, "Kiribati Creates World's Largest Marine Reserve," *Reuters UK*, February 14, 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKSP2310320080214>.
40. James McCarthy and Anote Tong cited in Natasha Whitney, "Kiribati Leader Cites Toll of Climate Change," *The Harvard Crimson*, September 23, 2008, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=524174>.
41. Allen Curnow, "The Unhistoric Story," in Curnow, 202.
42. Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion and Sustainability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 142.
43. Francis Pound, "Distance Looks Our Way," in *Distance Looks Our Way/10 Ten Artists from New Zealand*, ed. Mary Barr (The Trustees, Distance Looks Our Way Trust: New Zealand, 1992), 26.
44. Curnow, 60.
45. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997), 70. See also Geraldine Barlow, "Argonauts of the Timor Sea," *Broadsheet* 33, no.3, [http://www.cacsa.org.au/cvapsa/2004/8\\_B533\\_3/argonauts.pdf](http://www.cacsa.org.au/cvapsa/2004/8_B533_3/argonauts.pdf).



Figs. 1-3  
Film stills from  
*The Lottery of the Sea*  
2006  
Dir. Allan Sekula  
180 mins, colour, sound  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Christopher Grimes  
Gallery, Santa Monica

# Allan Sekula's *The Lottery of the Sea*

Mercedes Vicente

The opening sequence of Allan Sekula's *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006) is a close-up of a material substance, black, amorphous, painterly and textural, abstract (Fig. 1). It could be anything, yet this opening shot triggers the narrative and serves as an allegory for the sequence of images to come, assuming an iconic dimension. The abstract substance is oil: the one commodity at the nexus of global development and devastation, and the spectre that haunts the world's ongoing wars in Iraq and elsewhere (think Niger Delta, Georgia, Chechnya). Oil is the catalyst of the film and stands for the quality of certain commodities: "invisibility". The film's voiceover asserts, "The commodities we don't think about. Heavy, omnipresent, uniform in composition, but largely invisible",<sup>1</sup> and later continues, "Within twenty years [of Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil* published in 1927], oil became both crucial and invisible."<sup>2</sup>

Two more sequences complete the film's brief visual prelude: a baby fish preserved in wax being sliced in thin layers by a microtome machine for samples to be tested under a microscope (Fig. 2), and cargo containers docked in a port (Fig. 3). These three cryptic, apparently unrelated images summarise the film's themes: oil, the fishing industry and the exploitation of the sea's resources, and the emergence of the cargo container as an emblem of new transnational capitalist economies. All along the soundtrack plays Phil Ochs' *The Scorpion Departs and Never Returns* (1969), a protest song about the sinking of United States' nuclear submarines. The song is not a moral condemnation of the existence of nuclear weapons, but rather an ode to the anxiety that they create in the individual with an overarching existentialist tone.<sup>3</sup>

*The Lottery of the Sea* unfolds around a series of locations and events involving ports and maritime places around the world (Galicia, Yokohama, Panama, Los Angeles, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Athens, New York), addressing issues of geopolitical conflict that govern globalisation and the sea. The film's narrative relies heavily on the oil spill off the coast of Galicia, Spain, and ends with the speculative real estate development of Barcelona's littoral, which occurred under the guise of accommodating the city's 2004 Cultural Forum. Throughout, there are a number of detours: Chinese seafarers buying used cameras and electronics at shipside in the port of Yokohama, office buildings along the Piraeus waterfront and the Panamanian Registry, the ancient "agora" in Athens and its flea market, a "millionaires' fair" in Amsterdam, African construction workers in Lisbon, and anti-war and anti-corporate demonstrations in cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Barcelona. These digressive, drifting scenes build the tone and the social and political fabric of the global themes the film touches upon: war, free markets, democracy.

1.

The first image is of the Prestige oil spill incident off the Galician coast. The sinking of an oil tanker in November 2002 caused the pollution of thousands of kilometres of coastline in Spain and France, making it the largest environmental disaster in Spain and one that severely damaged its fishing industry.<sup>4</sup> The Prestige is an exemplar of the kind of disastrous scenario that can result from the murky governance of today's globalised capital, further heightened by the "borderless" nature of the sea. The Greek-operated, Bahamas-flagged oil tanker had a Liberian owner and had been chartered by a Swiss-based Russian oil company. It was classed by the American Bureau of Shipping and insured by the London Steam-Ship Owners' Mutual Insurance Association, a ship owners' mutual known as the London Club. Disagreements between the Spanish, French and Portuguese governments, none of which allowed the tanker to dock in their ports, caused further damage, as the ship gradually deteriorated and eventually sank, releasing over 20 million gallons of crude oil into the sea.

We hear in the film that Greek-operated ships are those carrying the "invisible" goods: cement, oil, coal, scrap metal, steel. The voiceover denounces the "attenuated and disguised" nationality, saying,

The flag flying from the stern is Liberian, or Panamanian—nations created by the United States—or that of other desperately poor countries: the Marshall Islands, Cambodia, even landlocked Bolivia ... All of this saves money, avoids regulation, makes it harder to assign blame when accidents happen ... American lawyers working for the shipping industry invented this convenient system of disguises, institutionalizing it after the Second World War, and helping the Greeks to rebuild their shattered merchant fleet from the immense surplus left over from the great convoys of the North Atlantic.<sup>5</sup>

It goes without saying that the Prestige case, despite the scale of its environmental damage, would do nothing to change the state of these affairs. At the end of film the voiceover concludes, "A year after the Spanish oil spill, the union of Greek shipowners is still defending self-regulation: no double hulls, no compulsory retirement for old ships."<sup>6</sup>

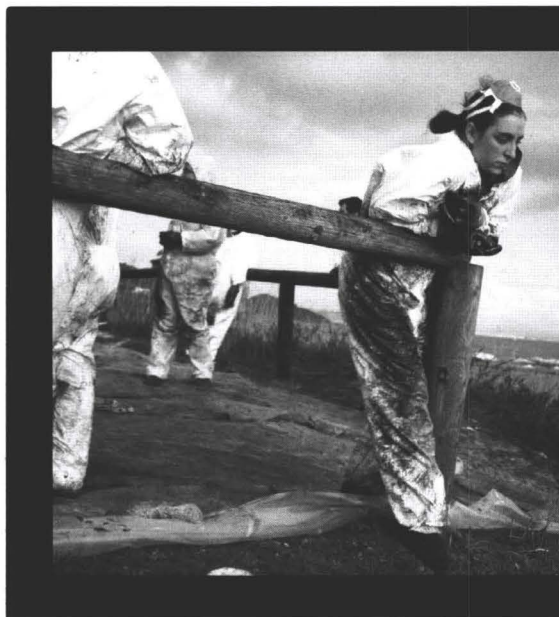
For Sekula, the Prestige incident also touches on the subject of global activism. Immediately after the disaster and in response to the passivity of the Galician and Spanish Governments (both under the rule of Partido Popular, or PP, Spain's right wing party), thousands of volunteers travelled from all over the country and organised themselves to clean the affected coastline, with no governmental help. That the population that came to save the situation was mainly made up of college students makes it a tale of hope in a new generation, forceful, engaged and altruist, that genuinely cares and takes action. This brings to mind the Seattle anti-corporate protesters of Sekula's photographic document *Waiting for Tear Gas* (1999–2000). As in the later example, the Prestige incident presents some hope; a shift is felt in the world's power relations when a citizenry demonstrates the capacity to organise itself and take direct action in response to the ineptitude and ethical failings of politicians and their governments.

Belonging to a generation of student radicals in 1960s America, Sekula is drawn to the subject of activism. Portraying the Seattle anti-corporate protesters, Sekula pays homage to the volunteers (keeping politicians at bay), who spearhead a new kind of popular resistance to the rising hegemony of neo-liberal ideology. Here they are portrayed as working tirelessly, making common cause with the local sailors and inhabitants of the affected villages, who reciprocate by taking them into their homes and feeding them. Sekula depicts this as an organic (if insufficient) solution that stands in stark contrast to the lack of resolve of the governments who underestimated the scale of the problem and disregarded their responsibility while arguing over who was to blame.

The film recognises that this shift in the power relations between people and governments may have set a precedent, leading ultimately to Partido Popular's election loss as a result of the country's democratic retribution for the government's lies around the perpetrators of the 3/11 terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2003. In the following days leading to the elections on 17 March, the PP kept attributing the attacks to the Basque terrorist group ETA rather than to Al-Qaeda, in an attempt to defer potential backlash for the party's alliance – despite the country's overwhelming opposition – with the US administration in the war in Iraq. On 15 February 2003, Spaniards joined worldwide anti-war marches with the largest participation in the world,<sup>7</sup> evidence of the robust state of the country's democracy.

*The Lottery of the Sea* moves from June 2001 through August 2004, and picks up on this momentum and the sense of urgency felt in the United States and Europe.

Fig. 4  
Allan Sekula  
*Volunteer watching,  
volunteer smiling*  
(Isla de Ons, 12.19.02)  
2002–2003  
Cibachrome diptych,  
edition of 5, AS069  
26 1/2 x 67 3/4 inches  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Christopher Grimes  
Gallery, Santa Monica

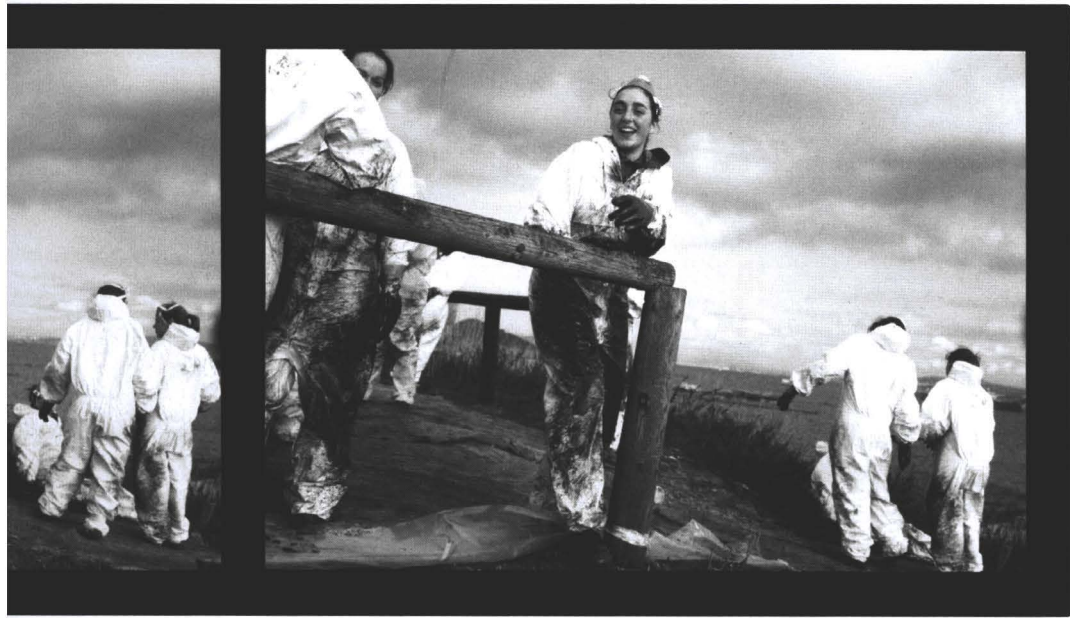


Democracy is the underlying theme throughout the film, and appears on numerous occasions. It is introduced early on in the stopover in Athens and speaking of ancient “agora” as the “legendary birthplace of democracy, stepping-stones of philosophy, market stalls of small traders, political platforms.”<sup>8</sup>

Hence, though the film project begins during the presumably “innocent” summer of 2001, it is caught in the dramatic political turn and aftermath of 9/11. Sekula shuns the US government’s rhetoric of the “war on terror” and instead sets out to find clues to the emerging crisis of globalisation – the construction of a unified world market under the United States’ benevolent gaze, at the expense of the wealth of poor countries and their people – choosing a marginal and overlooked subject, the sea. Sekula’s voiceover asserts,

So now three years into ‘the war on terror’, the American Navy asserts its right to board the thousands of ships flying the Panamanian and Liberian flags searching for weapons of mass destruction ... amidst the bags of tapioca and the giant rolls of newsprint ... Anxiety and fear take charge, and the port retreats into enforced invisibility, no longer a theater of the world’s connectedness.<sup>9</sup>

The destruction of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001 appears in the background, as another symptom of the developing globalisation crisis, along with the worldwide anti-corporate and anti-war demonstrations. The voiceover introduces “the great anecdotalist and sloganeer” Ronald Reagan, inconspicuously proclaiming the undisputable sovereignty of the United States in a radio speech,



The Panama Canal Zone is sovereign United States territory just as much as Alaska is, as well as the states carved from the Louisiana Purchase. We bought it, we paid for it, and General Torrijos should be told “We’re going to keep it.”<sup>10</sup>

Sekula’s involvement with the Prestige case dates from a commission in 2003 by Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia*, to document the incident. It was published in the newspaper’s weekly magazine *Cultura/s* under the titled “Marea Negra: Fragmentos para una Opera” (*Black Tide: Fragments for an Opera*).<sup>11</sup> Sekula sees an affinity in photography and the documentary with democracy, and in newsprint the democratic (and ideological) associations that the museum as a more elitist institution lacks. The newspaper also offers an experience similar to Sekula’s version of his photo works in the form of books, and one that naturally invites text and reading.

In *Marea Negra*, Sekula addresses the Prestige episode with the gravity of an epic. The photographs are mostly quiet, poetic portraits of the heroic, altruistic volunteers, the fishermen and the people of Galicia who took the responsibility avoided by the governments, and with their hands and bodies cleaned up the results of an act of intolerable negligence (Figs. 4 and 5). The portraits of single subjects or groups of people come in diptychs or triptychs, recording a moment at work or at rest, with the subject rarely appearing to be posed for the camera. They capture a certain stillness and convey an introspective, sober mood. Alongside these, long-distance landscape shots complete the series. They signal working activity but here the landscape and work machinery are more prominent than

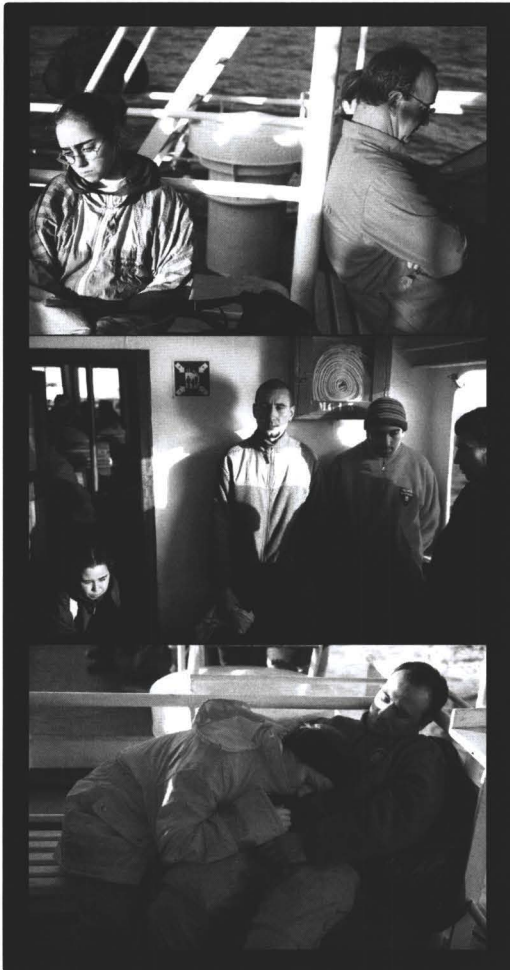


Fig. 5  
Allan Sekula  
*Exhausted volunteers*  
(en route from Isla de Ons,  
12.19.02) 2002–2003  
Cibachrome print,  
edition of 5, AS079  
66 3/4 x 34 3/4 inches  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Christopher Grimes  
Gallery, Santa Monica

the workers. This sequence of images is a reaction against the type of mass media representation of sensational photojournalism that seeks out the one dramatic shot that encapsulates the whole story. Instead they continue Sekula's attempt to keep away from the individual frame that individuates both the photographer and the subject.<sup>12</sup> Despite the exceptional singularity of each photograph, they build in significance as the sequence unfolds, capturing in their subject's faces an unaffected representation of the volunteers' heroism. Likewise in *The Lottery of the Sea*, Sekula continues his characteristic "rule of thumb for this sort of anti-photojournalism: no flash, no telephoto zoom lens, ... , no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image".<sup>13</sup> Yet in the video's long sequences, one stays with the subject, allowing us to see in detail and in time, the arduous conditions of the volunteers' Sisyphean labour, shovelling sludge off oil-stained beaches, the oil washing up on the shore by the waves again and again.

## 2.

The use of extensive sequences of photographs, combined with written texts and slide projections, starting with *Untitled Slide Sequence* in 1972, has been a way for Sekula to re-examine and re-invent documentary techniques that are closer to cinema, while avoiding what he calls “the dictatorship of the film projector”. Choosing slide projections as formats between photography and cinema, Sekula has described them as “a kind of primitive cinema, unable to synthesize movement”.<sup>14</sup> He describes *Aerospace Folktales* (1973), a conceptual photographic work with text, as a “disassembled movie”. Photographs have often been accompanied by texts written by the artist, in an interplay complementing one another, and to emphasise the idea of the *ensemble*.<sup>15</sup>

In order to resist reducing the image to the model of the text, and the text to the model of the image, his photographs are organised sequentially. Sequential organisation with parallel texts is for Sekula what allows the photographic work to function as a novel or film might, yielding a more complex level of formal unity. However, as he indicates, the openness of the sequential ensemble constitutes a crucial divergence from cinema and the visual-verbal heterogeneity of elements marks a difference from the novel. Sequences also “allow one to register time according to intervals of varying duration, and thus invite, for example, the absurd challenge of a work about the fluidity of the sea and capital by means of a static medium.”<sup>16</sup>

In Sekula's use of moving image in *The Lottery of the Sea*, the de-synchronisation of the simultaneous textual narratives and images reinforces the incompatibility of word and image. Neither the footage nor the voiceover text appear chronologically, nor are these synchronised in time or geographies (a caption reads “Yokusuka, Japan, June 2001”, while the voiceover announces “two and a half years later the ‘war on terror’ has yet to be declared”), treating the geographic space and time as a continuum. This also suggests a complex sense of economic and geopolitical interconnectness. Sekula explains,

To use the terms of Roland Barthes' early writings on photography, the goal is not a semantic ‘anchoring’ of the indeterminacy of the image through a news-caption-like instrumentality of the text, but rather a ‘relay’ between the text and image that raises the work to a higher power of complexity.<sup>17</sup>

Debra Risberg speaks of the intrinsic “freedom” of the image and “necessity” of the text.<sup>18</sup> Other parallels can be found between the use of photographic image and text, and those of the film's relationship to text where Sekula acknowledges the nuances between the heard voiceover narration versus the “functional insistence on reading”.<sup>19</sup> While he adopts an almost monochromatic tone to his voice, which acts as a homogenous binding element throughout the film, this is in stark contrast with his use of multiple textual narratives and sources

(American movies, the sporadic straightforward interview, radio news, stories of seafaring life from literature, popular and classical music, press releases).

His essayistic texts and photographs are always rich in philosophical and literary points of reference. In *Marea Negra*, the text takes the form of a libretto written in the third person.<sup>20</sup> It is emphatically subjective, theatrical and evocative, challenging journalistic conventions with the belligerence of a squatter. In its enunciation and operatic dimension, the text exceeds the realm of the printed page and aspires to be performative, alternating multiple voices (of the narrator and of the chorus' lines).<sup>21</sup> The Brechtian epic tone and acerbic, satirical mockery of Sekula's libretto exposes the farcical and ideological undertones of the official story and clashes with the quiet photographs, as if the subjects would retain their innocence and idealism, while the author, having seen it all, takes the role of conscientious political commentator. Here the text evokes the Prestige sequences in *The Lottery of the Sea*, rather than merely illustrating what we see in the photographs.

*The Lottery of the Sea* is also essayistic in structure building on the earlier *Marea Negra*. The amount and diversity of images is larger and the film builds upon the social and political fabric of all the maritime ports, coasts and waterfronts. A photograph must convey a scene, but in film a scene must convey a story. Sekula's lens tangentially captures a flow of marginal details, at times (ironically) of a photographic stillness. Long, slow sequences are presented with the focused attention of an outside observer, allowing mental space for the introspective voiceover. This ranges from an evocative lyricism and philosophical referentiality, to critically poignant political commentary. There are visual passages that offer breaks from the voiceover and act as contemplative visual landscapes for the mind to wander. Sekula's musing on ordinary details occurring in the margins, invisible mundane activities and anonymous characters, creates, in its own digressive, meandering way, the film's social backdrop. The film give us a view into rarely-seen worlds: Galician sailors gravely measuring the scale of oil lumps in the sea that will affect their fishing jobs; puzzled African construction workers unable to read the anti-corporate pamphlets given to them by the protesters; a street performer's dog in La Ramblas in Barcelona; stray dogs in Athens; beach parties of protesters during the 2001 World Bank with fashions labelled "prêt a revolter"; a tour guide explaining the building of the Panamanian Canal and a tour of the abandoned secret US Southern Command intelligence bunker now relocated to Miami; a dying squid in a port; a shot of the post-industrial abandoned factories in Poble Nou, Barcelona (once the Manchester of Spain) not far from where a Texas developer is building luxury apartments, displacing the local working class neighbours; the conversation with a Filipino cab driver and former sailor reminiscing about his time working with cargo before the arrival of containers; Quechua Indians from the Andes performing in the streets of Athens; scenes viewed from the window of the Registry of Ships

office in Panama of a man picking up soda cans from the garbage, only metres away from a security guard standing, rifle in hand, by a bank van; a street vendor in Panama selling sugar candy to a family seated on a park bench, a scene of poverty that stays in your mind, placed right before the sequence of a privileged group of Americans from Tulane University in New Orleans joining a fancy dinner in a boat; an art historian organising an exhibition that deals with the civil communities of the Canal Zone, and students at Tulane University studying maritime law; an environmentalist denouncing the lack of policy protecting the environment and the real estate speculation around the Canal Zone. And so on. These are the lives of real people and their situations, the backdrop of what we term globalisation.

### 3.

*The Lottery of the Sea* takes its title from Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations* (1776), a book in which the author formulates the issue of risk and compares the life of the seafarer to gambling, referring to the sea dangers for those who work on the sea and for the investors who risk their ships and consignments. "What does it mean to be a maritime nation? To harvest the sea? Or to rule the waves?" asks the film's narrator.<sup>22</sup> Sekula asks, "Could it be because risk is the most exciting and terrifying concept in economics, something like the sublime in aesthetics?"

The sea for Sekula is the "forgotten space of modernity", the "primordial source of sublimity",<sup>23</sup> and thus, the thematic impulse of previous work such as *Fish Story* (1999), and indirectly *Tsukiji* (2001), about the world's largest wholesale fish and seafood market in Tokyo. The maritime world, as Sekula has described it, is "a world with an undeserved reputation for anachronism". He argues,

The sea may be a forgotten space, but it is not an irrelevant space, nor is it simply the 'in-between' space of capitalism. The maritime world is fundamental to late modernity, because it is the cargo container, an American innovation of the mid-1950s, that makes the global system of manufacture possible. The container ship and the oil tanker are the last dismal reincarnations of Ahab's Pequod. The American poet Charles Olson remarked presciently in 1947 that Melville had already discovered a century before 'the Pacific as a sweatshop.'<sup>24</sup>

The maritime world has interested Sekula because it is a world of hard, isolated, invisible work, displaced from domestic life, the enduring danger and hardship of which should deserve the highest wages yet in fact pays its workers less than many in the workplace. Seafarers in the globalised marketplace are victims of their mobility, unable to organise themselves and to join the labour unions that would fight for their causes. As the film remarks, "they did not enjoy the competitive advantages of metropolitan workers." This is what Smith saw in the seafarers, "the prototype for a global market in labour".

The clip of the uneducated seafarer character of Spencer Tracey caught in the economic sham rhetoric of the charlatan in the tuna-fishing scenes of *Riffraff* (1935) beautifully illustrates this point:

*You'd be a big man if you'd listen.*

*– Listen to what?*

*Wages are not the working man's share of a commodity he has produced.*

*Wages are the share of a commodity previously produced of which the employer buys a certain amount of productive labor power.*

*That's right, isn't it?*

*– Huh? Oh, sure, sure.*

*All right.*

*The wage worker sells labor power to capital.*

*Why does he sell it?*

*– Why, because he's a sucker.*

*That's why.*

*Now look. Is work an active expression of a man's life?*

*– Yeah.*

*– No.*

*– No, you dope!*

*There you are.*

*We need you Muller. You are a born leader.*

*You've got the power to sway the masses.*

*You could be the biggest man on the waterfront.*

The cargo container is, as Sekula puts it, the “coffin of remote labor power”, because “the labor that produces the transported goods is always somewhere else, located in fluid, reassignable sites determined by the relentless quest for lower wages ... The cargo container has become the very emblem of capitalist disavowal.”<sup>25</sup> Against this sense of remoteness, or the ungraspable reality of the cargo container lies Sekula’s insistence on portraying the physical world supporting the free market economy: the seafarers and stevedores joining forces locally and, more recently, globally; the immigrants of poor countries forced to travel in search for work provided by wealthier countries; the transient fashions of the world’s “latest volunteers for the bottom of the global market in maritime wages”.

4•

Sekula arrived in Barcelona at the end of June 2001, during the World Bank meeting with protestors gathering from around Europe, to work with photography and video students. He proposes they take a break from the

subject of global capital and travel by boat to look at the physical world of circulating goods in the port of Barcelona, which like many others developed recently, has turned its back on the working waterfront.

Three years later, Sekula returned to Barcelona for the 2004 Cultural Forum. He notes how immigration paperwork has now become more complicated, the forms now written in Arabic among other languages – does this reflect the “war on terror” or the increasing transience of people? He meets again public manifestations of protesters, suspicious of the cynical tokenism of the Forum’s themes: a sustainable environment, tolerance for cultural diversity and world peace.

Every night at 10pm in the lead up to the 2003 elections, people would gather in the windows of their homes and bang pots and pans, protesting the government’s unscrupulous lies. Now, scarcely a year later, the Forum is historicising, one might say neutralising the history bracketed by Sekula’s documentary. An exhibition devoted to the subject of activism displays artefacts of this public gesture of resistance. School children are invited to bang some of the very pots, pans and kitchen tools used in protest. Outside, meanwhile, police try to contain youthful protesters railing against King Juan Carlos I’s inaugural visit. In a shot at the Forum, we see a reflection of Sekula himself behind his video camera in front of glass displaying in vinyl letters: “...activist?”. Wryly musing about his own position, Sekula ponders the state of radical politics today amidst the drift and traffic of images.

1. Allan Sekula, unpublished script of *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006).
2. Sekula, *ibid.*
3. Howard A. Doughty, “Phil Ochs: No Place in this World,” [www.collegequarterly.ca/2005-volo8-num03-summer/doughty2.html](http://www.collegequarterly.ca/2005-volo8-num03-summer/doughty2.html).
4. Prestige Oil Spill, *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prestige\\_oil\\_spill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prestige_oil_spill).
5. Sekula, voiceover, *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006).
6. Sekula, *ibid.*
7. Sunday’s newspapers the following day had front, full-page articles and panoramic pictures of the masses (around 4.5 million protesters) taking over the streets of 55 cities, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February\\_15,\\_2003\\_anti-war\\_protest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_15,_2003_anti-war_protest).
8. Sekula, voiceover, *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006).
9. Sekula, *ibid.*
10. Sekula, *ibid.*
11. Allan Sekula, “Marea Negra: Fragmentos para una Opera,” *Cultura/s*, no.34, *La Vanguardia*, February 12, 2003: 1–7. The project was co-commissioned by the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona. It was reprinted as “Black Tide/Marea Negra” in Allan Sekula, *Performance under Working Conditions*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser (Generali Foundation, Wien, 2003), 322–35.
12. Allan Sekula, in Debra Risberg “Imaginary Economies: An interview with Allan Sekula,” *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996* (Normal: University Galleries, Illinois State University, 1999), 241.
13. Sekula, as in his description of *Waiting for Tear Gas (White Globe to Black)* (1999–2000), in an email to the author.
14. Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996* (Normal: University Galleries, Illinois State University, 1999), 241.
15. Allan Sekula, “Introduction,” in *Photography Against the Grain, Essays and Photo Works 1973–83*, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), xi.
16. Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996*, 249.
17. Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996*, 250.
18. Debra Risberg, “Imaginary Economies: An interview with Allan Sekula,” in *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996*, 250.
19. Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996*, 250.
20. Written in the third person, the artist introduces the author in one of his footnotes describing his activity as such, “despite his unreasonable desire to proceed in the spirit of Federico Garcia Lorca’s *Six Galician Poems*, being only a photographer and not a librettist, unsuited for poetry in Spanish or his native English”. Allan Sekula, “Black Tide/Marea Negra,” in Allan Sekula, *Performance under Working Conditions*, 333.
21. In the prelude to the text, Sekula commands his words “to be performed” as in an opera, “in the village of Muxia, in the Galician language, on the 19th of November, 2032, a date imagined by many dwellers of that rocky coast to be set in a distant future free from the ravages of the black tide.” Allan Sekula, “Black Tide/Marea Negra,” Allan Sekula, *Performance under Working Conditions*, 322.
22. Sekula, voiceover, *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006).
23. *Underdiox: Dokument und Experiment, München 4.10. Oktober 07*, [http://i-camp-muenchen.de/underdiox/e/filme/filme07/Lottery\\_of\\_the\\_sea.html](http://i-camp-muenchen.de/underdiox/e/filme/filme07/Lottery_of_the_sea.html)
24. Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996*, 247.
25. Sekula, *Dismal Science: Photo Works 1972–1996*, 248.

Fig. 1  
Unknown photographer  
*Taking Koura into a Canoe*  
Date unknown  
Black and white  
photograph, copy print  
Collection of Rotorua  
Museum of Art &  
History Te Whare  
Tāonga o Te Arawa



# He Korowai o te Wai – the Mantle of Water

*Ian Wedde*

In 2007, the Rotorua Museum of Art and History in Rotorua, New Zealand commissioned me to organise an exhibition and related events for its centennial in 2008. An aspect of the museum's centennial project was the completion of the building's north wing following the original architectural plan which had remained unfinished when the building opened in 1908. This would provide substantial additional gallery space and, in order to give the opening the kind of profile the local authority wanted, I was asked to incorporate a significant loan of artworks from the national collection at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in my proposal.

That was the only requirement spelled out in my brief. However there were other practical considerations implicit in the museum's operational identity and context; and what might be termed thematic factors which had to do with the history, geoculture, and social formations of the place.

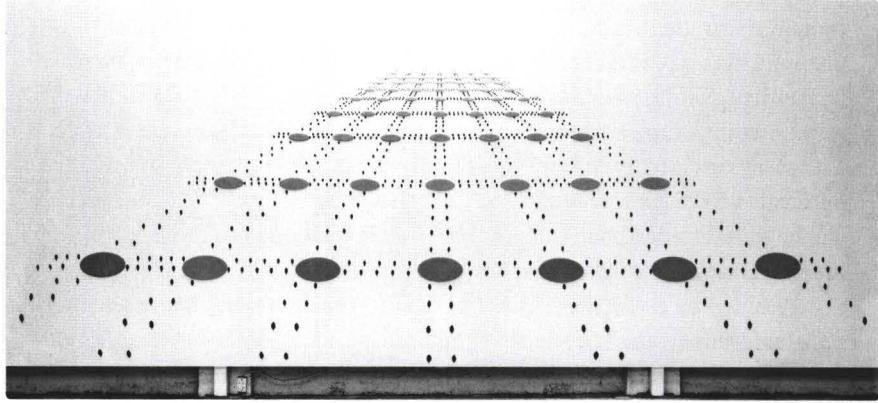
Practical considerations included the fact that the museum is a multi-purpose institution – in part a museum of itself as a former spa bath-house; in part an art and visual culture museum with a modest collection at its disposal; in part a social history museum, especially in respect of Te Arawa iwi (tribe) and hapū (subtribes), with significant stories such as the Māori Battalion; and a natural history museum, especially given its location in the unstable geothermal environment of a giant caldera, notorious for the Tarawera eruption in 1886. Largely because of this spectacular location, the museum is the centrepiece of international tourism in the region, with tour buses disgorging their

passengers several times a day in the summer season. Such tours, rather than a local or national art constituency, would be any exhibition's core audience, especially if staged across the high summer season as my project would be. In addition, at this time, schools would be on holiday for most of the exhibition's term – family visits rather than curriculum-based school groups would be the norm. Whatever their origins, most people visiting the museum between late November and early April would be in the region for the waters, including performances of their historical use by Māori.

Some thematic factors were obvious. The most obvious was the museum's historical and ongoing relationship to its natural environment of lakes and hot pools – it was there because of water, both hot and cold. Implicit but somewhat hidden in this relationship is an issue of tikanga Māori (protocols) which prohibits the association of taonga (treasures) with bodily practices such as eating or bathing – which is why the museum can no longer be called “The Bath House” and why certain kinds of pollution of the lakes' water have become highly political. Also obvious was the fact that human settlement in the region was a consequence of its watery environment. Historically, the lakes and their surrounding forests provided abundant food and building resources for Te Arawa iwi and hapū, including Ngāti Tuwharetoa further south at Taupo; though not gardens, which had to be located away from acidic volcanic soils. In the late nineteenth century this economy began to be augmented by tourism, especially therapeutic spa-based tourism for which there were historical precedents; as well as the view-based tourism of natural wonders and, once exotic fish species had been introduced, the tourism of fishing and water sports. Not surprisingly, most of the art made in the region has tended to represent or derive from this thematic environment.

Less obvious themes had to do with the ways in which the social structures, lifeways, economies, and material cultures of the region have also been shaped by water – its resources, flows, and narratives – both before and since tourism. The settlers from Rarotonga who came ashore from the Arawa canoe in Te Moana-a-Toi or the Bay of Plenty near what is now called Cape Runaway would have found eight major rivers emptying into estuaries or harbours in the region of their beachhead. From Maketu, named for a homeland kumara pit, they were able to make their way inland along the waterways formed by the Kaituna River to the 12 lakes in the Rotorua region and, further south, to Taupo. As well as providing transportation networks and freshwater resources, the region, extremely inhospitable in winter, also provided abundant hot thermal water. This environment was interpreted in landmarked narratives involving its major volcanic features and their turbulent relationships; its topography and the waterways from the sea at Maketu inland to Taupo came to be closely mirrored in social networks, in the flows and tributaries of whakapapa, and in the cartographic narrative of a collective entity whose tail was at Maketu, belly and heart at Rotorua, and head at Taupo (Fig. 1 and 2).

Fig. 2  
 Elizabeth Thomson  
*The Shimmering  
 Lakes* 2007  
 Zinc, oil paint,  
 lacquer, aluminium,  
 acrylic, HXTAL epoxy  
 and glass spheres  
 Approximately  
 2500 x 6500 mm  
 Courtesy of the artist  
 and Mark Hutchins  
 Gallery, Wellington  
 Photograph:  
 Paul McCredie



Latourian actor-network (ANT) approaches to sociology suggest that artefacts and technics are agents that perform and link up their societies. The same may be said of substantially narrativised and represented environments: they become agent subjects. The intricately braided waterways, artesian springs and thermal waters of the Rotorua region as it extends to the sea have in a sense acted their inhabiting human societies into existence. The cultural practices of those societies in turn re-enact their watery subject templates through material culture, language, belief systems and storytelling. It's all about water and how water sustains life, not least how it sustains social life through the provision of physical linking networks and the mirrored provision of a metonymic concept of fluid relationship.

Perhaps the best known Te Arawa narrative is that of Hinemoa and Tutanekai, sometimes characterised as a Hero and Leander story with a happy ending. Enchanted by Tutanekai's physical prowess in sporting contests and by the liquid sound of his flute-playing on Mokoia Island, the beautiful Hinemoa swam there from Owkata on the mainland and warmed herself in the hot pool Waikimihia. Here Tutanekai found her. Their relationship, which had been forbidden, became instead a cause for celebration, uniting their warring hapū. The story landmarks Mokoia as a significant juncture in *ngeri* (challenges) and *tauparapara* (canoe chants) mapping both the Kaituna waterway to Maketu and, in terms of relationship, that between disaffected hapū as well, perhaps, as between Ngāti Tuwharetoa at Taupo and Te Arawa hapū around Rotorua.

No great conceptual stretch is required to locate this model of fluid relationship within the human body itself, whose constituent parts are linked and related by life-bearing flows of fluid; and to extrapolate this embodied fluid model to the earth itself, warmed and cooled by intricately linked surface water and by precipitation from a water-laden atmosphere, but also the container of vast aquifers of

fresh water. One hundred and ten times more fresh water is stored underground in aquifers than above ground in natural lakes; 5,000 times more underground than in rivers. It is at this level of incorporation and embodiment that the phenomenal and the metaphorical or representational flow together into the political. In dealing with the body politic of Te Arawa, one will be dealing with water – with a watery body in which social and natural worlds mingle as subjects. On 31 May 2001, the Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Offer was made by the Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations. Though couched in the formal bureaucratic language of such documents, its subtext of embodied water – of a resource, even a life force, inseparable from the social body of its guardians – was entirely apparent. The Te Arawa Lakes Settlement Act that came into force on 25 September 2006 translated this symbolic understanding into practical terms, but the symbolic theme remained clear. The history of degraded water quality in the Rotorua lakes, catchments, groundwater aquifers, and rivers and streams, is intensely political – indeed, the work of Te Arawa Lakes Trust is built around a confluence of commercial and cultural issues brought about by such ecologically catastrophic and culturally repugnant practices as spraying human sewerage onto surrounding forests, where it rapidly seeped into lake-feeding groundwaters.

Nor is it a significant stretch from this political acknowledgement of the locally embodied value of clean water, to the global equivalent that, in 2007, was increasingly in the international news as well as in discussions around Rotorua. How much fresh water is there, who owns it, who should be looking after it, and how do these questions unite us in responsibility? 2003 was the United Nations' International Year of Freshwater, and 2005–2015 is its proclaimed International Decade for Action on “Water for Life”. The theme of freshwater for a centennial exhibition at the Rotorua Museum of Art and History seemed, in 2007, to be not only timely but obvious, at once local and international in significance, practical and literal as well as thematic and indexical, and capable of bridging the diverse cultural, operational and constituency requirements of the museum.

The curatorial task of researching and selecting works for the exhibition, as well as commissioning new work and establishing a public programme, was mostly complete by mid-2008 before the overarching concept had generated either a name for the exhibition or the kind of pithy thematic statement that would encapsulate the core idea of fluid embodiment. Then, in August, on a flight to Rotorua, I was seated near a group of people who had been in Wellington for legal consultations over the lakes settlement process. It was a beautiful clear winter's day and we were flying over the Kaimanawa forest south east of Taupo. The densely forested mountainous country of the Kaiweka Range was threaded with a multitude of glittering streams of water. A woman in the seat behind me exclaimed, “He korowai o te wai!” – the woven cloak of water. I was travelling to Rotorua to meet with kaumatua (elders) of Ngāti Whakaue, the tangata whenua (original inhabitants) of the land on which the museum stands. When I told them what the woman on the plane had said, Mitai Rolleston recited the

tauparapara or ngeri that describes the view, the route, and the key salients of relationship for Te Arawa between Ngongotaha and Maketu – including the reference to Hinemoa and Tutanekai.

The exhibition now had a title – “He Korowai o te Wai – the Mantle of Water” – and a key text grounding the total project in a locally specific social topography that, however, spoke comprehensively to a global situation. The elision of human agency and the natural world in the image of a woven cloak of water also, at the level of an overarching concept, mediated the relationships of exhibition artefacts to the natural environment without discursive strain. In the exhibition a sub-theme of bathing, for example, including works by Mark Adams, Raoul Dufy, Paul Gauguin, Colin McCahon, James Nerli, Edward Payton, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Thomas Ryan and Warren Viscoe, merely stated the obvious – that artists had long made bathing the subject matter of their work; that this was ubiquitous both historically, with an art historical thread back to Claude in seventeenth-century Europe (represented elsewhere in the exhibition); and geographically in, for example, Mark Adams’s photographs of Rotorua’s Blue Baths in the 1980s or the lake-side photographs of Edward Payton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The human cultures that flow with the patterns of the Rotorua Lakes catchment and its many streams and rivers, also flow with those cultures’ complex elisions of the social and the environmental, of the artefactual and the natural, and of wayfinding and genealogy. We may suppose that these flows and patterns disclose an epistemology reaching back to the oceanic knowledges associated with island cultures and the connective, not divisive, qualities of water. In the case of historical Arawa voyagers such knowledge was embodied in the Pacific Ocean; navigation lore linked mnemonic narratives and landmarking names with the currents, wave patterns, wind directions, and astronomical figurations of an environment characterised by the late Epeli Hau’ofa as a “sea of islands”. Hau’ofa’s famous figure of speech was a rebuke to the imperial cartographies that had mapped the Pacific as a watery *terra nullius* sparsely dotted with small, separate islands physically and culturally remote from each other. Hau’ofa challenged readers of this watery terrain to see how it embodied social relations. Not only did Pacific voyagers navigate with great accuracy between landfalls, but inter-island trade, intermarriage, power brokering, and inter-territorial dynastic bloodlines mapped a densely interwoven Oceanic construct, at once a natural world and a vast artefact, a complex suite of phenomena and an agent in the performance of a widely distributed, diverse human society.

Hau’ofa’s last book, a compilation of his well known essays, was called simply *We Are the Ocean* (2008); as well as “Our Sea of Islands” (1993) the book included his essay “The Ocean in Us” (1998). These succinct formulations echo the embodiment implied in “he korowai o te wai”; like it, they are in no way symptoms of a nostalgic ethnography. The woman who likened the forest



Fig. 3  
Natalie Robertson (Ngāti  
Porou, Clan Donnachaidh)  
Video still from *Uncle  
Tasman — the Trembling  
Current that Scars the  
Earth* 2007  
3-channel video with sound  
Courtesy of the artist

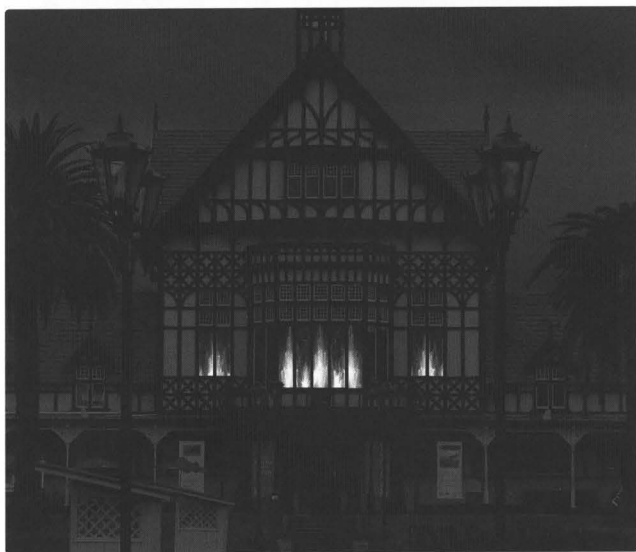


Fig. 4  
Tim Gruchy  
Video still from  
*Memory Floods* 2008  
3-channel video  
installation  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Rotorua Museum of  
Art & History Te Whare  
Tāonga o Te Arawa



Fig. 5  
Amit Srivastava  
*Anti-Coke Groundwater  
Protest, Balia, Uttar  
Pradesh, 23 October 2007*  
Colour photograph  
Courtesy the artist and  
the India Resource Centre

waterways of the Kaiwaka Range to a woven cloak was flying in an aeroplane with her laptop in the luggage compartment above her seat; for much of the trip, she had been using a cell phone in flight mode; she and her companions were returning from negotiations with Crown lawyers. Hau'ofa's essays are as much about contemporary linkages – fluidities – along air travel and electronic media corridors as they are about historical ocean voyaging. The reach of historical oceanic voyaging and social fluidity is in no way diminished by comparison with contemporary networks and flows linking Pacific homelands with Auckland, Sydney and Los Angeles. It is worth remembering the significance of the Tahitian navigator Tupaia on James Cook's first voyage, in its time the most global enterprise imaginable – a role recently documented in detail by Anne Salmond in her book *Aphrodite's Island: the European Discovery of Tahiti* (2009). Such combinations of embodiment and fluidity, of social networks and environmental constructs, with emphases on links, flows, and agents rather than autonomies, hegemonies and objects, recall the kinds of liquid states articulated by theories of loosely-coupled systems (for example of software and management), the principles of Latourian ANT sociology, the “relational aesthetics” or “altermodernity” of Nicolas Bourriaud and others investigating the global conditions for art, and perhaps also the “liquid modernity” critiques of “solid” modernity deployed by Zygmunt Bauman over the past 20 years.

There are evident concordances between the “liquidities” of the historical and contemporary social/phenomenal/political environment of Te Arawa, Hau'ofa's “sea of islands”, and Bauman's “liquid modernity”. These will not surprise anyone in touch with the global politics and internationally networked activism around freshwater. Such global networks, and the “solid”, nationally territorialised resource borders they dispute, constitute ethical identity formations similar to those argued for by Bauman in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991). In a sense, “the stranger” of Bauman's allegory of indeterminacy can be identified with both historical models of fluid social organisation at odds with modernity's control systems and taxonomies; and with the contemporary environmental activist.

The exhibition sought to incorporate such activist interventions and liquid contexts in a variety of ways – not all of which can be covered here. Natalie Robertson's 3-channel video installation, *Uncle Tasman – the Trembling Current that Scars the Earth* (2007) addresses the environmental degradation to waterways brought about by the Norske Skog/Carter Holt Harvey paper mill at Kawerau; its location in the water catchment of two mountains, Pūtauaki and Tarawera, allows Robertson to structure the work around the narrative of their unhappy love-triangle relationship with Whakaari (the active off-shore volcano also known as White Island) and Tarawera's tears that formed the Tarawera Falls (Fig. 3). The sound track of the installation includes songs of mourning, haka challenging the “solid” technology of the mill, and recorded accounts by locals of the degradation of their freshwater resources. In the exhibition, Robertson's work was shown in association with photographs of water utilities by the Burton Brothers (1880s)

and CP Parkerson (1908); etchings and lithographs of the commercial Thames basin by James Whistler (1850s–90s); and paintings and etchings of canals and windmills by Frances Hodgkins (1907–8), Wenceslas Hollar (1650), and Petrus van der Velden (1880s). A commissioned 3-track video work by the Australian artist Tim Gruchy, *Memory Floods* (2008), flooded the front windows of the museum at night deploying footage from a now defunct water organ in Rotorua’s Government Gardens – a work that was at once playful and ominous (Fig. 4). A selection of photographs from Brian Brake’s *New Zealand Scenery* was installed as a slide show of rivers, glaciers and waterfalls; images from his *Monsoon* series were also included, and both were implicitly juxtaposed with photographs by the Indian anti-Coca Cola activist Amit Srivastava of protests against ground-water degradation by Coke in Balia, Mehdiganj, and elsewhere in India between 2004 and 2008 (Fig. 5, Col. pl. 4). The tauparapara of Ngāti Whakaue was mirrored by a large topographical model of the extended Rotorua lakes system commissioned from The Centre for Biodiversity and Ecology Research at the University of Waikato in association with Environment Bay of Plenty Lake Management and Restoration. Itself constituting a topographical model of sorts, the large floor-based sculpture *Blackwater* (1998–99) by Bill Culbert and Ralph Hotere shared its room with a single-channel video work commissioned from David Cross, *Two Lines* (2008), whose small scale and intimate subject-matter (human tear ducts) refocused the spectacle of the large work at the level of the vulnerable human body (Col. pl. 3); a similar refocusing was provided by the Korean artist Jae Hoon Lee’s single channel video with sound, *Drool* (2006, Fig. 6). The principle signage of the exhibition consisted of fabric “waterfalls” background-printed with a cascade of the word “water” in some 50 different languages and scripts (Fig. 7). By these and other means an overall freshwater thematic was threaded – interwoven – with “strangers”: destabilising ethical challenges to the status quo represented by “solid” technologies, histories, disciplines and narratives.

Beyond the organisational and discursive space of the exhibition itself, such liquid thematics and interweavings were ubiquitous. In the Rotorua Museum’s art and photography collections, for example, self-evident themes associated with the Rotorua lakes and thermal environment predominate: significant works by Theo Schoon, Mark Adams, James Nerli and Edward Payton, among others, were included in the exhibition through a selection process that involved little or no curatorial determinism. One might even say such works flowed into the exhibition along historical channels that traversed and interwove disciplines that modernist categories had set apart – art and natural history, for example; the kinds of “solid” categories that thinkers emerging through and since the postmodern, such as Bauman, have sought to make permeable again, porous to the indeterminacies or cross-currents of “strangers”.

This comprehensive thematic opportunity was noted in a blog (<http://overthenet.blogspot.com>) by Jim Barr and Mary Barr on February 19, 2009 – “Theme shows are back”. Histories within which a “theme show” such as

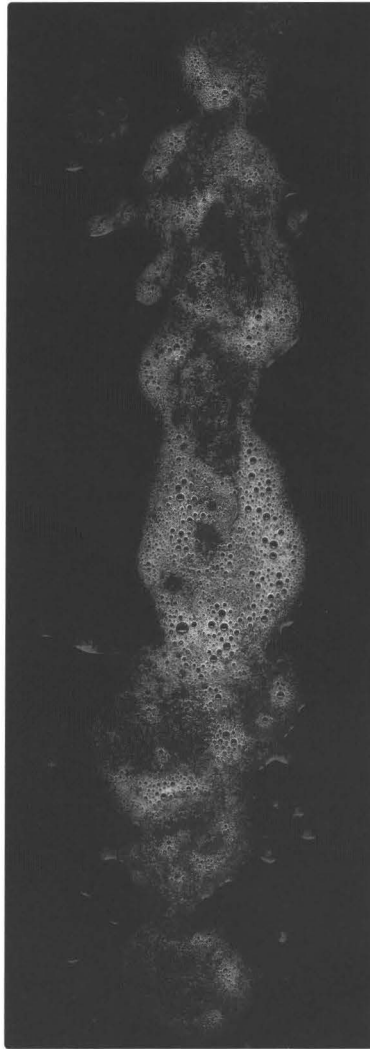
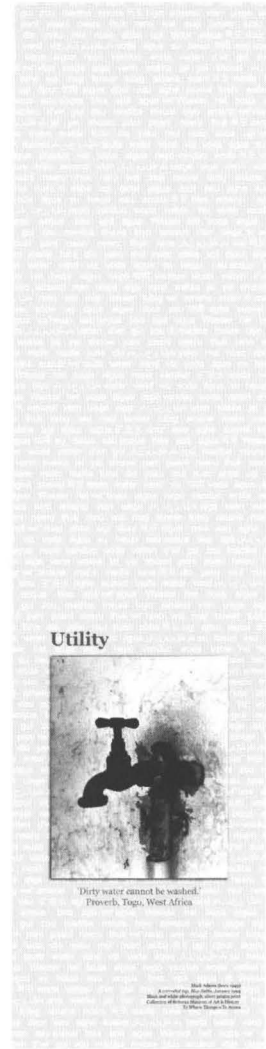


Fig. 6  
Jae Hoon Lee  
Video still from  
*Drool* 2006  
Single channel video  
with sound  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Starkwhite, Auckland

Fig. 7  
Exhibition signage with:  
Mark Adams  
*A Corroded Tap, Blue  
Baths, January 1994*  
Black and white  
photograph, silver  
gelatin print  
245 x 196 mm  
Collection of Rotorua  
Museum of Art & History  
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa  
Courtesy of the Museum  
and Mark Adams



*He Korowai o te Wai* might appropriately embody complex epistemological interweavings have been provided by several recent scholarly works. We have already seen how Zygmunt Bauman's project to liquefy modernist morality's over-confident absolutisms enlarges the philosophical context in which Epeli Hau'ofa's *We Are the Ocean* is able to argue for a sociology of oceanic space. Bauman also makes room, for example, for Richard Holmes's recent study of the astonishing interflows across art, science and the natural world in the period between James Cook's first voyage in the late 1760s and that of Charles Darwin in the 1830s (*The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science*, HarperPress, 2009). Endorsing the case for porous thematics, the Barrs chose to illustrate their February 2009 blog with what, since 2003, has been the most ubiquitous global image download available online: the freeze-frame splash of impact on a body of water, the ripples beginning to spread.

Fig. 1  
Jim Vivieaere dipping a  
sheet of paper with digital  
image of a Himalayan  
skyscape into the Pacific  
Ocean, Herne Bay,  
Auckland, 1999



# Round Table

## *Thinking Through Oceania Now*

*coordinated and edited by Peter Brunt*

*The purpose of this round table is to consider the legacy and relevance of two formulations of the idea of "Oceania". The first was proposed by Albert Wendt in an essay entitled "Towards a New Oceania", published in 1976, and the second was an essay by Epeli Hau'ofa entitled "The Ocean in Us", originally delivered as a lecture at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji in 1997.<sup>1</sup> Both were primarily addressed to Pacific Islanders and reflected on the challenges of art and decolonisation at different historical moments. Wendt wrote at the height of political decolonisation in the Pacific, which transferred governing powers from imperial states to Pacific Island nations in various forms – from full independence to independence in free association with the former colonial power to more limited forms of autonomy – between 1962 and 1994, with the bulk of transfers achieved by 1980. Wendt's essay, published in the first issue of Mana Review, addressed a burgeoning number of Pacific artists and writers and essentially called for a freer, more imaginative and critical voice in the decolonisation process. His utopian notion of a "new Oceania" not only echoed the post-colonial restructuring of the Pacific but also invoked something beyond it. Hau'ofa's lecture, delivered as a vision statement for the founding of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1997, reiterated many of these themes but also addressed new historical conditions under neo-liberalism and globalisation. In this context Hau'ofa's central theme was "the ocean in us", a unifying metaphor which responded to many of the tensions arising from national and ethnic differences and the impacts of urban migration within the region and beyond it. To discuss the legacy of their ideas with me, I invited a group of seven participants – Teresia Teaiwa and April Henderson of the Programme in Pacific Studies at Victoria University of Wellington; Jim Vivieaere, artist and curator; Albert Refiti, Senior Lecturer in Spatial Design at Auckland University of Technology; Ema Tavola, director of Fresh Gallery Otara; and Ron Brownson, Senior Curator New Zealand and Pacific Art at Auckland Art Gallery. Our conversation took place over a three week period in February and March 2010. What follows is an edited transcript of our discussion.*

**Peter Brunt.** *Let's begin by exploring the question of where we are now in this history of decolonisation. How is our moment different from Wendt's in the 1970s and Hau'ofa's in the 1990s? What ideas from their essays remain pertinent in the present, and what do not?*

**Jim Vivieaere.** I enjoyed Teresia's one liner, "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know/the Ocean is really in our blood."<sup>2</sup> My level of concern with seven-tenths of the earth's surface is structured around the sense pleasures, not too dissimilar to the fisherman or the surfer. The sound, the smell, the sun falling into, the moon rising out of, and the healing powers of the tidal pull.

**Teresia Teaiwa.** Kia ora tātou! Thank you, Jim, for starting us off in this sensory way. My initial impulse was to react to the question about decolonisation, and where we are now in relation to that project. And my reaction was going to be negative, pessimistic. But you have given me cause to pause. Your comments have refocused me back to our "liquid state". And I am reminded that the claim of being native in an ocean is altogether different from the claim of being native to an island. Decolonisation projects aimed at defending territorial borders, claiming national sovereignty and building nation-states are not what Albert and Epeli were envisioning or proposing. So I appreciate the reminder that this conversation needs to reckon with the concept of decolonisation on Albert's and Epeli's terms. The two of them were *immersed*, absolutely soaking wet, from a regional milieu that is difficult to recapture from the location of twenty-first century New Zealand. And the temptation, I feel, is to read questions of decolonisation from our positions in New Zealand in terms of land-based, iwi-based, (neighbour)hood-based, patch-based struggles. If we go to the water, the ocean, the moana, what might decolonisation look like?

Jakki Leota-Ete's MA thesis in Pacific Studies from the University of the South Pacific gives us a glimpse of what that might look like.<sup>3</sup> In 2007 she was part of a group of students who undertook a collaboration with a squatter community in Suva, on the other side of the fence from USP. Together they created an installation and performance art project called "Mara-i-wai" (translated as "lost at sea"), to tell the community's stories of loss and continuity, at sea and by the sea. In her thesis, Jakki was able to respectfully critique the celebratory approach of Epeli's "Sea of Islands" thesis. And yet, add to both the scholarly and artistic body of decolonising thought that Albert and Epeli had launched years before her.

**Albert Refiti.** Greetings to you all. A funny thing happened to me the other day, which might be helpful in expressing my thoughts on the subject under discussion. I'm involved with a group of researchers (Māori/Pasifika), and in our efforts to group our cluster of interests on Pacific space and architecture, we had to come up with a name to call ourselves. We got down simply to "Oceanic Space" – which was fitting to describe all the liquidity and varied conditions of our nations which literally float on the surface of the great moana. Well, we had an almighty scrap on this issue because others in the group think that under the rubric "Oceanic"

we may not be acknowledging identity based around whenua, fanua, land, maunga, etc. Well it is still not resolved but at the moment we had to call ourselves “Māori and Oceanic Space”. It occurs to me in thinking the Oceanic in the context of Aotearoa that both Wendt and Hau’ofa’s proposals are not universally accepted in Aotearoa because of a certain refusal to let go of the stability that “land” procures. Maybe islanders see it more from a point of view of the shifting surface, maybe what Teresia is saying in a sense about our privileged seat in the decolonisation project – or maybe Hau’ofa’s proposition has problems.

So let me propose a brief reading of Hau’ofa’s piece, which might point to some problems for us today. As a strategy to make a proposition on the Oceanic, Hau’ofa uses it first to encircle, make a limit on what is supposed to be all-encompassing. He universalises the concept – moana – for the chosen people: “islanders” (belonging to the ocean), constructing and reinforcing it as a territory under the regional. Under identity – all that is good and common to a region that makes us different from “others” – the Oceanic comes to be in the theorising of Hau’ofa. Now it seems that this is still the strategy in Aotearoa, at least as we define Pacific art; namely that under a certain claim to a common identity we therefore become. I’m sure that there are many good arguments for the strategy, but I think a few artists have been asking questions in the last ten years about this notion of identity and their art and how it might be a trap for them. A few have definitely distanced themselves from the Pacific moniker.

I wonder if I can back up a bit and maybe revel in all the qualities of “liquidity”, and difference in itself that Wendt playfully suggests but which gets bent under Hau’ofa’s regionalism. Clearly Wendt has a love affair with it: “I will not pretend that I know her in all her manifestations. No one ... ever did; no one does ... ; no one ever will because whenever we think we have captured her she has already assumed new guises – the love affair is endless, even her vital statistics ... will change endlessly.” The poetic approach seems to have been closer to the mark than the conceptual in the way the Oceanic has been theorised. I would like to think that the ocean is a powerful concept and to think it through it must retain its overwhelming status as a phenomenon which we have to define ourselves towards, not it defining its status from us.

**TT.** Mālō, Albert! You are right: there are key differences in Albert’s and Epeli’s approaches that need to be acknowledged and reckoned with.

**JV.** Your question Peter – “How is our moment different from Wendt’s in the 1970s and Hau’ofa’s in the 1990s?” – different people, different time, different approach. A conference paper is a bit like a sermon, a point of view delivered to an audience who can have recourse to ponder or memorise or forget.

**TT.** *Bottled Ocean* has got to be on the table for discussion, no? I remember watching a *Tagata Pasifika* feature on it while I was living and working in Fiji,

and just thinking “wow!” And then there’s *Lalalo Pasifika*, too, which you also worked on, Jim? That had a clear decolonisation agenda with its anti-nuclear position, right? Would you have described *Bottled Ocean* as a decolonising project, Jim? Sorry to put you on the spot, but you are right up there in terms of helping to give shape to a contemporary Oceanic imaginary in the visual arts.

**JV.** Tere, from my standpoint I wouldn’t have described *Bottled Ocean* as a decolonising project. My rationale was more pragmatic, one of each, gender balance, North, South, 2D, 3D etc. I entered the project from an intuitive space rather than with an academic or political agenda. The interesting detail was organising a wall of sound/elevator music (unpolluted ocean noise) recorded on a West Coast beach by Wayne Laird, as the punters viewed the work.

**AR.** Jim – I’m going to rat on you, I definitely remember you wanting to “decolonise” the Wellington City Art Gallery [where *Bottled Ocean* was first staged in 1994] by getting me to design the “framing of the works” for the gallery so that they could be viewed as if they were in a shop – by showing (“framing”) the masters that we are indeed slaves and by doing that it will transform them. (Well, we hoped back then.) Now that is quite a different strategy to Hau’ofa’s rallying cry of the ocean as a commonality between “us” to fight the bad guys with. What I wasn’t sure of in *Bottled Ocean* was if “framing” the work in such a way really was about a position to counter the colonising gaze, or a ruse to hide the imperfections of the not-fully-formed Pasifika art. I did remember you giving me Hau’ofa’s essay to familiarise myself with the ocean that was to play a big part of the show.

**JV.** Albert, you are right. Mind you way back then “decolonisation” probably wasn’t in my vocabulary.

**TT.** While we’re dobbing people in, I’ve just come across this 1973 feature from *Te Ao Hou*, with a picture of Peter in it! What dreams of art and decolonisation were you harbouring then, Peter? It’s quite a pregnant picture, isn’t it?<sup>4</sup>

**JV.** Great shot, two Sāmoan boys.

**PB.** Oh dear! I don’t know what to say about the photograph. I was a 17-year-old schoolboy with a talent for art who went to a national art workshop with Ralph Hotere as a tutor. I had no dreams of art and decolonisation at the time. Yes, I agree, we are all personally at stake in the question on the table, but I don’t know where to go with this folks. [Later] Actually, I will take up your question Tere, since you’ve put me on the spot. Yes there I am, a “Sāmoan boy” in an article in *Te Ao Hou*. I didn’t connect art with decolonisation at the time of this photograph. I was surrounded by the actors and events of decolonisation in the 1970s – I had school friends and church mates in the Polynesian Panthers, in Herbs, and leading Māori land marches; my art teacher at school was Buck Nin; I had a cousin staying in my home who was in New Zealand to train for a position in the new government of

Western Sāmoa; my relations were migrating from Sāmoa to New Zealand, some going on to Australia, Hawai‘i and the United States; I was in a film in 1978 partly shot on Bastion Point during the occupation; and on and on – but I had no political consciousness of it of my own and little historical sense of it at the time either. So where am I now in this history of decolonisation? Well, I’m only just “getting it”, belatedly, after most of it’s over, and to a large extent academically, which is more comfortable and accessible to me than my knot of autobiographical experience, although that underlies it. But what I did have in 1972 was a passion for art – with a motley set of interests in the Western canon and some local and international modernists. Everything in my life that had to do with my migrant family and predominantly Polynesian social milieu – at home, at school, at church – was totally irrelevant to my artistic aspirations at the time. I had no sense whatsoever of “my culture” as Sāmoan. But you can’t aspire to be an artist, as I did for some years, without connecting in one way or another to contemporary discourse about art. And it has been through art, and particularly when I stopped trying to make it and began to think about it and study it historically and critically back at university in the 1990s, that the subject of decolonisation finally converged with my youthful passion. Academic discourse gave me a way to narrativise my half-conscious history, while contemporary art suddenly made colonial history and cultural identity significant in all sorts of ways in the 1990s. Maybe this convergence is problematic because it’s still locked into my art obsession, and decolonisation is a much bigger subject than art, but both Wendt and Hau‘ofa give it an important role that I also value and am still trying to figure out.

**TT.** Thanks for taking up the invitation to share, Peter. Albert and Epeli risked so much of themselves in their respective times and it seems to me that is a crucial aspect – the lowest common denominator – of the ethos they challenge us to take up. Vinaka.

**AR.** Mālō both of you, good to hear your diasporic whakapapa Peter which I also relate to. Let me give a little of mine because I want to draw something out. I was brought up in the village of Fasito‘outa. I attended a very good Sunday school held by an amazing minister, Ioselani Pouesi, who was a medical doctor trained in the US and also a classical composer. He taught us that famous ethic which New Zealand artists of the 1950s and 1960s were brought up with – “distance looks our way”. In a positive way he taught us to imagine for ourselves the holy lands, not as something too far in the distance, but as something living in our landscape. His teachings allowed us to create our own fantasy projections of what paradise might be in the distance. So distance was not the “tyranny” that the New Zealand artists were trapped in but a privileged point of view of our imaginings. Now I never knew what theory was or modernism back then, but we were in a way participating in a kind of discourse about “a point of view”, a regional one. Now my version of postmodernism suggests that it is about a whole lot of “points of view” each having the potential to connect with others, their interfaces are where differences are produced, where the play of power comes about. Modernism has a “top down”

point of view or arborescence – treelike. Postmodernism is rhizomatic, multiple. So to cut a long story short, the colonial project in a way made possible the seeds for a decolonisation, allowed other thinking subjects to be produced.

Now I think the problem arises when we take our/my point of view to be what wholly constitutes an authentic becoming; that is like trying to make land from water (why I like the Oceanic because it eradicates a single view point). So in a sense decolonisation is already a postmodern phenomenon. I guess that is why I thought Hau'ofa and Wendt were already plugging in other views (local, regional, Oceanic) that run in parallel and opposite to the Eurocentric ones. Now the question I am interested in here is, if Hau'ofa and Wendt have fingered a hole for us to look through, would you want to rush in to look through one hole (might be too many of us already) or to poke a few more so that we have our own vantage point.

**JV.** My provenance as a Pacific Islander stacks up on paper but the milieu that I was raised in from birth until I was 31 years old was totally and indelibly Eurocentric. My first major “Ocean” recall was being let off school in Napier because of an impending tidal wave and pedalling with half the class on our pushbikes to the foreshore and being herded with other sightseers by police, to higher ground. Can't quite work out whether I was colonised or decolonised, either way my politics around these issues are borrowed, bordering on flimsy.

**Emma Tavola.** Sorry team, I've been absent from this dialogue, but intrigued reading this thread. Whilst I've read much of Hau'ofa's writing, I had never read Wendt. I enjoyed reading “Towards a New Oceania”, especially thinking about it being written six years before I was born. Where are we now in this history of decolonisation? I feel as if I am a product of decolonisation – my mother fourth-generation Pākehā, my father from the island of Dravuni, Kadavu in Fiji. Born in Fiji, I was raised, monolingual, in London and Brussels, educated in multi-ethnic international schools full of children from the “British Empire” – as a family we returned to the Southern hemisphere in 1998. Since 2002, I've found South Auckland to be an accommodating, Pacific-rim space where my mixed dislocated cultural understanding of self and community, is comfortable in an environment where Pacific people live, breath, love “a new Oceania” everyday. I find comfort in the contemporary Pacific visual arts sector where new perceptions of Oceania are explored, questioned and validated with every exhibition, and at Fresh Gallery Otara, with every viewer. Love and hate, irritation and tears are all evoked at Fresh ... the visual vocabularies have evolved, but the Pacific experience is often accessible, and always stimulates discussion. Contemporary Pacific visual arts at a (New Zealand) grassroots level in a facility supported by local government (Manukau City Council) in a community like Otara (68% Polynesian, 19% Māori; 45% under 21 years old) ... feels like ... artistic decolonisation.

How is our moment different from Wendt's in the 1970s and Hau'ofa's in the 1990s? This moment is different because the Pacific community in New Zealand

is “once removed” but now generationally rooted in new soils. A sense of the Pacific, as I find from the Pacific communities I’m surrounded by in South Auckland, is a very different Oceania to Wendt’s and Hau’ofa’s. I’m sorry if my perspective is heavily localised. I don’t leave South Auckland very much, unless attending meetings in Wellington, or travelling in the Pacific!

What ideas from their essays remain pertinent in the present, and what do not? Wendt’s poetic description of Oceania is rooted in a different time to the references we see in contemporary Pacific visual arts today, often so nostalgic and frozen in memory, interpreted from stories or disowned. The “Questions and Possible Answers” Wendt considers are still somewhat relevant today, and can be extended to the polarising of diaspora versus island-based ideas/arts/attitudes; and Auckland Pacific versus the rest of New Zealand Pacific; and further, South Auckland versus the rest of Auckland! The idea that “the life-blood of any culture is the diverse contributions of its varied subcultures” is indeed still relevant, more so as the New Zealand Pacific experience diversifies with each generation.

The framing of the Pacific by papālagi writers and academics is not dissimilar to the framing of the Pacific experience by non-Pacific curators and administrators via exhibitions, catalogue texts, representation at conferences and in governance structures of organisations established to service the needs of Pacific artists. As the increased presence of Pacific writers has enriched understandings of the region, Pacific curators, particularly in contemporary Pacific art, are needed to give texture to the understanding of Pacific experiences explored in new visual languages. My position is also stemming from the experience of working at a grassroots community level at the point where (Pacific) art meets (Pacific) audience, in a local government service delivery capacity, as opposed, obviously, to existing within an institutional/academic framework.

**JV.** Don’t apologise, Ema, for your “heavily localised perspective”. I agree with Albert’s take. “Hau’ofa and Wendt have fingered a hole for us to look through ...” poke a few more so that we have our own vantage point.

**AR.** Tālofa Ms. Fiji, champion of everything south of Mangere Bridge. Good to hear your thoughts.

**PB.** Ema, welcome, I’m so glad you’re part of this. Albert, I agree with you that postmodernism valorises a whole lot of points of view and that this was one of the main effects of decolonisation globally. But I do have a problem with a certain view of postmodernism that takes the plurality of experiences and perspectives to equate with ‘x’ billion subjective, individual points of view, where what’s impressive is just their quantity. But what I heard you say was that what mattered in this plurality of viewpoints was their “potential to connect with others”, their “interfaces”, the “play of power” between them, and that is a very different thing.

Ema, I think your comments help us see how things are indeed different now from Wendt and Hau'ofa. Your strong sense of locality is really admirable – and sane! You made me think of a visit I made a couple of years ago to Salt Lake City to attend a Pacific history conference at the University of Utah. I caught up with relations living in West Valley, a largely Polynesian suburb in the area of greater Salt Lake. My relations had recently moved there from Carson in California. West Valley felt a bit like Otara to me, comparable but different. An old school friend of mine (part Māori, part Sāmoan) is a cop there, in charge of the gang unit, and we spent all night talking about the challenges facing migrant Polynesian kids and their families in that particular milieu with its peculiar mix of the materialist American dream, Mormon theology and history, and migrant Polynesian cultures. Many of the kids there feel “dislocated” and generationally “removed” from island “homes” too, but do not yet feel “rooted in that new soil”, as you say of Pacific people in Otara. My friend said Salt Lake was a bit like New Zealand cities in the 1970s when the dominant host community was still grappling with its own prejudices in the face of the influx of new migrants in their midst.

I mention this only because what's coming through from your account of Otara, from Albert's upbringing in Fasito'outa, from Teresia's reference to Jakki Leota-Ete's project with the squatter community in Suva “over the fence” from USP, and my own experience, is a picture of Oceania that is diasporic but also densely local. It strikes me that it is impossible to totalise Oceania anymore in a way that maybe Wendt and Epeli were still attempting to do – as this spiritual “homeland” which connects us, rather than from which we are disconnected. Not that we should drop the term altogether and lose ourselves in the local, but I think we – academics, curators, artists, writers of this persuasion – have to articulate Oceania through the history and experience of these densely local manifestations without forgetting that they are part of global forces. We're not just talking about tourist travellers and the Internet but ways of living meaningfully as communities in the world.

Let me add apropos of Ema's last comment that while I agree we need better accounts of contemporary Pacific art and experiences, I don't see it as a matter of whether papālagi or non-papālagi are doing the accounting. Sensitive accounts can come from anyone, and also, I don't think mimetic faithfulness to Pacific experience and art matters as much as how that experience and art are articulated in relation to the art and experiences of others – back to Albert's point about “connections” and “interfaces” – and in relation to global forces.

**ET.** Vinaka Peter – yep, I thought after writing that last post that it would expose my brown curator self-serving agenda. But if a Pacific art exhibition can be drawn together of Pacific artists fairly easily, because anyone can be sensitive to our stories, then there is nothing that defines a Pacific perspective, translated into curatorial thinking, and I find that problematic. For me, the difference between some Pacific curatorial agendas and non-Pacific is the consideration of

audience. For some Pacific curators, it's important that new expressions of identity are made accessible to the communities these artists come from. These projects focus on creating intergenerational, cross-sub-cultural dialogue that becomes part of a social development-like process where new understandings of Pacific islandness are presented, discussed and understood ... in a small way, using contemporary art as a platform to articulate the "new Oceania" from the grassroots up, as opposed to working from institutions/academy down. Curatorial agendas concerning Pacific art outside of social development-like agendas can sometimes reduce Pacific artists to academic/industry currency where at the end of the day, the gains to the Pacific community are minor. But Pacific curators are also capable of using Pacific artists as curatorial leverage, so I guess it's not a matter of Pacific and non-Pacific, but more about art, accessibility and audience.

**TT.** Thank you, all! Let me add my welcome to Ema! I was just going to say, I think it is important to read the essays of Pacific thinkers such as Albert and Epeli as part of their particular fluid processes. Even as they might have offered their lectures or essays as manifestos in a particular moment, they themselves rarely returned dogmatically to them as references or templates. I find it difficult to adhere to a text-based understanding of Albert's and Epeli's legacies for us in the Pacific. I'm always cross-referencing to my own exchanges with them, and what I know of the work they do/were doing. I also liked your riff, Albert, on the relationship between decolonisation and postmodernism and multiple points of view. I appreciated Peter's pointing out that it's not about endless multiplicity but about dealing with the interface and interplays of power. I think that Albert and Epeli responded to that postmodern outcome of decolonisation differently: Albert seems to have taken solace in aligning himself and his art with the sovereignty movements of still formally colonised Polynesians, while Epeli rejected the ethno-nationalist turn for a kind of syncretic production of Oceania through the arts.

This leads me to my last point: I think what Albert and Epeli found themselves stuck with – though they probably wouldn't articulate it as such – is the enormity of artistic and intellectual isolation in Oceania. There simply weren't/aren't enough artists and critics to keep our movements honest. When Albert and Epeli wrote these essays, they envisioned the primary audiences of their Oceanic arts to be Oceanic peoples. But the truth is, unlike the contemporary literatures, visual arts and performing arts of other Third World (now postcolonial) regions, the primary consumers of Pacific arts continue to be outside of our natal or ethnic communities. Yes, African/Indian/Latin American etc., contemporary arts find huge numbers of consumers in the global market as well, but there are enough people at home engaging with their work in rigorous ways to keep them honest. Now Epeli, through the Oceania Centre, was really just beginning to consolidate a regular audience and largely local market for the visual and performing arts when we lost him. But that audience had very little competing for its imaginary, and so – in my perhaps uncharitable opinion – hadn't yet developed a critical sensibility. The audiences I observed certainly weren't asking

questions about aesthetics, historical logic, cultural and cross-cultural integrity, form, or social function, right? Maybe they will get there eventually – once the hunger for art and entertainment has been satiated, maybe a discriminating taste will emerge. But many of our Pacific academics weren't stepping up to the plate as critics for a number of reasons: a) couldn't give a toss about art, too busy with "real" and "important" social issues; b) couldn't give a toss about "naïve" art, too busy chasing sophisticated art; c) already too overcommitted to produce rigorous tangible criticism; d) too afraid to offend Epeli (smiles). But the answer doesn't just lie with academics.

And, as someone who has only been able to follow Otara Fresh Gallery's progress from afar, this is why I think that what's going on there holds so much promise. Because it is precisely its local orientation that engenders its own critical audience: its local orientation depends on highly localised critical literacies. This does not translate into isolation for Fresh Gallery, however – South Auckland is of course intensely hooked into global economies. What it means is that Fresh Gallery demands that those members of its audience who aren't dwelling locally must reckon with its complex global and local, fluid and global literacies.

**Ron Brownson.** I like Tere's comment about "the enormity of artistic and intellectual isolation in Oceania." This phrase scares me with its stark truth about the separation that our distance from written history entails. As if writing is somehow a truer articulation of who we are and what we have been. Kipling put this notion of alienation another way in his poem about colonial cities. He described Auckland as "last, loneliest, loveliest, exquisite apart" – a phrase that, while beautiful and memorable, seems to have no fit with our contemporary lives unless we accept his sense of having arrived at what James Cook called the farthest flung shore. Charles Brasch despaired when he returned to New Zealand after years away. He almost became a missionary in his attempt to construct a localised cultural life based on European models. When Brasch wrote "distance looks our way", he had no notion that he was constructing a phrase that has made New Zealand look at itself as living life like an alien nation. As a place where many colonies existed, the Pacific has been an ongoing testing ground for Europe's living away from itself. Not as a diaspora but as a mechanism of cultural and economic habitation.

**PB.** Mālō Ron and welcome to the discussion. I think the question of decolonisation we're considering must include reflection on the decolonisation of settler cultures in the region too. Our histories are entangled.

**RB.** I was leafing through Ron Crocombe's book *The South Pacific* and suddenly remembered with melancholy and affection the time when Marjorie Crocombe and Ron took me down to the seashore near their Rarotongan home and told me to look at the sky, while they quietly reminded me that it was also reflecting the ocean. It was a subtle, moving and hearted reveal to ground me within the

massive area of water that the Cook Islands encompass. Ron said, “it’s bigger than the area of France.” Ever since I have always thought of the Cook Islands as being a huge place, where the islands themselves are spread out like the distance between the stars they had asked me to peer at. In “Towards a New Oceania” Wendt commented “Our dead are woven into our souls like the hypnotic music of bone flutes: we can never escape them.” Aren’t we all the living representatives of our ancestors? We speak with the voices of their lives within us. The phrase “ocean in us” is a touchstone to me. I feel it not only because my father frequently told my late brother and me to never forget our ancestors were Phoenicians. Now we are called Syrians.

**TT.** Welcome to Ron the Phoenician! The Lapita people were settling the Pacific around about the same time that your people were developing their alphabet! I like to think that dentate stamping was Oceanians’ alphabet. Thanks for your story about viewing the ocean from Papa Ron and Marjie’s beach. I spent two weeks in Rarotonga with students in 2002 and the Crocombes were incredibly generous hosts. Papa Ron could be ornery at times, but his generosity was unrivalled. We feel his loss keenly.

**PB.** *Our discussion has already moved into the question of the region so let’s pursue this further. What is the relevance today of the regional idea, specifically the idea of “Oceania”? How is it to be understood? What issues – artistic, curatorial, critical, political or historical – arise from framing artistic production in this way? This issue of Reading Room includes an archive of the First Pan Pacific Biennale, staged at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1976, the year of Wendt’s essay. But it looked to the Pacific rim – Australia, Japan, the west coast of North America – and overlooked the “hole” in the middle. This was a different construction of the Pacific than Hau’ofa’s Oceanic regionalism.*

**TT.** Well I guess the first thing that comes to mind in relation to this question is that regionalism is Oceania’s version of cosmopolitanism. And when we think about cosmopolitanism, there’s a way in which it’s unavoidably tinged by a certain elite privilege. Now, globalising – and, ironically, even some neo-liberal economic restructuring – processes have helped to make cosmopolitanism and regionalism something that is much less an elite privilege than it used to be when Epeli wrote his chapter on “The New South Pacific Society: Integration and Independence” in 1987.<sup>5</sup>

Today, we are able to thickly trace a grassroots cosmopolitanism in the explosive regional circulations of Solomon Island shell bead necklaces, Papua New Guinea bilums, Māori-inspired hei matau, Fijian yaqona and taro, Tahitian and Cook Island tāmūrē, Laughing Sāmoans DVDs, etc. Such circulations are not new, they’re just more intense – and more easily accessible for the “masses”, such as they are in our communities. The Internet is also providing a medium for connecting artists and cultural/political activists across the Pacific. I’ve been amazed at just how proactive folks are at hooking up on Facebook and MySpace.

It's great! But one of the things that Epeli's 1987 essay pointed out about the bureaucratic elites that were leading the charge on regionalism that remains true today is that there's a strong Anglophone-centrism. And so our sense of the region is limited to what is accessible to those of us who speak English. (And even then, Micronesia, and especially the former American territories and Guam, keep getting marginalised in this Anglophone region.) When most of us stretch to engage beyond the Anglophone realm (say, with the French Pacific, Rapa Nui, or West Papua and East Timor), it's usually only because we have found English-speaking interlocutors, not because we have made an effort to shed our dependence on English as the medium of communicating and knowing (in) the world. And this brings me back to "the enormity of artistic and intellectual isolation in Oceania", because while the festivals and biennales and exhibitions Peter refers to are really important opportunities for curating and imagining the region, they are pretty ephemeral.

What gave the bureaucratic elites that Epeli referred to in 1987 their coherence and class solidarity in a way, was a set of common educational and professional experiences – they all went to USP, Auckland University, Canterbury, Victoria University, Australian National University or University of New South Wales, University of Papua New Guinea, University of Guam or University of Hawai'i. Or maybe they went to the same high schools: perhaps they went to Lelean Memorial School in Fiji as Epeli did, or maybe they went to St. John's, Cawaci in Fiji and St. Bede's in Christchurch as Tonga's current Prime Minister did, whatever. Most Tuvaluans in politics and public service today went to high school in Kiribati. And many of our key indigenous Pacific scholars have worked at either USP or UH. My point here is that there was a sort of crucible effect that helped produce the particular region that Epeli and Albert came to know. It was a crucible effect that was much more sustained than the *événements* that festivals and biennales and exhibitions can ever manage.

My favourite thing about "The Ocean in Us" essay is that Epeli gives props to Albert finally for "Towards a New Oceania". That was something that was noticeably missing from "Our Sea of Islands". Their relationship had not always been easy, but it was precisely because they had worked in such close proximity together at USP that it wasn't easy. USP, when they were all there: Albert, the Crocombes, Malama Meleisea, Epeli, the Thamans, the Griffens, and all the neo-Marxists (Vijay Naidu, Simone Durutalo and William Sutherland to name only a few of the locals), helped keep each other sharp precisely because they weren't always in consensus. This is what I mean by a crucible effect. Maybe it's the wrong terminology – I can't think of anything else at the moment. To put it simply, I get the sense that the arts in the Pacific generally lack a certain crucible effect – opportunities for intense, sustained, rigorous, challenging engagements. How do we create those opportunities? I think that wānanga models offer some promise, but the problem with wānanga is that they tend to be didactic, and I would want something more egalitarian than that.

Let me make one thing clear. I am not in any way trying to prescribe what the masses need. I am not even talking about the masses: I'm talking about contemporary artists and cultural producers, and they (we) are not the masses. I believe that academics, artists, and cultural activists, share the same responsibilities in our society: and at the risk of sounding like a broken record, one of our key roles is to keep each other honest. What does it mean to be honest in the context of regionalism? It means naming the inequalities of power (e.g. Polynesian hegemony, male dominance, Anglophone-centrism, etc.) and being willing to negotiate change in good faith.

My favourite story about Pacific regionalism comes from economics, not art: New Zealand was giving Sāmoa preferential prices for fruit imports in the 1960s, and countries like Fiji and the Cook Islands, especially, were suffering. The newly independent nation of Sāmoa decided that rather than protecting its privileged status vis-à-vis New Zealand, it would band together with its fellow Pacific island nations to negotiate fairer fruit prices for all through the Pacific Islands Producers' Association – which later became the Pacific Islands Forum. We need to be able to retrieve and recount similar acts of generosity and sacrifice of self-interest for the greater good in the arts of Oceania.

Epeli and Albert extended themselves in extraordinary ways to ensure that other artists were given platforms for launching themselves into the region, and beyond. Albert did this through his numerous national anthologies (most of them Melanesian) and his landmark *Lali*, *Nuanua* and *Whetu Moana* anthologies; as well as through his regular “roll-calls” of other artists and writers in his essays.<sup>6</sup> Epeli did this in his early work with the journal *Faikava*, in his mentoring of younger academics at USP, and then through his promotion of young artists at the Oceania Centre.

**AR.** You mentioned “the ‘hole’ in the middle”, Peter, and I have a story. Some years ago (mid-1990s) while in Sāmoa for a holiday, I ran into Momoe Von Reiche who invited me to one of her Sunday soirées at her Madd Gallery; poetry reading, modern art exhibition and general cultivated activity in cosmopolitan Apia. I was staying in Fasito'outa, typical village life, so when I entered her compound this Sunday it was like stepping through Dr. Who's TARDIS. On the inside was a haven where the “elite” and chosen ones get to ogle the art and conversation on show. On the outside ... well, you know, village life, art is just your traditional performance at the church hall or Teuila festival. The conversation at the soirée was about developing a Sāmoan modern art and some complained that in Sāmoa people are so ignorant of art and how hard it was to cultivate it. On my way back, driving through the villages, I had this thought in my mind: out the window, well it's life, traditional but continuing, seemed it revolves without contemporary art. Maybe this “hole in the middle” comes about because of a certain perception of what art should be in the Pacific. It often feels that the funfair for art, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, and the exalted group shows are TARDIS-like,

and those who are inside will be heard complaining about the “enormity of artistic and intellectual isolation in Oceania”. I wonder if the “hole” has something to do with our perception of what separates tradition from modern? Something that we can’t escape in Oceania.

**TT.** For me, the enormity of artistic and intellectual isolation is not necessarily about being isolated from the metropole, but just as much about being isolated from the village, as you so rightly point out, Albert. It’s a problem that “traditional” artists/artisans are not engaged (and maybe not available in as great a force as they must have been once) as potential critics of contemporary Pacific art, and that the contemporary and “traditional” arts are not able to dialogue in a way that allows for much beyond superficial borrowing. I like Filipe Tohi’s work so much because it is deeply embedded in a dialogue with Tongan artisanry/artistry.

**AR.** Yes I agree Teresia, Filipe is an interesting example of someone who has tried to engage with a tufuga practice and spent a long time dealing with the issue of translating the craft and concepts into other types of technology. I see someone like Lemi Ponifasio in a similar manner. But we have to remember that these two and a few others whose works are bonded to tradition, were raised in the tradition. I think it’s easier for them. Ema is dealing with a community in South Auckland who don’t have that grasp of tradition and if they use it, it comes out as “identification, bonding to, encircling and making territory with”. Now that has to count for something I’m sure – in fact there is even an audience for it – but I always wonder why do they “still” ask the question of tradition?

**April Henderson.** Kia ora koutou. Some thoughts: there’s a curious tension presented by an event like the Pacific Festival of Arts, which is premised on a simultaneous presumption of difference and sameness. Difference because each representative country group is expected to display what makes them unique and distinctive, but sameness because, well, they all wouldn’t be there except for the fact that they are all understood as “Pacific”, right? This same tension is present in Albert Wendt’s essay. Wendt argues quite passionately for the validity of all sorts of experiences in his “new Oceania”, challenging both papālagi and indigenous “gatekeepers” who would define correct behaviour and expression. He makes a point of arguing for the legitimacy of urban experiences, for example. But even while championing this multiplicity, there is nevertheless an implicit assumption of an entity or unifying element that entails or produces Oceania. Reflecting on the relevance of Wendt’s essay now, and particularly with regard to art, I wonder whether the valorisation of certain kinds of difference, positionalities, and locations has in fact privileged an inverse barometer of artistic merit, where the more urban, the more dislocated, the more “hybrid” (I dislike that word), the better? But the catch is that the artists themselves still think they are battling for legitimacy, and still feel embattled (without realising that their battle for legitimacy, cast in paint or ink or stone, *is* their legitimacy)?

“Contemporary Pacific artists” tend to revel in a certain playful aesthetic of pastiche and “you can’t pin me down!”-ness: Western presumptions about the figure of “the artist” still hold such sway that those who don’t exemplify such dislocatedness, inbetweenness, etc., get viewed as “naïve” (or, probably more often, don’t get viewed at all, at least not in the “right” galleries or exhibitions in metropolitan centres). I like Albert’s and Teresia’s exchanges above, which really raise for me the question of what gets defined as “art” and who gets defined as an “artist”.

And this then leads me to pick up on Teresia’s point about inequalities in power. I think one of the hardest things to recognise is how privilege is relational. For example, return again to the Pacific Festival of Arts: at recent festivals, I hear that the Hawaiian delegation has been very large and, as people have grumbled, very vocal. Now, the fact that the Hawaiian contingent comes across this way now, I think, is precisely the result of a previous moment several decades ago when Hawaiians began to conscientiously reconnect with the rest of the Pacific and, as a result of those interactions, were confronted with significant gaps in their ability to represent their cultural distinctiveness as others expected. In *Native Men Remade*, Ty Kāwika Tengan paraphrases respected kumu hula John Keolamaka‘āinana Lake, who recalls that Hawaiians were not even invited to the first Pacific Festival of Arts in 1972 because everyone presumed that “they had lost their culture”.<sup>7</sup> Then, when Hawaiians did attend the next festival, their contingent was primarily composed of women because Hawaiian expressive arts and cultural practices had been conscribed to hula and largely feminised in the popular imagination. Tengan continues, “[Hawaiians’] cultural insecurities became outright shame when Hawaiians were taken to task by Māori [who asked] ‘Where are your meeting places? What do you do with them? Where are your men?’” In effect, the vociferous Hawaiian contingents you see now at many pan-Pacific gatherings are an emphatic response to those questions after several decades of regrouping, relearning, and re-establishing a broader literacy in a range of cultural and artistic practices.

However, because these contingents are so busy, on the one hand, proving their difference from an imperial US that continues to administer them, and, on the other hand, proving their ability to express sameness (albeit through distinctiveness!) with the rest of the Pacific, it is sometimes difficult to realise that coming from a Western, industrialised, settler colonial society is precisely what gives them a relative degree of power and privilege in relation to those in independent Pacific countries. It’s the other kind of difference and distinctiveness that goes unnamed (except in sideways grumbles from others); there are reasons that Hawaiian contingents (and those from New Zealand, for that matter) are so large and relatively well-resourced.

Finally, I would offer hip hop as another example: for artists in Carson, California (where both Peter’s relatives and the Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E. come from), or in

Honolulu, Hawai‘i, or in Ema’s beloved South Auckland, hip hop is the music of choice to express what it is like to grow up poor, in a state house, on some form of public assistance, and the target of prejudice and discrimination. Hip hop music is an art form that relies, for its effect, on articulation of struggle. More often than not, this struggle has race- or class-based intonations. But if we move from the neighbourhoods of urban, industrialised cities to focus on more rural settings in the independent Pacific, what sort of picture do we get when we look for adherents of hip hop? Spending time in Sāmoa in the late-1990s, interviewing DJs and artists, was a bit of a wake-up call for me because (coming from Hawai‘ian and Californian contexts) I was so accustomed to hip hop having some presumed, inherent relationship to underdog status. Yet in Sāmoa, hip hop was the music of Apia’s afakasi elites, those who had spent a lot of time overseas or had a wealth of international connections, and who had access to the disposable income necessary to buy CDs which cost (before the advent of widespread CD-burning) between \$30–\$50 tālā (the children or younger cousins, perhaps, of the Madd Gallery crowd Albert mentions). I came away from conversations with students at the National University with a clear sense of a taste hierarchy (à la Bourdieu), where listening and dancing to recorded, imported music (including hip hop), played by a DJ, was their idea of a good time, while going to a club to hear a local band play was for people from the kuaback villages when, and if, they made it to town. In other words, hip hop was not doing the work in Sāmoa that it was doing in Hawai‘i, or Los Angeles, at all.

I guess what I’m trying to say here is that each art form, each instance of artistic expression, each movement, should be contextualised. What work is it doing where it’s at? What work does it do when it travels somewhere else? I think there are no guarantees that the liberating, anti-colonial battler in one context can’t become the batterer in another. I find myself sometimes in a schizophrenic position, where I am both championing Wendt for decrying gatekeepers of “tradition”, but then concerned by artists whose engagements with culture come across as sloppy or “anything goes”.

**PB.** Rivalries, differences in power and privilege, class tensions, ambitions for recognition and respect, how does all this square with what we are saying about audiences, the community, grass roots, and honesty? I wonder if maybe there is some naïveté or idealisation in the idea that the “grassroots” or the “community” will keep us “honest”. I think the wider world has a role in keeping us honest too, including the contemporary art world with its events and agendas and critics and curators and publications. When I was in Pago Pago for the last Pacific Arts Festival, I met a member of the Suva-based Red Wave Collective who was in serious conversation with a potential Auckland art dealer. He expressed some frustration with the Oceania Centre and Epeli because, as he put it, Epeli thought the world would come to the mountain, whereas he was increasingly of the opinion that he had to go to the world. And that meant getting a dealer. Epeli recognised this too: “the ocean that has been our waterway to each other

should also be our route to the rest of the world.” The paradox of our specific localities is that the globe is now inescapably our locality and community too.

**AH.** Weighing in with more brevity, Peter, I didn’t read Teresia’s comments as saying some reified “community” keeps us all honest (no simplistic recourse to the volk there), but rather that she sees a role and responsibility for “academics, artists and cultural activists” to keep us all (“each other”) honest. So the point here seems to be about the need for the development of a rigorous, Oceanic, community of critique.

**TT.** Thanks, April. You read me right. Welcome to the fray!

**PB.** Let me try again, and thank you April for keeping me honest. I think we’ve got our own little crucible going right here. I appreciate what’s been said, and in particular Tere’s call to people like us – privileged elites – to play our part in providing better critical traction for artistic and cultural developments in Oceania. And I take your point too that we inevitably grasp what we take to be Oceania in partial, biased ways that reflect our own social positions, cultural interests and geographic locations. To grasp “Oceania” is always to forget or overlook some countervailing aspect of it we fail to see, and we should try to remember that. But I am conscious that our time is different from Albert’s and Epeli’s with respect to cultural and artistic production in the Pacific. For one thing, there’s a helluva lot more of it. One can see this in the contrast between Albert’s 1976 complaint about soulless, office-block architecture in the Pacific and a Eurocentric educational system oblivious to the perspectives and experiences of Pacific Islanders, and the situation today when there is no shortage of Pasifika style or Pacific options in education. Neo-liberalism, postcolonialism and postmodern multiculturalism have fundamentally changed the milieu Albert was reacting against – and he’s been part of that change. Also, these “ephemeral events” – exhibitions, biennales, arts festivals – are increasingly where “Oceania” is being produced these days. And I’m not just talking about contemporary art either. Customary culture and village culture too are increasingly engaged in the world of ethnographic museum exhibitions, festivals, conventions, university programmes, television shows, and so on. There is a whirl and speed and ungraspable quantification to all this that may be superficial but I don’t believe that it is all happening somewhere apart from a more authentically grounded Oceania. And I think our critical community faces the same dilemma. It’s hard to imagine this community having the same coherence Teresia described in that regional context anymore because Pacific arts are produced, displayed and consumed potentially everywhere and by potentially anyone (audiences in Lithuania, Vienna, San Diego, etc.).

**RB.** I am fascinated, challenged and provoked by Ema’s phrase “artistic decolonisation”. It has set me thinking about what that might mean. Is it taking the “colonial” out of art or the “art” out of the colonial? Or is it taking more account

of the global than the local? Would we use that same phrase to describe visual art as well as the performing and literary arts? Do we care more about the global from an ecological context than an artistic framework? Does the larger public really want to be corralled by global art rather than their own local takes on creativity?

The First Pan Pacific Biennale, staged at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1976 did not include one artist of Pacific heritage and no artist who was included was briefed as to the meaning of Pan Pacific. It was, essentially, a new media show with film, photo-collage and reel-to-reel video and U-matic video. It was underfunded as an exhibit and baffled the public in a big way. Yet, the First Pan Pacific show was a fantastic experience to be inside of as all the art was recent and many Asian artists were included. I don't think any contemporary Asian artists had ever been shown in New Zealand before. The most radical thing about the show was that it used the notion of Pacific rim practice and this was certainly a first for New Zealand. The closest local exhibition to it nowadays is the Auckland Triennial. The 4th one opened in March. It is global in its gathering of artists.

**PB.** I'm glad Ron mentioned the First Pan Pacific Biennale because it was one of the first attempts, however problematic, to realise a regional idea – though obviously a different regional idea than the one Epli imagined. My colleague Christina Barton gave a great paper at Pacific Studies at Victoria a few years ago comparing the Biennale and the 1976 Pacific Arts Festival at Rotorua. It was fascinating. The festival, she pointed out, occurred at the height of decolonisation and national independence in the region and was designed to prop up that nation-making process. The Biennale, by contrast, marked a “post-national” turn in New Zealand art when artists were starting to break free of preoccupations with nationhood and connect with other artists on the Pacific rim. It was a new media exhibition, but so was the Pacific Arts Festival in a different way, using television, radio broadcasts, lighting and sound amplification technologies etc., to stage and publicise the event. Philosophically, however, the Pacific Arts Festival was primarily committed to reviving cultural traditions to buttress the goals of new nationhood. That emphasis seems to be shifting now. The festival is more and more challenged by contemporary practices: modern dance forms, experimental theatre, documentary filmmaking, contemporary art exhibitions, etc. The Pacific Arts Festival seems to me a dated and somewhat clumsy structure for dealing with Pacific arts today, with the diaspora, with contemporary practices, with “customary” culture as well for that matter. I'm still not sure what I feel about it.

**AR.** I think, Peter, that the Pacific Arts Festival and other similar festivals (Pasifika) are the market for the artists themselves as a mechanism for networking, renewing local contacts and reasserting identification with a region – sort of what carnivals and festivals are supposed to be: celebration and renewal. I think the more elevated view of the market tends to be in the biennales and triennials, where it is an exchange of discourse about art, where the cycle of

progress and the edge of thinking is probably more relevant. I always thought of festivals and carnivals as where a “body practice” becomes important, why there are performances which are important to artists and viewers, why there are demonstrations and workshops. The elevated discourse in the “nales”, where the frames of reference (local/global, singular/plural) are circulating against each other, being questioned, is quite different. Can’t really make a distinction of what is better for Oceanic art because they are both crucial to its make-up. I always remember that in Europe festivals and carnivals are important to the artistic life of the community for producers and consumers (some wonderful ones in France, German, Italy and Spain especially).

**PB.** That’s a good way to look at it Albert, thanks. Apparently a discussion took place a decade or so ago at Creative New Zealand about the possibility of a “Pacific Pavilion” at the Venice Biennale. Nothing came of it but interesting to consider. Africa has one, first set up in 2007 and the focus of a feature exhibition in 2009, curated by Robert Storr. A good idea or not?

**AR.** You know the only way we can find out is to have a Pacific Pavilion at Venice, I will be such a big supporter for this. Some years ago (2003) Lemi Ponifasio had connections with people at the Prague Quadrennial of Scenography; I wrote an application to Creative New Zealand and got \$10,000 which we used to design a big black folding rock with a projection of a picture of static on a velvet floor which made it look like wiggling worms – Europeans were puzzled and enchanted. We consulted no-one yet we represented the Pacific. The project was called Vasa – ocean. They have asked us back for 2011. Can’t see why someone just can’t go ahead – only way to find out if it will work.

I have no problem with the concept of Oceania raised by Wendt and Hau’ofa. Philosophically I think it might work as a concept now. In architecture the discourse has moved from the fluidity of surfaces and liquidification of structures to once again the notion of a firm ground. Because it has been generally acknowledged that we are now experiencing the next step of dissolution of social bodies, families, firms, communities are either vanishing or changing their structure. After the melting into air of ideologies and big moral institutions, it is now the turn of patterns of dependency and interaction between people to be liquefied. They have become malleable, architecture is the art of no longer occupying space by its enclosure, but the creation of situations that become movable and thus reflecting these social tendencies. It is difficult to represent values when there are no longer any shared values.

That is why Wendt and Hau’ofa and others thinking on the Oceanic might have currency in this shift in the discourse now. There is a big emphasis now on a “body practice” because remote sensing technology has allowed for the body to make a return to producing objects, straight from a movement of the hand to being printed out by a 3D printer. We are now talking about the death of

production drawings as a mediator of the process. Maybe there is another way to think through the oceanic of Wendt and Hau'ofa in an open way rather than in a territorial enclosure.

**RB.** I went back to Peter's question about how Oceania might be understood and thought when was the last time I heard the word Oceania actually used in conversation? Quite some time ago. Ocean is a common word, Oceania is not. This fact surprised me, as I really like using the word Oceania. When the phrase "the ocean in us" is read I think of our Oceania, as if the word Oceania does not apply to any other part of the world's topography or oceanography. If we are saying that we understand Oceania as a technical term for our region then does it mean more than the word Pacific? If Oceania is a more accurate term for the area then is it a more correct regional descriptor?

**AR.** Okusi Mahina, Tevita Ka'ili and others have been using Moana for the last five years.

**TT.** I guess as someone who grew up around USP – my mother worked there for about 15 years – and then I worked there for five years, overlapping with my mother briefly, I have a very specific understanding of the word "regionalism". And I can't help feeling: (1) the lack of immediacy of a sense of regionalism in New Zealand, i.e. regionalism seems to be, for the most part, a very rarefied foreign policy concern; (2) a blurring of what could potentially be described as regionalism with multiculturalism here in New Zealand (it's about ethnicity, not so much nationality, here – whereas at USP, there's a very tangible way in which the region is understood to be made up of nationalities, as much as ethnicities).

In Fiji, with USP, the Forum Secretariat, SOPAC, and a large section of the SPC (Secretariat of the Pacific Community) based there, there's a very immediate sense of the region, as embodied in institutions, multilateral protocols and agreements, and of course the "events" that are the public faces of these institutions: USP Open Day, the Forum Heads of Government meetings, South Pacific Games, Festival of the Arts, etc. Events such as the Festival of the Arts have their own accretion of memories and cultural politics ... and, in a way, are becoming institutions unto themselves.

But these regionalisms are also very particular. USP's region is demarcated by its 12 member countries: The Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Sāmoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. You have to be a citizen of one of these countries to be recognised officially as a "regional" person. New Zealand citizens are not considered "regionals" at USP. SPC has broader membership: add all of the USP countries plus Guam, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Belau, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, American Sāmoa, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, France, US, Australia and New Zealand. But there are

competing regionalisms, and as Epeli recognised, they can be held captive to bureaucratic elites ... which I believe is why he sought out a form of regionalism that could be made and owned by less economically privileged actors.

My quick point is this: there are certain Pacific arts that seem to be able to thrive even in the absence of economic incentives and state or corporate investment – dance and music, for example. But there are other arts that seem to need more than a culturalist or revivalist rationale to survive. I’m thinking here of voyaging canoe building and sailing in the South Pacific. The Hawaiians are the exception with the Polynesian Voyaging Society, but for the most part, what we’ve seen in Tahiti, the Cooks, New Zealand, Sāmoa, Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, etc., is a real failure of the culturalist rationale to sustain voyaging “societies” in these countries. And I guess this is what the Red Wave artist Peter spoke to in Pago (did he have a name?) was expressing: a determination to pursue art for economic gain, not just for its own sake. My sense was that Epeli struggled with this tension.

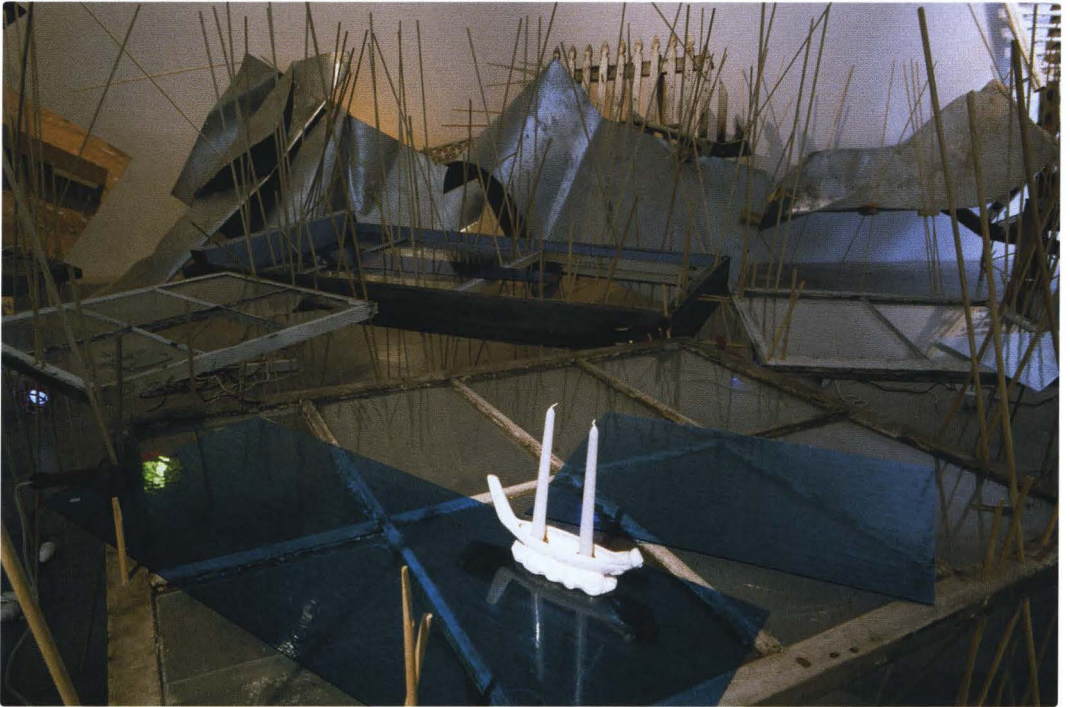
And this is where, hopefully, I’ll finally be able to clarify what I mean by “the enormity of Oceania’s isolation”. For me “Oceania” represents an intellectual space, an imaginary – an imaginary that Albert, and Epeli, and others like Subramani and some of us have taken up. It’s not a geographical space of dwelling, although it is inspired by such a “real”. But this imaginary, intellectual space, became isolated, in spite of its proponents’ own global journeys, transnational kinships, etc. It became isolated because the artists/intellectuals who imagine(d) it ... in some cases, abandoned it; in other cases, allowed it to be turned into a caricature or commodity.

**PB.** It was Mason Lee. He was negotiating representation with the Okaiocanikart Gallery in Auckland. I don’t think he was seeking economic gain *per se* though, just taking himself seriously as an artist, which means entering the marketplace. I admired him because it was a brave thing to do. The marketplace is highly stratified and differentiated; it puts you in your place, so to speak, but there are few other ways for contemporary artists to be socially relevant. Exhibitions in civic art galleries, biennales, etc. – where public discourse is generated – are dependent on that marketplace, they sift and select from it. So I saw him as taking the first steps towards entering that realm of “public” discourse as a contemporary Pacific artist. What I don’t understand is the “location” of that discourse anymore. I call it “public” but what does that mean when art circulates everywhere for everyone? It seems to be hyper-located on the one hand – it’s about Otara, for example – and absolutely go-anywhere fluid, on the other. It’s not a strictly “national” discourse anymore as far as the New Zealand public is concerned. Location still matters but any particular experience of location is now put into exchange and dialogue with everybody else’s in no particular order in some grand swirling global market place. It’s interesting that Epeli was so uncomfortable with this; it’s the one historical condition of the 1990s he did not fully face perhaps. That and the full extent of the diaspora.

I agree with Teresia that the region does not register for New Zealanders (and Australians I presume), except as tourist destinations and that rarefied realm of foreign policy. It didn't for me, and I am genealogically connected to it. For me, I connect to Epeli's vision of Oceania in its extra-regional dimension, as one of that "increasing number of true urbanites who are alienated from their ancient histories" and who grew up in "non-traditional environments". This is my reality as a Pacific person. It is moving to hear Teresia speak of the isolation or abandoning of that particular investment in the idea of Oceania and community of critique – though I wonder if the reasons for it are more historical than personal. Perhaps the sense of "isolation" is not just people failing or abandoning the cause but the liquidating effect of this hyper, globalising production of Oceania. I don't say this because I am personally bewitched by the global cultural spectacle, but because that spectacle is one of the forms into which Empire has transformed itself, and Oceania is part of it.

**AR.** I like the concept of the ocean/moana and I say yes it's worth adding to it. There were things that Wendt said which I think are worth revisiting about an elusive lover, a "thing" that is bigger than the personal. It has a progenerative character, things (island, identities, politics) become attached to it without itself being a thing. I know that I'm speaking here on the side of the conceptual but I think that's where Wendt and Hau'ofa are powerful – to think Oceania as a concept that draws us into a relation and which show our relationships are fundamentally different from that of the West, Orientalism, etc. I think it hasn't really got tested properly in the visual arts, only Jim's *Bottled Ocean* and the 1996 Asia Pacific Triennial comes to mind where he was really testing Hau'ofa's notion. I'm sure it's been widely explored in literature. We do come back to visual arts somehow. I know that Sāmoan artists and theorists (myself included) have used the notion of Va, which connects to Vasa (Sāmoan for ocean) as the "ocean swells" inside us, and that we also see in others. Va is important as traces of lines and networks of ancestral relations, which is basically an oceanic motif. This is what Lemi Ponifasio sees as being inherited in the bodies of dancers. John Pule's Oceanic clouds also come to mind. I think the idea is still valid, but I think new additions must be folded into it to make a richer fabric.

1. Albert Wendt, "Towards a New Oceania," *Mana Review* 1 (1976): 49–60; also published in *Writers in East-West Encounter: New Cultural Bearings*, ed. Guy Amirthanayagam (London: Macmillan, 1982), 202–12; Epeli Hau'ofa, "The Ocean in Us," *The Contemporary Pacific* 10, no.2 (1998): 392–410; also published in *Culture and Sustainable Development in the Pacific* ed. Anthony Hooper (Canberra [A.C.T.]: Asia Pacific Press, 2000), 32–43.
2. The epigraph Hau'ofa asked Teresia Teaiwa to write for his essay.
3. Jakki Leota-Ete, *Malaga i Mara-i-wai: De-composing the Pacific at Sea* (MA thesis, University of the South Pacific, 2007).
4. *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, no. 71 (1973): 47, <http://teahou.natlib.govt.nz/journals/teahou/image/Mao71TeA/Mao71TeAo47.html>.
5. Epeli Hau'ofa, "The New South Pacific Society: Integration and Independence," in *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*, ed. Anthony Hooper (Auckland and Suva: Centre for Pacific Studies, the University of Auckland and Institute of Pacific Studies, the University of the South Pacific, 1987), 1–15.
6. Albert Wendt ed., *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1980); Albert Wendt ed., *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan eds., *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003).
7. Ty Kāwika Tengan, *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawaii'i* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 76.

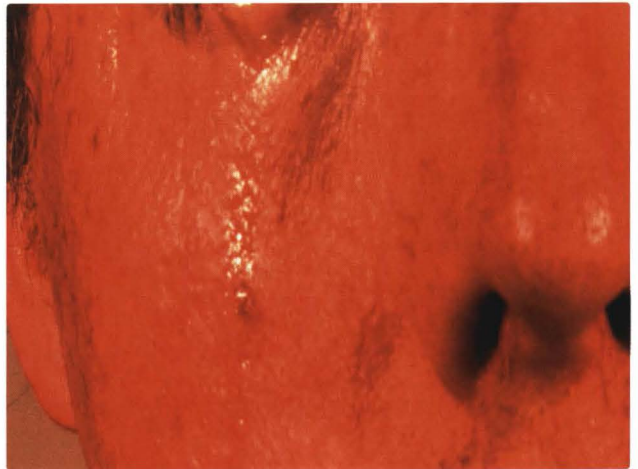
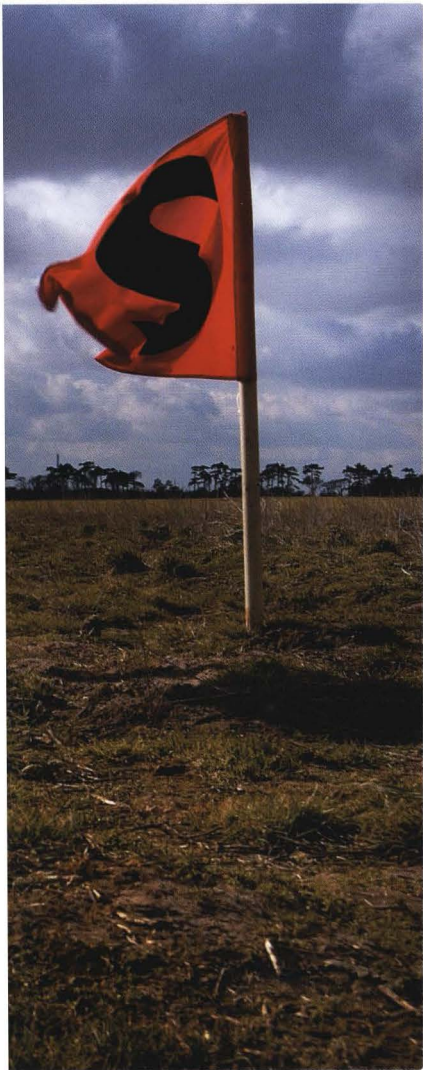


Col. pl. 1  
John Lyall  
*Towards an Hyper-Feral  
Art, Aotearoa: Picketing  
the Sublime; Given Both  
A Blue Displacement and  
an Illuminating Vessel  
(detail) 1997*  
Installation view  
Auckland Art Gallery  
Toi o Tāmaki  
Photograph: Jennifer  
French



ABOVE  
Col. pl. 2  
Bettina Furnée  
Lines of Defence 2005  
Bawdsey, Suffolk  
38 appliquéd flags on  
posts, year-long web-cast,  
photo archive, time-lapse  
film, [www.ifever.org.uk](http://www.ifever.org.uk)  
Photograph: Douglas  
Atfield

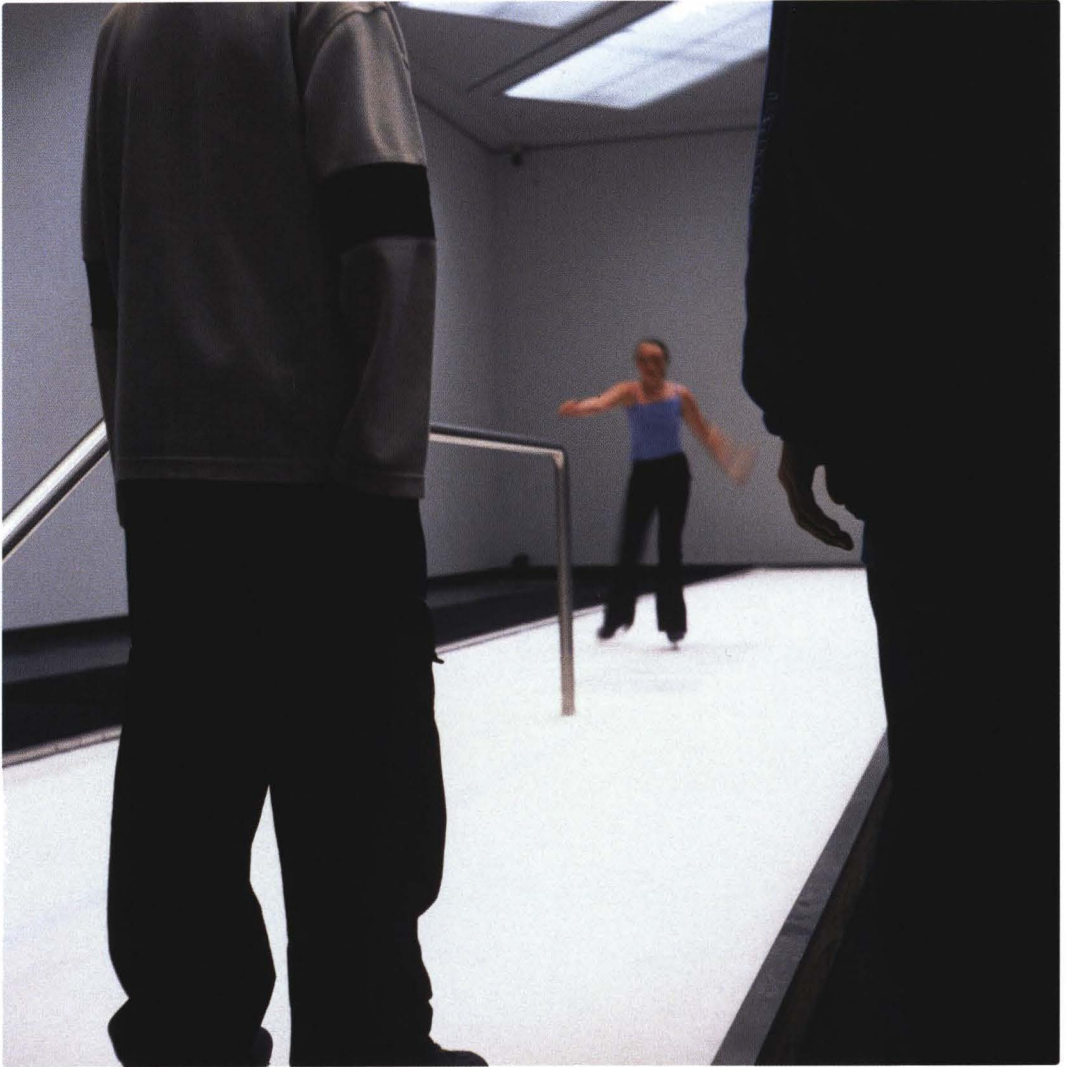
RIGHT  
Col. pl. 3  
David Cross  
Video still from *Two Lines*  
2008  
Single channel video  
Courtesy of the artist







Col. pl. 4  
Amit Srivastava  
*Anti-Coke Groundwater  
Protest, Balia, Uttar  
Pradesh, 23 October 2007*  
Colour photograph  
Courtesy the artist and the  
India Resource Centre





## LEFT

Col. pl. 5  
 Maddie Leach  
*The Ice Rink and The Lilac Ship* (detail) 2002  
 Installation view:  
 Waikato Museum of Art & History, Hamilton, New Zealand, 2002  
 Courtesy of the artist and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (2009-0005-3/2a)  
 Photo: Maddie Leach

## ABOVE

Col. pl. 6  
 Tsuneo Nakai  
*Horizontal Line* 1976  
 Colour photograph  
 [Slide 17, *Pan Pacific Biennale* 1976, Auckland City Art Gallery]

Fig. 1  
Robert Smithson  
*Ithaca Mirror Trail, Ithaca,*  
*New York 1969*  
Mixed media  
image (map): 525 x 365 mm  
image, each  
(photographs): 510 x 760 mm  
Purchased from funds  
provided by the American  
Patrons of the Tate Gallery,  
courtesy of the Tate  
American Collectors  
Forum 2002  
© Licensed by VISCOPY,  
Australia, 2010



# The Truth of Waters

*Stephen Turner*

...it is not only amid things, or bodies, that we live and speak. It is in the transport of the True, in which it sometimes happens we are required to partake  
– Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*<sup>1</sup>

From the point of view of a settler society I will discuss the originary exteriority of settlers to an Indigenous place. The interiority of the same place, what it is to the original or first inhabitants, follows from being encircled and enclosed by second settlement. The everything or all things of the local world becomes the *own world* of Māori, one among many worlds, and another object of the knowledge of others. Becoming one's own world, now less than everything or all things, follows the radical change of surroundings as a consequence of settler invasion. But the interiority of that enclosure is not simply something to be known, like anything else. The inside is exactly what you cannot see from the outside, coming, as it were, in the train of settlement (or boat). Nor can the truth from the inside be spoken in the outside world that has surrounded and created an inside world. The truth that interests me is the idea that that prior and local world also *remains* everything or all things. It is only from the perspective of second settlement that you would think otherwise. Second settlement ensures the turning inward of Indigenous truth, but also its unfolding in terms that are indiscernible to settler society itself. The truth of settlement then involves the becoming exterior of an historical interiority.

I take the distinction I am making between truth and knowledge from philosopher Alain Badiou. For him "truth", or "the true", lies beyond the domain of the local world, and its self-evident logic or reason. "Knowledge" is more like a description in its own terms of that same state of affairs. Indeed a local world is constituted and consolidated by its very description. In these terms the "truth" of any place, how it is constituted, organised and maintained, might be counterposed to knowledge of the same place, understood in terms of its self-description. In settler societies, however, a local world has been created by the imposition and creation of a newer one. The truth of settlement, I suggest, does not exactly lie in

a prior world, because second settlement has not yet occurred. Rather it lies in things, or bodies, which withhold the truth of the transposition they have themselves undergone. Here I take three different waters, or lakes, to be bodies of knowledge that withhold the truth of settlement. Whereas the interiority of Indigenous lakes suggests the persisting local world of First Peoples, their exteriority suggests a view of their properties and uses from the perspective of second settlement. The truth of things or bodies challenges what has happened, detailed in the “encyclopaedia” of settler understanding; here the “transport of the True” or transposition of truth challenges *Te Ara: the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*. We live in a place of knowledge but I doubt that we know the truth of it.

That a truth inheres in things or bodies may be established by a process that Badiou calls “subtraction”. The bodies of water that make up lakes are no different. Subtracting the quality of being a lake from any particular lake constitutes for Badiou an exception to or splitting of such a thing or body in any manifest empirical sense. The subtraction inserts a break in what is known, what is taken to constitute a local world. A similar process of subtraction makes tangata whenua, or people of the place, “Māori” to settlers, inserting a break in the local and prior world of Māori understanding of themselves. That there even exists a multiplicity of local worlds, ontologically speaking, constitutes an “exception” to the existence of any particular local world. But multiple local worlds, as a set, must *in-exist*, says Badiou, for any local world to be considered one. Politically speaking, an exception inheres in a situation or local world to which the truth that it constitutes is inadmissible. For Badiou this truth is a matter of fidelity, the forcing through subjective commitment, or political faith, into a state of affairs of something inadmissible within it. Forcing truth into a situation locates something inside its being that cannot be seen from that inside position. The waters whose being I touch upon briefly here – Omapere, Okanagan, Cayuga – all have Indigenous names, and all constitute an exception to a situation, or local world, made over by second settlement, in which each is known. My immediate concern is the constitution of a settler place, at once a state of affairs and body of law. The Indigeneity of lakes reconstructs this constitution in terms of a long history that exists, or *in-exists*, as an exception to a shorter settler one.

My own “fidelity” is to place, not to Badiou. My problem is settler hereness not a European thereness – *dasein* or there-being. I say this because the place – its things and bodies – are what I seem to know, making up the objects of my immediate consciousness. This knowledge will be tested by attending to the Indigenous encounter with the same place. The prior encounter is the base matter or material reality of any settler place. This makes the truth of New Zealand a matter of encounter rather than event. An “evental” truth, with its sense of rupture and transformation, suggests that the French revolution, or something like it, is the definitive event for Badiou, defining the event-ness of any event. An encounter, however, makes for an exception that is extrinsic rather than intrinsic, relational rather than eruptive, inhering in one’s own

history. Where the arrival of second settlers radically decentres and recentres a place, the reality of prior occupation, and a prior centredness, becomes lodged in things and bodies, and is withheld from the world of second settlement. The settlers' belated knowledge of place makes its truth Gnostic: what settlers know of it is the secondary screen of their own settlement, backlit by a deeper truth that is not discernible in terms of the encyclopaedia of their knowledge. What "inheres" in this place, strictly speaking, is settler eccentricity. This is what I think lakes and other things "know." It is the truth of their point of view, taking there to be such a perspective. And this is what is strictly inadmissible in the same place. One can say it, or write it, but a transformation of some sort would surely follow from it being effectively admitted. This eccentricity of the second settler constitutes the real exception to the current situation or state of affairs. It is the exception to settlement suggested by the truth of waters that reveals the secondariness of settler encounter, and manifests the possibility of a re-centred place and renewed public of place.

The self-eccentricity of second settlers and the possibility of a new commons are connected. But it's not clear to me that I could even think these things that I am saying *inside* my local world, which naturally hides my eccentricity from me. After all, hiding the original eccentricity of second settlers from themselves is the very basis of its construction. It is the situation of lakes in other Indigenous settings that enables me to take an extra-settler or *between* perspective here. I see this truth elsewhere, and therefore its invariance. The state of each Indigenous lake registers the stakes of a settler society to which it, or what inheres in it, constitutes an exception. In the extra-settler view of the lake, the current form of settler society is the real exception to a state of affairs that the lake itself makes conceivable. What inheres in each, what *in-exists*, is a constituent order, commons or public of place that hinges on the revelation of settler eccentricity. This truth hinges on *being seen* or being beheld by the lake, and not simply knowing what the encyclopaedia says about it. The possible public it withholds is not anything to come but already present. It is an order, and awareness, that exists without being admitted. Beyond things and bodies, a body of water constitutes a body of truth that is both historicisable and subjectivisable, an object of commitment and faith for those who draw upon it in its more local world, and whose future depends upon it.

### **The Situation of Three Lakes**

Lake Omapere is centrally situated in the upper North Island between the Hokianga Harbour and the Bay of Islands. Through my own encounter with the Hokianga area, which has included visits to the biennial Hokianga film festival and a remarkable class visit hosted by Te Hikutu at Moria marae in the Whirinaki valley of the Hokianga, I have become more aware of local history, and the unhappy state of the lake. Over the course of second settlement, its life-force, or *mauri*, has been diminished through deforestation, land-fill, the run-off of chemicals from farming and business operations, and the

appropriation of water for farming and nearby public utilities, including a local geothermal station. The diminished life-force of the lake ensures, co-equally, the diminished mana, or authority, of the long-standing peoples of the wider area, Ngāpuhi. While the multifarious use of the lake since second settlement has led to its poisoning through nitrogen intake and the growth of toxic algae, with negative effects for all users and local communities, the lake remains the sacred heart of Ngāpuhi peoples. Its degradation, in the view of tangata whenua, follows the failure of second settlers to acknowledge its rightful guardian, the taniwha (supernatural creature) Takauere. This being names the truth of the exception that the lake makes to a state of affairs in whose terms it has become degraded (more broadly the “transcendental” regime of the nation-state and the premise of continuous improvement on which it rests). Takauere’s recognition is also the basis on which the lake might yet be made healthy again, something which the highly expensive initiatives of government agencies have failed to achieve.<sup>2</sup> An acknowledgement of the lake’s truth, however, requires rethinking property rights, and a sense that the users and communities of the lake are all served, above and beyond their individualised property holdings around the lake area, by respecting its “mauri,” both as life-force and source of life for all people of the area, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (whether business people, farmers, recreational users, etc).

The invariant truth of settlement is the exception that the lake more generally constitutes to a state of affairs defined by the settler logic of continuous improvement. Lake Omapere has much in common with Lake Okanagan in south-east British Columbia, Canada. Considered in the matching terms of their Indigenous histories, such lakes form a larger body of truth, as well as an imaginable society of beings. My limited but eye-opening encounter with Okanagan people occurred at a conference on settler colonialism in 2007,<sup>3</sup> which impressed upon me the resemblance that I describe here, and that I hope to pursue further. The deficiency of knowledge based on the short history of second settlement, which I counterpose to the fullness of long Indigenous histories, cannot be understated, and makes a deeper encounter with local people and place in every case the necessary corrective.

Omapere shares with Okanagan a new set of problems created by eco-recreation and the building of holiday homes, which are remoulding the waterscape. The lake in British Columbia has been strongly marked by more recent activities of second settlement, namely orcharding, lifestyle settlement, wine-making, and tourism. The marketing of the area, like that of the Hokianga, has raised house prices and local government rates for First Peoples and settlers alike, while the unregulated extraction of Lake Okanagan’s rich mineral deposits has lowered the water table and destabilised surrounding forest. Local irrigation-based industries are depleting the area its new inhabitants celebrate. If marketing has brought new settlers, shrinking by proportion the Indigenous population, what settlers know, and propagate for the purposes of more settlement and higher



house prices, is what the marketing itself says: the Okanagan area is a land of fruit and sunshine, a garden of Eden and new-found paradise. The exception that the lake waters pose to this knowledge is a body of truth, and conceivable alternate society, it shares with Lake Omapere. This truth is an in-existent society that is at once historical and subjective, that is to say, a matter of Indigenous fidelity or truth, which is the commitment and faith of Okanagan people.

To historicise such development extends knowledge of the area to earlier forms of trade and exchange between the Salish Okanagan peoples, Europeans and eastern Iroquois, dating back to a period when Okanagan territory had not been split between Washington State, United States, and British Columbia, Canada. Such earlier “communities of interest” reconstitute the lifeways of waters since cut in two by treaty and national borders. In such relationships there lies the basis of a reconceived community and public of place. While the history might yet be known, the true public of place, grasped in terms of this long history, cannot. Within the situation or local world of second settlement the truth of place is as indiscernible as Okanagan people themselves. Their self-conscious strategy of survival has involved mixing themselves with in-comers to the point of indistinction. As with Lake Omapere the body of truth that the lake as exception instantiates is a set of lived and living relations, crossing the long and short histories in the same place of first and second settlers. The “transport” enabled by a long view of the situation is a means to truth in which we are asked to partake.

A third point of comparison extends in time and space the invariant truth of Indigenous waters. Lake Cayuga in upper New York State, given the location of Cornell University at its head, also raises questions about the domain, or site, of knowledge. I attended this university in the early 1990s, but for all my interest at the time in “colonial studies” I am now struck by my almost total inattention to the history of the same area. The setting of Cornell as a “ground” of knowledge has been much discussed, notably by Jacques Derrida in an influential *Diacritics* essay.<sup>4</sup> Its title, “The University in the Eyes of its Pupils”, might be counterposed by another, “The University in the Eyes of the Lake”. Indigenous waterscapes suggest a different ground of the knowledge of history and place. Where Derrida interrogates the metaphor of ground in Western metaphysics with regard to the topography of Cornell – he takes its canyons for the abyss of reason – the truth of waters counterposes a different sense of place. With reference to Vilisoni Hereniko’s film *Pear ta ma’on maf’ / The Land has Eyes* (2004), a lake too, I suggest, has eyes. Considering the university in the eyes of its historically Indigenous setting, the lake has long been looking at you.

The lake’s view of the events of long history, or what I am calling its truth, resituates the romantic aesthetics of Ezra Cornell’s vision of Cornell University, encapsulated by titles such as *Ithaca: the Site of Cornell University: a Center of Beauty and Intellect*.<sup>5</sup>

In *Ithaca Mirror Trail* (1969, Fig. 1) Robert Smithson illustrates the imposed screen of second settlement in a series of images that dislocate the sublime landscape by internally mirroring it. A Wordsworthian relation to the site of Cornell University as one of supersensible “beauty and intellect” appears inorganic and constructed. The photo-mirrors play the mediating role of writing itself in Wordsworth’s well-known “Boy of Winander”, which “constructs” the natural elements that echo and thereby mirror the boy’s call to the wild. Smithson’s images may be set alongside Shane Cotton’s 75 panel series *Te Tāmatanga: From Eden to Ohaeawai* (2000), which shows intermixed interior and exterior views of settlement, or a truth of Indigenous experience unfolding in terms of successive settlement. That the truth of settlement is invariant, though its source might be multiple, is suggested by the figure of Jesus that John Huria sees in the panels walking on Lake Omapere.<sup>6</sup>

A view of long history resituates the imagined place of second settlers’ settlement. A properly historicised waterscape returns the skyward-looking and sublime setting of the university to the place of Cayuga people, one of the original five nations of the Iroquois confederacy. The Longhouse established by the adjoining Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and easternmost Mohawk, founded in the Great Peace two centuries or more before European contact, later accepted the northern Tuscaroras, forming the six nations. Its long history takes in the second settlement of Iroquois territories following the Sullivan-Clinton campaign during the American revolutionary war, the subsequent destruction of the Six Nations’ resource-base, their dispersal and fragmentation, and the parcelling out of land in large holdings to the invaders.<sup>7</sup> The campaign was ordered by George Washington to nullify the threat that the Six Nations appeared to present to the nascent Republic. The Iroquois had been drawn to the British side, against their wish to remain neutral, in order to protect their central stake in the fur trade. The price for Cayugans included the complete destruction of villages on the east and west sides of Lake Cayuga by two detachments of the larger campaign. Across the wider territories of the Iroquois the campaign engaged in what we would now call “infrastructural warfare”: crops were uprooted and food-bearing trees levelled. The reduction of Cayuga people to the barest subsistence led to the relocation of many to the Six Nation reservation of Great River in Canada, and others to north-eastern Oklahoma, forming the Seneca-Cayuga tribe of that state. It also played a role in treaties with the state of New York that saw initial Cayuga holdings of some three million acres, stretching from northern Ontario to the border of Pennsylvania, reduced to just three square miles in 1795, and a final extinguishing of that miniscule territory which finds New York Cayuga today residents of the Seneca reservation of Cattaraugus. The similar story of the Seneca precipitated the Handsome Lake movement of the so-named chief, whose code is today observed in biennial meetings of the Longhouse.

An interior view of such history, held by the lake as much as the Longhouse, makes the long occupation of Cayuga people an exception to settlement. But

the exception that the now placeless Cayuga pose to New York State and the Republic makes settlers eccentric to the place of their future belonging. In the settlers' own view, which includes the prospect of Cornell University, the transformation and improvement of the area is the very basis of their "own" prosperous and peaceful country. In the terms of the Republic the truth of settlement cannot be admitted. The pursuit of "life, liberty and happiness" in the Declaration of Independence is prescriptively blind to people as peoples. If the same truth of settler invasiveness, and the radical transformation of the area of Indigenous lakes by second settlement, may be subtracted from three lakes, it remains indiscernible from the point of view of each lake as a resource for extraction and the basis for future settlement. Subtraction and extraction are here opposed as truth and knowledge. The truth of Lake Cayuga is irreducible to its current uses, which includes the lake-cooling system operated by the town for energy and utilised by the agri-research branch of the university. Its truth queries a knowledge of lake histories, or the histories that lakes hold, understood in terms of merely present purposes, including, in the case of Cornell, the enlightenment of university knowledge. With a visionary eye to the future Ezra Cornell did not look behind or below himself.

### **The Political Constitution of Waters**

The seminal moment in recent New Zealand legal history of the foreshore and seabed asks us to think below the waterline. Therein lies the true ground of place, and basis of a reconceived commons. The case of Lake Omapere makes the contrast of land and water explicit, and the true constitution of place less "solid" than it would appear to second settlers. There the physical ground created for farming through lowering the waters of the lake by four and a half feet (1.3 metres) in the 1920s is regarded as one of the main reasons for its currently degraded state. The recovered land was made available to returned servicemen after World War One. In the memory of *tangata whenua*, however, the same ground remains water. A local view is that in order to make the lake healthy again, the ground should be returned to water. This view raises the heated question of local governance of the lake area as opposed to the failed interventions of the national government. In this instance the "hard" ground of second settlement, now the individual property of farmers and the would-be basis of settler prosperity, is actually water and the real source of the well-being of local community. Returning the contested land to water might suggest the rightful state of the lake for all parties. The view of *tangata whenua*, certainly, would make this action right, or *tika*. But the rightness of the matter does not rest there. Interior and exterior views of settlement are conjoined by a truth that surpasses them. Right action follows from grasping the truth of the situation in terms of its exception, and historical precondition, which is the eccentricity of settlers to an Indigenous place.

In terms of the physical histories of First Peoples, ground is more than metaphor. The physical place and being placed there by a long history of occupation

are not separable. Nor does the subtraction of Indigeneity remove the truth that long history constitutes from any place that instantiates it. Rather than something you have, or own, the body of truth that a lake constitutes inheres in the world that has supplanted it. Nor is the truth of its long history of inhabitation properly articulable in terms of a national regime based on the shorter history of second settlement. For filmmaker and writer Barry Barclay the Indigeneity of “Fourth Cinema” is distinguished precisely by an “interiority”, an indiscernible exception to film more generally, and not by more ostensible “indigenous” markers, whether the language, the use of elders, the presence of children, attitudes to land or rituals associated with spirit worlds. Such “surface features” or “accidents” make up the exteriority.<sup>8</sup> Constitutionally speaking, what is indiscernible is the long history of place that inheres in the short or shorter history of second settlement. This history, however broken it might be for First Peoples, is for second peoples a non-relation. It is neither available to them, nor can it be appropriated by them. Yet long history is not necessarily common knowledge among First Peoples. The truth of long history can appear as in-existing divisions previously indiscernible to the majority of First Peoples who are its vehicle.<sup>9</sup>

The ontological ground of Indigenous claims, which is also a political claim, is therefore the very place of their long occupation. This is the substance or material reality of long-existing relations among First Peoples and the place of their originary inhabitation. This human-nature collective may be quite transformed as Māori or Native American collectives become corporatised in a business sense through treaty and other settlements, introducing a new sense of the corporate body of Indigenous peoples. How that corporatisation might constitute right relation from an Indigenous point of view is a matter of internal politics. One might question capitalist activities of casino gambling or the extractive land use that benefit iwi (tribes). In any case the fidelity of right relation, which is the inherent truth of waters, conjoins and surpasses interior and exterior views of the lake. Here Māori fidelity sits within, or better, alongside a Pākehā fidelity to their encounter with a fully Māori place. Right relation does not necessitate a return to a prior human-nature, given the irrevocable change wrought by technology and second settlement, but neither is it subordinate to Pākehā human-nature, which is, importantly, a secondary one. Nature as its own preserve, separated out from human cohabitation, describes the history-cleansing wilderness aesthetics of New Zealand’s national parks. The neo-indigeneity of Pākehā drives the eco-national enterprise of *weeding*, constructing a purified primordial place so that all New Zealanders will be at home and know themselves as One. Eco-indigenist oneness, ensuring the health and well-being of the whole population, means compulsory nationalism.

Given the state of the world’s waters, eco-friendly Indigeneity has become globally acceptable and attractive. Witness James Cameron’s *Avatar*, reputedly the “future of cinema”. Eco-indigenism may be a pseudo-religion well-suited

to twenty-first century concerns, but Indigenous claims are appropriated, and Indigenous peoples re-colonised, when they are made everybody's claim. The truth claims of ecology and indigeneity are co-equivalent and not simply the same. They can easily be grasped as separate in every instance where Indigenous practices conflict with conservation, whether killing whales, moose or native pigeons. Indigenous claims are partial to every place where Indigenous claims are made. Their basis, which is the survival of Indigenous peoples, makes their struggle for self-determination universal, but fidelity to Indigenous principles and values means that Indigenous claims are not made on everybody's part. The nature of an Indigenous claim cannot be everybody's, it being foundationally an Indigenous claim and not one of any other kind. Everybody becoming Indigenous, even for the survival of all, suggests a new colonisation. In New Zealand, becoming Indigenous makes Pākehā the avatar of Māori. I detect more than technological know-how in Weta Workshop's local contribution to the film.

Indigenous claims are more difficult, more challenging, than eco-friendliness. The merging of ecologism and Indigeneity ignores the broken history of invasion, the deracination, urbanisation and corporatisation of Indigenous peoples, as well as intra-, inter- and urban tribal politics. The more difficult truth is that the fidelity of Indigenous peoples to Indigenous principles and values is not just a condition of Indigenous flourishing (the freedom to be Ngāpuhi, Okanagan, Cayuga and so on). If the subjectivism of Indigenous fidelity is denied, so is truth as exception, which is the inherent or in-existing condition of local worlds. This is the truth that waters "know", which is that the everything and all things of being Indigenous persists in and through the multiple forms of successive settlement. As displaced peoples, subject to the derived sovereignty of that displacement, Indigenous peoples seek a constitution on the basis of their long-standing inhabitation of place. This new-old constitution would be based in the co-equivalence of First Peoples and land, in the first instance, and a co-habitation of First Peoples and settlers in the second instance. If the majority of Indigenous peoples today are no longer landed people, the history of dispossession yet inheres in the collectives that Indigenous peoples variously maintain they still are.

This same applies to the displaced Cayuga, a people today with ostensibly no land they can call their own in their ancestral territory. Nor has the law responded to the history of their dispossession.<sup>10</sup> The Cayuga have claimed that the 1790 Non-Intercourse Act makes treaties entered into by parties other than Congress invalid, and that this nullifies the exchange of land negotiated with themselves by the New York State government. Having lodged the initial claim in 1980 the Cayuga were awarded monetary damages in 2001 of \$250 million by the United States Court of Appeals of the second circuit. The judgement, however, has since been reversed in a Supreme Court hearing of 2005 on the basis of the novel defence of laches, which end-stops the time in which a plaintiff can bring a claim for damages, given changes to the property in the interim. Because the Supreme

Court has refused to revisit the case, this would appear the end of the legal road for the Cayuga. But Cayuga sovereignty cannot, I think, be similarly end-stopped. Here another constitution emerges that does not rest on the American Constitution, which in this case withdrew the redress initially offered to Native American tribes by its own establishment.

The situation in New Zealand is stymied for the time being by the State's refusal to revisit its political settlement and redress the quasi-constitution of the Treaty. Pākehā, and many Māori, might prefer the piecemeal and ad hoc transfer of resources through treaty settlements negotiated between individual iwi and the Crown. What has not been settled, however, and which therefore remains irresistible, is the transfer of a more primary resource, which is the human capacity to regulate affairs according to the shape and pattern of long-existing social behaviour. In this regard the Ngāpuhi claim to the Waitangi Tribunal is explicitly constitutional in nature. The lake at the centre of their territory calls for a fidelity to tikanga (protocols). To Pākehā the same call calls for a fidelity to the place and its history, which is to say to their encounter with Māori. In this sense the body of truth that Indigenous waters constitute is also an existing body of law. Its constitution is an already peopled one, the base matter and material reality of a prior encounter of people and place, and the social arrangements that resulted from that encounter. This is what the later Pākehā encounter, whether or not it is recognised, has encompassed. Indigenous law, says Barry Barclay, is my *breathing*.<sup>11</sup> Barclay calls this fidelity "First Law". It is not peculiar to First Peoples, though the long denial by settlers that tangata whenua have a law-making capacity makes settler sovereignty secondary, and derived.

The constitution of First Law in a country of second settlement inheres in the pre-existing nature of an Indigenous place. This many-peopled place counts as one only in relation to second settlers (it is many to itself). It may now be broken, dispersed, fragmented, but nevertheless inheres, or *in-exists* in Badiou's sense, as an inadmissible exception to the place at its stands. This is the truly "originary relation" of a settler place, in-existing as an exception to a state of affairs defined by the nation-state. While many Māori certainly take exception to settler governance, the true exception manifested by Māori sovereignty is settler eccentricity – their encompassing of an already inhabited place. This means that the truth of Māori fidelity is strictly *extra-settler*, that is, without settlers. It draws upon sources that predate second settlement altogether. The constitution of tangata whenua, and the Māori fidelity of tino rangatiratanga, in this sense bears no relation to second settlers at all. This universality of self-determination manifests itself in a partial, local claim, one in which in which I as Pākehā have no part, because it does not at source depend on my being here. Tino rangatiratanga, as a result, is properly inadmissible to the national regime of non-Māori. But being inadmissible, as I hope to have shown, does not make it not true, and does not mean it can be avoided. On this understanding of tino rangatiratanga Māori

cannot simply be counted as one. Every place, and place within it, must be negotiated in terms of its own history. Māori are many peoples of a place that has been counted as one after the fact of second settlement. They are a prior multiple of a place that has been multiplied by second comers.

### The Extra-Settlement of the Future

The material reality of prior peoples, now multiplied by relations with second settlers, is the true basis of a reconceived commons, and people or public of place. This is invariably true of Ngāpuhi north New Zealand, Okanagan British Columbia, and the once-Cayugan territory of New York State. The in-existing truth of waters constitutes the emergent and “true” public of societies of second settlement. There are multiple interests in a lake, and the lake itself, considered a being in its own right, is one interest in the multiple. Taking into account this range of interests, which are sets of longer and shorter-standing relationships, makes place a different ground and basis of governance. The “public” is the new human-nature or multiple of place. Reconstituted as the truth of waters, the place is reconfigured as a parliament of human and non-human voices, bound in a constitution older than the inauguration of the New Zealand parliament. The majoritarian non-Māori public – the basis of that settler parliament – is dissolved by the exception that the long history of Māori occupation makes to it. A prior human-nature inheres, in-exists, and insists on a new constitution that acknowledges its being. A claim whose corollary is the absence of Pākehā may well not be admitted, perhaps cannot be admitted, but the exception that it constitutes in terms of Pākehā occupation alters the nature of place, *what it is*, ontologically, politically, historically. The longer view of Māori occupation is the case for the co-equal voice of lakes and its surrounding peoples. So Indigenous peoples, land and waters, multiply the one people of the nation by insisting that they themselves, and their long-standing relationships, are an inextricable part.

*My grateful thanks to Anna Cushen for her help in assembling this essay.*

1. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009), 20.
2. See the documentary *Raising the Mauri of Lake Omāpere*, dir. Simon Marler (2006).
3. At the Fifth Galway Conference on Settler Colonialism in Galway in June, 2007, I learnt a great deal in a short time from a panel devoted to the Okanagan, and thank the participants, Jeanette Armstrong, Lally Grauer, Marlowe Sam and John Wagner, who inspired my attempt in this essay to grasp the more general truth of Indigenous waters.
4. Jacques Derrida, “The Principle of Reason; the University in the Eyes of its Pupils,” *Diacritics* (Fall 1983): 3–20.
5. Alexis Lawrence Romanoff, *Ithaca: the Site of Cornell University; a Center of Beauty and Intellect* (Ithaca, New York: Cayuga Press, 1962).
6. “Metamorphic Vocabulary: Text and Image in Shane Cotton’s Paintings,” in *Shane Cotton* (Wellington: City Gallery Wellington and Victoria University Press, 2003), 136.
7. For an instructive visual reconstruction of this history see [www.sullivanclinton.com](http://www.sullivanclinton.com), a site by Robert Spiegelman. Accessed April, 2010.
8. “Celebrating Fourth Cinema,” a talk given to the Film, Television and Media Studies Department, University of Auckland (September 17, 2002), reproduced in *Illusions*, no. 53 (Winter 2003): 7.
9. A local instance would be the appearance/ re-appearance of numerous sub-iwi Māori groupings in the Auckland area, each claiming tangata whenua status, following the claim by Ngāti Whātua to the Māori seats to be allocated in the new Super City council.
10. See “This Land is your Land, this Land is my Land: Cayuga Indian Nation of New York v. Pataki,” 52 *Villanova Law Review* (2007): 607–639.
11. This is the title of a talk given by Barry Barclay at the *One Country, Two Laws* symposium in July, 2006. Barclay died in February 2008.

Fig. 1  
Katoomba Falls,  
Blue Mountains,  
Australia  
June 24, 2009  
Photograph:  
Jan Bryant



# Waterfall

Jan Bryant

An excursive rumination on dislocation, memory and water follows this short disclosure. *Waterfall* was written in the small creases of a certain kind of historical account, histories that are immense and overarching, meta-histories that present evidence of momentous social and political shifts, but are too cumbersome to penetrate the small, discrete spaces of individual resistance or singular experience, too hefty and self-assured to admit difference, or multiple understandings of place and identity. James Belich's *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939*,<sup>1</sup> with its ambitious reach, and carefully signposted disclaimers about what falls in and out of its research focus, is such a history.<sup>2</sup> A history of economic development, mass emigration, mushrooming populations, and the hubris of fledging states, its central thesis is that “Anglo-settlerism”<sup>3</sup> transformed the world through a crucial period of physical and economic expansion, producing predominately positive and enduring changes. Necessarily, by the terms of its own thesis, *Replenishing the Earth* is a work of generalisations and exclusions that dives fearlessly into a sea of contentious and sensitive issues, while evading being sunk by them,<sup>4</sup> however, such a move cannot insulate this kind of history from essentialism (exclusion) and reductionism. In Belich's case, we are left with the underlying presumption that a special correspondence between Anglo-settler nations endures, and this best explains the economic and political “successes” of the English-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> In his grounding of the diversity of many nations into a white paste of “Anglophone” self-congratulation (although this is never done with a strident or vainglorious voice), what is impeded, even at the level of meta-analysis, is a thorough consideration of the impact of other factors that have had substantial and far-reaching effects on the development of these nations (such as penal-transportation, wars of independence, slavery), effects that are just as important in understanding who we are, and how we got here.<sup>6</sup> Since Belich's attention is narrowly construed around economic indicators, particularly booms and busts measured through periods of growth and decline in demography and wealth,<sup>7</sup> we might reflect for a moment upon those whose numbers were radically reduced by “settlerism”, Australian Aboriginals. As Noel George Butlin writes, in his influential, *Economics and the Dreamtime:*

The aboriginal economy was a stably ordered system of decision-making that amply satisfied the wants of the people. British occupation resulted (note that there was no indication of intent) in the destruction of Aboriginal economy and society and the decimation of its population. We have two counter-balancing experiences – a rapidly expanding British society and a rapidly declining Aboriginal society between 1788 and 1850. Over this period, Australian history seen from the point of view of human beings as a whole is a dual process, not simply one of European expansion.<sup>8</sup>

The actions taken against First Peoples, including the policies, treaties, reconciliations and ongoing disputes, combined with the very significant impact of the millions of non-British settlers and immigrants who contribute to the economic and cultural weave of Belich's settler nations are defining influences that cannot be hastily brushed aside. Further, ending his history at the beginning of World War Two, Belich allows the long-term consequences of British Empire, and the ensuing re-shaping of the contemporary world around heightened regions of ethnic and religious conflict, to fall neatly outside his vista (India is conspicuously absent from the account altogether). The ecological effects of industrialisation that continue to challenge the world's political, intellectual and scientific resources are also beyond consideration. Even under the terms of Belich's meta-history, *Replenishing the Earth* is less than the full story.

What follows is a personal account of the specificity of place, which is also a struggle with place, and of history, water and ecology. This is a place complicated by transportation and shaped ineradicably by ongoing waves of mass immigration, first Northern and Eastern, then Southern Europe, South America, Asia and Africa, all of which have continued to dilute in very important and particular ways, memories, cultural or otherwise, of British settlement. Dilution is not the same as forgetting, as many on the conservative side of politics in Australia claim is their right when they insist that our history should not focus on the "bad bits", the embarrassing bits, the mistakes, the atrocities, the subversions and resistances.<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, whose thinking forms the armature of *Waterfall*, would not agree:

The course of history, seen in terms of the concept of catastrophe, can actually claim no more attention from thinkers than a child's kaleidoscope, which with every turn of the hand dissolves the established order into a new array. There is a profound truth in this image. The concepts of the ruling class have always been the mirrors that enable an image of "order" to prevail. – The kaleidoscope must be smashed.<sup>10</sup>

Benjamin's historical method is not to identify great, historical shifts, but to focus on the details, the subversions, the forgotten possibilities. "Redemption", he argues, "depends on the tiny fissure in the continuous catastrophe."<sup>11</sup>

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Clinging to a cavernous plunge into unimaginable depths are ferns here and there, ancient, spidery growths that stretch translucently through the vertiginous drop of rock (Fig. 1). At points they move in ribbons across the flat rock face, while others are isolated and appear more tentative in their hold on the vertical wall. Perhaps smaller ferns huddle around their roots but it is not possible to see them from the cable car. The drop from the cliff edge to the concealed valley floor, so thick with eucalyptus bush and growth, so inaccessible, is accentuated in the fall of water that descends to the valley below. The ferns achieve the same perspective but dotted here and there down the rock, they fall with much more subtlety. I left this place when I was still only a baby, returning only once as a small child, many years ago, yet this waterfall has been clinging to my memory ever since. This foreign, unfamiliar place, bursting with tourists and marked permanently on my passport, holds only the barest relation to my life.

I descend with the other tourists into the valley below. Its paths are spotted with signs of cartoon figures (strangely rupturing the dense and wet bush air) that tell stories of mining and other historical “achievements”, of trees hit by lightning, of native fauna and flora. There are no pre-contact stories. It is as though in the decision to decorate the paths with these “comical” renditions of achievement, there is a vain hope that our attention will be momentarily deflected from thoughts of invasion. After weaving our way through the dark mountain paths, we are pulled suddenly from bush cover to be strung high up above the trees in a glass viewing contraption, illuminated brightly by the sky, its thick cables swinging with the shape of the mountain. In the distance a more prominent landmark is now visible: three, enormous, perpendicular rocks that sit in the foreground of a vast, ancient valley that stretches hundreds of kilometres inland. From here, a recently re-built tourist structure cannot be seen. Its housing of shops and cafés, parking spaces for buses and cars, asphalt and concrete, fences, coin-slot telescopes all disappear. Looking out to the empty blueness of an immense valley, I forget momentarily that we are actually trapped in this strange concentration of pre-determined activities, “sight-seeing”, severed from all other significances or meanings. As with the waterfall, diverting and flashy, the three rocks ensnare tourists inextricably in narrow acts of looking and consumption.<sup>12</sup>

To look, to collect fridge magnets, to have rides, to send postcards, to inscribe one’s presence with a photograph, the same photograph reproduced as an original again and again with the arrival of each new tourist. Might a gathering of the snapshots of tourists posing in front of the rocks, one taken from each decade since the middle of the nineteenth century, reveal in the folds of their discrete yet collective “realities”, the devastation of the ancient culture that had once defined this place? It seems a simple enough premise to imagine the gaps opening up between the images of the rocks, repeated hundreds of times on one hand, and the separate interests of each group or individual photographed in front of them on the other, and in the gaps, the possibility of discovering other images, other

stories. Would it be possible to retrieve authentic and ancient stories, the mysteries of this valley, which are lost, perhaps even to the descendants. Singly each one of these photographs, isolating and replete, wholly suffused by the lives of its enframed figures, their thoughts, their recollections of the place, the day, the holiday, would be too weak to summon the memories that might be entombed under this melancholic terrain. Yet, collectively, something much more powerful may be generated. As with all seemingly simple premises, though, this one too holds submerged traps. Since I connect with the episteme of late European thought, where meaning circulates entirely within language and cannot be found disconnected from it, I know there would be no way of accessing or recognising, simply through its metaphysical evocation, the “authentic” as something out there to be retrieved. In selecting a photograph from each decade another form of violence would be perpetrated upon it, for the perception of time as dividing and linear interleaves neatly with the velocity of the coloniser.

Just as memory is increasingly enclosed in the slipstream of a wholly urbanised life, the problem of time suddenly looms portentously as a sign for endless estrangement. Since questions of “Western” time are fully absorbing (hegemonic), is it possible that spaces between knowing and belonging will never be breached? The way time presents as a rapid passing and a concurrent longing-for, mimicking a form of commodity-malaise, the way it arises as phenomena marked on the things we own and make, as fashion, as ways of thinking, as progress, as technology, as screen time, “real-time”, time lost and regained – the dominance of “Western” time makes the capacity to recognise other forms of time more and more implausible. I remember a Tūhoe friend talking of his grandmother who thought of time only as the division between day and night, since hours were simply extraneous markers of invasion. This is a cold reminder that my cultural understandings of indigeneity come more richly shaped from Aotearoa friends, than through direct contact with Aboriginal culture. These thoughts induce once again feelings of dislocation and a belief that a search for “home” (as something concrete and “knowable”) is a highly unstable and unsettling experience. It is not located in the cities I’ve inhabited over the years, and neither is it found in Katoomba where I was born<sup>13</sup> (I understand this now), yet there are feelings of homesickness, nonetheless, for a nebulous, shadowy utopia that lingers without tangible form. And when I envy, now and then, the idea of a family that extends to a whole people, through generations, it is an intellectual longing, not an emotional or intuitive one. It is as though a desire for a deep connection to place, what Tūhoe call *matemateaohe*, a craving for dirt (for homeland), is so forcefully severed that it can only manifest as pure abstraction. It might cling as powdery dust to the finest points of my DNA, but I doubt this too, for unlike my many friends with immigrant parents or grandparents who still carry the cultural traditions of their lineage close to their stomachs, my persisting sense of detachment is not accompanied by a heritage longingly romanticised. Ancestrally I am convict-class, and I bear a long and tortured excision.

Fig. 2  
 John Glover  
*The River Nile, Van  
 Diemen's Land from  
 Mr Glover's Farm*  
 1837  
 Oil on canvas  
 76.4 x 114.6 cm  
 National Gallery of  
 Victoria, Melbourne,  
 Felton Bequest, 1956



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There is an uncomfortable compulsion not to stare at John Glover's *The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land from Mr Glover's Farm* (1837), on permanent display at the National Gallery of Victoria (Fig. 2). The gentle shock first emitted by the painting turns with closer attention into a more savage one. The subject matter, ostensibly the local Plindermairhemener band of the Ben Lomond tribe, positioned in a river landscape is unknowable, belonging to another place, even otherworldly in its imaginary folly and Arcadian allusions. The conceit of paternalistic primitivism appears deeply inscribed in the crudely drawn figures, generalised and unspecific; one climbing a tree to catch a possum, another facing the viewer with a huge, white smile and bulging eyes (imperceptible in reproductions), and next to him a man whose arm merges indistinguishably with his boomerang, so that the frozen, curling motion appears at first to simulate a tail.<sup>14</sup> Around the clear and benign waters of the river and its smooth, rocky bed, the trees, particularly the trunks of those framing the foreground to ensure compositional impact, are sinuously exaggerated; a typical mannerism of Glover that John McPhee suggests is an "attempt to compose the unruliness of the Australian bush."<sup>15</sup> Devoid as it is of all signs of European contact, the work suggests loss and perhaps regret, and yet the civilising ideologies of colonial expansion are still clearly reflected in its idealised setting (untainted by invasion or Christianising missions) and its highly generalised and impersonal figures.<sup>16</sup> The people bathing in the river, on the riverbanks, or in the distance by the campfire, are not just in harmony with nature but seem interchangeable with it: rather than representing the connection of the land to the people, they are indistinguishable ontologically from the perspective of the painter. Despite passing reference to hunting in the frozen boomerang thrower and the absurd climbing possum catcher, insinuating Aboriginal custom and bountiful food supply, this is primarily an image of non-productivity, of Arcadian idleness. This place, imagined prior to invasion, this dark, watery expanse is painted for its picturesque charm and for a settler's land-owning ambitions.

The first object which strikes the beholder, is a clear column of water, apparently eight or ten yards in circumference, which is projected with great impetuosity from the perpendicular rock, at the height of one hundred yards... We mounted on the highest stone before the bason [sic], and looking down into it, were struck with the sight of a most beautiful rainbow of a perfectly circular form, which was produced by the meridian rays of the sun refracted in the vapour of the cascade. Beyond this circle the rest of the steam was tinged with the prismatic colours, refracted in an inverted order.

– George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World* (1773)<sup>17</sup>

How different is the depiction by William Hodges, official draughtsman on James Cook’s second voyage to the Pacific (1772–75), of Māori and their lands close to the force of a powerful waterfall. Executed for the Admiralty on Hodges’ return to England, [*Cascade Cove*] *Dusky Bay* (1775) is a composite of two separate experiences of the voyagers: their meeting with a nomadic Māori family (estranged from wider iwi or tribal connections), and the sighting, in this verdant and secluded region, of a rainbow encircling the Cove’s eponymous cascade (Fig. 3).<sup>18</sup> In this work, “united and harmonised by the controlling imagination”, as Bernard Smith noted,<sup>19</sup> it is not surprising that Hodges’ treatment of the landscape often leads to discussions of the sublime. An experience (painfully) indescribable in its intensity, and in its



vastness, is located somewhere between George Forster's journal entry and Hodges' subsequent visualisation of this event,<sup>20</sup> the painting's liberal use of chiaroscuro, its scumbling and vigorous brushstrokes that form the thrashing and dangerous white waters of the waterfall, the spectrum of light that overarches this vicious turbulence, turning the waterfall and its vapour (powerful enough, according to Forster, to soak the voyagers from a hundred yards away)<sup>21</sup> into a radiant cynosure, and then, as the focus shifts skyward, another intense concentration of light emitting from the clouds above this unfamiliar and precipitous terrain. Each element of the painting contributes to the theatrical affect cast by Hodges over this dark land.<sup>22</sup> In this early contact between Māori and Europeans, two women are turned to the waterfall, ostensibly becoming part of the spectacle, yet a third faces forward in a pose that mirrors the posture of the man.<sup>23</sup> In the treatment of Māori, the man, assertive, comfortable, his body resting with ease against his taiaha, and the woman, also self-possessed, leaning against her spear, there is regard for the accuracy of an encounter with indigeneity that is patently lacking in Glover's work,<sup>24</sup> or, as Bernard Smith and Rüdiger Joppien observe, "we come to realise that Hodges has broken through the schemata of ethnography and is now drawing the people of Dusky Bay as he might have done figures in the landscape back home in England, with a feeling for the individual posture and living presence of the person."<sup>25</sup>

Hodges' painting demonstrates a quite different concern from Glover's. In the *River Nile*, we find "natives" fatefully enduring Glover's "primitive" Paradise, with its lugubrious destiny, as though salt were being rubbed into the wounds of usurpation, of death; the sensation of life, so tangible in the Hodges' work to Smith and Joppien, is plainly absent. David Bindman, in describing Cook's second expedition, establishes that this was an incisive moment that "opened the South Seas to the European Imagination", at a time "when the Franco-British Enlightenment was at its height."<sup>26</sup> It was an opportunity, furthermore, for testing "common assumptions about humanity, raising an urgent need to place the 'new people' within existing frameworks of human development."<sup>27</sup> This historical context – a compulsion for investigation and exploration, not yet formed into the acquisitiveness of the settler – separates significantly the visual schema of the artists. Hodges' painting is a first-hand document of a journey into the imagination of eighteenth-century European aesthetic and intellectual concerns, and since Hodges' painting operates as much as documentation for the British Navy of its expedition to remote corners of the Pacific, as it does as a romanticised first response to Māori and their lands,<sup>28</sup> there is little sign of the personal self-interest that is so conspicuously flaunted in the title of Glover's work. As an active member of a settler community, where its own pastoral ambitions were wholly incompatible with indigenous hunting and land-management practices, Glover painted *The River Nile, Van Diemen's Land from Mr Glover's Farm* in a very different context. Glover's arrival from England in 1831 fell in the middle of the forced mass

Fig. 3  
William Hodges  
[Cascade Cove] Dusky Bay  
1775  
Oil on canvas  
1359 x 1930 mm  
National Maritime  
Museum, Greenwich,  
London

removal of Aboriginal people from their lands to Wybalenna on Flinders Island, and he would not have been, as Jeanette Hoorn has shown, unaware of the debates surrounding dispossession that were active and heated at the time.<sup>29</sup> By the time Glover settled at Patterdale, the property he acquired as part of the British Government's "Lands Grant Scheme", the area had already been "cleared" of the local Plindermairhemener people by his neighbour John Batman<sup>30</sup> and George Augustus Robinson, Governor Arthur's "Aboriginal conciliator", who Glover greatly admired and supported.<sup>31</sup>

Glover's work is a befitting indictment of exclusion and exile, where the wont for mimesis has turned instead into the self-interests of subjectivity, of history, of colonialist systems of possession, but it also signifies another "reality". This uncomfortable work of Glover's with its deformations and conceits, with its "transliteration" of European landscape conventions onto an "unknown" and "unseeable" world, also provokes a familiar sense of spatial and cultural confusion. It is as though the unknowable gulf that is inevitably inscribed in the foreign surface of the canvas, the foreign materials of the paint, which cannot "see" except with the blind touch of foreign eyes is emblematic of my own incapacity to "see", my own sense of displacement.

\* \* \*

How might one think of a body of water that exists only as a folly of the painter's imagination; or, as with the waterfall of my birthplace, a spectacle for tourism? What might a single drop of water be in relation to these bodies of water?<sup>32</sup> The division of water into smaller and smaller parts (analogous, perhaps, to the presumptuous division of time) is water's power neutralised, its movement arrested, to become not a force but many thousands of trickles, each divided from the other, self-interested and exposed in their singular and fragile isolation. And even though "the small size of its molecule belies the complexity of its actions and its singular capabilities",<sup>33</sup> such epistemological resolve may open to nothing more than the hubris of classification, of knowledge, (ultimately an exasperating enquiry), for trying to understand the molecular structure of water by reducing it to its base observable properties (H<sub>2</sub>O), draws me no closer to understanding a waterfall.

... and when Indiana raised her eyes and smiled upon me,  
I pointed to the waterfall and talked of dying.  
– George Sand, *Indiana* (1832)<sup>34</sup>

While water's many conditions – cultural, instrumental, chemical – endure as a profusion of mutable and capricious hypotheses, quite another relation is found by refracting the image of a waterfall through a lens. Now numerous pixels on a screen, it is not the fantasy of a drop of water but a single picture element with an ordered and systemised relation to its whole (a digital waterfall of equal and divisible parts).

Fig. 4  
Chris Welsby  
Video still from *Waterfall*  
2004  
Single channel video  
installation  
Courtesy of the artist



*Waterfall* (2004) is a single channel video installation by Chris Welsby (Fig. 4). Positioned near a waterfall in the “wilderness” of Canada, the camera arbitrarily “determines” moments of focus, captured as a five-minute loop. The camera concentrates on the magnified droplets of spray as they hit the lens so that a watery pattern gradually builds up on the screen. Enclosed now around the self-interest of the lens, the image is flattened to become a plane of splashes, a body of water becoming-droplets-becoming-pixels. During these moments, the waterfall’s “spectacular” actuality is absorbed by a compulsion for abstraction, and then it shifts back to deep focus and the digital waterfall returns. In the work’s playful referencing of the droplet to its body and the pixel to the picture, *Waterfall* also alludes to water’s intricate and complicated constitution. Looping continuously on a large, translucent screen, suspended in the centre of the gallery space, viewers are able to walk around the waterfall projection, now reduced to pure image, so that only “the fragile and transitory nature of the digital image” remains.<sup>35</sup> Disconnected from the waterfall and from stories of intrepidity, authenticity, and sentimentality that often sustain national myths of wilderness, “nature” is replaced by the screen.

The mountain waterfall of my birth continues to flow only under the continual threat of a long and devastating drought. A trickle of what it once was, it nonetheless still flows, all the while shifting its course with slow diversions and trajectories. Water finds its own way through the mountain rock as a force of gravity (a forceful body), wearing channels and ridges that are memories of ancient *and* recent movements. And yet, despite water’s pertinacity, human interference can throw it off its determined path, sending it astray and against its natural destiny, as instrument for “improvement”, farming, industry, pleasure... In early settlement, there was a small waterfall just below Market Street, that odd street that destroys the perfect harmony of Melbourne’s

grid-formation. It was once a rocky crossing for the local Wurundjeri people who'd lived sustainably with the river for over 40,000 years, and it provided a separation point between salt water and fresh.<sup>36</sup> It was also the place where the long-awaited and only son of the City's ill-fated founder, John Batman – Glover's old neighbour from Van Diemen's Land – John Charles drowned. His distraught mother, Eliza, recently widowed, an ex-convict and "absconder", struggling with the legal wrangling over her exclusion from her late husband's will, wrote to her daughter of his death:

It seems he was catching some small fishes which are left by the tide among the stones at the falls, and in getting up in haste, one of the stones gave way and he was immediately carried away a considerable distance by the current into the middle of the unlucky Yarra and before any assistance could be procured, my lovely boy had sunk. Every effort was made to get the body, but to no purpose, until next morning, when several of the blacks dived in different parts of the river and were successful in finding him... all my happiness in this world is buried in the grave with him. I loved him to excess.<sup>37</sup>

In the first years of settlement, there was "a punt or little boat just above 'The Falls', where the owner made a good living at three-pence a head for the half-minute's passage." They called this disembarkation place "The Beach".<sup>38</sup> The building of the bridge put an end to the ferry business and, in 1883, the waterfall was removed by dynamite.<sup>39</sup> The destruction of the waterfall caused salt water to spread up the river,<sup>40</sup> while down river came pollution and rubbish from the industries that had set up along its constantly altered banks – sewage, waste from gold mining, wool washing and leather tanning. Even the mortuary poured its waste directly into the river.<sup>41</sup> The once clear waters are now turbid, contaminated. The bottom of Market Street where there was once a waterfall is now a corner of the city edged by skyscrapers and barely reached by the sun. Holding so many memories of death, of theft, of the usurped, it remains a melancholic part of the city. The river is barely seen now from Market Street, blocked by elevated railway lines and roads. It is as though the nineteenth-century love of the picturesque could not be resolved within its instrumental drive for profit, for the "good" of the settlement.

There's not enough water in the city now.

We left the vessel this morning at daybreak, being most anxious to resume our rambles over a country possessing so many interesting features, and facilities so entirely congenial to the ripening of my intentions. We travelled round the bay to examine some plains and low hills at a distance. After crossing the neck of land we fell in with a small river or creek, which we were obliged to follow up, as we were unable to cross it; indeed I had rather a desire to follow it up, as I anticipated finding fresh water at its head: we

followed the course of the creek for ten miles, when we saw a great many duck and teal. The creek here was from fifty to sixty yards wide. We passed many dams of stones across the creek, made by natives for the purpose of catching fish during the summer months. These dams were from four to five feet high, and excellently contrived. Three or four of these stone walls were built in succession, with floodgates formed of sticks and bushes. We found at least a dozen of these dams or wears in different parts of the creek.

– From John Batman’s diary of his exploration to Port Phillip (1835)<sup>42</sup>

Even though the city’s rapid development prevented the execution of proper topographical surveys,<sup>43</sup> it is not difficult to imagine the curving, ancient watercourses that sit under the city’s rigid grid formation. A little creek once wound its way for a mile or so through the settlement, tormenting the early villagers with its flooding, its dangerous gullies, its watery contamination.<sup>44</sup> It is said that eels can still be found in the drains today, where the creek had once been, as though in the witnessing of the creek’s cold and pragmatic “removal” by these subterranean creatures,<sup>45</sup> they continue to attest to the failure of the early Colony to live imaginatively, ecologically, with its new environment.<sup>46</sup>

As Ivan Chitchevlov, proto-Situationist and conceiver of psychogeography, might have described it, these lost sources of water, the little waterfall below Market Street, the memory of ancient riverbeds, the creek paved over by the mercilessly straight line of Elizabeth Street, each holds a “small catalysing power” (as absence, as longing, as memory),<sup>47</sup> even though “the processes of ruination and annihilation of the Yarra’s billabongs, lagoons, waterholes and creeks has been repeated over and over for more than a century.”<sup>48</sup>

All cities are geological; you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a closed landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain *shifting* angles, certain *receding* perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space. But the vision remains fragmentary.<sup>49</sup>

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For many years, with neglectful inaccuracy, I have remembered something Walter Benjamin had written, “You cannot know a city unless you’ve been a child in it.” Since I moved many times as a child, as though in exile, restlessly, from city to city, and within cities, always outside of things, never long enough in one place to imagine my future there, it was Benjamin who offered percipient clues to my continuing feelings of estrangement. I was amused to discover, therefore, that through the years, details of Benjamin’s thought had gradually fallen away. What I had arrived at was a frail image of Benjamin’s original idea. With memory as it is, and the details of things blunted by time, I had reduced Benjamin’s more specific sense to something broader and as such, perhaps even more saturnine in its generalised and reductive form. Referring to Marseille, Benjamin had written:

Childhood is the divining rod of melancholy, and to know the mourning of such radiant, glorious cities one must be a child in them.<sup>50</sup>

The mis-remembering of Benjamin's quote, and now the remembering of this mis-remembering, is evidence that the reading of others' writings discloses more about the reader than the writer. Benjamin's writing is very precise; a careful reader will find nothing inconsequential or extraneous there. Metaphors formed with the finest precision depart from the mundane or commonplace by sparking unexpected and pleasurable shocks. Nestled within his aphoristic image of Marseille, with its dark and melancholic atmosphere, is a kernel of Benjamin's larger thoughts on memory and hope. As Marcel Proust's German translator, Benjamin was particularly fearful of slipping his own ideas on memory wholly into the lining of Proust's.<sup>51</sup> Yet, structurally, their shared understandings of memory persisted. The power of memory is not just the intentional concentration of thoughts on the past, with a storehouse of childhood images lying in wait for memory to retrieve them, something akin to what Proust named *mémoire volontaire* (voluntary recollection). Nor does memory act simply in the way a photograph fixes permanently the image of the child, and performing like the bewildering effects of Rohypnol (forever lost), reveals unexpected chunks of a life lived but now unable to be remembered.

... And there is a photograph, said to be me as a small child, the little girl playing with her now forgotten toys alone on a lawn near a beach, her dark hair whitewashed by its meeting with the sun in the lens of the camera, and the towering presence of a stranger's motorbike, tying forever, purely by chance, the girl to the bike.

Now isolated from the actions that flow in and around events and the infinite movement of memory immobilised, the day is lost except as image on the surface of the photograph. A metonym for eternal dislocation, the photograph becomes another form of forgetting, and this unknown life becomes an impartial life and also a life objectified as other...

And I remember another photograph, another day, leaning against a vintage motor bike, two decades later in Florence with messy bleached hair, skin darkened by summers in the North and then the South and back again, in a perpetual summer, and not just the photograph, but the day trip with friends driving from Santa Margherita, and drinking in gardens with grottoes, the heat scoring the stones of the city with its smells and perfumes and its putrid river and the long trip back to Genova in silence, pierced by instants of blindness as thresholds are crossed from brightness to darkness into long Ligurian tunnels cut through the coastal rock, the sea appearing now and again in the distance, unexpectedly, as restlessness appears to an aimless future.

To combat the endless and intertwining course of thoughts, Benjamin observed that recollections must be brought to an abrupt standstill. Where an “experienced event is finite, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite because it is only a key to everything that happened before it and after it.”<sup>52</sup> Could this present a substitute for belonging, albeit a wholly internalised one, where the sense of having lived many lives, each fragmented from the next, is resisted via a single line of memory, a “story” constructed to make sense of a life lived in discrete parts? As with the ferns, scattered without design around the waterfall, fragments of greenery connected only by their relationship with the water that flows through them to the concealed basin below, the connecting story is a reminder of a life lived, a contemporary life, divided by many separate locations, many schools and jobs, so many friends, now lost or forgotten, many belongings pointlessly purchased and then abandoned, and many attachments, deeply felt and quickly ignored, a life arranged not by great historical events, but in the seeming sameness of an undemonstrative everyday. Only memory, in the way water is an essential connecting force, has the power to stabilise the incongruity and variance of a life fragmented by modern economic and political systems. Perhaps we can expect no more than this, with only memory capable of pulling a disparate life together, of giving it cohesive form, to regard “place” in relation to belonging as outmoded, and to rely wholly on memory to stabilise a restless sensibility. And yet, what of memory’s proneness to nostalgia, its leaping and bounding across time, its selfish and individuated concerns and associated apoliticism, its shifting and moody perspectives, its fundamental unreliability and lack of vision? And then, the problem of place and dislocation looms once again, particularly on the realisation that memory has no meaning at all if it is not spatialised and located, as it was for Benjamin. To think again of Benjamin’s *denkbuild* (thought image) of Marseille with its coupling of melancholy (loss) and childhood (hope), is to realise that on a search to understand intrinsic “placelessness”, I am still no closer to appreciating the full import of Benjamin’s use of memory.

Despite many affinities, Benjamin and Proust did depart in fundamental ways. First of all, as Peter Szondi has shown, they were differently motivated “in their search for ‘lost time’”;<sup>53</sup> Proust by a need to stand outside of time, or rather, to be beyond the subject of time’s laws;<sup>54</sup> and Benjamin, vital to his thoughts on history and redemption, “to find the traces of what was to come.”<sup>55</sup> As an outcome of these dissimilar intentions, an essential disparity opens up around the place and importance of “experience”. Benjamin, commenting through Jacques Rivière, recognised that “Proust approaches experience without the slightest metaphysical interest, without the slightest penchant for construction, without the slightest tendency to console. Nothing is truer than that.”<sup>56</sup> Relating an anecdote about Proust’s tendency to recall more and more, as he repeatedly changed galley proofs sent to him by his publisher, Benjamin concludes, “Memory was everything.” Conversely, the function of experience was critical to Benjamin. The adult, now dulled by

“over-familiarity” with the world (as repetition, as habit, “as ever-always-the-same”), remembers the child enlivened by newly discovered experiences and a capacity “to discover the new anew.”<sup>57</sup> This is not simply recollection of the moment when the child was first “thrilled” by novelty, the experience of the first-ever time, for that would edge too closely to commodification; time subsumed by the logic of the commodity. Rather, it is experience enlarged by the discovery of the expansive power of a utopia-to-come, which has been projected by the child into the adult’s present-time as a futurity yet to be fulfilled. And, since it is uncertain that such expansive imaginings will be re-experienced, due to the dulling effect of habit and repetition, the adult has been left only with the barest memory of the first experiences of the child: or, from another perspective, the early images of childhood come to the child as a promise, and this promise presents to the adult as a mixture of hope and melancholy (as remembrance of affirmative experiences of the past, as well as unfulfilled promises and disappointments of the present).

In Szondi’s words, Benjamin would “devote himself to the invocation of those moments of childhood in which a token of the future lies hidden.”<sup>58</sup> But also the past, it should be stressed, is enlivened by Benjamin’s experiences in the present. His essay on Moscow, for instance, begins; “More quickly than Moscow itself, one gets to know Berlin through Moscow.”<sup>59</sup> As with the quote from Marseille, this too encapsulates the dialectic of past and future, and of expectation and remembrance. This is Benjamin’s redemptive moment, re-politicised in his final essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, as an urgent task “to brush history against the grain” (“Thesis VII”), to cut through the fixed and eternal image of the past (“Thesis XVI”).<sup>60</sup> A faint messianic thread persists, therefore, through the child to the adult (from the past to the present and back to the past from the present), “a politics of memory”.<sup>61</sup> And since redemption is ventured for Benjamin by the possibility of shifting from a historicist perspective (ruin, loss) to a period transformed by historical materialism (redemption), it is fashioned as worldly hopefulness, and not deferred hope, which is infinite in the disconsolate sense that his colleague, Gerhard Scholem, scholar of the Kabbalah, understood it.<sup>62</sup> We know that the positive and elevating dimensions of Benjamin’s philosophy never deserted him, even through his final, darkest days of exile and moments of desperation.

In another way Benjamin shared an affinity with Proust, and that was in a search for happiness, what we might call redemption by another name. Commenting on *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913–1927), and quoting Jean Cocteau, Benjamin noted that Proust’s text demonstrated a “paralysing, explosive will to happiness.”<sup>63</sup>

There is a dual will to happiness, a dialectics of happiness: a hymnic and an elegiac form. The one is the un-heard of, the unprecedented, the height of bliss; the other, the eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the

original, the first happiness. It is this elegiac idea of happiness – it could also be called Eleatic – which to Proust transforms existence into a preserve of memory.<sup>64</sup>

What is gleaned from Benjamin, therefore, is that childhood memory is a possible source of elegiac happiness, in which case, adult happiness would be dependent upon originary happiness, first happiness, returning as restoration of the original experience of happiness, as eternal repetition (in the Nietzschean sense). For Benjamin, the subsequent city-spaces of his travels, and of his exiles, sit in relation to the spaces of his earlier “awakenings”. No matter where Benjamin found himself in his struggle to keep writing (through continual threat of homelessness, through political persecution and exile, and under extreme financial deprivation), his image of happiness remained tied to his early experiences in Berlin. “Anyone who describes his own city,” Peter Szondi observes when writing on Benjamin, “must travel into the past instead of into the distance.”<sup>65</sup> And yet, it is requisite to ask whether the idea of happiness is fully contingent upon the concretisation of the spaces of childhood, in the way Benjamin’s early experiences are tied to Berlin? Or might memories, in the restless folds of modernity, be satisfied with the *idea* of a place, an image of a city, cinema cities, all cities, or any urban space whatever?

\* \* \*

Today I have transferred my writing activity to the café for a change of scenery. It has few advantages over my forest hiding-places. But sometimes one simply needs the sight of a glass of coffee in front of one as the representative of a civilization that is otherwise sufficiently remote.  
– Walter Benjamin writing to Gretal Adorno from Ibiza, March 16, 1933 <sup>66</sup>

A sense of fearlessness overtakes me when I arrive in foreign cities. Strangers’ languages dissolve in the glare of subway maps and familiarity swells in the subdued light of back lane shortcuts. I feel happy in cities, even though they too carry an inevitable sadness, particularly feelings of nostalgia that seem to issue from every modern city, as their pasts are bulldozed and their shapes and forms endlessly altered. We barely pay attention to the abounding cycles of gentrification and dispossession that span a single life, even though these urban ruptures and displacements could just as well replace “generations” as the measure of a modern life. Homelessness too is a problem of modernity, bearing the haunting awareness that the modern world is conditioned by a sense of uprootedness, of exile. As writers from a broad range of theoretical views revealed throughout the twentieth century, existing in modernity is frequently accompanied by a sense that we are not quite at home in this world, forever in exile. And whether this manifests in a concrete way (as the world’s growing homeless or refugee populations attest), metaphorically (the uncanny or shock of recognition), or psychologically (from Freud<sup>67</sup> to Kristeva’s stranger within<sup>68</sup>), homelessness carries politically potent affects.<sup>69</sup>



Fig. 5  
 Kirsten Peiroth  
*Die Farbe der Meere*  
 (*Colours of the Sea*) 2002  
 Plastic water bottles, water  
 samples  
 Dimensions variable  
 Private collection  
 Courtesy of the artist and  
 Klosterfelde, Berlin

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT  
 Red Sea, White Sea,  
 Black Sea, Yellow Sea

Kirsten Pieroth's work, *Colours of the Sea* (2002) is about displacement. It consists of four large drink bottles filled with water from the Red Sea, the White Sea, the Black Sea and the Yellow Sea (Fig. 5). Underpinned by a simple intention: might these diverse and distant waters, these scattered waters, take on the colour of their names?

And, then, even at the moment of recognition of the seas' fundamental connectedness (their sameness), where ecology is complicated by abstraction (by history), enormous divisions arise, sometimes cruel and irreparable divisions, corrupted and polluted, riven by bitter cultural and historical differences, un-crossable.

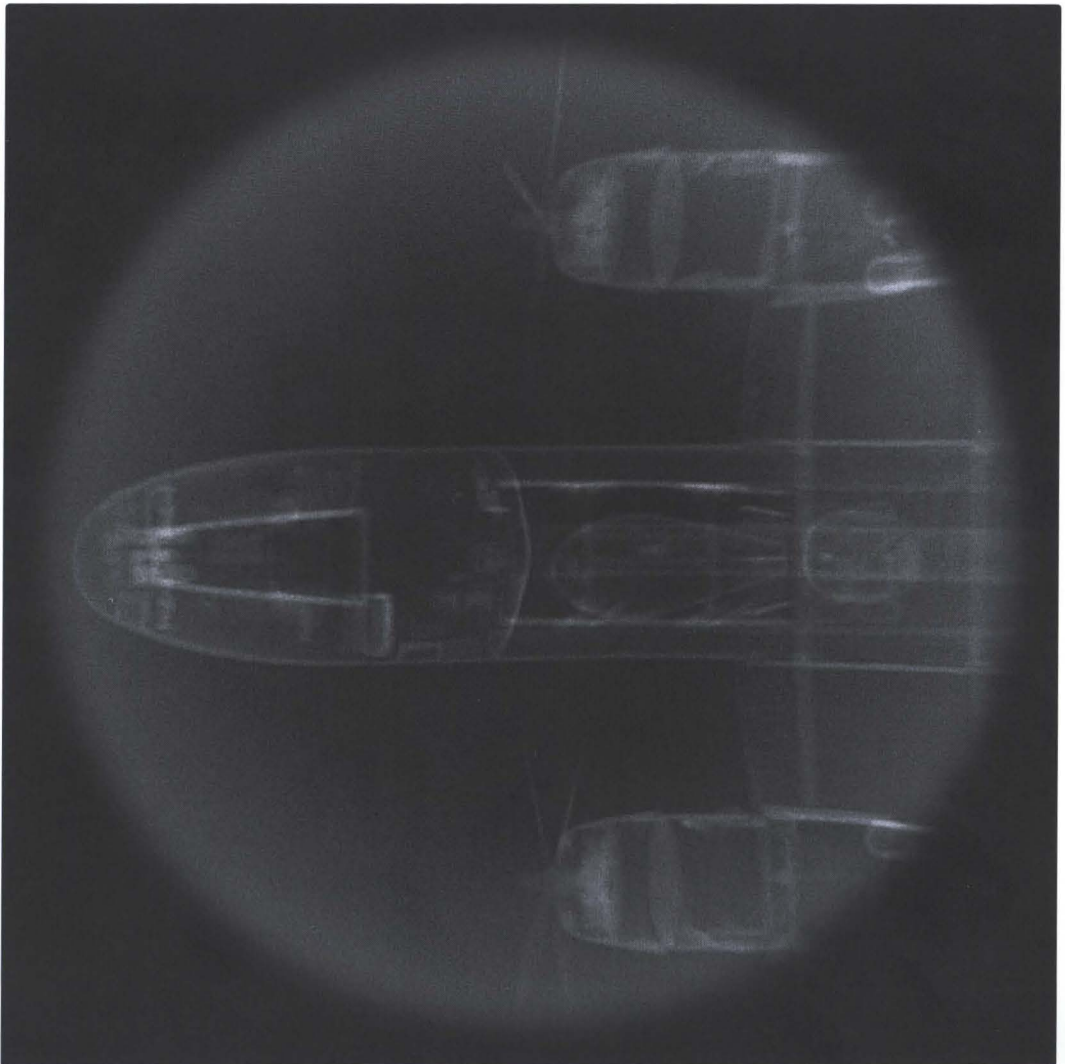
Are we each more intimately aware of exile as a permanent state of existence if we have not clung, as with those pellucid ferns near the waterfall, steadfastly and resolutely to our ancestral cliff faces, evading the fate of war, diaspora, invasion, wanderlust, marriage, ambition, transportation? If this has been our fate, to be shaken from the solace (myth) of uninterrupted lineage, are we more intimately and profoundly connected to exile as primordial homelessness, in the way of *Shevirah*, the breaking of the vessels from Lurianic Kabbalah, that great ruptural catastrophe which forced the scattering afar of "Godly sparks"?<sup>70</sup> And even if we welcome the promise of redemption and accept that shards of messianic hope cling to dispersion (for "exile is not, therefore, merely a punishment but also a mission as well"),<sup>71</sup> would this still not make existence a universal and innate state of melancholic homelessness, where nothing sits in its rightful place. Would this not connect us, for as with all fragmented and restless thoughts, all is displaced?

1. James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of The Anglo-World, 1783–1939*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
2. *Replenishing the Earth* has enjoyed a largely praiseworthy reception (Stanley E. Engerman, *The Journal of Economic History* 69 (2009): 1162–1163; Edward Cavanagh, *Borderlands E-Journal* 8, no. 2 (2009), including being named *Independent Book of the Week*, review by Prof. Stephen Howe, July 3, 2009.
3. Belich is using the term “settlerism” to define the ideological dimension of his Settler Revolution (capitalisation, Belich), claiming it loomed as large in its time as “socialism, evangelism and racism.” Belich, 153.
4. While seeming to flirt, for instance, with racism and determinism, Belich buttresses his thesis from criticism by “outing” earlier histories that try to link genetic, environmental (regional) or cultural determinism to claims of superiority, noting that isolating an essential trait would be impossible, in fact, unknowable. He writes: “Anglo-Saxonism was an important myth that need no longer be taken seriously as a historical explanation. Yet it has left an ironic legacy. Where people mistake similar form for similar content, it tars pan-Anglophone studies with its brush. It has generated an understandable but deceptive tendency to downplay, diminish, or even deny genuine Anglophone divergence.” Belich, 5.
5. A corollary to this thinking is the search for “a British collective identity” (Belich, 457), which is being publicly debated in Britain at the moment as reflexive responses to the Post-Empire era. See, Stephen Howe, “Review of *Replenishing the Earth*,” *Independent*, July 3, 2009.
6. Regional specificity and differences are well beyond the book’s concern. Belich is clear on this. He opposes the myopic vision of a regional history that is too parochial to recognise the larger trans-regional settler revolution that was happening beyond its borders.
7. These are also signs of the weakening and strengthening of ties to the “homeland”, which in turn produce moments of decolonisation and re-colonisation according to Belich.
8. Noel George Butlin, *Economics and the Dreamtime: A Hypothetical History* (Cambridge, U.K and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 184–85.
9. Bernard Porter’s analysis of the Australian “History Wars”, being resolved by Belich’s “less condescending approach” simplifies what were intense ideological battles over the way museums and education institutions should present history in Australia. See Porter’s, “The Anglo-world of Settlers, not Dominators”, *Times Online*, Sept. 23, 2009, entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\_and\_entertainment/the\_tts/article6845826.ece, accessed March 2010. The disparaging slogan, “A black armband view” of history, the idea that history is overly burdened by negative analyses, was particularly championed by the conservative Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard during his Government’s incumbency (1996–2007). The term has been attributed to historian Geoffrey Blainey in 1993, particularly in relation to the treatment of Australia’s Indigenous peoples. But it was Aboriginal Australians who first adopted black armbands as markers of protest: “A spirit of mourning has been an important feature in the politics of Aboriginal resistance in twentieth-century Australia, most notably at times of national celebration for White Australians. At the one hundred and fifty year celebrations in 1938, members of the Aboriginal Progressive Association wore formal black dress when they met at Sydney Town Hall on January 26 to declare Australia Day a day of mourning.” Mark McKenna, *Politics and Public Administration Group*, 1997, Australian Parliamentary Library, www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/RP/1997-98/98rpo5.htm#ORIGINS, March 2010.
10. Walter Benjamin, “Central Park” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 164.
11. Benjamin, 185.
12. A “dreamtime” story of tribal princesses turned into stone by a protective father has been overlaid on the rocks, but since the earliest mention of this legend occurs in print in 1949, it is thought that the story was simulated to boost the “charm” of the rocks for tourism. Martin Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 153–54.
13. Katoomba is a derivation of the Aboriginal word, *Kedumba*, meaning “shiny, falling waters”.
14. It should be acknowledged that Glover’s experience and competency lies in landscape painting and not in the figure, for which he is generally considered inept. See in particular Jeanette Hoon, *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2007), 88.
15. John McPhee, *The Art of John Glover* (South Melbourne: The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty Ltd, 1980), 35. Along similar lines, David Hansen insists on the verisimilitude of Glover’s renderings of light and trees, stressing that the painting displays an accurate representation of the writhing Midland species *Eucalyptus ovate* and *E. pauciflor*, as well as the representation of what Glover considered the “natural picturesque”, which was, rather, the outcome of centuries of aboriginal “fire-stick agriculture”. In other words, that Glover “was able to focus clearly on the actualities of the new land.” However, in *River Nile*, there is a strong sense of an imposed Classical Landscape composition, where the trees in the background are straighter, so that attention is naturally steered to the tunnel of curvilinear Gums that lead from the foreground through to smoke in a distant clearing, where people gather around a fire. There is no mention of the “awkward” rendering of Aboriginal people but emphasis falls on aspects of the local environment that distinguish Glover’s Australian paintings from his European. See David Hansen, “The Life and Work of John Glover,” *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque* (Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2003), 88–89.
16. Ian McLean has recently written of Glover’s work that; “His paintings were not just generalised representations of the Rousseauesque ‘noble savage’, but pictures of people and things he had seen in Tasmania.” But this seems impossible to support in his *River Nile* work, with its idealised subject matter and awkward and generalised representation of local Plindermairhemene people. See Ian McLean, “Figuring Nature: Painting the Indigenous Landscape,” in ed. Hansen, 126. It also leads to the question, what processes could possibly continue to foster the separation of “art” from the politics of its production (after Edward Said, after years of post-colonial discourses)?
17. George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World*, eds. Nicholas Thomas and Liver Berghof, Vol 1. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 91–92.
18. Both events were recorded in George Forster’s journal.
19. Quoting Reynolds, Bernard Smith is commenting on the relationship of Hodges to Salvador Rosa: “Such landscapes as Rosa painted them could be contrived from diverse elements providing they were united and harmonised by the controlling imagination.” Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989), 67.

20. Readings of Hodges' paintings seem to fold too impetuously into Edmund Burke's sublime, often as a literal overlaying of Burke's specific conceptualisation of this state, with its capacity to induce "astonishment", "horror" and "terror" in the viewer. "The passion caused by the great and the sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect." While it is true that Burke's work on the sublime had been published and popularly debated for more than two decades before the exploration, there is no visual evidence that Hodges' aim was to reproduce Burke's thesis on the sublime, for this level of awe or astonishment is certainly not obvious in the people's demeanor in *Dusky Bay*. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), ed. J.T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 57. [Capitalisation and italics in the original.]
21. Forster, 92. In a journey to photograph the sites of Cook's visit by Nicholas Thomas and Mark Adams, Thomas writes of Dusky Bay; "Forster's description made sense, though the 1773 visit must have been after heavier rain unless he exaggerated the drenching effect of the mist. In 1995 the fall certainly did create vapour, but we were not soaked to the skin; nor did we witness the unusual circular rainbow described in this passage." He also notes that Hodges diminished the sublime affect of the rocks. *Cook's Sites: Revisiting History* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press and Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, 1999), 79.
22. With their darkly rendered landscapes and beams of glowing white water, abstracted to their barest and simplest forms, the genesis of Colin McCahon's waterfalls from the 1960s is clear from a close reading of Hodges' *Dusky Bay*.
23. There are several entries by George Forster about this family, who became the main Māori contact in this part of their voyage. I am unconvinced, however, by Peter Brunt's argument that the separation on different rock ledges of the man from the women is Hodges re-presentation of a scene of physical violence he and the other voyagers witnessed between the man and the women, described in Forster's journal. See Peter Brunt, "Savagery and the Sublime: Two Paintings by William Hodges based on an Encounter with Māori in Dusky Bay, New Zealand," *Eighteenth Century* 38, no.3 (Fall 1997): 266–286.
24. The sympathetic rendering of the figures being noted, John Bonehill draws our attention to the similarities between Hodges' male figure in *Dusky Bay* and that of an engraving of an early Briton, *Habit of an Ancient Briton*, from Jeffreys (1772), held in the British Library, London. Bonehill argues that it is likely to be a reference to the discussions at the time of "Artists, historians and social theorists [who] all drew parallels between newly discovered cultures and earlier European societies, such as the early Britons, whose belligerence was taken to indicate their uncorrupted state. See Bonehill, "Catalogue Entries," in Quilley and Bonehill, 112.
25. Rüdiger Joppien & Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages, Volumes 1, The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776–1780* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987), 28.
26. David Bindman, "Philanthropy Seems Natural to Mankind': Hodges and Captain Cook's Second Voyage to the South Seas," in *William Hodges 1744–1797: The Art of Exploration*, eds. Geoff Quilley and John Bonehill, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 21.
27. Bindman, 22.
28. As Bernard Smith points out, one needs to be prudent when applying the adjective "romantic" at this time, since an intellectual engagement with Romanticism is still many decades away, and yet, it is evident in Hodges' work that he is foreshadowing the popularity of this movement, perhaps, as Smith points out, under the influence of both the "profound beauty of Dusky Bay", and the Forsters, in particular the elder, J.R. Forster (1729–89), who came from the region of Germany that is to become the source of Romanticism. Joppien and Smith, 22–23.
29. Jeanette Hoorn, *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2007), 80.
30. John Batman will carry out an expedition from Tasmania in May and June 1835 to found Melbourne, as representative of the Port Phillip Association, a syndicate of 15 men from Tasmania who were desperate to secure more land. One of Batman's biographers suggests that due to the appalling treatment of Tasmanian people that they had each witnessed, their agreement is unusual in its stress on safeguarding the rights of aboriginals, "not only from the grasping importunities of 'squatters', but also from the possible, more physical deprivations of servants: these were to be of 'good character, and if possible married men, who would 'proceed with their wives and families, in order to prevent the possibility of any injury being inflicted upon the natives.'" C.P. Billot, *John Batman and the Founding of Melbourne: The First Biography of this Century* (South Yarra, Melbourne: Hyland House Publishing Pty Ltd, 1979), 121. As such, a treaty of sorts was signed between Batman and chiefs of the Kulin Nation, with Batman buying 600,000 acres of land in exchange for, as Batman writes, "blankets, knives, looking glasses, tomahawks, beads, scissors, flour, &c., and I also further agreed to pay them a tribute or rent yearly. The parchment or deed was signed this afternoon by the eight chiefs, each of them, at the same time, handing me a portion of the soil: thus giving me full possession of the tracts of land I had purchased." Account recorded in Batman's journal, reproduced in *Settlement of John Batman in Port Phillip: from his Own Journal*, (Melbourne: Georges Slater, 1856), 20–21.
31. In Glover's own words written in a letter to Robinson (November 2, 1835), "...under the wild woods of the country, to give an idea of the manner they enjoyed themselves before being disturbed by the White People..." Quoted in McPhee, 37; see also Jeanette Hoorn's research noting that this painting was to be a gift to Robinson for his efforts, [84], which were clearly "to see the Aboriginal people of Tasmania dispossessed and imprisoned." 80ff.
32. Couched in more scientific terms, the question would be posed more along these lines: what might the nature of liquid water be, and within it, how are H<sub>2</sub>O molecules organised, and how do they interact? See Martin Chaplin, *Water Structure and its Science*, www1.lsbu.ac.uk/water/, accessed December 25, 2009.
33. "Although it is an apparently simple molecule (H<sub>2</sub>O), it has a highly complex and anomalous character due to its intra-molecular hydrogen bonding. As a gas, water is one of lightest known, as a liquid it is much denser than expected and as a solid it is much lighter than

- expected compared with its liquid form.”  
Martin Chaplin, *Water Structure and its Science*.
34. George Sand, *Indiana*, trans. George Burnham Ives (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, Cassandra Editions, 1978), 230–31, 324.
  35. Chris Welsby, <http://www.sfu.ca/~welsby/WaterNot.htm>, accessed December 28, 2009.
  36. In describing in 1855 the regions of the Yarra (which are going to experience severe salinity after the destruction of the waterfall) John Butler Cooper writes: “Mr Eddington says that, on Sundays in the summer time the family of Bell went from Tivoli [their estate above the river] in a double-handed paddle boat down the Yarra to attend service at Melbourne in the John Knox Church, Swanston Street. This mode of progression occupied a long time, and the boat carried provision, in the way of eatables for the Bell children who regarded the trip as a picnic. Their drink was of the pure waters of the Yarra, which they lifted in a horn tumbler.” *The History of Prahran from its Settlement to a City* (Melbourne: Modern Printing Co. Pty Ltd, 1912, revised 1924), 53.
  37. Letter reprinted in C.P. Billot, 280.
  38. William Westgarth, *Personal Recollections of Early Melbourne and Victoria* (Melbourne & Sydney: George Robertson, 1888), 17.
  39. The small waterfall was destroyed by divers and dynamite, see newspaper wood engraving print, Julian Rosi Ashton (1851–1942) “Improvements on the Yarra—removing the Falls Reef” (1883), *Illustrated Australian News*, October 3, 1883, held in State Library of Victoria, accession number IANo3/10/83/161, available online, [www.slvvic.gov.au](http://www.slvvic.gov.au).
  40. A 1993 study demonstrated not only extremely high levels of toxicity but that “the salt wedge penetrates to somewhere between Punt Road and Bridge Road, a distance of approximately 15 kilometres upstream of Hobson’s Bay,” Kerry P. Black, et al, *Nutrient and Toxicant Outputs from the Yarra*, (Melbourne: Victorian Institute of Marine Sciences & Melbourne Water Corporation, Technical Report No. 20. 1993), 10–11.
  41. Kristin Otto, *Yarra: A Diverting History of Melbourne’s Murky River* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2005), 68–69.
  42. John Batman, *The Settlement at Port Phillip 1835* (Melbourne: Queensberry Hill Press, 1983), 33–34.
  43. Although the first contour survey of the Port Phillip Bay region was executed by the Acting Surveyor of the Colony of New South Wales, Charles Grimes (1772–1858) in 1805, 30 years before settlement, it was a general survey of the whole bay area, rather than a detail of the area that will become Melbourne. See *Port Phillip* [Cartographic material], lithographed at the Department of Lands and Survey, by T. Slater, 14 February 1879; one map, mounted on cardboard, 51x45cm. Map Room, State Library of Victoria.
  44. “The bane and bottomless deep for the Corporation’s narrow budget was Elizabeth-Street, where a little ‘casual’ called ‘The Williams’, of a mile’s length, from the hardly perceptible hollows of the present Royal Park, played sad havoc at times with the unmade street. It had scooped out a course throughout, almost warranting the title of a gully, and at Townend’s corner we needed a good long plank by way of a bridge. At the upper end of the street was a nest of deep channels which damaged daily for years the springs and vehicles of the citizens.” Westgarth, 29–30. The creek is clearly visible on a map entitled, *1838–1888, Melbourne Then & Now: Together with the First Land Sale and Present Value*, cartographer, M.L. Hutchinson, 1888. 1 sheet: ill. (some col.), plans; 46 x 58 cm., folded to 23 x 15 cm. The 1838 map was recreated from a model produced for the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition of 1888.
  45. Interview with urban designer, Nigel Smith, anecdote from [www.villagewell.org](http://www.villagewell.org), accessed December 20, 2009.
  46. Westgarth notes, “Melbourne missed a great chance in filling up with a street this troublesome, and, as a street, unhealthy hollow. Dr Howitt used to tell me he never could cure a patient, resident there, who had become seriously unwell. A reservation of the natural grass and gum trees between Queen and Swanston Streets would have redeemed Melbourne up to the first rank of urban scenic effect, and the riotous Williams might, with entire usefulness, have subsided into a succession of ornamental lakes and fish ponds.” Westgarth, 30.
  47. Gilles Ivain, “Formulary for a New Urbanism,” *Potlatch*, 1953, reprinted in *Situationist Anthology*, ed. and trans., Kenneth Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 1.
  48. Kristen Otto, 90.
  49. Ivain, 1 [Italics in the original].
  50. Walter Benjamin, “Marseilles,” (1929), trans. Rodney Livingstone and others in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 234.
  51. Theodor Adorno noted: “He did not wish to read a word more of Proust than what he needed to translate at the moment, because otherwise he risked straying into an addictive dependency which would hinder his own production.” Quoted in Peter Szondi, “Hope in the Past,” in Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 234.
  52. Walter Benjamin, “Image of Proust,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry ZONE (Great Britain: Fontana, 1992), 198.
  53. Szondi, “Hope in the Past,” 11–19.
  54. Szondi, 12.
  55. Szondi, 18.
  56. Benjamin, “Image of Proust,” 208.
  57. Peter Osborne, “Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin’s Politics of Time,” in *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Andrew Benjamin & Peter Osborne (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
  58. Szondi, “Hope in the Past,” 21.
  59. Benjamin, “Moscow,” *One-Way Street* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 177.
  60. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry ZONE (Great Britain: Fontana, 1992), 248.
  61. Osborne, 89.
  62. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, Israel and Toronto, Canada: Keter Publishing and Quadrangle, the New York Times Book Company, 1974), 167.
  63. Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” *Illuminations*, 199.
  64. Benjamin, “Image of Proust,” 199–200.
  65. Szondi, 19.
  66. Walter Benjamin and Gretel Adorno, *Correspondence 1930–1940*, eds. Henri Lonitz and Christoph Gödde, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, UK and Malden, Mass., USA: Polity Press, 2008), 21–22.
  67. Hélène Cixous, “Fiction and its Placment: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche*,” *New Literary History* 7 (Spring 1976): 525–548.
  68. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Hertfordshire: Haverster Wheatsheaf, 1991).
  69. For an analysis of how exteriority and otherness (strangers and enemies) have been dealt with in Western thought, see, Richard Kearney, “Strangers and Others: From Deconstruction to Hermeneutics,” *Critical Horizon* 3, no.1 (2002): 7–36.
  70. Scholem, 167.
  71. Scholem, 167.

Fig. 1  
Stella Brennan  
Video still from  
*South Pacific* 2007  
Single channel video,  
stereo sound  
10 mins  
Ultrasound images:  
David Pery



# The Ordering of Worlds: Two Recent Video Works by Stella Brennan

*Sean Cubitt*

*This essay is about two single-channel digital video artworks by Auckland artist Stella Brennan, South Pacific (2007, 11 minutes), made with David Perry, and The Middle Landscape (2009, 10.30 minutes). In rather different ways these meditative works, which combine imagery, on-screen text and sound, speak to, from and of the necessary but historically tragic ordering of the world that every human and technical action produces. Art is charged with imagining and, perhaps, putting into practice orders other than those we inherit. For moving image media, the inherited order is inescapably linked with the heritage of classic American cinema, directly in the case of Brennan's South Pacific with Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1949 musical, and more loosely through cinema's fascination with landscape from the Hollywood Western to Tolkien's Middle Earth. Brennan's art reconsiders the order of the world, re-orienting it around a Pacific perspective, from which order no longer appears as static structure, but as a imagination of other futures.*

After a century of rectangular cinema, it is more than time enough to reconsider the shape of screens. The odd thing is that cameras produce circular images: it can be quite a technical struggle to produce a rectangular picture from the light falling through the lens. The problem is that the intensity of illumination falls off towards the edges, so pulling out a select, reasonably lit area must have seemed like a good idea. Besides, it made photographs look more like paintings: more legitimate. But now photography and cinema have celebrated their 150th and 100th birthdays respectively, why still rectangular?<sup>21</sup> Sadly, computers are the answer.

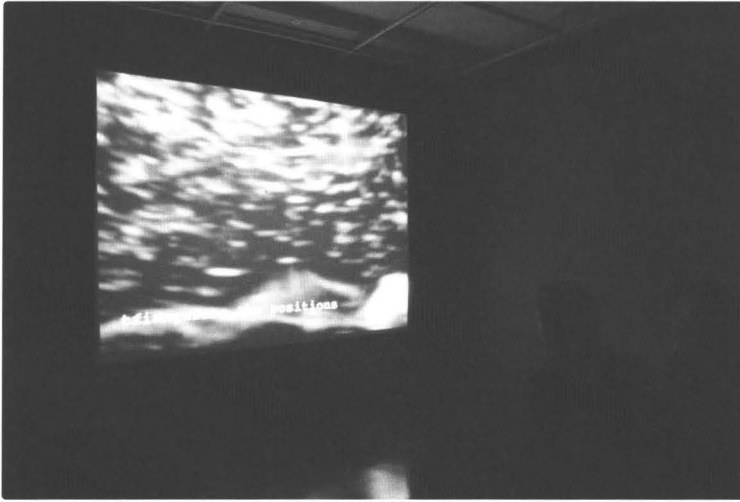
Initially designed as a TV screen in front of a typewriter, desktop computers have become amazingly sophisticated but they have also become more deeply standardised. One thing that is standard is the pixel array: the rows and columns of square dots on the screen. The numerical definition of each square is part and parcel of a computer's basic library of commands, the gravity field that inputs cannot but deal with. This arithmetic system, the raster display, has made us more rectangular than ever. Data projectors even come with automated keystone correction. You have to really want to get away from four-square pictures, and do some tricky adjustments to get another shape. The rectangle has become the default option, and few people bother to use any other.

Radar and ultrasound screens are some of the few that are oddly shaped. This is partly because they represent the path not taken in computer displays. Ultrasound produces the delightful fan-shape familiar from intra-uterine perinatal scans, like polar projections in childhood atlases. For a brief period in the early days of arcade games, the radar style of display dominated the market for games screens: vector screens. Ivan Sutherland's first computer graphics programme used one, and Doug Engelbart's first mouse-driven point-and-click interface. These are the kind of screens used in oscilloscopes. Instead of scanning the screen in rigid order, vector screens' cathode ray guns travel to the point where the light is wanted and paint it electronically on the phosphors. A lovely technology relegated to expert systems. Systems, however, with their own fraught histories.

In 2007's *South Pacific* Stella Brennan and David Perry struggle with the curved or circular image in a rectangular frame (Fig. 1). In 2009's *The Middle Landscape* Brennan makes the contradiction of rectangle and circle integral to the work's themes. The geometry of the vector versus the arithmetic of the raster. Of course she is obliged to show the work on rectangular raster screens. It is a familiar conundrum: digital imaging is thickly populated with vector-generated artefacts, from 3D animations to the fonts Brennan uses, and they all have to be retro-engineered to fit the enumeration of pixels. There is an element of masquerade in digital imaging, a translation, as when Shakespeare calls someone plucked away by the fairies "translated". The elsewhere of digital imaging is the digital screen. We can only imagine the world lying microns below its ordered surface.

In a solid, molecules are locked into a structure. In a liquid, the molecules float free of one another. In a gas, the atoms composing the molecules separate and fly. In a plasma – as in a plasma screen – the electrons in those atoms divorce their nuclei and race madly about in the quantum foam. Liquidity is a gentle condition compared to the violence of hotter states of matter. Bonds still hold good. There is some formal familiarity between things. Liquid seems a fine term, for the ocean and the rain-drenched Taranaki landscape which dominate these two works. It catches the molecular relationship of the artists in the first, of the couple in the second, and the bond that holds the image together in the acreage of the black frame. Unities in contradiction are the dynamic of

Fig. 2  
 Stella Brennan  
*South Pacific* 2007  
 Installation view  
 Liverpool Biennial, 2008



molecules in the liquid state, and of the formal properties of these works. Like electricity and water. An LCD screen – liquid crystal display – is made from materials that sit at the border between liquid and solid, molecules constantly restructured by the electric currents passing through them. The very word “current” says that there is a flowing in all things.

But everything that flows, flows downhill. This is the law of entropy. For good or ill, order has its job in the universe: to oppose and if it can, even for a while and locally, reverse the second law of thermodynamics. To hold on. To make it through. Not to dissolve. Not become gas, resist the lure to become plasma.

Every kind of order we build in the human universe seems to come out bad in the end. Order gets a bad name. Art gets a bad name when classicism rules, and order becomes not the shape of living organisms but some hierarchy. The *hieron*, the temple, and the high priests’ secrets that it secretes discretely among its sectaries tell us to abandon Apollo, embrace Dionysius, But it is art’s difficult work to make new kinds of order from the chaotic flux: the ocean, the war, time.

If the text that advances along the bottom of the screen in *South Pacific* (Fig. 2) were laid out on the page, you would say “a poem”, perhaps a poem of the sea, and of its margins, like Charles Olson’s *Maximus*. Olson was famous for his voice, even though much of *Maximus* is so clearly typewritten that it is hard to imagine how to read it. The silent voice of Brennan’s text poses a similar

question: how could one (authorial) voice speak in the accents of all the personae inhabiting the words. We recognise, in the opening passage of *South Pacific*, the banality of the long-haul flight from Auckland to Los Angeles, or Auckland and anywhere except across the Tasman. The indefinite rumble of the engines, the foetal curl, the suspension of time in the steel bubble of pressurised air. The oval windows. We make a leap of imagination to hear, translated, the log of Gunther in the U-boat off Hastings, his fascination with the lights at a time when Europe had turned off its streetlamps and shuttered its windows. And we are amazed with him at how wonderful it is to live without trepidation.

The image of the passage on airline travel is a jet's eye view of waters far below through a moiré mask of scanning artefacts as the artists re-record from the in-flight nose-cam housed in a nacelle below the pilots. The image for the Hastings submarine is the patient rotation of a radar sweep. Separating them, ultrasound images of a drowned aircraft, a scale model of the plane which, we will read later, placed the Nagasaki bomb. There is a moment in the image flow when something – a nacelle? – turns into an organic form, which morphs to suggest the mushroom cloud forming over Japan or Bikini. “We are wet, transparent” say the words closing the Hastings passage, transparent to the cries of fish swimming round us, using sonar to communicate, find their shoals, and hunt. The epidermis that organises our water into form lets sounds pass through or echo back reflected. The microseconds between different echoes speak of distance, not substance. The changing reflections of mass and surface, and, swimming or floating, of water inside and outside the skin are pretty much of a kind.

Not so metals. The script evokes the ships' graveyard in the Solomon Islands and the dumping grounds of military stock off Vanuatu. Sixty years on, the wreckage of the Pacific War rusts slowly into the seafloor. Brennan wonders what the islanders would have made of this mass wastage. She uses the word cargo. In the 1940s, some years after the likely beginnings of the John Frum cult on Tanna, one of the least Westernised islands in the Micronesian archipelago of Vanuatu, 300,000 US troops were stationed there. An evolution of traditional beliefs, the John Frum rituals (and the similar Prince Philip Movement) earned the name “cargo cults” from missionaries and anthropologists amused at the idea that replica landing strips might attract more cargo from the distant folks who once brought so much stuff to their islands. Or bring it back from the local impresarios who made off with so much of it.

Or who, like the retreating army, threw it into the bay at Million Dollar Point. Brennan evokes a different irony: that the villagers' attempts to reforest the abandoned runways failed; that they remain as scars. Runways like the one on the island of Tinian in the Marianas, base of the Enola Gay and Bockscar, the plane which dropped the second atomic bomb, after Hiroshima, on Nagasaki.

Radar and sonar were critical innovations of World War Two's arsenal, especially for bombers, as was aerial photography, which developed rapidly in the Pacific theatre and was especially important for the A-bomb missions. Both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki flights were intended to be accompanied by photo-reconnaissance aircraft (though Bockscar's escort got lost). The radiant energy techniques of photography and radar – both working in the electromagnetic spectrum – differ from sonar, and later ultrasound, which are fundamentally physical effects in matter. One of sonar operators' first discoveries was the level of sound underwater in the sea. Most human inventions come, like flight, from trying to imitate natural processes. Sonar was an abstract idea which discovered that it had already been invented, by fish.

A kind of interference: a moiré pattern, like those Brennan uses to separate her footage taken from the nose-cam of a passenger jet from the ocean it records. Visual ambiguity is integral to scientific visualisations and optical instruments. They are images which require professional expertise to read. The migrant phenomenologist of media Vilém Flusser believed that photographs were the third stage of human communication.<sup>2</sup> First there were images. Then came words to explain the images. Now we have images to explain the words, images that therefore evoke, call for, demand, words to decipher them. But there is a gap here between the data carried in pictures and the images of things that emerge from them. It is like the difference between a *trompe l'oeil* still life and a Cézanne: both make us look at the way they are painted, but each works on the gap between picture and data in different ways. Another mesh lies over the arithmetic grid of the screen; another patterning contests the aggregate space of the clear, untreated image, revealing that it is after all also treated, also in its own way, if not an obfuscation, then a too-literal *trompe l'oeil*.

The soundtrack is shaped by electronic pings, like sonar beacon signals. They organise themselves around the reference to Musick Point, at the tip of Bucklands Beach in Auckland, where it points out into the Waitemata Harbour, whose waters, in te reo Māori, sparkle like obsidian. Musick, not as in the consort of musick, but named for a famous aviator, housed a radio station, operated at first by the Post Office, then by the Civil Aviation Authority, then by Telecom's maritime services. It is today a cellphone mast, and a heritage site, recalling the preparations for invasion, on the site of the Te Waiarohia pa (fortified settlement). That headland has a long history of managing the sea, of bringing it to order, since Kupe churned the waves on his departure from Aotearoa to dissuade pursuit. These harmonies across the many histories of the Hauraki gulf combine in layers of cloudy indefiniteness, the condition of all pictures, out of which the clarity of images is abstracted.

Ambiguity and ambivalence are responses to the over-definite determinations of the numerical screen. "A wide road, a vast possibility" is how

Brennan first dreams the openness of it all, teletyped across the interference where islands, clouds, storms, volcanic eruptions suggest themselves. There is nothing to deny: everything is possible. But what floats up is the Rodgers and Hammerstein movie, a movie, she recalls with the one word “khaki”, set in wartime, a time when soldiers came, bringing with them equipment, music, airstrips and romance. The first sonic pings follow, and as the text admits to searching for “another place”, the oceanic blue image fades to black, that impossible invisibility.

For “inscrutable, khaki-clad women”, it is a table-top war, as they push the symbols to and fro across the grid of the map. They struggle to make sense of vastness and invisibility. The radio station at Musick Point, its portholes a memory of circular screens, is the centre of a cartographic enterprise to turn the Pacific into a net: a communication device for catching information on the fly. Like lines of longitude and latitude, their radio signals can’t be seen, but are no less powerful organs of order for that. The design of the map tells them what is information, and leaves aside the rest. Noise is what is not information: as Mary Douglas said of dirt,<sup>3</sup> it is matter in the wrong place, matter that doesn’t matter.

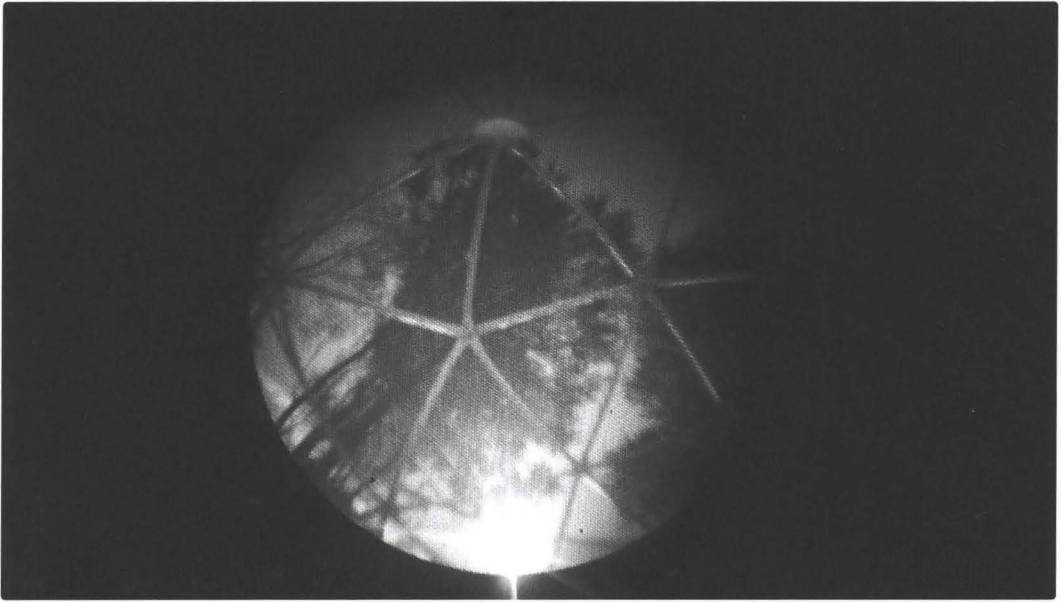
The static on the radios playing Hawaiian music, the indecipherable flickering of light in the ultrasound images before they give up their content, and in the areas where there appears to be no content, are matters all the same, the froth on a wave’s crest that doesn’t signify from five thousand metres but which the Polynesian navigators read – if read is the word to use of that understanding of the ways of wind and water. Extracted from the interference over shortwave, mainly solar in origin and so of a kind with the light and the radio, tunes pass from one island to the next through the medium of war, gifts to be passed on from islander musicians to their GI guests. Noise, interference, is the patina of space, as dirt is the patina of time. It is the evidence of distance, evidence systemically erased in the pursuit of the unambiguous which we call information.

The opening passage of *The Middle Landscape* (Figs. 3–5) recalls this cartographic order. Wallace Stevens wrote of the jar in Tennessee, “It made the slovenly wilderness / surround that hill”. Brennan places a surveyor on the heights of Taranaki, or in the map room, “jamming his compass in the throat of the volcano”. That distinctive circle in maps of the North Island of New Zealand preserves the wilderness of the peak, and defines it. It is at once an act of desecration and preservation, sacred and profane. We can never choose to make order under conditions of our own choosing. The sound is of the forest: the rustle of foliage and feathers. The second passage begins: it has the sound of water. The image fills the screen, but the words, which fade up and away in whole phrases, form a line along the lower left edge. After a while, the image seems to zoom out: darkness surrounds it, where in the previous sequence the smaller circle gave way to the full screen image. The shots are in low light: the camera strains for colour



Fig. 3  
Stella Brennan  
Video still from *The  
Middle Landscape* 2008  
High definition video,  
stereo sound  
10:30 mins

Fig. 4  
Stella Brennan  
Video still from *The  
Middle Landscape* 2008  
High definition video,  
stereo sound  
10:30 mins



and edges, interpolates them where it can, and artefacts begin to form a texture in the light, where quantum effects in the CCD chip begin to appear in the darker zones as indefinitely small pops of electricity discharge, to be read as colour information as the chip drains its freight of voltages into store.

Electricity: and water. Brett Graham and Rachel Rakena evoked the theme through a hydro plant's loss in *Aniwaniwa* in 2007. The animating spark in the waters, the dangerous confluence of two orders of flow: the Frankenstein legend, and the myth of genesis in one. But Brennan describes the hydro plant at the falls, almost as if it were Kipling's mill, that ground its corn and paid its tax ever since Roman times – a presence in the landscape that secures continuity. She is intrigued that the scale model of the plant at the nearby lodge is powered from the same place it pictures. History, as it were, seen through the wrong end of a telescope. You wonder whether taming the wild waterfall is trivial or cosmic. The mismatch of natural and human worlds is slight, but it will be greater. Strangely for an artist who has worked so much with video, it is television that marks the break between the two. On the motel TV they watch a wildlife show, rescreened literally through the colonoscope roughly attached to her camera, its optic fibres producing the insect-eye texture that characterises much of *The Middle Landscape*. The digital composite in the TV show, the text explains, evokes another spectacle, of the naturalist-presenter stupidly posing with wild creatures, with a brief gesture towards the Australian TV host's sudden demise from stingray poison. A sting in the tail. On those rare occasions when we try to love nature, it may not love us back.

As we move into a passage opening with the sounds of construction and lines on a ruined commune, it's hard not to recall James K. Baxter's Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Baxter dreamed of a double rainbow, Māori and Pākehā entwined to the regeneration of both. The commune's "failure" in its noble humility was nonetheless a successful utopia, if only in the bounds of a special generation, and the imaginations of another. Brennan's text recalls the joy of discovering that abandoned hives still house their honey bees, something Baxter too rejoiced in, in the second of the *Jerusalem Sonnets*:

The bees that have been hiving above the church porch  
Are some of them killed by the rain –

I see their dark bodies on the step  
As I go in – but later on I hear

Plenty of them singing with what seems a virile joy  
In the apple tree whose reddish blossoms fall

At the centre of the paddock

Such utopias stretch from the imagining of the South Pacific to the filmic moments that Brennan brings to heel around the image of an old communard hiking back down the mountain with his grandfather's chair tied to his back: *The Piano, Fitzcarraldo*, those moments of almost humdrum surrealism. Somehow it evokes the equally haunting imagery, also shot in Taranaki, of Vincent Ward's film *Vigil* (1984), rain-soaked, quiet. Brennan's images here are fluid, with the soft edges of dappled shadows, the kind that baffled Aristotle as he tried to understand how light which travelled in straight lines could cast shadows of such perfect circularity. Baxter's sonnet concludes with the image of a madman set on fire by the wind. The constant evocation of prayer, praying to and mediated by the elements of landscape, flora, fauna and weather, in Baxter seems not far from the altogether secular text Brennan opens and closes at the foot of her screen, as if a pagan ghost of Baxter theology haunted both the land and the bric-a-brac of tourism and passing settlements.

There comes a mention of windows as "eyes". The window frames have been recovered for the construction of a geodesic dome built around the spine of a growing tree. Today windows – the wind's eyes in their ancient etymology – are no longer shaped like orbs, but carved in the shape of safety deposit boxes. But disturbing their rigid geometry restores the prayerful aspect of the apertures that open onto the wind we hear on the soundtrack, and the open sky. The frames of doors retrieved from an abandoned cinema, like grandpa's chair, are also taonga, or treasures, rightfully and devoutly remade for present uses. As in a dream, a imperfectly circular vignette, its upper edge faded where its lower is

Fig. 5  
Stella Brennan  
Video still from *The Middle Landscape* 2008  
High definition video,  
stereo sound  
10:30 mins

crisp, placed symmetrically mid-screen, pans through the sky of a classical geodesic dome. A wind is blowing. It makes me think of psychedelia, of album covers dusted with ash and Rizlas.

We have no real reason to our utopias. Whether in war, like the movie of *South Pacific*, or in the isolation of the Taranaki sheep stations, forests and falls, the dream of living well, of the good life, Aristotle's eudaemonism that spreads from the household through friendship to the polity, these lands of Cockaigne that were always at the further edges of the world have drawn the navigators Cook and Kupe as they drew the poets and dreamers from More to Butler. The curious destiny of the "Shakey Isles" has been to extract from older worlds the dream of a better and a newer one, and that for a thousand years since the first explorers found them.

The dream of fair weather, rich lands, kind harvests, bonny babies, of peace and plenty, has always had to subsist along with cut feet, wet hair, cold nights and hungry days. And the ordering of the world has always been a matter of conflict. Brennan speaks again and again of the rifts. Map and ocean will not fit. Nature and nurture are at odds. Frame and image do not match. Words and images have their disparate rhythms.

There is some structural resemblance between these works and the early *Cantos* of Ezra Pound; the personae, voices ventriloquised by the poet, the witnessing of history and myth in their moments of metamorphosis, the large blocks of story placed beside one another from which, by proximity, a sense arises that is not in any one tale but inhabits all of them, changed by their particularities. Like Pound's epic, they seek to contain history, but unlike Pound they have the wit to realise that history contains them. And unlike Pound, they are deeply implicated in the body of the artist, the colonoscope and ultrasound being medical imaging technologies which understand the terrains of Taranaki and the Pacific in the same terms as the bodies they more frequently image. Here too the scale, scaling of image and object opens dialogues: between projections, Mercator's or perspectival, micro- and macroscopic. Like the mutual and constant divergence of image, sound and text, these repurposed techniques of picturing produce a parallelogram of forces, create vectors, meanings which travel between them, and are not any one of them but formed of their interactions.

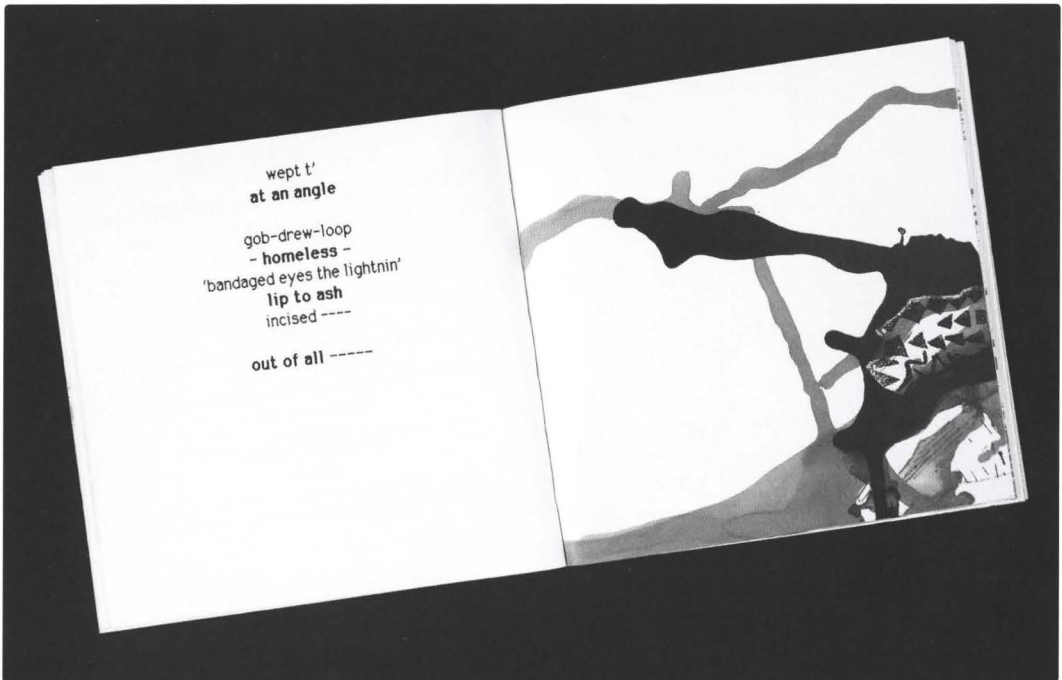
Ambiguous light, dirty light. Light thrown awry. It would be wrong to say this is dialectic: Brennan is an ironist, a dry, droll eye that has learned to shape her visions round the square, and when she floods the screen with picture, to make it clear that this, the rectangle full of colours, is a special effect, special because it is not the world of human perception with its fade-out into peripheral vision. She orders the strangeness of the worlds she dreams into essays, where the old French word "essayeur", to try, attempt, assay, tends towards a future whose distance pulls as the past grounds. These little films are essays in that sense, tentatives towards an ordering of time that make of the dialogues between language, sound and

image homeopathic remedies for the rootless, directionless flux of the world and the passion we feel for it. A little order: like a seed set to crystallise a fluid. And yet, against the instinctive lure of order, she sets her ironic gaze on the failures of other orders, the nets set to catch a world in a frame or a grid.

These digital pictures are conducted into the light through imaging, a technology intrinsically pointed towards order through its histories of geometry and arithmetic. The float of words against the obdurate darkness of unilluminated pixels tells us about the layering that makes composite images, a technology stretching back into the history of theatre drops and flats, a baroque theatre of monarchical perspective, the whimsy of photographic backdrops and seaside cut-out stands. Between those layers lies the void: into it we drop, and from it we are born. These meditations on the Ocean of our story, and on the heartland of the Central North Island, open gorges under our feet, and stars above our heads. Cargo from faraway outposts and remote histories, weaving another textile, fabricating another form, prayers for a future we can't yet touch, but which Brennan teaches us to imagine.

1. See Gene Youngblood's classic *Expanded Cinema* (London: Studio Vista, 1970) for a historical account of vanguard disruptions of rectangular film, Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel's collection *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, (Karlsruhe: ZKM,; Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 2003) for the look forward, and Anne Friedberg's *The Virtual Window from Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge MA.:MIT Press, 2006) for an account of the rectangle in Western culture.
2. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Matthews, introduction by Hubertus Von Amelunxen (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).
3. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1966).
4. See John Newton, *The Double Rainbow: James K. Baxter, Ngāti Hau and the Jerusalem Commune* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009). I'm grateful to Zita Joyce who brought this to the attention of the *Re:Live* Media Art History conference in Melbourne in November 2009.

Fig. 1  
Maggie O'Sullivan  
*red shifts* 2001  
Etruscan Books



# Membranism, Wet Gaps, Archipelago Poetics

*Lisa Samuels*

I will content myself with saying that the only things valuable, even here in this life, are the continuities.

– Charles Saunders Peirce, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*

## **Wet Contact**

The overarching Western paradigm for imagined order in the nineteenth century was time, which shifted in the twentieth century to space, and now has shifted again: the paradigm for imagined order in the twenty-first century is contact. Wet contact is closer and faster than dry contact – literally, sound travels faster in water, electricity jumps liquid – and membranes work as both bio-zones and substantial metaphors for the actualisations that occur in wet contact. Membranism, then, is wet touch and transfer event of object to body, body to object to body, and mental image (three-dimensional, embodied, and active idea) within our wet neural network. Membranism means to emphasise the contact we sustain with each other and with our objects and events of transaction. The distinctness of membranes, for cellular action and for membranism as a metaphor, is that they are contact and transfer event and linking act and object and permitting passage and activation horizon all at once.

Discussions of representation – how figures in words, images, and sounds are connected with real and imagined objects, events, and ideas in the world – are most often set within the context of a removal of contact, a slippage between representing figure and represented matter, and a subsequent pondering from a conceptual dry distance. Here membranism interposes: the eye that looks at the representation is wet; the air between hangs with droplets; the brain for figuration is wet; the ear's drums vibrate all the way through; the fingers touching the object are budding with tiny moistures. In imaginative work, which always involves some kind of representation, the page, the canvas, the keyboard, the historical conjuration, dried paint, objects, and inky fixity are all fascinating in large measure as and because of the interrupted dynamism of their moist conception and the posited wet life of their participant-creators.

Often, in the West, water seems more temporary than time and space, as though water's more intense substantiality is an inverse sign of its evanescence. Figuring substantiality as more temporary than abstraction can be a way of ordering mental concepts in reverse: thus Western religious beliefs and the invisibility cloaks of ideologies. Membranism means to be both more present, more conscious of its ongoingness and transfer, and less imagined as lasting (in all three senses of that word, as fastening, finishing, and enduring) than concepts of discrete observation.

### **Consciousness is Electrifying**

When you read this the liquids inside you are surging electricity and yet you do not die from the equation. Thinking is self-electrocuting. Mild electricity across membranes generates and re-transfers felt life. Within membranism's contact paradigm is the electric equation always present in the *digitas*, a term I use to refer to the principal imaginative interface of our era. The *digitas* means the digital realm performed by and interlaced with the digits of our fingers, with our *habitus*, and with the *civitas*.<sup>1</sup> Western imaginative work and reflective theory now are always, whether explicitly or not, composed within the *digitas*. In terms of daily acts, I realise I am referring to those human activities that are privileged to access the practical *digitas*. But in terms of imaginative cultural life, the *digitas* is *the* enveloping and extruding paradigm of interface, the interface that enables membranism, writ large, most explicitly.

Just as membranism as metaphor is allied with its literal image – the soft wet intactness of looping transfer – so the *digitas* operates as a metaphoric constellation and as a literal computing level. Now that diatoms, those minute ocean algae, are forming the basis for some new computer chips,<sup>2</sup> computing is getting overtly wetter too, in relation to the wetness of the humans who act in it. We should be able to take computers underwater soon enough. Then we might further mitigate a felt, and arguably learned, separation of media from mediation. Computing is more responsive to biological structuring and metaphors than it might at first appear to be. As Mario Pérez-Jiménez points out, for example, membrane computing is an offshoot of natural computing “inspired by the structure and functioning of living cells.”<sup>3</sup> As computers come to operate more in parallel with our wet contacts, then bio-computing, literal digital selves, can resonate more with the synchrony between the electricity and the water in our neural networks.

In a long Western conceptualising of human wetness and dryness, the first is customarily suspect and the second asserted as the context for doing and thinking (but not at all asserted as the concomitant context for “being” and “dwelling”, to extend the Heideggerian cue). Substance dualism, in the vein of Descartes, values mental activities as separate from putatively less self-transacting, indeed apparently unnecessary, bodily activities. Descartes did not write, for example, as one might for membranism, “I bethink as a wet electric being in contact with an event-object and a you, therefore I am a looping moist

electric exchange in bethinking.”<sup>4</sup> However reductive such an assertion may well be when applied to careful philosophical work, this epistemic/ontological apartheid – dry thinking from wet being – is still very much in operation in Western activities. But it is also in transition. Membranism’s contact is available in the operations of the digitas, as altered metaphoric imaginings of human make-up indicate (see “hive-mind”, see *Avatar*, “see posthuman”, see, even, globalism challenging the nation-state).

### Moistening the Continuum

Our most evidently wet selves are a matter of extremes: womb and infancy, incontinence and other loosening of the body’s liquid boundaries in trauma, epiphora (excessive tearing of the eyes), orgasm, and of course bleeding, whereby the body’s richest liquid is spent. Our moderately evident wet selves are a matter of dailyness: urine, basal tears, sweat. The containment of our natural liquids and the careful release in socially permitted-and-constrained circumstances is a constant interest of every culture, though I am confining here to the Western.

I am interested in how the figure of the contained wet person, full of watery brains and pumping blood and sweat but not evidently revealing that condition, becomes a figure for the non-translatable event of any complex cultural happenstance. The more we release the possibility of these waters into cultural circumstances the less mystified might be the relation between the individual and the cultural. The prohibition *don’t touch the art* is because of your liquids at least as much as it is due to a concern about giving potentially dangerous access to a person who might wish to damage a work. The “dry” explanation, however – involving the sacrosanct desired eternity of the curated work – arguably has become the ideology that obscures the liquid issue.

Imagine more cultural engagements carried out as moist exchange ceremony. This essay is elaborating a metaphoric membranism that is connected to literal membrane activity. One such literal level was recently pointed out to me by the cultural theorist Stephen Turner: aspects of the Māori tangi involve the cultivation of intense wetness in the eyes and nose as a way of grieving someone’s death. Not spontaneous tears, but a ceremonial excess and calling forth of tearing. The word “tangi” translates as “to weep” and one of the tangi’s repeated proverbs is “Me nga roimata me te hupe ka ea ai te mate,” which is commonly translated as “by tears and mucus death is avenged”. The wetness of living bodies is being deliberately summoned. Such ceremony is in contrast to the general Western and especially Anglo-American preference for so-called “authentic” emotion in response to strong events such as death. The permission brackets of such “authentic” emotion are “out of control” rather than in control; that is, griever cry because “they cannot help it”. But imagine if we produced tears like sentences that would be accepted ceremonial corollaries to events such as death. I can of course only speculate about membranism in the arena of the tangi, whose forms and nuances exceed my limited knowledge of complex

Māori cultures. But in the context of this essay I can imagine the super-abundance of cultivated wetness as going beyond the so-called “authentic” toward imaginative work that engages and incorporates “authenticity” to the point where ceremony, or artifice, operates as exponentialised sincerity.

Such exponentialising of thought-affect (grief, in the tangi) via moisture as ceremony is a kind of self-conscious wet physics, a term I use to indicate cultural applications of quantum theory’s organisational consequences. Those consequences include the presumption that all interpretive categories are constructed, are in effect localised and self-aware cultural anthropology, not (strictly) biology. In the wetness aspects of the tangi we see bloody brains in watery bodies working together in cultural acts both resistantly imaginative and productively social. The roimata and hupe of the tangi are resistantly imaginative acts as soon as they meet the Western discomfiture about overt displays of feeling and overt corporeal overflow. They are productively social as a continuity of access to a wet culture of pre-“contact”, to use that term in its colonial frame. Insofar as we might wish to change some of the terms of contact, to reinvigorate wet contact in our theories, such resistant wet ceremony has something to teach Anglo and Western theory.

What that “something” is I’d like to put into the context of wet physics via an application of Charles Sanders Peirce’s “continuum of qualities”, specifically from his lecture on “The Logic of Continuities:”<sup>5</sup> Peirce comes in here because of his sustained focus on thought organisations as *bethinking* (not his word, but one meant to gesture to his ontological metaphysics), his multidisciplinary inspirations, and the intense physicality of his illustrative imagination. When he works to explain his continuum of qualities, the “*singular surface*” of Peirce’s doubled cave bubble – an image he describes at more than quotable length (*Reasoning* 252–253) – is like a floating membrane. For Peirce and for membranism this continuity of “relations” with singular surface involves a metaphor, or a thought-experiment, for imagining our organising of bodies and world and encounters. In turn, I hope membranism can imbue Peirce’s continuum of qualities with moisture. Such a transliteration, from continuum to membranism, can operate in the context of wet physics to facilitate a yet more palpable, more wet contact-oriented, concept of the continuities among mediated acts. So that Peirce’s Pure Mathematics need not be segregated, as he posits it to be in his passion for the pure thought-forms of higher mathematics, from “we ... little creatures, mere cells in a social organism.” (*Reasoning* 121)

### **Archipelago Poetics**

When I moved here in 2006, I conjured a figure for the intense oceanic unknown of New Zealand’s geophysical location. As I have written in previous work, I am interested in imagining what we don’t know,<sup>6</sup> in exploring the implications of what we cannot access, mirror, or control, and I was considering the implications of living where wet non-access characterises, in part, what is available to humans. In the mainland United States, that is excepting its six current territories (Puerto Rico,

American Sāmoa, Guam, and the Midway, Virgin, and Northern Mariana Islands), Hawai‘i, and Alaska, one has a sense of enormous dry land that is importantly *available* to the inhabitants. That access contributes to a belief that we know what we see, that it is up for possession, purview, knowability, inhabitability, transaction and transversal. In England, to continue with my own principally Anglo-American orientations, we look to the continent for a continuation of our traversability.

In New Zealand, by contrast, because of the presentness of the ocean we are hemmed in by non-access, or released to what we cannot possess. We can be intensely aware of the grounded islands that permit and constitute human interchange (though of course remarkable underwater moments are open, for example, to transmigrating oceanographers).<sup>7</sup> This literal situation of islands and ocean made me think the term archipelago poetics could refer to our condition of interchange across inaccessible vibrant gaps, ocean as fact and idea. Archipelago poetics describes local imaginative work according to the nonconformist relevance of oceans between: oceans of uncertainty, change, extinction, and the unseen that arrange and derange the stand-out possessed lands.

Archipelago poetics certainly concern language differentials, in dialects, codes, and languages, as all human transaction does to greater and lesser degrees. My broader interest here is in the gaps among apparently knowable events and how that gapness comes to characterise one’s hermeneutic expectations when one encounters a work of imagination. Archipelago poetics means not to stabilise gaps but to traverse them, to activate and dislocate the isolated islandic discourses we can all feel our selves to be characterised by when we are focusing on those moments of comparative dryness on land.

To put it another way, my long-term interest in “the gap” is latterly concerned with how that gap can function as a membrane, a suffused wet conveyance, rather than as a blank break or as a discontinuity with edges. The gap as membrane is filled with inhabitable wetness, a gap not of split but of contact, a membranism gap. Seen in the context of archipelago poetics, this interpretive image of the gapped membrane means to emphasise the admixture and change that happens in the membrane conveyance. The passage of the archipelago gap is via a membrane, the metaphoric ocean, whose message transitions operate via what is other (wet, dark, non-human animal) and what is in that sense and context unknown. The course of this membranism courts unprefigured combinations and responses. Torquing the moistness of membranism with the oceanic water of archipelago poetics helps emphasise the constant fluxed connection in “bethinking”; we do not imagine a release from the membrane contact or from the oceanic context; we do not imagine we know what will exchange in the membrane contact. The combination of membranism and archipelago poetics also exponentialises the wetness of these metaphors, and therefore mirrors what sometimes seems the miraculous speed of attention in an artistic exchange, since, to repeat an earlier point, wet contact is more facilitating than dry contact.

## Wet Gaps on Page Mouth and Screen

What happens if we read the areas across and among artistic inscriptions and images as liquid, instead of as air and space? In her 2001 poetry and images book *red shifts* (South Devonshire: Etruscan Books), Maggie O’Sullivan helps challenge what I have often previously imagined as dry spatial areas among words. Her gaps seem deliberately bodily and wet:

wept t’  
**at an angle**

gob-drew-loop  
- **homeless** -  
‘bandaged eyes the lightnin’  
**lip to ash**  
incised ----

**out of all -----**

The recto page that faces this text page features discrete and blended streams of red and black watercolour as well as some quite small drawn lines, triangles, and irregular squares (Fig. 1). On the watercolour printed page, wading through the areas and paint traces facing O’Sullivan’s words, I am reminded of the blood that gets released in the making of an old-fashioned chisel moko (latterly performed with needle tattooing), the carved pattern rivulet tattoos in the lips and chins of some Māori women.<sup>8</sup> The streaming red of O’Sullivan’s watercolours is reminiscent of moving blood, certainly, and many pages in *red shifts* feature words such as “gouged”, “turning flesh”, and “tonguesbled”. O’Sullivan’s book, as with many of her works, is replete with references to the bodies of both human and non-human animals. In the context of this essay it is interesting to consider parallels between what an outsider like myself can perceive about the moko (what seems evident in the perception of the symbolic tattoo when one is not inside the practice and culture) and how a reader comes into O’Sullivan’s image and poetry book. In terms of representation’s force, I think of the moko alongside the membrane gap and alongside stories of reading aloud for so long that one’s vocal chords and mouth begin to fleck blood on the page, a literal membranism ceremony. The metaphor of membranism reading recognises the gaps as wet via the mouth and eyes and fingers, recognises the swirls that liquidity introduces in the material, recognises as strange the blending of literacy paper (a poetry book) with graphic excess (blood images) and lips (for speaking and eating) with chiselling and needles.

The preceding comments touch mostly upon the referential wetness and markings of *red shifts*, suggesting what might seem a formally strange relation with the moko. I want to turn to the related idea that there is nothing natural or given in perceiving the areas among word clusters on a poetic page or screen as

airy space or time. Certainly I have read and conceived analyses of poetic word-clustering and line-floating in space and time terms, especially insofar as “the opening of the field” has been construed as a “field” of dry paper-qua-land.<sup>9</sup> A preference for seeing blank parts of pages in terms of air and space and linear time, forward or back, over imagined interpretations that are water and ground and cyclical (recurrent) time is, in my experience, dominant in the hermeneutics of our bibliographic cultures as well as, so far, in the digitas. But there is nothing less reasonable in perceiving interstitial and intra-linear areas as metaphorically wet. There is no more sky in the page than there are oceans.

In the example from *red shifts*, the areas around the printed words and the watercolour reproductions are a high-contrast white in relation to the graphics and words. To say that either page is literally dry does not quite work, since if it were perfectly dry we could not turn the page; it would disintegrate. Imagining the words as scored on a membrane pulls them in a more tangible relation to the unincised parts of the page, as though a membrane page can be imagined as thicker, wet translucence rendered here a particular colour (white, which we are in the habit of associating with blankness). A thicker membrane page might encourage an interpretive sense of palpable potentiality, a connected continuation rather than an airy echo. Metaphorically, to apply the categories of this essay’s opening paragraph, membranism reading views the page as contact (something must be manifest and encountered), transfer event (something must be given and taken and altered in exchange), linking act (writer, reader, language and image meet in the membrane page), object (the page is solid, is a thing yielding and pliant and tense all at once), permitting passage (you can go through the page, can turn to another, can hover between what is “incised — // out of all —”), and activation horizon (the watercolour image and the thickened print face is perceptible as a continuation of the damp yielding of the white ungraphed page).

As I have suggested, we can easily point to the references in Maggie O’Sullivan’s book, the blood and earth and birds and bodies, as encouraging a potential perception of its inter- and intra-linear areas as watery rather than airy. Perhaps a strictly formal membranism reading might be better tested with writers whose texts have neither images nor fundamental constancy to liquid references – Will Christie, or Edmond Jabès, perhaps. But we can also read O’Sullivan’s references in the more customary dry-paper way; we might want to claim that the dry air of the paper forms a contrast with the incisions or visitations of her words, which are sometimes printed in red ink, and watercolours. Alternately, again, we might read Charles Olson and, say, contemporary poets such as Lisa Robertson and Craig Santos Perez as having textual portions situated on membranes, with areas of moisture all around.<sup>10</sup> I am deliberately bringing wet interpretations in to the unincised and ungraphed portions of page spaces as well as internet displays, which might seem a bit like linking O’Sullivan’s paint shapes to moko blood patterns. Membranism, to underscore the point, wants to alter our relations with continuums of relating. How do we

tally our expectations of familiarity when encountering an artwork (am I coming to *red shifts* as art or culture; is a moko art or culture)? Computing poetry such as that celebrated in Eduardo Kac's *Media Poetry* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), with its combinatory approaches to the multiple spaces of language (sounds, nanobots, environmental interactions), is an overt invocation of the possibilities of wet contact, of membranism, in the digitas. Kac's own "biopoetry" (191–196) is an acute literal example here: he makes poetic urges biologically transacted and transactable. Is a poem of his amoebic or textual?

Much other computing art evokes the possibilities of electric liquidity, as well as embodiment. Mark B. N. Hansen adduces the example of the work of Teresa Wennberg, specifically *The Parallel Dimension* (1998), developed for the VR-Cube, which sets up body places as "a metaphor for the nongeometric space of the virtual". Wennberg's work presents six imaginary rooms demonstrating different body spaces, from The Brain Chamber to The Heart & Blood Room to The Breathing Cathedral to The Thought Cabinet to The Flesh Labyrinth to The Dream Cavern. For Wennberg's 2001 project *Brainsongs (Welcome to My Brain)*, she writes "we experience a real-time metaphor for the change and transformation that is constantly taking place inside us."<sup>11</sup> I would like to see Wennberg's works rendered wet; I would also like to see her work as marking a bridge between Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* and a truly wet concept of virtual reality. Such a concept might give up using the term "virtual", since membranism wants to emphasise that there is no such thing as virtual reality given that there is always a wet human connection in relation to and enabling computing acts in the digitas.

### **Imbue**

Insofar as I was formed from an Anglo-American critical preference for dry hardness, my gradual formulation of membranism has been one more heave against the grain. For articulations of thought-being I have been drawn more to the concept end of the spectrum than toward the affect end, to de Certeau and Bourdieu more than to Deleuze, for example. The present essay might be considered to extend the linking gestures of Deleuzian rhizomes all the way toward the water that nourishes those rhizomes, as well as pulling metaphors of connection back toward the bodies of the enacting and activating participant-creators (readers/writers/viewers). That drawing together I am deliberately making as a relation amidst water, since water is the destabilising, the scorned phlegmatic in humours theory, the unsettling undefined.

Conceiving ungraphed and uninscribed screen, page, and canvas areas in terms of watery membranism, we might object that their meaning potentials are submerged, even "drowned". That reaction is arguably part of a preference for space-time-dryness in conceiving. Such a view might proffer purified air as a metaphor for clarity of mind, might think of water in terms of natural bodies that fill with silt and are visually impenetrable, or even think of clear water in terms of its literal potential for visual distortion. The metaphorical wet gaps in

membranism mean to hold the words and/or other graphed elements in an active tension, elements amidst the graphemes, to be filled areas in which we feel the skin, touch a depth of page or screen, sense a weighted resistance as we move from sign cluster to sign cluster, or indeed introduce visual distortions as we join the work of art in perceiving it.

The differentials of visual distortion can be positive, in terms of a theory of membrane reading, can help make an argument that images – that any “relief” or thickening of the literate context – serve to increase the palpable quotient of the nearby words. To put that another way, graphemes that de-emphasise transparent semantics thicken the surface of an imaginative work and can thus be conceived as damper (because “touchier”) than abstract semantics. Bodies of paint or drawing, as well as transparency-resistant writing such as unusual or differentiated typeface, are comparatively palpable, and palpability is a kind of increased moistness. Getting the reader/viewer’s body in self-conscious relation in the membrane of the imaginative work helps that reader/viewer imbue into the work. This palpability is part of the involving effect of bpNichol’s thick purple paper in his *Martyrology* series (1972–1990). It is part of the impact of Tom Phillips *A Humument* (1970, with successive editions added) with its deep surface pages and painted swirls, as well as part of the impact of O’Sullivan’s red print and watercolour accompaniments in *red shifts*. The meaning event of the membrane encounter is a matter of vibrational transitions among work, reader/viewer, and posited creator. Funnily enough, water colouration can be seen as a literal transaction of such metaphorical membranism. The scientists Charles L. Braun and Sergei N. Smirnov note that “the intrinsic blueness of water is the only example from nature in which colour originates from vibrational transitions. Other materials owe their colours to the interaction of visible light with the electrons of the substances.”<sup>12</sup> We can think of membranism as a constellated vibrational transition.

### Activity Theory

In 2006, the Auckland Art Gallery presented an engaging installation by Stella Brennan. Titled *Wet Social Sculpture*, it consisted of a hot tub in the middle of a fairly large room, with muted lighting, mild psychedelic images projected on a wall above, and a 1970ish sound track including, as I recall, whale songs and similar pulsings. If gallery visitors knew the set-up in advance, they could plan to bring swimsuits and have the full experience of the piece (Fig. 2). Outside the main installation room, a “corridor” created by blue rubber matting hosted a row of hooks on which were hung identical blue bathrobes provided for patrons. You could take a shower in a small side room, put on your swimsuit, don one of the blue robes, pad across the industrial blue plastic pathway to the installation room door, open it, walk to the tub, and get in the warm water. There were a few coloured lights inside the tub, glowing slowly in various patterns. As one of my first art events after arriving in Auckland that year, I joined Wystan Curnow in the hot tub to talk about art.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 2  
Stella Brennan  
*Wet Social Sculpture* 2005  
Mixed media  
Courtesy the artist and  
Starkwhite, Auckland

We sat wetly, occasionally commenting on the immersive experience. At one point other patrons entered the room, fully dressed, and walked around the hot tub. As they circled us, we realised we had joined the work of art. All this was very interesting, since the set-up also made for a public health-oriented consciousness that one's body fluids were on offer and needing to be contained. What kind of bathing suit was covering how much of your flesh? What was the chlorine content in the warmish water (not too hot lest anyone be burned)? The *Wet Social Sculpture* water was nowhere near as cold as an "authentic" corollary that came readily to my mind: the rock pools in Marin County, California, where denizens frolicked naked and usually stoned in the 1970s. The comparison was a contrast, a multi-temporal jostling of cultural contexts, which may well have been part of the artwork's constitutive points.

I felt the contrast between life and art events also as a natural liquid self outdoors (in Marin County) and an artficed liquid self participating in an indoor art work. In that sense the artwork's structure was inadequate to "authentic" social experience but adequate to artificial or conceptual wetness. To put it another way, *Wet Social Sculpture* highlighted the particularity of one's interpretive self especially by insisting in its form that *joining*, in effect melding, was the only full way to experience the art event. Brennan was making art out of life, to be sure. Acted life, not observed life; the water of *Wet Social Sculpture* made for the closest possible contact, exchanging fluid with our bodily pores and crevices as literally as it melded metaphorically with our interpreting selves.

Brennan's piece was exteriorising and making explicit the request of an artwork: that you carry out an act in experiencing an imaginative work, that you link with its membrane. In this sense there is a similarity between the strangeness of

becoming semi-naked and wet and joining an art work and trying to shift one's interpretive position towards membranism. Our imaginative encounters are governed by default approaches, including the linear turning of pages and quiet walking in museums and valuing of "critical distance". Membranism wants metaphorically, something as Brennan wants literally, to shift one's encountering metaphors with art. In each case the literal level of encounter is a physical intervention, an activity of your interpreting self coming like a membrane into joined contact with the membranes of its encounters.

1. The term *habitus* means to invoke its usage beyond Aristotle, as elaborated contemporarily by Pierre Bourdieu (habits of cultural consciousness manifest in and as our behaviours and approaches), as well as its usage in ecomorphology. The term *civitas* I hope to be using not as a nod to the Romans but as another rhyme with "digitas" that can refer in a generalised sense to persons aware of sharing in the works of semi-permanent locale gatherings, whether these latter involve tribal, nation-state, or shared geophysical places.
2. Michael Sussman, "In Diatom, Scientists Find Genes That May Level Engineering Hurdle," January 21, 2008. See [www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2008-01/uow-ids011808.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-01/uow-ids011808.php), accessed 1 September 2008.
3. See Mario J. Pérez-Jiménez, "An Approach to Computational Complexity in Membrane Computing," in *Membrane Computing*, ed. G. Mauri et al. (Springer Berlin/Heidelberg, 2005), 85–109. Pérez-Jiménez summarises Natural Computing as "a new computing area inspired by nature, using concepts, principles, and mechanisms underlying natural systems" (86). Gheorghe Pañ, in *Membrane Computing: An Introduction* (Berlin: Springer Books, 2002), sets forth many hypothetical consequences and problem sets of membrane computing and is a useful orientation to this field.
4. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Library of Liberal Arts, 1960). What Descartes wrote includes: "...I concluded I was a thing or substance whose whole essence or nature was only to think, and which, to exist, has no need of space nor of any material thing or body" (25).
5. Charles Sanders Peirce, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conference Lectures of 1898*, ed. Kenneth Laine Ketner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Peirce was an American semiotician of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This essay does not afford the scope to really explain the implications of the wrought parallel between Peirce's continuum and my membranism, and the reader is referred to Peirce's lecture (*Reasoning* 242–68) for further consideration. The following excerpted paragraph might go some way toward indicating why I think it matters to bring Peirce in to a complex of considerations including quanta and ceremonial tears:
 

A potential collection more multitudinous than any collection of distinct individuals can be[,] cannot be entirely vague. For the potentiality supposes that the individuals are determinable in every multitude. That is, they are determinable as distinct. But there cannot be a distinctive quality for each individual; for these qualities would form a collection too multitudinous for them to remain distinct. It must therefore be by means of relations that the individuals are distinguishable from one another. (248)
6. See, for example, my "Introduction to Poetry and the Problem of Beauty," *Modern Language Studies* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 1–7, at [www.jstor.org/pss/3195342](http://www.jstor.org/pss/3195342); see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_humanities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities).
7. I use the term "transmigrating" deliberately, in reference to its context with diapedesis, the movement of blood cells through capillary walls, as well as to its definition as movement from one country to another. For the former definition, see *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 384.
8. For information on this practice see, for example, Michael King and Marti Friedlander, *Moko: Maori Tattooing in the 20th Century* (Wellington: Alister Taylor, 1972).
9. Robert Duncan, *The Opening of the Field* (New York: Grove Press, 1960). The title of Duncan's first poetry book has become in American poetics synonymous with opening up the poetic page to spatial hovering and line clusters. This view of the poem on the page is a move away from strict line-by-line poetry that presents as unconscious of the page as an active participant in the poem's meaning resources. The open field view is also associated with Charles Olson, whose poetic lines often look scattered on the page and who is known for having declared space crucial in the twentieth-century American imagination.
10. In checking on Craig Perez's book *from unincorporated territory* (Kane'ohe: Tinfish Press, 2008), I looked at the blog of his publisher Susan Schultz and found her summary of some of Perez's remarks about the page space in his book:
 

On this first page, "from Lisiensan Galilago" (15), names given to Guam are put in dialogue and spread like islands across white space — not an Olsonian field, but a Pirezian ocean. Craig considers that there are currents between the words; the closer the words are to one another, the more tension is created between them.

See [tinfisheditor.blogspot.com/2009/04/skyping-craig-santos-perez.html](http://tinfisheditor.blogspot.com/2009/04/skyping-craig-santos-perez.html), accessed 12 January 2010. Such comments seem to chime synchronically with membranism, especially with archipelago poetics and wet page gaps.
11. For brief descriptions of Wennberg's works, which can be experienced only with access to their complex computer installations, see [www.nada.kth.se/~teresa/PDVR.html](http://www.nada.kth.se/~teresa/PDVR.html). For remarks on Wennberg's works, see Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 182–85. Hansen's stimulating book is directed differently from my emphases, but I am very responsive to his interest in affect and bringing the body in to time-space and digital reconsiderations.
12. See Charles L. Braun and Sergei N. Smirnov, *Journal of Chemical Education* 70, no. 8 (1993): 612. Available at [www.dartmouth.edu/~etnrsfer/water.htm](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~etnrsfer/water.htm), accessed 28 December 2009.
13. For more on *Wet Social Sculpture*, see *The Walters Prize 2006* (Auckland [N.Z.]: Auckland Art Gallery, c. 2006), and [www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/exhibitions/docs/0609waltersjudge.pdf](http://www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/exhibitions/docs/0609waltersjudge.pdf).

Fig. 1  
Maddie Leach  
*My Blue Peninsula*  
2006–2007  
Installation view: Museum  
of New Zealand Te Papa  
Tongarewa, Wellington,  
New Zealand, 2006–2007  
Image: Maddie Leach



# Into the Mystic: Maddie Leach's (*im-*)Material World

*Martin Patrick*

*Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists,  
they leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach*

– Sol LeWitt, 1967

*We were born before the wind  
Also younger than the sun  
Ere the bonnie boat was won as we sailed into the mystic  
Hark now hear the sailors cry  
Smell the sea and feel the sky  
Let your soul and spirit fly into the mystic*

– Van Morrison, 1970

Maddie Leach – as is the case with most native New Zealanders – has never lived far from the ocean, beaches, harbours, the shipping industry, ferries, piers. There are particular features of the topography of any given locale that invariably become implicated in an artist's practice, whether directly manifested or not. In the artist's words:

I dream about water a lot. These are dreams in which I float down rivers, tread water out at sea at night, surf through enormous waves or dive into the deep-end of immense swimming pools. They are dreams in which I am never scared by the aquatic environments I find myself in, and I wake up with the feeling of having been somewhere extraordinary and very far away.<sup>1</sup>

The sea and other bodies of water are frequently referenced in her work, either in actuality or as signified through closely related materials, such as boats, boatsheds, ice and ice rinks. This fact summons an antithetical notion, and that is Leach's continuing focus upon the artwork in flux, and, quite contradictorily, in the midst of evoking such fluidity, the works themselves exhibit little intentional abandonment of control, craftsmanship, and coherence.

One could state that Leach has enacted a passage in her creative development from sculptures made of something to artworks made of (almost) nothing. Leach's sharp movement away from a classic training in modernist sculpture to more adventurous projects is a provocative and revealing one. In addition, her approach features marked contradictions: open to possibilities, yet highly controlled; the use of sparse conceptual frameworks and aesthetically alluring installations; timely and informed by current phenomena, yet engaged with historical avant-garde concepts. In Leach's practice, each new piece maintains a highly disarming quality of appearing from "out of nowhere," while this is actually far from the case, given the artist's precise and methodical research.

The period leading up to each of Leach's works involves a lengthy stretch of deliberations; for example, what is it to build a boat, which in the end becomes neither a boat, a readymade, nor a conventional sculpture, but something disturbingly interstitial, occupying a sort of nether or not-quite space?<sup>22</sup> This indeterminacy owes much to the contemporary climate, manifesting recent uncertainties, yet drawing upon nearly "ancient" influences: Marcel Duchamp, 1960s Minimalism and Conceptualism, radical architectural programs, countercultural initiatives. Leach intertextually mixes the readily accessible (Jim Jarmusch, Gram Parsons) with the so-called elitist (Samuel Beckett, Emily Dickinson), tracing arcane historical data for up to date re-presentation, revising, reworking.

Liz Allan has noted, "Aligned with a current international art trend toward the relational, Maddie Leach's recent series of works have thematically evolved to explore how groups of people can be attracted to her projects from outside the spectrum of existing art audiences."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the privileging of art considered as "games" and "situations" which unfold within a variety of creative contexts, as highlighted in writings of critic Nicolas Bourriaud, curator Claire Doherty, and others, becomes altogether relevant when considering Leach's approach. What Leach achieves in large part is a sleight-of-hand to be reckoned with. Leach's mode of art practice *is* in the best sense "relational" – however much this term has been of late overused and extended nearly to the point of meaninglessness. Furthermore Leach struggles with the implications of much so-called relational art being interpreted as friendly, convivial, and ultimately anodyne.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, Leach's departure from certain normative models of sculpture towards a more socially-incorporative and conceptually-driven model of practice does not eradicate notions of transcendence, Romanticism, nostalgia, and mysticism. While Leach's vision is clearly drawn, it does not plot a straight-forward path. Her coordinates are not altogether precise, leaving an opening for eccentric but nuanced moments to develop, occur, and reverberate, signposts at the intersection of the rational and the absurd.

Leach has often gravitated toward initially curious conceits: building a boat from start to finish and hoisting it atop the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa

Tongarewa high above Wellington Harbour (*My Blue Peninsula*); creating a dance floor used by troupes of all types (*Take Me Down to Your Dance Floor*); and installing an actual ice rink with a nearby video which portrayed the passage of a cruise ship (*The Ice Rink and the Lilac Ship*). What binds most of these activities is Leach's concerted effort to contain, organise, and merge aspects of the everyday with her own artful whimsy and loopy versatility.

Although used as an exhibition space for sculpture, the roof of Te Papa in Wellington is never a completely straightforward place to see art. One either confronts the picturesque harbour, or is nearly injured by the gale-force winds characteristic of the city almost year-round. Perhaps in some perverse fashion this is part of the contextual fuel for the work *My Blue Peninsula* (2006), wherein Leach placed an actual wooden boat, constructed from scratch by the artist in tandem with a small crew, onto this dramatic perch (Fig. 1). The labour of boat construction in this particular instance gaining a specific resonance in that the boat was not made with any clear intentions of it becoming "sea-worthy" (or lake-worthy, pond-worthy, or even puddle-worthy for that matter).

On the contrary, the readymade boat plans Leach bought from the Internet served to initiate the readymade artwork. Instead of representing the whorls of waves represented in many seascapes and abstractions thereof common to New Zealand's art and visual culture, Leach created a vessel removed from its proper context, inserted gingerly into that of the art museum, although, of course, how can one disguise a boat/sculpture reaching some 4.5 meters in length? *My Blue Peninsula* is an artistically camouflaged conundrum that hides in plain sight as a simultaneously extravagant and elegant parody of the everyday thing. It calls such attention to itself that many viewers were confronted with a difficult task as the (anti-)readymade notion reenacted itself: *how is this (not) art? is this (not) a boat? how does it (not) function? What am I (not) to do?*

Marcus Moore's evocative description is worth quoting at length:

This boat sits in place rather forlornly, displaced from its accustomed medium and separated from the boats bobbing in the marina below the museum. It is clearly a labour of love, the product of hours of effort. Yet in its presentation here Leach's skills and talents are downplayed. Visitors are not encouraged to learn about the processes that brought this into being; therefore this is not an occasion to celebrate the artist's skills as a crafts-person. She has further distanced herself from the production by making an object from a pre-existing blueprint using the specialist skills of others who do not see themselves as artists.<sup>5</sup>

Moore's phrase "*specialist skills of others...*" is of the utmost importance in view of Leach's increasing interest in relinquishing individualised sculpturally crafted works in favor of an emphasis upon more oblique meta-commentaries, circular

trajectories, and conceptual statements. Decisions influencing why, where, and when Leach's artworks are made, have begun to overshadow questions concerning how they are constructed and of what materials. The works themselves proceed to set off chains of intriguing associations, many of them manifestly non-visual. For the artist the act of letting go becomes as significant as other forms of control.

*My Blue Peninsula* is a quiet, yet imposing artwork, at once adamant and ambiguous, as an object that appears to be one thing argues for another type of status/existence. So to speak, we have "art-ness" and "everyday-ness" in utter collision, collapse, conflation. The image of the boat *as boat* and the sculpture *as art* are awkwardly superimposed, as if two misregistered printing plates. There is a glitch that thwarts us, daring us to take this artwork, this mis-representation for granted.

Two of Leach's earlier works *The Ice Rink & The Lilac Ship* (2002, Col. pl. 5) and *Take Me Down to Your Dance Floor* (2004, Fig. 2) are similarly characteristic of her approach in that skating and dancing are incongruously introduced into a setting that clearly wouldn't seem to be the appropriate context: the art gallery. (To borrow a phrase from the music critic Charles Perry, such an effect becomes a bit "like finding a hamburger in a medicine cabinet.")<sup>6</sup> Many aspects of these key works are very intriguing, but the one I want to highlight here is Leach's use of video projections and video monitors.

Paralleling the (mini-)ice rink in the former piece, an enormous ship slowly passes by, as do the lights of passing nighttime vessels on the monitors which accompanied the square dancers, folk dancers, and others meanwhile tangoing and waltzing away. The videos appear to provide a recorded, metronomic undercurrent to the live – sometimes choreographed, sometimes spontaneous – actions occurring nearby. Such time-based images serve as a form of deliberate measurement, and add a melancholic tone and air of unease to otherwise joyful proceedings.

When one sees a large moving ship it might open up perplexing questions, including: *Where is it going? Who is aboard? Why am I stuck here?* Or, conversely, as in most locales situated near harbours, bays, ports such events are profoundly uneventful, simply everyday occurrences. I think the use of such imagery by Leach simultaneously strikes at both of these readings: the yearning for the unusual, and the overlooking of the ordinary.

The more recent *Perigee #11* (2008, Fig. 3), commissioned as part of the "One Day Sculpture" series, again offered up multiple challenges owing in large part to its hybrid status: not exactly sculpture, not precisely performance, not land art *per se*. Leach's artwork manifested an open framework, which could take on all sorts of real world "events", whether random or intentional. It unfolded on a blindingly gorgeous day, emerging in stark contrast to the terse phrasing printed on Leach's

Fig. 2  
Maddie Leach  
*Take Me Down to Your  
Dance Floor* (detail) 2004  
Installation view: Dunedin  
Public Art Gallery, Dunedin,  
New Zealand, 2004  
Image: Emma Morgan



Fig. 3  
Maddie Leach  
*Perigee # 11* (detail)  
2008  
Installation view:  
One Day Sculpture,  
Wellington, New Zealand,  
August 28, 2008.  
Image: Stephen Rowe



announcement: “Northern declination, perigee, southerly storm, downpours, hail, wind and rain.” Thus a warning of an onslaught of near-Biblical – or at least typically Wellingtonian – proportions never materialised. This prognosis was attributed to the weather predictor Ken Ring, a one-man meteorological industry, from whom Leach purchased this tip as a sort of “readymade” to be tinkered with and used as a trigger for further research.

For this work Leach carefully lined the interior of a boatshed with exterior-quality cedar, painted and replaced portions of doors and window frames, added a radio to monitor the reports on nearby nautical traffic, and also a small camping-style lamp for modest illumination during the evening hours. The quasi-Minimalist set up lent a great amount of significance to a select number of decisions made by the artist. The cedar interior of the shed in turn had a distinct olfactory presence, but also recalled the unadorned use of wood in the early works of Carl Andre, and in addition wrapped around and thus served to unify the space. Inasmuch as the boatshed on Breaker Bay was simultaneously a viewing station, framing device, isolation chamber, and a shelter from the (non-)storm it also flickered ambiguously – as in the case of *My Blue Peninsula* – in this strange, intermediary state: both/and, either/or, within/without.

If *Perigee #11* as a work accommodated the notion of performance, it was solely the performance of its visitors in response to the site, as the artist after a complex series of preparations largely left the building to its own devices. Unlike artists who thrive on forefronting their own performative persona(e), Leach prefers to retain a more backstage role in the temporal unfolding of the work. Leach is also a Feminist artist although she might shy away from telegraphing this aspect of her work directly – after all her work gains much of its power from its subtlety and understatement. Part of this involves her generosity and the notable reciprocity between Leach as artist and viewers in the space, for whom she both makes the work but is dependent upon for the work to fully exist. Again the Duchampian trace: the spectator completes the work.

The sea played a central role in *Perigee #11*, visible from the shed's window, always audible, and edging its way up the floor further and further as the tide came in. As I backed up to look out the window at a beautifully rendered seascape, I thought of the painter Barnett Newman and his (not entirely) flippant comment that “Sculpture is something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting.” There I was in this amazing sculpture, which, in turn, conjured memory glimpses of Caspar David Friedrich, J.M.W. Turner, and Winslow Homer.

But more to the point might be projects by artists Bas Jan Ader and Marcel Broodthaers. Ader, although emerging from the conceptual scene of the early 1970s, tended towards his own particular brand of Romanticism, incorporating movement and risk; Broodthaers however was purely cerebral, managing a closely controlled game of chess. Broodthaers for example used a banal “ready-made” maritime scene to satirically scrutinise as if fodder for a traditional art history slide lecture in *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1973–74). Ader's untimely death somewhere in the Atlantic after setting off in his boat *Ocean Wave* endowed his final project with a pathos which surely exceeded the requirements of its title: *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975).

Again, melancholic males from art history, but in Leach's case, relations are shifted radically. Here we aren't confronted with a pictorial representation of the figure gazing out to sea, but we as viewers, enter a shelter, a closed chamber, almost a surrogate camera in order to look anew in a variety of directions, to discover things only partially revealed or visible. The space subsequently becomes, as an intimately scaled but entirely public location, a context for dialogue and interaction between individuals. Although in anticlimactic fashion one could also entertain the possibility that very little actually happens. Leach has previously described her interest in a 1922 essay entitled “Those Who Wait”, by the German critical theorist Siegfried Kracauer discussing “the ways in which people search for fulfillment. He concludes that some people are in constant search for faith, while others are willfully sceptical. In between these two positions he makes a space for the person who waits. This waiting can signify an openness, and constitutes an act that is, in itself, a form of exertion and engagement.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore in Leach's work she has carefully responded to both her (often considered peripheral) local context and how this relates to the broader global community. Indeed one could propose that we are *all* to some degree islanders, one way or another, in the postmodern context. New Zealand is a lot closer to cultural production occurring elsewhere than it once was, with high-speed communications and the Internet transforming so many dispersed points of contact into a virtually unified terrain of endlessly streaming data.

Most recently Leach has been involved in a series of research trips to a comparatively remote location called Beaver Island, set in Lake Michigan in the mid-western United States. Leach's visits to the small, faraway island (from this considerably larger island) have involved uncovering much local lore and history, reminiscences and documentation.

Among the potential topics for Leach's investigation: Beaver Island's plentiful apple orchards (Figs. 4 and 5), its links with a denomination of the Mormon church known as the Strangites, and the longtime residence of a disciple of Leo Tolstoy named Feodor Protar.<sup>8</sup>



ABOVE  
Fig. 4  
Apple tree, Beaver  
Island, Michigan, US,  
October 2008.  
Image: Maddie Leach

RIGHT  
Fig. 5  
Advertisement in the  
Beaver Beacon, Michigan,  
USA, July 2009.  
Designer: Warren Olds

**A request for information**  
**on the apple trees**  
**of Beaver Island Archipelago**

*wild or cultivated*  
*good croppers*  
*good eaters*  
*good cookers*  
*and their whereabouts*

**Please contact Maddie Leach**  
**m.leach@paradise.net.nz**  
**171 Breaker Bay Road**  
**Breaker Bay, Wellington 6022**  
**New Zealand**

All information held in confidence

Thus Leach has been engaged in the process of sifting through and determining how all this information might become integrated into a new, site-specific and community-related project. Leach has often been drawn to peculiar historical anachronisms and the obsolete items which crowd opportunity shops and attics have served as launching points – so to speak – for her further investigations. This is not a random proclivity, instead indicating more broadly the presence of the nostalgic in Leach’s practice, the conjuring of a somewhat indeterminate yet altogether fascinating vision in which folk dancers, ice skaters, and boat builders (among others) might peacefully coexist in an eccentrically communitarian Never Never Land.

In Maddie Leach’s recent works, so much is left intentionally open-ended, as intensively choreographed settings become ever more conducive to chance and spontaneity. The writer Lewis Hyde in his compelling interdisciplinary study of the “trickster” impulse throughout art and culture, commented on the composer John Cage:

When chance handed Cage an interesting melody he never took it as a sign of his purposes (as Picasso might), nor did he allow it to arouse his intention. He moved on to let chance decide what happens next. Thus, and despite the fact that Cage sometimes spoke as if his art produced objects, this line of thought takes us back to his aphorism, “Not things, but minds.” Cage was above all dedicated to creating a kind of awareness, believing that if we rigorously allow chance to indicate what happens next we will be led into a fuller apprehension of what the world happens to be.<sup>9</sup>

The particular rigour involved in Leach’s case in the careful “set up” of her works is derived from such manifestly different aspects of her background as her earlier sculptural training and ongoing study of Yogic practice. All of this helps to foster a greater ambiguity, generosity, and openness to Leach’s work. The trickster and the artist in close alliance, but at crucial intervals, parting company, and standing aside to let the spectator-participants redirect the course of the work.

1. Maddie Leach, *Silence Please: The Art of Idle Moments* (University of Canterbury: Documentation for Master of Fine Arts, 2000), 4–5.
2. See the perceptive essays by art historian Marcus Moore and writer Anna Sanderson on the specific responses to this work in Maddie Leach, *My Blue Peninsula*, ed. Christina Barton (Wellington, N.Z., M. Leach, 2007).
3. Liz Allan, “A Cord of Wood (or How to Light a Dark Corner),” in *SHOW*, ed. Jenny Gillam (exh. cat., Wellington, NZ, 2009), 50.
4. See Leach’s comments in the “Roundtable Discussion” in *One Day Sculpture*, ed. David Cross and Claire Doherty (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009), 249–59.
5. Marcus Moore, “Made by Hand: ‘Serving the Purposes of Art’, Even,” in *My Blue Peninsula*, ed. Christina Barton (Wellington, N.Z., M. Leach, 2007), 4.
6. Cited in Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (New York: Plume, 1997; 4th revised edition), 266.
7. Leach, *Silence Please*, 8.
8. Maddie Leach, *Close Encounters* (Chicago: Hyde Park Art Center, Project Outline 2008–2009). Courtesy of the artist.
9. Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2008), 149.



*Insolvency and loss of the adventure*







*The limitations on all risks*







*The named perils*







*Theft, pilferage and non-delivery*



Maddie Leach  
*Loss of the adventure*

Sam Diephuis, Stockbyte / Getty Images  
Michael Duva, Photonica / Getty Images  
Jason Edwards, National Geographic / Getty Images  
Kim Steele, Photodisc / Getty Images  
John Dunt, *Marine Cargo Insurance (Lloyd's Shipping Law Library)*, 2009

PREVIOUS PAGES 177-192

Maddie Leach

Loss of the Adventure

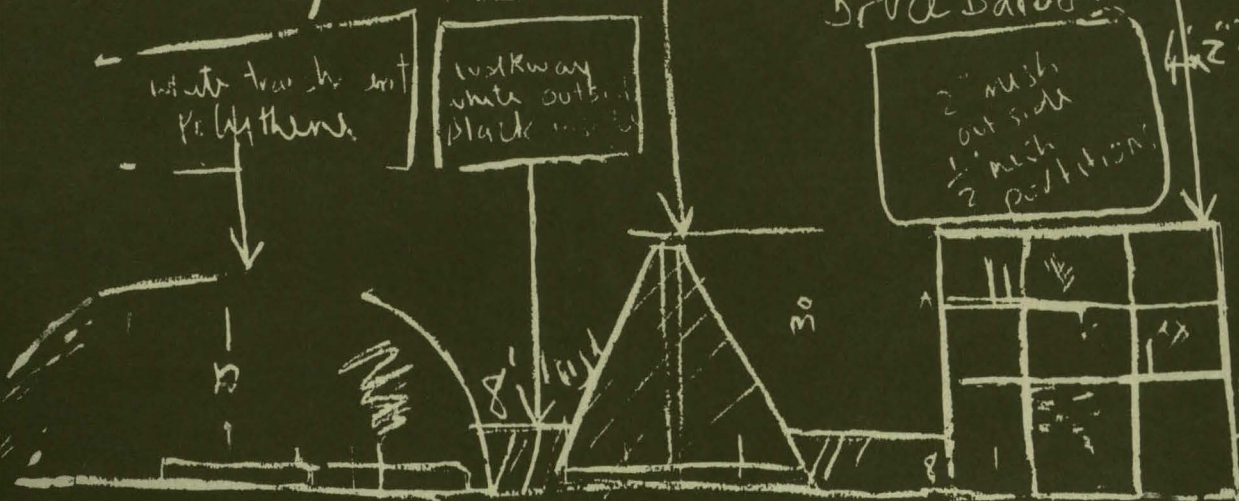


# 3 SITUATIONS

Bledisloe/Kivic

silver  
insulating foil

David Brown  
Marek Herber  
Bruce Barber



LEFT  
 Poster for 3 Situations  
 1971

RIGHT  
 Construction shots for  
3 Situations 1971  
 Photos: Clive Bartlett



New Zealand-born artist, teacher and writer Bruce Barber is known for post-object performances including *Bucket Action* (1974) where the wetsuited, blindfolded artist struggled through an obstacle course, laboriously transferring two fish from bucket to bucket, and *Stocks and Bonds* (1975), in which he spent three days in the Auckland Art Gallery restrained in a set of wooden stocks. Since his departure for Canada in 1976, his projects have been more overtly political. *Reading Rooms* (1984–1992), for instance, is a series of installations inspired by Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko's 1925 model for a worker's study and library. Based around topics including the Vietnam War and male violence, and incorporating architectural elements, press clippings, comics, videos and slides, the rooms are critiques, spaces for investigation. A writer on performance and long-time teacher at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Barber continues to exhibit internationally. While he has presented a number of projects in New Zealand galleries in the years since his departure for Canada, increased art historical

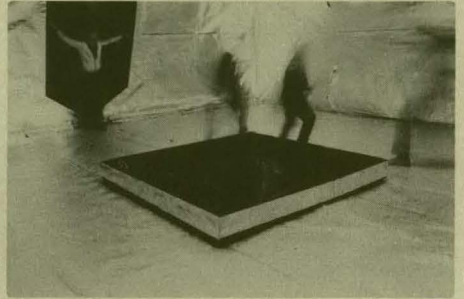
interest in post-object practice has highlighted Barber's local significance; his most recent exhibition here was Te Tuhi's survey show, *Reading and Writing Rooms* (2008–9), a project with Artspace Sydney.

On his last visit to New Zealand Barber deposited papers, largely from the 1970s, with the Auckland Art Gallery's E. H. McCormick Research Library. The heaped boxes have been subject to archival discipline: sorted, ordered, recorded and filed according to size and kind; ephemera transformed from personal detritus to historical artefact.

Because I am not an art historian, and because I am responding to an invitation, rather than following some trail of my own research, I am not sifting this archive for evidence of positioning within a canon, of continuity and discontinuity, of unknown origins to known artworks. For me this archive is a found object – like a box of documents discovered in a thrift store or in clearing a house. I am trying to reconstruct a person, to infer and understand a time, a place and a



LEFT, RIGHT  
Construction and  
installation shots for  
*3 Situations* 1971  
Photos: Clive Bartlett



body of work, to decide what to retain, to tuck into the corners of my own life. There is a strange kind of intimacy in reading the papers of a living artist, intimacy combined with the historical distance that gives black and white photographs and carbon-copies of typewritten letters a nostalgic sheen, and the geographical distance that renders the artist known but not familiar.

In the midst of a spasm of domestic reorganisation myself, I cannot avoid comparing the semi-sorted contents of my own hard drives, file drawers and shelves with this collection of works on paper, documents and small objects, to imagine what might be revealed of me, what might, perhaps require redaction — because the archive, like the artist, always has an eye on posterity, and cares what history thinks.

As counterpoint to the prudery of my imaginary self-censorship are Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules*, his series of numbered and dated cardboard boxes of desktop sweepings, into which he piled everything

from taxi receipts to audio tape to pieces of birthday cake, to be labelled, sealed and carted off to storage. This to me represents a paramount use of art to solve the problems of life, in this case the rising tide of clutter, which, anointed by the artist's hand, parcelled and placed in deep storage, becomes artwork. Warhol considered auctioning off each sealed box in a high-society lucky dip, but the 600-odd capsules were never sold and are slowly being unpacked by the Warhol Foundation, whose chief archivist estimates the task will take four people, working full-time, 50 years.<sup>1</sup>

The Bruce Barber Archive is less heterogeneous and certainly runs to nowhere near 600 boxes, but it makes me wonder about the artist's motivation in gifting the material: a closing of some compartment of a life? A gleeful abdication of responsibility for one's own leavings? A need to put something else in that cupboard? The amalgam of objects forming physical evidence of the public and private person of the artist reminds me too of an exhibition in

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE PROGRAMME 1972

PROGRAMME FOR SECOND TERM

SESSIONS ON WEDNESDAYS, 12.30-2.00 pm

UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Wednesday, 31st May<br>1.00-2.00 pm | 6. "Laws Governing Indecent Publications,<br>Libel and Copyright"<br>Law School Team<br>Chairman: Assoc.Prof. B. Brown                              |
| Wednesday, 7th June                 | 7. "Uniqueness in Aesthetic Properties"<br>Mrs. Hilary Spanos, Department of<br>Philosophy<br>Chairman: Mr. T. Hutchins                             |
| Wednesday, 14th June                | 8. "Artists and their Income Tax"<br>Mr. M. Chatfield<br>Chairman: G. Twiss   |
| <u>THURSDAY</u> , 22nd June         | 9. "Aspects of Visual Perception"<br>Professors H. Sampson and R.J. Irwin,<br>Department of Psychology<br>Chairman: Assoc.Prof. W. Allen            |
| <u>THURSDAY</u> , 29th June         | 10. "Anthropological Approaches to the<br>Study of Culture."<br>Professor Theodore D. Graves<br>Department of Anthropology<br>Chairman: T. Hutchins |
| Wednesday, 12th July                | 11. "Why Bother with the Theatre."<br>Mr. Sebastian Black and Mr. Randall<br>Wackrow.<br>Chairman: Prof. P. Beadle                                  |
| Wednesday, 19th July                | 12. "Contemporary Music"<br>Mr. Max Cryer and Mr. Jack Body<br>Chairman: A. Hall  |
| Wednesday, 26th July                | 13. "Art in Society"<br>Mr. R.S. Oppenheim, Senior Lecturer,<br>Department of Sociology<br>Chairman: Assoc.Prof. W. Allen                           |
-

LEFT  
 Lecture list  
 Professional Practice  
 Programme  
 Elam School of  
 Fine Arts, Auckland  
 1972

Auckland by Daniel Malone, just before his long-term departure for Poland. In *Black Market Next to My Name* (2007) Malone exhibited the entire contents of his flat, all his possessions, his furniture, record collection, boxes of art materials, clothes, books, in Gambia Castle's galleries to be traded away. The entirety of the work is now in the Chartwell Collection (on long-term loan to the Auckland Art Gallery), although the artist retains visitation rights, so he can borrow back a shirt or LP if needed, keeping the work alive and evolving.

This connection between the personal and the professional is vexed. Warhol's blank, gossipy omnivorousness is one solution. In Barber's case, the artwork is formal, conceptual, though embodied and performed by the artist. While Barber's notion of a littoral art explicitly investigates the space between institutional artistic practice and lived experience, his work operates at a remove from his everyday life. So Barber's case, rather than the confessional approach of, say, Tracey Emin, whose intimate personal life is drawn

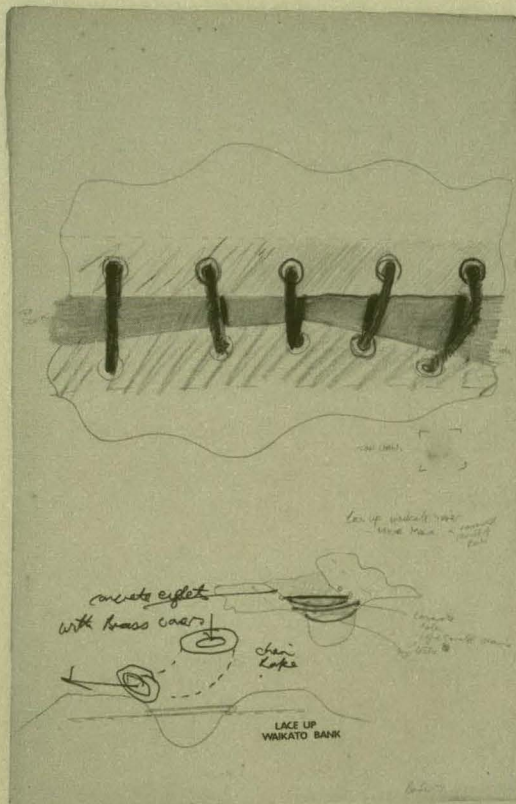
into her public work as an artist, or Billy Apple's pieces from the 1970s recording his mundane cleaning activities, there is a sense of looking behind the scenes at what is not strictly part of the work.

Some folders contain Barber's high school etchings and drawings, university essays, poems, journals and notes. As artists we often want to appear to have sprung fully formed into the art world; faltering student work is largely suppressed. The voyeuristic (and, of course, art historical) appeal of this evidence of origins was explored by Michael Stevenson in his exhibition *Genealogy* (2000). Stevenson produced meticulously simulated versions of the School Certificate art boards of artists Julian Dashper, Michael Parekowhai, Paul Hartigan and Christine Hellyar (as well as exhibiting his own, genuine exam submissions). These critical simulations, combining faked evidence of early preoccupations and promise with the required educational exercises of the time, reflect a historical curiosity with what is winnowed by training and expertise, as well as in pedagogical influence.

BELOW  
Concept drawings for the  
river lace-up project, on a  
postcard of Whakatane

RIGHT  
Concept drawings for the  
river lace-up project,  
Waikato River

FAR RIGHT  
Selection of Bruce Barber's  
correspondence with  
various territorial  
authorities trying to get  
the river lace-up project  
underway



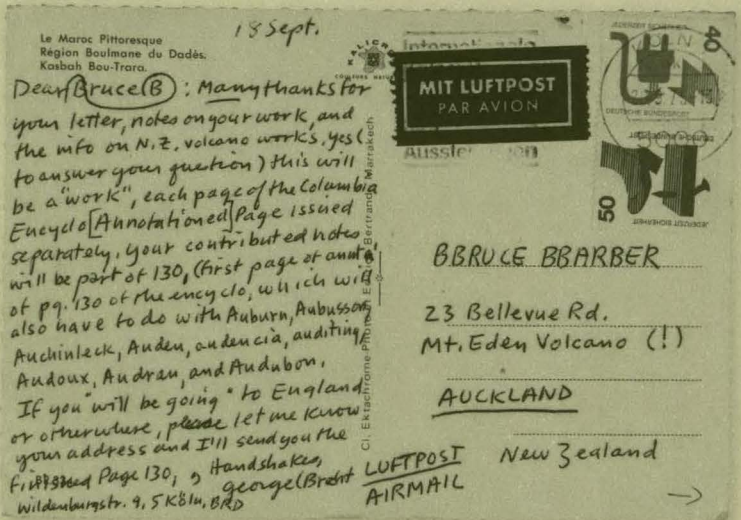
In Barber's archive, genealogy and pedagogy are further invoked by lecture notes and a 1975 class photo and grade sheets from his year teaching sculpture at Elam School of Fine Arts. There's a certain fascination in examining the first year marks of John Reynolds, Jacqueline Fraser and Judy Millar, a fascination of both the student and the teacher in me. What connection is there between academic performance and art world success? What became of all those classmates whose names I can't recognise? What was the curriculum like then? As a student in the same sculpture department 20-odd years later, I have only subsequently understood how an emphasis on interdisciplinarity, group critique, and the notion of artistic research as creative play reflected, in part, the lingering influence of Jim Allen, head of department from 1960 to 1976. In an archived letter to Barber, his ex-student and colleague, posted from Sydney, Allen describes, among other things, his just-completed sail across the Tasman Sea from Auckland, his reluctance to leave the harbour for the art world. This, to me, having only ever conceived of

making that journey in the indifferent comfort of economy class, seems a relic from a heroic era.

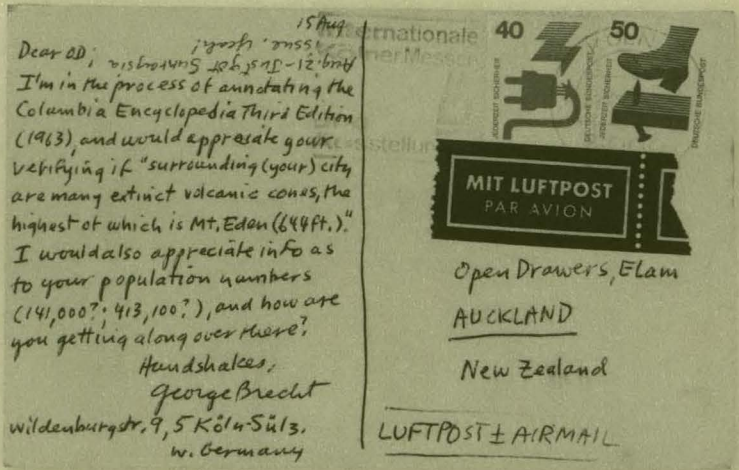
Of particular interest from Barber's own student days are photographs and posters from the project *3 Situations* (1971), an ambitiously scaled public installation in Bledisloe Place led by Barber, Maree Horner and David Brown. There is evidence of other early projects: a folder of photographs and documents of lighthouses in New Zealand, concept sketches for a 1972 attempt to make a public artwork lacing steel cables across the Waikato River, accompanied by yellowed correspondence with the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Marine and Fisheries and the two councils controlling either bank of the river.

The files of letters suggest a nascent internationalism, a broadening of the influence of the wider world on local artists. There's a letter to Lucy Lippard (who visited New Zealand in 1975) offering advice on her proposal to write about Māori women's art,

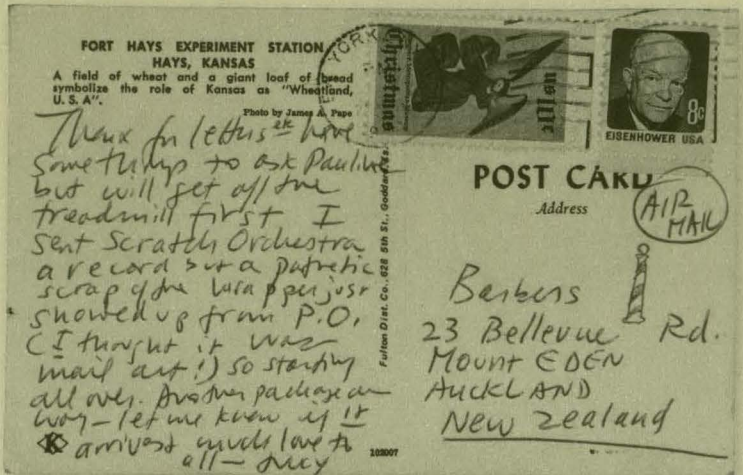
LEFT, RIGHT  
Face and reverse of  
postcard to Bruce Barber  
sent by George Brecht  
September 18, 1975



LEFT, RIGHT  
Face and reverse of  
postcard to Bruce Barber  
sent by George Brecht  
August 15, c. 1975



LEFT, RIGHT  
Face and reverse of  
postcard to Bruce Barber  
from Lucy Lippard  
c. 1975



BELOW  
Class picture from Elam  
School of Fine Arts,  
Auckland 1975

RIGHT  
Bruce Barber  
*Lighthouses Came First 1975*  
Photographic print (1/3)  
Off-set lithographic print  
(edition of 112)  
Installation view  
Artspace, Sydney, 2008

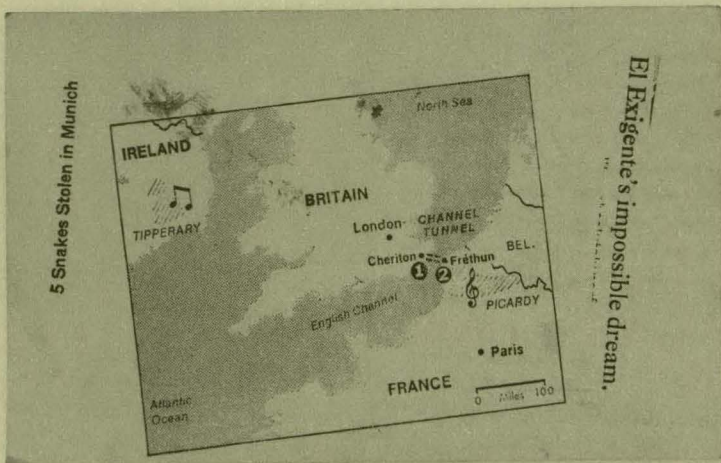


with her replies, written in hot pink ballpoint (who would have thought!), a postcard from Fluxus stalwart George Brecht enquiring about Auckland's volcanoes for his artwork annotating the Columbia Encyclopedia, as well as more personal and more local communications: collaged party invitations, a series of indignant letters about a hastily cancelled video workshop at the National Art Gallery in Wellington.

There's also a sheaf of notes and correspondence on the 1976 *New Art* publication edited by Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow, providing background to what has become a vital document of ephemeral practices of the time. The continuing re-examination of post-object works often preserved only as instruction sheets, photographs or tapes, leaves me thinking of the increasing evanescence of our everyday communications, of art projects that leave trails of bytes, broken web links and defunct hard drives, and I wonder what a similar archival trawl will feel like in another 20 or 30 years. I'm not so naïve as to

suggest a paperless future, but great portions of our discourse and exchanges are, for better or worse, no longer localised (perhaps stored in a Google server farm in Oregon or Eemshaven) nor so clearly material (though most certainly embedded in physical stuff). What kind of nostalgia will there be in ancient email logs and discs of images, navigated by tags and filenames, when high definition video projections seem as redolent of a particular past moment as the blurry black and white of a Sony Portapac? What will form the evocative marginalia — in this collection, the venerable letterheads, the crinkly onionskin writing paper, the advertisements in the yellowed newspaper clippings — the things that gives history weight and grit?

1. Peter Nesbett, *Unpacking Andy's Boxes: Speaking with Archivist Matt Wrbican about Warhol's Time Capsules*, [www.artonpaper.com/bi/v11n02/unpacking\\_andy.php](http://www.artonpaper.com/bi/v11n02/unpacking_andy.php), accessed January 16, 2010.



O.H.M.S.



# WAIKATO VALLEY AUTHORITY

409 GREY STREET, HAMILTON EAST

Mr. B.A. Barber,  
C/O  
University of Auckland,  
Private Bag,  
AUCKLAND.

434000

10th May 1972

Dear Sir,

Waikato River: Sculptural Proposal

With reference to your letter of 7th April 1972, I advise that we are always happy to facilitate University projects but I am not sure from your letter just what the side effects could be if cables were stretched across the river, rather than along the bank across an embayment, barge traffic could become entangled with them. There could be other problems.

I suggest that you firm your plans, relate them to a specific site and then discuss them with the appropriate authorities and commercial interests as may be involved. A starting point would be the Superintendent of Marine, Marine Department, Auckland, as the Department controls navigational aspects of the lower river up to Karapiro. In principle it is difficult to see how Waikato Valley Authority could be involved but I suggest that when the site is chosen, you discuss the proposal with the local Council, City, Borough or County Council, as the case may be, with courtesy and in confidence.



Office of  
THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT  
WELLINGTON, N.Z.

24 April 1972

Dear Mr Barber,

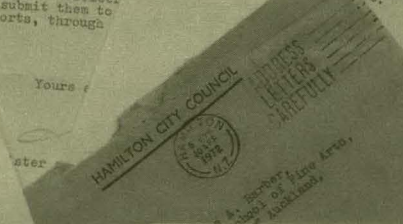
Your proposed sculptural project on the Waikato River sounds very interesting but I think it is a little outside the province of my portfolio. I have, however, made a few enquiries and suggest that you discuss the proposal with the Minister of Marine, who will refer it to the appropriate authorities. I have referred a copy of your letter to the Minister of Marine for his direct attention.

The Waikato River is a navigable waterway and permission must also be granted by the Minister of Marine in case your project creates an impediment to river traffic. I have referred a copy of your letter to the Minister of Marine for his direct attention.

It would be advisable for you to notify the Waikato Valley Authority at 409 Grey Street, Hamilton, for their approval. I am generally responsible for the Waikato Catchment.

Yours faithfully,

Yours faithfully,



Yours faithfully,

## DEAGLAN COUNTY COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN  
M. H. TYLER, M.B.E., M.A., B.A., D.L.S., D.C.

CHAIRMAN  
M. H. TYLER, M.B.E., M.A., B.A., D.L.S., D.C.

REF: A/2/1



ENGINEER (CIVIL) - JOHN W. BISHOP

P.O. BOX 1  
NGARUAWAHIA

26 April 1972

Mr. B.A. Barber,  
C/- Elam School of Fine Arts,  
University of Auckland,  
Private Bag,  
AUCKLAND.

Dear Sir,

SCULPTURAL PROPOSAL

In reply to your letter of 7 April 1972 regarding the above, I have to advise that my Council consents to the use of a particular section of the embankment of the Waikato River within the Deaglan County for a sculptural proposal by the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland.

It will be appreciated that the west bank only of the Waikato River from Ngauruaahia to Fort Waikato is under the

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF MARINE,  
WELLINGTON,  
5 May 1972



Town Clerk's Office  
Waihi Street,  
Hamilton, N.Z.

TELEPHONE 42-780  
PLEASE ADDRESS  
ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO  
THE TOWN CLERK  
P.O. BOX 187

IN DEPT PLEASE QUOTE  
28/72 JSR/MS  
AN ENQUIRY PLEASE SEE 409

20th April, 1972.  
Mr. Ryan

Mr. Bruce A. Barber,  
C/- Elam School of Fine Arts,  
University of Auckland,  
Private Bag,  
AUCKLAND.

Dear Sir,

I acknowledge your letter of the 7th of April and regret that on the information available to me I am not able to tell you whether or not your proposal is one which can be approved by the Hamilton City Council.

Should you decide that your project should be erected within the City boundaries it would be necessary for you to tell me just which part of the river banks would be involved. Although it is not clear from your letter, I gain the impression that the cables referred to are to span the River. If this is the case, it would seem to be necessary that you receive the approval of the Marine Department as the Waikato River is a navigable waterway as far as Cambridge and is used frequently by tug, and barge traffic.

Yours faithfully,

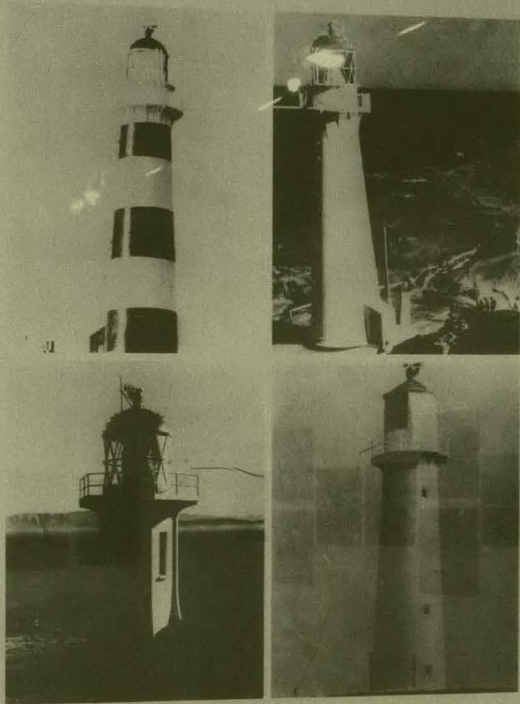
A. LEWIS  
CLERK  
Deaglan County Council

Mr. B.A. Barber,  
C/- Elam School of Fine Arts,  
University of Auckland,  
Private Bag,  
AUCKLAND.

The Waikato River is a navigable waterway and permission must also be granted by the Minister of Marine in case your project creates an impediment to river traffic. I have referred a copy of your letter to the Minister of Marine for his direct attention.

O.H.M.S.

## LIGHTHOUSES CAME FIRST.



Delete all the categories below that do not apply to the photographs above.

1. Cuirassier
2. Gendarme
3. Flunkey
4. Department store delivery boy
5. Bus boy
6. Priest
7. Lighthouse keeper
8. Undertaker
9. Station master
10. Policeman.

BELOW

Invitation to the opening  
of the *Pan Pacific Biennale*  
Auckland City Art Gallery  
March 20, 1976  
Exhibition curated by  
John Maynard

PAGES 207-210

John Tarlton  
"The Biennale, 20  
March-20 April 1976"  
Article reprinted from the  
Auckland City Art Gallery's  
*Quarterly*, nos. 62-63,  
December 1976

The Auckland City Council and the Auckland Gallery Associates  
invite you to attend the opening of the

PAN PACIFIC BIENNALE

by

HIS EXCELLENCY MR HIDEHO TANAKA

Ambassador of Japan

in the City Art Gallery on

SATURDAY 20 MARCH AT 8. P.M.

Tickets \$2.00 each available from the Cloaking Desk until 18 March

The Biennale is a survey of new directions and other aspects  
of colour photography, colour film and colour video.

# The Biennale

20 MARCH — 20 APRIL 1976

by John Tarlton

At the first Pan Pacific Biennale 1976 the once accepted classical definition of photography and its derivatives took a subordinate role to the possibilities attained by the artists' manipulation of all aspects of visual communication. Even those artists who worked within more conventional modes of image photography seemed preoccupied with the explorative powers of technique and overall presentation. The photograph as mere information source for the image's physical reality was gone, and in its place the artists presented works which were subjective, adventurous in their aesthetic, and unique.

Contemporary photography and its audio visual counterparts have established themselves as viable mediums for artistic expression. The ever changing attitudes concerning the validity of art forms allow exploration in many directions, and the modern artist is quick to grasp the possibilities inherent in photography and associated fields. He sees the intimacy, emotive power, and creative variants of new mediums which are not confined to one physical boundary (as in painting), or dependent upon relationships with space (as in sculpture). Contemporary audio visual artists create an environment of their own, as well as presenting an art form with a wider potential for distribution.

**John Baldessari** (USA) was represented by nineteen mounted photographs. Chosen images of still life motifs (glasses, ice cubes, etc . . .) and portraits dominated. Presentation varied from super realist, clinical focusing, to gentle monochromatic colour fields which, depending upon the discretion of the artist, could bathe the image in a gentle fog or dissolve it into total colour. Throughout the exhibited photographs Baldessari established artificial, subjective atmospheres, enabling ordinary still life images to attain an extraordinary visual importance.

**Lynda Benglis** (USA) exhibited two works. These were framed, re-generated polaroid photographs which represented an ambiguous series of events, and the exploration of environment. An interior and a male nude were photographed at different angles and depths. The photographs isolated form and space, establishing the whole interior by dissecting its various parts. Benglis' use of polaroid prints, and her *family album* presentation, produced a feeling of intimacy between artist and model. One looked at the photographs as voyeur, with an uneasy feeling that some secret bond had been broken.

**Robert Cumming** (USA) *Pen Point Choreography* was a series of paired photographs depicting a symmetrically placed male figure waving two large pen nib props. Inked directional lines were drawn onto the photographs, indicating the movements of a formalised, absurd semaphor or mechanised dance step.

The photographs and films of **Andrew Davie** (New Zealand) dealt with durations of time. In his *Blue Suede Shoes*, Davie utilised a sequence of photographs to document an event — the spray painting of a leg and shoe.

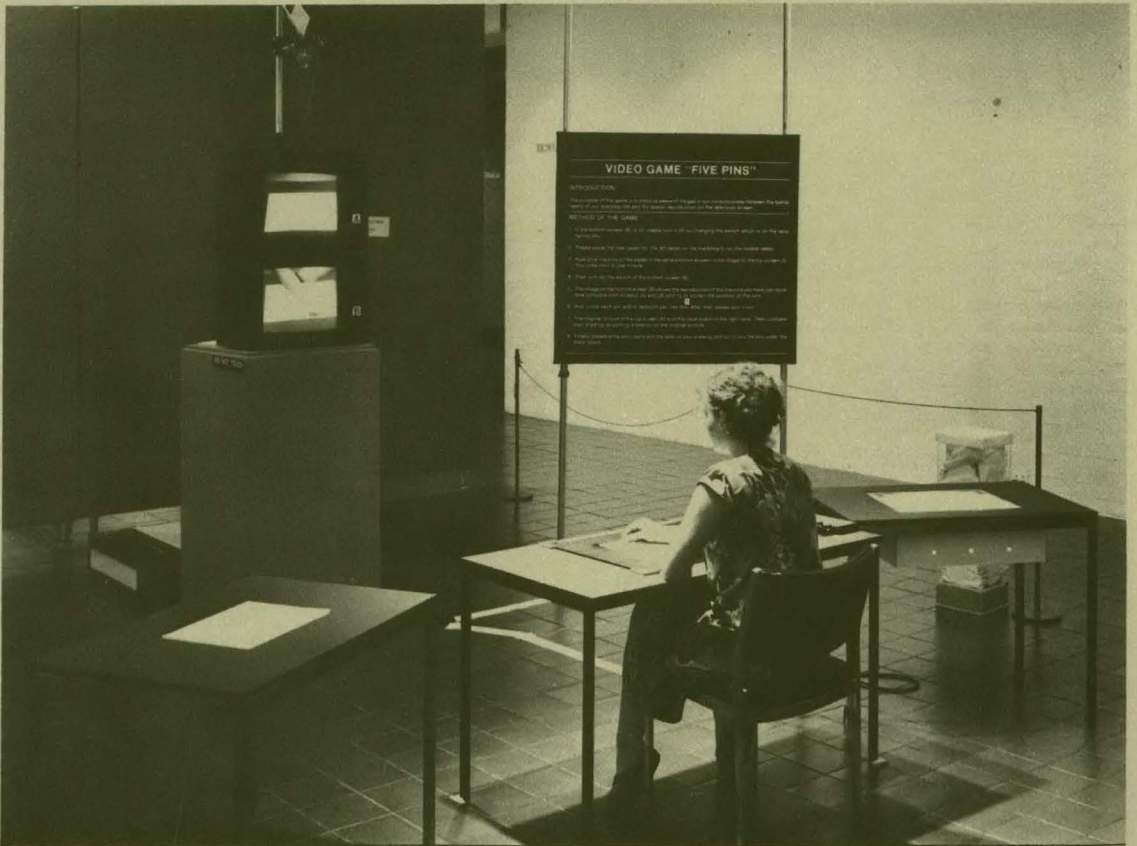
The eight Sculptograms of **Adrian Hall** (England) consisted of photographic prints of temporary sculpture pieces. Each large print was stamped and signed on the front, notating the works as Sculptograms and original works of art.

Experimentation with light and colour variations was the underlying theme of **Michael Harvey's** (USA) work. In the film *Sub Rosa*, Harvey used a woman, a dimly lit room, and a moving light beam to illuminate the various reds of the interior. In addition to visual references, the actress's narration presented the intellectual complexities of colour. For the presentation of mounted stills from the movie, an entire gallery wall was painted red, as were the photograph's mounts and frames. The total effect of this environment accentuated Harvey's exploration of colour. Harvey also used colour xerox. These acted like small paintings and created within the xeroxed images an unfamiliar graphic light, totally foreign to colour photography.

*Skin of Your Eye (Seen)*, by **Arthur and Corrine Cantrill** (Australia), was a multi-screen, multi-projected event which included front and rear projectors, slides, and audio equipment. The entire project, according to the artists, was "... to deal with the various aspects of the refilming process: the relationship of projectors, screen, camera; the film strip of positive or negative; the colouring medium; the film frame; the projector gate; the projector lens; the projected image on the screen and the darkness around." The documentary story line was separated and explored in various sizes on a seven screened structure. Ideas were frozen, arbitrarily coloured, made larger or reduced in scale. The production was a total, in depth exploration of the complexities of manipulating the physical aspects of the film medium into a visual work of art.

**John Henry's** (New Zealand) video presentations were abstract colour patternings fused with instrumental music. The non-objective amoebic colour forms pulsed, fought with, and caressed the rhythms of recorded music. The properties of both audio and visual became integrated into one experience — an experience of light and sound.

**Michael Nicholson** (Australia) presented video and dealt with abstractions of colour and sympathetic sound.



Keigo Yamamoto (1936-) Japan  
Video Game "Five Pins" (n.d.)  
TV monitor & camera/VTR cassette

PAGES 211–214  
Checklist for set of  
24 slides  
First Pan Pacific Biennale  
Auckland City Art Gallery,  
1976

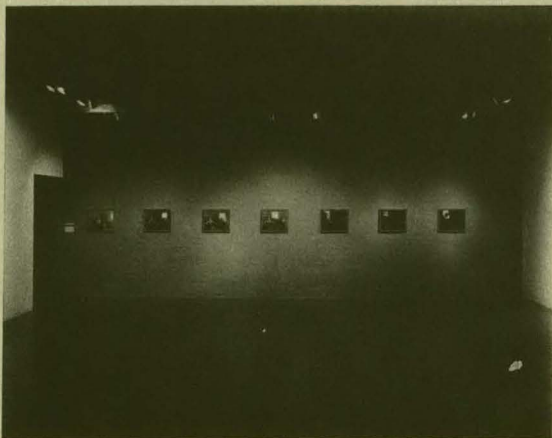
PAGES 215–219  
Reproduction of 24 slides  
in slide set  
First Pan Pacific Biennale  
Auckland City Art Gallery,  
1976

*From Sun to Sun: Pin Hole Camera Work* by **Nobuo Yamanaka** (Japan) was a series of grouped photographs taken through pin holes. The resulted effect was one of abstracted colour formations resembling kaleidoscopic tunnel-visioned prisms of light.

In New Zealand, where photography as a fine art is still in the awkward stage of artistic adolescence, the Biennale was a timely and well received exhibition. This was the first time in New Zealand that such audio visual and photographic experts had been assembled for exhibition. For our isolated photographers it was an opportunity to view new directions international trends in the rapidly expanding photographic fields, to use the exhibition as a guide and reference tool for future explorations, and to enable us to gauge our own domestic photographic growth.



Tsuneo Nakai (1947-) Japan  
*Horizontal Line* 1976  
Colour photographs (Set of five identically titled)



Michael Harvey (1944-) U.S.A.  
*Sub Rosa* (c1974)  
Seven colour photographs — stills from 16mm film of same name

**Selwyn Lissack's** (USA) holograms, according to the artist, are a "...method of recording visual information in a new form — that of interfering light wave. This wave front recording, after processing, will play back the original visual information with all the properties of real-time experience." Physically, the holograms were geometric light patterns projected in a third dimension. Some of the holograms employed kinetics, allowing the work to be viewed from all angles. Lissack considers holography as a "new visual tool" for the artist. It enables the artist to incorporate photographic techniques with the sculptural possibilities of the third dimension.

**Satoshi Saito** and **Tatsuo Kawaguchi** (Japan) exhibited large photographs. By using concrete steps and mirrors as subject matter, Saito recorded the variations in natural lighting and the effects of mirrored and reflected light. Fractioned, ambiguous perspectives and angles were also created by Saito's use of the photographed mirror.

Tatsuo Kawaguchi's *Cosmos* acted as reference maps to outer space. Constellations and celestial bodies dotted the otherwise black void background. Different stars were hand lettered.

**Boyd Webb's** (England) four colour photographs, with accompanying text mounted on card, dealt with innuendo and pun. The images constituted illustrations for the text, often using hand painted accents. The photographs, floating in large mats, resembled oversized story book pages for Webb's satirical and witty looks into the follies and absurdities of societal morality and behavioral patterns. Similar in presentation to Webb's photographs was the work of **Nicholas Spill** (New Zealand). These photographs were also accompanied by text. Spill's views, however, were more domestic and light hearted.

In **Tsuneco Nakai's** photographs, large, acutely focused hands projected into the picture plane, caressing and playing with the distant horizontal line of ocean. Perspective and space seemed flattened into a two dimensional format.

With *Loops*, **Francis Bennie** (Australia) used a projector and a spliced piece of positive and negative film as the art object. The looped film suspended from the projector to the wall. The duration of light was regulated as the film fed through the projector lamp.

One of the photographs of **Robert Rooney** (Australia) *The White Rug*, was an in depth investigation of a shag carpet. Small photographs were mounted together, producing a type of pictorial mosaic recording texture, shade, and various perspective angles.

**Keigo Yamamoto's** (Japan) video game "Five Pins" involved the interplay between a participant's sense of object placement and the reversal quality of the camera. Also his video film *Hand* had interesting metaphysical implications.



Keigo Yamamoto (1936-) Japan  
*Hand* (1976-no.2)  
Colour video

**FIRST PAN PACIFIC BIENNALE, 1976  
COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS DERIVATIVES  
AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY, AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND**

**AUCKLAND FESTIVAL 20 MARCH - 20 APRIL 1976**

**Sponsored by Auckland City Council, TV2 South  
Pacific Television, Vidcom Ltd Auckland.**

**All video equipment supplied by Sony's agent:  
Email Industries N.Z. Ltd.**

This first exhibition in a projected series of Biennales gathers the widest possible range of works which at some stage use a colour photographic process. Within the conditions laid down no limit was set, and the resulting exhibition vindicates the idea on which the exhibition was based — that there is a substantial alternative movement to that of "photographers" photography.

A video film of the exhibition is available for the cost of tape and postage. (PAL system ¾" Sony cassette).

Address: Exhibitions Department  
Auckland City Art Gallery  
Private Bag  
Wellesley Street  
Auckland  
New Zealand.

Slide 1      general view of  
entrance showing  
names of artists.

**JOHN BALDESSARI b. 1931, U.S.A. Lives in the United States of America**

**WORKS:**

- |           |  |         |        |
|-----------|--|---------|--------|
| No. 6109  | COLOUR CARD SERIES: TWO ORANGES WITH FOOT,<br>1975<br>Two panels (colour), 11 x 14 ins each          | Slide 2 | right  |
| No. 6108  | COLOUR CARD SERIES: TWO GRAYS WITH PALM<br>TREE, 1975<br>Two panels (colour), 8 x 10 ins each        | Slide 2 | middle |
| No. 5652  | COLOUR CARD SERIES: TWO BLUES (WITH HAND),<br>Nov. 1975<br>Two panels (colour), 13½ x 19¾ ins        |         |        |
| No. 5647  | PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: VALIANT KNIFE,<br>Nov. 1975<br>Black and white photograph, 16 x 20 ins      |         |        |
| No. 5646  | PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: ANNOYED ELBOW,<br>Nov. 1975<br>Black and white photograph, 16 x 20 ins      |         |        |
| No. 5645  | PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: FRIENDLY FOOTSTEPS,<br>Nov. 1975<br>Black and white photograph, 16 x 20 ins |         |        |
| No. 5635  | PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: STOIC PEACH,<br>Nov. 1975<br>Colour photograph, 11 x 11 ins                 |         |        |
| No. 5634  | PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: YEARNING YELLOW,<br>Nov. 1975<br>Colour photograph, 11 x 11 ins             |         |        |
| No. 5550A | PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: SUSPICIOUS PINK,<br>1975<br>Colour photograph, 11 x 11 ins                  |         |        |

- No. 5550B PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: RESIGNED YELLOW, 1975  
Colour photograph, 11 x 11 ins
- No. 5549 PATHETIC FALLACY SERIES: GLOWERING HAIR, 1975  
Black and white photograph, 16 x 20 ins
- No. 5546 COLOUR CARD SERIES: ONE GREY (ON GREY BACKGROUND) HELD IN FOUR FINGERS AND THUMBS, 1975  
Colour photograph, 20 x 20 ins Slide 2 left
- No. 5545 COLOUR CARD SERIES: YELLOWS (ON GREY BACKGROUND), 1975  
Colour photographs, two panels, 14 x 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> ins Slide 3
- No. 4955 EMBED SERIES: GLASSES (2 & 3 ICE CUBES), Oct. 1974  
Colour photographs (retouched), two panels, 13<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ins each
- No. 4954 EMBED SERIES: GLASSES (CAT, DOG), Oct. 1974  
Colour photographs (retouched), two panels, 20 x 14 ins each

**LYNDA BENGLIS b. 1941, U.S.A. Lives in the United States of America**

WORKS:

- "SECRET NO. 6", 1975. 30 Polaroids in frame 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 22<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ins Slide 4 & 5
- "SECRET NO. 7", 1975. 18 Polaroids in frame 10 x 33 ins Slide 5 right

**FRANCIS BENNIE b. 1943, Australia. Lives in Australia**

WORKS:

- 16mm Loops: 1. 'Two Cameras' (two loops-twin screen)  
2. 'Black Leader' Slide 6
- 16mm Films: 1. 'The 4 Corner Rolls'  
2. 'Walk'  
3. 'Portrait'

**ARTHUR & CORINNE CANTRILL b. Australia. Live in Australia**

WORKS:

- 6 screen 16mm film (4 for film, 2 for 35mm slides)  
Title: 'Skin of Your Eye (Seen)'. 20,000 feet of film/500 slides  
Time: Approximately 120 mins Slide 7

**ROBERT CUMMING b. 1943, U.S.A. Lives in the United States of America**

WORKS:

1. Pen-Point Choreography, 1976. 20 x 30 ins. 2 paired photographs.  
2. Torso Pen-Point Costumes, 20 x 30 ins. Slide 8

**ANDREW DAVIE b. 1956, New Zealand. Lives in New Zealand**

WORKS:

- Films: 1. Drop in the ocean 1975 (Super 8 film)  
2. Blue water 1975 (Super 8 film)  
Photographs — Blue Suede Shoe sequence. 18 5 x 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ins  
colour photographs mounted in sequence. Slide 9

**ADRIAN HALL b. 1943 England. Lives in Northern Ireland**

WORKS:

- Eight Sculptograms. (8 colour photographs each 30 x 20 ins Slide 10 one example

**MICHAEL HARVEY b. 1944, U.S.A. Lives in the United States of America**

## WORKS:

- |  |          |       |
|--|----------|-------|
| 1. "SUB ROSA" 7- 16 x 20 ins PHOTOGRAPHS (stills from film "Sub Rosa")           | Slide 11 |       |
| 2. "SUB ROSA" 16mm FILM, 12 minutes, 1973-74                                     |          |       |
| 3. "EMIT T TIME" 25 colour xerox sections, over all dimensions 42 x 54 ins       | Slide 12 | left  |
| 4. "EMIT T TIME" 16mm FILM, 10½ minutes. (1st made 1971, Super 8. Re-shot 1975.) |          |       |
| 5. "SUNSET SONATA" drawing with colour, 1972, colour xerox                       | Slide 12 | right |

**JOHN HENRY b. 1942, New Zealand. Lives in New Zealand**

## WORKS:

Three video works for video projector ¾" colour.

1. Heather
2. Stratus
3. Snoopy's search

**TATSUO KAWAGUCHI b. 1940, Japan. Lives in Japan**

## WORKS:

- |                             |          |             |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 1. "COSMOS — Perseus", 1975 | Slide 13 | one example |
| 2. "COSMOS — Virgo", 1975   |          |             |
| 3. "COSMOS — Cygnus", 1974  |          |             |
| 4. "COSMOS — Orion", 1974   |          |             |
- Drawing on photographs. Each 72.8 x 103cm.

**SELWYN LISSACK b. South Africa. Lives in the United States of America**

## WORKS:

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. TRINITY, 360° computer generated motion complex hologram | Slide 14 |
| 2. INNER SPACE, high transmission motion hologram           |          |
| 3. PROJECTED WATCHES, dichromate hologram                   | Slide 15 |
| 4. SIX SERPENTS, transmission hologram                      |          |

**TSUNEO NAKAI b. 1947, Japan. Lives in Japan.**

## WORKS:

- |  |          |           |
|--|----------|-----------|
| 1. Horizontal line (1976) — Colour photo | Slide 17 | whole set |
| 2. Horizontal line (1976) — Colour photo | Slide 16 | no. 2     |
| 3. Horizontal line (1976) — Colour photo |          |           |
| 4. Horizontal line (1976) — Colour photo |          |           |
| 5. Horizontal line (1976) — Colour photo |          |           |

**MICHAEL NICHOLSON b. 1916, England. Lives in Australia.**

## WORKS:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. The Rational Hyphen Absurd Burnt-Sienna Live-in Film ECF/251074. 16mm EKTA COLOUR FILM, 25 minutes. |          |
| 2. Videop, for 2 monitors (red and green) played in tandem. Each 35 mins. NF/030176                    | Slide 18 |
| 3. Videop, Orwell McLeay Pedestrian Crossing. OM/090176. 20 mins.                                      |          |
| 4. Videop, International Arrivals. 20 mins. IA/060176  |          |

**ROBERT ROONEY b. 1937, Australia. Lives in Australia.**

WORKS:

- |   |          |        |
|---|----------|--------|
| 1. Holden Park 1 1970 (11 colour photos)                    | Slide 19 | top    |
| 2. Holden Park 2 1970 (8 colour photos)                     | Slide 19 | bottom |
| 3. Variety May 1971 (12 colour photos plus envelope)        |          |        |
| 4. The White Rug: for S.K. Aug-Sept 1974 (46 colour photos) |          |        |
| 5. N.E.W.S. St Kilda April 1975 (32 colour photos)          |          |        |
| 6. Luna Park St Kilda Jan 1975 (51 colour photos)           |          |        |
- 

**SATOSHI SAITO b. 1936, Japan. Lives in Japan.**

WORKS:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. "DIM LIGHT A", 1973 Colour Photo 75 x 100cm | Slide 20 |
| 2. "DIM LIGHT B", 1973 Colour Photo 75 x 100cm | Slide 20 |
| 3. "DIM LIGHT C", 1973 Colour Photo 75 x 100cm | Slide 20 |
| 4. "WORK F", 1975 Colour Photo 75 x 100cm      | Slide 20 |
- 

**NICHOLAS SPILL b. 1951, New Zealand. Lives in New Zealand.**

WORKS:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. "If its funny its not art, if its serious it is art"<br>(pair of photographs with text) | Slide 21 |
| 2. "A story about nappies" (colour photograph and text)                                    |          |
- 

**BOYD WEBB b. 1947, New Zealand. Lives in London.**

WORKS:

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. UNTITLED 75 (2 colour photographs 10 x 8 ins +<br>accompanying text mounted on card 30 x 40 ins) |          |
| 2. UNTITLED 75 (2 colour photographs 10 x 8 ins +<br>accompanying text mounted on card 30 x 40 ins) |          |
| 3. UNTITLED 75 (2 colour photographs 10 x 8 ins +<br>accompanying text mounted on card 30 x 40 ins) |          |
| 4. UNTITLED 75 (1 colour photograph 10 x 8 ins +<br>accompanying text mounted on card 30 x 40 ins)  | Slide 22 |
- 

**KEIGO YAMAMOTO b. 1936, Japan. Lives in Japan.**

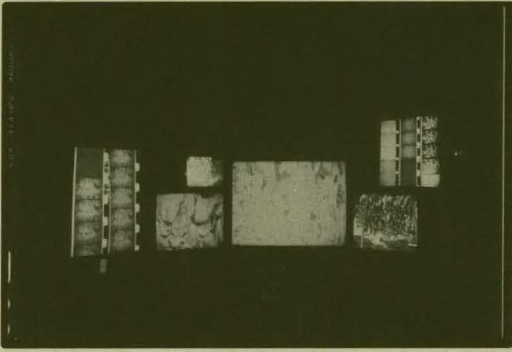
WORKS:

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. VIDEO GAME "FIVE PINS" for 2 monitors, video<br>camera and cassette recorder | Slide 23 |
| 2. MAGIC BALL (1976 — No. 1) Colour, sound, ¾ ins<br>video, 10 minutes          |          |
| 3. HAND (1976 — No. 2) Colour, sound, ¾ inch video.<br>4 minutes                |          |
- 

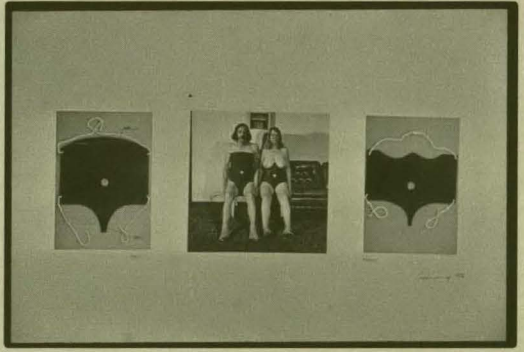
**NOBUO YAMANAKA b. 1948, Japan. Lives in Japan.**

WORKS:

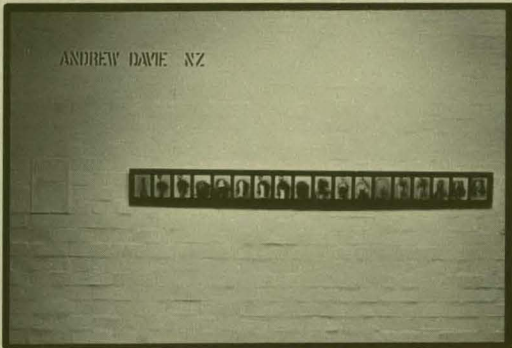
- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. From Sun to Sum: (68 pin-hole colour photos) | Slide 24 |
| 2. Untitled: (4 pin-hole colour photos)         |          |



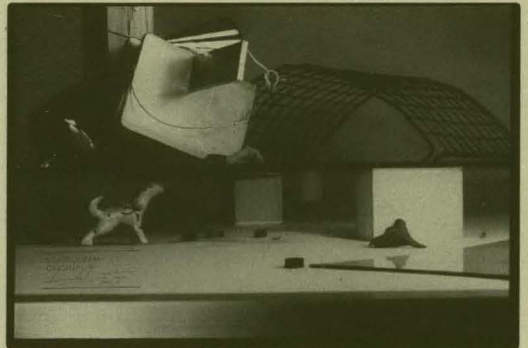
SLIDE 7



SLIDE 8



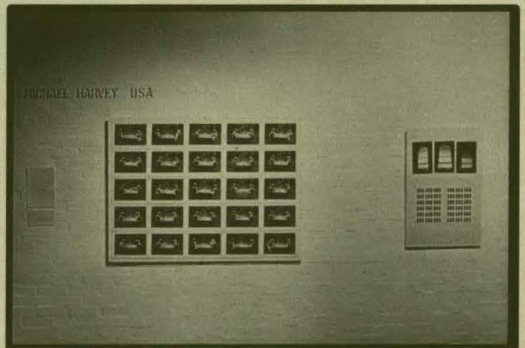
SLIDE 9



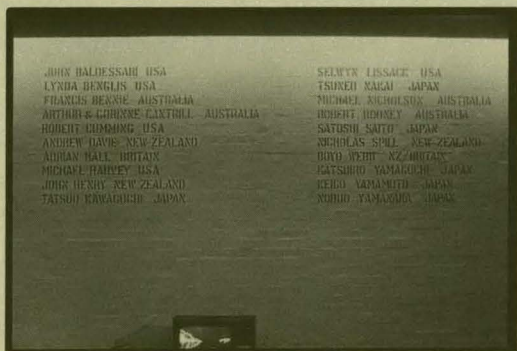
SLIDE 10



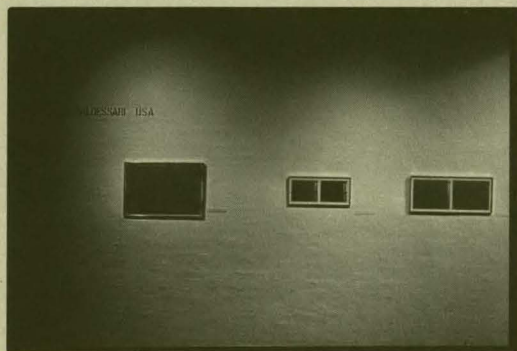
SLIDE 11



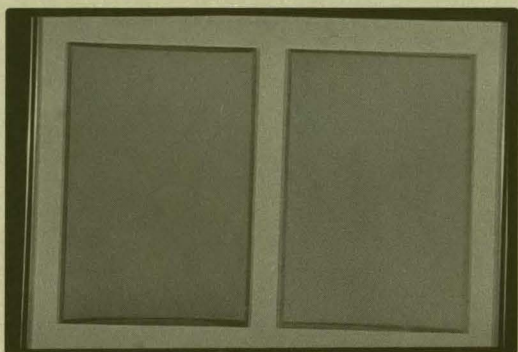
SLIDE 12



SLIDE 1



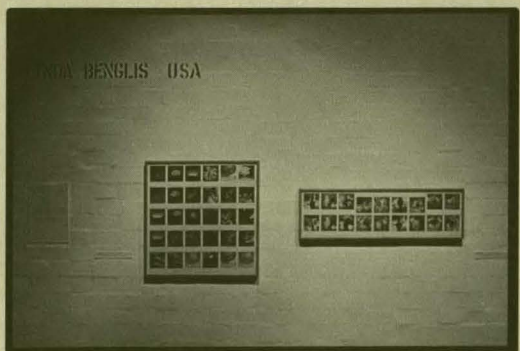
SLIDE 2



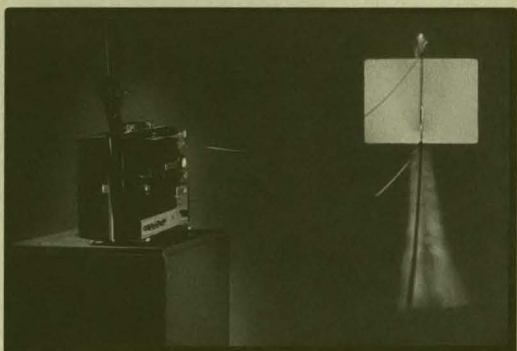
SLIDE 3



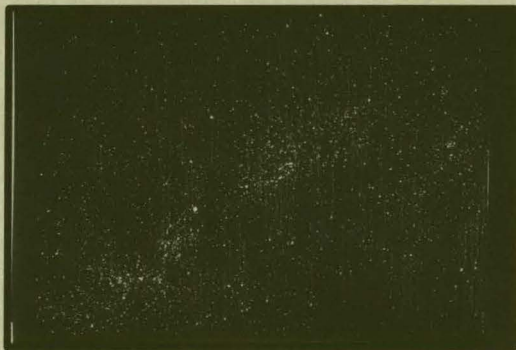
SLIDE 4



SLIDE 5



SLIDE 6



SLIDE 13



SLIDE 14



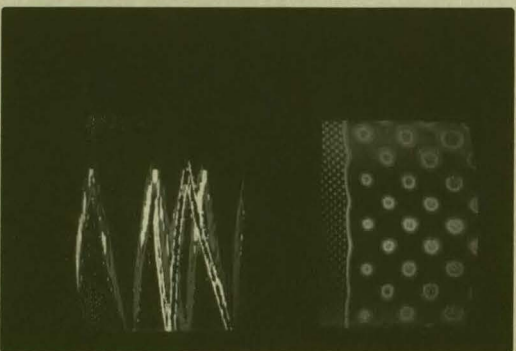
SLIDE 15



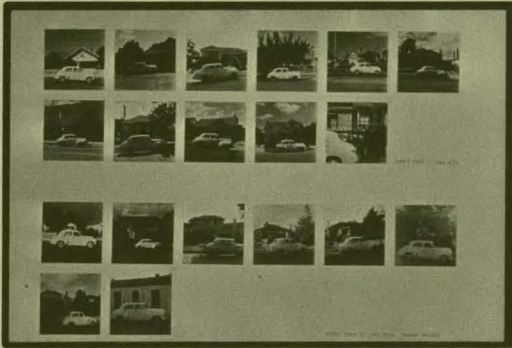
SLIDE 16



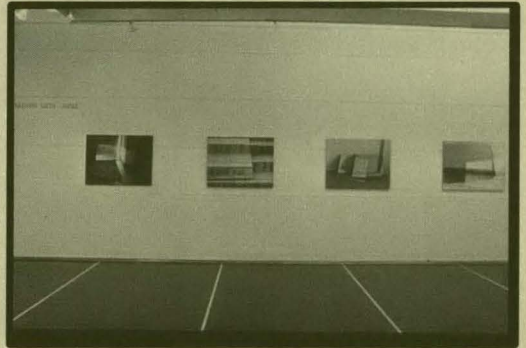
SLIDE 17 (COL. PL. 6)



SLIDE 18



SLIDE 19



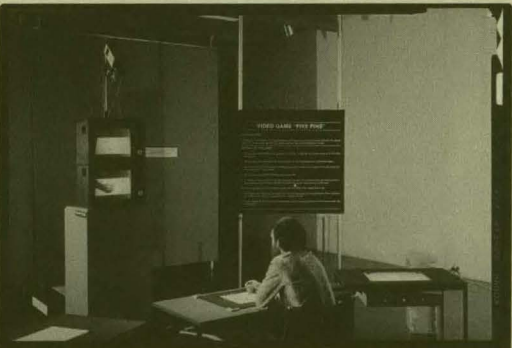
SLIDE 20



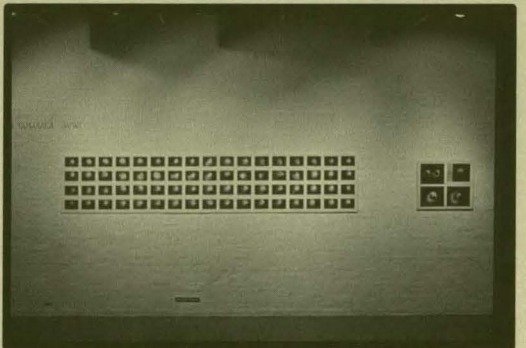
SLIDE 21



SLIDE 22



SLIDE 23



SLIDE 24

JOHN BALDESSARI USA

LYNDA BENGLIS USA

FRANCIS BENNIE AUSTRALIA

ARTHUR & CORINNE CANTRELL AUSTRALIA

ROBERT CUMMING USA

ANDREW DAVIE NEW ZEALAND

ADRIAN HALL BRITAIN

MICHAEL HARVEY USA

JOHN HENRY NEW ZEALAND

TATSUO KAWAGUCHI JAPAN

SELWYN LISSACK USA

TSUNEO NAKAI JAPAN

MICHAEL NICHOLSON AUSTRALIA

ROBERT ROONEY AUSTRALIA

SATOSHI SAITO JAPAN

NICHOLAS SPIEL NEW ZEALAND

BOYD WEBB NZ/BRITAIN

KATSURO YAMAGUCHI JAPAN

KEIGO YAMAMOTO JAPAN

NOBUO YAMANAKA JAPAN

**Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki**  
**Staff Research, Presentations and**  
**Publications 2009**

**Camilla Baskcomb**

**(Conservator, Works of Art on Paper)**

Co-authored with Ute Larsen, "Henry Fuseli: Necessity or Frugality? The Artist's Selection of Drawing Papers," in *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 32, no 1 (2009), 15–29.

Co-authored with Ute Larsen, "Outside the Square: A Considered Approach to the Treatment of a 3-Dimensional Paper Object," paper presented at the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials conference, *Conservation in Public*, Auckland, October 21–23, 2009.

**Ron Brownson**

**(Senior Curator, New Zealand & Pacific Art)**

"Snapshots – the Vernacular in New Zealand Photography," lecture for the *Auckland Festival of Photography* presented at Auckland Art Gallery June 7, 2009.

"The Late Landscapes of Rita Angus," lecture for the New Zealand Art History Teacher's Association 2009 conference, presented at Auckland Art Gallery.

"Rita Angus: New Zealand Landscape in View," lecture in association with the *Rita Angus – Life & Art* exhibition presented at the Christchurch Art Gallery, 15 April, 2009.

"The Late Work of Rita Angus," lecture in association with the *Rita Angus – Life & Art* exhibition presented at the Auckland Art Gallery.

"John Ioane's Profane and Sacred World," in *John Ioane: Journeyman Artist and the Pacific Paradox: a Selective Survey* (Whangarei: Whangarei Art Museum, 2009).

"Andy Leleisiu'ao," in *Andy Leleisiu'ao* (Auckland: Whitespace, 2009).

"Pat Hanly," "Robin Morrison," "Marti Friedlander," "Philip Clairmont," "Michael Smither," in *Art at Te Papa*, ed. William McAloon (Wellington, Te Papa Press, 2009). Auckland Art Gallery blog, *Outpost*, posts on George

Silk's Papuan Samaritan; Cecil Beaton; Contexts for Cartes; Welcome to Auckland; John Fields; Visual Forensics of Oriental Bay, Snapshots (1–12); The Wonderland Album; Camera Shenanigans; Alfred Burton – the Man who Makes Likenesses; Forensics on Fashion; Peter Black's Portrait of *Dr Diana Mason OBE, SPUC, Wellington*; Brian Brake looks at Pablo Picasso; A Sofra Made for Eating From; Happy Snappy Instamatic; One Hundred Photographs; John McGarrigle and the American Photographic Company; Ans Westra's New Zealanders, at <http://aucklandartgallery.blogspot.com/search/label/Ron%20Brownson>

**Natasha Conland**

**(Curator, Contemporary Art)**

"Slapstick Technology: Making Nothing Out of Something," in Sean Kerr, *Pop* (Auckland: Clouds and Michael Lett, c. 2009).

"Arts Knowing Disintegration: Contemporary Art and Wilful Decay," a paper presented at the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials conference, *Conservation in Public*, Auckland, October 21–23, 2009.

**Sarah Hillary**

**(Principal Conservator)**

"Rita Angus' Oil Painting Techniques," lecture presented at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, February 15, 2009.

Co-authored with Mary Kisler, "Auckland's *St Sebastian* by Guido Reni," in *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, ed. Shulla Jacques, 32, no. 2 (September 2009).

**Lydia Gutierrez**

**(Marylyn Mayo Intern 2008)**

"The Painting Materials and Techniques of Ralph Hotere's Black Nitrocellulose Lacquer

Works 1967 to 1977," in *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, ed. Shulla Jacques, 32, no. 2 (September 2009).

### Mary Kisler

#### (Mackelvie Curator, International Art)

"Salvador Dalí," talk presented at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, July 16, 2009.

"Frances Hodgkins," talk presented in *Frances Hodgkins: Femme du Monde*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, July 26, 2009.

"Brought to Light – Historical Works," talk presented in *Brought to Light*, Christchurch Art Gallery – Te Puna o Waiwhetu, November 2009.

"Restoration in Italy Today," lecture presented to the Friends of the Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, October 14, 2009.

"Symbolism of Food in Renaissance and Baroque Art," lecture presented in association with the exhibition *Taste*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, December 13, 2009.

"The Peter Tomory Archive," in *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*, no. 3 (2009): 154–163.

Co-authored with Sarah Hillary, "Auckland's St Sebastian by Guido Reni," in *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, 32, no.2 (2009): 205–218.

*Displaced Legacies: European Art in New Zealand's Public Collections* (Gordon H Brown Lecture, 2008) published on Victoria University of Wellington website, [www.victoria.ac.nz/art-history/events/wtgn\\_events/ghbrown\\_lectures.html](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/art-history/events/wtgn_events/ghbrown_lectures.html).

*Art with Mary Kisler*, "Saturday Morning with Kim Hill," Radio New Zealand: "Yinka Shonabare," March 21, 2009; "Fiona Connor (Michael Lett Gallery)," May 9, 2009; "Salvador Dalí – Liquid Desire," July 11, 2009; "5 Works in 7 days – The Robertson Exhibition (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki)," November 6, 2009; "Debates about Art Conservation," December 19, 2009.

### Ute Larsen

#### (Conservator, Works of Art on Paper)

"Primarily a water colourist? The Materials and Techniques of Frances Hodgkins' Watercolour and Gouache Works on Paper," in *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 32, no 1 (2009): 3–14.

Co-authored with Camilla Baskcomb, "Henry Fuseli: Necessity or Frugality? The Artist's Selection of Drawing Papers," in *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 32, no 1 (2009), 15–29.

Co-authored with Camilla Baskcomb, "Outside the Square: A Considered Approach to the Treatment of a 3-Dimensional Paper Object," paper presented at the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials conference, *Conservation in Public*, Auckland, October 21–23, 2009.

### Ngahiraka Mason

#### (Indigenous Curator, Māori Art)

"Hands Turned to the Soil," panellist at Lyman Museum and Mission House, Hawaii, USA, January 16, 2009; presentation on aspects of farming practices of rural indigenous Māori communities.

"A Māori Curatorial Practice," lecture presented at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, June 2009.

"Robyn Kahukiwa and her Power to Define," in *Power to Define* brochure, Warwick Henderson Gallery, (September 2009).

Interview in Viva section of *New Zealand Herald*, December 2 (2009): 18 on *Taste: Food and Feasting in Art*.

### Caroline McBride

#### (E. H. McCormick Assistant Librarian)

"From Penny Lane to the Burlington Arcade: ARLIS UK & Ireland Liverpool Conference and Visits to London Art Libraries," *ARLIS/ANZ Journal*, no. 65 (December 2008/June 2009): 25–29.

## Contributors

**Stella Brennan** is an artist, writer and curator. Her works include *Wet Social Sculpture*, an installation featuring whale song, psychedelic film and a fully-operational spa pool, nominated for the 2006 Walters Prize. She is founder (with Sean Cubitt) of Aotearoa Digital Arts. In 2008 she edited (with Su Ballard) the *Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader*, the first comprehensive text on digital arts practice in New Zealand. She teaches at AUT University and is represented by Starkwhite.

**Ron Brownson** is Senior Curator New Zealand and Pacific art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

**Peter Brunt** is Senior Lecturer in Art History at Victoria University of Wellington. His most recent publications are two book chapters: "The Portrait, the Pe'a and the Room," in *Tatau: Photographs by Mark Adams: Samoan Tattoo, New Zealand Art, Global Culture* ed. Sean Mallon, Peter Brunt, and Nicholas Thomas (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2010) and "History and Imagination in the Art of John Pule," in *Hauāga: The Art of John Pule* ed. Nicholas Thomas (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2010). He is currently working on a collaborative book on the history of art in Oceania with chapters on developments since World War Two.

**Jan Bryant** is currently Head of Research at AUT University. Her area of research is contemporary art and moving image theory.

**Anne Buckingham** lives in Brussels and is a translator specialising in European languages with a close association with CCNOA (Centre for Non-Objective Art, Brussels).

**Nigel Clark** teaches geography and environmental studies at the Open University, UK. He is the co-editor of *Material Geographies* (2008) and *Extending Hospitality: Giving Space, Taking Time* (2009), and has just completed a book entitled *Volatile Earth, Vulnerable Bodies: Sociable Life on a Dynamic Planet*. Current projects look at the bodily aspects of climate change and the juncture of the living and nonliving.

**Sean Cubitt** is Director of the Program in Media and Communications at the University of Melbourne. His publications include *Timeshift*, *Videography*, *Digital Aesthetics*, *Simulation and Social Theory*, *The Cinema Effect* and *EcoMedia*. He is series editor for Leonardo Books at MIT Press.

**Wystan Curnow** is a Research Fellow at the University of Auckland. He has published widely on modern and contemporary art and literature, and has curated many exhibitions. His most recent book is *Len Lye* (2009), which he co-edited with Tyler Cann. He is co-editor of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*.

**Rudi Fuchs** is an art historian and writer. He has been director of museums in Eindhoven, The Hague and Amsterdam; in 1982 he was artistic director of *Documenta 7*.

**Rob Gardiner**, founding Director and **Sue Gardiner**, co-Director, of the Chartwell Collection of New Zealand and Australian Contemporary Art have been collecting Julian Dashper's work since the mid-1980s. The Collection, formed in 1974 under the auspices of the Chartwell Trust, is held on long-term loan at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, New Zealand.

**Andrea Gaskin** is an artist based in Auckland, New Zealand. Andrea was a student of Julian Dashper's between 2002 and 2005. With Eimi Tamua, Andrea is co-founder of the annual craft fair, *Edward and Son*: the *Dashpers* t-shirt is available from andreagaskin@gmail.com with proceeds going to the New Zealand Melanoma Foundation. Upcoming exhibitions include *Product of Circumstance* with Kathryn Tsui and Linda Roche.

**Catherine Hammond** is Research Librarian at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and the managing editor of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*. She is currently involved in developing a website on Gottfried Lindauer's nineteenth-century portraits of Māori, in partnership with Te Tauri Whiri i Te Reo Māori/The Māori Language Commission.

**Simon Ingram** is an artist based in Auckland, New Zealand. Recent exhibitions include *With Your Eyes Only* in Graz at Kunstverein Medienturm, *PULSE* Art Fair New York, *Random Walk for Brussels* at CCNOA in Brussels, *Boing Boom Tschak!* at Gow Langsford Gallery and *Minus Space* at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center / MoMA. He is a senior lecturer at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland.

**Maddie Leach** was born in Auckland in 1970. Her practice is largely project-based, site responsive and conceptually driven. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture from the University of Canterbury, Christchurch and has lived and worked in Wellington since 1995.

**Elodie Lesourd** is a French artist based in Paris. She has exhibited mostly in Europe and is included in various public and private collections, notably the Cartier for Contemporary Art Foundation.

**Stephen Little** is a practicing artist and is Subject Leader for Painting at the National Art School in Sydney.

**Dane Mitchell** is currently engaged in an artist residency at the Berliner Künstlerprogramm/DAAD. Recent solo projects include at daadgalerie, Berlin; Art Statements and Art39Basel. In 2010 he will participate in the Busan Biennial, Korea and will be artist in residence at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, New Zealand.

**Moreno Miorelli** is Director of *Stazione di Topolo' – Postaja Topolove* and has curated many contemporary art events in marginal and deserted sites in Italy and Slovenia. He lives in Cividale del Friuli, Italy.

**John Nixon** is an artist based in Melbourne, Australia.

**Martin Patrick** is a critic and historian whose writings on art have appeared in many publications, including *Afterimage*, *Art Journal*, *Art Monthly*, and *Third Text*. He has taught at the University of Chicago, Illinois State University, and the Savannah College of Art and Design. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Critical Studies at Massey University.

**Jan van der Ploeg** is an artist based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Recent solo exhibitions include the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand.

**David Raskin** is Associate Professor of Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago ([www.artic.edu](http://www.artic.edu)). His books on Donald Judd and Richard Serra will be published later this year.

**Albert Refiti** trained as an architect and currently is a PhD candidate at the Auckland University of Technology where he is also the Head of Department and Senior Lecturer in Spatial Design. He has published widely on concepts of space in philosophy and Pacific thought and their relationships to Pacific art and architecture.

**Marie Shannon** is an Auckland artist, and partner of Julian Dashper. She is represented by Sue Crockford Gallery and Hamish McKay Gallery. Recent projects include *For Keeps: Sampling Recent Acquisitions 2006–2009* at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, *The* at The Suburban, Oak Park, IL and *Reboot – The Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection* at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

**Barbara Strathdee** exhibits at <Suite>, Wellington, and museums and galleries in New Zealand, Italy and Slovenia.

**Emā Tavola** is a visual artist and curator of Fijian and New Zealand Pākehā ancestry, currently living in Manukau City, South Auckland. She works as the Pacific Arts Co-ordinator for Manukau City Council managing Fresh Gallery Otara, a community gallery profiling new Pacific art from Manukau.

**Teresia Teaiwa** is Senior Lecturer in Pacific Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. Previously she taught in the History/Politics Department at the University of the South Pacific. Her PhD, from the University of California, Santa Cruz, focused on militarism, tourism and native articulations in Oceania.

**Stephen Turner** teaches in the English Department at the University of Auckland. He has published essays on issues of settlement and indigeneity, film, television and popular culture, and worked with photographer Ann Shelton. He is currently completing a book on “first law” and “second settlement” in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

**Mercedes Vicente** is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Govett Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, New Zealand.

**Jim Vivieaere** lives in Auckland, works intermittently as an artist, curatorial adviser and commentator on issues concerning New Zealand artists, who identify as Pacific Islanders. He has travelled extensively in North Western Europe, the Pacific Rim and its Basin. He has three daughters, three grandsons and is on the cusp of retirement.

**Ian Wedde** is a freelance writer and curator. His most recent books are a novel, *Chinese Opera* (2008), a collection of poems, *Good Business* (2009), and an art monograph, *Bill Culbert: Making Light Work* (2009). In 2008, he curated the Rotorua Museum of Art and History's centennial exhibition.



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**Contributors** Stella Brennan, Ron Brownson, Peter Brunt, Jan Bryant, Nigel Clark, Sean Cubitt, Wystan Curnow, Rudi Fuchs, Rob Gardiner, Sue Gardiner, Andrea Gaskin, Catherine Hammond, Simon Ingram, Maddie Leach, Elodie Lesourd, Stephen Little, Dane Mitchell, Moreno Miorelli, John Nixon, Martin Patrick, Jan van der Ploeg, David Raskin, Albert Refiti, Lisa Samuels, Marie Shannon, Barbara Strathdee, Ema Tavola, Teresia Teaiwa, Stephen Turner, Mercedes Vicente, Jim Vivieaere and Ian Wedde.

**Writing on** Bruce Barber, Zygmunt Bauman, Stella Brennan, David Cross, Julian Dashper, Epeli Hau'ofa, Bettina Furnée, John Glover, Tim Gruchy, William Hodges, Maddie Leach, Jae Hoon Lee, John Lyall, Maggie O'Sullivan, Kirsten Peiroth, Natalie Robertson, Allan Sekula, Robert Smithson, Michael Stevenson, Elizabeth Thomson, Albert Wendt and more.



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