



Reading Room:
A Journal of Art and Culture

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Marylyn Mayo as a child with
her mother Mavis Mason

Foreword

Catherine Hammond

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 a number of major initiatives: in 2007 the Marylyn Mayo Internships and the scholarly journal *Reading Room*, and in 2011 the John Mayo Members Lounge and Marylyn Mayo and Mavis Mason Painting Conservation were opened. The journal is also 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 love of 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 1974, Mavis left New Zealand and joined her daughter 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

Jon Bywater, for the editors

The works re-presented by finalists Simon Denny, Maddie Leach, Luke Willis Thompson and Kalisolaite 'Uhila for the 2014 Walters Prize are revisited in this issue of *Reading Room*. They offer us moments of experience and images which might contribute to the way we can figure a number of contemporary political questions: of links between technology and capitalism, for example, the extraction of natural resources, the place of art in the wider culture, intersections between class and ethnicity, and increasing inequality. In quite different ways, the consequence of such issues combines with the immediacy and subtlety of each artistic gesture to give its formal qualities a *raison d'être*, to give the piece its impact and, potentially, its audience pause.

Palpable especially for the way the Prize is staged as a competition, each artist puts herself at risk, in just that way artists usually do – handing her work over to a public (as well as, in this case, an official judge) to make something of, or not. The run-of-the-mill incomprehension and hostility an artist may face, though, is a difficult comparison to the seriousness of situations she may allude to. The opprobrium of the *Taranaki Daily News* letters columns, for example, is a risk of an obviously different order to the kind scientists and politicians exhort us to heed, such as the intensifying “natural” disasters that will result from climate destabilisation.

“Risk” – and disjunctions between the scales and scenarios in which the word might apply – serves as our theme, through which the journal returns to the vital question of contemporary art’s relationship to the wider world. The sense of the term shifts in a present various authors see as characterised by conflicted, reflective states: fear (Brian Massumi), cynicism (Paolo Virno), anxiety (Plan C) or distraction (Jalal Toufic). While and *because* matters of urgent, general concern bear heavily upon us, we experience fright without flight, participation

without conviction, a generalised uncertainty that “represses active force”. How does art’s role in inducing reflection – taking risks, exposing audiences to sensations of uncertainty – relate to the task of effective action? What traction might it offer?

Juliana Spahr’s poem reprinted here evokes the sometimes incalculable relativity of the relation between our personal agency and our awareness of distant realities and larger forces. Her witness to a day’s news is a reminder that profit-motivated media use triggers of fear and anxiety to increase ratings and traffic. As the late twentieth-century news room adage has it: if it bleeds, it leads. Thus traps are set for and become drains on our ethical attention. From the standpoint of his work in political theory, David Hall’s essay starts from an analysis of the way fear and desire relate to risk to examine artistic responses to the Canterbury earthquakes (a possible local instance of neoliberal “disaster capitalism” playing out).

Relating Richard Killeen’s work to our current state, writer Tim Corballis develops a nuanced account of “the political associations that an aesthetic form is able to take on”. The aesthetic forms of the 2014 Walters Prize works are contextualised art historically by Gregory Minissale, who finds them exceeded by their “unravelling a set of emotions and affects”. Simon Denny also appears in curator Tim Gentles’ account of the international circulation of the tropes and concerns of the so-called “post internet” genre of physical works that quote digital aesthetics. Kalisolaite ‘Uhila, and the hardship he took on in his performance, is related to local historical works by critic Anna Gardener in the archive section, which concludes with Brooke Randall’s survey of issues in the conservation of time-based art.

Ecological threats are touched on in several contributions, including the artist pages by The Distance Plan, a collective formed to work collaboratively on how art might respond meaningfully to climate destabilisation. Art historian and curator Susan Ballard surveys a range of art works that begin from Aotearoa’s distinctive local history of extinctions, and how they might illuminate the category of the natural. We are pleased, too, to have permission to share again an essay by the late Geoff Park, which brings a bicultural awareness to the aesthetic category of landscape and the task of ecology.

Not clearly separable from the environmental are the financial connotations of risk that have intensified since the Global Financial Crisis. Writers Rachel O’Reilly and Plan C member Simon Barber bring a facility with European discussions of precarity to this issue’s roundtable. Together with artists Dan Arps, Toril Johannessen and Desna Whaanga-Schollum, they contribute to a frank and searching exchange, cognisant of the effects of both austerity policies and the market on art and its current institutions—whose own sustainability could be in doubt.

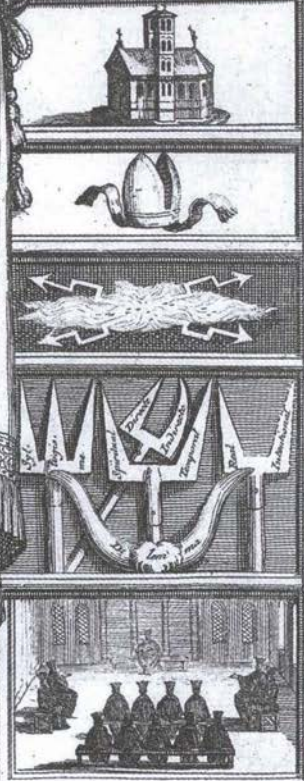
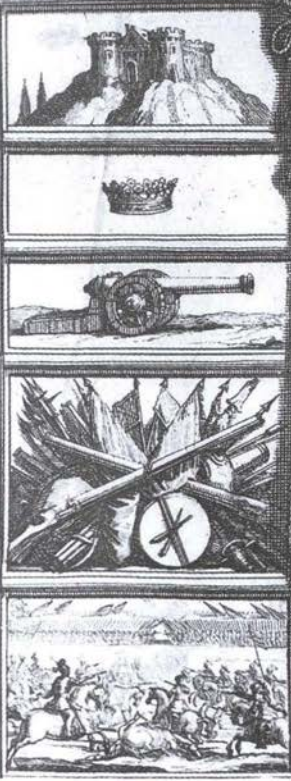
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LEVIATHAN
Or
THE MATTER, FORME
and POWER of A COMMON-
WEALTH ECCLESIASTICALL
and CIVIL.

By THOMAS HOBBS
of MALMESBVRY.

London
Printed for Andrew Crooke
1651.



Sensing Sovereignty: On What's Real About Emergency

David Hall

It was a new city, because it was made up of new citizens. We learnt again what it was to be citizens in the city, rather than rate-payers. New winners and new losers. New geology, new probabilities, new dangers and new delights. New days and new nights; new walls and new pathways. When every brick could be the death of us, and every moment might see all bets off: no one is bored.¹

Fig. 1
Abraham Bosse
Frontispiece for
Leviathan
Photo courtesy
of Wikimedia
Commons

I.

This is an essay about emergency, about the way we discover desire through fear, the way that shocks expose the mechanics of the ordinary, and the way that art can make sense of sovereignty. John Dewey wrote a long time ago: “The problem of the relation of art and morals is too often treated as if the problem existed only on the side of art.”² The author of this essay was once guilty of believing as much; this is his attempt to set things right.

II.

Risk is a slippery concept but at least two very obvious things can be said. The first is that risk is ubiquitous, everywhere. The second is that risk is closely related to the experience of fear. The first point can't be stressed enough: risk hovers over any action that could turn out badly, from the crossing of a road to the regeneration of our cells. But the second point is easily overplayed, because it threatens to obscure a more important affective relation: *love*.

In this vein, we might define risk as a conditional relation to what we treasure, covet, or desire. This is not to say that fear is not involved – of course it is – for to want a thing is to produce a fear of not having it. Such fears constitute two common forms of risk: (1) our fear of losing what we want and already have, and (2) our fear of not getting what we want. In regards to (1), the risk of a gamble is tied up in what we fear to lose: the material assets or personal reputation we stake on each bet. But any gamble is actually a two-fold risk, because we *also* risk not

attaining what we want and don't yet have, or don't have enough of. Similarly, when we speak of the risk of shark attacks, we speak not only of our fear for the shark or its attack, but also of our love for the life we have, for the life the shark could take from us. Yet, by fearing the shark too much, we risk missing out on an ocean swim, on its pleasures and perspectives. This is why risk is so omnipresent, because it paves each tine of any fork in the road. In our decisions and practical judgments, there is always something potentially to be lost, something to regret.

So to love is to subject oneself to risk; this is clearly, banally true. Cue Badiou: "[L]ove cannot be a gift given on the basis of a complete lack of risk."³ Less often expressed, though, is the inverse: this notion of risk as essentially love-struck, as grounded in need, desire, and attraction. If we love nothing, then nothing matters to us – we have nothing to fear, nothing to risk – which is, if not an inconceivable state, then at least a pathological one.⁴ Accordingly, it is the things we love the most – our lovers, our lives, our families, our communities – that provoke our most profound feelings of risk, of threat. But what makes love unlike more simple desires is that love is a highly complex emotion, an elaborate tapestry that entangles both attraction and aversion. Risk isn't so much a consequence of love, as it is for simple desire. Rather, risk is woven *into* that relation: our fears are among the many threads that constitute love in its fullness. This is what Lauren Berlant identifies as politically useful about love: "[I]ts normative utility is that love allows one to want something, to want a world, amid the noise of the ambivalence and anxieties about having and losing that merely wanting an object generates, even when the object is a political one."⁵ It is the "merely wanting" that creates the feeling of risk, but it is love that holds us there regardless, that forces us to push through what feels fearful.

Like most things in life, though, risk isn't evenly distributed. The weight of our choices is often a function not of luck, nor of information, but of circumstance – of upbringing, inherited wealth, gender, temperament, or lesions on the brain. In other words, our risk depends on our capacity to absorb the costs (psychologically, economically) that we inevitably incur through our choices. To recognise this is to recognise the self-mythologising quality of a certain idolisation of risk, hardly less common in the arts than in finance,⁶ by which the successful chastise the unsuccessful for not taking enough risks in pursuit of their desires or dreams. Through this modern outlook, fear of risk is treated as inhibiting, stultifying, unbecoming of creativity, as something to be vaulted, suspended, or suppressed: "No fear!" Yet some can afford to be more risky, less afraid of what they will lose than what they will miss out on: more glory, more money, more progress. This imbalance is what Berlant sees as the threat that this age of austerity poses for creativity: "The problem is that people do not feel that the world is a generous and patient space for them to be awkward in."⁷ Or, as Swedish social democrats put it in a famous slogan, *secure people dare*. Risk, rather than being an essential energy of creativity, can be an impediment; and to manage that we must not merely rearrange our aversions, but attend to our connections, our relations, to what we love.

III.

Given its ubiquity, it's no surprise that risk lies at the heart of modern political understanding. Thomas Hobbes conceived of the state as a response to the perilousness of our state of nature: "continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."⁸ Given these circumstances, we are driven to jointly consent, either knowingly or implicitly, to the rule of an absolute sovereign that provides some minimum of safety and security. Its legitimacy grows from our self-interests, from our love of the life we have and, hence, our fear of losing it.

This seminal account of modern sovereignty sets the tone for an enticing logic of emergency, recently revived by Giorgio Agamben's discussion of *the state of exception*. This is where a state frees itself from rules it is ordinarily bound by, where it asserts the finitude of law's reach. As Agamben puts it, the state of exception is "a suspension of the juridical order . . . an emptiness of law"⁹ which offers us a glimpse of the power that lies beyond law's horizon. And it is emergency, either actual and imagined, that gives exceptionality its legitimacy, that reveals the threat posed by citizens or the state itself. As Agamben learns from Machiavelli – that notorious advocate of tough love – sometimes an order must be broken to be saved.¹⁰

So, exceptionality becomes a tool for governments to deploy. Agamben cites Guantánamo Bay as an instance where ordinary rights were suspended, where each prisoner of war is "a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being."¹¹ But the relevance of exceptionality goes deeper. He describes the state of exception "not only . . . as a technique of government rather than an exceptional measure", but "as the constitutive paradigm of the juridical order."¹² In other words, he takes the state of exception to say something about one of political philosophy's enduring puzzles: the question of the origin of sovereignty. He does this by drawing on Nazi jurist, Carl Schmitt, who believed that what is required of politics is a capacity for decisiveness. In his view, the error of democracy is to dilute that capacity, a folly or façade that emergency will swiftly correct – or else. When the state of exception is declared, when the muddy waters of normalcy recede, we expose the origin of power: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception."¹³

Agamben's attitude to Schmitt is fatalistic, a grim acceptance that this is indeed the way things are, for better and/or worse. This is the strain of *political realism* that runs through both Agamben and Schmitt: a pride in taking politics for what it really is.¹⁴ Bonnie Honig also belongs to this realist tradition,¹⁵ yet she further insists that *this is not all there is*, that Schmitt and Agamben are not realist *enough*. On her view, the sovereign decision is not the only response to emergency – by which I mean not the only *possible* response and, moreover, not the only *actual* response, not the only way that people really *do* respond to onslaughts of risk and rupture. Worse still, Agamben, by advancing this

unrealistic realism, risks reinforcing the very device he describes. As Honig says, “the idea that he promotes, that emergency brings an end to any real politics, itself cements, it does not penetrate, emergency’s closures.”¹⁶

In part this comes from her dual understanding of survival, drawn from Jacques Derrida’s explication of *survivance* as *sur-vivance*, as “more life, surplus life... [as] overliving: it is a dividend – that surprise extra, the gift that exceeds rightful expectations, the surplus that exceeds causality.”¹⁷ This contrasts with more conventional understandings of survival where it is enough to get by, to secure the bare minimum for life. This is the survival instinct that the Hobbesian state relies on: the collective desire for security, stability, for the satisfaction of basic human needs like food and shelter. Yet Honig adds that “survival’s needs reduce us, they make us focus on specifics, immediacies, the needs of *mere life*.”¹⁸ The risk of risk, both real and mistaken, is that it creates “a sense of stuckness”, a hunger for bare necessities that governments can exploit by interposing states of exception. Honig’s ambition is “to mobilize democratic theory on behalf of the double meaning of survival as *mere life and more life*.”¹⁹

To do this, she offers a more fluid, less hierarchical account of sovereignty. She writes: “Democratizing emergency means seeking sovereignty, not just challenging it, and insisting that sovereignty is not just a trait of executive power that must be chastened but also potentially a trait of popular power as all, one to be generated and mobilized.”²⁰ So, where Agamben confronts and attacks the Schmittian *status quo* – he calls for legal creativity²¹ and a politics that does not regard itself merely “as constituent power (that is, violence that makes law)”²² – Honig instead denies that this *status quo* is what it seems.

Perhaps the simplest way to destabilise Schmitt’s account of sovereignty is through Hobbes – or, more precisely, the frontispiece for his great book, *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. Drawn by Abraham Bosse under Hobbes’s direction, it depicts the sovereign as a man, of course, a sword in one hand and a crosier in the other, towering over a civilised landscape of deforested hills and tidy, orderly hamlets and towns (Fig. 1). No sign here of the state of nature. But what’s most important is his tunic, seemingly chainmail at first glance, but on closer inspection a mass of people gazing upwards, all eyes on the sovereign’s grave face. This is where all hopes converge, upon a powerful protector, oriented by a certain uniformity in the fears of the people. Yet the image also captures the state’s ambiguous ontology, disguised by our ordinary language, where it is not so much an object or entity, nor even an agent or actor, but an event, a coordination, an issue of passing agreement or communal projection. It is, at once, an expression of the political anthropomorphism to which we are all prone (“America wants this”, “Russia decided that”) and a reflexive acknowledgment that, if the state is any thing, it is a gathering of persons.

So the apparent permanence of the state, its solidity, stems not from its materiality or inevitability, but from a recurrence, a reiteration, of events. This raises various points, of which I mention three. First, this temporality of Hobbesian sovereignty, its perpetual renegotiation, isn't obvious in Schmitt's account, perhaps because he saw sovereignty as embodied in the person of the dictator, not the people. Second, whether or not people in Hobbes's day really did converge in their desires for an absolute sovereign, it is unlikely that this is so today, given the diverse schemas of political legitimacy that exist in modern democratic communities. And, third, to recognise such contingencies is to recognise that things could be otherwise, that it isn't pointless to lament the "stuckness" of a Hobbesian emergency politics and its self-perpetuating attendance to the demands of mere life.

To escape this circularity requires confronting what Honig calls *the paradox of politics*, drawn from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's observation that "you need good men to make good law, but you need good law to make good men."²³ It is a problem of co-production, a question of how people can produce institutions in which they can reach their potential when existing institutions already hamper that potential for reform. A thinker like Schmitt appears to have solved the problem by separating the sovereign from this tangle: "Although [the sovereign] stands outside the normally valid legal system, he nevertheless belongs to it, for it is he who must decide whether the constitution needs to be suspended in its entirety."²⁴ From this semi-detached perspective ("[b]eing-outside, and yet belonging" in Agamben's phrase),²⁵ we can expect the state to make the tough decisions that need to be made – on terrorism, greenhouse gas emissions, slavery, child pornography, or whatever else – even when that requires suspending existing laws that protect privacy, market freedom, and so on. But this ignores the state's entanglement, its co-constitutive relationship, with the citizens it represents. It also sets aside the new dangers that the emergence of the state creates, as it imposes new patterns of cruelty and manufactures risks to justify its powers. The successful regulation of these threats, through responsive surges of counter-sovereignty, can contribute to what Judith Shklar called *the liberalism of fear*, a reining in of state power, guided by the same fears for death and violence that prompted the state's inception in the first place.²⁶

In this vein, Honig recommends (contra Schmitt) that we leave the paradox of politics unresolved, that we recognise "the chicken and egg circle in which we are the law's authors and law's subjects, always both creatures and authors of law."²⁷ On this view, "even the neo-Hobbesian, emergency-reproduced notion of sovereignty as unified and top-down itself has democratic qualities: It postulates popular subscription to sovereign power."²⁸ But the trick is to see this as just one among many actual or possible flows of sovereignty, funneled by history and circumstance to gather as publics on certain issues and things, substantial but never fully determined:

Every day ... new citizens are born, others immigrate into established regimes, still others mature into adulthood. Every day, established citizens mistake, depart from, or simply differ about their visions of democracy's future and the commitments of democratic citizenship. Every day the traces of the traumas of the founding generation are discernible in the actions of their heirs. Every day, democracies resocialize, recapture, or reinterpellate citizens into their political institutions and culture in ways those citizens do not freely will, nor could they. Every day, in sum, new citizens are received by established regimes, and every day established citizens are reinterpellated into the laws, norms, and expectations of their regimes such that the paradox of politics is replayed rather than overcome in time.²⁹

To be a democrat, in Honig's sense, is to face up to this reality of sovereignty and use it to democratic advantage, to extract both mere and more life from emergency.³⁰ As the saying goes, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Honig's ambition is to steal that wisdom back from opportunistic governments – or, rather, from those who speak on their behalf – and give it back to the people, to encourage democratic publics to stake their own sovereign demands, to produce people power.

IV.

Honig cites various examples of emancipatory emergency politics: the Slow Food movement which lobbies for, tongue-half-in-cheek, "the right to taste";³¹ art theorist Douglas Crimp who responded to the AIDS crisis by defending promiscuity as a risky way of life that was now itself at risk;³² and American jurist Louis Post who saved several thousand people from deportation during the First Red Scare.³³ But I turn to the local example of the Canterbury earthquakes, to illuminate our own eloquent democratic theorists of emergency.

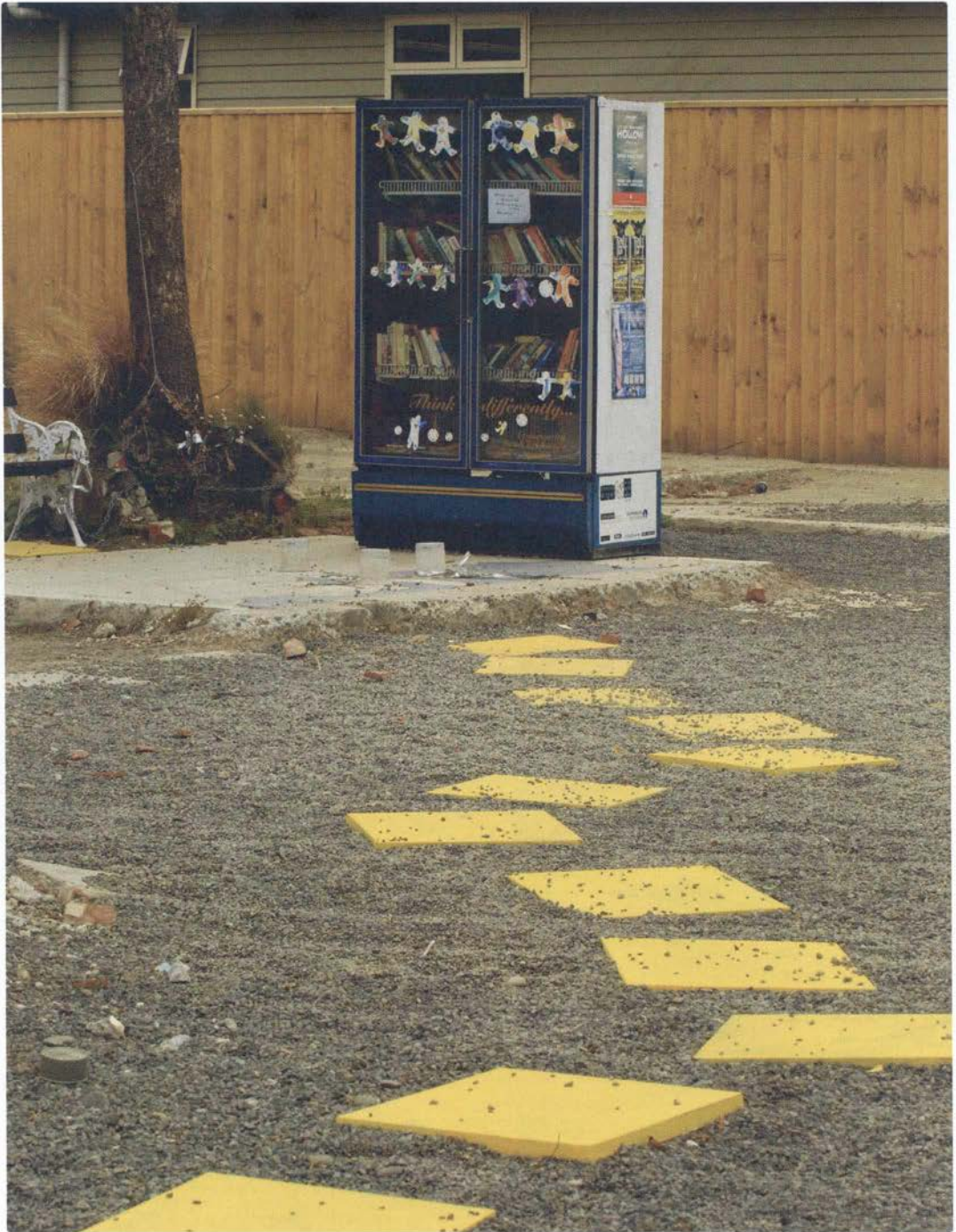
In this, Schmittian mechanisms were readily visible. The day after the 22nd February 2011 earthquake, a National State of Emergency was declared, only ending eleven weeks later. Lasting much longer was the Red Zone, the public exclusion zone which cordoned off the central business district for more than two years, enforced by New Zealand police and army personnel. This control over space (admittedly easily perforated by looters) was reinforced by institutional exceptionality, most notably through the creation of the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) on 29th March 2011. CERA's power to decide and act on the recovery came from it being freed from certain ordinary laws; for example, Section 38 of the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act 2011 (passed under parliamentary urgency) suspended rules that would protect heritage buildings from demolition. Finally, the rebuild plan, originally led by Christchurch City Council and involving a public consultation process, was later subsumed into the Christchurch Central Recovery Plan, directed by another central government organisation, the Christchurch Central

Development Unit (CCDU). It is a common complaint that public consultation procedures were subsequently abandoned.³⁴

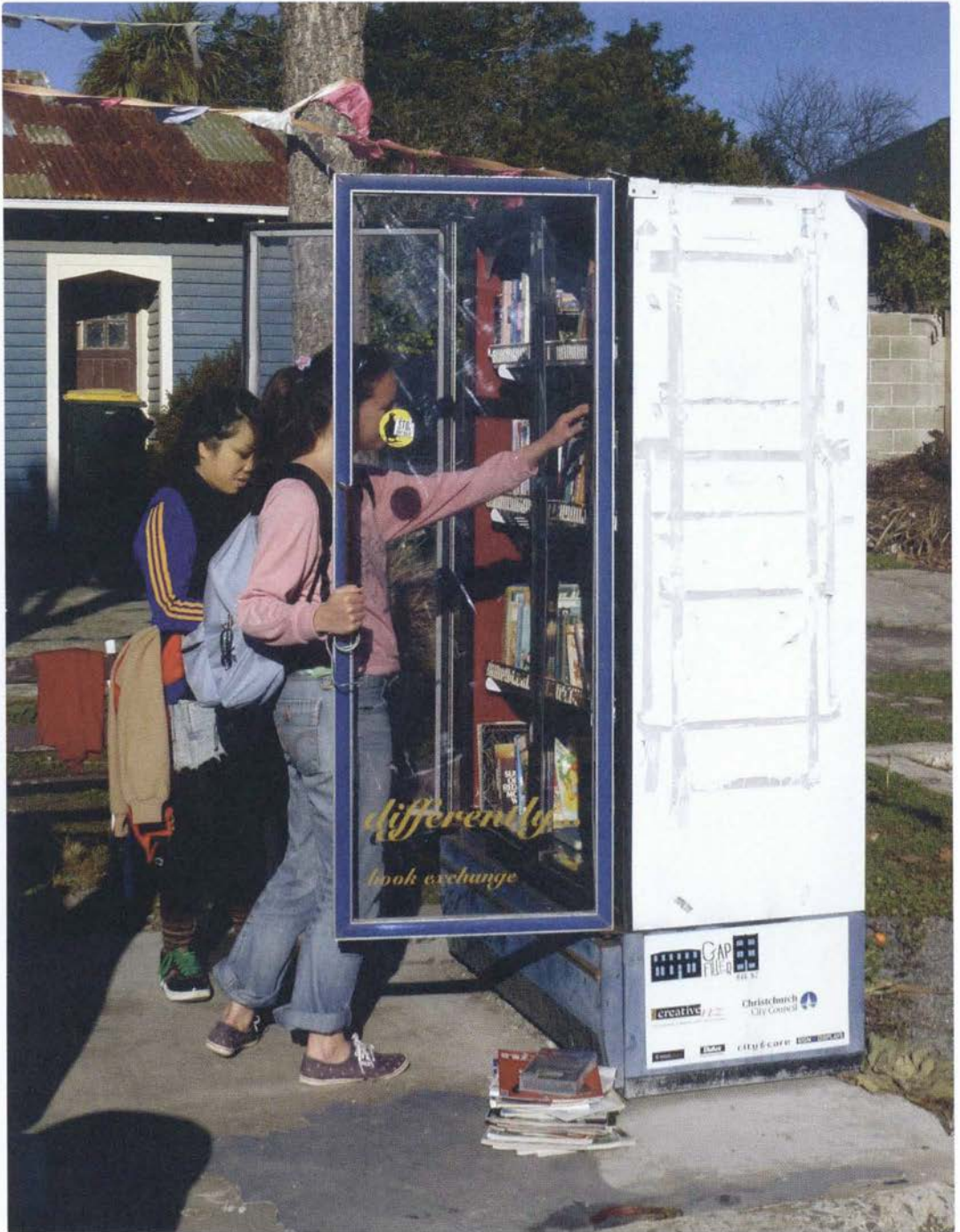
As just discussed, however, this need not mean that the rebuild is undemocratic in any clear-cut way: there is no shortage of Christchurch people who genuinely want, who were perhaps even produced to want, an unequivocal decisionism. But to acknowledge this is already to sharpen the nature of the challenge for democratic activists: to make democracy look like a risk worth taking, again and again and again. It isn't enough to challenge the powers that be.³⁵ We must discover why those powers have the sovereignty they have, how they could be otherwise, and what alternative sovereignties we might discover, entice, and cultivate.

The Gap Filler initiative, among other like-minded initiatives, enacts this nuanced political style by using empty demolition sites for diverse public projects.³⁶ This wasn't merely to fill the material gaps in urban space, but also gaps in the urban heart – to insert intrigues, entertainments, and points of collective convergence for a city suddenly trying to rediscover itself. As co-founder Ryan Reynolds describes, the idea to stage interventions in empty urban spaces had percolated for years, but “[t]he quakes galvanized our desire to act, heightening the importance of symbolic performance. They also secured public support, of a sort.”³⁷ In a sense, the exceptionality that fell upon government actors refracted – albeit to a lesser extent – onto the public. It offered a suspension of rules and norms by which the public's engagement with space might have otherwise been regulated and, perhaps more importantly, *self*-regulated. As Bruce Russell describes it, “The earthquakes took a lot. They also gave us a holiday of a new kind. Not a vacation of planning and choice: but a festival of destruction, a chance to see things we never imagined in the city. New views, new jobs, new pastimes, new meetings, new sadness and new fun. The balance of boredom was upset.”³⁸

By 2014, Gap Filler created 45 projects and facilitated 40 more, including Film in the Gap, Lyttelton Petanque Club, the Cycle Powered Cinema, the Dance-O-Mat, Gap Golf, RAD Bikes, and the Pallet Pavilion. One of the more iconic projects was the Think Differently Book Exchange, an old fridge filled with books for taking and replacing, situated on an empty site at the end of an enticing pathway (Figs 2 and 3). It was, despite its folksy function, often treated warily by passers-by: “they become a bit vulnerable, worry about looking foolish, about it being a trick. Some approach cautiously, or not at all.”³⁹ Yet against the risk of embarrassment came a potential pay-off: “a brief experience outside of our conventional social logic”,⁴⁰ precisely the sort of experience that could make a self-made city seem like a more attractive wager. As Reynolds says, it isn't so much about the object itself: “what is powerful, at least to those within Christchurch, is the actual book fridge as a tangible symbol of what could be possible throughout the city.”⁴¹ This is “a politics of becoming”, which “presuppose[s] and claim[s] already to inhabit a world not yet built”,⁴² which



Figs 2 and 3
Gap Filler
Think Differently Book Exchange 2011
Photo courtesy of Ross Becker



could still (or could not) be sustained through its iteration in political life, by the way it shapes the desires, values, memories, and habits of those who interacted with it. As Reynolds says, in each project “there is an activated intent to design the future of the city in a small way.”⁴³ These future manifestations could take quite unexpected, even unrecognisable, forms; or could be straightforwardly transitional, where the intention of the gap project overtly survives in whatever comes next. Such was the case of the Lyttelton Petanque Club, on the site of the former Albion Hotel, resettled with furniture and a garden as a community space. It was later bought by the Christchurch City Council and converted into a civic square, featuring a stage, a playground, and a herb garden. In this way, the gap project serves as a catalyst for more lateral, embedded, localised currents of sovereignty, producing new civic possibilities that are captured – materially or institutionally – by the city itself.

Reynolds calls this the *propositional* mode of development: A project is created – “an artwork, a public space, an amenity” – and inserted into the world, then modified and adapted in light of public engagement and interaction.⁴⁴ This is an approach that acknowledges its own riskiness, undertaken in a speculative spirit that is open to being rejected, tweaked, tolerated, or praised. And, as Berlant argues, love is helpful for sustaining these messy modes of development, because “love is one of the few situations where we desire to have patience for what isn’t working... [an] affective binding that allows us to iron things out, or to be elastic, or to try a new incoherence.”⁴⁵ To love enables us to act *with*, rather than *in spite of*, the effects of our actions; to care for the means, as well as the ends, of our choices. Such interventions are necessarily labours of love, because of their uncertain payoffs and procedural sensitivity – which is why it so often falls to artists, traditionally familiar with this form of labour, to fill the gap.

Governmental approaches force the contrast. In Christchurch, a state of exception enabled a decisionism that assumed the crudely utilitarian logic of cost-benefit analysis. This was forcefully and famously expressed by Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Minister, Gerry Brownlee: “Quite frankly people have died in this last earthquake trying to save old buildings. We’re not going to do that any more. My absolutely strong position is that old dungas, no matter what they’re connection, are going under the hammer.”⁴⁶ Such are the unequivocal calculations of the state, uttered by a man, impervious to the nuance and complexity of real people, not least the possibility that some people would willingly, lovingly take risks to save old buildings. It is indicative of what Bernard Williams identified as one of utilitarianism’s ethical flaws: its failure to account for the *remainders* of moral decisions – that is, the regret or remorse we might carry as a result of our choices, even when we’re sure we made the choice we had to make.⁴⁷ For utilitarians, the right thing to do is *just right*, without remainder; all further considerations are sentimental, if not irrational. But for Honig, following Williams, the question is how might we respond to dilemmas when we know that, no matter what we do, there will be something to regret.

For example, we might attend to the procedural aspects, the implementation, and the after-effects of our decisions. More concretely, we might consider the consequences of not involving the public in a recovery plan that, in the abstract, may well have its merits. "Decision isolates," Honig says. "But acting can force us into connection with others."⁴⁸ The question, in short, is how might we survive emergency with our integrity intact.

Yet the connections that follow from action will also destabilise the hegemony of utilitarian logic by bringing it into conflict with ethical alternatives or, more subtly, by nudging its calculations of risk.⁴⁹ Consider the graffiti and signage that emerged around Christchurch after the earthquake. Several large band-aids, for example, were pasted over cracks and fissures on building walls, accompanied by speech bubbles: "I'll kiss it better", "You poor thing", "Ouch!"⁵⁰ Here, very simply, was an effort to reintroduce humour, care, and love to urban relations. Similarly, a sign long fixed to the Cotter building at 158 High Street, the only building left on that stretch, reads: "Buy me don't bowl me!"⁵¹ It brings an inanimate object into the deliberative process, giving a voice to a thing that can't speak, a voice that's plaintive, pitiful, confronted by its own precariousness, and demanding that we involve it in the all-too-human procedures by which we design its fate.

I return to the importance of listening later – but I note that these observations fit neatly with the recent turn in Honig's thought, her arguments for why privatisation poses a risk to democracy: "In health, democracy is rooted in common love and contestation of public things."⁵² These *things* – buildings, parks, pay phones, public television, newspapers, *et cetera* – are issues upon which publics gather and coalesce, upon which they discover themselves.⁵³ To cease to care about public things is to let democracy die by desiccation, to leave a husk of procedures and structures with no heart or affective connection. These urban interventions show that, to acquire a sense of risk for a thing, we don't need to heighten the statistical likelihood of misfortune, we only need to intensify our love for what we'll lose.

V.

It's fruitless to say anything about what artists should do, because they should – and will – do whatever they like. Still, it might be useful to say something about how artistic practice feeds into (or not) the generation of political sovereignty, as a resource for any artist who aspires to "being political".

The easiest route is to simply refuse any ontological separation, to take the artistic and the political as instances of the very same thing: social practice. On this view, to have political potential is very easy indeed: it is *inevitable*. It is all simply action in the world, shaped by the powers, constraints, and imbalances of political circumstance, and shaping that circumstance in its turn. From this perspective, we can see Hito Steyrel's point: "Art is not outside politics, but politics resides

within its production, its distribution, and reception.”⁵⁴ It is a market, industry, occupation, and way of life that – irrespective of the intentions of practitioners – can come into conflict with, even exploitative relation to, others.

But setting aside this banal, all-encompassing sense in which art is political, we might look more closely at how we evaluate an artistic object or performance, how we classify and value a thing as political, as artistic, or as “political art”.

In politics, power is a prominent criterion; to deploy one famous definition, we evaluate a political action on its capacity to make people do something that they otherwise would not have done⁵⁵ – perhaps in terms of keeping things the same (conservatism) or making things different (progressivism). Artistic practices certainly *can* involve themselves in these evaluative games, to be judged on those criteria and thereby stake their claim to be “political art”. Yet those practices that aren’t successful – that don’t make people do things or make people do things other than what was intended – hardly cease to be political. Indeed, political failures constitute a large part, if not *the* large part, of political activity.⁵⁶ Moreover, acts that *aren’t* overtly political are an abstention from acts that *are* – and such abstentions remain among the most powerful political acts available to us, especially in an age when our political institutions are implicated in war, exploitation, pollution, and corruption.

It is also the case that politically successful art won’t necessarily succeed by whatever standards an artistic community holds in a particular time and place, for the games of politics are often won through dull, cruel, vulgar manoeuvres. There is no reason to expect that the wants and needs of people, in a particular political setting, will converge with the values that artists have learned to valorise. It might (or might not) be the case that the art that succeeds politically in a certain context is crude, kitschy, unreflexive, and/or aesthetically unremarkable, even when an artistic community is animated by contrary values. A political success can always be a failure of another kind – or, more likely, something even more ambivalent, like a crystal with many facets that take different hues from different vantage points.

It’s relevant, in this regard, that Reynolds describes Gap Filler as suspended between progressive and conservative elements. As already discussed, its projects project into the future, supporting the “possibility for fundamentally reshaping social interactions... for inclusivity and for the possibility to be truly surprised.”⁵⁷ But they also project, in Reynolds’s words, “conservative principles – restoring lost amenities; indulging some nostalgia and sentimentality; creating a ‘village gathering’ atmosphere... and often embracing ‘amateur’ content.”⁵⁸ Reynolds is surely right to trace these currents to Christchurch’s simultaneous status as both post- and pre-city, in transition from what it once was to what it might become.⁵⁹ Accordingly, that impulse to defend public things, those desires to memorialise or take care of them – be it the crumbled



Fig. 4
Shag Pile Rug 2014
Installation view:
Fantasing, Physics
Room, Christchurch
Photo courtesy of
Daegan Wells



Figs 5 and 6
Eko Nugroho
It's All About Coalition
2008
bronze
Photo courtesy of Cemeti
Art House, Indonesia



remnants of the Christchurch Cathedral, or the more carnal icon of Shag Rock (Fig. 4), or the dregs of a state-administered social welfare system – are among the currents of popular sovereignty to be captured and crystallised, a response to the risks and realities of natural disaster and economic transformation. Noting this dual influence of progressivism/conservatism, Reynolds speculates that “perhaps those traditional distinctions no longer hold”.⁶⁰ But it could also be argued that these are just the fundamental energies of creativity – whether artistic, political, or entrepreneurial – an impossible compulsion to transcend the cultural materials that any innovator is invariably embedded in. The state of emergency simply exposes and accentuates a dynamic that is more generally true, but disguised behind the conditions of ordinariness.

It is a common fetish of theorists to draw sharp distinctions and presume to occupy one or other. One recent example is to associate “the political” with rupture and disagreement, to sweep consensus and stability into the realm of non-politics or anti-politics.⁶¹ Yet to do this is to valorise just one dimension of human life, to hypothesise political animals that are fundamentally lopsided. As Michael Freeden puts it, “the human mind, in its political as well as other modes, is highly uncomfortable with indeterminacy and incapable of reflective action if it cannot engineer temporary, yet continual, escapes from uncertainty... Those who insist only on conflict or rupture as the defining properties of the political... are ill-advised to ignore or underplay the endemic play-off between the languages of disintegration and of amalgamation in political thinking.”⁶² In both language and action, politics encompasses both dispositions, as well as the frictions that their interaction creates. It’s like the handshake in Eko Nugroho’s sculpture *It’s All About Coalition* (2008, Figs 5 and 6), poised in the moment prior to agreement and fraught with a perilousness that both parties can see but must persevere through regardless – through negotiation, compromise, self-control, and very fine shades of judgment. Indeed, this is another of politics’ paradoxes: the need to produce agreement out of disagreement, to strive for finality in an essentially contestable realm. But this tension is also infinitely generative precisely *because* it is irresolvable; as Honig writes, such paradoxes “[teach us] that the stories of politics have no ending, they are never-ending.”⁶³ What really impoverishes politics is being reduced to one side or the other. This defies the actual conceptions of politics that exist in people’s understandings and practices, incoherent as these might cumulatively be.⁶⁴

Theory can, therefore, be a poor guide to politics. For example, an artistic community that, as a matter of principle or theoretical precommitment, prides itself on disrupting expectations and unsettling present patterns of understanding could find itself politically neutered in emergency situations because people’s daily lives are already *avant-garde*, already thoroughly disrupted and disordered. To venerate risk or rupture could come across as condescending or brow-beating, or it could not come across at all, failing to find a footing in actual currents of popular sovereignty. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, theory, to be

politically and epistemologically effective, must travel “in the same direction as the immanent tendencies of the social world”.⁶⁵ Accordingly it is incumbent on ambitious political actors – artists included – to not presume too strongly what the people(s) need, to not let one’s excitement for theory eclipse one’s relations to the world, and especially to be attentive to what might cause or prolong further suffering.⁶⁶ So, although the production of art could be regarded as an act of sovereign will on the part of the artist,⁶⁷ for that sovereignty to gain political currency it must resonate in the thoughts and feelings of others, through the mobilisation of sympathy or, conversely, hostility.

Chance plays a major part here. As Joan Cocks warns, “calculation and sentiment conspire to ensure that [the miracle of action] will not be easy to pull off.”⁶⁸ The only way to minimise the tyranny of fortune is to attend to the particularities of a situation, to exercise one’s political judgment or “sense of reality”,⁶⁹ which includes attending to whatever people truly yearn for. This chimes with a rebuke that Iris Marion Young leveled at Honig (among others), that radical progressive politics can recklessly fetishise the new and unfamiliar, the precarious and risky, and in doing so frustrate genuine human needs for home, belonging, and safety. On Young’s account, it is one thing to observe that idealisations of the familiar can reinforce privilege, but “the proper response is not to reject home, but to extend its positive values to everyone.”⁷⁰ In Christchurch, where a great deal of suffering is indeed related to physical ruptures of house and home, Young’s recalibration of the balance between progressivism and conservatism has resonance. If we take future politics to be immanent and abundant in real life, then we have a responsibility to attend to people’s real fears and desires and, most of all, any imbalance in their distribution. Otherwise we could end up romanticising a belligerent, risky politics that suits those least in need of care.

VI.

So: art can function as an active political intervention, as a magnet for surges of political sovereignty, like a mote of dust triggering the crystallisation of super-cooled water. But it will more than occasionally be disadvantaged by precisely those qualities that make it art – and especially by those qualities that make it *good* art. And even if it isn’t so disadvantaged, art is still hostage to the same indeterminacies that politics is. In navigating these indeterminacies, theory, no less for art than politics, can only be a questionable guide to reality, because the abstractions and distinctions that make for good theory can easily make for bad politics. Political realists are convinced this is a problem for mainstream political theory, yet they all too easily fall into the same trap, losing touch with the reality they purport to attend to.

Which brings us back to my citation of John Dewey in §I: his suggestion that moral and political theory would benefit more from engaging with art than vice-versa. By way of conclusion, I flesh out this thought.

Like his fellow American pragmatists, Dewey endorsed *experimentalism* in politics, an approach that grows out of their prioritisation of the practical, their shared understanding of society as deeply relational, and their presumption of the enduring plurality of social life. Given that plurality, pragmatists insist there is no way for the theorist, the artist, or the planner to know *a priori* what political projects are right; as Williams James wrote, “The philosopher only knows that if [s/he] makes a bad mistake the cries of the wounded will soon inform [her/him] of the fact”.⁷¹ Accordingly, stress is placed upon the importance of listening⁷² and attending to the consequences of our actions.⁷³ (In all this, there are strong parallels with Reynolds’s propositional mode of development.)

But we must to go further than James implies, we must actively seek out instances of suffering and give them voice. After all, a common symptom of social suffering is that wounds cause no cries – or, at least, no unambiguous linguistic expression. Disenfranchisement can silence people, sapping their agency, demotivating them from entering the deliberative, participative, or agonistic procedures that well-meaning democrats take to be the solution to their predicament.⁷⁴ Moreover, some affected parties simply can’t speak for themselves, such as buildings, the unborn, or those denied access to relevant channels. Because of this, even ideals of democratic politics can be recklessly utopian, blind to social realities that leave some people behind.

So, to identify the suffering produced by oneself and by others is a perpetually relevant task for political inquiry. It uncovers and empowers actual and immanent sovereignties, including those grounded in basic Hobbesian fears for life and limb, but also those responsive to more contemporary or localised risks, to ours losses and longings now and around here.

But this is a task that political theory frequently falls short of fulfilling, fixated on the discovery of the right and good in its more utopian modes, and dazzled by abstract ontologies of “the political” in more critical modes. According to Dewey, one important route to remedying this lapse is by engagement with art, due to its special attendance to, and expression of, human experience. As Dewey recognized, theories of morality and politics “either are, or tend to become, consecrations of the *status quo*, reflections of custom, reinforcements of the established order.”⁷⁵ Accordingly, he argued: “To esthetic experience... the philosopher must go to understand what experience is. For philosophy like art moves in the medium of imaginative mind, and, since art is the most direct and complete manifestation there is of experience *as* experience, it provides a unique control for the imaginative ventures of philosophy.”⁷⁶

Of course, there are no shortage of political theorists who believe that normative philosophy does something more than this, that it possesses a transcendental capacity. John Rawls, for instance, once argued that “the limits of the possible are not given by the actual”.⁷⁷ Yet this underestimates the vast

scope of the ambitions already latent *within* the actual, the immanent hopes and political imaginations that really do exist but are not yet actualised in the form of legislation, institutions, or practice. These are the radical potentialities that simmer in the paradox of politics, a pullulating tangle of giddy utopias, half-baked plots, singular strivings, cluttered platforms, thwarted hopes, and outright surrenderings that flush and fade through our thoughts, gestures, utterances, and acts. This is the dynamic material that saves *realists* from being *conventionalists*, because political reality is interwoven not only with bad habits and dowdy traditions, but also grand aspirations, far-fetched ambitions, and bursts of political creativity. And it is through art, Dewey believed, that these bubbles of immanence first burst: “Only imaginative vision elicits the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual. The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art.”⁷⁸

It pays to remember that this is Dewey-the-social-scientist talking, singling out what he thinks are the most nuanced, responsive, and appropriate materials for social inquiry. No matter what artists think they are doing by way of theme, method, or purpose, their creations are potentially politically useful by releasing evidence of real social experience and concern into the public domain. When an artist tries to second-guess what will be politically salient, especially by fetching from the predilections of a few political theorists, she has already narrowed her imaginative, interpretive, and expressive possibilities. As Boris Groys’ more stridently prescribes: “The goal of art . . . is not to change things — things are changing by themselves all the time anyway. Art’s function is rather to show, to make visible the realities that are generally overlooked.”⁷⁹

This isn’t to suggest that artists *shouldn’t* wrestle with theory in their search for conceptual materials, but it is to say that the urgency of doing so, the necessity to academicise, is easily overestimated. As a way of attending to politics, artists are in danger of leapfrogging the heart of the matter and landing among ideas and arguments that have already distortingly abstracted themselves from real politics. On the other hand, there should be no limit to political theorists’ hunger for sincere expressions of experience, whatever form these take, because any responsible theory ought to be attuned to the horrors and longings that fuel the struggle for mere and more life.⁸⁰ Among the realities of suffering and imagination are whims and exigencies that might spirit popular sovereignty, in forms all-too-familiar or as-yet unknown.⁸¹ Artists can help publics to discover these immanent politics, by design or by chance, through shrewdly positioned advocacy, or simply by confronting a public with its own unarticulated, unpublicised experience. In this, art does not reach beyond the paradox of politics but makes its content sensible, giving form or unruly expression to the forces through which we shape, and are shaped by, the politics we inhabit. Realism, so often seen as dangerously constrictive in art and politics, assumes new potentials once we grasp how wild reality can be.

1. A description of the 2010/11 Canterbury earthquakes by Bruce Russell, "No: Your City": Formulary for a New Christchurch," *The Silver Bulletin* 7 (July 24, 2012): 3.
2. John Dewey, *Intelligence In The Modern World: John Dewey's Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: The Modern Library, 1939), 999.
3. Alain Badiou with Nicolas Truong, *In Praise Of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012), 7.
4. I'm thinking here of persons with damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, a brain region associated with social emotion, whose emotional poverty seems linked to their diminished sense of risk. See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994), chap. 8.
5. Lauren Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love: Three Approaches in Ten Pages," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (November 1, 2011): 687.
6. Compare Katherine Mansfield, "Risk! Risk anything! Care no more for the opinion of others", with Mark Zuckerberg, "The biggest risk is not taking any risk. In a world that's changing really quickly, the only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks." See Katherine Mansfield, *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (Hamburg: The Albatross, 1933), 271; and Steve Tobak, "Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg – Insights For Entrepreneurs," *CBS Money Watch*, October 13, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/facebook-s-mark-zuckerberg-insights-for-entrepreneurs/>.
7. Gesa Helms, Marina Vishmidt, and Lauren Berlant, "Affect & the Politics of Austerity: An Interview Exchange with Lauren Berlant," *Variant* 39/40 (Winter 2010): 5.
8. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996/1651), 89.
9. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL.; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 4, 6.
10. Agamben, *State of Exception*, 46.
11. Agamben, 3.
12. Agamben, 7.
13. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theory: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5.
14. For an influential review, see William A. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010): 385–411. For a more dyspeptic polemic, see Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
15. See especially Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
16. Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton, NJ, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), xvi.
17. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 10.
18. Honig, *Emergency Politics*. Emphasis added.
19. Honig, *Emergency Politics*. Emphasis preserved.
20. Bonnie Honig, "Three Models of Emergency Politics," *Boundary* 2 41, no. 2 (June 20, 2014): 48.
21. "One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good." Agamben, *State of Exception*, 64.
22. Agamben, *State of Exception*, 88.
23. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xvi.
24. Schmitt, *Political Theory*, 7.
25. Agamben, *State of Exception*, 35.
26. Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21–38.
27. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 3.
28. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xv.
29. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 15.
30. An alternative view emerges in Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, "On the Risk of a New Relationality: An Interview with Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt", *Reviews in Cultural Theory* 2, no. 3 (2012): 6–27. While motivated by similar concerns, Berlant and Hardt stake their allegiance, rather awkwardly, to "non-sovereignty", to social formations that lack absolute sovereignty in the Schmittian sense. By contrast, Honig simply denies that sovereignty is ever thus, that it necessarily encompasses paradoxical and popular elements. I prefer Honig's strategy, her reclamation of sovereignty from Schmitt's glorification of dictatorship. As Michael Billig once argued in a similar vein, Adolf Hitler's myth of the Superior Will only ever succeeded because "his audiences conspired in their own submission". See *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 226.
31. Billig, *Arguing and Thinking*, chap. 2; Honig, "Three Models of Emergency Politics," 65–70.
32. Honig, "Three Models of Emergency Politics," 53–8.
33. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, chap. 3; Honig, "Three Models of Emergency Politics," 58–65.
34. For accounts of these and related issues, I cannot recommend enough the collection by Barnaby Bennett, James Dann, Emma Johnson, and Ryan Reynolds, eds., *Once in a Lifetime: City-Building after Disaster in Christchurch* (Christchurch, N.Z.: Freerange Press, 2014).
35. For such a challenge, see Bronwyn Hayward, "Reimagining and Rebuilding Local Democracy," in *Once in a Lifetime: City-Building after Disaster in Christchurch*, ed. Barnaby Bennett et al. (Christchurch N.Z.: Freerange Press, 2014), 179–85.
36. Among others are Life in Vacant Spaces, Greening the Rubble, the Festival of Transitional Architecture (FESTA), The Social, Plant Gang. For a record of initiatives, see Barnaby Bennett, Eugenio Boidi, and Irene Boles, eds., *Christchurch: The Transitional City Part IV* (Wellington, N.Z.: Freerange Press, 2012).
37. R. E. Newman-Storen and Ryan Reynolds, "Conversations over the Gap," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 18, no. 3 (2013): 49. That ambivalence of public support is to be expected given the facts of disagreement, both reasonable and unreasonable. Indeed, the Christchurch Central Recovery Plan could also claim no more than "support, of a sort", which, as they know very well, is all they need to claim to have.
38. Russell, "No: Your City": Formulary for a New Christchurch."
39. Newman-Storen and Reynolds, "Conversations over the Gap," 48.
40. Ryan Reynolds, "Desire for the Gap," in *Once in a Lifetime: City-Building after Disaster in Christchurch*, ed. Barnaby Bennett et al. (Christchurch, N.Z.: Freerange Press, 2014), 172.
41. Newman-Storen and Reynolds, "Conversations over the Gap," 52.
42. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 47. The "politics of becoming" she derives from the work of William Connolly.
43. Newman-Storen and Reynolds, "Conversations over the Gap," 49.
44. Reynolds, "Desire for the Gap," 169.
45. Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love," 685. Elsewhere, she says of love: "A form of affective solidarity that admits the irrationality of the principled attachment", in Berlant, 686.
46. Kate Chapman, "Lives before Christchurch Earthquake Damaged Historic Buildings," *Stuff.co.nz*, March 1, 2011, sec. Christchurch earthquake, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/>

- national/christchurch-earthquake/4715003/Lives-before-Christchurch-earthquake-damaged-historic-buildings.
47. Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 173-9.
 48. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 7.
 49. Too late to properly include I discovered Arjun Appadurai's description of the struggle between an *ethic of possibility* and an *ethic of probability*, the former being "ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope" and the latter being "ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that flow out of what Ian Hacking called "an avalanche of numbers" ... tied to the growth of casino capitalism which profits from catastrophe and tends to bet on disaster". See "The Future as Cultural Fact," in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), 295.
 50. The works are attributed to Nathan Ingram and Jenna Brown, in Bennett, Boidl, and Boles, *Christchurch: The Transitional City Part IV*, 70-1.
 51. Bennett et al., *Once in a Lifetime*, 177.
 52. Bonnie Honig, "The Politics of Public Things: Neoliberalism and the Routine of Privatization," forthcoming, 60.
 53. This gels with Dewey's famous claim: "Unless local communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately solve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself." John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry* (Athens: Swallow Press, 1991/1927), 216.
 54. Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, e-flux journal (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 100.
 55. Robert A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2, no. 3 (1957): 202-3.
 56. For a discussion of political failures, see Michael Freeden, "Failures of Political Thinking," *Political Studies* 57, no. 1 (2009): 141-64.
 57. Reynolds, "Desire for the Gap," 175.
 58. Reynolds, 171.
 59. Reynolds, 167.
 60. Reynolds, 171.
 61. I'm thinking here of radical democratic theorists like Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Jacques Ranciere, "Ten Theses on Politics," in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), 27-44.
 62. Michael Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.
 63. Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 3.
 64. I signal here my Wittgensteinian sympathies, that if there's anything that "the political" is, it is in patterns of what people say it is (by which I mean *everyone* and not just political theorists). See John G. Gunnell, *Political Theory and Social Science: Cutting Against the Grain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
 65. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.
 66. Actually, I think artists are generally much better at this than political theorists, perhaps because artists are confronted by the stormy realities of public engagement in a way that political theorists are typically isolated from.
 67. For such an account, see Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *E-Flux* 2, no. 1 (2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-installation/>. I note that Groys conceives of sovereignty more in Kantian terms than Honig does, in terms of freedom of expression and autonomy, rather than the constituent power of political effect.
 68. Joan Cocks, *On Sovereignty and Other Political Delusions* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 9.
 69. Isaiah Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," in *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 1-39.
 70. Iris Marion Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," in *Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 159.
 71. William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," *International Journal of Ethics* 1, no. 3 (April 1891): 350.
 72. Andrew Dobson, *Listening for Democracy: Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 73. An exemplar of this practical reflexivity is Weber's *ethic of responsibility* – that is, an attendance to the actual consequences of one's actions – as distinct from an *ethic of ultimate ends*, which produces goals to guide political action. See Max Weber, "The Vocation of Politics," in *The Essential Weber: A Reader*, ed. Sam Whimster (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 261-2. It is an interesting question to what extent this ethic of responsibility also applies to the vocation of art, or satire, or speech.
 74. This point is powerfully made in Lois McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2014).
 75. Dewey, *Intelligence In The Modern World*, 1000.
 76. Dewey, 996.
 77. John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12.
 78. Dewey, *Intelligence In The Modern World*, 1998.
 79. Groys, "Politics of Installation."
 80. For such an argument, see Bernard Williams, "The Women of Trachis: Fictions, Pessimism, Ethics," in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 49-59.
 81. Online social networking offers new platforms for such social coalescences. For an optimistic, even rose-tinted, account of the Internet's political potential, which properly emphasises its emotional dimension, see Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Fig. 1
James McAllister
(1869-1952)
The Reid family outside
their slab hut home,
Whangamomona
Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington, New Zealand
(Ref. 1/2-065619-G)



Colony / Art / Freedom / Debt: The Negation of the Full World

Tim Corballis

One of the effects of the 2008 financial crisis was, or should have been, to infect all talk about freedom with worries about debt. If freedom is always associated with risk – if heading out into the wide world means the possibility of encounter, with all its dangers and unknowns – then debt serves as one of the ways to sever that association, or rather forget it for a time. The situation in 2008 brought our attention back to debt, as the simultaneous offer and limit of freedom. It reminded us of something that has structured many people's freedoms for a long time. It has – and this is something that should be especially clear from an Antipodean position – also structured spaces. It has created relationships between different parts of the world: between debtor and creditor nations; between suburban homes and financial institutions; between the everyday world and its ratings agencies. They are relationships in which the values of activity, of lives lived, are based on the whims and interests of distant strangers.

The debtor is, for my purposes, someone who defers or externalises risk – someone who seeks a kind of freedom without the risks that entails. In what follows, I will relate debt and its hope of riskless freedom to a set of places, practices and forms of visibility. The places and practices include our own: settler colonies, including New Zealand. As for the forms of visibility, I will find them exemplified in the “cutout” paintings of Richard Killeen. However, it is important to be clear what form of enquiry this is. It is not an art-historical or interpretive enquiry that relates Killeen's work to its context, say, finding debt in the painting *because* debt is there in its settler-colonial context. Indeed, I am quite sure Killeen might have made the same paintings anywhere. This is not a question of *why* he made the formal break from canvas to cutouts. My approach is different, and perhaps less familiar: I intend to open our eyes to how, in the form of appearance exemplified by Killeen's work, we can see embodied a form of life.

This will become clearer, I believe, as I discuss the precedent for this way of working, which finds associations between a way of life typified by the “city”, and a form of visibility typified by collage and montage.¹ Citing Brian O’Doherty, but making a more general point, Peter Osborne writes that “[t]he organising principle of collage is the mythos of a city”.² The aesthetic principle for which all things can be presented together – which grounds the juxtapositions of collage and montage – is the principle of the city, by which all things, all people, can be met. The city is the place of strangers (Simmel), the place of coming together of people as a demos or an industrial proletariat, threatening to overcome distinctions and boundaries, mixing all together in an explosive combination. This is the characteristic place of politics (the classical city’s *agora*), but also more simply one of the places where juxtaposition is invented, where any two objects can be found next to one another, without reason or hierarchy.

This is the driving insight behind the Situationist *dérive*, which attempts to cut, on foot, across the thin boundaries that our cities might otherwise hope to administer. The city offers a freedom to follow one’s feet, to cast one’s eye or recording device without prejudice. It is a freedom from role or place, an ease of movement from one sort of place to another, an annulment of boundaries, that is particularly urban. Its politics, ultimately, takes the form of “we are all in this (place) together”. The emancipation ideally available in the city is the freedom of a world that is full – a condition most obvious in, but not limited to, the city itself. It is the freedom of the possibility and the risk of encounter.

There are three immediate points to be made about this association between an aesthetic form and a place. Firstly, although I suspect it is a familiar enough association, it is certainly not a causal one. It is presumably by no means only in cities, or because of cities, that montage/collage works appear. Secondly, and relatedly, juxtaposition, collision and encounter are not the exclusive property of cities – indeed, there is no reason why the very same set of terms and thoughts should not also apply to the collisions inherent in the first-contact “beach”, the exemplary place of contact between indigenous people and (potential) settlers. That beach is what demonstrates that the globe as a whole was always as full as any city – the city, perhaps, is only the figure of a place where some of us once noticed that fullness. Thirdly, by talking about a form of visibility I am not only talking about art. We are, I think, closer to a discussion of that form of presentation that we can call aesthetic indifference, which Rancière places at the heart of the “aesthetic regime of the arts”.³ It is – as well as the possibility of collage and montage, anything next to anything else – the possibility of anything or anyone being included within the novel’s vision, or the indifference of the camera lens to what it records. The indifferent view interrupts narrative categories as well as the hierarchies and distinctions obtaining between the different arts – which it therefore replaces with a singular category of art. Aesthetic indifference is one way to understand art’s various fascinations and

flirtations with non-art: its inclusion of more and more parts of the world within itself; its avant-garde thoughts of bringing about its own end. It is a way to think about movements within art-history, then, but it is also something else. It is the name for a freedom – not the freedom of the artist, but the freedom of vision and appearance discernible within certain artworks, a freedom of the eye's and the body's movement, in which anything and everything crowds into the field or frame even as the frame itself expands and ruptures.

The set of associations between collage/montage, the city, and a form of freedom, is both the precedent and the starting point for thinking a different set of associations. It is the starting point because, from the form of freedom I have described, it is possible to derive another form of freedom, another form of the annulment of boundary: one that attempts to leave the city's fullness behind altogether, and to avoid the risk of encounter. This second freedom negates the postulate of the city's own freedom, the postulate that the world is full. This form of freedom is postulated on the idea of empty spaces into which it is possible to escape – that is to say, its postulate is that the city's outside is empty after all.

This is the freedom structured by debt.⁴ In times of crisis debt has a bad reputation – but in boom times, it is positive and enabling, allowing a vision to be built and paid for later. In itself, this is no bad thing – we should hold back from criticising those who, seeing their dreams offered (however seemingly banal), purchase them on credit. Debt, however, also involves the sharing of the vision between the debtor and the creditor – both must be equally enthusiastic, but for different reasons in each case. The debtor believes in the vision for its own sake (its use value) while the creditor believes in it for the returns it promises. Neither – but, we might guess, least of all the creditor – has any interest in allowing the risk of encounter disturb the building of what has been envisioned. Debt requires an empty space; it teams up with states to clear or police the land, to ensure there is somewhere suitable to build. Debt's freedom not only negates the full world as a postulate, it negates the full world itself, in reality, cleansing spaces within it.

Debt's freedom involves a form of movement into an emptied space. It involves an assessment of the project to be built in that space by a creditor who, in essence, stays outside it. The creditor's interest in the project means the assessment – and constant reassessment – of the predicted return to be had on their investment. The creditors (and their delegated experts in banks or ratings agencies) determine the value of the activity of the debtor. As the explosive panic involved in debt crises demonstrates, there is no science that can safely predict returns – which is to say, the economic value given to activity at the place of debt is not founded on any objective calculation. Activities in those places survive or collapse depending on variously sophisticated arrangements of whim and anxiety, enthusiasm and the collapse of hope, all distributed elsewhere. In the case of debt, the determination of value is less an economic calculation than an exercise of arbitrary power.⁵

The question I pose is this: if the aesthetic indifference embodied in collage/montage relates to a particular, “risky” form of freedom and an “urban” fullness, is there a corresponding aesthetic principle to relate to the different freedom of debt’s emptied spaces?

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We can immediately identify two of the major forms taken by debt’s physical migrations into cleared space, and the associated negation of the full world. The growth of suburbs is one, driven in part also by road and other transport infrastructure, and containing its own, fragmented utopian visions. Another is settler colonialism. Thus an Antipodean position should give us a particularly clear view of how debt has structured spaces.

Debt is present at the establishment of settler colonies, or at least those that James Belich calls “Anglo-world” colonies: New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and the West coast of the United States and Canada. Not initially the staples exporters that they are famous as, the early colonies were bubble economies that relied on boosterist imagery to recruit both settlers and capital – a great, self-perpetuating dynamic of enthusiasm for the colony that Belich calls the “settler boom”. Settler colonies were net importers. They relied on their own improved infrastructures – better ships, railroads – as well as some of the most explicit and thorough clearances to be visited on the full world. They contained their own utopian (or arcadian) promise. Debt is built into the historical dynamic of Belich’s most consistent topic: the back and forth between the settler boom and its bust, the collapse of the bubble and turn back to the metropolis, culturally and economically, that comes under the heading of “recolonisation”. Recolonisation is a combination of repayment, default and loss of credit; it is the reining in of debt’s tether, the drastic reduction of the settler’s debt-freedom. It is also the spur for the colony to turn towards staples exports – to become the hinterland for the ever-growing metropolitan city.⁶

Settlement and suburbanisation can now be seen as different moments within the same broad, debt-fuelled expansion of the West. It is an expansion reminiscent of Lefebvre’s discussion of the annihilation of absolute space by abstract space:

Abstract space [...] simultaneously embraces the hypertrophied analytic intellect; the state and bureaucratic *raison d'état*; ‘pure’ knowledge; and the discourse of power. Implying a ‘logic’ which misrepresents it and masks its contradictions, this space, which is that of bureaucracy, embodies a successful integration of spectacle and violence (as distinct from ‘pure’ spectacle). Lastly, we find that abstract space so understood is hard to distinguish from the space postulated by the philosophers, from Descartes

to Hegel, in their fusion of the intelligible (*res extensa*) with the political – their fusion, that is to say, of knowledge with power. The outcome has been an authoritarian and brutal spatial practice[.]⁷

This expansion proceeds by following visions into spaces emptied for their fulfilment – but the freedom to perform those visions is tied back to the assessments of economic necessity determined by the creditors' interest. As a spatial practice, debt's movements redistribute the relationship between freedom and necessity. No longer an either/or taking place in the site of struggle and encounter, the expansion of the West through debt has tried to place freedom *here*, necessity *there*, culture *here*, economics *there*, and so forth. You be free, while we worry about the risks and take the profits. Putting freedom and necessity at either end of the debt relationship – at different points on the globe – means a spatial explosion of many of theory's most intimate arguments.⁸ Freedom forgets its intricate negotiations with necessity, its interstices and iterations, and simply seeks out a place.

Casting settlement itself in terms of debt-migration affords Pākehā, I think, an approach to the relationship with Māori not limited to settler guilt, self-abasement or ethical paralysis in the face of past wrongs. It allows us also to ask the question whether and how, in our current, ongoing spatial practice, we are still settlers. It allows us to ask the question of whether we regard our world as full; whether our would-be freedoms are structured by the availability of cleared spaces; what conditions would allow a freedom based on encounter and the collectivity that might emerge from it. Indeed, it allows us to ask the question of whether we have, under our current conditions, any choice but to be settlers – whether the full world is compatible with a capitalist economy, or whether capitalism must always work to clear new spaces for its ventures and secure their borders against the possibility of something or someone else. If our revolutionary freedom is to involve a utopian vision, then that vision must be porous to the possibility of encounter.

The debt migration offers a revision of the imagery through which we think of the Antipodean condition. A quarter of a century ago, Miles Fairburn's influential *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* included a series of visual images that informed his view of the character of early New Zealand settlement: an isolated settler hut or house with its context of bounteous nature or cleared land (Fig. 1).⁹ Such images related to his thesis about the atomisation of New Zealand's early society, itself the result of an arcadian vision of the new colony – individual settlers or families whose relations of dependence were to the land rather than to one another. Fairburn's thesis has been the subject of much debate and revision since – it is not clear how atomised that early society was, and how exclusively driven by promises of natural abundance. In any case, it

was supposed to be a thesis for the earliest settlement, up to the 1880s, only. The image, however, seemed to tap into and foster any number of more embedded cultural forms and myths, from Antipodean Do It Yourself (DIY) know-how to a dubious claim to Pākehā tūrangawaewae (“place to stand”). Architecture has claimed the settler hut as the source of a distinctive, New Zealand modernism, itself appealing to DIY practicality in its own version of form following function.¹⁰ It also relates, in negative mode, to the idea of the tyranny of distance – the colonist working at a lonely remove from whatever international powerhouses might sustain her.

Fairburn’s image illustrates his answer to the question of why settlers might have wanted to take the enormous risks associated with migration: nature seemed like, and was, a source of sustenance for those of industrious spirit and modest needs. For him, as for Belich, it is an idea of the colony that excites the settler to depart from the metropolis; and, as for Belich, the idea matches the reality in some way. However, on Belich’s account, the match between idea and reality is performative: the enthusiasm is the cause of the reality on the ground – and not through any forthright settler character, but through the support and exports from an equally enthusiastic metropolis. In short, the performance was made possible by being given fertiliser, textiles and pianos, all on credit, for as long as the metropolitan creditor remained on board. Fairburn’s supporting nature seems, on comparison, now like an ideological cover for debt funding – at least until that point where the defaults are made and the credit withdrawn, and the settlers must turn to (and create) nature in order to provide export staples.

Fairburn’s image of the settler, isolated and industrious, surrounded by nature’s *Bestand*, can be replaced by another kind of image, the functional settler hut by another, later kind of architecture. I am thinking, for example, of an unremarkable photograph of the Opotiki branch of the Bank of New Zealand taken in around 1930 (Fig. 2). It was taken from a raised position diagonally over a crossroad, possibly inside or on the balcony of a similar building. The initial suggestion in the photograph concerns what happens at crossroads: things, buildings, raised up. We can think about this photo and the building it shows mostly in terms of the lines outward from it and what those lines represent and where they lead. Horizontal features of the building, especially cornices at both half and roof height, run parallel to the roads. These lines suggest continuity with buildings yet to be built on either side – they run up to the edges of the walls facing the street and then stop. The rear facing walls – this is familiar from any number of similar buildings in similar situations, if not from the photograph itself – are blank, perhaps punctuated by a window or two.

If we think of the building as a small-scale, unexceptional example of Baroque revival, these lines are interesting less as an architectural feature than a hint at town planning. In them is the suggestion of something that might grow up

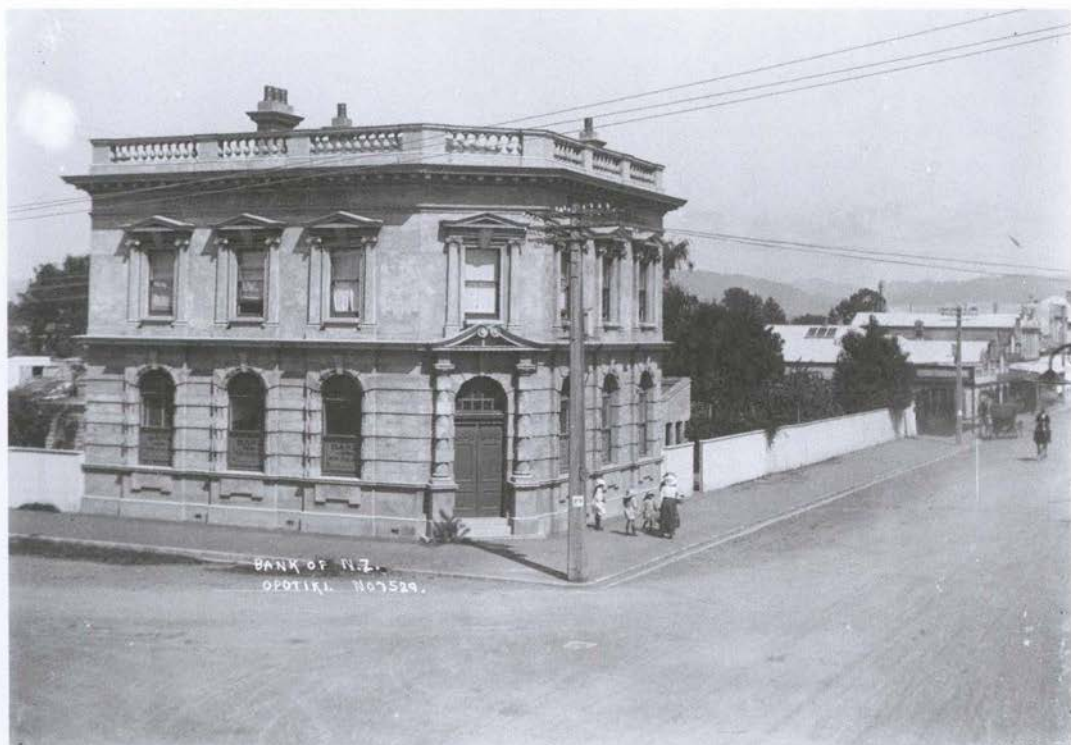


Fig. 2
William Archer Price
(1866–1948)
Bank of New
Zealand, Opatiki
Collection of
postcard negatives
Alexander Turnbull
Library, Wellington,
New Zealand (Ref
1/2-001105)

but that hasn't grown up around the crossroads. Instead, its surroundings are a thin rural agglomeration with a glimpse of the main street in the background. There is the sense that the building in the foreground is out of place, sliced from another context or planted in the hope that that context will seed itself out of the building's form. What is interesting about this photograph and the building in it, then, is the suggestion and the absence of a town. This is not to say that the town of Opotiki itself is absent, but rather that other town imagined, we might suppose, by the architects of the BNZ building. We could call the building's form "truncated Baroque" – its horizontal lines, as well as the larger vision that they suggest, are cut off.

Although there are other relevant lines that might be traced here – I am thinking, especially, of lines of credit, pointing ultimately to the overseas centres of the world's regime of accumulation – it is worth focusing on these curious lines that are visible, set in concrete, and yet lead directly to an imaginary place. The building we are looking at in the photograph is, as it were, the terrestrial tip of a dream city that tilts down onto our world at this point and this point only. If we can take seriously the idea of Baroque in the building, then what would be its Baroque city? It is a city designed according to a dialectic of planned totality and dramatic vista, of street level and bird's-eye view, in which the movement of the viewer through the city provides elaborate theatrical effects. In terms of the street level experience of the city, it is one in which lines are there to be followed towards a final scene. It is this form of scene – the imagined city and its equivalents – that makes settlement possible, and keeps risk at bay.

Truncated Baroque combines the offer and the withdrawal of credit in a single figure: a grandiose vision, realised only as far as allowed by decidedly practical limitations. The promised greatness arrives only reflected in a fragment of itself – in arrows that point but are cut off before reaching their object. This suggests a more general form sedimented by debt freedoms. This is not the functional completeness and self-reliance embodied in the settler hut, as well as in DIY culture and a half-forgotten import-substitution industrialisation. Instead, it is the concrete index of a more elaborate and fanciful project, inscribed by the intrinsically uncertain, off-stage perception of value and function. The wavering assessment of a project's credit means a wavering power for debt's visions, a power to clear whatever stands in its way, up to a point.

How might aesthetic form be understood in relation to debt freedoms? Earlier I linked montage and collage with aesthetic indifference, and both with the city, the full world, and the risk of encounter. I think, however, that cities of that kind and encounters of that kind – clamorous places and meetings within which interest and identity begin to fade – are now rare, thanks to debt's structures of value and avoidance, according to which a place and a freedom are

tolerated for their part in a tenuous and inaccessible arrangement of financial calculation. If I am right, then this cannot have the simple result that collage is not now possible. The association between an aesthetic and a social form is, again, in no way a causal one, but has to do with the political associations that an aesthetic form is able to take on.

Montage, or more broadly the coexistence of one thing with another, is in itself ambiguous between (at least) two possibilities. We can explore them in a very clear way by turning to Richard Killeen's exploding of the painted canvas into assemblages of cutout shapes. Laurence Simmons rightly saw a continuity between these paintings, which "hand over to their owner/hanger the task of composing/arranging the painted aluminium pieces of the full image", and Killeen's earlier non-assemblage paintings of subjects in suburban settings.¹¹ However, what I want to register here is the formal break between them – the role taken by the explosion of the object into its component parts. As such, I will focus purely on the relation of part to part, the mode of appearance suggested in the being together of the parts, and eschew any broader readings of the works themselves in other, representational and thematic terms. This formal break can be taken as an indication of the distinction between the two possibilities of montage.

Simmons sees, in the suburban paintings showing larger groups, a relating of seemingly unrelated figures, each "quietly occup[ying] his or her own space", and each "looking or moving into different spaces" (Fig. 3).¹² The effect is the isolation of the figures not only thematically but formally – the occupation, by each, of a separate pictorial space rather than a single perspective. Simmons relates this, indeed, to an inclusive indifference (under the heading of "whatever", the inclusion of a non-specific "any" rather than a positive, universal "all") and, further, to the failure of positive community in an anonymous suburbia.¹³ So far, this is a mere being together, reminiscent of the city's egalitarian juxtapositions, even if here it is discussed negatively, with a hint of nostalgia for the social bond. For these images, the suburbs perform, within themselves, the same aesthetic indifference to hierarchy and identity as we expected to find on a *dérive*, cutting across the spaces of the more concentrated city. The difference, however, lies in the inability of the suburbs to find (in Rancière's terms) a common stage, to make that egalitarian principle visible to itself. As such, the pre-cutout paintings become representative, critical figures – maps – of a real failure of political staging. They represent what cannot be represented in the suburb itself, *for* the figures in the painting. What they are not, then, is embodiments of a form that is itself indifferent to its subject matter. Rather than embodiments of political coming together, they are representations whose subject is the lack of coming together, the lack of encounter.

The explosion of the image into the physically separate elements of the cutout paintings is, then, a continuation of this logic of separate spaces (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3
Richard Killeen
Street Corner 1969
oil on canvas
1650 x 1655 mm
Courtesy of Museum
of New Zealand Te
Papa Tongarewa
purchased 1994 with
New Zealand Lottery
Grants Board funds
(1994-0021-1)

However, it allows a genuine formal indifference to come into play – by separating the elements, there is no need to do the work of indifference through the position, gaze or visage of the represented figures themselves. Within such a formally dispersed work, each element can accommodate any figure. However, this formal indifference does not do the work of representing a lack of encounter, but formally enacts a separation.

We should, moreover, be mindful of what is at stake here. The formal separation of elements is not simply their physical dispersal – there is, after all, a minimal spatial or temporal separation between elements in all montage. Instead, the important factor is precisely that the artist gives up on arranging the elements, leaving that task up to the owner or curator. This formal principle, as with the principle of aesthetic indifference discussed above, relates to a redistribution of intentions and roles. Indeed, it can be cast in terms of a *new form of indifference* to contrast with Rancière's aesthetic one. The indifference of the Rancièrian political/aesthetic appearance to what appears can be thought of in terms of the distribution of intention between artist and subject, in which the depicted subject claims its own space within the work. Alternatively, in the photographic analogy, the artist cedes final control over the form of the work to the non-intentional lens – which, again, allows photographic subjects to present themselves, compose their faces and bodies independently of the photographer's wishes.

In Killeen's case, however, the artist cedes control in a different direction: to the curator/owner. The work becomes, not a way of seeing everything together, everything as equivalent, but a way of leaving the status of objects up to external evaluation. The common stage, the coming together of montage, is eschewed in favour of the administered dispersal of things; the aesthetic stage becomes a scale on which each element is weighed before being presented. In this, the elements derive their formal status in part from that of separate works. The relation between artist and curator takes on something of the debt relationship, each presented form determined by the artist, but appearing only in accordance with the curator's administrative choice. As Boris Groys puts it, the curator, unlike the artist, "can't but place, contextualize, and narrativize works of art".¹⁴ The curator's work of placing art in view is a necessary act if aesthetic presentation is to be achieved: "[t]he artwork needs external help, it needs an exhibition and curator to become visible".¹⁵ As such, curating is the administering condition of aesthetic appearance – the assessing of work according to its place in a larger economy of the exhibit, in which the self-presenting object must justify its role. The curator takes the role of enabler, mediator and indeed creditor, "funding" the image and transporting it to its stage, and so requiring a certain kind of work from it. By inserting a separation between artist and curator *within* the work itself, Killeen allows us to highlight the fact of curation, demanding a minimal curatorial input and a minimal reflection on the hang from the viewer.

Fig. 4
Richard Killeen
Natural and Unnatural Selection 1984
alkd on aluminium, 18 pieces
variable hanging
Courtesy of the artist





Curated montage is thus no longer a political/aesthetic principle in itself, the (co-)appearance of images on a common stage, but the principle by which multiple separate appearances are combined. Juxtaposition no longer makes an argument about equivalence or of being in one place, but one about mere tolerated and dispersed coexistence. The point to make here, moreover, is that *all montage can be read in either of these two ways*: the debt principle to be read into Killeen's assemblages can be read back into other aesthetic forms, just as the assemblages themselves can be read in terms of the "political" juxtaposition of their elements within the implicit frame of the work.

Montage more generally can also be seen then not in terms of a presentation of urban experience, the sense of being thrown in amongst a multitude of elements in a coming together that challenges their ordering, or indeed as the encounter always forthcoming in the full world. Instead it is a curatorial decision (albeit one made in this case by the artist himself) to present a collection of separate images in indeterminate fashion. Each element comes forward, then, in terms of its own self-presentation, not in terms of its equivalence to all the others. The whole becomes not the experience of confusion but a confusion of experiences. The difference is subtle, but can be made stark by associating the latter with a mediated world-view: the coming forward of multiple, mediated (curated) visions from around the world, colliding not in reality but only in the viewer's imagination. This is formally somewhat like the leisured view from a distant living room, directed out at a seemingly chaotic world – one whose confusion of images is drawn from disparate, dispersed sources, each presenting itself in its own claimed place. It is the clamour of many individual voices on the isolated attention, not the challenge those voices present to their tidy administration.

1. It could also be useful to compare the relationship of aesthetic to "economic" form found in Adorno's idea of the artwork as the "absolute commodity". Adorno, here, is comparing the *value form* of the artwork with the commodity form. The comparison makes no causal claim whatsoever about the actual use of artworks as commodities or the trade in commodities more generally. See Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Hullot-Kentor, Robert (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 28. "The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity". Also Stewart Martin, "The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity," *Radical Philosophy* 146 (2007): 15-25.
2. Peter Osborne, "Non-Places and the Spaces of Art," *The Journal of Architecture* 6 (Summer 2001): 190. See also Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica and San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1986), 44.
3. See, *inter alia*, Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Rockhill, Gabriel, (London: Continuum, 2006); Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36.1 (2009): 1-19; Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Paul, Zakir, (London and New York: Verso, 2013).
4. It should be said that not all debt begins with a freedom. Debt is characterised by an alternating dynamic of freedom and repayment/default associated with cycles of boom and bust. Predatory lending, then, begins with repayment and servitude rather than freedom, with the latter being relegated to a deferred future.
5. See Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 53.
6. Formally speaking, there would also have been metropolitan equity investments in the colony—but debt remains the operative term for its implication of the debtors' ownership of their enterprise. It is something that the settler generally undertakes with the full enthusiasm of an owner, regardless of formal title, and not the grudging and partial assent of the employee in another's project.
7. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 308.
8. The distinction between freedom and necessity lies behind a large number of theory's various negotiations and debates. For example: idealism vs. materialism in Marx; structure vs. agency in the Sociological tradition up to Giddens and Boudieu; intersubjective community vs. total administration in the Frankfurt School; politics vs. police in Rancière; event vs. state in Badiou; cynicism vs. kynicism in Sloterdijk; minor vs. major literature in Deleuze and Guatarri. Necessity itself takes various forms: discourse, "appetite" (Hobbes), causality (Spinoza), context (Montesquieu), habit (Hume), tradition (Burke), history (Tocqueville), power (Nietzsche), the unconscious (Freud), convention (Wittgenstein), writing (Derrida), desire (Deleuze), drive (Žižek)..." The cited portion of the list is from Peter Hallward, "The Will of the People: Notes Towards a Dialectical Voluntarism", *Radical Philosophy* 155 (2009), 17-29: 21.
9. Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989).
10. See for example Justine Clark and Paul Walker, *Looking for the Local: Architecture and the New Zealand Modern* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2000), 26.
11. Laurence Simmons, *The Image Always Has the Last Word: On Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Photography* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002), 132.
12. Simmons, *The Image Always Has the Last Word*, 132.
13. Simmons, *The Image Always Has the Last Word*, 131-34.
14. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008), 45.
15. Groys, *Art Power*, 46.

December 2, 2002

Juliana Spahr

As it happens every night, beloveds, while we turned in the night sleeping uneasily the world went on without us.

We live in our own time zone and there are only a small million of us in this time zone and the world as a result has a tendency to begin and end without us.

While we turned sleeping uneasily at least ten were injured in a bomb blast in Bombay and four killed in Palestine.

While we turned sleeping uneasily a warehouse of food aid was destroyed, stocks on upbeat sales soared, Australia threatened first strikes, there was heavy gunfire in the city of Man, the Belarus ambassador to Japan went missing, a cruise ship caught fire, on yet another cruise ship many got sick, and the pope made a statement against xenophobia.

While we turned sleeping uneasily perhaps J Lo gave Ben a prenuptial demand for sex four times a week.

While we turned sleeping uneasily Liam Gallagher brawled and irate fans complained that "Popstars: The Rivals" was fixed.

While we turned sleeping uneasily the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case of whether university admissions may favor racial minorities.

While we turned sleeping uneasily poachers caught sturgeon in the reed-filled Caspian, which shelters bear and wolves, and some of the residents on the space shuttle planned a return flight to the US.

Beloveds, our world is small and isolated.

We live our lives in six hundred square feet about a quarter mile from the shore on land that is seven hundred square miles and five thousand miles from the nearest land mass.

Despite our isolation, there is no escape from the news of how many days are left in the Iraq inspections.

The news poll for today was should we invade Iraq now or should we wait until the inspections are complete and we tried to laugh together at this question but our laughter was uneasy and we just decided to turn off the television that arrives to us from those other time zones.

Beloveds, we do not know how to live our lives with any agency outside of our bed.

It makes me angry that how we live in our bed – full of connected loving and full of isolated sleep and dreaming also – has no relevance to the rest of the world.

How can the power of our combination of intimacy and isolation have so little power outside the space of our bed?

Beloveds, the shuttle is set to return home and out the window of the shuttle one can see the earth.

“How massive the earth is; how minute the atmosphere,” one of the astronauts notes.

Beloveds, what do we do but keep breathing as best we can this minute atmosphere?

Fig. 1
Dan Arps
APPOCOCYOLLAPOSED 2015
Installation view: Ilam
Campus Gallery,
University of Canterbury,
Christchurch, 2015
Photo: Daegan Wells



Mauri and Survivance: A Roundtable on Art and Risk

*Coordinated and edited by Jon Bywater with
Dan Arps, Simon Barber, Toril Johannesen,
Rachel O'Reilly and Desna Whaanga-Shollum*

As one of the most likely signatories to a defined concept of risk in recent academic work, Ulrich Beck, notes: "It is easy to underestimate the subtlety of the sociological category . . ." ¹ As an index of our toleration of change and uncertainty, who or what we might take to constitute a risk could reveal our own interests and investments before anything else. The call for papers for this issue of *Reading Room* suggested various senses of the term, in part to re-question art's relation to urgent wider realities. As a guest editor and co-author of those provocations, this facet of the issue reflects my own work in an art school (as a lecturer at Elam, the University of Auckland) and as an art critic (based in Aotearoa New Zealand, concerned with issues of aesthetics, politics and place). As the following discussion has helped me to appreciate afresh, the question of the *potential* in a Western, modern concept of art and its institutions – as things to be worked with, or departed from – is important both to the task of facilitating a critical understanding of relevant legacies and archives for student artists, and to locating and articulating the value of a work or an oeuvre. I am grateful to the artists and writers who took up the invitation to join this conversation.

In what unfolded, Dan Arps' idea of studio practice as a form of resistance connects for me to Desna Whaanga-Schollum's that the creative process is a way to refuse an obsession with progress and effectiveness, and to Toril Johannesen's characterisation of the artist's position as risking a certain knowing "ignorance", for example. What is clarified for me through this strand of the exchange is the way that the space of making relates to that offered to the audience for art, and the conviction I brought with me in initiating the discussion, in the value in the experiences art offers. These practitioners' takes affirm that art's address to whatever shared situations we face need not be in any narrow sense rational, instrumental or expert, but as Toril puts it, related to an "other way of thinking"; to an extent freed from the dominance

of what neuroanatomists might designate as “cold cognition”, and closer to our embodiedness and connectedness to human and non-human being, what Simon Barber identifies as relational and processual realities, something indigenous understandings of what it is to know take for granted. The reflective, apparently disengaged state we might enter in order to be open to an art work, then, is not further paralysis or delay from action, but perfectly effective preparation for it – perhaps, in Rachel O’Reilly’s phrase, in the way that despite its probably restricted reach “a work [can feel] to make so much difference in its singularity”.

Everyone was invited to begin by introducing themselves:

Rachel O’Reilly (ROR). I’m a writer/poet, critic and independent curator (installation and moving image) from Australia, based in the Netherlands and Germany for the last six years. Of late I’ve been focussed on my own critical and artistic writing practice (my first book of poems *Rue Methanic* dramatising the material imagination of fracking will be finished this year) and on collaborations, for example the Moving Images of Speculation artistic research group we organised at the Jan van Eyck Akademie last year,² a Lecture Performance project with Jelena Vesic on the politics of neutrality between Non-aligned Movement and Contemporary Curatorial Economys, another with Marina Vishmidt and others on “reproductive realism”,³ and a writing collaboration with Danny Butt on artistic autonomy in settler colonial space.⁴ I’ve also been making 2D artistic drawings collaboratively with the PaLaCe architecture group⁵ and Rodrigo Hernandez,⁶ running reading groups on feminism, performativity and political economy for If I Can’t Dance in Amsterdam,⁷ and am in dialogue with Vivian Zihel’s “Frontier Imaginaries” curatorial research,⁸ through my artistic research project The Gas Imaginary (of which *Rue Methanic* is a part), which is ongoing and crosses media.

I guess I mention all of this to note across time some kind of processing of artistic labour as risks of relations to others and local conditions, towards aesthetic and political knowledge production and dialogue [which] have been made most possible or admissable in unsimple formats by institutions of art – that “autonomy” contradiction. I left Australia at the height of its neoliberal investment in culture, to write about the impact of neoliberalisation and the right populist turn upon culture and the subject (including, but not limited to, art) and worked through the Dutch austerity logics in my research work. So my curatorial, discursive and artistic work is very much informed by those unfolding destabilisations, as well as the destabilisations that come with shuffling between different discursive scenes also, e.g. in the obvious break between “seeing” from the North and South, or Europe and the settler colony. My work on the aesthetics of extraction between North and South has me increasingly interested in the historical meetings of colonial, nature/green and labour/productionist thought.

Simon Barber (SB). Hey, I'm Simon, a member of Plan C London. I can't give a better blurb for Plan C than the one from the website so I will paste it here:

Plan C is an organisation of people who are politically active in their workplaces and communities. We work together to support each other, amplify our struggles and think strategically.

We want to go beyond network-based organisation, without falling back on the model of a party. We are committed to ongoing experimentation to find the forms of collective activity needed to build a world beyond capitalism.

Plan C is also concerned with making plans – plans to survive and resist capitalism's attack on our lives, and plans for collective self-organisation.

I'd add to this that ideas of "social reproduction" have been fundamental to the ways in which we have been trying to organise politically, which is also to say socially. I will hopefully get to go into this later in more detail. Also the caveat that I am speaking from my own perspective and not trying to represent a particular party line on things. Not least because Plan C doesn't have one. What has been good about Plan C for me is that it has worked the other way round, fostering a productive dissent across which we have found commonalities around which we can organise and act.

I'm originally from Auckland but have been living in London for 5–6 years now. At the moment I'm trying to complete a PhD in the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths College. My research is about settler colonialism, most specifically how it plays out in Aotearoa New Zealand, or trying to understand the relationship between here and there. I'm looking at the arrival of, and Māori encounter with, a series of European abstractions and the ongoing violence of the instantiation of those abstractions – law, the value-form, the individual, sovereignty, for example. So, I would definitely share Jon's interests in place and politics. But, despite having been at an arts college for years now I am still a bit of a bogan when it comes to art, at least what is referred to as fine art.

Desna Whaanga-Schollum (DWS). Kia ora Koutou, I am of Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Pahauwera iwi descent. Hapū: Ngai Tahu Matawhaiti and Hīkairo ki Taipōrutu. Taipōrutu is my whanau ancestral farm located at Mahia mai Tawhiti. I am co-Chair of Ngā Aho, Māori Design professionals Inc. Society.⁹ I'm currently finishing my masters in Science-Communication which uses Taipōrutu as a case study for expressing and supporting Māori identity and landscape values within a rural farming context. Mahi-wise, I work in design/research/art which supports and maintains kaitiaki and tangata whenua concepts and practice.¹⁰

Tautoko Simon's korero regarding finding forms of collective activity that moves beyond capitalism, and industrialisation! I've been experimenting with the idea of Urban Mauri in the last six months – via wānanga and writing, with a collective of researchers and artists. We're looking at ways of generating mauri enhancing practice in Māori creative communities, and re-connecting with identity and place in the urban context.

Dan Arps (DA). I am an artist based in Auckland, in the process of completing my DocFA at the University of Auckland. I just got back from a short residency at University of Canterbury, where I made an installation titled *APPOCOCYCOLLAPSE* or to use my earlier more academic title *Towards Apocalyptic Time*. This installation is an exploration of various ideas and images related to the end of the world; a look at the end of time/cyclical time/desperate time and figures of the revelation such as chimeras, hybrids and weird corporate synergies. I have had a sustained interest in the materiality of everyday objects and the urban environment.

Fig. 2
Whakaki nui a Rua,
Hapū site visit,
Sites of Significance
research, Treaty of
Waitangi Claims



To take a stab at the question about the potentiality of artworks I am reminded of what Paolo Virno says about jokes.¹¹ A joke is a diagram of innovative action that describes the rules of a situation and the way that they can be circumvented. We all laugh at a joke instantly and spontaneously but all decide individually in the moment because we understand it. I think maybe in a similar way an artwork is also a diagram of innovative action but because of its physical manifestation it involves logistic and material resources, practical considerations, a diagram of what is possible given a particular institutional framework and available resources.

DWS. I often use the creative process to tune out all the obsession with progression, effective action. Making slows the madness down and brings ideas into focus. This noise that politicians, media, economists, business, industry causes, is like static. DISTRACTING static-in-the-attic. Messy, irritating noise that attempts to pull people away from connecting – by creating an unremitting sense of urgency, and lost time, and trade-treadmill.

There is a sense of grounding and positive, simple flow in really connecting with people, words, music, images, objects, and with physical activity in ›place‹. Noticing where you are, climbing out of our over-packed minds and inflated heads. There's positive creative connection in visiting ancestral cultural sites with your people and sharing stories, and laughter.

- graffiti on an urban wall (beauty, thoughts) in the concrete world we've created
- snorkelling around a reef, getting paua to cook on the fire with friends in the evening
- making objects and visiting exhibitions of other people's art-ings.

Art and life, sustaining life, is a personal journey. I feel there is something so essentially human and good in the process of making, the transferral of your intentions and ideas and energy into the made object – this can be seen as the process of transferring mauri from the maker to the made object. So the maker/artist really invested in creating it, connected to the mauri and generated mauri. And if we're tuned into mauri we're efficient – we get to the point rapidly. The static clears.

While mauri is a central concept in the Māori world, to define it is to attempt a “classification of the unclassifiable”.¹² Like other deep traditional concepts, mauri has undergone a continual “process of re-invention and expansion.”¹³ Most contemporary discourse about mauri draws on the late Rev. Māori Marsden, who described mauri as “the bonding element that holds the fabric of the universe together”, “a force or energy mediated by hauora – the breath of the spirit of life.”¹⁴

Mauri can be embodied in people, natural objects and human creations. In my work, I interpret mauri as creative energy, as powerful toki (adze/tool) for challenging the status quo. For moving the norm, making the new path, finding beauty. When we tap into mauri, we are a part of the ecosystem, not an unhealthy parasite on the outside drawing away from our sustainability. Sure, there's an industry built around art. People trade ideas. And push ideas and challenge ideas. We're fringe idea pushers and dealers...

SB. For me the traction art can provide is in helping to make sensible something of the relations between things, the processual forms of their co-production. Desna might be able to say more, but to me it seems that the concepts you mention – mauri, kaitiaki, tangata whenua – are well-suited to dealing with the relational and processual way of the world. This is something that fashionable euro theory/philosophy is grappling with now, with all the posturing and obfuscation that entails – Speculative Realism being the most noxious brand, I suppose. Anyway, fear, anxiety – the operative affects of contemporary capitalism – I think come from isolation: fraught, precarious, powerless. I think there is an individualising tendency, the artist as creator and brand, their personal genius or whatever. If it remains like this I don't think art can do much but reinforce the logics of capitalism. So for me art would need to be collective, or at least start to work through the paradox that the more homogenous and massified our lives become, the more we experience it as heightened individuality.

One example of this is an artist who found it incomprehensible that he could buy a toaster for £3.99. His response was to try to build a toaster from scratch – mining the ore, smelting it, and so on. The result is a monstrosity. (I realised when looking for the link that the artist has since given a TED Talk on it, which suggests any radical currency it may have had has expired...)¹⁵

But for me it really helps to unravel the processes of production of something that otherwise seems entirely commonplace or just apparent. It gives me a glimpse of the complex of social relations – and I don't mean simply human sociality – that I am reliant on for day-to-day life. The minimum-wage machine that pays you minimum-wage for turning a crank is also along the lines of what I'm talking about here.¹⁶

But again, while these might help us to shift our perspective, there are limits to how far these sorts of practices can go in changing things. Adorno, talking about classical music, says that Strauss has a sort of narcissism of private feeling and that his music represents a rampant individualism, in fact hiding the decline of the individual.¹⁷ Beethoven on the other hand gives an asceticism towards his own feelings so that his music carries the general social antagonisms of his day. The struggle of the social as aesthetic; art that recognises that it is only within the social that the flourishing of the individual

is secured. I don't listen to classical music so my translation here would be early Dizzee Rascal (Beethoven) Later Dizzee Rascal (Strauss).

This would all be to say that I think artists should give up art in the same way as activists should give up activism.¹⁸ We need to break down the identities that render us separate from others as an audience, public, or mainstream. Art and politics both need to be generalised into our everyday lives if they are to become adequate to the task of moving beyond our stuck present.

Finally, to try and give an example that embodies this and returns to Jon's last question, I think of Voina as a collective that took huge risks. They ran around with traffic cones on their heads flipping over police cars, and painted a giant penis on a drawbridge so that when it lifted up it was facing the old headquarters of the KGB. Members were imprisoned because of the threat they posed to the state. In the UK and Aotearoa New Zealand to say something is art is probably another way of saying it has been neutralised of any threat politically. Russia is a different context in this regard. But I see Voina's art as a kind of a collective risk-taking that, very much in line with what Dan said about jokes, shows up some of the lineaments and contradictions of an oppressive structure, at the same time as revealing that it could be different.

SB. Dan, I really like what you have said about Virno and jokes. My question would be that so often the art world seems like it is making private jokes. I wonder what the tension is here between a simultaneous and collective laughter and more inward-looking and exclusionary, sometimes snide laughter.

DA. The question of withdrawal is interesting, although like the others I don't think there is anything wrong about withdrawing from production, but also perhaps we might consider the inverse, the necessary withdrawals that an artist makes in order to produce, from the workplace with its readymade social and professional network. Social media platforms have become a space where one can simultaneously withdraw and extend, a way of negotiating isolation in public, where we can alone together.

SB. Desna, what you have said about creativity and mauri would also apply to what Dan has said about invention. I just wanted raise the fact that creativity and invention are things that neoliberalism also privileges and attempts to capture. How do we protect our creativity from it being appropriated, exploited and turned back against us? I realise mauri isn't at all translatable as biological life, which might take us in the direction of biopolitics or something, but I wanted to ask if you see attempts to capture and repurpose elements of Māoritanga as a sort of localised or localising strategy of neoliberalism?

I think the dual character of both our need for creativity for ourselves and each other, but also capitalism's need for those same things for its continued

Fig. 3
Dan Arps
Chicken Stock 2015
digital video with sound



functioning is something that the concept social reproduction helps us to understand more clearly. Luckily for me, the always brilliant Camille Barbagallo from Plan C has just made a short video explaining it.¹⁹

ROR. Simon, I agree that these are some of the most critical questions being processed at the moment: culture's privation, the capture and repurposing of practices, within changed (or say, exaggeratedly contradictory) conditions. There is also the difference of the risks of artishood vs the risks of citizenship (and non), and of activism, which are not collapsable, nor entirely separable, as different positions of response-ability.

Withdrawal also gets complicated by the fact that capital has withdrawn from its commitments to the reproduction of work/ers. There are many kinds of withdrawal being invoked here too, sometimes meaning subjectivisation, sometimes "organising differently", sometimes "taking back" or withholding something from a full market logic (which I read as producing differently), and which also carries always with new modes of accumulation (including attention

and expression). In Europe and the UK if not in Australia/New Zealand (but we will see about this I guess) there has indeed been renewed investment in the value of the negative and abolitionist politics (forms of withdrawal, boycott, detachment, exit) as a response to the tendency of neoliberalised forms to neutralise positionalities that query market ontologies of risk making from above etc.

I'm very interested in the role of art in showing up normativity in these sense, and that is also how I think about my poetry (most crassly) as located and denaturalising. Since the cuts to art with austerity regimes there has been a definite rethinking going on of where so-called artistic risk is being understood to be located and how distributed.

Indeed, with neoliberal transformation we have observed a generalized confusion, compaction and heightening of contradictions regarding the relationships between fine art, capital accumulation and risk.²⁰ You mention also conflict in the introduction Jon, which I would say is actually always inherent to "reflective states" (the sociality as sublimation in/of aesthesis); generalised uncertainty is perhaps only "new" for fine art producers (are they lumpable into a we? not sure, that's a huge question) in so far as it invades art's class unconsciousness with the end of welfare norms. Here, the *idea* of risk as a kind of precarity, exposure, and increased need to *gamble* on one's own livelihood just in order to choose to "participate" in post-mass market sociality, is itself becoming more (but not evenly) distributed, more (but not evenly) ordinary, and thus more unclear as a concept. The in/aesthetic concept of risk here is as often formed by anxieties of stagnation, and dispossession, in the failing and falling from safety nets that once naturalised one's relation to livelihoods. From the more critical precarity discourses in art and politics it is hard to generalise a "we" that might be felt as collectively shared in all this, while the longing for one points very precisely to a politics of literacy of conditions that are needing to be groked so as to be dealt with response-ably.

This neoliberalised subjectivisation of increased risk as exposure (thinking backwards again) is a part of neoliberal state management – the answer to a crisis of productivity in the West from the 1970s onwards, and which essentially redistributed, re-internalised and accelerated new kinds of risks in capital accumulation downwards and laterally, while actually securitising such risk from above. Today, those who take the greatest possible risks with livelihoods and the biosphere through new processes of accumulation are also those most buffered from the great consequence and disasters of such an economized idea of risk. We saw post-GFC for example that that category of risk takers are the last to be punished for poor risk assessment.

Art as practice and as industry has participated in and beautified the globalisation of this reality and its logics. Which is not to say that there aren't

other forms of risk in art making (including vulnerability, immeasurable, and especially affective and counter-/re-organisation)... but that these too must deal with the contradictions of neoliberalised production, and discover, quite belatedly it seems (with the right populist de-naturalisation of art's public value), that the "autonomy of arts" as a kind of non-profit risk-taking is actually a very open, vague, and manipulable/contradictory concept.

DA. Risk is everywhere when you are an artist. We take our lives in our own hands when we cross the street. Tools and materials are quite dangerous. Exhibiting artwork has public safety risks. I remember quite early on in the City Gallery Wellington for *Prospect 2004* being told that I couldn't have a few polystyrene packing beads on the floor of the exhibition because a toddler might choke on them. The risk of a toddler dying in my artwork because of my negligent aesthetic was enough for me to rethink this idea, probably for the better. Even making "safe" art is a risky economic venture, and then there is the risk of being boring or irrelevant.

To suggest a quite canonical Western example of risk in an artwork Richard Serra's leaning corten steel *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* (1969/1986), the risk is inherent in arrangement of elements literalising its own precariousness by scaling up what appears to be child's-play, a recurrent theme in post-modernism. Desna mentions the danger of creativity being captured, and I agree there is a danger to that, but also opportunity provided there is still mauri and voluntary energy.

My own strategy has been to work with and through the social conventions of the art world, a little cynically at times, an individual artist embracing precarity as a way of becoming resilient to the unforeseen events attempting to become anti-fragile to use Nassim Nicholas Taleb's term. What keeps things alive for me is the way that the studio practice is a form of resistance, a withdrawal from the usual order of things, and a place where planning can be refused in preference to process, and work refused in favour of play. This sense of the studio practice as a resistance is a tricky thing to negotiate, what with deadlines and a constant need for new production, and the fact that I rely mostly on selling art to survive. It doesn't work if the objects have no life....

ROR. I love what Desna says about noise, distraction, mauri, and fringe pushing and dealing. The white and generally "North-looking" left fall into and out of acknowledgement of this kind of comprehension of the materiality of a practice's work in survivance and even the demands of repetition in production, in ways that can be quite abrupt and kind of shocking. My own late experience of the alienations of studio production (I just did my first year long residence last year) is quite different to how Dan describes his. The link of the studio to one's sense of production networks does not feel particularly liberatory to me a lot of the time (the temporality of it I found quite awful as an occupation of what I would call something like a "pre-display-side" politic)



Fig. 4
Open Studio work in
progress
Rue Methanic (chapbook)
at Jan van Eyck Academie,
Netherlands



Fig. 5
Lecture Performance
(presentation of script)
"The Juxtapolitical Form of
Neutrality: Between
Non-aligned Movements
and Neoliberal Curatorial
Economies," with Jelena
Vesic, Museum of Yugoslav
History

but the confrontation of that alienation – which is still resistive for many, can indeed have a worlding value that acknowledges and puts into circulation its minor materialised ways of being-otherwise. In so far as singular works do point to collectivities, they *can* have this redistributive ethos and do such work in the absence of actual redistributive conditions, which I find interesting as a kind of paradoxical form of responsibility and rehearsal of sociality of “art in private space.” Lauren Berlant’s work has been key to me getting my head around the fact that contemporary art’s fully commodified “intimate publics” while rarely involving re-organisational (political) effects, can still be considered an achievement. Or at least, we have that confirmed every time we experience a work which feels to make so much difference in its singularity (erecting the terrain and scope of its care, by and for that moment).

This kind of autonomy can only be operative in a heteronomy of relations and with the advantage of some kind of supports. A lot of recent writing on disability has thought this through so well. Many artists dramatise an artisthood of “autonomous” agency, that is “choosing” dependencies, and

bravely taking risks but we also always already held up by various kinds of naturalised instruments and vectors and opportunities and abilities that allow us to be passing as such, like cookies cut out of the fabric of how we actually get produced each day by conditions and so on, yes. I think more about subjectivisation – which is always inter – and processes of more and less autonomisation as collectively resocialised risks at (differentially) meaningful encounter and interdependency while an ideality of autonomy is itself very full of contradictions and blindnesses. I'm very interested in art's base level relation to justice in this sense, its capacity to materialise and attend to the question of what gets (co- and re-)produced by individuated collective behaviours and who gets to have the role of being seen to do that. There are a lot of fictions (of whiteness and masculinist singularity in labour acknowledgements) that one must negotiate constantly.

DWS. Simon, I think the issue is framing up as one of Neoliberalism vs. Tinorangatiratanga. And this relates to what Dan says, too, about being aware of how you spend your time, your effort, your energy – being aware that there is a system that you choose, or attempt to choose not to – participate in. To have your own sovereignty of thought, action, identity, and understand its value – is extremely important I think, to our wellbeing. By choosing the way we spend our day to day lives, albeit that we obviously have to participate in the system somewhat, for sustenance – brings self-sovereignty.

But inherent in the idea of Tinorangatiratanga, is the social contract we have to each other; we have to our ancestral roots; to respect each other and act in a mana-enhancing way which contributes to our lives as a society; to lead and to support. I think you can only really be empowered if you put yourself on the line because you believe what it is you do/make is relevant and valuable.

So, being a part-of-the-production-machine doesn't enhance healthy identity, doesn't get the mauri flowing, because if the value you bring to the picture isn't recognised, you become invisible. Dis-connected. And – there is risk in opting out, in creating your own path – you get all kinds of bullets fired at you by those in the system, because by stepping sideways/away from it – you're questioning the validity of the system, and I think people can find that a challenge. Because then – basically – you're questioning their life choices.

I find middle-class New Zealand society's reaction to the Tino flag pretty interesting; it's *immediately* associated with rebellion. It's loaded with all these ideas of anger, unrest, struggle for power. It's a major statement to fly that tohu. Flags have power. I don't think people often understand that there could be a solid partnership, a recognition of difference and respect for a different belief systems working alongside each other. Autonomy is some sort of threat, brings up these ideas of gated communities, unfair because we have different rules etc. etc.

Individual identity and value can be recognised within the whole and work well, work creatively, so long as we respect each other. Respect is key.

Eddie Izzard puts it succinctly: No flag no country!²¹

Toril Johannessen (TJ). Hey, I'm Toril, an artist based in Bergen, Norway. In my work I often make use of material and methods from the domain of science, and would say my take on it is a critical layperson's perspective. At the moment I'm about to start on a collaborative work with a colleague, guided by a common interest in questions concerning the notion of nature (as resource, as environment, as ideology) – and although our project is not clearly defined yet, I'd like to add that another commonality is that our works are not necessarily presenting practical solutions to questions that concerns us. Speaking for myself on this, it's not something that I've planned and made a clear strategy or motif in my work, but I've come to realise that this is a fact in many of my works. Reading what Dan says about the resistance of studio work, I wonder if this could somehow be seen as a related sort of resistance, the resistance of impossible propositions – or if it is just dysfunctional communication. Around here, people in the art field, including myself, keep telling each other that the political potential or agency in any kind of artwork or artistic practice is that we represent alternatives or difference: different ways of thinking, of production, of leading our lives. For example, a claim I've heard a few times lately is that there are too many artists being educated these days, but it's a good thing because they can use their knowledge from the arts in other fields and sort of smuggle this other way of thinking – the less linear, aiming for less obvious solutions – into other fields, as a corrective to more streamlined ways of thinking where being effective and productive is the goal. I do think that there's a core of truth in this, but sometimes, I have to say, the “alternative” way of art makes me more sad and pessimistic than anything else. After a few days of running around meeting and greeting and toasting while getting an overload of art at what has this year been dubbed the “the political biennial” in Venice, the notion of double standards seems worth thinking through (and many critics have indeed addressed the issue). Another sort of “difference” comes to mind, the difference between what we speak of and how we choose to sustain institutions and behaviours that are just as much part of the problem as the solution. I'm torn, though. I don't like to point fingers, neither in art nor in life in general. I don't think that art and artists in principle have to stand for higher morals and better solutions than anything or anyone else. I don't think that we have to do good, and I for sure don't want to make any promises to Adrian Piper by making a contract with her organisation, as asked for in her work *The Probable Trust Registry*. On the other hand, in general I find that Adrian Piper's finger is pointing in such an annoying way that it does stay with me, as an irritation, as something beyond liking.

On the notion of risk, something that comes to my mind is ignorance: speaking and acting from the position of an ignorant is a risky business. Not that I hold

ignorance as an ideal, but if we are to ever interact with each other, we will necessarily have to talk about things that we are not entirely confident on, and find ourselves in situations where we are not fully oriented on what's going on. Perhaps, being conscious of our own ignorance can be a helpful mindset in meeting others.

I realise I'm being abstract here. I'll return to my unpractical propositions and an example from one of my works, titled *Unlearning Optical Illusions*, which brings together two otherwise unrelated histories and visual cultures: modern scientific research on geometrical optical illusions and the history and cultural impact of wax resist cloths in West Africa. The project is mediated in different ways; as book, as photo installation, as printed cloths and in the future as clothes, but to make the description short: for the project I've designed a series of patterns inspired by the aesthetics of such cloths, and have included one classic geometric illusion in each design. The link I make between optical illusions and wax resistant cloths has to do with cultural identity and the influence cultural background/environment has on our ways of seeing. More specifically, on the optical illusions: a cross-cultural study first made in the 1960s presented results that suggested that people brought up in different cultures perceive illusions differently. The Western informants in the study saw the Müller-Lyer illusion strongly as an illusion, while the African and South-East Asian informants were less susceptible to it. Explanations are disputed, but among the most common one is that environment (architecture and landscape) shapes the way you use your eyes; if there's lots of rectilinear shapes in your environment, such as modern architecture, you interpret the figure as a 2-dimensional representation of a 3-dimensional figure. So, the speculation in my project and in the title of my project is: If I learn to see illusions, can I also unlearn it? Not in order to see in a more "truthful" way (there's no qualitative judgement in whether seeing optical illusions is a good or a bad thing), but in order to take on another mode of seeing, another perspective; to estrange things. Then there's the printed cloths – I became interested in them because they are culturally and visually coded in a way that I don't "read" that easily. They're both colonial products and West African products, they're global and local, the aesthetics both modern and lending from tradition, and then there's the proverbial culture where the cloths are assigned a meaning which is not apparent for the casual observer. Many products and visual cultures these days are mixed in similar ways, but I think that this particular case is interesting to think about in parallel to the case of optical illusions.

Art makes me feel ignorant every single day (not only in situations where I meet other fields and cultures such as science or the textile industry in Ghana), because its scope is so vast, the combination of skills and intellectual capacity and empirical knowledge that is asked for is (or at least should be?) huge, and perhaps that's part of the "alternative" in art – that we're professional ignorants.

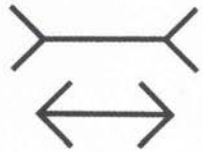


Fig. 6
Müller-Lyer illusion,
devised by Franz Carl
Müller-lyer in 1889

DWS. Thinking about the concepts of tangata whenua (people of the land), mahi toi (art) as a relational practice, both humanistically and ecologically, there is another nice term which goes some way to encompassing this – ahikāroa. The simple translation of which, in relation to land, is “the fires long burning”, indicating those that have “kept the home fires burning” have maintained traditional land tenure through continual occupation.

However, more broadly ahikāroa is an ethos which denotes an active practice that is ancestrally derived, holistically encompassing cultural and social well-being of contemporary whanau directly associated with a specific landscape. These practices may have evolved through changes in their context and therefore have been applied in new and innovative ways, but still remain a central component of cultural identity. Ahikāroa identity is a living continuation of the pito (the umbilical cord), or the vital nourishing whakapapa (genealogical, to make a foundation, to place in layers, knowledge pathways) link to whenua (both land and placenta).

An example of this is the “Urban Mauri” concept I mentioned earlier. Our exploration of Urban Mauri has largely been through a series of wānanga (tikanga māori led workshops/knowledge sharing events). Wānanga bring together a wide range of people for deliberative working dialogue on a specific kaupapa (subject or initiative), to arrive at a deeper understanding. Used to describe a space or forum for immersive learning, wānanga are Māori-led events based on core cultural values, with tangata whenua worldviews central in the discussion. We argue that design wānanga can be an effective focused methodology for generating new knowledge, and aligning purpose.

Two current situations requiring Māori cultural design and arts input presented themselves via the Auckland Council: the Auckland Design Manual and the Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan. The role which Urban Mauri exploration filled in relation to these projects, was developing productive ways of working/interfaces in a relationship which is often combative in nature, local body government “consulting” tangata whenua.

When working with Māori or as Māori, we know that “[c]onsent is not so much given for a project or a specific set of questions, but for a person, for their credibility. Consent indicates trust and the assumption is that the trust will not only be reciprocated but constantly negotiated – a dynamic relationship rather than a static decision.”²²

The wānanga integrated cultural art practices such as karanga, contemporary dance, drawing, music, whaikorero (oratory artform), manaakitanga (hosting and reciprocity), recognition of the value of place via architecture and location, in order to produce more substantial knowledge sharing experiences. Artists and designers from many walks were more able to contribute to the questions

at hand, and also draw personal benefit from the experience – rather than a consultation process, which is often seen as a “one-way street”.

Through historical (and contemporary) precedent, indigenous practitioners and researchers are very aware that the main risk we face in sharing our, as Simon termed it, processual and relational methodologies, is that the process and terminology – Intellectual Property in effect, may be repeated elsewhere and removed from the tangata whenua context. Wānanga without the above relationship of trust and reciprocal community relationship, lose integrity and connection, and are therefore no longer wānanga. The risk – as aptly put by Te Rangi Hīroa – Sir Peter Buck, “Thus he relegates us to the Shades, and we cease to be as important as the carvings our brains designed and our hands executed.”²³

SB. Yeah, I definitely agree Desna, there is a risk that these things will be removed from their context and fetishised in a superficial way. What offers some defence against this is that a Māori world view isn’t something that can just be appropriated from reading. To come to any understanding would require long-term participation with, and learning from, people and place. To do that I think you would need to have some respect, or you wouldn’t learn much at all. So those taonga have a certain way of looking after themselves, I hope.

For Pākehā there are a lot of mental constructs that make it difficult for us to comprehend a Māori viewpoint. Ideas of individualism, linear progress, patriarchy, private property for example seem to go pretty deep into our DNA. Yet a lot of these ideas emerge with and are produced within a capitalist mode of existence. We inhabit it, it inhabits us. I don’t think anyone is entirely immune to their effects either – once we arrive with capitalism and it arrives with us. But definitely Māori keep those longer fires burning, an understanding of a different way of inhabiting the world. This is why Aotearoa New Zealand is such a fortunate place. Not that many Pākehā recognise this. I’m always drawn back to a statement Donna Awatere made in *Maori Sovereignty*:

All white people are captives of their own culture. And they don’t know they’re captives. They therefore ignore the door of the cage we hold open for them. Whether they will ever see the door we cannot say. All we can do is continue to hold it open.²⁴

I think what appears as the risk for Pākehā is that if we were to admit the fact of original inhabitation of the land, and to admit the brutality and injustice of the dispossession that we inherit then we might feel our identities drain down the plug-hole. This is what causes a lot of violence toward Māori at the state and individual settler level. What might lead out of this situation would be to come to the more relational understanding that we are only Pākehā because we live in a Māori place. Being Pākehā might eventually come to be something positive we could draw our identity from. Once, that is, we started to understand we are

the guests here and so it is tikanga that is the first law and gives the proper way of going about the place and relating to it and its people.

When the leader of the New Zealand Labour Party Andrew Little says we need to start to maybe have a think about the faint, future possibility of having a discussion about te tino rangatiratanga and the settler majority starts to cry foul about segregation we see how perverse the logic of this attitude is – do Pākehā seriously think they are the black South Africans in this situation? So I'm not saying we are close. But the problem isn't going away so these questions will have to keep being asked.

So I'd say that risk is double-edged. We are constantly told that any deviation from the business-as-usual of neoliberalism and structurally racist settler majoritarian rule will bring about certain catastrophe. But when you look at the looming ecological collapse and the psychic damage of refusing to acknowledge the place you inhabit, how you came to be there, your relation to its peoples and its past, it's clear we don't have much choice but to make a few leaps out into the open. Otherwise, our lives will be worked out in advance for us by the calculated risks of financial speculation, media manipulation, and right-sliding mediocrity of parliamentary polling. If we don't take real risks then we have to be prepared to be little more than populations to be managed – an aside or inconvenience to the real business of making profit at all costs.

TJ. I do agree with Desna and Simon on the risk of superficial fetishisation when knowledge, methods and terminology are taken out of context, and that real understanding happens through long-term participation and respect. I mentioned the ignorant position above, a kind of position where you know that you don't know, and respect is of course implied in that if it should have any meaning as a positive term at all.

Reading through what has been said above on Māori culture and terminology, one thing that strikes me is that it seems to have a strong and specific use of language, which I think might provide an additional defence from fetishisation.

Obviously, knowledge is passed on both through language and through practice. Another factor is pedagogics. If knowledge of or even within a culture is thought to be something learnt only through a sort of osmotic process, I think the chances are great that we will be caught in gaps between cultures and worldviews. An example: Up until my parents' generation, people in the region where I grew up (my family included) were largely sustained by a combination of fishing and farming. As that generation got more education and had careers rather than work, lots of the knowledge that was traditionally passed on from one generation to the next didn't find its place in everyday life practice, such as how to handle a boat, how to fish, how to cook from local ingredients for a large family. Still, knowing and praising these things

were vital for the cultural identity and for self-understanding as a family. The problem (in my experience, and I'm taking the liberty to exaggerate a bit) was that you were supposed to just *have* the knowledge, but the way of passing it over was intrinsically connected to prior everyday life, work and role models. There was not that much of a pedagogical model to support learning those things. And when there was not that much of a language to explain things either – demonstrations could easily be accompanied with a shrug and a hmpf and a you'll-figure-it-out – the gap between our generations were widened.

DWS. Re: Simon's comment "Being Pākehā might eventually come to be something positive we could draw our identity from." The interesting point there, which also connects with Toril's comments about the roots of the language, is that both the Pākehā (other) and Māori (normal), only came about due to the meeting of the cultures. Prior to a relatively collective European culture occupying New Zealand, Māori were all different peoples, many iwi. So the coining of those two names is absolutely uniquely of the time when the country started to have this serious debate and discussion of two cultures. Of sovereignty, of setting codes of conduct and so on.

I think there should be pride of identity held in both of the names. "Pākehā" is not your identity name, if you are German, French, English, American. Pākehā means your home is Aotearoa. For some reason, many seem more comfortable to identify themselves with the small fluffy brown bird, "Kiwi", probably as it's less loaded. But the casualness of that label is obvious. "Pākehā" has history, a whakapapa of the pain of colonisation, but Simon's right, I think we need to face looking into that history from which we are based and know our relationship to here – to Aotearoa, otherwise we risk being washed into those waters of anonymity.

In that moment of those cultural names being founded, we are reflecting on each other's identity. Māori facing Pākehā, what do we see?

SB. Yep, Toril, I am very much into ignorance as you describe it, as a knowing that you don't know. I think the off-sider to this sort of productive and open ignorance is an arrogance that decides in advance, or will only admit one way of framing things. This might seem like a humanities platitude, or a way to keep face while admitting defeat to the certainties of science. But, I'd agree with Johannes Kepler that good questions are far more valuable than good answers. In an academic context, staying with ignorance in order to ask collective questions, with the hope they will lead to better questions, is a risky endeavour. The imperative within the university these days is to professionalise, to build competencies, to become an expert. The hierarchies of knowledge are minutely ordered and map on to the even sharper distinctions of our rank within the institution. Refusing to become an expert, refusing to mark your scent on some little territory of expertise, is a good way to end up at the job centre.

But the problems we face, ecological crises being a prime example, refuse any strict categorisation by subject area. Any solution will have to be simultaneously political, economic, social, scientific, spiritual, and so on. I don't want to decry science like a climate change denier but I also don't think we can simply rely on it to solve a crises it was instrumental in causing. Certainly the attitude that produces "nature" as an object out there, outside of ourselves, has been a ready alibi for the wholesale degradation of the planet. Science isn't objective, which is not to say it has no access to truths, but that it is captured and conditioned by the logics of capitalism and therefore privileges certain questions, develops in directions that close off other possibilities.

So what is desperately needed is for indigenous knowledges to be present in these discussions but without being subordinated to Science as some final adjudicator. It is here I have been finding Isabelle Stengers' notion of an ecology of practices useful:

an ecology of practices does not have any ambition to describe practices "as they are"; it resists the master word of a progress that would justify their destruction. It aims at the construction of new "practical identities" for practices, that is, new possibilities for them to be present, or in other words to connect. It thus does not approach practices as they are – physics as we know it, for instance – but as they may become.²⁵

So it is from the possibilities of our collective becoming that I draw optimism. Politics as it may become, for example, if we were to honour the partnership outlined in Te Tiriti. A politics unimaginable from within the crap pantomime of parliamentary politics as it is now. I can't even work out which characters I'm supposed to boo at anymore.

And this is where the question of language that you both raise is all important. Language might not exactly build worlds by itself, but it is intimately entangled with them and absolutely necessary in order to enter into them in any meaningful way. Aotearoa New Zealand has two official languages, yet apart from a song, some colours, and the days of the week I was taught nothing of te reo at school. I'm still terrible. If I had to name one thing that would start to make a real difference in people's attitudes then I think te reo would be the place to start.

And yes! the Kiwi is a brilliant emblem for the arse-over-backwards stories Pākehā like to tell ourselves. In fact when I did my undergraduate degree it was Stephen Turner who really got me thinking about Aotearoa New Zealand and my place within it using precisely that example. He thought we were much more like possums, an invasive introduced species that causes a lot of damage. It seems reasonably straightforward to me now but, continuing the animal metaphor, it still gets a lot of people's goat if you tell them this.

ROR. Stengers is I think an extremely important thinker for keeping indigeneity and ecology at the forefront of art-science concepts of practice. I was reading a lot of her work when I was working on the first stages of The Gas Imaginary project, which through poetry, archi-poetic drawings and installation formats, processes the rollout of fracking as a large scale, aesthetically mobilised “installation project”, second wave of internal colonialisation and new form of accumulation that is deeply challenging to the imagination of settler colonial late liberal citizenship.

What I found initially (awfully) most fascinating about that emerging period of “investment” and “social licensing” in such an extreme degree of environmental injustice, was how anomic and fully economised the use of language was (including mathematic and diagrammatic) in the blur of the industry-government alliance’s work, which of course affected the capacity of communities to speak injustices with any rhetorical or material force. The industry knows that its use of language and securitisation of scientific truth claims (through stylisation, but also through secret patents upon chemical ingredients, for example), achieves this, so how can art and linguistic experimentation work “for” the ecology of practices (including non-corporate science on the side of biosphere) that are resistant to this kind of deeply destructive norm-making.

I feel grateful for a lot of risks of the project: in non-neutrally speaking from my own semi-autobiographical voice/position (as a kind of outing of personhood and performative valuing of “response”), in wrangling a lot of settler anxiety about only partial relational connections to indigenous communities and histories of my fully industrialised home town harbour landscape; and in confronting what are sometimes ridiculous-feeling and crazed, spatially distant and spectral concepts of responsibility (though that impotence against “distant industry” is also a part of what I was dramatising as shared). But I felt driven to do it as an *artistic* research project, not only because of the complex layers and scales of justice questions in the industry’s roll out (including through corporatised PR only masquerading as post-modern science) but because it was just such an exemplary case of the capitalist destruction of language – and because that was very clearly the problem it was processed as by ordinary people. All of which made it a fascinating drama for a poet to tarry with, also through televisual and network media formations. I kind of fell in love with the way people of all kinds of political persuasions were commanded through crisis to “finally” become literate (and savvy) to the post-political ethos of neoliberal governance, through this experience of a “next” destruction of language, land, and meaning on colonised ground. The way at least some reorganisations of settler imaginations were understanding it as a “next” problem for a common bio-heritage, and not just as their own family’s licentious exposure to property devaluation. But that is starting to sound a bit romantic. To watch the recent evictions in

Western Australia of remote indigenous communities hardly circulating as an urgent discussion on the social media sites of the East Coast anti-extraction movements puts some very strong limits on that kind of optimism.

1. Ulrich Beck, "Critical Theory of World Risk Society: A Cosmopolitan Vision", *Constellations: An International of Critical and Democratic Theory* 16, no. 1 (March 2009): 3-22.
2. See <http://racheloreilly.net/2014/01/10/upcoming-exhibition-and-events/>
3. This is Marina Vishmidt's coinage for a hegemonic aesthetic logic that shows up in policy and ordinary compartments to put 'needs' at the basis for certain conservative strategies of accumulation/investment, while taking the category of needs for granted. The framed necessity of gas fracking as a "transition fuel" would be something like this.
4. See www.dannybutt.net
5. See <http://palacepalace.com/>
6. See <http://www.rodriago-hernandez.net/>
7. See <http://racheloreilly.net/2014/09/26/economies-and-objects-of-performance-if-i-cant-dance/>
8. See http://www.internationaleonline.org/opinions/66_frontier_imaginaries
9. See www.ngaaho.maori.nz
10. See www.dwscreative.co.nz.
11. Paolo Virno, *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008).
12. Jeffrey Paparao Holman, *Best of Both Worlds: Elsdon Best and the Metamorphosis of Maori Spirituality. Te painga rawa o nga ao rua: Te Peehi me te putanga ke o te wairua Maori*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Māori in the University of Canterbury, 2007.
13. Holman, Best of *Both Worlds*.
14. T.C. Royal ed., *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Otaki, N.Z.: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003).
15. See www.thetoasterproject.org/page2.htm.
16. See www.blakefallconroy.com/18.html.
17. Theodor Adorno, trans. E F N Jephcott, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005).
18. See <http://eco-action.org/dod/nog/activism.htm>
19. See https://youtu.be/apO3B_o6dz8.
20. The insights of this paragraph are drawn from the current and upcoming work of Marina Vishmidt, whose *Speculation as a Mode of Production* will be published with Brill in early 2016.
21. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEx5G-GOS1k
22. L. T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (London: Zed Books; Dunedin, N.Z.: University of Otago Press, 2012).
23. Te Rangi Hīroa (Peter Buck), *The Coming of the Maori* (Nelson, N.Z.: R. W. Stiles, 1925).
24. Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland, N.Z.: Broadsheet, 1984).
25. Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005).



Fig. 1
Bill Hammond
*Semaphore Cave, Cave
Painting II* 2008
acrylic on canvas
1600 x 2100 mm
Private collection

Fig. 2
Bill Hammond
Giant Eagle 2006
acrylic on canvas
1200 x 1800 mm
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki,
purchased 2007



Signal Eight Times: Nature, Catastrophic Extinction Events and Contemporary Art

Susan Ballard

In the histories of Western thought, nature has been defined through a set of visual, social and aesthetic codes that to the popular imaginary remain continuous and at a safe distance from the impacts of humanity and technology. Amidst the escalating crisis known as anthropogenic climate change, nature is understood as a human construction that more than ever needs our protection. Despite its pleasures, this understanding is flawed because it relies on an illusionary stable power structure in which humans find themselves at the apex of a great chain of being. A number of contemporary artists are challenging this order of things by addressing nature as a complex of environmental and interspecies relationships. Nowhere is this entanglement more acute than in New Zealand where in the past 750 years over 50 percent of the native land species have vanished. This essay focuses on some contemporary artworks that directly engage this devastation and along the way examines a number of broad contexts (both historical and geographical) in which the defence of nature is challenged.

In the inaugural Sir Paul Reeves Memorial Lecture in 2012 Anne Salmond contributed a key reassessment of the defence of nature.¹ Salmond described a split in Western Renaissance thought between the Cartesian “order of things” and what she described as a vitalist “order of relations.” She argued that Descartes’ model of a “static tiered universe... has put our future at risk” because it results in binary oppositions that lead to concepts of conservation and defence such as “environmental services” and “resource management”: ideas that assume people control the planet via the economic tools they themselves have invented. In the order of things nature is something that humans control and defend.

Salmond contrasts the Cartesian binary model with “the order of relations” as understood by the vitalist thinkers such as Erasmus Darwin in England and Denis Diderot in France. She explains how in the vitalist view oppositions

do exist but the focus and understanding is in the “fertile middle ground.” Salmond outlines how both frameworks travelled to New Zealand in the baggage of the European colonialists.² On the one hand, the order of things contributed a desire for classification and measurement of nature, and on the other, the order of relations found recognition in the knowledge of Indigenous peoples well versed in integrated and dynamic ecosystems.³

Salmond’s careful analysis of the division between things and relations is particularly useful for thinking about species extinction. The order of things leads us towards a distressed conservation ethics, where powerlessness and grief are countered by a determination to “do something.” In this, the order of things also contributes hope; it suggests that by participating in nature, if only in a very small way, we can defend nature against greater harm. The Kakapo Recovery programme in New Zealand is one example of this approach. The programme is fronted by the world’s first “spokesbird” – Sirocco – who was rescued from Whenua Hou (Codfish Island) as a small chick, and despite efforts to return him back to the wild, chose to stay with his adopted human family. With fewer than 130 Kakapo alive today, it was opportune that Sirocco was appointed a recovery ambassador (the result of a partnership between the government Department of Conservation, the advocacy group Forest and Bird, and corporate sponsor NZ Aluminum Smelters). A flightless celebrity with his own Facebook page, Sirocco travels around New Zealand via aeroplane, and tickets to meet him sell out within hours. It sounds like a reasonable activity; one that draws on the progressive conservation ideals of the turn of the twentieth century. As Charles Babcock proclaimed in 1894: “to know a bird is to love him.”⁴ Babcock, one of the originators of Bird Day in the United States, advocated for a combination of moral passion with scientific objectivity, and Sirocco continues this tradition; wherever Sirocco travels he is accompanied by public education programmes. There is a problem though. Sirocco is known and understood in a human rather than a bird sense: to know the bird is to be able to protect the bird from predators human and otherwise. To know the bird is to defend nature. At its core the defence of the Kakapo is a mode of power; a method adopted by humans who believe nature is something over which they can assert both moral and physical control. (In his Facebook updates Sirocco repeatedly stresses that he is not kept in “captivity”).

Sirocco’s success cannot be denied (recently the Oscar winning film *Birdman* drew on the iconography of Sirocco’s celebrity encounter with Stephen Fry).⁵ Yet, in the current climate we clearly need an alternative to this model of defence. By turning to the order of relations, I think we can start to understand the implications of the human animal in the complexes of capital that have been labelled “nature”. Rather than concentrating on saving individual members of individual species a vitalist approach investigates the environment as a system that includes the organism (both human and non-human) as part of an integrated whole. This notion was first suggested by Jakob von Uexküll in

his studies of the “umwelt” or how living organisms perceive and interpret their environment, and was then extended in popular culture by American systems thinker Gregory Bateson, who argued that the basic “unit of survival” was the organism plus its environment. At first it would seem that an approach to species extinction that engages a vitalist perspective is found within the ecosanctuary movement. For example, Zealandia in Wellington, New Zealand considers itself a vital “lifeboat” where numerous species interrelate inside a protective environment. However, its aim to “restore our sanctuary valley to its pre-human state” suggests a desire to return to the order of things (the removal of the human organism). A vitalist understanding of ecologies does not separate the (human) organism from the environmental; instead the environmental is part and parcel of any organism that may occupy it.⁶ Engaging with the uncertainty of our own impacts on the “umwelt” of other organisms means we adopt a way of thinking and doing in line with the order of relations and implies we risk losing control of our abilities to defend, restore, remove, and protect.

An understanding of our entanglement within nature still does not present a solution for how we might understand extinction – that moment when the organism has already gone, and the environment has been irrevocably transformed. Any discussion of extinction needs to be layered upon understandings of evolution. In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson transforms and extends Darwin’s contingent histories that documented the formation of species and questioned the “teleology of nature” (the order of things).⁷ Bateson argues that we must “correct the Darwinian unit of survival to include the environment and the interaction between organism and Environment.”⁸ This is not to say that Darwin didn’t consider the environment a key effect in the processes of evolution, he was certainly a subscriber to the order of relations, but Bateson takes it one step further; by considering the organism and environment together, he suggests, “a very strange and surprising identity emerges: the unit of evolutionary survival turns out to be identical with the unit of mind.”⁹ An evolutionary unit formed from organism and environment means that it is not possible to separate nature from culture. The distinction between Bateson’s notion of ecology and Darwin’s model of adaptation through natural selection points us towards an understanding of the order of relations and how we might approach extinction. Darwin argued that the “unit of survival was either the family line or the species or subspecies,” Bateson writes that the “unit of survival is organism plus environment.” He continues: “We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself.”¹⁰

To reconsider the position of the human within extinction, it is necessary then to think of vitalist challenges to the defensive modes offered above. To think of the order of relations (when all relations are unevenly distributed events of power and control between human, nonhuman and more-than-human) means that if we are not to defend nature, we need instead to articulate our place as witnesses, activators, and recorders of the species extinction events that

are ever increasing in frequency. Instead of maintaining discrete boundaries between culture and nature, it is necessary to address the “impossible fact that humans are both ‘in’ and ‘of’ nature, both are and are not the outside.”¹¹ That this integrated relationship raises problems for the notion of “being in”, “representing” or “defending” nature is the point, for in the logic of relations we are already a part of nature.

Buller’s Birds

My sense is that we should turn towards home to articulate how we might understand our place amidst the histories and geographies of species extinction. Contemporary Australian and New Zealand artists have looked to New Zealand’s catastrophic bird extinctions as evidence and tragic reminder of the price paid by a country that maintains the order of things through a clean green image. In this instance, engaging with extinction events is not about doing something before it is too late (in some cases defence is no longer even possible) instead it is about revisiting the ‘unit of survival’ and perhaps learning something new about human entanglements in the order of relations.

Bill Hammond’s bird paintings resulted from a trip in 1991 to the drowning land of the Auckland Islands. Three hundred and twenty kilometres south yet still within New Zealand waters, Hammond began the process of documenting the histories of a bird-land filled with sentient beings. He has now produced well in excess of 50 bird paintings, and they are often discussed in metaphorical tones (Figs 1–3). I wonder what happens when we read them as documentation of an extinction event. In *Semaphore Cave, Cave Painting II* (2008, Fig. 1) the birdpeople inhabit a cave from which they gaze across a blinding horizon. Waiting and watching for the tall boats already foretold in their history they prepare for interspecies communication. In the far distance, on a windswept land, one birdperson shakes hands with another in an imitation of previous moments of first contact (General Hobson and Tamati Wāka Nene, Mr Robinson and Timmy). In the foreground a young birdperson walks towards a fire holding a dripping heart, while another reads aloud. Others are undertaking callisthenic exercises, as if in preparation for a long journey. Hammond’s birds have no need for shoes; instead they tattoo themselves with fashionable embroidered Victorian gowns. On the wall someone has scrawled “If you make a mistake signal eight times.” The actions of the birdpeople who live in this cave do not resonate as the final actions of a dying race. Alert and aloof they signal a new stage in the ecological process. The direction of emergence here is important, as it supports the notion that the first colonisers of New Zealand were winged. They signal but are not drowning. Hammond suggests that our first step is to write the histories anew.

The species extinctions in New Zealand are the result of dramatic environmental changes. Aotearoa New Zealand is a country formed from multiple “species, including landscapes, animals, plants, microorganisms, people and technologies” (to relocate Donna Haraway’s motley crowd).¹²

Unlike its closest neighbour with 60,000 years of continuous living human culture, New Zealand “was the last large habitable land mass to be colonised by humans.”¹³ The colonisation of New Zealand by invasive land mammals is marked by two major periods of arrival. Around 1250–1300 the Pacific rat ‘kiore’ and its friend Kuri (the dog) hitched a ride with Polynesian explorers, and in the early eighteenth-century European colonialists and their companion animals began to arrive in droves. In a period of about 750 years New Zealand’s native animal population was halved. What makes the New Zealand extinction event particularly interesting and unusual is the way that:

small species died out at the same time as the megafauna (large birds in this case). Now most of the large species are gone, and small birds continue to be threatened and lost. Indeed, the New Zealand extinctions have aspects of both the continental extinctions (involving mainly large species), and of island extinctions (where small species were the main casualties).¹⁴

There was not much time for a defence of nature, although some valiant efforts were made. For example, lawyer and naturalist Walter Lawry Buller was alert to the decline and, with astonishing determination, shot, ate and stuffed thousands of bird carcasses between 1852 and 1903.¹⁵ Although just a portion of the huge trade in New Zealand birds, Buller’s work resulted in a global distribution of New Zealand bird specimens: 310 were purchased by the then Colonial Museum in 1871 (of which only about 70 remain in Te Papa Tongarewa today).¹⁶ The American Museum of Natural History and Carnegie Museum of Natural History each hold intact collections of over 500 of Buller’s birds each.¹⁷ In the enlarged edition of Buller’s *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* (1880) John G. Keulemans’ drawings offer stunning documentation of these individual species isolated from their habitat. Rather than quantify numbers, they make Bateson’s unit of survival visible. Isolated on a clean non-polluted white page a pair of birds cling to a small selection of foliage; a sample of the organism plus a sample of the environment inside a gaping abyss.¹⁸ Buller and Keulemans were resigned to an unutterable truth and their desire for documentation overruled the consideration of individual deaths. Like any sincere colonialist Buller believed that he was witnessing the last days of not just New Zealand’s native flora and fauna, but also its people. He saw a direct connection between the deaths of birds and Maori, and in 1884 in his opening Presidential address for the Wellington Philosophical Society he quotes Isaac Featherston: “the Maoris are dying out and nothing can save them. Our plain duty as good and compassionate colonists, is to smooth down their dying pillow.”¹⁹

As well as being intimately tied to the colonial enterprise, Buller’s project was also a domestic arrangement where his mother skinned and stuffed birds at their kitchen table.²⁰ The birds themselves could offer little resistance. Hammond, ever alert to the fate of the birdpeople, presents this as a post-apocalyptic scene of horror in *Buller’s Table Cloth* (1994, Fig. 3). Hammond’s work is much more



Fig. 3
Bill Hammond
Buller's Table Cloth 1994
acrylic on canvas
1682 x 1675 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi
o Tāmaki, gift of the
Patrons of the Auckland
Art Gallery, 1997

than an illustration of the trauma. On a loose canvas, itself both a skin and shroud, Hammond presents a colonial interior littered with carcasses. From our perch high on the wall we witness Buller's kitchen laboratory. On the left is a completed reliquary housing a pair of Huia, and spread on the bench are numerous large bound and flayed specimens. The human activity has been momentarily interrupted and a glass of wine rests on a side table alongside yet another skin; mimicking a shawl that has been hastily thrown from someone's shoulders. If transformed with colour, the feathered grisaille floorboards would be dripping red. Hammond's work is a picture of interspecies domestic violence that anticipates future atrocities. Unable to prevent the destruction of an earlier time, Hammond documents a colonial mortuary that is at once a new home location for one species and a site of death for the other.

Part of the difficulty of understanding Bateson's unit of survival is the way in which Darwin's laws of evolution encouraged people to think about extinction events in isolation from their location. In particular the trade in New Zealand birds played a significant part in the late nineteenth-century debates surrounding the definitions of extinction that presented ongoing fuel for Darwin's own explorations in other parts of the world. The bird carcasses were organisms at a double remove from their environments yet they enabled extraordinary understandings of environmental ecology to develop. Debates raged about how and why these extinction events occurred, and most importantly, when. As Holdaway says, "New Zealand was one of the first places where debate over extinction was part of public and scientific life."²¹ Much of the discussion was staged along the lines of colonial authority; the bird extinctions were tangled with late nineteenth-century social and cultural ecologies of power, resources and access. In London Richard Owen examined a single thigh bone sent from New Zealand and in declaring it to be "dinornis" introduced the British public to both the Moa and the reality of recent extinction events.²² Questions over whether human or environmental transformation were to blame for the disappearance of the Moa and its smaller companions seemed for the moment unanswerable and appropriate strategies for the defence of nature were not easy to grasp. Researchers on the ground such as Julius von Haast and James Hector, despite their own differences, battled for recognition with the scientific powerhouses in London.²³ Everyone was involved.²⁴

British settler Samuel Butler arrived in New Zealand in 1860 with a copy of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) packed in his bags, and found himself in the middle of a verdant and hazardous southern island that would inspire *Erewhon* (1872) his dystopian vision of machinic evolution that formed only part of his own futile and extended argument with Darwin.²⁵ Butler was convinced that there were unconscious knowledges (such as memory) within the individual that could not be accounted for by evolution. Gregory Bateson comments that the battle between Darwin and Butler was "really about 'vitalism'. It was a question of how much *life* and what order of life could be

assigned to organisms.”²⁶ Butler lost, and Darwin’s law that maintained that evolutionary facts could be read within the bodies of individual specimens continued to dominate scientific understandings.

For Darwin species were not eternal essences, instead it was the shifting and ever-evolving individuals understood through random mutation, natural selection and hereditary difference that gave him his greatest insights. The dead New Zealand birds that could only be studied within the cultural ecologies of the museum lent substance to the possibilities first of species and then of their extinction. For Owen though, the cataclysmic disappearance of the bird was direct evidence of the damage left in the wake of human dispersal.

... all hitherto observed causes of extirpation point either to continuous slowly operating geological changes, or to no greater sudden cause than the, so to speak, spectral appearance of mankind on a limited tract of land not before inhabited.²⁷

Life-lines

Owen was aware that New Zealand was a unique environment, and clearly suspicious that the human had completely transformed that environment. But he was challenged by the need to read individual fragments as markers of broader species extinctions. Without setting foot on the land, he was unable to gather the resources to link the signs of the organism (or body) with its life events, and vital environment. In this context Bateson’s unit of survival continues to resonate (even if we feel the need to add into the environment nonorganic and nonliving things). Yet, in the same way we have had to rethink systems discourse in order to embrace the network, since the 1960s global extinction has exponentially accelerated. Is it still possible to even think in ‘units’? Contemporary understandings of species extinction remain caught in this tension between the individual and the collective. The last of a species to die is not just about an individual death but highlights that individual as a representative of a unit of survival. Understanding extinction is about addressing the implications of life as understood outside of the bounded individual, yet remains strangely dependent on the individual survival of the organism as discrete entity. Gilles Deleuze suggests that it is art that can help us think through this tension between life and organism. He writes, “It’s organisms that die, not life. Any work of art points a way through for life, finds a way through the cracks.”²⁸

The extinction of the Huia presents a particular case study, as all individual units of survival have gone and the fact of species death cannot be separated from the action of humans. The potential extinction of the Huia was recognised in the 1880s when Māori chiefs in the Manawatu and Wairarapa placed a tapu on the Huia prohibiting the killing of the birds. Yet, on a royal visit in 1901, the Prince of York was presented with a Huia tail feather on his arrival at

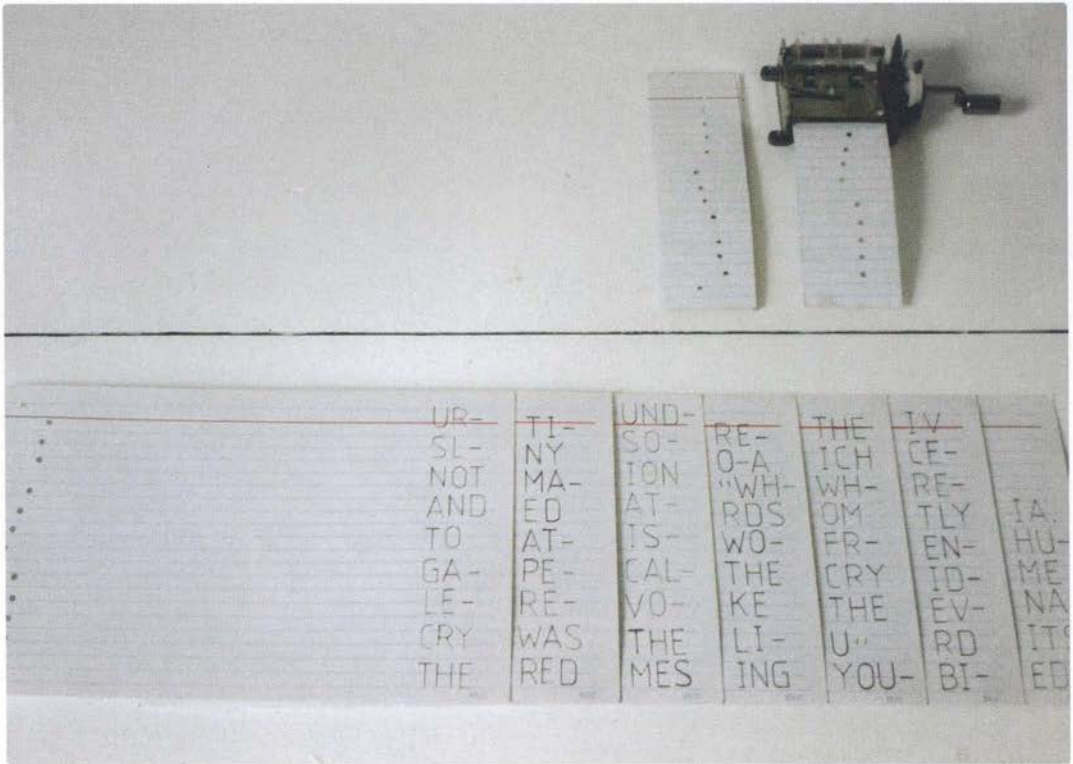
Fig. 4
 Hayden Fowler
Call of the Wild 2007
 mounted chromogenic
 photograph
 dimensions variable
 performance
 documentation: Auckland
 Festival, March 2007
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photo: Sarah
 Smuts-Kennedy



Tama-te-Kapua.²⁹ The Prince placed the feather in his hatband, setting off a devastating fashion trend back in England. By 1907 the Huia were extinct.

There was no debate; human fashion and ritual had irrevocably transformed the Huia's living environment. Darwin connected the human desire to use adornment for beautification to the activities of the bower bird and the bird-of-paradise; his observation of the bird's apparently compulsive behaviour led to his formulation of the second maxim of evolution: sexual selection.³⁰ Sexual selection too dominated the social ecologies of a repressed Victorian society. Social and inherited authority gave way to fashion and presented us with an early example of the integrated and vital ecologies of what Felix Guattari would later call Integrated World Capitalism.³¹

In 2007 New Zealand born Australian artist Hayden Fowler staged the installation and performance event *Call of the Wild* (2007, Fig. 4). In an aestheticised street-front boutique, and under the gaze of the passing public, Fowler had a pair of Huia on straggly branches tattooed on his back.



The choreography of the event took three days, during which human skin was irreversibly transformed into a new organic form. The performance was not about human or bird suffering, nor was it some kind of Frankensteinian reanimation of the bird (as this would presume some gift of life held by the artist). Instead, by offering his own body as a site for mourning and remembrance Fowler holds out a life-line. The blank white surface of the environment, the sterile white clothing and custom furniture highlight the flesh of the canvas upon which the tattoo artist etched his lines. On live human skin, in a purified white tank, the Huia found a way through the cracks.

Despite the fact that many Huia were enticed to their death by human imitation of their call, no extant recording of a Huia song remains. In *Huia Transcriptions* (2012–13, Fig. 5) Sally Ann McIntyre offers the Huia a line of music. In the first part of *Huia Transcriptions* McIntyre replays a 1960s transcription by Phillips of the Huia song (itself a reworking of early Pākehā settler narratives) as part of the early morning chorus in the forest areas of Kapiti Island (now a significant ecosanctuary off the coast of the North Island). This music box transcription of

Fig. 5
Sally Ann McIntyre
Huia Transcriptions
2012–13
index cards, music
boxes, installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

western sheet music was attached to the trunks of species of trees Huia would have climbed. The irony here is that the actual voice of the Huia was more likely contained in the mimicry of the other birds singing that morning than in the grossly inadequate human records of the Huia unearthed by McIntyre. In the second part of the work McIntyre transcribes the same call onto cardboard index cards enabling visitors to a gallery space the opportunity to play the call themselves via a small mass-produced music box.³² McIntyre does not mimic but with the archivist's reach reintroduces a bird that has lost its voice. Foolish bird.

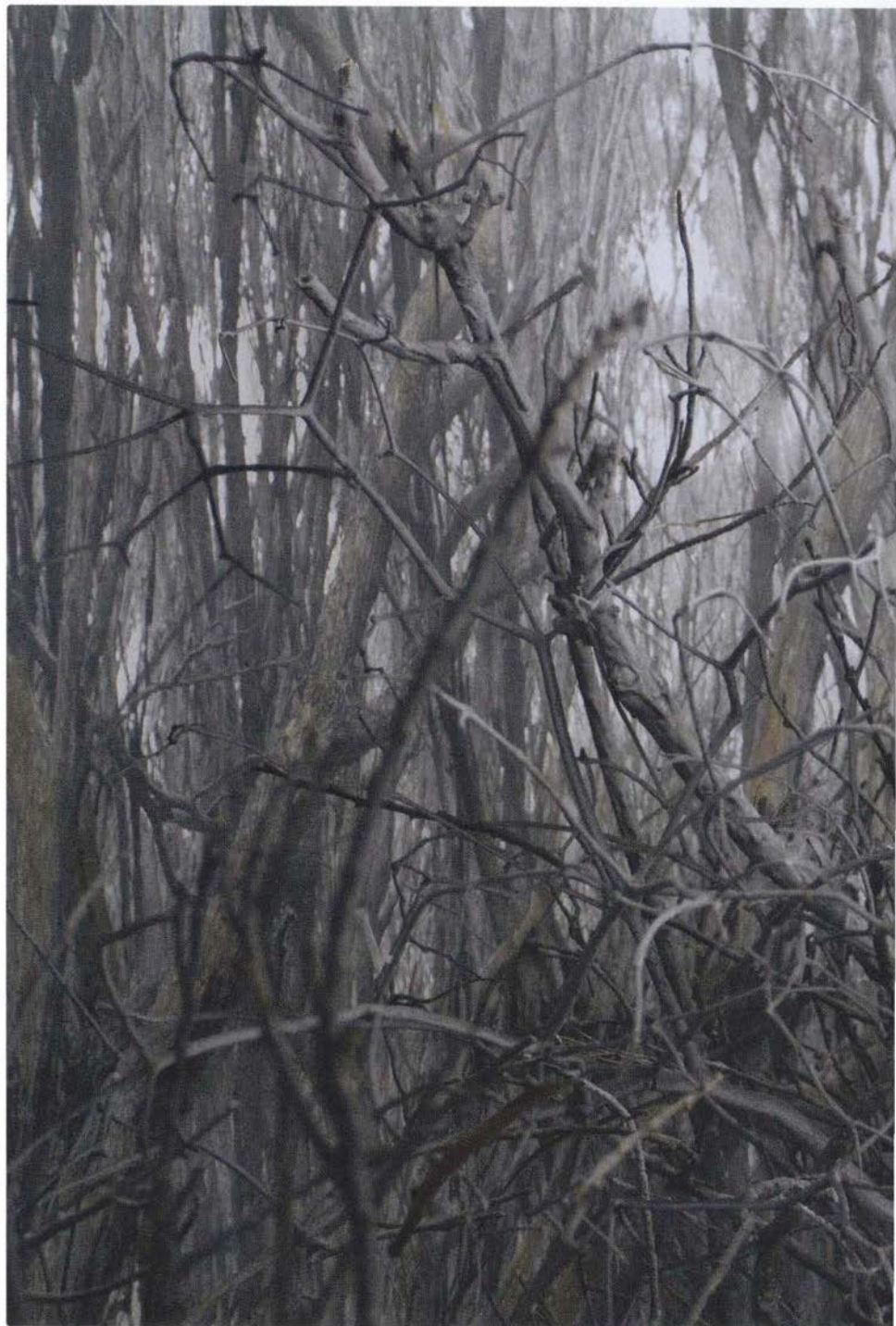
There is something profoundly beautiful and nostalgic about McIntyre's reanimated voices that move beyond defence and into an ethics of care. In the human languages of affect "shame" is considered immensely disabling.³³ Yet it is a collective shame that McIntyre addresses and in this she engages much more than melancholy.³⁴ In the same way that Fowler gives the birds new flesh, McIntyre offers the birds back a voice; except it is a replication of their own voice travelling across time. Together bodies are being connected and new habitations are being formed. Shame then is found to be active, an affect that connects one body with another. It is an ethico-aesthetic strategy that suggests we occupy an extended ecology. Through Fowler and McIntyre we gain the sense that it is possible to reanimate the dead by suturing together new living skins and old voices.

S.O.S.

To articulate these responses in terms that engage more than a simple defence of nature means again addressing where exactly our responsibility as human beings lies. In the early twentieth century, once they made the shocking realisation that New Zealand birds were disappearing, the humans redrew the space of nature by establishing ecosanctuaries: microcosmic areas of land surrounded by clear felled dirt and fences that burrow underground as deeply as their barbed wire tops soar into the air. In these small protective zones, accompanied by a longing for a time when they themselves were not present, humans tried to regenerate what had been lost, they tried to put the order of things back. Buller was one early advocate of offshore island sanctuaries, but remained confused as to why birds transported to these new environments did not thrive.³⁵ What appeared to be clean and pristine to the human occupier was definitely not a unit of survival for the animals.

In *New World Order* Hayden Fowler revisits this neocolonial idealism with a hopeful space of regeneration where, very literally, nature has taken on the voice of the machine. *New World Order* (2013, Fig. 6) is a video installation presenting a unit of survival: organism plus environment. Here Fowler shows us a new kind of natureculture that includes technology.³⁶ We witness a dull grey environment inhabited by pedigree mutations (chickens who have been bred by human amateurs as much as for scientific need).³⁷ Fowler has gifted these exotic birds new techno-voices that they use to call to one another.

Fig. 6
Hayden Fowler
New World Order
(*production still xiii*)
2013
colour pigment print on
cotton rag art paper
540 x 750 mm, unique
edition
Courtesy of the artist





These are seductive birds co-produced by both nature and culture.³⁸ But there is no call and response. Just a call, repeated. Mediated and transformed into technological ring-tones the chickens pierce the environment with their search for a mate. Fowler's constructed environment conjures an immediate response from human viewers; in the constant activity this world is full of hope.

The video is of a new world order layered with social and economic relationships. Inside a desolate universe this corner of a petrified forest is an environment remade by the lost voices of species attempting to communicate across space and time. The humans who established this sanctuary (if it ever was one) have long gone and the bush has taken on the patina of the petrified concrete that used to mark the spectacular skyscrapers of the past. The trees are the twisted and rusting steel of towers that appear no longer fit for human or animal habitation. Fowler highlights how Bateson's "unit of survival" is not fixed in time and space. Fowler's birds evolve together with their environment as a constantly transforming ecosystem, and it is a mistake to always think that this is always a positive thing. As Bateson says in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*: "There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds."³⁹ Fowler does not cast judgment on the spaces occupied by the chickens, nor on their ritual behaviours. *New World Order* is a work about survival not death.

Eight Legs and No Wings

Fowler and McIntyre offer some way forward for us living amongst the dead. They show how embodying the tension between shame and nostalgia is one possible site for human response. As well as finding their way to the far southern reaches of the earth, threads of vitalism and relationality also strung themselves into the French philosophical tradition and the ecosophical thought of Felix Guattari. In *The Three Ecologies* Guattari draws our attention to the operations of Integrated World Capitalism (IWC) which form within three related ecological registers that he labels: the environmental, the social and the mental. We must, he says "dare to confront the vertiginous Cosmos so as to make it inhabitable."⁴⁰

... In the future much more than the simple defence of nature will be required ... and the adoption of an ecosophical ethics adapted to this terrifying and fascinating situation is equally as urgent as the invention of a politics focused on the destiny of humanity.⁴¹

Although he does not mention extinction at this point, the kind of risky inhabitation he imagines encompasses more than individual locations. It has the potential to include other animal inhabitants who are no longer present.

One of the most cited passages in *The Three Ecologies* involves a disjunction between relationships of habitation and existence. Let's call it "the parable of the octopus". Guattari describes a live television show in which Alain Bombard

(a marine biologist known for his 1952 survivalist crossing of the Atlantic whilst consuming only fish and filtered seawater) removes a perfectly healthy (“almost dancing”) octopus from a tank filled with polluted water from the port of Marseille and immerses the octopus in a tank of apparently “normal” sea water. In Guattari’s words, “After a few seconds the animal curled up, sank to the bottom and died.”⁴² What is most depressing about this event is the realisation that Bombard must already have known that this would happen, and that the octopus did not have a chance of survival. This is paralleled by the equally unpleasant likelihood that Bombard had probably sacrificed other octopi in rehearsal for this staged media event.

I find myself returning to the passage and wondering why Guattari retells this televised execution; apart from its clear power as yet another example of humans disrespecting the other animals with which we co-habit. There must be more to it than this. For Guattari the parable of the octopus offers a way to move smoothly between two of the three ecologies that make up his ecosophical method, and demonstrates an alignment between the “monstrous and mutant algae” that have invaded and “polluted” the water and the “degenerate images and statements” that populate our television screens.⁴³ The connection is vital for his unfolding argument that environmental ecologies cannot be understood as discrete from mental and social ecologies. The octopus was another, unnecessary, victim of social ecology. And it is a neat example of the moment when animals, death, and pollution meet the social and cultural brutality of reality TV.

We could leave it there, but there is another part to the story – the part that Guattari does not fully develop. This is a human animal using another living animal to demonstrate something about habitation and adaption and life. It is a demonstration of the order of things rather than the order of relations. For a brief moment in front of the televisual audience was a perfectly happy dancing octopus in a polluted tank. Except, the pollution was NOT pollution to the octopus, it was home.

Bateson’s observation that the unit of survival is the organism plus the environment puts the madness of the octopus stunt into focus. If the octopus was already an ecology of many things, this would mean that the organism cannot be separated from its environmental ecology and that the unit of survival for the octopus was not only its body, but also included its water, and for a brief moment its tank, the television studio, the captivated viewers, and Alan Bombard.⁴⁴ In the case of the octopus, the organism that had the arrogance and power to destroy another’s environment destroys itself. To talk of the defence of nature is to ignore Bateson’s unit of survival.

Finitude

We consider species to be extinct because they no longer exist at this time, in the present. The problem is that nature is not normative, and the kinds of

interactions necessary to address species extinction are never normal. To apply ecosophical understandings based on the unit of survival to events like the death of the last of the Huia, and the death of one individual octopus, results in a definition of a social ecology where differences rather than similarity bind relationships, and where nature cannot be considered separate to the mental, social and environmental contexts it is defined within. The argument starts to accrue. Perhaps Buller dreamed about an island sanctuary that he could transport effortlessly to London, and perhaps these dreams infected the realities of the specimens he kept as pets. Whatever his intentions the birds died. Perhaps Bombard considered this one octopus a necessary sacrifice in the face of the enormity of future extinctions. Both examples suggest it is necessary to increase our ecosophical notion of the unit of survival and connect the organism not only to environment as space but also to environment as time.

In *Drowning Theory* (2011, Fig. 7) Fiona Hall uses deep time to suggest that the reanimation of nature can occur by returning extinct birds to a geological state from which they may emerge anew. Balanced on four delicate legs a long and narrow museum case holds a glass shelf upon which rest an assortment of geological shapes. They seem to be a new species of crystal, or a collection of landscape forms. The objects break the Linnaean rules of classification: it is not clear whether these are specimens of animal, mineral or vegetable. Viewed from above, the cabinet contains small mountains, all with some aspect of symmetry, yet all discretely different. It is below the shelf that the cabinet reveals itself. Suddenly the shapes are painfully real. Frosted glass icebergs mimic exactly the geological forms above and reveal themselves as bird beaks; the small brass identifying labels are actual material descriptors rather than metonymic devices. There is Whēkau, Kakapo, Huia, the enormous Moa and the tiny Mātuhi. The cabinet is not one of curiosity but is a coffin marked by a careful attention to death. The upper shapes become otherworldly. All are nature, natural. Yet they remain undefined. They are closed beaks without faces, shut mouths embedded beneath an icy surface.

The Zealandia Drowning Theory was a risky and short-lived hypothesis (first proposed in 2001 and discredited by 2012) from a group of University of Otago scientists that questioned whether New Zealand was a geologically constant landmass. They posited that New Zealand emerged from under the sea only about 23 million years ago, and thus no living organism (the lack of land mammals was a key piece of evidence) native to New Zealand could possibly have inhabited these geologically new and certainly shaky isles.⁴⁵ Rather than a drifting “Moa’s Ark” of small isolated islands with their own unique ecosystem of flora and fauna, the inhabitants of New Zealand were suggested to be recent emigrants from Australia.⁴⁶ Hall does more than illustrate the theory. *Drowning Theory* offers the possibility that perhaps these birds may emerge again. Under the crust of the earth, where they have all the time in the world, the birds wait. It is, in Guattari’s words, an “environment in the process of being reinvented.”⁴⁷

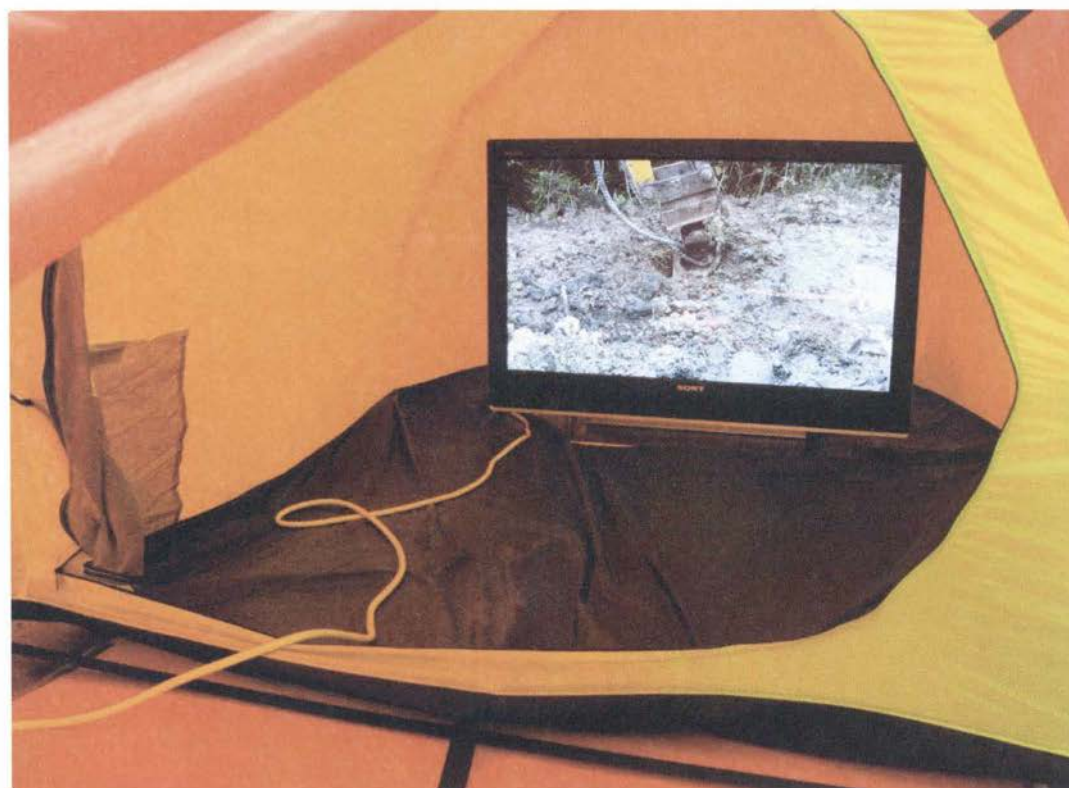


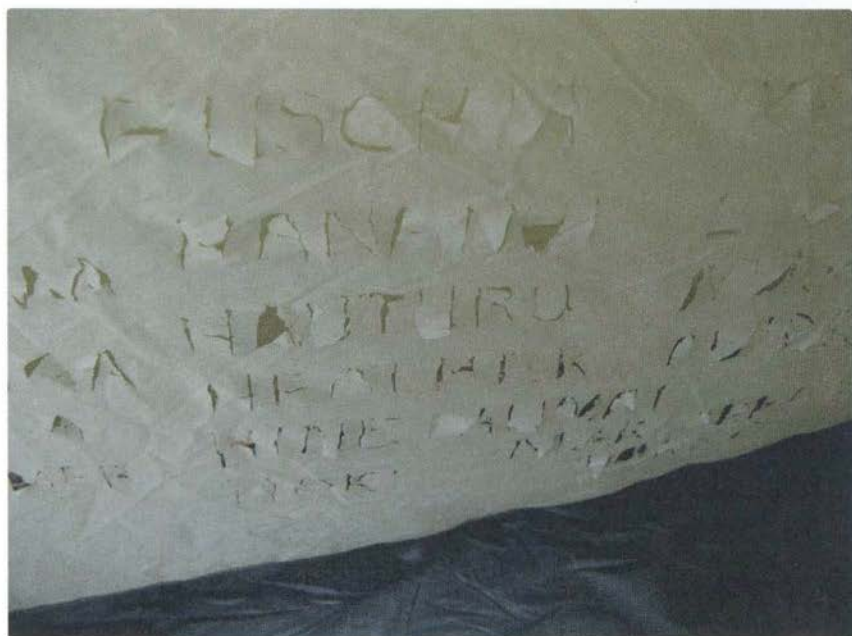
Fig. 7
 Fiona Hall
Drowning Theory 2011
 polyurethane, vitrine
 1800 x 2500 x
 400 mm
 Edition of 5 + 1 A/P
 Courtesy of the artist
 and Roslyn Oxley
 Gallery, Sydney

Parallel Landscapes

The sensation begins to emerge that European humans have never been any good at the order of relations. When this species meets other species, it does not always go well. In the contemporary art works discussed so far newly animated organisms are removed from their usual spatial locations and step outside of temporal distinctions. Fowler, McIntyre, Hammond and Hall suggest a next step in our understandings of ecosophy, and offer new material environments within which bird species can potentially live. Fowler and McIntyre supply new animation to the voice and skin of birds, whilst Hall and Hammond encapsulate the birds in a floating geological time. In their hands the environment is no longer bereft, and the unit of survival is transformed.

Where does this leave the humans? Outside of the order of relations it may be that we are the last bastion of nature. Current economic and social structures mean that concerns for biosecurity and the Romantic model of the picturesque tend to frame any attempt to “get back to nature”. In *The Middle Landscape* (2009, Figs 8–11) Stella Brennan presents humans with one last chance to





Figs 8–11
Stella Brennan
The Middle Landscape
2009
Courtesy of the artist

TOP LEFT
installation view:
Starkwhite, Auckland
tents, video, pine bark
dimensions variable

BOTTOM LEFT
installation (detail)
tents, video, pine bark
dimensions variable

TOP RIGHT
installation video still
tents, video, pine bark
dimensions variable

BOTTOM RIGHT
Installation view: *Every
Living Kakapo* (detail)
tents, video, pine bark
dimensions variable

lose themselves within this familiar definition of nature.⁴⁸ In three brightly coloured tents small events take place. In the first, an auger bores into the ground, heaving and shuddering, the earth is displaced and new fences are established. To watch it we lie on our stomachs, sensing the vibrations through the length of our bodies. In the second tent is a list of the names given to every living Kakapo (*Every Living Kakapo*, 2009), girls on one side, boys on the other: Bella, Flossy, Hinemoa, Boomer, Sirocco and their friends are etched into the thin nylon walls.⁴⁹ And in the third, a melancholic video plays. A subtitled narrator guides us through constructed nature as witnessed on a journey across Taranaki. At first it is a travel monologue familiar to anyone who has driven by car through the lush North Island bush. The curve of the lens mimics the arch of the trees and reinforces the circular separation of space into either protected nature or friable land by the surveyors who used the mountain itself as a compass.

Brennan narrates the disappearance of New Zealand's birdlife at the same time as offering humans a protective shell from which they can understand the kinds of sacrifices that are necessary for the continuation of our evolutionary story. Nylon walls do not prevent their contents from leaking. Sounds merge in the open space and images flicker in the half-light. These tents are not sanctuary islands or rafts. The aesthetic of the nature documentary, the hushed voice over and the lingering close up enable Brennan to highlight how the romantic desire to preserve nature via the order of things contributed to a total transformation of the ecology around us. The grainy rescreening of the footage via medical, televisual and video screens distances it, giving a microscopic insect eye view. The way to see all is to become very very small.

At one point our traveller encounters an abandoned geodesic habitation dome. Who or what might gain occupancy is left unresolved, as is the exact purpose of the human-sized structure. The camera seems to hover around a tree creating another kind of eye through which insects and birds can watch us. These are the ruins of a commune, of a space where humans got back to nature. We peer through the perfectly aligned triangles and listen to the bees; the last remaining occupants of this site who have survived in the absence of humans. The video is fragmented, hidden beneath gauze as if viewed through mesh security screens. And then we are in a motel, paying for an evening's temporary habitation. And there is another octopus, being watched.

On another channel
Is a Japanese nature documentary
An octopus hanging mid current
Furls itself up,
While a little porthole of peering faces
Is blue screened into
the corner of the picture,

Their loud amazement at this wonder
 Superimposed on a blank bit of ocean
 The scene is a composite version of a familiar trope.⁵⁰

This time the octopus is left to go about her business and it is the viewers who are immersed in a green-screened tank. Brennan traces layers of mediation: the Japanese nature documentary; the green-screened audience who model appropriate responses; the television in the corner of a musty motel in central New Zealand; the eye of the camera filming the television. These are all nature (the “umwelt” of the video). Rather than mourn the loss of a pure concept, Brennan documents a world where we are learning to live with multiple and strange creatures whether biological or machinic. It seems brutal, but this is what Samuel Butler warned us of when he invoked the evolutionary powers of machines.

Survival

Brennan's should be the final work in this narrative of cross-species engagements as it offers a non-judgemental statement about the impossibility of getting it right, and the need to keep asking questions of ourselves as active players only temporarily sheltering within our chosen environments. However it is difficult to finish this discussion without returning to the birds. The 5th of July 2014 marked 100 years since the last sighting of a Laughing Owl or Whēkau in the wild. Surviving the first decades of the human invasion, in 1914 the last recorded Whēkau was found dead on the side of a road in Canterbury. In the bird hall of the Canterbury Museum Sally Ann McIntyre commemorated the occasion with a new work: *A Memorial Silence for Sceloglaux Albifacies, on the Centenary of its Extinction* (2014, Fig. 12). Standing in companionship with many other silenced animals, McIntyre recorded the bird as it perched in its final home.⁵¹ Marking the same event from the other side of the world Hayden Fowler staged the new work *Your Death* (2014–15, Fig. 13). In a pure white geodesic dome built into a Berlin street window Fowler had a Whēkau tattooed on his chest.⁵² This Whēkau is in flight, resting against the soft surface of Fowler's body, the bird scans the environment around him. His feet hang relaxed and ready, his head is bowed watching, there is no mouse, no tree, just the image of a living bird.

When Owen began his research on Moa bones, and Buller's global trade in native bodies was in its infancy, nature was a newly redefined concept that seemed to raise logical and oppositional definitions. In these most recent works Fowler and McIntyre offer a new way to engage rather than defend nature. The anniversary of the death of the Whēkau is about much more than a record of romance and nostalgia. McIntyre adds sensory presence to the intangibility of the scientific catalogue. Fowler's body is much more than a canvas for an illustration, as the needle embeds its ink within his skin, he becomes bird, a conjunction of living bodies.⁵³ McIntyre's silence and Fowler's body return us



Fig. 12
Sally Ann McIntyre
*A Memorial Silence
for SceloglauX
Albifacies, on the
Centenary of its
Extinction 2014*
performance and
recording, 10 mins
Courtesy of the artist

to the ideological power structures behind the processes of museum collections and species extinction. Once again it is the machinations of integrated world capitalism, and human social and metal ecologies that have contribute to the death of species.

At the end of *The Three Ecologies* Guattari makes his plea for a future ecology that articulates not only new forms of subjectivity outside those recommended by the mass media, but also a radical reconsideration of what it means to be part of a society. These are his mental and social ecologies. It is the third ecology I have focused on here: the “environment in the process of being reinvented.”⁵⁴ Guattari’s environment is a process always in the middle, one in which the order of relations is infinite and within which anything is still possible. It is clear that in this definition Guattari is drawing on Bateson. And it is also Bateson’s approach that has opened up this narrow study of extinction events, and enabled me to think of their ongoing significance for our understanding of the great risks we face today. In “Pathologies of Epistemology” Bateson writes:

Ecology, in the widest sense, turns out to be the study of the interaction and survival of ideas and programs (i.e., differences, complexes of differences, etc.) in circuits.⁵⁵

The only way we can know another species (in circuits) is to acknowledge and imagine the full range of interrelations possible with that organism and their environment – their differences and our differences. Equally, it is essential we understand that organisms are never singular. Donna Haraway articulates this as a problem of habitation when she opens her book *When Species Meet* with an extended passage thinking about the shifting deaths of the various organisms that form the being that is her body.⁵⁶ It all seems strangely normal. Haraway encourages us to start thinking about the kinds of natural environments these mundane spaces we call bodies need, in order to get on with the business of being, in this world. This is difficult enough, and as continually and partially reforming human bodies it is hard to imagine if we have anything more we can offer to other animals who may be struggling with the contemporary situation they find themselves within.

In New Zealand the risk is that we continue to think of these birds in isolation. I wonder what happens when we further extend the ethico-aesthetics of capital towards a consideration of the colonial environment of local extinction events and directly engage with the temporal disjunction that remains after a species has vanished. Without acknowledgement of shifting and changing environments we continue to subscribe to the order of things. The artists discussed in this essay suggest an alternative: that the birds are already and have always been embedded in environment, even in their death. These works stage small moments of encounter, moments of time and of space, which remind us that the survival of ideas is intimately tied to our experiences of

Fig. 13
Hayden Fowler
Your Death 2014
performance
documentation:
Michael Reid Gallery
Berlin, June 2014
Courtesy of the artist

ourselves in relation to the environment, that in turn, makes up our unit of survival. We are presented with spaces where relics are inscribed onto a body or housed within museum cases and times where the scent of an old tent surrenders itself to the spaces around it. In each work extreme and unthinkable events begin to generate new sensations. Together they offer a future ethico-aesthetic; the ephemerality of their actions is risky, yet together they suggest we embrace much more than the order of things.

- Dame Anne Salmond, "Shifting New Zealand's Mindset" *New Zealand Herald*. Published text of the First Sir Paul Reeves Memorial Lecture, August 18, 2012. http://www.nzherald.co.nz/environment/news/article.cfm?c_id=39&objectid=10827658 (accessed July 17, 2014).
- Salmond's essay gives a fantastic articulation of the ways in which European ideas of relations (to which I would add the thought of Deleuze, Spinoza, Bergson) connect to Maori concepts of whakapapa and logics of "negotiation and exchange."
- Her discussion can also be connected to the influential work of Carolyn Merchant who has demonstrated how the order of things (what Merchant calls "the hegemony of mechanistic science") conflated women and nature in order to control both. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).
- Kevin C. Armitage, "Bird Day for Kids: Progressive Conservation in Theory And Practice," *Environmental History* 12, no. 3 (July 2007): 529.
- See Sirocco's twitter feed: <https://twitter.com/spokesbird/status/569972646932299777>
- Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 62-63.
- Levi Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 252.
- Gregory Bateson, "Pathologies of Epistemology," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology*, (London: Pimlico Press, 1972), 489.
- Bateson, "Pathologies of Epistemology," 489.
- Quoted in Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), note 1, 70.
- Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 114.
- Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 41.
- Richard Holdaway, "Extinctions – Extinctions in the Human Era," *Te Ara The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 13 July 2012. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/extinctions/page-3> (accessed July 17, 2014).
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40. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 66-67.
41. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 67.
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43. "Just as monstrous and mutant algae invade the lagoon of Venice, so our television screens are populated, saturated, by 'degenerate' images and statements." Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 43.
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46. Armstrong, "Moa Citings."
47. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 68.
48. See: <http://www.starkwhite.co.nz/exhibitions/stella-brennan-the-middle-landscape.aspx> (accessed July 17, 2014).
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50. Transcription from Stella Brennan *The Middle Landscape*.
51. Fiona Pardington photographed the same Whēkau in 2004. (Fiona Pardington, *Whēkau Laughing Owl*, 2004. C-type print mounted on dibond. Unique presentation, 1600 x 1200 mm). See: <http://radiocegeste.blogspot.com.au/2014/07/a-memorial-silence-for-sceloglaux.html> (accessed July 17, 2014).
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The Ecology of the Visit

Geoff Park

Fig. 1
Josiah Martin
Fern Stand, Okoroire,
Rotorua Road
19th century
McDonald Album
of New Zealand
Photographs
albumen print
293 x 238 mm
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki,
purchased 1973

Geoff Park (1946–2009), ecologist and author of the now seminal Nga Ururoa: The Groves of Life (1995) wrote the essay “The Ecology of the Visit” in 2000 during the early phases of his work at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Geoff was employed as Concept Leader Natural History at the national museum, a title only someone with Geoff’s intellectual dexterity could hope to bring into action. Prior to my arrival at the museum as curator contemporary art I must have read the essay intensively as my issue of Landfall is riddled with lines, exclamation marks, and even something that looks like a doddle-as-collage as I sat on the page and contemplated how this ecologist was managing to intervene in New Zealand’s art history. Our desks ended up next to each other the following year in this hybrid of curatorial activity from natural science, Art, Māori, Pacific and History. It was a memorable time, but very few managed to live up to the Museum’s ambitions to cultivate a way of thinking across disciplinary lines in ways that were generative for scholarship and cultural enquiry. This essay is such an example, embodying how a wealth of research into the natural, botanical and ecological conditions of New Zealand can be understood properly through analysis of social, cultural and in this case art historical events.

This small, personal, ranging essay achieves an enormous invocation, which is to announce a paradox at the heart of New Zealand’s much loved, much touted, natural environment – that preservation has been maintained through the subordination of indigeneity. I remember well Geoff’s recitation of Stephenson Percy Smith (government Surveyor-General in the 1890s) his assertions, character, and aesthetic values. His ability to visualise the ecological past and characters such as these in cross-cultural terms, enabled readers and listeners to set aside their usual terms of engagement with “the environment”, “nature” or “landscape” and shape a denser perspective on what we have and what might be. The essay starts with his own, his family’s time at Lake Rotoiti, and things noticed during a lifetime of observation and co-habitation, and ends with a pledge to incorporate Māori understanding of whenua and the lived-in wild in order to dislodge a historical relationship with preservation in this country which has depended on remote views and visits – their economy and aesthetic.

– Natasha Conland

We seemed to be the only ones in the bay who noticed. But even then, it was a good month or more after the event. We'd overwintered in the city that year and I yearned for the lake's organic wildness. So, gathering excited offspring, we drove there through the night. It was when we came out into the warm spring sunlight next morning that everyone felt the difference in the place. The shags had gone. Completely.

Until that morning, *whenever* you looked skyward, you'd see a two-way line of bird traffic stringing from one horizon to the other: to and from the old pohutukawas on the lake cliffs in which they'd rest and dry out between feeding dives, and home. Right over our place. The hundreds of shags who, almost without exception, took this particular passage were scarcely a river-of-birds, as Columbus called the seemingly endless migratory flow he sailed beneath as America began to manifest itself in European imaginations. But in a landscape whose interweaving of earth and water made it one of many beauties, this arc of birds streaming so determinedly across the sky was, to my eyes, its most animate. In its sudden absence I was aware of something lost.

Home for the shags was a place where scenic tourism had its New Zealand beginnings: a waterfalled gorge amid a remarkable convergence of lake, river and forest, suffused with wairua and myth, a place of ancestral burials. A romantic's landscape. A "scenic wonder" that tourists to New Zealand have been visiting since they travelled with Wordsworth's Lakeland poems in their baggage. A "favourite resort" of which it was said, 80 years ago: "hundreds of tourists used to go there, and the Native girls who were selected as guides used to take them over this beauty spot".

When the tourist road first came to the lake, and local Māori still got "a nice little income" from it, there was a hotel and a restaurant, the Duke of Edinburgh, for those who travelled in search of new scenes. It was another 30 years before the meeting of gorge and lake became one of New Zealand's first scenic reserves. Katherine Mansfield stayed here after her Urewera journey, and *The Scenic Paradise of the World*, the government's tourist guide to New Zealand, extolled the "charmingly idyllic trip" you could take to see wild, wooded hills "mirrored in the bosom of the lake". By then, though, the lake's Māori were beginning to realise that this way of looking at their lake was why it felt less and less like theirs.

The shags didn't mind the tourists. By the 1980s, they were watching columns of people going down the steps to Tutea's Falls as they, full of fish, flew in from the lake, lined up their entry to the gorge and wound their way down between its cliffs to their otherwise inaccessible roost trees – in which, in spring, their young waited. Then, about a month before our return to the lake, the gorge was discovered by a new type of visitor.

Geared up in wet suits and helmets and fired up by the guide's drill, people go white-water rafting for the sheer adrenalin whoop of it. Some of the wildest

rapids and thus some of the most exhilarated yelling were right beneath the shags' roost trees. The shags couldn't hack it. How a shag colony determines what it does in such a situation, whether a great council of sub-colony elders confers, I don't know. But the gorge was suddenly no longer the sanctuary they needed to raise their young, and in the midst of preparing for the new year's infants, every bird upped and left.

One way in which a visitor to a place becomes an inhabitant is through attentiveness to the lives of its other species and how, through them, the ecology coheres. Watching the shags, I learned that lake and gorge are linked by more than water. Unlike a rainbow, the arc of shags across the sky had an end. Once I'd discovered it, I'd often creep down from the gorge track and as close to the roost trees as I'd dare, and sit and watch shag life. That spring, though, it was a ghost town. The guanoed gatherings of twigs had been built soundly enough for it to seem, for the first year, that the birds were merely away for a while. But then nest after nest began to decay and collapse, and, within five years, you'd hardly know they had been there.

Nowadays, rafters and kayakers have become serious players in the local ecology. Dangling from wires, the poles of a slalom course colour the rapids below the lake-level control weir. The gorge has become a place of pullouts and timber-decked lookouts, and the folk who've moved into the old coach house want to reopen it as a café. In the Resource Consent notice nailed to a tree outside, they call the place a playground.

The shags, in their far-less-optimal lakeshore trees, might appreciate the irony in a notice at the car park end of the gorge: "*Enjoy your visit. Toitu te whenua. Leave the land undisturbed.*" Its Māori words should not be taken to mean that the landscape's Māori are its kaitiaki, its guardians and caregivers. When the Resource Management Act 1991 enabled local community groups with an established history of guardianship of their environment to apply to be a Heritage Protection Authority, one of the first applicants – fed up with the disturbance inflicted on their ancestral gorge by the government's pact with tourism – was the local tribe's runanga. Persuaded of the runanga's descent from the lake's customary fishers, and the fact that administration of the Resource Management Act was meant to reflect the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, government environmental officials considered it a good idea. Their minister didn't though.

It wasn't the first time that tourism had caused havoc among the lake's native shags. Well into the 1960s, they were routine targets of Crown wildlife rangers' rifles. The rangers were defending one of the prime reasons tourists visited the lake and its outfall river – the quality habitat they provided for exotic trout. When trout were being "acclimatised", it was the prerogative of local Acclimatisation

Societies to “extirpate... the shag vermin”. In 1912–13, the societies whose domain included the central North Island lakes paid £500 to men to work the lake shores till the shags “were all destroyed”; a bounty of 2s 6d a bird. Reporting some 2064 shags killed, the Conservator of Fish and Game said the intention was to “rid the district of these birds”. To those who had long fished the lakes and knew the lakes’ shags as an integral part of their ecology, the killings were wrong. The Māori, some fishermen told the Conservator in the early 1930s, said it was a mistake to kill shags – “they were of service to the fish instead of being inimical to them”.

But for local Māori, it was the beginning of a cascade of ecological change in their landscape. The ecology of their sustenance proved all too attractive to visitors wanting to see what the 1903 *Guide to New Zealand* called the “Tourists’ Elysium and World’s Sanatorium”, whose:

SCENERY is unrivalled for beauty and grandeur.

RIVERS, LAKES AND WATERFALLS are incomparably beautiful.

TROUT STREAMS AND DEER FORESTS offer the best of sport.

Trout Pool Road reads the highway road sign designed to bring visitors to the gorge. Ever since the first introduced trout flourished in New Zealand waters, they have been a vital factor in the scenic New Zealand package. They have wrought changes in New Zealand’s native freshwater ecosystems as massive as any of the species brought here by nineteenth-century colonists. In this lake and its waterways, trout decimated indigenous fish species, and with it, a primary Māori food resource.

When Gilbert Mair first saw these lakes in 1880 he was astounded by the richness of their wildlife. His hankering to shoot game was tempered by Māori for whom, he said, the lake was “held sacred as far as sport was concerned... sacred to the Natives, and the only manner to secure the birds was by snares”. Just as the various hapu around the lakes had their own marked-off fishing grounds, they had exclusive, and jealously guarded, rights over the nesting areas of birds, shags among them. If you had reason to pass time among the lake people before trout and English common law entered their landscape, as Mair did in his role as a Native Land Court judge, you might have been similarly struck by their intimate knowledge of the lakes’ ecology. After some half a century of Land Court experience, Mair said that he knew of “no land in New Zealand... more absolutely, more thoroughly, more completely, and more thoroughly under Maori owners’ customs and rights than these two lakes”. The reason: “for their food-supply the people of the blocks surrounding these two lakes depended very much more upon the lake than upon the dry land”.

Trout changed all that. Mair himself confessed to introducing them.

In 1918 he spoke with regret of how “these European fish swarm in these

lakes so numerously . . . merely . . . to give sport (so called) to tourists in knickerbockers while the Native owners are sometimes on the verge of starvation". Government officials first placed trout fry in the lakes in 1880. Within 25 years, licensed tourist anglers were pulling over 28 tons of trout a year from them. Māori without licences could not. Inevitably, in 1908, there was a prosecution, of a young Māori cleric fishing where his hapu had customary rights. The case led to local Māori seeking a determination of their customary rights to the lakes, and to a protracted legal battle with the Crown. The lakes' Māori had been as resolute as any in their refusal to sell land, and, for the Crown, customary rights were the one real obstacle facing the state-owned and operated tourist industry emerging in force around the Rotorua lakes' scenery. A Solicitor-General advised the government that "under no circumstances should Natives obtain freehold title in respect of such waters" and the 1909 Native Land Act rendered Maori customary title unassertable against the Crown. One legal historian, Paul McHugh, has called it "amongst the most serious legislative violations of the Treaty of Waitangi during the last 150 years".

By the time it had prised the Rotorua lakes and their waterways out of Māori hands, the government knew well the relationship between tourist revenue and scenic landscape. And it was becoming earnest about controlling that relationship.

By 1903, "scenery preservation" had its own Act of Parliament, and a government commission to seek out needed scenes. By the time the Rotorua lakes' Māori began their litigation to keep what was left of the ecology that sustained them, the Scenery Preservation Commission had identified "acquisition and reservation of Maori lands containing thermal attractions in the Rotorua District" as one of its most urgent aims. In 1910, the Scenery Preservation Amendment Act was passed "to give the Crown an undoubted right to take for scenery-preservation purposes lands at present held by Native owners". The following year, the Commission reported, "an unusually large area of land was acquired and reserved".

Citing what the English papers were saying about the "suicidal folly" of not rendering New Zealand's scenery "more accessible", the politicians of the 1890s made it a matter of law and policy. But probably no person did more to preserve scenery than the government's Surveyor-General in those years: Stephenson Percy Smith. In future, he instructed his district surveyors, "attention must be given in dealing with Crown lands to the reservation of all places of natural beauty of whatsoever nature, which are likely to become resorts for the people of the country hereafter". He was especially mindful of lakes and rivers, "not alone in the interests of the conservation of their banks, but in the interests of tourists and other travellers".

Percy Smith's words touched on a quality of country that his culture had always considered superb about New Zealand. He was a man with "an eye for the picturesque", as his obituarist described him, in a countryside fast becoming exceedingly *unpicturesque*. Many of the landscapes of what we today call "conservation" and "eco-tourism" would not exist had it not been for his propensity for looking at country as beautiful scenes, imagining them as framed paintings, and choosing those most worthy of our gaze, our visits.

Lakes set amid wild woods and glades were among what the famous early nineteenth-century English landscape designer Humphrey Repton called "the most pleasing works of nature". Those who have attempted to quantify the aesthetic response to landscape tell us that environments combining water, green vegetation and spatial openness are those most preferred by the human animal. Citing archaeological evidence from the East African savanna, where early hominid camps were located at the edge of water, they suggest it is an ancient human affinity.

But seeing lakes as Repton did is a cultural persuasion, barely 200 years old. Lakes and waterways with woods, mountains, figures – and ruins – are essential components of the French and Italian landscape paintings that, as English eyes were first encountering New Zealand, were all the rage among Englishmen of taste and influence. And as Claude's and Poussin's enchanting scenes prepared the elegant English to aesthetically appreciate the interworking of human and natural history, they enabled a traveller of Joseph Banks's erudition to designate the coastal features he saw from the *Endeavour* "picturesque": to extend the landscape aesthetic from canvas to the country itself.

... the romantic shores of the Sound ... the scenery became more and more majestic as we advanced into this noble estuary. It was impossible not to be struck by the majesty of this primæval forest ... [but] although the immediate vicinity of Ship Cove could boast of excellent harbours and sublime scenery, it was not at all suited for a large colony.
– Jerningham Wakefield, 1839

Tucking in right after the discoverer's landfall, the visit is a cardinal element in the New Zealand colonial narrative. Scenery was not the principal quality the colonisers sought in the land for which they'd crossed the world, but it was nonetheless reported on fervently.

When Jerningham Wakefield made "Landfall at Cook Strait" he did not imagine the country as a new England, proud in fields and oak woods, but described himself instead "absorbed in contemplating the luxurious vegetation". No first-comer, he was in many ways a tourist, "eager to touch the land" and to visit

a place that was already considered highly visitable. Wakefield's astonished account of his moment in history – "How well Cook has described the harmony of the birds at this very spot" – tells us many things in its few words, not least that Wakefield was mindful of the company he'd put himself in.

Wakefield reported his visit to Ship Cove in a *particular* language, as at least half of the pre-1850 colonial diaries surviving in the Turnbull and Hocken Libraries do: in feelings rooted in a tradition of landscape aesthetics, and expressed in the iconography of scenery. That tradition and iconography continue to remind us who, colonially, we are. You see it when you visit Ship Cove's Cook Monument and picnic ground today. The sublime scenery has been kept intact by keeping out all those who are not just passing through. When all visitors have gone, there's not a soul in sight.

Whatever ideas Jerningham Wakefield communicated to the canoe-loads of Māori who gathered around him, "sublime scenery" was not one of them. It was too novel and culturally idiosyncratic an idea to have much equivalence. Appropriated from the theatre and the imaginations of fashionable eighteenth-century painters, it began inhabiting "the landscape" only a few decades prior, in travellers' guides to Britain's remote corners. One of the earliest, Thomas West's 1778 *Guide to the Lakes for Lovers of Landscape Studies*, was replete with scenes "as sweet as a travelled eye ever beheld". It was why, perhaps, Jerningham Wakefield's fellow passenger on the *Tory*, Charles Heaphy, evoked the appearance of Wellington Harbour a few weeks after the New Zealand Company's advance scouts had been to Ship Cove as a "beauty certainly far surpassing that of our English lakes".

The scenery idea flourished in the late nineteenth century when wealthy Englishmen like Sir Charles Dilke were able to visit the beautiful reaches of the Empire and pronounce in his travelogue that "in the union of rich foliage with deep colour and grand forms, no scenery save that of New Zealand can bear comparison with that of the hill country of Ceylon".

The early nature appreciation movement was, to a degree, romantic; poets and painters were its seers. It was also a form of connoisseurship for people of what Thomas West called "quality and fashion". By 1844, however, English tourist railways were disgorging Sunday crowds from city factories into their scenes. Dismayed at the "swarms of uneducated pleasure-hunters" invading his beloved Lake District – more toting his scenic guide than his nature-immersed poems – an ageing William Wordsworth sniffed: "the perception of what has acquired the name of picturesque and romantic scenery is so far from being intuitive, that it can be produced only by a slow and gradual process of culture".

The "beauty" of Nature was something which only those travellers cultivated in fine painting and landscape gardening could appreciate – those Charles Dilke called "the greater Saxondom which includes all that is best and wisest in the

world”. Māori were thus unqualified. At about the same time that Wordsworth was complaining to his local paper about the “humbler ranks of society” being able to access his “beautiful region”, William Cotton was retreating from Central North Island weather: “When we came to the first view of Taupo the sun was just setting – such purples! As I said to the Bishop this view of Taupo quite repaid us for our forced retreat. Not so the Maories. They had no eye for the beauties of nature.”

No less baffled than Cotton were those who 70 years later were busy cordoning off the “beauties of nature” as Crown reserves. “Do not the Maori inhabitants of this country take a pride in its beauty”, asked the government’s Inspector of Scenic Reserves, E. Phillips Turner, in 1914, when Whanganui River Māori objected to the conversion of their homelands into scenery. “Do they not wish to see preserved for their heirs even small portions of that forest in which their ancestors for a thousand years have hunted, and every plant of which they knew with a familiarity superior to that of the most ardent modern gardenlover?”

The essential literary expression of that sense of beauty has to be Blanche Baughan’s *River of Pictures and Peace*, written in the Whanganui in 1916, the same year the Scenery Preservation Commission reported on the Māori riverland it was taking:

Ah, and of what do you now dream, and I, as the waka glides along ...
Through this ... river dream ... this mood of ferns and mosses and flowing
waters, as though through a secret doorway, into what sanctuary were we
for a moment admitted, of established and profound Well-being, where
Truth most palpably was Beauty? Upon what deepening of ourselves have
we chanced here ... beyond reason into soul ... out of life into Life? ...
o Nature, miracle-worker! you can do more than make a rift into a river.
Man, the painploughed, the passion-distracted, you can make for a
moment into Man the Seer! And for a few moments at least, we know
ourselves to have been a part of that Peace which passeth understanding.

It is a visitor’s beauty, not an inhabitant’s. To experience it you had to be seeking solace, escaping from ordinary life into the elsewhere of scenery for a few aesthetic moments. This is the beauty – the tourist elixir – from and for which New Zealand’s protected area system has been built.

It was the organising principle of one of New Zealand’s first scenic “wilderness” guides. “Of all the New Zealand lakes”, said Percy Smith’s introduction to *Waikare-Moana: The Sea of Rippling Waters*, “Waikaremoana stands second for beauty, Manapouri taking first place.” The guide’s author, the ethnologist Elsdon Best, prefaced his accounts of “delightful scenery” with a description of the scenic wilderness motive itself:

And, moreover, there comes to him, as there comes to all who truly love to view the face of mother Nature, the desire to look upon the unwrought wilderness and note the war which has waged for untold centuries between it and primitive man neolithic man, who has opened up the trails through the great forest he could not conquer trails by which the incoming pioneers of the Age of Steel shall pass along, to leave behind them peace in place of war, thriving hamlets for stockaded pas, fields of waving grain for jungle and for forest. And with this there also comes that strange sensation of vivid interest and pleasing anticipation which is felt by the ethnologist, botanist and lover of primitive folk-lore when entering on a new field for research. For the glamour of the wilderness is upon him...

Then the narrative embarks onto Waikaremoana:

across the rippling waters to Waikopiro, another ancient settlement... At this place a small rivulet trickles down... at certain seasons the little maehe fish come in myriads to drink these waters, at which times they are taken in great numbers by the Natives... Next comes Te Umu-titi, so named from the ovens (umu) used for cooking the mutton-bird (titi) which formerly abounded here. Then... Te Piripiri, a famous spot among kaka (parrot) snarers, and Te Rawa, also a favourite resort of bird-catchers, the adjacent spurs of the Whare-ama Range being a famous *whenua pua* – that is to say, a land rich in the peculiar berries, and so forth, which the kaka, koko (or tui) and kereru (pigeon) feed upon. We are here informed by the Kaumatua that his tribe have a reserve at this place; doubtless a clear-headed people, these Tuhoe.

Clear-headed enough, surely, not to call their country “unwrought wilderness”? Waikaremoana’s most beautiful scenery, according to Best, is that farthest from the road. Most beautiful of all is “Wha-kenepuru, a lovely spot, with a short sandy reach of shore-line, and the picturesque wooded isle of Te Ure-o-Patae”. To emphasise the point, perhaps, Best’s guide included a painting of the scene by his mentor Percy Smith.

It’s late afternoon by the time we come around into Wha-kenepuru and paddle up to Te Ureo-Patae. But Patae’s Penis is no longer an island. It was reduced to a peninsula in the year I was born, when the government lowered the lake level for a power scheme. Best’s sandy shoreline is no longer, like the maehe fish that vanished when the government introduced trout. It’s a week from Midsummer’s Day and in the warm silence, way out on the limpid water, we’re greeted by the smell of the manuka forest that now sprawls across the peninsula.

There is not a soul to be seen, so we pull ashore and pitch the tent at the edge of the trees. An armload of bride manuka is soon sending a scented curl of smoke into the sky. Watching the sun through it, dropping behind the forest across the bay, it is easy to be persuaded that you are looking upon Elsdon Best's "unwrought wilderness", or that you are in that space embodying "remoteness and discovery, challenge, solitude, freedom and romance", as wilderness was recently defined by government national park policy.

Te Ure-o-Patae's distance from the road and the garrison of British soldiers at Onepoto made it the sanctuary to which Tuhoe guided Te Kooti and his followers in 1869. Colonel John St John, the commander of the brutal military search, saw the country of their vanishing rather differently. "A tourist," he said, "could have been delighted with the excursion I took under circumstances not unfavourable to a search after the picturesque."

Te Urewera is the country in which we can see most vividly the path this piece of the Pax Britannica has made through New Zealand history: the umbilical cord connecting what the Victorians and Edwardians called "Maoriland scenery" to our national parks and wilderness zones. The state's attempt to secure what William Massey called "samples of the primaevial scenery that existed in the country at the advent of European occupation" are evidence of a bitter and bedrock paradox of New Zealand history: preservation was also subordination. That paradox, I suspect, is what led Colin McCahon, when commissioned to express "the mystery of man in Te Urewera" for the Urewera National Park's Visitors Centre, to create the Urewera Mural – depending on your politics, New Zealand's most famous or infamous painting. Smoulderingly beautiful in its own way, Colin McCahon's paean to land as whenua rebukes the state's attempt to institutionalise beauty, to take the "picturesque region", as Best called Te Urewera, from Māori homeland to Pākehā wilderness. Echoing with ancestral names, McCahon's dark hills are not wild but profoundly cultured. Ironically, the names that Tuhoe required McCahon to delete from the Mural's first version had been found by McCahon in material Best gathered.

At the root of Elsdon Best's reverie was his – and Percy Smith's – ethnology. Tuhoe, he told Smith, were "the most primitive people of the Maori race in New Zealand". His words would have never been written had not Smith, the Surveyor-General in the 1890s, got him a job as camp overseer on the new road the government was cutting through the Urewera forest to Lake Waikaremoana. Best's main purpose, though, was to collect ethnological information on Tuhoe and send it to Smith, who was also president of the Polynesian Society and editor of its *Journal*. As Best was soon relating to Smith, Te Urewera was "really a splendid district for the collector and I can plainly see that I shall possess a huge mass of matter by the time I come back to Wellington". The result, Best's *Tuhoe: Children of the Mist*, is one of the most comprehensive ethnographic accounts of Māori.

For Tuhoe themselves, though, the 1890s were a time of great uncertainty. Some wanted the government road, as they wanted surveyors and schools and an end to their isolation from the rest of New Zealand. Others wanted “the whole of Tuhoe land, with its mountains and forests... set aside as a reserve for the Native people, where the Natives could develop themselves, and where the native birds, which had been driven out of other parts owing to the advance of civilisation, could be preserved”. Which is what happened, the year before Best published *The Sea of Rippling Waters*, when special legislation in 1896 created the Urewera District Native Reserve Act. The Act’s provisions for scenery preservation brought it political support at a time of settler antipathy to any legislative recognition of tribal authority and Māori selfgovernment. As Thomas McKenzie, one of the political advocates of scenery preservation, said in the debate on its Bill, the reserve would complement the “marvellous alpine scenery” of the South Island and the North’s thermal features: “why not add to that what is attractive in its way – the Natives in their original state, and the native flora and fauna which exist to a very large extent in the Urewera Country?”

When Jerningham Wakefield, on the Whanganui river in the early 1840s, bid his readers to “picture to yourself this scenery”, it was a vision of primeval riverbanks that roused him. And when, 50 years later, scenic tourism became a force in the landscape, the vision had scarcely altered. Initially at least, Māori life was a vital part of “the beautiful scene”. The numerous editions of *The Scenic Paradise of the World*, the government’s tourist guide to New Zealand in the 1900s, brim with Māori imagery. The Urewera country, the guide said, was “interesting because of its remarkably fine scenery, but more particularly because of its inhabitants – about a thousand natives of the Urewera and Tuhoe tribe. These people, whose villages are scattered here and there along the more fertile patches in the bush-girt valleys, were the last in New Zealand to submit to the Pakeha and his works.”

In 1916 Blanche Baughan travels the Whanganui, “the river of pictures and peace”. Notwithstanding her preoccupation with Nature’s beauty, Baughan knew that a human quality was needed “to complete the picture”. From the wharepuni of Parinui she reflected on the unseen river below: “All day we have been sharing its frank, friendly life; and now to share so naturally the naïve life of the brown man continues, do you not feel? the same melody in another key. What a lovely kind land it is! Everywhere frank and fresh, almost everywhere beautiful, New Zealand is always sure of the Nature-lover’s heart.”

In their separate paeans to the people of the land, *The Scenic Paradise of the World* and the river dreamer were simply being true to the land-as-scenery idea. As we’ve seen, it’s an idea whose evolution we can follow back through English tourist guides toward William Wordsworth’s vision of a “perfect republic of Shepherds and Agriculturalists”. His proposal that such a republic should be cared for as “a sort of national property” led to today’s Lake District National Park. When that idea was transplanted to New Zealand, it underwent a signal distortion.

As long as nature is seen as in some way outside us, frontiered and foreign, *separate*, it is lost both to us and in us. The two natures, private and public, human and non-human, cannot be divorced; any more than nature, or life itself, can ever be truly understood vicariously, solely through other people's eyes and knowledge.

– John Fowles, *The Tree*

George Bernard Shaw was a telling observer of manners. What he noticed most – and thought peculiar – about New Zealanders when he visited in the 1930s was their determination to show him the scenery: each district's “last bit of original bush”. We are all familiar with this doubleness in our response to country: the same history that produces the urge to be native, to belong at one with the nature of the place, has created a nature from which we are profoundly separated.

New Zealand has changed prodigiously since Shaw saw it. But its scenes and our sense of them haven't. When we define ourselves as inhabitants of certain islands in the South Pacific, it is scenery that we call upon as a proof of identity: the native, indigenous wild stuff of that place increasingly called Aotearoa. We haven't lost Elsdon Best's “desire to look upon the unwrought wilderness”. It was in this scenic urge that Shaw saw the Englishness that was so peculiarly preserved here. Jaded Victorianisms still lingered in this antipodean cabinet of curiosities. But what William Massey meant by “primaeval scenery” in New Zealand in 1915 was quite unlike the English scenery Thomas West admired in England in 1778.

Scenery preservation became state policy in a colonial climate suffused with ideas of Social Darwinism. The art historian Bernard Smith has written of how the turn-of-the-century Social Darwinists transformed evolutionary theory “into an ideology for the pursuit of power ... a superior strategy for the control and subjugation of technologically weaker peoples”. Its agency in New Zealand lay in amateur ethnologists like the Polynesian Society and Scenery Preservation Commission boss – and Surveyor-General – Percy Smith, and the New Zealand Institute's Sir Walter Buller. Smith wrote of a “Great Fleet” of Polynesian refugees arriving in a perfect landscape only a few centuries before, while Buller wrote of “the pathos of a great departing race” who were vanishing just as suddenly. These notions fused to form the idea of an indigenous-ecology-without-people – the guiding principle of today's conservation of biodiversity.

Suddenly New Zealand was not only “the Scenic Paradise of the World”. Its ecosystem of true natives, its flora and fauna so strange, primitive and assailable, had become “the most interesting and instructive in the world”. Laws were crafted to expunge native custom from the landscape, and, no less suddenly, state policies were returning native forest, lake and river country to what James McKenzie in

1901 called their “old primaevial grandeur”. Its human natives became “poachers” if they continued to hunt its birds. All of which leads to the belief that we humans have our places, and other native species have theirs. And this split is what stops us from seeing country as ecosystems rather than scenes to pass through. Should we leave such notions unexamined simply because their vessel in the national landscape is the besieged-enough-as-it-is conservation estate?

We acknowledge the changes wrought in New Zealand’s ecosystems whenever we utter the word “landscape”. Art historians locate its roots in the retreat from nature that emerged in fifteenth-century European and Mediterranean cultures and the ideology of their organised religions. It was here that nature began to be perceived in linear/mathematical terms and represented framed as pictured objects, the two principal means by which, historically, people came to see themselves as observers of nature, more removed from than connected to it. Nature went “out there”. We see this distancing at work in all the landscape arts, of which travel is one, and in our efforts to cordon off “samples of primaevial scenery”. The colonial policy of “setting aside small reserves of native forest every 3 or 4 miles” has left us with glimpses of how the country might have appeared naturally. But the same policy annulled what Gary Snyder calls “the insouciant freeness of wild creatures”, and with it the kernel belief of twentieth-century ecology: everything’s connected.

Wherever we see nature as a passing scene rather than a rhythm and process, we deny the umbilical connection to place implicit in the Māori word *whenua* and its Oceanian equivalents like the Melanesian *vanua*. We erase the connection whose traces you can see in the minute books of last century’s Native Land Courts, in what the people of Waikokopu called “their love for the mother’s milk of their ancestors”. Paul Shepard, an American thinker about the natural world, said recently that one of the most repeated questions of our time is “How do we become native to this place?” History can’t answer that question, he says, for history itself is the great de-nativising process. For Shepard, belonging is measured in one’s habitation of a place as spiritually and materially nourishing terrain.

For as long as I’ve been conscious of nature in New Zealand, I’ve believed its forests’ awesome emptiness to be their most vital quality. But as I watch the siege and collapse of wild nature in New Zealand, I begin to agree with the North American philosopher of the wild, Jack Turner – and with the common wisdom of many indigenous traditions. The most practical means of preserving wild nature is residency in it, and “a visceral knowledge of that wildness”. Like our plundered coasts, the forests need their people back. Not visitors treating them as scenery, but people who consider them home and invest them with love and vigilance.

Fig. 1
Simon Denny
*The Personal Effects
of Kim Dotcom* 2013
Installation view:
mumok, Wien, 2013
Courtesy mumok /
Simon Denny
Photo: Gregor Titze



Between Here and Nowhere: A Survey of Post-Internet Practices among New Zealand Artists

Tim Gentles

Just as twentieth-century modernism was in large part defined by the relationship between craft and the emergent technologies of manufacturing, mass media, and lens-based imagery, the most pressing condition underlying contemporary culture today – from artistic practice and social theory to our quotidian language – may well be the omnipresence of the internet.

– Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, 2014¹

In a sense, the reading – and fertile misreading – by New Zealand artists of European, Russian and American modernisms, and the bringing of those modernisms to bear upon specifically New Zealand concerns, is the story of 20th century New Zealand art.

– Francis Pound²

Perhaps the longest lasting legacy of modernist discourse in New Zealand has been to inscribe a particular sense of locality and place that continues to deeply inflect the practices of artists from New Zealand. According to Francis Pound's formulation, New Zealand modernism was defined by an anxiety over the relationship of its art to that of the rest of the world, and as such he finds built into its fabric "a topos of distance and isolation from Europe."³ Emerging from a cultural moment in which the development of communicative technologies allowed artists for the first time to keep up with the latest artistic developments emanating from Europe and the United States, New Zealand modernism faced a twin pressure to respond to the aesthetic and political challenges of modernism as they were constituted on a newly global scale, while also accounting for the particularities of an acutely felt sense of peripherality. This tension between proximity and distance is, I would like to argue, similarly visible in the recent international emergence of so-called "post-internet" art and its rather tentative, ambivalent adoption by a handful of young New Zealand artists. This essay will explore the ways in which these contemporary practices have reoriented this tension around the twin axes of an internationalising art world and new forms of digital communication technologies.

Post-Internet Art

The term “post-internet” was first used in an art context by US artist Marisa Olson in 2006 to describe her process of making art *after* using the Internet. As Olson describes it in an interview with Lauren Cornell that was published in *TimeOut New York*:

What I make is less art “on” the Internet than it is art “after” the Internet. It’s the yield of my compulsive surfing and downloading. I create performances, songs, photos, texts, or installations directly derived from materials on the Internet or my activity there.⁴

Thus distinguished from “net art” and “new media art”, which were primarily focused on the medium-specificity of new technologies, post-internet art responds to the banality of the Internet, to the Internet as a feature of everyday life and an everyday feature of art. In an influential early blog devoted to the subject (which has since been republished as a book), curator and critic Gene McHugh argues for the necessity of contemporary art’s acknowledging the presence of the internet as a distribution context.⁵ His suggestion is that, more than simply being a style or genre of art, post-internet is a technological and cultural context that cannot help but define the art being made today:

Somewhere in the basic framework of the work, an understanding of what the Internet is doing to the work – how it distributes the work, how it devalues the work, revalues it – must be acknowledged in the way that one would acknowledge, say, the market.⁶

Another early essay on post-internet art by artist Artie Vierkant claims that the term encompasses “any cultural production which has been influenced by a network ideology.”⁷ Vierkant considers post-internet art the inevitable result of what he calls “the contemporary moment”, and as such it is characterised by “ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials.”⁸ For these early theorists of the post-internet condition, post-internet art is defined by a self-reflexive approach to the generalised condition of its circulation within networked contexts.

In more recent years, discourse around post-internet art has proliferated alongside a great deal of contestation about the term’s usefulness.⁹ On a recent blogpost for *Rhizome*, a new media art organisation that has been host to a great deal of important discussion related to post-internet art, Michael Connor outlines three primary ways in which the term is used today:

socio-historically; as an art historical movement, i.e. united by a shared aesthetic and conceptual approach; or economically, as part of a shift from

a gallery and magazine/critic dominated market to one in which the circulation of images on blogs and Instagram plays a dominant role.¹⁰

An example of the latter usage appeared in *Artforum* in 2013 in an article titled “2011: Art and Transmission.” Its author, Michael Sanchez, argues that the ubiquity of computing technology has reoriented the art world around the screen. Citing the impact of popular global exhibitions website Contemporary Art Daily in particular, Sanchez suggests that these days, “Art is no longer discovered in biennials and fairs and magazines, but on the phone.”¹¹ He even goes so far as to claim that art production and display is increasingly calibrated around being viewed on screens, shaping how galleries are lit and favouring work using colour palettes that photograph well.¹² Contemporary Art Daily is indicative of a present configuration in which art is viewed more on the screen than in person, which according to Sanchez has resulted in a radical dematerialisation and deterritorialisation of the art system at the level of both artistic reception and production.

Finally, in an attempt to articulate post-internet art along art historical lines, 2014 saw a full-scale institutional survey show dedicated to it in Beijing, China. Curated by Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, *Art Post-Internet* situates post-internet art as an international phenomena (despite its readily apparent concentration in the art centres of Berlin, London and New York) that is defined by its relationship to the network. As a working definition they propose it is artwork that is “consciously created in a milieu that assumes the centrality of the network, and that often takes everything from the physical bits to the social ramifications of the internet as fodder”; post-internet art is art that reflects “an internet state of mind.”¹³ The network referred to here has been completely flattened, purged of any trace of geographical specificity. For Archey and Peckham, post-internet art is both a reaction to and an identification with the communicative conditions of global, networked capitalism.

While I use the term post-internet with considerable wariness – I do not think the term is necessarily a “perfect fit” for the practices of certain emerging New Zealand artists discussed over the course of this essay, nor do I think that given the term’s excessively broad range of applications it really functions as a coherent stylistic or socio-historic marker – it is nonetheless useful in certain respects. It is primarily useful for designating a set of concerns, and certain aesthetic affinities, that have become highly influential in contemporary art circles over the past three to five years. And further, for this essay in particular, the discourse around post-internet art provides way of thinking about contemporary art production in broadly technologically deterministic terms, as an imperative to respond to a set of ubiquitous conditions that are synonymous with contemporaneity. Post-internet delimits a context for the production, circulation and reception of art that appears to have little room for locality, and as such conveniently aligns with a renewed commitment to more international approaches in recent years among New Zealand artists.

Distance and Immanence in Contemporary New Zealand Art

Natasha Conland's survey of New Zealand contemporary art since 1990 in the Auckland Art Gallery's commemorative 2011 book, *Art Toi*, points to a shift from a discourse dominated by a fixation with New Zealand's cultural specificity and distance from the rest of the world to one defined by globalisation and a greater degree of cultural plurality. In the 1990s, she suggests, the influence of global economics and cultural networks on New Zealand art were felt to a greater extent than ever before.¹⁴ Describing a handful of international exhibitions of New Zealand art, she identifies a shifting curatorial emphasis around the mid-1990s toward framing work from New Zealand as being simultaneously "engaged with issues of global interest and relevance" and as "working within New Zealand's unique geographic and cultural conditions."¹⁵ With one foot "here" and the other "elsewhere", Conland suggests that the question of New Zealand identity lingers in the background of the practices of many New Zealand contemporary artists in the form of "the ferocity of critical attention given to questions of authorship and the unstable post-colonial condition."¹⁶ No longer articulated with regard to a local specificity, this identity is today understood on the basis of *migrancy*.

This corresponds with Allan Smith's claim in an essay in the same book that New Zealand contemporary art is defined by its "casual globalism."¹⁷ He points to the increasingly common phenomenon of the "frequent flyer" artist who, "with their flexible career paths and inquisitive global nomadism, are currently re-mapping a very different set of possibilities [for cultural practice]."¹⁸ With mobility as the new norm, a renewed attention to the relationship between distance and proximity is readily apparent in contemporary New Zealand art practices. It is this dynamic that the local reception of post-internet art takes up, revitalising anew at the same time as it obscures its operation.

Simon Denny

Exemplary of this new model of the increasingly mobile, nomadic and flexible New Zealand artist is Simon Denny. Denny is based in Berlin and with gallery representation in Auckland, New York, Berlin, Cologne and Rome is arguably considerably more renowned on the international gallery and art fair circuit than in New Zealand. Having not lived in New Zealand since 2007, Denny maintains a distant but nonetheless significant relationship to the place of his birth and location of the majority of his artistic education. Exhibiting in New Zealand only very infrequently, he has been nominated for the Auckland Art Gallery's prestigious Walters Prize twice in a row and will be representing New Zealand at 2015's Venice Biennale. His international exhibitions also frequently contain references both sly and overt to New Zealand events.

Perhaps most illuminating for our purposes here is that Denny has been framed as a post-internet artist in both the local and overseas reception of his work. The press text for Denny's component of 2014's Walters Prize states

that his “substantial exhibitions prove his original contribution to what has come to be known as ‘post-internet aesthetics’” and goes on to note that the exhibition re-presented for the Prize, *All You Need Is Data - The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX*, “is a clever visualisation and subtle critique of the hyped-up promises... of our digital future.”¹⁹ Internationally too, Denny has been aligned with other artists who foreground questions about the cultural forms of new communications technology in their work, and he has been included in a number of high-profile post-internet art group shows, such as Karen Archey and Robin Peckham’s aforementioned *Art Post-Internet* and the philosophically ambitious *Speculations on Anonymous Materials* held at Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany towards the end of 2014.

Denny’s work of the past few years represents a thoroughgoing investigation into the role media and communication technologies play in the shaping and visualisation of information. Taking the perennially accelerating contexts of cultural production as his primary subject, Denny playfully examines the evolution of formats, interfaces and modes of display, rupturing the seamlessness of today’s multifaceted communications infrastructure.

Simon Denny’s 2011 exhibition *Corporate Video Decisions*, shown at Michael Lett in Auckland and Petzel Gallery in New York, is exemplary. It addresses the topic of obsolescence through the use of television as a sculptural medium. The exhibition takes its title from a trade magazine that was published from 1988 to 1990 in the wake of the ’87 financial crash and offered advice to corporate video departments about improving internal morale and managing their public image. The magazine forms the basis of a series of standing canvases cut to the dimensions of a then-contemporary flat screen television, on which are printed digital collages of material from the magazine contained within a photograph of the outer frame of a Samsung television. Transposing and remediating a number of different media and historical moments – a magazine about video technology from the late-’80s is presented using present day software techniques and displayed on a present day television, which is then photographically reproduced and printed onto canvas – the exhibition asks us to consider how the display and distribution of information both reflect and are actively shaped by economic conditions and imaging technologies.

Other exhibitions deal explicitly with New Zealand content as a way of addressing modes for the dissemination of information and culture geographically. Exhibited as part of Art 43 Basel in 2012, Denny’s *Channel Document* takes as its primary subject the dissolution of the government-funded New Zealand television station TVNZ 7. Following what is a common installation practice for Denny, information from diverse sources is collated and re-formatted for display, in this case as a series of Plexiglas canvases detailing a timeline of TVNZ 7’s short existence. This is interspersed with items such as a promotional *Pirates of the Caribbean* television and DVD unit and a New Zealand Metallica

tour t-shirt, while the exhibition's other main component is a documentary commissioned by Denny about New Zealand's then recent passport redesign. In juxtaposing these elements with a narrative describing the obsolescence and phasing-out of a particular model of the non-commercial distribution of information, Denny suggests that the case of TVNZ 7 ought to be understood within a global context of changes in the way information is disseminated via a rapidly evolving consumer technology sector. The documentary about New Zealand's passport redesign picks up on our national self-imagining as being constituted primarily through distance. Curator and critic Karen Archey remarks that the video is "a chuckle-inducing narrative about the way the country came to develop navigation technology because, well, Kiwis have a knack for travel since New Zealand is in the middle of nowhere. (Whoops, your colonialism is showing!)"²⁰ The significance of the work however, lies not just in poking fun at New Zealand's small island in the middle of a vast ocean mentality, but in its pointing to this very mythology of distance as continually being recast and renewed in the light of an encroaching, compulsory globality that is increasingly intertwined with narratives of economic and technological progress.

Fig. 2
Julia Lomas
BEING SPACES
2011
Courtesy of the artist
and Personal Best
Gallery

Denny's recent exhibition *The Personal Effects of Kim Dotcom* (2013, Fig. 1), which has been shown three times during the course of 2013–14 in Vienna, Colchester and Wellington, further elaborates the artist's exploration of the overlapping geopolitical concerns that are mobilised in the dissemination of digital media. The exhibition's starting point concerns a letter of indictment featuring a list of items seized by the authorities as a result of the arrest of internet mogul Kim Dotcom and the raid of his New Zealand property through the coordinated efforts of the FBI and local police in January 2012. The seized items appear up to three times in the exhibition in different iterations: in a legal context as part of the indictment document, which is printed out and displayed at the entrance to the gallery; as images formatted according to a ubiquitous flat user-interface design, which are placed on the walls of the gallery space; and finally in the form of objects themselves that have been scaled, borrowed or reproduced for display. Denny confuses and conflates the status of these items – which are both physical objects and immaterial assets such as bank accounts – drawing attention to the complex interplays of material and immaterial value as they are compressed, circulated and dispersed across different contexts. *The Personal Effects of Kim Dotcom* embodies what Denny describes as a "drag-and-drop" of multiple content distribution systems onto one another, and as such calls attention to the murky, overlapping legal jurisdictions that are eroding New Zealand's cultural and judicial autonomy simultaneously.²¹

Personal Best Gallery and PB PR

Personal Best Gallery was a relatively short-lived artist-run exhibition space on Auckland's Karangahape ("K") Road. Operated for less than a year in 2011 by Zhoe Granger, Sophie Bannan, Julia Lomas, Ashlin Raymond, Ryan Ballinger and other more temporary members, the gallery was host to a number



Fig. 3
PBPR
100% Pure You (still)
2013
HD Digital Video,
2:08 mins
Courtesy Blue Oyster
Art Project Space



of exhibitions by recent Elam School of Fine Arts graduates that explored the newfound ubiquity of the internet as a site for artistic production and reception. The gallery's final exhibition in its K Road space at the tail-end of 2011, *Brand New Value*, was guest curated by Morag Dempsey. Featuring the work of two Melbourne artists, Rowan McNaught and Sam Hancocks, alongside the then Auckland-based Daif King, the exhibition examined the material and immaterial effects of global flows of capital and information. Its international (or, at least, Australasian) scope points to a growing online network of like-minded artists, exploring aesthetic affinities and collaborating on social media platforms (many of which were created by the artists) and blogs – Hancocks, for instance, ran the website *Visual Aids*, a visual repository exploring the intersections of technology, post-humanism, globalisation and commercial aesthetics, and which was affiliated with the network of projects organised by US artist Kari Altmann called *R-U-In?S*. Pointing to shift in the value systems of images as a result of their hyper-circulation online, the exhibition is notable for its thematisation of globality as a generalised condition of contemporaneity with very little sense of geographical specificity as such.

Similarly, the gallery's group exhibition *BYO USB*, featuring the work of Sophie Bannan, Ben Clement, Ashlin Raymond, Ryan Ballinger, Tom Henry, Julia Lomas and Zhoe Granger, is highly indebted to an emerging post-internet aesthetic and mode of distribution. The exhibition's premise was that the work would be available digitally, in addition to being present in the gallery space, but only by a physical USB transfer that also took place in the gallery. This complication of the distinction between physical and digital spaces recognisably aligns the exhibition with the concerns of international post-internet artists at the time, and the aesthetic of much of the work – in particular Clement's faux-marble decorated transfer station and Lomas' office aesthetic-influenced text and installation (Fig. 2) – reflects a then up-to-the-minute awareness of visual trends on online platforms such as Tumblr. But as with *Brand New Value*, the exhibition feels remarkably placeless, and in a certain sense it could have occurred in a small city anywhere in the world. Yet the show is also defined by the sort of "business as usual" approach that often characterises such small, relatively isolated art scenes. Grouping together fairly disparate artists that by no means share a common aesthetic or conceptual approach, it is as if post-internet and the burgeoning discourse of digital platform-awareness that characterised the era has been "dragged and dropped" into Auckland's post-Elam milieu, and the result is tellingly askew.

Following the dissolution of Personal Best as a physical gallery space, two of its members, Zhoe Granger and Ashlin Raymond, continued as PB PR, a project that was more explicitly engaged with a recognisably post-internet aesthetic at the same time as it explored notions of "New Zealandness" in contemporary art. Under the guise of a public relations firm, PB PR's video and installation projects adopted the visual language of advertising and lifestyle magazines, which were twisted in the direction of a particularly New Zealand vernacular – Toyota Hilux utes, adventure in the verdant Southern Alps and mocking references to news website Stuff.co.nz. A 2013 project at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Dunedin, *100% Pure You* (Fig. 3), features a video depicting a wholesome looking young blonde woman wearing a Kathmandu® puffer jacket and Canterbury™ running shorts, soaking in the lush Otago landscape while eating a muesli bar and downing cans of Southern Gold Lager, all to a high-energy soundtrack of drum & bass. According to the exhibition's press release, this "labyrinth of contemporary images of New Zealand" reveals an "obsessive bionic quest to be your 'best'."²² In this sense, the project connects current manifestations of New Zealand nationalism to the obsessions of contemporary visual culture with purity and performance – in other words, to the motivational language of business and a hyper-individualised late capitalism. The video ends with an extended shot of the New Zealand flag, suggesting that our national identity, like our contemporary art, is increasingly implicated in the global flows of commercial images from which it attempts to set itself apart.

Chill Spree and Campaign Furniture

A group exhibition featuring PB PR alongside Claire Mahoney, Oscar Enberg, Ben Clement and Jack Hadley was held in 2013 at Dog Park Art Project Space in Christchurch – another significant, and now defunct, artist-run space that exhibited a number of young artists influenced by the commercial and network aesthetics of post-internet art. Called *Chill Spree* (Fig. 4), the exhibition explores the aesthetics of relaxation. Curator Henry Davidson writes in the exhibition's catalogue that, "the artists in *Chill Spree* have practices that draw upon the languages of various formulae within capitalism – public relations, merchandising, strategies of display, fashion."²³ Responding to the homogenising effects of global capital, the exhibition nonetheless posits a "floating, chill-space that exists between personal tranquility and corporate profit."²⁴

PB PR's contribution to *Chill Spree*, *How to Live Before You Die* (2013), is a video installation with a flat screen TV placed on a circa 1980 Swedish three-seater sofa that with its shaky footage and awkward close-ups suggests an ultimately futile attempt to soothe the stressful effects of late capitalist precarity by creating a false sense of opulence and safety. Jack Hadley's two works in the exhibition consist of digitally embroidered items of clothing hanging on retail display racks – one of these, *Big Fresh Paris* (2013), features an animated cucumber printed on a white polar fleece dress, referencing the advertising campaign of the discontinued New Zealand supermarket chain Big Fresh. Ben Clement's work similarly alludes to supermarket merchandising by featuring reusable green supermarket eco-bags onto which images of contemporary consumer technology have been digitally printed, and which are then encased in wall-mounted Perspex displays. Subsuming all modes of cultural production into the language of branding and consumption, the work in *Chill Spree* can be read as attempts to locate agency in a contemporary visual culture that would seek to collapse art into fashion, retail and leisure in an undifferentiated flow of images.

Also curated by Henry Davidson is the group exhibition *Campaign Furniture*, held at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2014. The exhibition includes the work of Auckland-based artists Juliet Carpenter, Biljana Popovic and Sorawit Songsataya and was conceived of as an engagement with the Dunedin Public Art Gallery's Decorative Arts Collection. Considering decorative objects as sites for the construction and performance of identities, *Campaign Furniture* suggests a way of rethinking "decorativeness" in relation to the digital devices and interfaces that populate the contemporary world.²⁵ Proposing that the cross-pollination of the decorative arts, fine arts and other forms of media constitutes a pervasive condition of the present, the exhibition probes at the way in which the very notion of the "decorative" is increasingly inextricable from the circulation of images and information between devices. Elaborating on this is the work of Sorawit Songsataya, who contributed to the exhibition a set of 3D printed vases (Fig. 5) created using an iPad app called *Let's create! Pottery*.



ABOVE
 Fig. 4
 Claire Mahoney, Oscar
 Enberg, Ben Clement,
 Jack Hadley, PRPR
Chill Spree 2013
 Installation view:
 Dog Park Art Project
 Space, 22 June – 14 July
 2013
 Curated by Henry
 Davidson
 Photo: Kate McCaskill



RIGHT
 Fig. 5
 Sorawit Songsataya
Vases I, II 2014
 3D printed plastic
 particle
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photo: Max Bellamy

Fig. 6
Francis Till
Social Study 2013
Courtesy of the artist
and Window Gallery



Addressing the notion of the “prosumer”, the works demonstrate technology’s increasing erosion of the distinction between producer and consumer, and decorated with images of selfies taken by young men rather than more traditional ornamentation, Songsataya’s vases suggest the body as the site onto which cultural flows and technology coalesce.²⁶

Gloria Knight; Francis Till

Most of the aforementioned Auckland artists have also shown at Gloria Knight, an artist-run space in Auckland’s Wynyard Quarter. Opened in 2012 before shuttering after its final exhibition in December 2014, Gloria Knight was founded by recent graduates and then-current students of Elam School of Fine Arts: Oscar Enberg, Francis Till, Henry Babbage and Juliet Carpenter – with Babbage being replaced in the gallery’s final year of operation by curator Henry Davidson. From the start, the gallery was committed to an engagement with contemporary international approaches that placed it firmly in the lineage of such ambitious Auckland artist-run spaces as Teststrip and Gambia Castle. Somewhere between a project space and a dealer gallery, Gloria Knight did such

un-artist-run space things as participate in art fairs in Auckland and Melbourne (the Auckland Art Fair proper and Melbourne Art Fair spin-off Spring 1883) as well as curating exhibitions of work by overseas artists. (Full disclosure: one of these exhibitions, *Soft Intensities*, was curated by the author). Given the interests of the gallery's founding artist-members in practices engaged with what we might broadly term network or digital aesthetics, Gloria Knight proved to be the most concentrated site of an exploration of post-internet aesthetics by young New Zealand artists at precisely the time when that aesthetic was attaining a level of ubiquity on sites such as Contemporary Art Daily that coded its aesthetic markers as arguably the dominant international style of contemporary art.

The work of Gloria Knight co-founder Francis Till in many respects puts a contemporary spin on the push-and-pull between the adoption of an international style and maintaining a connection to local concerns. By taking up digital communications technology as his explicit subject matter, Till's work explores the implications of smart phone technology: making distances obsolete at the same time as they make location (through GPS) paramount, these devices are at the very least profoundly reshaping our sense of locality and place. For his exhibition *Social Study* (Fig. 6), which took place in 2013 at the University of Auckland's Window Gallery, Till entered into a contractual agreement with some of the University's students to intercept their personal data and communications from their phones. The material was then presented interactively on smart phones, which were displayed in the typical manner of mobile phone retail and accompanied by smart phone sculptures and large translucent prints. The press release notes, "*Social Study* reflects the public space with The University of Auckland General Library foyer where Window is situated: a field of incoming and outgoing information permeating bodies and devices."²⁷ Reflecting on the dense imbrication of material and immaterial connections that structure the ubiquitous global communications networks of the present, the exhibition is a reminder that as much as the forms of communication are increasingly homogenised, communication still requires content, which is driven by local, institutional concerns. The result feels oddly paradoxical: art about specific connections that could have come from anywhere.

Conclusion: Antipodal Internationalism

These practices have emerged at a moment in which shifts in communication technologies have drastically changed not just the production and reception of art worldwide, but the very connection it has to place. More than ever before, young New Zealand artists are tapped into the discourses and visual languages of the international art world. Yet in many respects, the work of these artists exists primarily within a local art ecology, with substantive connection and exchange between local and overseas artists and institutions relatively rare. If it's possible to detect an aspirational internationalism in the artists affiliated with Gloria Knight for example, this is tempered by the wry awareness with

which New Zealand specificities are deployed by these same artists as a kind of foil to a slick and homogenous global image culture, of which post-internet art ought to be considered a significant node.

As McKenzie Wark noted as early as 1997, despite what internet utopians might have us believe, the world is not flat and we are not living in a “global village.”²⁸ Wark proposes a way of thinking about globalisation from the periphery as an experience of “antipodality”:

the feeling of being neither here nor there... an experience of identity in relation to the other in which the relation always appears more strongly to consciousness than either the identity it founds or the other it projects.²⁹

While the rhetoric of post-internet art, which casts our relationship to the circulation of images online as universal and ubiquitous, has very little room for such “local concerns”, its influence among New Zealand artists of a certain generation is inescapable. This suggests the need to recast the relationship between distance and proximity in New Zealand art practices that take global telecommunications networks as the condition for their production and dissemination along more ambivalent, which is to say antipodal, lines.

We might also wish to think about the way in which the relationship between locality and globality is recast in a manner that is specific to the technical communication infrastructure of the internet. Design theorist Benjamin Bratton has extensively explored the geopolitical implications of the era of “planetary-scale computation”, which he argues is characterised by a conflict between “the territorial integrity of the state and... the gossamer threads of the world’s information.”³⁰ In his 2012 essay “What We Do Is Secrete: Paul Virilio, Planerarity, and Data Visualization”, Bratton suggests that given contemporary representations of worldly processes as “networks”, locality might best be conceived as an “embedded actor” constrained and delimited by top-down structures (legal, geographic, semiotic) in such a way that “the global and the local are not dichotomous, but are mutually embedded one inside the other.”³¹

The influence of post-internet art on New Zealand artists might then be read, perhaps disappointingly, as a point of contact between an international technical infrastructure with the local parameters to cultural circulation. But such moments of contact are becoming increasingly ubiquitous and automatic. While early adoptions of this aesthetic by galleries such as Personal Best had something of the self-conscious air of trying on the latest international style and the more conceptually rigorous Gloria Knight found its international ambitions constrained by the lack of resources endemic to running an artist-run space in New Zealand, we are perhaps beginning to see modes of artistic practice that more seamlessly fold international trends with local tendencies. If Simon Denny functions as the new New Zealand artist *par excellence*, managing to make

largely redundant the question of whether one is a New Zealand artist or just an artist, this nevertheless raises the question of whether one must now have an international career to “count”, or whether something equally important hasn’t shifted locally. While heading “overseas” is still the inevitable temptation for the promising young New Zealand artist (and naturally, many of the artists discussed in this article are now based outside of New Zealand), perhaps the lasting legacy of post-internet art has been the entanglement of contemporary art with its circulation online, which has allowed for increasing degrees of social and aesthetic interconnection between artists based in different parts of the world.³² In other words, while these practices are a vivid demonstration of a continual renegotiation within New Zealand art of its “heres” and its “elsewheres”, this elsewhere is beginning to look like no place at all.

1. Karen Archey and Robin Peckham, *Art Post-Internet*, digital catalogue, 2014 (<http://post-inter.net/>), 8.
2. Francis Pound, “From Here: Reading and Misreading European, Russian and American Modernism,” in *New Zealand Modernism in Context: Paintings from the Gibbs Collection*, ed. James Ross (Auckland: The Gibbs Collection, 1995), 12.
3. Francis Pound, “Distance Looks Our Way,” in *Distance Looks Our Way: 10 Artists from New Zealand*, ed. Mary Barr (Wanganui: Sarjeant Gallery, 1992), 21.
4. Quoted (but not cited) in Gene McHugh, *Post-Internet* (Brescia: LINK Editions, 2011), 11. It is worth noting that the first published instance of Olson using the term is in a 2008 interview for *We Make Money Not Art* (<http://we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2008/03/how-does-one-become-marisa.php#VFQ420vF8kg>). However, Olson is adamant she had been using the term since 2006, and the segment quoted above suggests that the conceptual framework of her usage of the term was in place at that time. For more information see: Michael Connor, “What’s Postinternet Got to do with Net Art,” *Rhizome*, November 1, 2013, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/1/postinternet/>.
5. McHugh, 6.
6. McHugh, 6.
7. Artie Vierkant, “Image Object Post Internet,” 2010, http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf.
8. Vierkant, “Image Object Post Internet.”
9. For a recent example of such contestation see: Brian Droitcour, “The Perils of Post-Internet Art,” *Art in America*, October 30, 2014, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-perils-of-post-internet-art/>. The author derides post-internet as being artistically and aesthetically superficial, and as being a term to brand and market contemporary art.
10. Michael Connor, “Rhizome Today: A Critic, with Opinions about Postinternet Art,” *Rhizome*, November 3, 2014, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/nov/3/rhizome-today/>.
11. Michael Sanchez, “2011: Art and Transmission,” *Artforum* (Summer 2013): 297.
12. Sanchez, 297.
13. Archey and Peckham, 8.
14. Natasha Conland, “Indefinite Article: New Zealand Art 1990-2011,” in *Art Toi: New Zealand Art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki*, ed. Ron Brownson (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011), 282.
15. Conland, 285.
16. Conland, 287.
17. Allan Smith, “Mobility and Migration,” in *Art Toi: New Zealand Art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki*, ed. Ron Brownson (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2011), 339.
18. Smith, 346.
19. *The Walters Prize 2014* press release: <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/whats-on/events/2014/july/the-walters-prize-2014>.
20. Karen Archey, “Corporations Are People Too,” *Modern Painters* (June 2013): 53.
21. Laura Preston and Simon Denny, “Conversation,” in *The Personal Effects of Kim Dotcom*, ed. Matthias Michalka (Cologne: König, 2013), 76.
22. PB PR, *100% Pure You* press release, <http://www.blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/pbpr/>.
23. Henry Davidson, “Retail Therapy,” in *Chill Spree*, eds. Chloe Geoghegan and Rebecca Boswell (Christchurch: Dog Park Art Project Space, 2013), 6.
24. Davidson, “Retail Therapy,” 6.
25. Henry Davidson, *Campaign Furniture* exhibition text, http://dunedin.art.museum/exhibitions/future/campaign_furniture.
26. For more see: Tim Gentles, “Design Futures: An Interview with Sorawit Songsataya,” *Circuit*, May 20, 2014, <http://www.circuit.org.nz/blog/design-futures-an-interview-with-sorawit-songsataya>.
27. Francis Till, *Social Study* press release, <http://window.auckland.ac.nz/archive/2013/12/press.html>.
28. McKenzie Wark, “Antipodality,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 2, no. 3 (1997): 17.
29. Wark, 23.
30. Benjamin Bratton, “The Black Stack,” *E-flux* 53 (March 2014), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-black-stack/>.
31. Benjamin Bratton, “What We Do Is Secrete: Paul Virilio, Planetary, and Data Visualization,” <http://www.bratton.info/projects/texts/what-we-do-is-secrete/>.
32. Although by no means does this make the social networks established and consolidated IRL in cities redundant, far from it.



Problem Spaces in the Walters Prize

Gregory Minissale

Fig. 1
Luke Willis Thompson
*inthisholeonthisisland-
whereiam*
2014
Walters Prize 2014,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

Fig. 2
Luke Willis Thompson
*inthisholeonthisisland-
whereiam*
2012
Hopkinson Cundy (now,
Hopkinson Mossman)
Courtesy of the artist
and Hopkinson
Mossman, Auckland

Introduction

The artists in the *Walters Prize 2014*¹ seem eager to test art's power to transform the everyday, a concern presumably shared by various visitors, the jurors and the artists in history with which they engage. We might call this an “underlying discursivity” that has something to do with opening up particular spaces where the everyday is used as a kind of medium modelled by artistic knowledge so that the unpredictable might come into play. Because all projects nominated for the Prize must have appeared elsewhere, one possible criticism of the Prize is that this implies somehow the artworks were “rediscovered” or rescued from some relatively obscure time or context and endorsed by the institutional stamp of approval, a curatorial authority the media blitz further reproduces or traduces. However, one of the 2014 Prize's strengths, thanks to curator Stephen Cleland, is that it offers us some interesting juxtapositions where the artworks seem to spark off each other. In so doing, they seem to explore the discursivity I referred to in a rather more horizontal way than a vertical or hierarchical thrust which a prize, rewarding one above the others, suggests.

Art History

I had heard many things about Luke Willis Thompson's *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* (2012, Figs 1–3), the winner of the 2014 Walters Prize. According to Charles Esche, the judge of the Prize, it was an “extraordinary intrusion of art into daily life that cuts through the protocols of the exhibition system like a knife.” Yet, the work first appeared for the Hopkinson Cundy Gallery (now known as Hopkinson Mossman) in 2012. The exhibition system, as ever, emerges relatively unscathed from both incisions. With a probable mixture of intuitive, tacit and explicit knowledge with which artists often work, *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* invites comparisons with art historical precedents. A brief look at some of these gives us an intriguing overview of how far art has come. Thompson's work “begins” with an empty

Fig. 3
Luke Willis Thompson
*inthisholeonthisland-
whereiam*
2012
Hopkinson Cundy (now,
Hopkinson Mossman)
Courtesy of the artist
and Hopkinson
Mossman, Auckland





gallery. In Santiago Sierra's *Space closed by corrugated metal* at the Lisson Gallery, London in September 2002, the artist invited guests to his opening only for them to find the gallery closed by corrugated iron. Martin Creed's *Work No. 227. The lights going on and off* (2000) was also an empty gallery with a light going off every few seconds, the exertions for which the artist was rewarded with the Turner Prize in 2001. And in the 1960s there was also Robert Barry who locked out gallery visitors appending a sign: "During the exhibition the gallery will be closed." In Thompson's work for Auckland Art Gallery's *Walters Prize 2014* exhibition attendants are charged with acting out the artist's instructions – engaging with visitors and arranging for a taxi to take them to an unknown destination and returning them to the Gallery. This is reminiscent of the way Tino Sehgal has often used collaborators or actors as gallery attendants for his performance pieces. Thompson's work then proceeds to take visitors to the site/non-site of a house in the central Auckland suburb of Epsom, a repeat of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002) for *Documenta 11* where a taxi ferried passengers to a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Kassel. A taxi also featured in Navin Rawanchaikul's celebrated artwork in the 1998 Biennale of Sydney, the 'every day'.

The taxi helps to produce a "situation" that becomes a kind of heterotopic or fluid space Foucault suggests we find in ships and funfairs, a strange margin space that is in-between a place of departure, a place of arrival, a place of centre and a place of periphery. This liminal space creates an odd kind of consciousness on hold. The taxi ride is functional but difficult to recognise as a situation (being in-between situations), and as the artist states, you'd get into a taxi if you were planning to drink alcohol and you'd put yourself into a kind of passive futurity of being driven. This taxi ride, however, seems vaguely portentous, the glass of the car window appears to frame a cinematic experience, and you carry along the aura of the gallery with you. There's an element of risk but the risk may also be purely aesthetic or bourgeois; that it's risky because you might end up disappointed, or it could be risky for a liberal conscience moved into an emotional encounter with relative poverty, or worse, tediousness. The humdrum taxi ride through ugly motorways and backstreets is repeated on the return to the gallery where visitors are escorted back to the exhibition space through the service areas not normally open to the public, an opportunity to see the "theatre" of the gallery backstage, something that Michael Asher was notorious for doing by taking down the walls separating the exhibition space from the curatorial offices. Of course, there are varying differences and repetitions in all these works but it seems important not to pass up how they form an underlying discursivity concerned with how artists can transform the everyday and artistic precedents in order to create something new.

To some, it appears that Thompson's artwork makes use of certain aspects of the ready-made. The ready-made is a kind of deliberate syntactical error, an everyday object placed in a gallery setting or treated as an art object (the

philosopher Danto suggested that this kind of thing might be seen as a kind of theory of modern art stretching what is possible and making a problem out of it for us to think about). However, it was the ready-made that historically challenged categories in art and the power of institutions by ennobling matter and inviting the humblest of objects into art galleries and practices. This has spawned endless permutations of materials and objects so that the everyday and art have become so indiscernible that spotting the difference between them becomes a major part of the experience. The ready-made continues to liberate artists in their use of any objects, places, materials whatsoever, and makes those who insist that art needs to be about paint, brush and canvas appear somewhat fey. Yet it also, arguably, enhances the power of the gallery system by suggesting that it stretches not only outwardly into the spaces surrounding it but also, more perniciously, inwardly, deep into the psychological processes of object recognition which we habitually and unthinkingly adopt in day-to-day tasks and affairs *and* in the generosity by which we are ready to embrace humble objects as art. So the logic of the ready-made suggests that a hammer or one's bicycle wheel or any other quotidian object we are likely to find in a house in Epsom could be a work of art given the right circumstances. Yet this seems comparable with the religious attitude that suggests that some tatty slippers are significant because they belonged to a martyr, or that a bit of old wood could be a relic of the cross. The logic of the ready-made also seems uncomfortably similar to corporate marketing strategies where, for example, Nike trainers (although new) become objects of desire as winged sandals. Treating objects as if they have auras or lives of their own is often justified by the mantra that objects "have agency" as if the hammer causes the nail to comply. These pathetic fallacies forget that agency is distributed across many contingencies and networks and does not inhere in the object itself. The ready-made is not just a concrete object folded into the wider context of understanding agency, it is adopted or explored in affluent and elite circles the world over; it is no surprise then that it found its way, eventually, to Epsom. Yet Thompson's complex work inverts this structure, the objects that occupy the house in Epsom are not out of place, far from it. The house seems to be the architectural equivalent of a person one never really notices; shabby but not repulsive, lived-in and with an overgrown garden but resting in itself, homely enough for groups of visitors to feel as if they are encroaching upon a personal space. The house is, after all, where the artist was raised, where his mother still lives, and has, for the term of the Prize been asked to remove herself.² Visitors are told that the bedrooms are off-limits, which immediately makes one feel as if one is trespassing. Here, the visitor's body becomes a kind of ready-made carted from place to place increasingly awkward in its immediate surroundings.

Another artist in the 2014 Walters Prize with his work *Mo'ui Tukuhausia* (2012, Figs 4–7), Kalisolaite 'Uhila also seems to explore the body out of place, this time, the artist's own body lodged into the gallery spaces becoming a kind of ready-made, an artifact, just as Native American artist James Luna did years





Fig. 4
Kalisolaite 'Uhila
Mo'ui Tukuhausia
2014
Walters Prize 2014,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki



Figs 5-7
Kailsolaite 'Uhila
Mo'ui Tukuhausia
2014
Walters Prize 2014,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

before, placing his body amongst a collection of museum exhibits as a parody of a specimen. 'Uhila's act of will and endurance, living rough in the gallery's margin spaces also shares art historical synergies with Marina Abramović's *House with an Ocean View* (2002) where the artist fasted and refused to speak, living in three rooms in a gallery exposed to the public; and with Joseph Beuys' 1974 *I Like America and America Likes Me* performance work where he lived with a coyote in an art gallery for 3 days among stacks of newspapers and wisps of hay, letting the animal spirit of the coyote revive a neglected mythopoeic indigenous topology.

Maddie Leach draws together a system of relations in *If you find the good oil let us know* (2012–14, Figs 8–10), between institutions, media, scientists, engineers and readers of newspapers and letter-writers and shows how this system comes into operation to mark the ecology with the deposition of a concrete block at the bottom of the sea outside of New Plymouth. This has drawn attention to plans by multinationals, in collusion with the National Government, to drill for oil there risking violations of the delicate balance of the ecosystem. The set of circumstances that are documented provides context for the execution of the work (and the subsequent fallout and spin-offs in terms of publicity) and suggests Leach's careful planning extends the work through situations of power in the wake of creating the "concrete" object. It almost seems as if the finished object is secondary to the events surrounding it. The story goes that the artist discovered 70 litres of oil that she believed could have been whale oil. Although mistaken, the artist became the custodian of the idea of the whale, an archetype which links the land and the sea and allows sacred time to intervene in the ongoing work, obviously rooted in particular ways in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. The oil was used to fire a kiln for the concrete block (a kind of plinth reminding one of Piero Manzoni's *Socle du Monde* (1961) which makes the earth a sculpture). The ceremony of dropping the block into the ocean off Taranaki reminds one of a burial at sea.

Leach's work synthesises aspects of Hans Haacke's systems art that were intended to expose the vested interests of the gallery system and its financial dealings, as well the broader ecological systems in which gallery spaces are situated. Her work touches upon the art practices of those interested in the legalistic, journalistic, transactional and collaborative aspects of art. Robert Morris' well-known letters and instructions involved in setting up blocks of his minimalist sculpture by remote control spring to mind and Mel Chin's conceptual eco-art practice, as well as various works by New Zealand artists Billy Apple and Daniel Malone.

Simon Denny's *All You Need is Data -The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX* (2013, Figs 11–13) seems to share in the "bureaucratic" ethos of earlier artists (Benjamin Buchloh called this the "administrative aesthetic") who used the typewriter and the card index (Robert Morris' *Card File*, 1962), often with lots of textual

Fig. 8
Maddie Leach
*If you find the good
oil let us know*
2014
Walters Prize 2014,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki







Figs 9-10
 Maddie Leach
 If you find the good
 oil let us know
 2014
 Walters Prize 2014,
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki

information juxtaposed with images in archives. This kind of art seems deliberately unattractive and funnels thought through the syntax of the words and the spatial arrangements of the office, work, business, the library or the archive. In a different way, Jenny Holzer used LED blinking lights to broadcast public statements that seem to require the whole body to stand to attention. And the later works of Barbara Kruger forced the body to walk through floors, ceilings, walls, rooms and corridors of text. Denny updates the public text-image address with his garish digital images inkjet printed on an archive of canvases that one physically has to walk through as if in a line for a concert or queuing through passport control. These digitally engineered images on canvas appear as a series of advertisements or posters for a conference of the great and good in digital technology and communications (Wikipedia, Twitter, Facebook etc). We seem to be walking through boring, everyday data again, text-image combinations that are trying to mould us. Capitalism's new kid on the block, the digital economy, with its text-image formats and visual literacies, organises art's mental and physical spaces. Images and networks segment and regulate the rhythms of our movements, cogitations and even our microperceptions. While each image seems different and benign, the underlying formula of composition, colouring and presentation are quickly discovered. This cheapens notions of creativity and freedom of manoeuvre and alerts us to the underlying clichés of graphic design in the service of consumerism. Along with a mind-deadening seriality of images that Warhol would have been proud of, the winding pathway in Denny's space with metal bars ensnares the body in the digital-analogue conundrum, compressing phenomenology while depressing the soul. The question remains: does Denny merely reflect the everyday, or is he reformatting creativity within the current conditions of the global digital economy?

None of these works is the sum of its art historical parts. Each work enters into unique or singular encounters with its milieu formed by a constantly changing audience and opens up a little chaos or unpredictability arising from these encounters. The works surprise not in theoretical terms but by unraveling a set of emotions and affects that one might perhaps experience meeting a person for the first time, nothing prepares you for the personal response, mood, rhythms and intuitions that arise in such a situation. What one does with such patterns of emotional energy can be turned into critical reflection, or toward further creative endeavours, or they can fall by the wayside like so many uncared for objects or bodies.

The Everyday

Casting a long shadow over the most recent Walters Prize are Henri Lefebvre's and Michel de Certeau's philosophical analyses of "the everyday". The last several decades have seen numerous texts and exhibition catalogues that engage with this topic. This treatment of the everyday suddenly allows things in plain sight to glimmer.

In Thompson's house the everyday is less to do with individual objects than the temporal layers, expenditures of energy, mental states and patterns of habit required to produce *how* they are arranged into slow or quick, tight or loose, fine- or coarse-grained groups suggesting rhythms that seem to compose the rise and fall of the viewer's own sensations and the intervals between them. Such entangled rhythms are produced by the gathering, sifting, shedding and spacing of clusters of objects repeated or amassed as gestures over several days, months, years or lives, some careless others more purposeful; there are also arrangements that seem quietly sacred to the memory. I like Michel Serres' remark that every object in the world, "in so far as it resists the tendency towards entropy, is a complex clock drawing together several times."³ The visitor does not have to be a clairvoyant to be sensitised to such aggregates, to experience pulses of empathy for the cogitations and capitulations that organise such groups.

Objects glimmer between meaning and nonmeaning, haecceity and anonymity. The arrangement of concrete objects outside of the mind seems better able to express our real preoccupations than pure mental introspection and this says a lot about the way we construct a world. The predominant mood in Thompson's house is melancholic, a bit shop-soiled, a bit post-apocalyptic. And because these objects are not smart or sexy in consumer terms they also seem to withdraw from any kind of engagement that might constitute recognition of one's bearings or preferences. Matter is not captured by such objects so much as lost in its folds, a sedimentology that one feels could go on forever. This weighs down upon one as long as one looks, a vertiginous material infinity, a muddying of matter and mind accompanied by an increasing need to break away from the gravity of some kind of black hole. *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, the title of the work, suggests entropy, a hole being a place you can get stuck in and the house stuffed with objects that seem to be in a rut.

Yet, despite all this, occasionally, an object seems to distinguish itself from the darkness of the background. It comes forward into the light of our attention and appears to communicate something to us: a convolution of being, only to sink back again into the background milieu as we move on. This may have to do with the aesthetic lens that we take with us, where the gallery situation primes us to spy a "purloined letter" on the mantelpiece, a ship in a bottle with the label "America 1851"; moments of curious beauty such as little pastel-coloured plastic beads or some photographs, and some narrow paintings in the gloomy entrance hall depicting moonlit lakes shimmering and metaphysical. The surveillance culture of the gallery extends into the house and is distributed amongst the everyday processes of cleaning, food cycles, keeping the right temperature, maintaining an appropriate level of hope with quantities of entertainment.

The everyday in art produces a paranoia about visual pleasure, even with Thompson's invitation to be prurient. 'Uhila's lurking in the shadows or hiding his face create a kind of guerilla everyday outside of the mainstream everyday,

the everyday without a home, the repeats of the daily grind for survival through determination, ingenuity and instinct. The everyday is embodied, performed, enacted and its impoverishment laid bare. Meanwhile, Denny's work produces a vision of the world of multinational corporations that undoubtedly contribute to this widening of the gap between rich and poor through the medium of neoliberal economics. Denny's methodical, serial everyday is banal and droll; the dull thud of bureaucratic power extends mechanically into a form of discipline and punishment. The seriality, one thing after another of conference formats, produces only empty gestures, a glimpse of a world without art. Leach's everyday circles around the daily frissons of the local "news" and letter writing, modes of conduct that acquire precise metrics of time and the codes of language.

Spatial Practices

Because curators are acutely aware of the ambiguities of space and the aesthetic, social and political ways in which space turns into place, rooms into galleries, galleries into temples (or even shopping malls, catwalks and LEGOLAND®), the works in the Walters Prize confound notions of inside and outside in order to critically explore such seamless spatial transformations. As Brian O'Doherty put it, "[t]he development of the pristine placeless white cube is one of modernism's triumphs... the art within bares itself more and more, until it presents formalist end-products and a bit of reality from outside... maybe a collector should buy an 'empty' gallery space."⁴ Thompson's work begins with the timeless, minimalist emptiness of the elevated gallery, then there is a descent into the taxi, a journey (a swerve, a clinamen) into entropy, the chaotic fullness of matter, objects and ordinariness outside in the world where the metrics of time begin, where processes of self-organisation arise as we sift through the strata of the piles. We return, anagogically, to the emptiness of the white cube filled with mental images and memories of the ordinary lives of objects.

Leach's site/nonsite work is a large scale and ambitious spatial practice that spreads its influence as far as the bottom of the ocean, snagging various places, sites and relations on the way. It is interesting that the block is also a marker resting silently on the border of international waters bringing together the earth and the world in the artwork. And in Denny's work power and control "outside", in the actual conference the artwork references, is the analogue world compressed into digital images imaginatively unfolded in our own physical "spacetime" in the gallery, a neat demonstration of what we do with our computer screens that has passed into second nature. 'Uhila's work is a performance of iterations with little spatial markers or transgressions, paper wrappers, blankets and graffiti (much of it on the gallery walls where visitors have left their own messages of support, critique or art). 'Uhila performs a nomadic topology, a kind of circumambulation which creates a territory about the temple of the gallery allowing the periphery to come into the centre to breathe on the pristine white cube and to interlope in the whispers enclosed within. The artist suggests that this is a kind of life, parasitic but generative of



CONVERSATION

It's not about the words you speak
it's about the actions you demand. You can
speak a lot but if it doesn't change
anything it's just noise.

DLT DLT DLT

SPEED TO LEARN

It's not about the words you speak
it's about the actions you demand. You can
speak a lot but if it doesn't change
anything it's just noise.

DLT DLT DLT DLT DLT DLT DLT

MONDAY JANUARY

EPHAPHANY

It's not about the words you speak
it's about the actions you demand. You can
speak a lot but if it doesn't change
anything it's just noise.

EPIDEMIC INTELLIGENCE

It's not about the words you speak
it's about the actions you demand. You can
speak a lot but if it doesn't change
anything it's just noise.

PRIVACY

It's not about the words you speak
it's about the actions you demand. You can
speak a lot but if it doesn't change
anything it's just noise.



KEYNOTE



"People need to be informed about the processes of their cities in simple, clear language they can understand."

"Blocking the internet is not a European option"

"We have to have rules that are future proof and technology neutral"



"Our data laws were made in 1995. When 1% of data was transmitted through the internet. It is now 99% that goes through the internet. So it is high time that we review these laws"

"Freedom of information and copyright must not be in tension. They are partners"

"People's content needs to be complete and secure"



www.dld.de



Figs 11–13
 Simon Denny
All You Need Is Data
 – The DLD 2012
 Conference REDUX
 2014
 Walters Prize 2014,
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki



its own purposes and relations, a kind of debased participatory art where the circulation of food packages and gifts are somewhat reminiscent of Tiravanjia's transformation of the gallery into a canteen but here void of any utopian tendency. The glass walkway where visitors look down on the amphitheatre peopled by 'Uhila's destitute companions reverses the panopticon and puts the gallery visitors on show. Thompson's work seems intricate and complicated compared with this ascetic work which remains true to the pared down techniques and methods of performance art, immanently (that is, not just representationally or allegorically) dealing with homelessness, ironically in a place of wealth and national pride. 'Uhila undermines the very theory of art, perhaps even the appropriateness of theorising, by which we explain what artists do to test its very limits. *Mo'ui Tukuhausia* ("life put aside") also cuts through the exhibition system like a knife.

By bringing together these different works the Walters Prize becomes a clearing where all these issues materialise yet the Prize does not stand outside of this opening; it is part of this problem space, an observer who cannot extricate

herself from the adumbrations of the objects observed. These works spatially explore the underlying discursivity that I mentioned to begin with which has to do with how the everyday (in its various bureaucratic, domestic, homeless and digital forms), might be framed or transfigured with artistic knowledge in the hope of allowing critical and creative responses, and problem spaces, to emerge. Problem spaces make us think and disrupt automatic behavior and assumptions, sometimes even purposeful activity; however, they are also spaces where the bodily enjoyment of comforting sensations is thwarted. These artworks achieve these problem spaces not with the rational methods we might expect of a treatise or political manifesto but by risking chaos, unreason and meaninglessness.

Situating Imagination

These artworks make us a little less comfortable in our bodies. In Denny's spaces the body is fashioned by a "walking-reading"/"machine-readable" walking that forces a grammar onto its mechanics: the imagination's freedom of manoeuvre becomes pedestrian and gridded. The embodied everyday drains away creativity into the disciplined and segmented spaces we occupy most in our lives: office, home, and shopping mall all producing predictable rhythms. It could be that these artworks become a spark for exercising a rather more arrhythmic imagination. Thompson and 'Uhila provide an affective, discomforting dimension to politics: it is all very well to understand the (textual) critique of how neoliberalism functions to alienate or deceive us but it is precisely the everyday that brings home to us how this system of exploitation affects us personally in terms of mood, spatially, and in multisensory ways, and in terms of our relationship with hope. Similarly, Leach's work suggests a system of belief in something that is not visible or tangible, removed from site/sight and known only through tales and relics. This could be the mythic power of the whale, the sea and the recycled energies of lost monuments, or it could be the enduring power of the imagination that causes all these things to move.

If there is a criticism of any of these works it lies in the question concerning futurity: is the presentation of our predicament enough to make us *want* to change it? Or are we any better placed to understand *how* to change it? Are we all in some utopian sense to become artists able to discern *ironic* everyday? Is it creative enough merely to point at, to *objectify* the everyday? Should we ask, after Foucault, what are the conditions by which a person can become an artist of her own life? How can an aesthetics of existence work outside the auspices of the exhibition system which spins out its own kind of everyday?

Lefebvre explains that the everyday is the place "where repetition and creativity confront each other ... simultaneously the time and place where the human either fulfills itself or fails."⁵ For the visitor to the house in Epsom, the price of failure is to be left to endure the tyranny of the ready-made, where the world "turns to prose" and where unremarkable objects and facts befuddle the

imagination. On the other hand, one might venture that something is not right with this world, that one does not feel at home in it somehow. One can become sensitive and open to ripples of chaos underlying any milieu. This is also risky because such openness is not vouchsafed by critical theory or history: they can guide us with knowledge of previous artistic experiments but they can foreclose as well as open up a situation. In these works there is something humble, concrete, and in excess of or resistant to theoretical explanation. This concrete does not merely follow theoretical positions and tradition, it can change them.

In encounters with these artworks, we wager the reserves of our imagination to transform the everyday or we are left in its thrall. The repeat structures and rhythms of the everyday with which we drift into our standardised lifestyles according to habit, familiarity or mindlessness, produce a world where everything has its predictable place. It seems important that this is not quite the same as snagging these rhythms into the facture of art which somehow allows us to become aware of them. For a moment things might seem out of joint, intensities and passions could rupture erratically through the everyday repeats and order, the semblance of normalcy, to give us glimpses of how we might possibly live or think differently; there is a “clamour of being”.⁶ How can something so vital and important be so imperceptible? As Lefebvre writes:

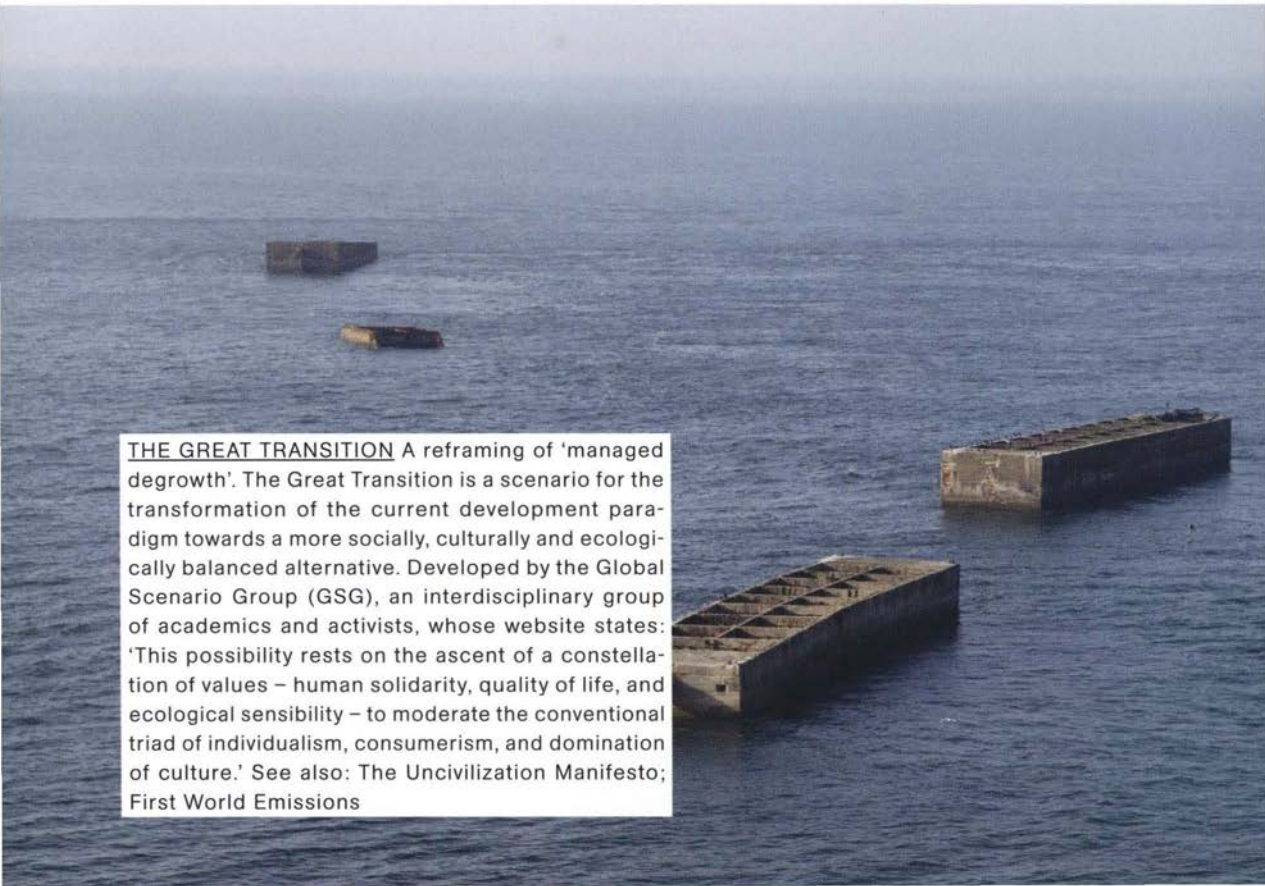
In one sense there is nothing more simple and more obvious than everyday life. How do people live? ... nothing could be more superficial: it is banality, triviality, repetitiveness. And yet in another sense nothing could be more profound. It is existence and the ‘lived’, revealed as they are before speculative thought has transcribed them: what must be changed and what is the hardest of all to change.⁷

1. The Auckland Art Gallery explains that “the \$50,000 Walters Prize is awarded for an outstanding work of contemporary New Zealand art produced and exhibited during the past two years” <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/whats-on/events/2014/july/the-walters-prize-2014> [accessed 17 April 2014]
2. The British artist Jeremy Deller did something similar in 1993. While his parents were on holiday he used the family home for an exhibition titled, *Open Bedroom*.
3. Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics* (Manchester, U.K.: Clinamen Press, 2001), 202.
4. Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, [Calif.]: Lapis Press, 1986), 79.
5. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, vol. 2 (London: Verso, 2002), 47.
6. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 35.
7. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life*, 47.

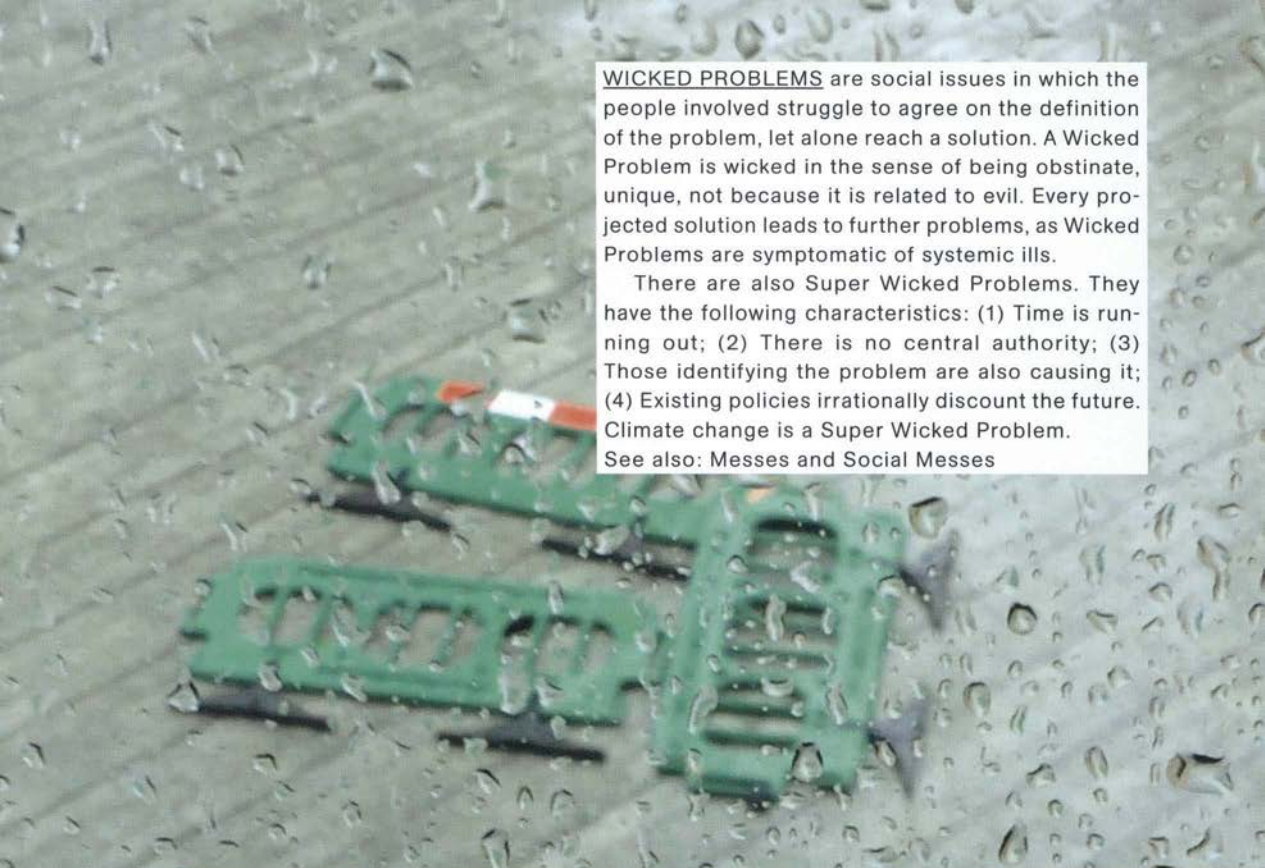
CLIMATE CHANGE AND ART
A LEXICON IN PROGRESS

Compiled by
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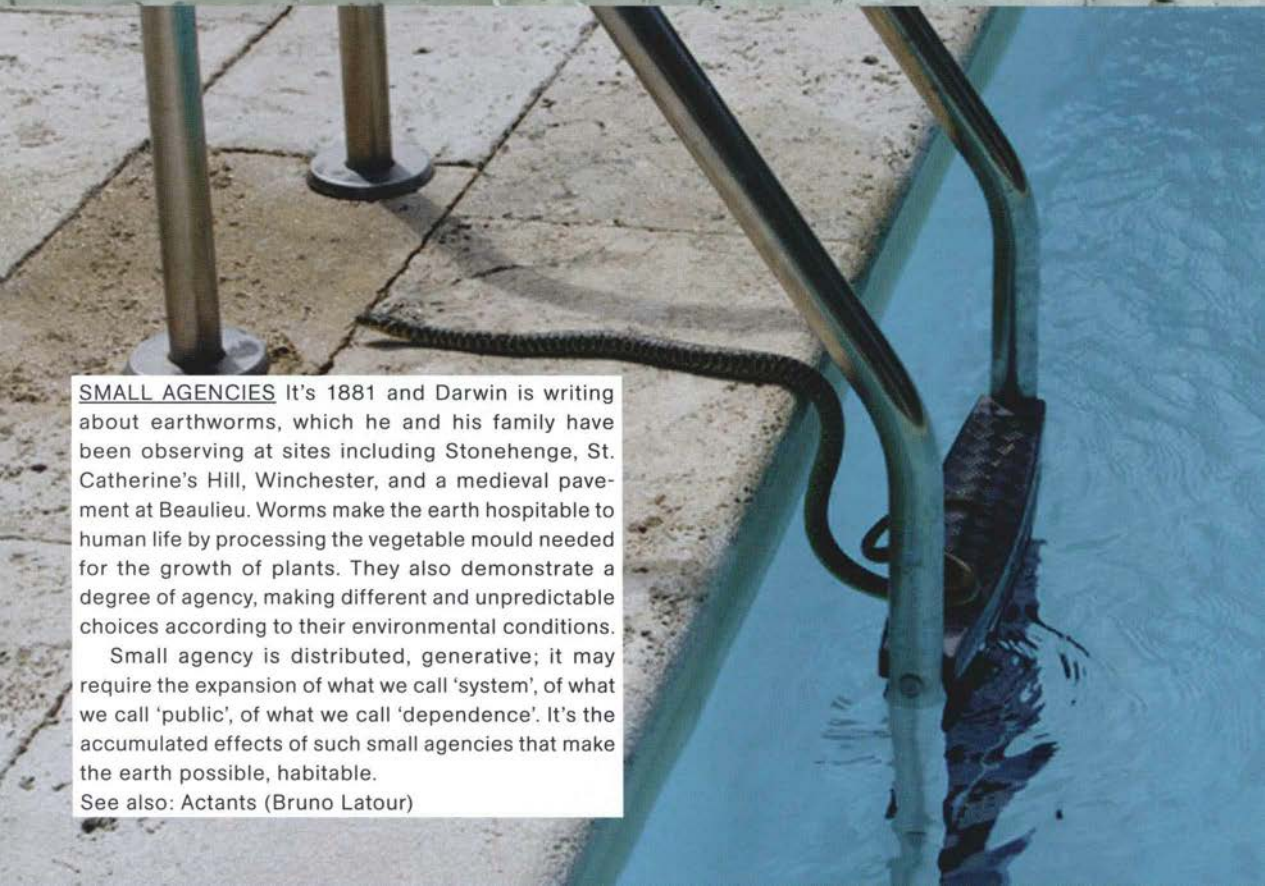


THE GREAT TRANSITION A reframing of 'managed degrowth'. The Great Transition is a scenario for the transformation of the current development paradigm towards a more socially, culturally and ecologically balanced alternative. Developed by the Global Scenario Group (GSG), an interdisciplinary group of academics and activists, whose website states: 'This possibility rests on the ascent of a constellation of values – human solidarity, quality of life, and ecological sensibility – to moderate the conventional triad of individualism, consumerism, and domination of culture.' See also: The Uncivilization Manifesto; First World Emissions



WICKED PROBLEMS are social issues in which the people involved struggle to agree on the definition of the problem, let alone reach a solution. A Wicked Problem is wicked in the sense of being obstinate, unique, not because it is related to evil. Every projected solution leads to further problems, as Wicked Problems are symptomatic of systemic ills.

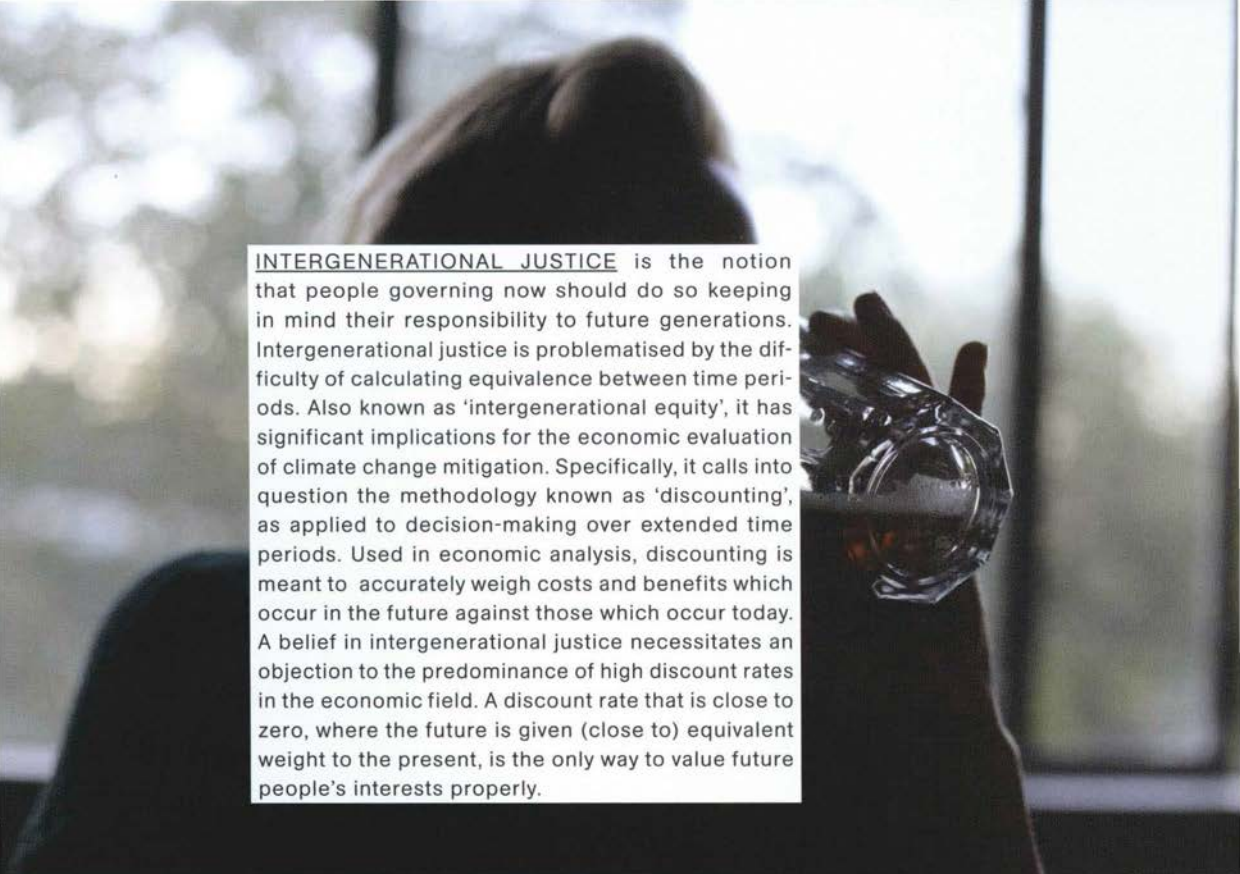
There are also Super Wicked Problems. They have the following characteristics: (1) Time is running out; (2) There is no central authority; (3) Those identifying the problem are also causing it; (4) Existing policies irrationally discount the future. Climate change is a Super Wicked Problem. See also: Messes and Social Messes



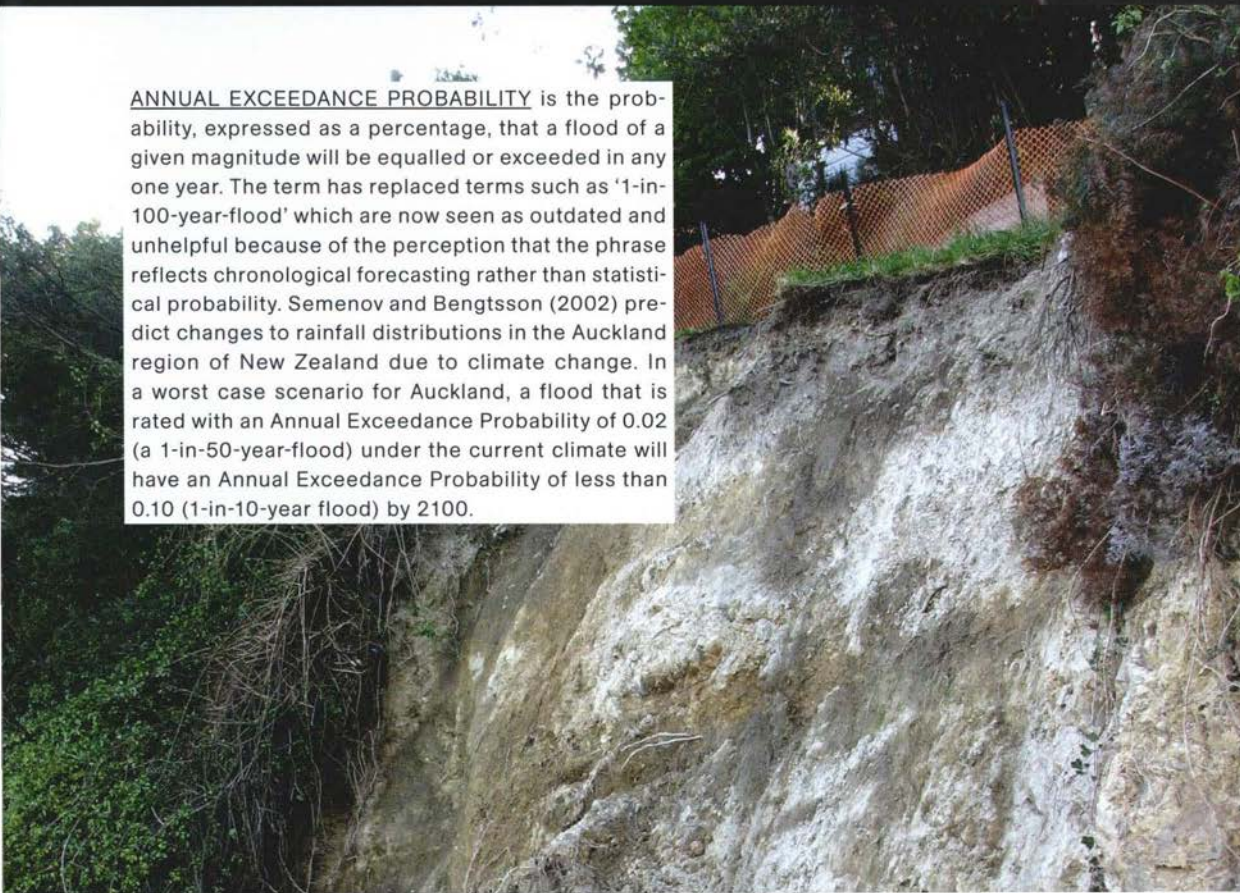
SMALL AGENCIES It's 1881 and Darwin is writing about earthworms, which he and his family have been observing at sites including Stonehenge, St. Catherine's Hill, Winchester, and a medieval pavement at Beaulieu. Worms make the earth hospitable to human life by processing the vegetable mould needed for the growth of plants. They also demonstrate a degree of agency, making different and unpredictable choices according to their environmental conditions.

Small agency is distributed, generative; it may require the expansion of what we call 'system', of what we call 'public', of what we call 'dependence'. It's the accumulated effects of such small agencies that make the earth possible, habitable.

See also: Actants (Bruno Latour)

A person with long hair is seen from behind, looking out a window. They are holding a clear glass of water. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor scene.

INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE is the notion that people governing now should do so keeping in mind their responsibility to future generations. Intergenerational justice is problematised by the difficulty of calculating equivalence between time periods. Also known as 'intergenerational equity', it has significant implications for the economic evaluation of climate change mitigation. Specifically, it calls into question the methodology known as 'discounting', as applied to decision-making over extended time periods. Used in economic analysis, discounting is meant to accurately weigh costs and benefits which occur in the future against those which occur today. A belief in intergenerational justice necessitates an objection to the predominance of high discount rates in the economic field. A discount rate that is close to zero, where the future is given (close to) equivalent weight to the present, is the only way to value future people's interests properly.

A steep, eroded hillside with a safety net. The hillside is light-colored and shows signs of erosion. A safety net is visible on the upper part of the slope. The background is a dense forest.

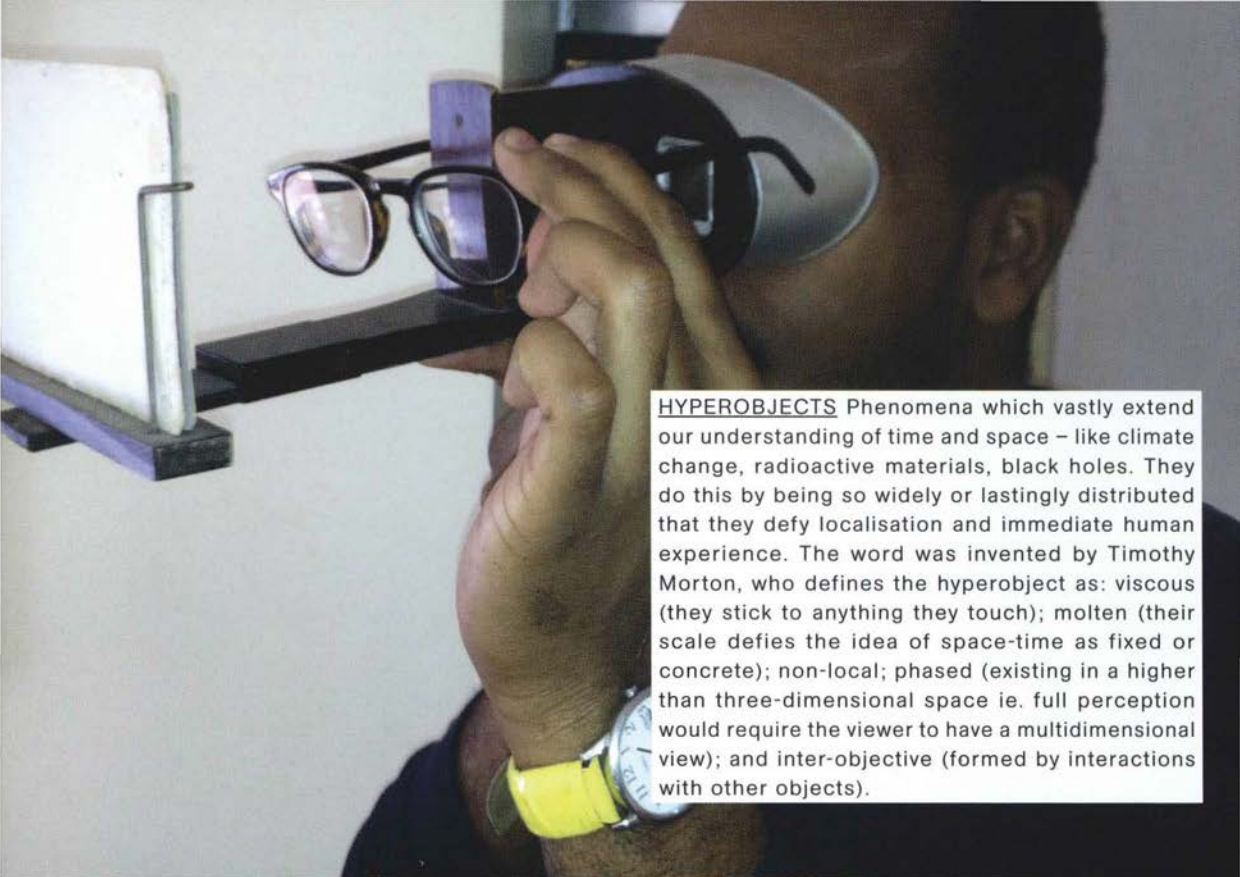
ANNUAL EXCEEDANCE PROBABILITY is the probability, expressed as a percentage, that a flood of a given magnitude will be equalled or exceeded in any one year. The term has replaced terms such as '1-in-100-year-flood' which are now seen as outdated and unhelpful because of the perception that the phrase reflects chronological forecasting rather than statistical probability. Semenov and Bengtsson (2002) predict changes to rainfall distributions in the Auckland region of New Zealand due to climate change. In a worst case scenario for Auckland, a flood that is rated with an Annual Exceedance Probability of 0.02 (a 1-in-50-year-flood) under the current climate will have an Annual Exceedance Probability of less than 0.10 (1-in-10-year flood) by 2100.

GREEN FASCISM A pejorative term used by those anxious that environmental policies are overemphasised, and will be used to 'destroy the free market' on the pretext of a pending ecological crisis so extreme that it justifies state intervention. Frequently called upon by individuals politically and economically invested in maintaining a system unregulated by ecological concerns.

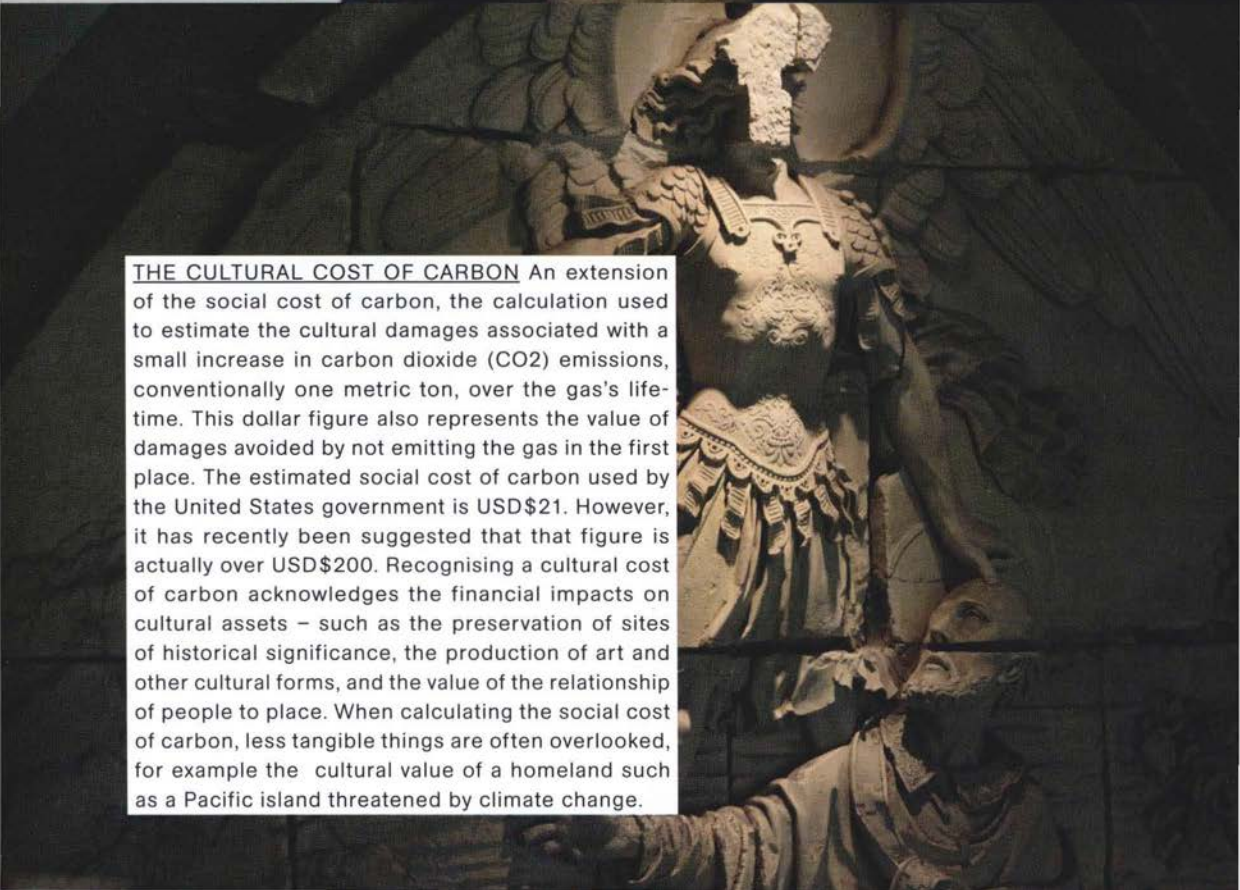


RE-COMMUNALISATION The reversal of the neoliberal policies of the past decades that led to widespread privatisation of state controlled assets. Also called 're-municipalisation', driven by the desire on the part of communities for local power. A locally controlled energy system would be concerned with public interest not profits. Re-communalisation allows for greater local agency in decision-making about what to invest in; this is typically used as a means to invest in renewable energy.



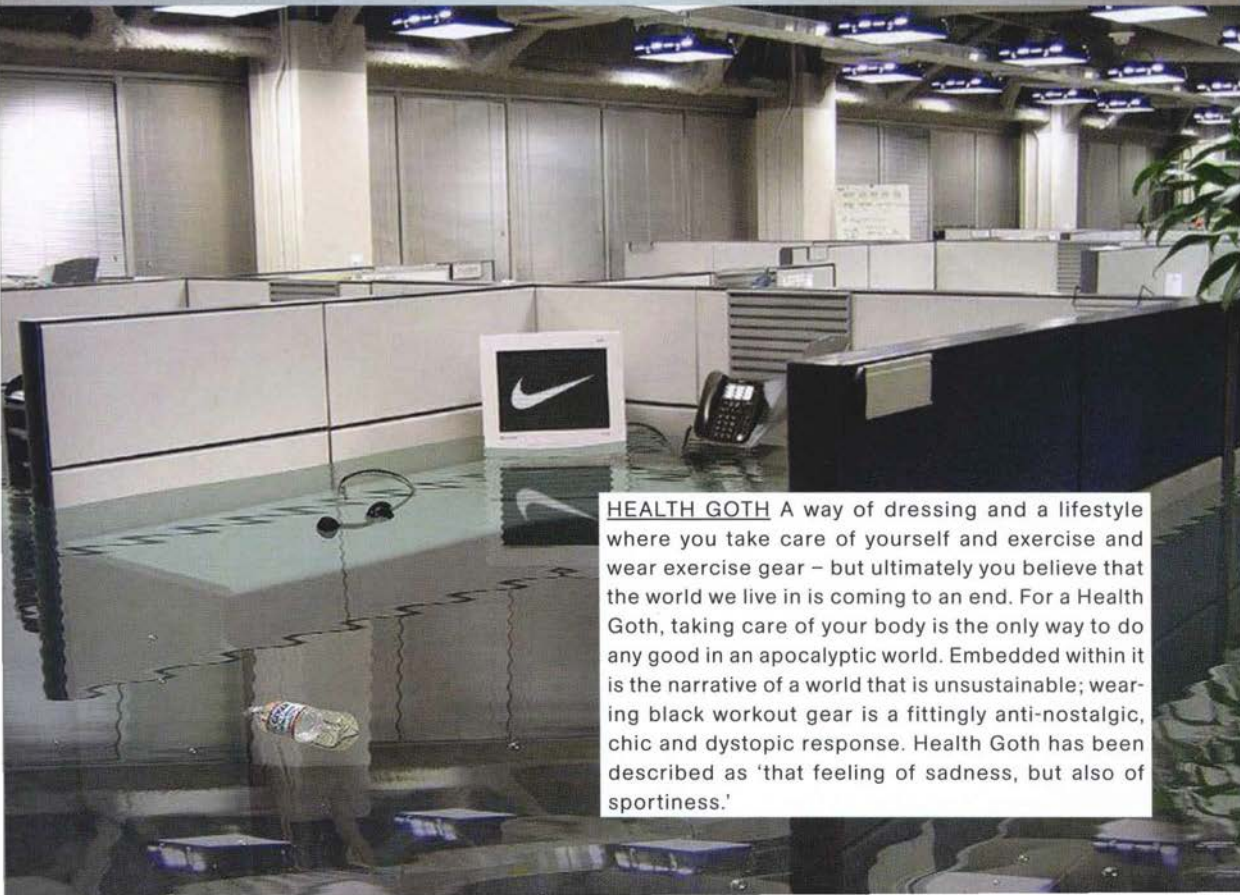


HYPEROBJECTS Phenomena which vastly extend our understanding of time and space – like climate change, radioactive materials, black holes. They do this by being so widely or lastingly distributed that they defy localisation and immediate human experience. The word was invented by Timothy Morton, who defines the hyperobject as: viscous (they stick to anything they touch); molten (their scale defies the idea of space-time as fixed or concrete); non-local; phased (existing in a higher than three-dimensional space ie. full perception would require the viewer to have a multidimensional view); and inter-objective (formed by interactions with other objects).



THE CULTURAL COST OF CARBON An extension of the social cost of carbon, the calculation used to estimate the cultural damages associated with a small increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, conventionally one metric ton, over the gas's lifetime. This dollar figure also represents the value of damages avoided by not emitting the gas in the first place. The estimated social cost of carbon used by the United States government is USD\$21. However, it has recently been suggested that that figure is actually over USD\$200. Recognising a cultural cost of carbon acknowledges the financial impacts on cultural assets – such as the preservation of sites of historical significance, the production of art and other cultural forms, and the value of the relationship of people to place. When calculating the social cost of carbon, less tangible things are often overlooked, for example the cultural value of a homeland such as a Pacific island threatened by climate change.

RESILIENCE RHETORIC Matthew Allen writes about the widespread use of the word 'resilience' in post-disaster scenarios in Australia. Adopted by the media, government agencies, community groups and NGOs, it is often associated with national character: being 'tough', 'hardy', 'battlers', 'pragmatic', 'plucky' etc. In the context of increasingly extreme and frequent natural disasters, the idea of resilience may be instrumentalised by policy makers to offload responsibility for mitigating the causes and consequences of such disasters onto individuals within the affected communities themselves.

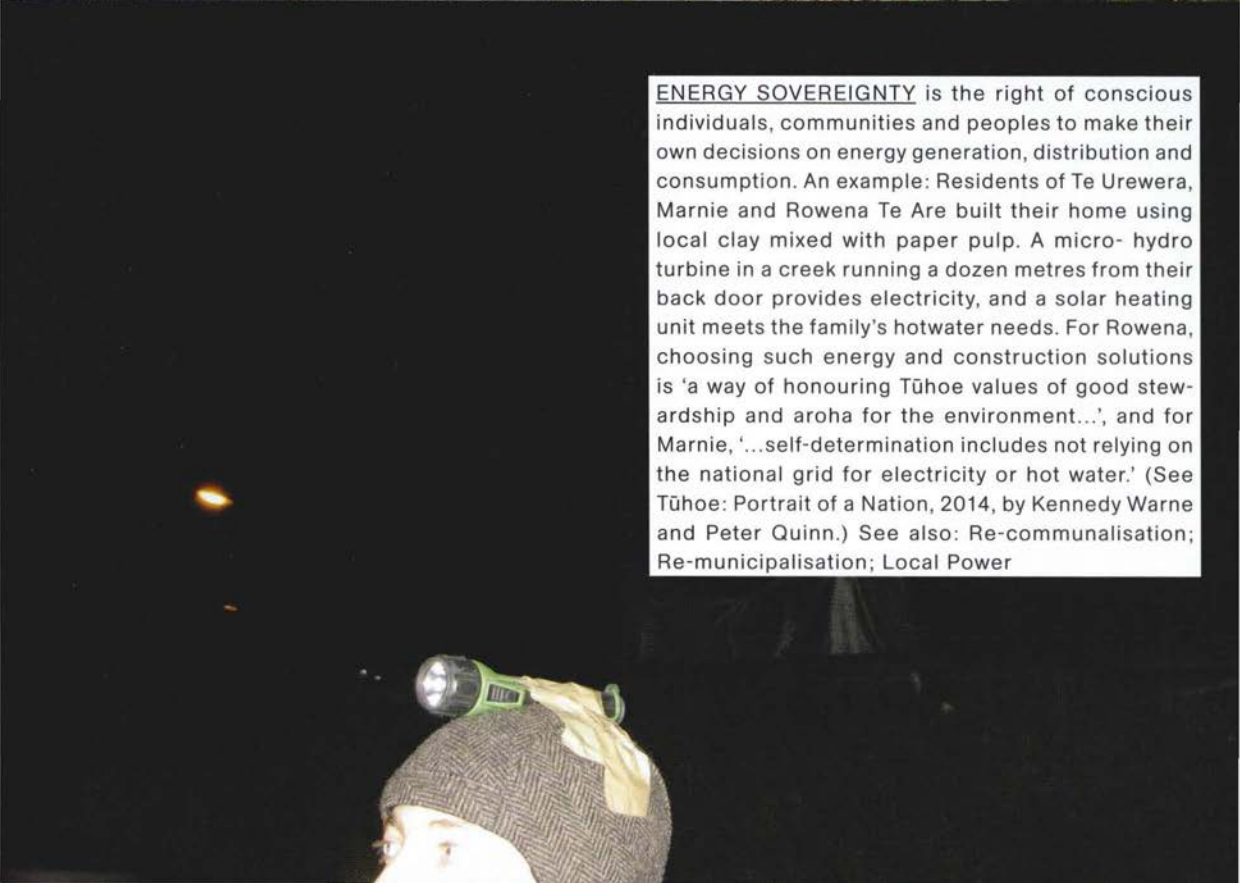


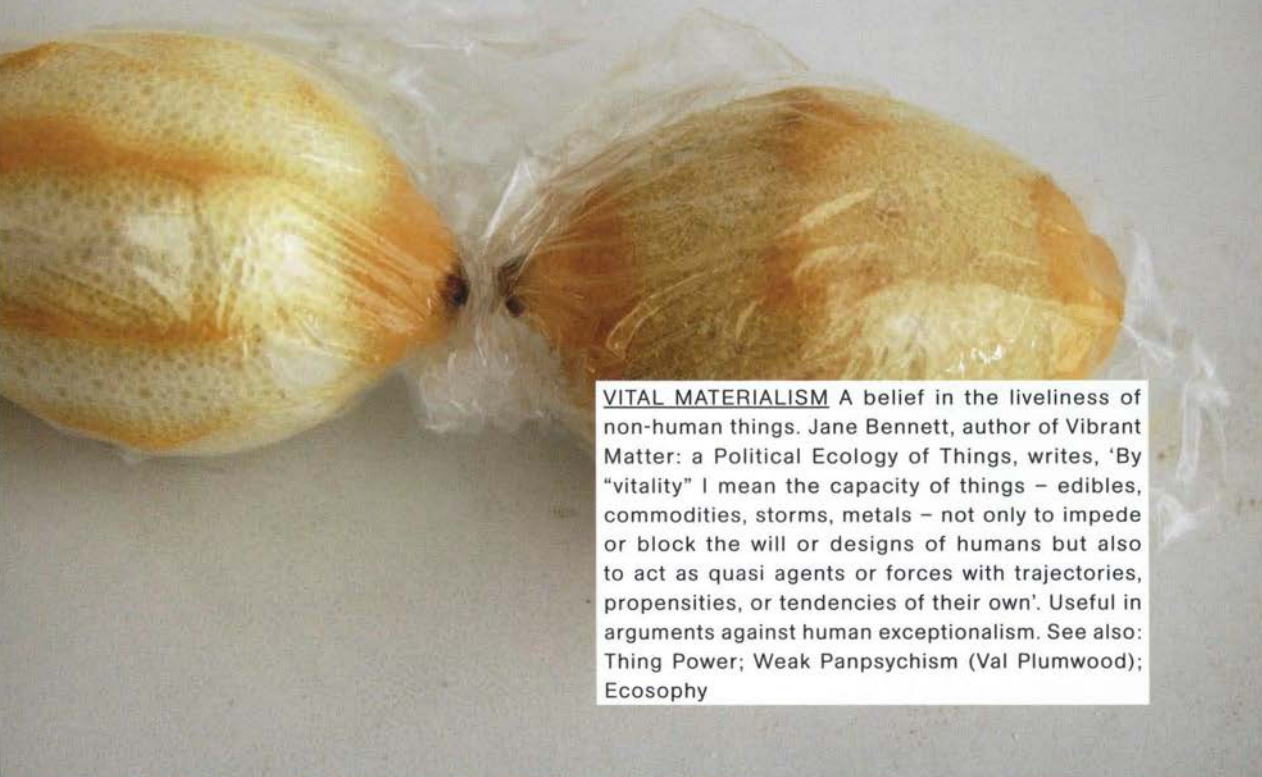
HEALTH GOTH A way of dressing and a lifestyle where you take care of yourself and exercise and wear exercise gear – but ultimately you believe that the world we live in is coming to an end. For a Health Goth, taking care of your body is the only way to do any good in an apocalyptic world. Embedded within it is the narrative of a world that is unsustainable; wearing black workout gear is a fittingly anti-nostalgic, chic and dystopic response. Health Goth has been described as 'that feeling of sadness, but also of sportiness.'



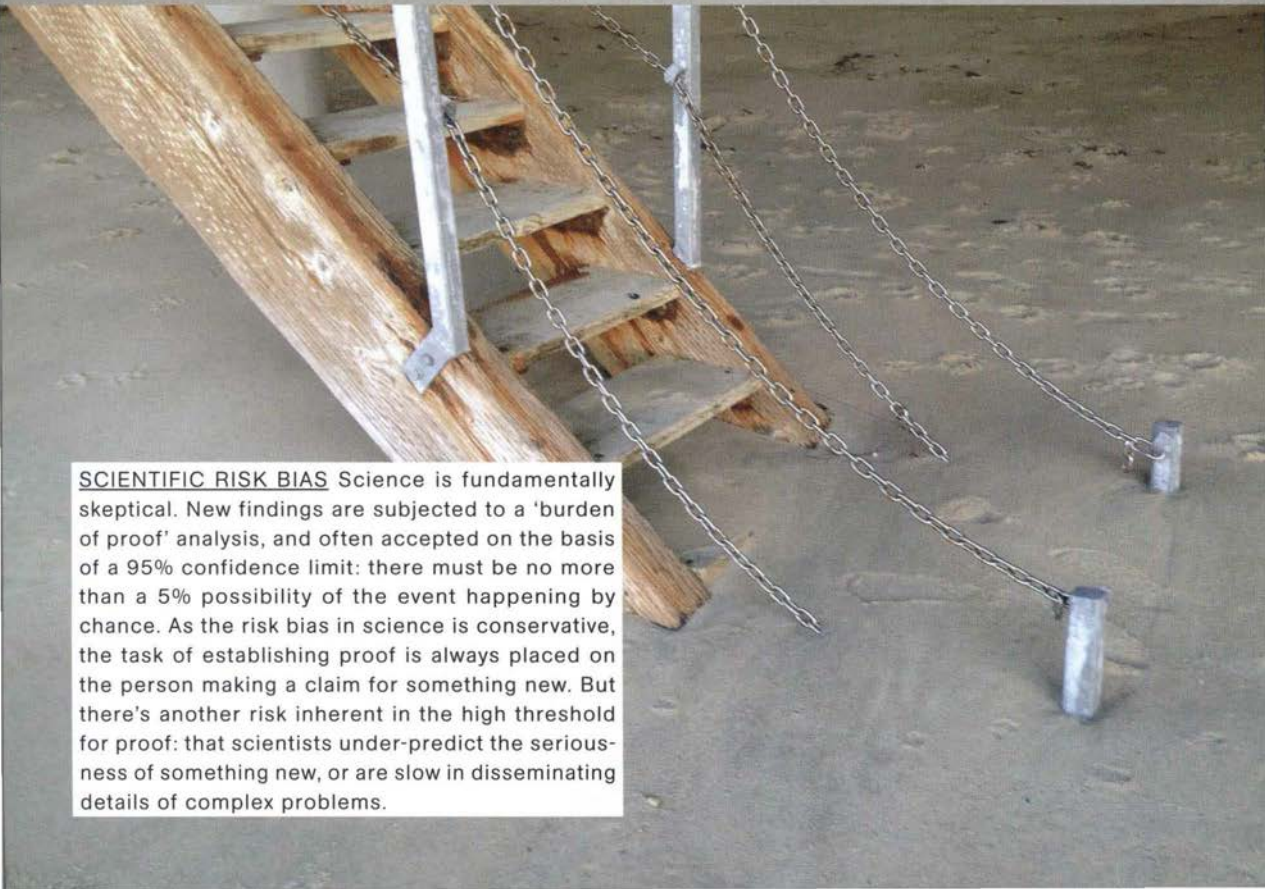
HABITAT NOSTALGIA Nostalgia for a place you're in, grieving its 'inevitable loss'. Related to what Naomi Klein (author of *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*) calls 'a morbid habit of "pre-loss", a variation on the "pre-crimes" committed in the movie *Minority Report*.' See also: *Ecological Despair: Ecocide*

ENERGY SOVEREIGNTY is the right of conscious individuals, communities and peoples to make their own decisions on energy generation, distribution and consumption. An example: Residents of Te Urewera, Marnie and Rowena Te Are built their home using local clay mixed with paper pulp. A micro- hydro turbine in a creek running a dozen metres from their back door provides electricity, and a solar heating unit meets the family's hotwater needs. For Rowena, choosing such energy and construction solutions is 'a way of honouring Tūhoe values of good stewardship and aroha for the environment...', and for Marnie, '...self-determination includes not relying on the national grid for electricity or hot water.' (See *Tūhoe: Portrait of a Nation*, 2014, by Kennedy Warne and Peter Quinn.) See also: *Re-communalisation; Re-municipalisation; Local Power*





VITAL MATERIALISM A belief in the liveliness of non-human things. Jane Bennett, author of *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*, writes, 'By "vitality" I mean the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will or designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own'. Useful in arguments against human exceptionalism. See also: *Thing Power*; *Weak Panpsychism* (Val Plumwood); *Ecosophy*



SCIENTIFIC RISK BIAS Science is fundamentally skeptical. New findings are subjected to a 'burden of proof' analysis, and often accepted on the basis of a 95% confidence limit: there must be no more than a 5% possibility of the event happening by chance. As the risk bias in science is conservative, the task of establishing proof is always placed on the person making a claim for something new. But there's another risk inherent in the high threshold for proof: that scientists under-predict the seriousness of something new, or are slow in disseminating details of complex problems.

PREVIOUS PAGES

*Climate Change and Art:
A Lexicon in Progress*
The Distance Plan

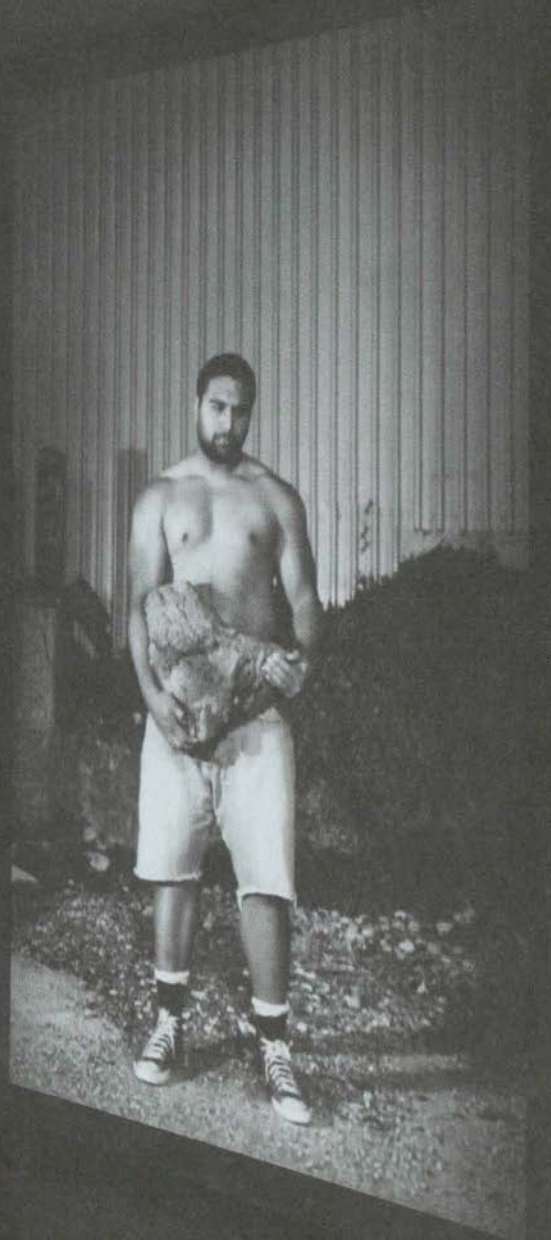


Fig. 1

John Vea

Finish this week off and that's it! 2014

Five channel projection,

1:59:20 looped

Exhibited as part of

Welcome, Artspace,

New Zealand 5 September

– 4 October, 2014

Photo: Sam Hartnett

Image courtesy of the

artist and Artspace,

New Zealand

For six weeks in the winter of 2014 John Vea, a man of rugby player build and over six feet tall, ate for \$2.40 a day. The documentation of Vea's six weeks, *Finish this week off and that's it!* (2014) was a five-channel video installation in which each projection showed an almost-life-sized Vea, filmed one week apart, picking up and holding a volcanic boulder, weighing perhaps 40 kilograms, for as long as he could.

In the course of the six weeks, Vea's friends, family, the curator Ahilapalapa Rands, Artspace as the commissioning institution and I myself as a facilitator for the exhibition watched and supported Vea through this process. By our own implication in its production we are also made witnesses, a position that both clarifies and complicates what I can see in the work. Proximity complicates vision. In the production his body tired and slackened and shrunk; conversations with him languished, he struggled to concentrate. By contrast, in the documentation – a progression test conducted for the camera – Vea's grip improved, he became stronger, or perhaps more resilient against

the jagged surface upon his palms, though his form slackened; his back arched and his weightlifter's technique waivered. In the videos he is hungry and silent and there is no particular glamour or grace about it, but he copes.

Two dollars and 40 cents per day for food is one definition for poverty in New Zealand. There are others – many are more frequently cited – though partial and simplistic this definition is immediate in its translation to an everyday, lived reality. In taking on this definition, Vea steps outside of his world of postgraduate study and away even from friends who offer to shout him a coffee or a meal. He situates himself in solidarity with people who must live this definition but his retained agency in *choosing* this position also presents a stark and disconcerting difference.

Vea was however, not alone in his taking on of a position which is both out of sync from those who support it and from the circumstances and world which he steps alongside. Vea's undertaking occurred

Fig. 2
Bruce Barber
Exhibition poster for *Stocks
and Bonds*, Auckland Art
Gallery, 21–29 October,
1975
Project Programme
Archive, E H McCormick
Research Library Auckland
Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

concurrently to Kaisolite 'Uhila's Walters Prize restaging of the work *Mo'ui Tukuhausia* at the Auckland Art Gallery in 2014; in which 'Uhila lived homeless around the gallery for the roughly three month duration of the exhibition. As a friend of 'Uhila and as security guard for the Auckland Art Gallery, Vea was a daily audience for, witness to and facilitator of 'Uhila's work and 'Uhila for his.

Mo'ui Tukuhausia, originally commissioned for the exhibition *What do you mean, we?*, at Te Tuhi in 2012 in part developed from 'Uhila's experiences working as a security guard in and around Auckland's central business district and simultaneous experiments he conducted in sleeping rough at the other end of the occupation of public space¹. 'Uhila's long corridor-like exhibition space at Auckland Art Gallery, began the exhibition with nothing but a few possessions which he might make use of in his time. While the space evolved to a (largely unplanned and uninvited) cacophony of graffiti drawn by gallery visitors, for the most part, the work was just 'Uhila's promise to himself and the ripples that created.

The work is nearly invisible. There was no sign around 'Uhila's neck, no app for gallery goers to find him. Not knowing 'Uhila could mean he might be any face in a crowd of unfamiliar faces noticed or ignored (wilfully or unwittingly); knowing him meant realising the places one doesn't normally look for friends. "Seeing" the work complicated the acts of seeing and seeing through. 'Uhila's choice produces the position of homelessness and in this the work relentlessly centered and complicated invisibility as a position; be that for the homeless, the audience, the institution, the artist or those occupying more than one of those positions at once.

Recent years, and perhaps 2014 in particular, have seen a number of important post-object works restaged and their critical conditions revisited and reframed through major publications and exhibitions – many within specifically contemporary art contexts. In 2014 this bringing into focus of works from the 1970s and early 1980s naturally occurs alongside the emergence of new works by a younger generation of artists like Vea and 'Uhila. The structure of exhausting and potentially dangerous commitment-as-work and some of the visual cues in well-known works from the period like Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance 1981–1982 (Outdoor Piece)* or lesser-known, locally produced works like Bruce Barber's *Stocks and Bonds*, Gray Nicol's *Installation/Performance* (both from the Auckland City Art Gallery's 1975 Project Programme) and Marina Abramovic and Ulay's *Witnessing* (performed at *ANZART* in Christchurch, 1981)² are a few examples that Vea and 'Uhila could be referencing. However, Vea and 'Uhila's works are not produced in order to echo or reference those earlier works, some of which are relatively obscure for a start, rather their conception privileges this time and this place, lived experience, personal encounters, Vea for example citing *talanoa*, a social process of one to one conversations where one's story, realities and hopes are shared, as integral to his decision to undertake the work. In short, while comparison of structural similarities presented within this art history will not present a map of references that frames lineages, allegiances and legacies, it will give a tool with which to closely read the work.

The E H McCormick Research Library holds in its archive collections a letter sent dated 19 September 1975 by John Maynard, the then exhibitions officer at Auckland Art Gallery, to Bruce Barber. Maynard's letter is a clear and informative response to a query from Barber

STOCKS AND BONDS
 AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY
 BRUCE BARBER 21st - 29th OCTOBER 1975

A PERFORMANCE

An examination of some of the distinguishing features of the public gallery situation when confronted with an art work that attempts to deny the efficacies of that situation.

- Given 1. The artist as petty offender and/or judge.
 2. The gallery as churchyard and/or market place.
 N.B. Are the principles of the gallery egalitarian?
 Are the principles of the work egalitarian?

Tuesday 21st.

C.C.T.V. is arranged in the galleries. Co-axial cable is run from the two top galleries to a television monitor below in the foyer. This allows the public to view the performance while the gallery is closed. A public address system is arranged so that the performer may harangue the audience within and also outside the gallery itself. The P.A. system must sound like that found in a fairground or market place. The stocks are set up in the access area between the two galleries, effectively dividing these into two separate spaces . . . into two hemispheres. The seat is placed in anticipation. The scene is set for the arrival of the petty offender.

Wednesday 22nd

Mother's birthday.

Thursday 23rd.

Rest, confer . . . concentrate . . . confutation occurs.

Friday 24th.

United Nations day. The offender's fast begins.

Saturday 25th.

The offender is placed in the stocks at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday 26th.

He remains in the stocks.

Monday 27th.

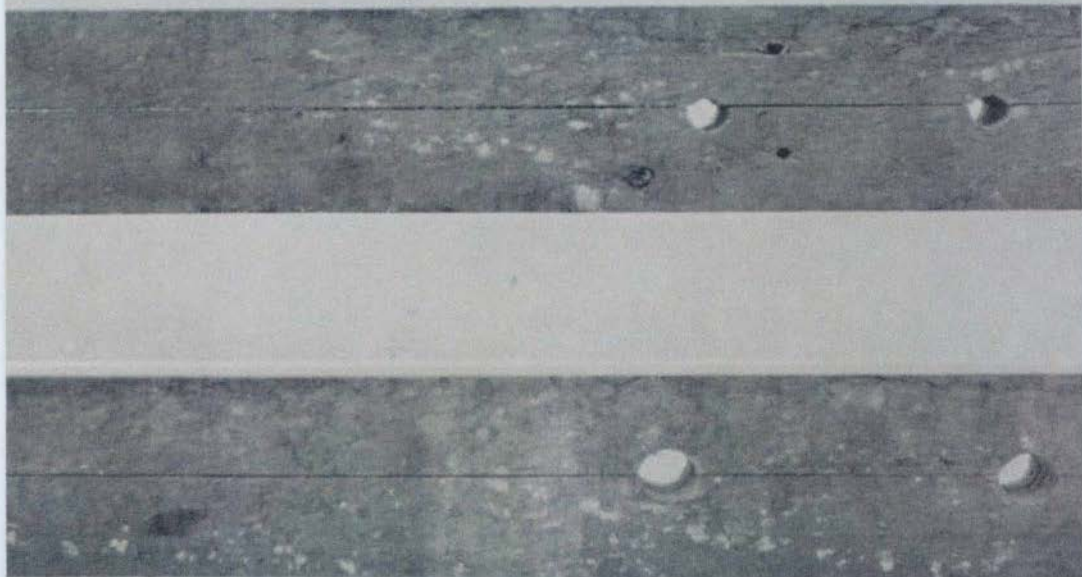
Labour Day. At 5:00 p.m. the offender is released. Fast ends.

Tuesday 28th.

Confer, rest.

Wednesday 29th.

Equipment is switched off. All is removed.



PPX

19 September 1975

Mr Bruce Barber
c/o School of Fine Arts
University of Auckland
Private Bag
AUCKLAND

Dear Bruce

I have asked for the information you requested to be supplied and you will find it below.

Having extra staff has not been without some difficulties as one of our permanent security staff is on holiday abroad and one wishes to take his family away, and of course one is required to work during the day. As we only have four, we are left with one person to do a night shift, which he has kindly agreed to do.

The information you require is:-

Charles Marshall Saturday 5.30 p.m. to Sunday 8.00 a.m. which is because of penalty rates a total of 27½ hours at \$2.5578 per hour (would you believe four decimals) and I guess that makes a total of \$70.3395.

Sunday 5.30 p.m. to Monday 8.00 a.m. 29 hours. There is a difference in penalty rates (blame Sunday for that), a total of \$74.1962 which gives a total of \$144.5357.

Because gallery staff do not usually commence work until noon, another security staff member has agreed to come in from 8.00 a.m. to 12 noon, his name is Doug Mitchell. Penalty rates make 68 hours and at \$2.774 per hour (a more senior person) \$22.182.

Total for both is \$166.7177. On top of this must be taxi fares (for Sunday 8.00 a.m.) \$6.00. The grand total is \$172.71 (note two decimal places for grand total).

Best wishes

JOHN MAYNARD
EXHIBITIONS OFFICER

LEFT

Fig. 3

Letter to Bruce Barber
from John Maynard,
exhibitions officer at
Auckland Art Gallery,
detailing shifts and
costs for security staff
during the performance
Project Programme
Archive, E H McCormick
Research Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

RIGHT TOP

Fig. 4

Bruce Barber confined to
the stocks during *Stocks
and Bonds* performance,
Auckland Art Gallery,
21–29 October, 1975
Project Programme
Archive, E H McCormick
Research Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

RIGHT BELOW

Fig. 5

Bruce Barber
Excerpt from *On the
Stocks: A Catalogue
Complement/
Supplement to the
Performance "Stocks and
Bonds" 1975* Auckland
Art Gallery, Project
Programme Archive,
E H McCormick Research
Library Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



The enterprise I have involved myself in is not intentionally cabalistic in nature; I have focused my attention more on the hermeneutics of the situation and accordingly on the production and exploration of active and passive metaphors within a flexible structure. This structure exists within a definite art context but does not attempt to estrange itself from the culture at large.

The contract/communion between myself, my audience and by implication the culture as a whole is contingent upon the need to make and experience art . . . in this sense the terms artist (performer) and audience (active or passive participants) are mutually interchangeable. This is particularly true if we consider that the spectator completes the work irrespective of the nature or condition of that which is presented. He can only be guided or simply exposed. There is I feel a natural tendency for us to think while thinking and to shift from the role of audience to that of performer, from observing to doing; all of this takes place in the mind. We may complete not only the performances of others but also our own. This often happens in spite of our selves and our senses. It is unavoidably an act of observation and participation occurring simultaneously, with only subtle shifts of emphasis to distinguish one from the other. There is however a limit to what we may complete, as this catalogue will no doubt indicate.



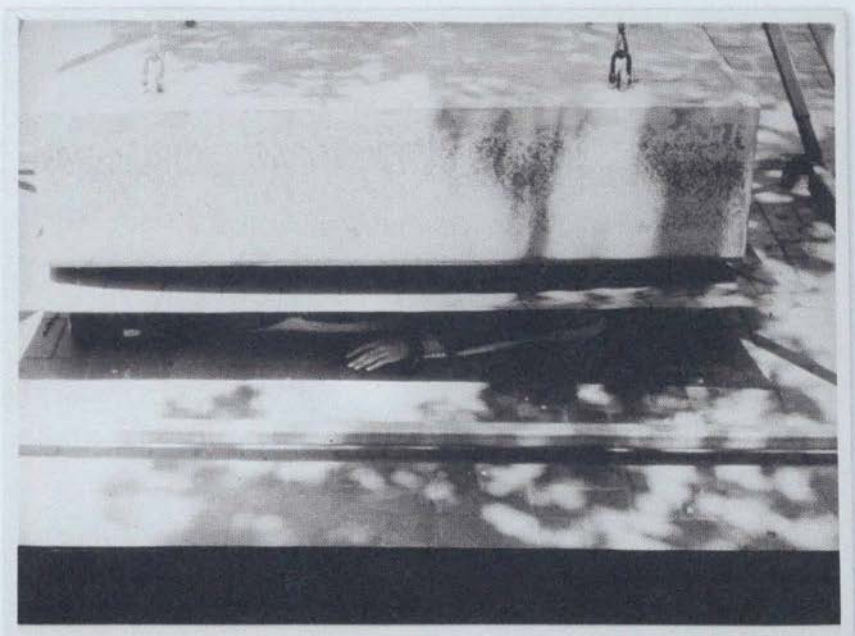
regarding arrangements for security staffing for Barber's forthcoming work *Stocks and Bonds*, Project 2 of the Auckland Art Gallery's Project Programme, running over the week 21–29 October 1975. The brief letter is delicately balanced with near finicky detail (the letter outlines costs to the fourth decimal place) with warmth, humour and a little sarcasm. The boring detail is almost memorable, and ostensibly this is what is required of Maynard as a producer of exhibitions actively facilitating the possibility of a week in which Barber would fast for several days and would be confined to stocks at the wrists and ankles in the gallery. A special arrangement of CCTV also made him visible to audiences on the street and audible elsewhere in the gallery. Throughout Barber was abused by the audience and occasionally was also the abuser. Suffering excruciating pain, he had his wrists removed from the stocks four hours into the performance.

Reading with the eye of a project facilitator, all seems to have gone more or less to plan; Barber's installation and performance riffing off of the position shared by

artist and criminal as deviant spectacle. Barber chose his action and dressed a precise stage for that action. He set his course. As did Veя and 'Uhila. However, to say that these artists are clearly producers and craftsmen of the risk that accompanies their works is not to say exactly that they simulate or imitate risk. While Barber retains an "out" the pain inflicted to this point is nevertheless not simulated; it is real pain.

However, part of the daring implied by Barber's action, the risk as a probability, as a chance calculated by producers and witnesses alike disintegrates with the safe resolution of the work. Maynard's letter appears again within the catalogue conceived alongside the commission under the heading "Securities for the Artworks"; the heading in this instance playfully circling around Barber's own status as artist and work; simultaneously producer and that which is produced. The catalogue extends the work through conceptual framing, descriptions, references and orphaned quotation, wordplay and a careful selection of documentation. The letter redirected to (or perhaps always

Figs 6 and 7
Two views of Gray Nicol lying shackled, during *Installation/Performance*, Auckland Art Gallery, 8 December 1975
Project Programme Archive, E H McCormick Research Library Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



intended for) this context privileges the moment in which risk is at its most threatening, the moment at which it requires the most management, the most minimisation. A corner is turned, here there is the possibility that Maynard assists in both the facilitation of risk and the production of the appearance of risk alongside Barber as a producer of the work.

The first group show for the Project Programme, Project 7, included a single installation/performance amongst an exhibition otherwise comprised of drawings and paintings: *Current Works from Studios*. The work involved Gray Nicol laying shackled to the Sculpture Court of Auckland Art Gallery with a concrete block weighing several tons suspended above him for 24 hours. A liability waiver was signed with the Gallery (retained and later published and now in the E H McCormick Research Library), Nicol fasted in the lead up to the performance, and at dawn on 8 December 1975 he was locked into place. Various, meditative, “touched”, “disoriented and nauseous” over the 24 hours, at one point he was fed sparkling wine through

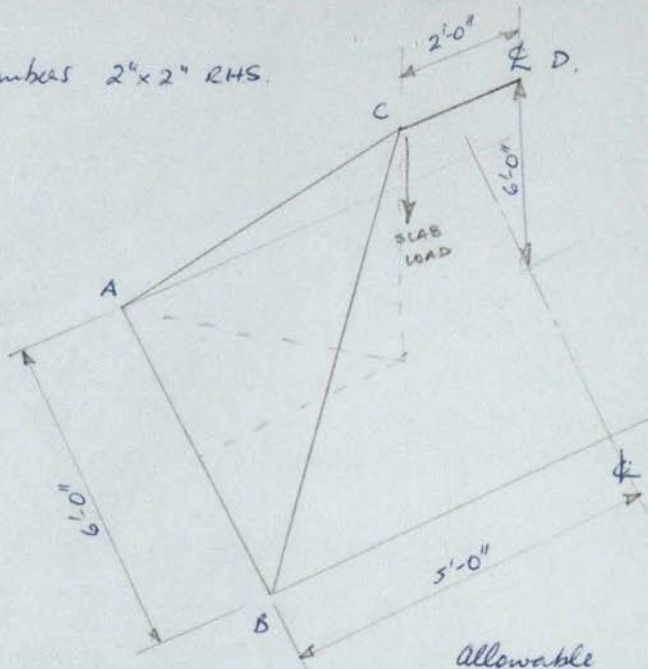
a chain of straws by a band of revellers and at another he had to convince a group dressed as Robin Hood and his Merry Men to stop rocking the slab above him. He stayed the planned amount of time, at the end “grateful to Kim [Gray] who had stuck around to loosen the shackles” at dawn the following day³.

Crucially, in the lead up to the performance Nicol fragmented the fabrication process of the structure that suspended the block, firstly designing it and stipulating the materials himself, then obscuring the mysterious object’s purpose from the engineer who simply provided him a calculation of the design’s strength. Then, again, the purpose was hidden from the technician who welded the structure to specification. The technician and engineer knew nothing of the risk implied by a slight miscalculation; their presumed diligence is subsumed into the work.

For Nicol, there is only one way out if the structure fails; the privilege of an “out” by choice, by flipping a switch, is reigned in. If Nicol’s endurance, his promise to

All members 2" x 2" RHS.

1/3



Allowable loading based
on: NZSS1900 Ch. 9.4

Frame Properties:

RHS 2" x 2" mild steel
W = 3.11 lb/ft 10g.
A = 0.916 in²
I = 0.523 in⁴

Loading:

concrete slab @ 150 pcf. (6'-0" x 3'-0" x 1'-6")

$$W_{DL} = 6 \times 3 \times 1.5 \times 150 \times 0.5 \text{ kips} \\ = 2.03 \text{ kips}$$

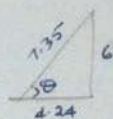
allow live loading 150 pcf

$$W_{LL} = 6 \times 3 \times 1.50 \times 0.5 \text{ kips} \\ = 1.35 \text{ kips}$$

Total load for each shackle point
on frame = 3.4 kips.

2/3

i) Member AC
 $L = 7.35'$



axial load in AC
 $= \frac{1.7}{\sin \theta} = 1.7 \times \frac{7.35}{6} = 2.08 \text{ kips}$

$$r_y = \sqrt{I/A} = 0.76$$

$$L/r_y = 7.35 \times 12 / 0.76 = 116$$

$$P_{all} = 3.96 \text{ T/O}''$$

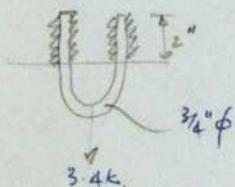
$$P_{actual} = 3.96 \times 0.916 \times 2.24 = 8.13 \text{ kips}$$

ii) Member CD
 $L = 4'0''$

axial load in AC
 $= 2.08 \times 4.24 / 7.35 \times 3/4 \times 2 \times 2$
 $= 3.40 \text{ kips}$

$$P_{all} > 8.13 \text{ kips} \quad \text{hence O.K.}$$

(iii) check hook:



$$\text{stress} = \frac{3.4 \times 4}{\pi \times 0.75^2} = 7.70 \text{ k/in}^2$$

$$= 8,000 \text{ psi}$$

$$\text{allowable} = 15,000 \text{ psi (mild steel)}$$

$$\text{weld } 7 \text{ T/O}''$$

for $1/8''$ fillet weld length required
 $\geq \frac{3.4}{2 \times 0.25 \times 7 \times 7 \times 2.24} \text{ ins}$
 $\geq 0.62 \text{ ins} \quad \text{O.K.}$

Fig. 8
 Engineer's calculations of the load-bearing capacity of the structure designed by Gray Nicol to suspend the concrete slab above him during *Installation/Performance*
 Project Programme
 Archive, E H McCormick
 Research Library Auckland
 Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Fig. 9
 Liability waiver signed by Gray Nicol absolving Auckland Art Gallery of any culpability for injury or death of the artist during the staging of *Installation/Performance*
 Project Programme
 Archive, E H McCormick
 Research Library Auckland
 Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

himself, had failed, the stage he had set would retain the qualities of the theatre; but should the structure's endurance (the situation he had produced) have given way there would have been no trap door with mattress beneath. One may pretend to rob a bank; one may rob a bank. The reaction that is produced in the real police officer that attends the scene will be the same; the situation produces a confluence of real and imitated into the same river running in a single direction.⁴

At the moment in 1975 when Nicol emerged he transitioned from Wile E. Coyote, hurling an Acme anvil from a cliff (with backfire moments away) to Road Runner merrily escaping an attempt on his life unscathed again, ready to jauntily outstrip The Coyote in another episode. Works are read and re-read. In 2014 we know that Nicol exits stage left, in fact feeling like a "new chicken" once unshackled⁵ his role as Road Runner is cemented. Reading the work's documentation, 40 years later it is not the dangling concrete block that forebodes and exerts itself but rather the insidious and then unperceived and onstage-managed menace in the asbestos sheet that lay beneath Nicol to insulate him from the ground. The import of asbestos into New Zealand peaked in 1975, and so, Nicol's one creature comfort becomes a threat that is unresolved by his exit from beneath the block. Abstracted into a final narrative, having hindsight, knowing the outcome without ever having witnessed the work unfold over a day blunts and abstracts the threat, bringing its theatre-like qualities to the forefront. In looking back the moment is isolated by the distance of time and the conclusiveness of the narrative; knowing the outcome suspends the threat almost as if it never was. One imagines the spectacle in the end to be rather dull though perhaps not uncaptivating; like walking on a glass floor in a skyscraper.

'Uhila and Ve'a's works (promises, contracts) do have clear differences from these works by Barber and Nicol, for Ve'a and 'Uhila the trapdoor upon which they stand is also a stage from which real pain and difficulty (be it read as their own or that of another) is voiced with an audience. The operation of theatricality in relation to actual risk, and real lives, real stories is placed much closer to the surface of Barber's *Stocks and Bonds* and Nicol's *Installation/Performance* than it is in *Finish this week off and that's it!* and *Mo'ui Tukuhausia* but the theatrical possibility and eventual actuality of the "out" remains a consistent and complicating presence. Reading *Stocks and Bonds* and *Installation/Performance* becomes a kind of sonar with which to navigate when seeing is complicated. Barber points to the role the spectator has to complete the work. *Finish this week off and that's it!* and *Mo'ui Tukuhausia* call the viewer to be alive to their position, to social and societal contexts, and to transition to witness and implicated producer.

1. Bruce E. Phillips "Curator's response: Kalisolaite 'Uhila's *Mo'ui Tukuhausia*" OUTPOST: Blogs from staff and friends of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, posted 21 August 2014, <http://aucklandartgallery.blogspot.co.nz/2014/08/curators-response-kalisolaite-uhilas.html>
2. For documentation and an account of this work see Wystan Curnow *The Critic's Part Wystan Curnow Art Writings 1971–2013* eds Christina Barton and Robert Leonard with Thomasin Sleigh (Wellington and Brisbane: Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Institute of Modern Art and Victoria University Press, 2014), 414–415.
3. Gray Nicol and Colin Quayle, "From Project Programme No.7": Gray Nicols (sic) Extract of Interview by Colin Quayle After the Fact," *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly* 64 (May 1977): 12–13.
4. Metaphor adapted for brevity from the more eloquent original in Jean Baudrillard "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* ed. Brian Wallis, trans. Paul Foss and Paul Patton (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art: 1984), 267.
5. Nicol and Quayle, 13.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I GRAY NICHOLS do hereby absolve the Auckland City Art Gallery of all responsibility for my personal injury or death resulting from the performance in PROJECT PROGRAMMES 1975 of the art event Installation/ Performance scheduled to take place on and waive all claims for liability against that institution.

Signed

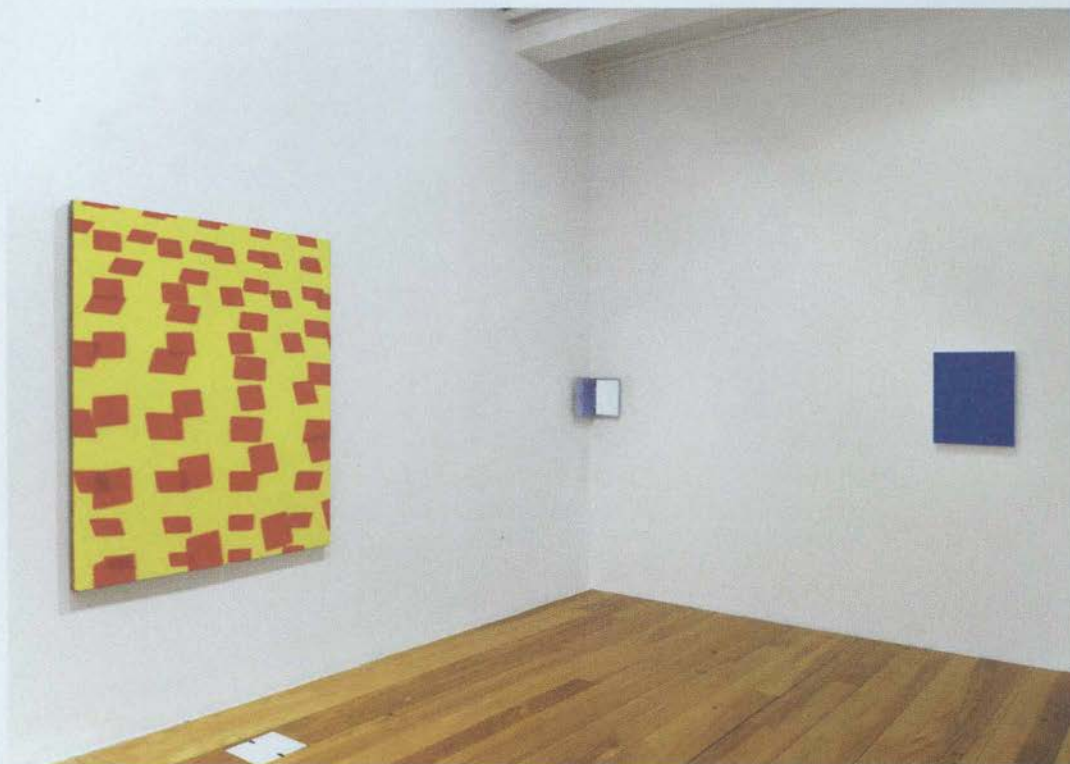
Gray Nichols

Date

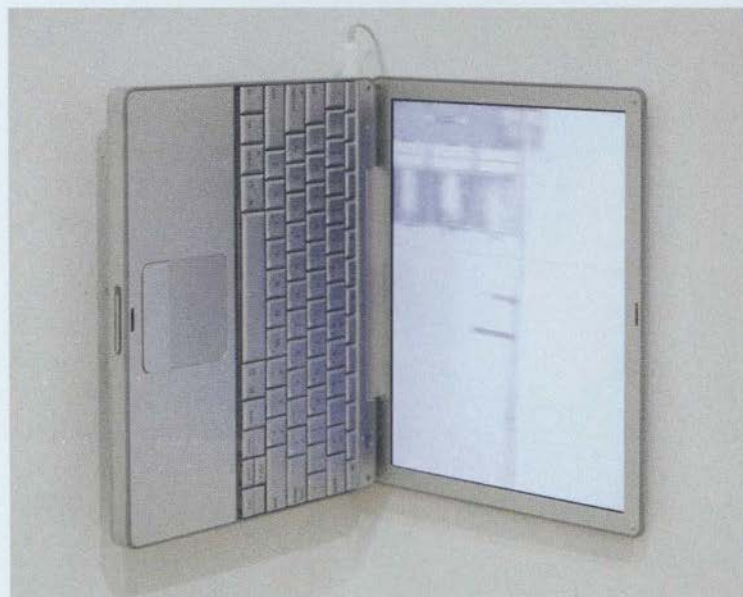
6/12/75

Witnesses

John Hayward
.....
John Barry
.....
.....



ABOVE
Fig. 1
Simon Ingram
Frictionless Painting (Social Colour) 2003
oil on linen, 12 inch Apple
G4 PowerBook, video
(single channel, standard
definition, 4:3, colour,
silent), 46min 16sec
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2003



LEFT
Fig. 2
Simon Ingram
Frictionless Painting (Social Colour) 2003 (detail)
oil on linen, 12 inch Apple
G4 PowerBook, video
(single channel, standard
definition, 4:3, colour,
silent), 46min 16sec
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2003

Introduction

The term "time-based art" refers to artwork that is "dependent on time for the maturation or completion of the experience".¹ It can be argued that time has always been part of the creative process and integral to audience perception. However, the emergence of cheap, accessible technology has provided artists with the means and material to produce challenging and innovative artwork. Artwork that not only comments on the historical time and place in which it was made but challenges our preconceived notions of what is and is not art.

Auckland Art Gallery cares for close to 300 time-based artworks. Although artworks are evenly distributed across production year, the acquisition of time-based art continues to grow. This is greatly influenced by the Chartwell Collection, which is cared for by the gallery. Approximately 13% of all time-based artworks are stored on analogue media, 40% are stored on digital media and 15% are sculptural with an analogue and/or digital component. The gallery also cares for 55 artworks that incorporate light and 29 artworks that incorporate an electronic device (i.e. motor).

Inherent vice

In the article "Risk Management Applied to Preventive Conservation" Robert Waller outlines the ten agents of deterioration: fire, water, pests, pollutants, physical force, light, temperature, relative humidity, criminal activity and custodial neglect.² Any combination of agents may act upon an object when in storage or on display. "Inherent vice" is the quality of a material to self-destruct.³ In conservation the term is used to describe a fundamental flaw in a material or object. Unlike the ten agents of deterioration, inherent vice acts from within an object, accelerating the rate of deterioration.

Although "inherent vice" is traditionally used to describe physical and chemical instability, it is also applicable to the conservation of time-based art. In addition to physical and chemical deterioration, artworks reliant on technology may experience obsolescence and, those with time as a dimension, misrepresentation through inadequate installation. By using technology, both as a means and as a material, artists dramatically alter the time frame in which an artwork is expected to remain viable. In other words, artists compound risk, increasing the likelihood and accelerating the rate of deterioration.

Physical and chemical degradation

Artists consistently experiment with the new, integrating untried and often unmediated material into their artwork. No modern material is more unpredictable than plastic. Plastics not only constitute a large proportion of analogue and digital media, but are integrated into the very equipment time-based artworks rely upon. While the physical degradation of plastics may arise from prior use, interaction with display and storage environment or migration of additives, chemical degradations may arise from an adverse reaction with oxygen, light, water, heat or pollutants.⁴

Technological obsolescence

In the past three decades artists have delivered work on film, magnetic media (audio and video tape), CD, DVD, USB, hard drive and as digital files via email. Each format brings with it a host of equipment and software used to capture, manipulate and display work. Now that artists primarily work within a digital context the risk of technological obsolescence has in no way lessened. While digital file formats, specifically those of a proprietary nature, are controlled by

corporate entities,⁵ computer and internet-based art rely on complex systems of computer and/or user generated input and output.

Misrepresentation

Alterations to an artwork or exhibition space, such as the projector used or height of ceiling, can change how a work is experienced and therefore read by an audience. Conservators work closely with artists and artists' assistants in order to define acceptable limits of variability. Once the identity of a work is known, a conservator will monitor each installation to ensure no compromises are made that may be detrimental to the meaning of a work. It is important to think of this process as facilitative rather than restrictive. Like curators, the aim of a conservator is to promote access.

Mitigation

In order to mitigate the risk of physical and chemical degradation, technological obsolescence and misrepresentation through inadequate installation conservators must be active throughout the lifecycle of an artwork. Prior to acquisition members from the registration and conservation department may assess the condition of an artwork and explore issues related to long-term preservation. This is an important step as it gives the Gallery an idea of how long an artwork is expected to stay viable and what resources need to be directed towards the artwork in the future.

Condition report

At the time of acquisition a conservator will produce written and photographic documentation. Like traditional art forms, documentation is crucial in the conservation of time-based art. However, due to the variability of media and materials employed, time-based art challenges established documentation methods and standards.⁶ For example, a conservator documenting a sculptural work with an audiovisual component cannot rely on description of physical attributes alone. The conservator must also observe the audiovisual component, commenting on image and sound quality, and discuss the significance of equipment employed.

Artist interview

Artists will not be available indefinitely to answer questions about the meaning and presentation of

their work. Therefore, it is advantageous to create a primary source record of artists' intentions.⁷ To create such records, the artist, or individuals who have insight into the artist's practice, may be interviewed at the time of acquisition. Although questions are generally orientated towards display requirements and technical specification, they may also cover conservation treatment and public engagement. For example, a conservator may ask how an artist feels about his or her work being touched and what information gallery staff should convey to the public.

Iteration report

Time-based artworks only exist in their installed state. In other words, they rely on a second stage of creation, installation, for their realisation.⁸ An iteration report captures the spatial and technical specification of an artwork each time it is installed in a new environment. The report also comments on the decision making process, identifying individuals involved (i.e. exhibition designers and media technicians), concessions made and reaction afforded by both the artist and the public. The conceptual framework behind this approach suggests an artwork, particular one with time as a dimension, is not a discrete object but a living entity, subject to change.

Treatment

The treatment of time-based art generally falls into three broad categories: repair, replacement and emulation. While repair is reactive, responding to a fault in media or equipment, replacement is preventive, updating a specific item before it becomes obsolete. Emulation attempts to emulate the original experience using current technology. Treatment relies on documentation created during the acquisition process and is undertaken in consultation with the artist when possible. All material and equipment removed or replaced during treatment is kept by the Gallery for posterity.

Repair

Frictionless Painting (Social Colour) (2003, Figs 1 and 2) by Simon Ingram features a large yellow and red painting, a small blue painting and a single channel video displayed on a 12 inch Apple G4 PowerBook. By placing the PowerBook on its side, in the corner of a room, Ingram incorporates the device as a sculptural

Fig. 3
Dane Mitchell
Gallery Mantra 2003
custom crate, portable CD player,
portable speaker system, audio,
51min 19sec
Chartwell Collection, Auckland
Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2006



Fig. 4
Michael Stevenson and Danius Kesminas
Slave Pianos (of the Art Cult) 1998–99
piano, QRS Pianomation system, Playola
key top player, Yamaha MIDI data filer,
MIDI files, motor, hydraulic jack, steel
plate, sheet music
dimensions variable
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
purchased with the assistance of the
Chartwell Trust, 1999

object. While the paintings remain in good condition, the PowerBook is difficult to navigate and slow to respond. As the meaning of the work is closely tied to the technology employed the PowerBook will not be replaced with a new make or model. In order to repair the device all files on the computer have been saved to the Gallery's audiovisual archive and a secondary 12 inch Apple G4 PowerBook purchased for spare parts.

Replace

Gallery Mantra (2006, Fig. 3) by Dane Mitchell features a brown cardboard crate, discreetly placed next to a white plinth or wall. Inside the crate is a CD, portable CD player and portable speaker system. Although the exterior of the carton is in pristine condition, the internal components are showing signs of physical and chemical degradation. To ensure long-term viability the CD, portable CD player and speaker system will be replaced with a new audio system. As the equipment is concealed inside the crate the replacement of parts will not impact the overall appearance of the work. To ensure audience experience is not compromised, a conservator may record the sound level emitted from the crate.

Emulate

Slave Pianos (of the Art Cult) (1998–99, Fig. 4) by Michael Stevenson and Danius Kesminas features a QRS Pianomation system, Playola key top player, Yamaha MIDI data filer and MIDI files stored on floppy disks. The media and equipment directly relate to the historical time and place in which the work was made. By replacing the equipment we are at risk of systematically removing layers of meaning and dramatically altering the way an audience will experience the work. Although the equipment may be repaired, the media (floppy disks) cannot be repaired nor replaced indefinitely.

A floppy disk hardware emulator may be used to replace the floppy disk drive. A USB or SD card can then be used to store the MIDI files.

Final considerations

It may surprise some that the aim of conservators is not to maintain artwork in perpetuity. We, like artists and curators, acknowledge that some artworks have a finite life. However, it is our responsibility to “conceive of even the most recent works as the ‘future’s past’. This means being mindful of what will be important to a work in the future and what historical links should be maintained”.⁹ To do this, conservators aim to build a framework of reference so that, when the time comes, we are able to make informed, conceptually sensitive decisions regarding the future of an artwork.

Decisions regarding the future of an artwork are never made in isolation. Often the role of a conservator resembles that of mediator, balancing opinions and expectations of stakeholders. Stakeholders include but are not limited to the proprietors (Auckland Art Gallery and the Chartwell Trust), curators, exhibition designers and media technicians. A conservator must balance these opinions in relation to the artist's intentions and the needs of the audience/public. It is important to acknowledge and actively seek direction from all parties in order to reach the best possible solution for an individual work.

The future of time-based art is at present unknown. However, there has been a dramatic shift in the way artists engage with individual communities and the world at large. Many are resorting to computer programming and software development to produce readily available and socially interchangeable artworks.



In 2003 the Tate acquired its first computer-based artwork, *Becoming* (2003) by Michael Craig-Martin¹⁰ and in 2014 the Smithsonian acquired source-code for the iPod application *Planetary*.¹¹ As the Auckland Art Gallery and Chartwell collections change so too will the way we acquire, treat and loan time-based art.

Conclusion

The conservation department at Auckland Art Gallery is taking the first steps in ensuring that the time-based art collection remains viable. This includes introducing a thorough documentation process and treating artworks that are exhibiting signs of physical and chemical degradation or at risk of technological obsolescence. It is the aim of the conservation department to meet standards set by larger institutions and conduct further research into the field. With the support of curators, registrars, exhibition designers, media technicians, artists and, above all, the public, conservators will be able to support this type of work for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

1. Carole Neves, *Collaborations in Conserving Time-Based Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, Office of Policy and Analysis), 5.
2. Robert Waller, "Risk Management Applied to Preventive Conservation," in *Historical Perspectives on Preventive Conservation*, ed. Sarah Staniforth (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013), 317-27.
3. Glenn Warton, "Challenges in Conserving Contemporary Art," in *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, ed. Bruce Altshuler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 166.
4. Yvonne Shashoua, *Conservation of Plastics, Material Science, Degradation and Preservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008), 153-177.
5. Ross Harvey, *Preserving Digital Material*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 146-47.
6. "Media Art Documentation," Guggenheim, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/conservation/time-based-media/media-art-documentation> (accessed December 16, 2014).
7. Carole Neves, *Collaborations in Conserving Time-Based Art* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, Office of Policy and Analysis), 6.
8. "Conservation – time based media", Tate, <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/conservation/time-based-media#art> (accessed December 16, 2014).
9. "Conservation – time based media", Tate.
10. Patricia Falcao, Alistair Ashe & Brian Jones, *Virtualisation as a Tool for the Conservation of Software Artwork*, (London: Tate, 2014), 2.
11. "Planetary Collecting and Preserving Code as a Living Object", Copper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, <http://www.cooperhewitt.org/2013/08/26/planetary-collecting-and-preserving-code-as-a-living-object/> (accessed December 16, 2014).

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Staff Publications and Presentations
2014–15

Books and Exhibition Catalogues

Stephen Cleland, *The Walters Prize 2014*, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2014.

Stephen Cleland, *A World Undone: Works from the Chartwell Collection*, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2014.

Rhana Devenport, *Lisa Reihana: in Pursuit of Venus*. Foreword by Rhana Devenport; introduction by Anne Salmond; editor Clare McIntosh, with contributions by Rhana Devenport, Vivienne Webb, Nicholas Thomas, Sean Cubitt, Sean Coyle, Deidre Brown, Caroline Vercoe, Sean Mallon, Geoffrey Batchen and Rereata Makiha. Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2015.

Ute Larsen and Camilla Baskcomb, "Working on a Grand Scale: The Conservation of *The Mocking of Christ* by François Langot," in *ICOM-CC 17th Triennial Conference Preprints, Melbourne, 15–19 September 2014*, ed. J. Bridgland, Paris: International Council of Museums, 2014.

Sarah Hillary, "Modern Paints Aotearoa: Setting a Context," in *Modern Paints Aotearoa*, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2014.

Sarah Hillary, "The Paint in Painting," in *Five Māori Painters*, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2014.

Sarah Hillary and Bronwyn Ormsby, "Surface Streaking on a Matt PVA-Acrylic Painting," in *ICOM-CC 17th Triennial Conference Preprints, Melbourne, 15–19 September 2014*, ed. J. Bridgland, Paris: International Council of Museums, 2014.

Caroline McBride and Catherine Hammond, "Being Modern: Auckland Art Gallery in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Modern Paints Aotearoa*, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2014.

Ngahiraka Mason, *Five Māori Painters*. Foreword by Rhana Devenport and Elizabeth Ellis; editor Clare McIntosh, with contributions by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Anna-Marie White, Nigel Borell, Louise Fury, and Sarah Hillary, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2014.

Ngahiraka Mason, "Shared Legacies," in *Gottfried Lindauer: Die Maori Portraits*, Berlin: Nationale Galerie, Staatliche Museum, 2014.

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Tim Corballis is the author of the novels *Below*, *Measurement* and *The Fossil Pits* (all Victoria University Press) as well as a substantial corpus of short fiction, essays and art writing. *R.H.I.*, a pair of novellas about psychoanalysis and communism, will be released in August 2015. He recently completed a PhD at The University of Auckland on aesthetic theory in the context of the Antipodes. In 2015, he is Writer in Residence at Victoria University, Wellington.

The Distance Plan is a loose collective of artists, designers and writers whose aim is to promote discussion of climate change within the arts. The Distance Plan works through exhibitions, public forums and publications, including a regular journal. The lexicon was edited by the co-founders of The Distance Plan, artist Amy Howden-Chapman and curator and writer Abby Cunnane. See TheDistancePlan.org.

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Geoff Park (1946–2009) was a highly regarded ecologist, research scientist and writer. In 1986, while a Stout Research Centre fellow, Park began work on his acclaimed ecological history of New Zealand, *Nga Uruora: Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape* (1995). Geoff Park was extensively involved in the conservation and ecological communities in New Zealand and his ecological histories are widely celebrated. His book, *Theatre Country Essays on Landscape and Whenua*, was published in 2006.

Brooke Randall is an objects conservator specialising in the conservation of modern and contemporary art. In 2014 Brooke was the Marylyn Mayo Intern at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Her role was to scope the collection of time-based art, assess the condition of the collection, explore maintenance needs, identify unsafe housing issue and prepare a methodology for adequate documentation of future acquisitions. Brooke is also a practicing artist and has extensive voluntary experience working within contemporary art organisations such as Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne.

Juliana Spahr is an American poet, critic and editor. She is the recipient of the 2009 Hardison Poetry Prize awarded by the Folger Shakespeare Library and received the National Poetry Series Award for her first collection of poetry, *Response* (1996). Her most recent book is the novel *An Army of Lovers* (2013) written with David Buuck and published by City Lights. Her many titles include, *Well Then There Now*, *The Transformation*, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, *Fuck You-Aloha-I Love You*, and *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*. With Jena Osman, she has edited the arts journal *Chain* since 2003. She teaches at Mills College in Oakland, California.

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