



# MEMORY CONNECTION

Volume 3, Number 1, January 2019  
Memory Works

Massey University & Syracuse University | ISSN 2253-1823



THE MEMORY WAKA



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*Memory Connection* is an international, peer-reviewed journal project of The Memory Waka Research Group (Massey University, NZ). *Memory Connection* provides a meeting place for multidisciplinary perspectives, discourses, and expressions of memory. The journal aims to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue that may lead to different ways of 'seeing' and the creation of new knowledge.

Articles are subjected to a peer review process.

Memory Connection is only available electronically at <http://www.memoryconnection.org>

First published 2019

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ISSN 2253-1823

#### Citation example:

#### Notes

Kendall R. Phillips, "The Profanity of Memory: Temporality and the Rhetoric of 'Too Soon'," *Memory Connection* 3, no.1 (January 2019): 14, <http://www.memoryconnection.org>

#### Bibliography

Phillips, Kendall R. "The Profanity of Memory: Temporality and the Rhetoric of 'Too Soon'." *Memory Connection* 3, no.1 (January 2019): 14. <http://www.memoryconnection.org>.

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#### Cover image:

Stuart Foster and Kura Puke (with Te Matahiapo), *Te Mauri, Trigger Points* exhibition, curated by Heather Galbraith and Andrew J. Saluti, Palitz Gallery, Joseph I. Lubin House, Syracuse University, New York City, US, 19 May – 30 June 2016. Photo still from audio-visual (2016): Sasha Huber.

#### Journal design

Open Lab, Briar Bayler, Michael Kelly and Connah Hazelwood, College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, NZ. The Memory Waka logo design: Ross Hemera with Open Lab. Web coding: Cameron Askin.

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As a means of conveyance a waka is a Māori canoe. Waka has other meanings such as a receptacle or a chief's carved treasure box (waka huia) containing valuable possessions including prized feathers. Waka also refers to a body of people such as a kinship group. Metaphorically, The Memory Waka is a vessel of humanity, ideas, and culture. It is also (literally) a means of travel for people allied in a common cause (paddling in the same direction!). The Waka initiates and supports projects concerned with memory including the *Memory Connection* online journal.

#### Memory Works

*Memory Connection* Volume 3, Number 1 is called "Memory Works". Published in association with Syracuse University (US), it comprises 14 selected articles developed from papers presented at *Triggering Memory* Symposium (Wellington, NZ, 2015) and *Memory Works* Symposium (NY, US, 2016). Both symposia were presented in partnership by Massey University (NZ) and Syracuse University (US).

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# Memory Works

General Editors

Kingsley Baird

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## Introduction

Kendall Phillips, Ekaterina Haskins and  
Kingsley Baird

Editors, Memory Connection Journal  
Volume 3, Number 1, Memory Works

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## Introduction

Kendall Phillips, Ekaterina Haskins and Kingsley Baird

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato compares the human soul to a ball of wax. Our experiences, he reasons, leave impressions upon our soul just as something like a signet leaves an impression upon wax. Memories exist not in the wax nor in the signet but in the negative space of the impression. According to Plato's analogy, when we recall we are seeking to fit some image of the past into the space left by that experience, something akin to fitting a jigsaw piece into a space within the puzzle. Plato recognized that this process was fraught with potential difficulties since the conjuring of images of the past involves the same faculty of imagination that is responsible for creating fictional, poetic, and speculative images. It is also worth recalling that the mother of the Muses who were thought to inspire the arts was Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. This interrelationship between speculation and recollection is the source of much of Western civilization's anxiety around issues of memory and remembrance, whether manifested around questions of whose memory counts, how these memories are made visible to others, or how we can preserve these memories in perpetuity.

The essays collected herein largely operate within this complex space between remembrance and representation and between historical fact and artistic expression. The authors represent a variety of scholarly and artistic practices and their topics span the globe. But, whether exploring the artistic use of diatoms mined from guano in Africa (Barrar) or commemorating victims of oppression and injustice around the world through portraiture (Huber), each of the essays in this volume seeks to examine the connection between cultural practices of remembrance and artistic efforts at representation. By collecting these essays together, we hope to expand upon an important dialogue regarding the ways in which these practices are intertwined and implicated within broader global currents of ideology, commerce, and politics. Kendall Phillips and Mitchell Reyes coined the term 'memoryscale' to suggest the global movement of memories and memory practices across national and cultural boundaries. This collection of articles adds to this broader dialogue around the movement of memories by focusing particularly on the ways that artistic practices are instigated, contested, and mobilized along these global lines.

*Memory Connection* Volume 3 is a combination of selected papers developed into articles from the 2015 *Triggering Memory* symposium (Wellington, NZ) and the 2016 *Memory Works* symposium (New York, US). Both these symposia were part

of a broader interdisciplinary and international consortium known as The Memory Waka, which began in 2008. Throughout the journey of the consortium a focus on the connection between the artistic, cultural, and rhetorical practices of memory has emerged. The two symposia that provided the articles collected here attended to two important dimensions of this connection: the effects of bringing forth, or triggering, memories; and, the kind of work done by, in, and through these memories once brought forth.

During the 2015 *Triggering Memory* symposium, participants inquired into what initiates the willed or involuntary process of recall when memories are, as A. S. Byatt describes, ‘taken out, burnished and contemplated’? Sensory experiences, places, objects, images, language, rituals, and therapy are some of the means by which memory is evoked, and the participants in the 2015 symposium investigated these means in relation to various cultural and artistic practices from locations around the globe.

Following up on this theme of evoking memory, the 2016 symposium attended more directly to the work done by the memories that emerge. With the theme *Memory Works*, the organisers sought to ask a series of related questions including: how does memory work? What kinds of cultural/political/psychological work does memory perform? Drawing together scholars and artists from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and with a variety of perspectives, the symposium sought to foster further inquiry into the dynamic nature of public memory and its relation to art, culture, and public rhetoric.

Importantly, both conferences hosted not only the presentation of scholarly work but also exhibitions. These exhibitions were curated by Heather Galbraith and Andrew J. Saluti, in the case of *Trigger Points* (NY, 2016), and *reflex, figment* (Wellington, 2015) curated by Galbraith. According to the curators, the former drew together ‘contemporary and historical works from New Zealand, the United States, Australia, Finland and the United Kingdom to explore the potent and slippery nature of memory’. The exhibition explored

(without a hierarchy of value) triggers of smell, touch, submersion, psychoanalysis, incantation, the act of drawing, juxtaposition/collage, and acts of repetition. It also presents works that address the politics of remembering (and forgetting). Akin to a braided river, dark, traumatic, violent and bleak threads intertwine with humorous, sardonic and political gestures and moments of romanticism in the exhibition.

Hosted at Massey University, *reflex, figment* continued a focus on, as Galbraith put it, ‘ways that encounters with tangible and intangible materials, objects, images, sensations can trigger memory’. This exhibition examined not only the ways that memories manifest but also the limits of our very conception of memory and the ways we encounter and understand the failure of memory, the moments when memory is overwhelmed or repressed.

These two exhibitions provided a crucial foundation for the presentations and discussions that occurred during the conferences and some of the images from those exhibitions are included in the present volume.

Of course, staging these conferences and exhibitions was a large, costly, and complicated effort and the editors of this volume wish to acknowledge the invaluable support of the many individuals and institutions who provided it. In particular, we wish to express our gratitude to Massey University's College of Creative Arts Toi Rauwharangi and to Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts. Without the support of these institutions, the present volume would not have been possible.

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# The Profanity of Memory: Temporality and the Rhetoric of 'Too Soon'

Kendall R. Phillips, Ph.D.

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## The Profanity of Memory: Temporality and the Rhetoric of 'Too Soon'

Kendall R. Phillips, Ph.D

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### Abstract

The temporality of public memory is perhaps most evident when there are objections that some irreverent comment is made 'too soon' after a traumatic event. This essay explores this dimension of sacred temporality and a corollary sense of sacred space in relation to moments and spaces of remembrance.

Keywords: humour, public memory, rhetoric, sacred, space, temporality, trauma

On the evening of September 29, 2001—18 days after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—the legendary New York Friar’s Club held a comic roast of *Playboy* magazine founder and publisher Hugh Hefner. As is customary in these events, a series of popular comedians and celebrities took turns delivering stand-up monologues largely focused on barbed comments directed towards Mr. Hefner. Around the midpoint of the evening, American comedian Gilbert Gottfried—perhaps best known as the voice of the parrot in the popular Disney film *Aladdin*—took his turn. Near the end of his set he made a joke that almost brought proceedings to a rapid halt. While video of the event was broadcast on American cable television and is widely available via the internet, this moment was deleted and, to date, has never been seen in public. By all accounts, Mr. Gottfried made a joke that went something like this—‘I’m a little nervous about my flight from New York to Los Angeles because it’s scheduled to make a stop at the Empire State Building’. The crowd erupted into angry booing, several individuals shouted out ‘too soon’, and there was a moment when the event itself seemed likely to implode as a few individuals rose from their seats to leave.<sup>1</sup>

While the impropriety of the comment may seem abundantly clear even now, it is perhaps worth pausing for a moment to ask of this suddenly angered crowd, what exactly was too soon? Surely the objection was not to the notion of frivolity or irreverence. The entire event was about these pursuits and just the night before, no less than the almost sainted Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, had given his public blessing to humour’s return to New York City. In a deeply moving opening for the first post-attack airing of the popular American sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, Giuliani took to the show’s stage in 30 Rockefeller Center. He was accompanied by the Police and Fire Commissioners and a number of New York Police officers and firefighters—many of whom had come directly from the World Trade Center site—Ground Zero—and whose uniforms were still covered in ashes. After a poignant rendition by singer Paul Simon of his elegy ‘The Boxer’, the Mayor had called on all the city’s institutions to return to functioning—to get New York back to business. At the conclusion of his speech, *Saturday Night Live* producer Lorne Michael asked the mayor, ‘Can we be funny?’ The Mayor replied, ‘Why start now?’ With the audience’s roar of laughter at this mild joke, Giuliani seemed to be signalling that the sombre time of grief and mourning had come to an end. Giuliani, the person who had come to personify the city’s heroic response to the tragedy, had made the first public post-9/11 joke and, indeed, was arguably the only person who could have done so.<sup>2</sup>

So, if even the mayor of New York was cracking jokes, what was it that so incensed the crowd at the Friar’s Club—a legendary comic venue? The audience had, after all, come to hear a roast of famous (or infamous) publisher Hugh Hefner. They had laughed uproariously at crude, off-colour, and distasteful humour from a number of comedians before Gottfried’s evidently ill-timed remark. What exactly, we might ask again, was too soon?

The answer, of course, is obvious—in the audience’s mind it was too soon to treat the events of September 11 with irreverence. The event was, at least in the linguistic logic, too recent to bear the weight of irreverence. Implicit in this

formulation, although perhaps not yet explicit in the mind of those shouting at the diminutive comedian, was the notion that at some point in the future this kind of irreverence would be appropriate—but just not now, not this soon. I would like to suggest that this notion—the notion of ‘too soon’—suggests a temporal orientation that might best be understood as the sacred time of trauma. The angry audience members were not suggesting that the events of September 11 were somehow divine and, so, not invoking a literal sense of the sacred but, rather, a sense of a ‘secular sacred’. This sense of the secular sacred is deeply interrelated with notions of public trauma and is, as I will seek to demonstrate, reenacted in public rituals of remembrance. The ‘secular sacred’ in public remembrance is provoked in relation to, indeed often in response to, moments in which the sacred remembrance is perceived to be profaned. This article explores some of the complex dynamics between the secular sacred of remembrance and what I will call the profanity of memory.

In what follows, I will briefly sketch out the relationship between trauma, memory, and the sacred. Next, I will examine the notion of sacred temporality in relation to the profanity of ‘too soon’. In the third section, I will explore the corollary notion of sacred space in relation to the profanity of ‘too close’ (the common but less clearly articulated cousin of ‘too soon’). The paper concludes with a brief reconsideration of the political and rhetorical prospects of the profanity of memory.

### Trauma, The Sacred and Public Memory

What does it mean to speak of trauma or to call an event traumatic? First and foremost, it is to acknowledge an event as decidedly different from those events that are, by contrast, ordinary. Our day-to-day lives are made up of events at times comforting and at others challenging, filled with intense emotions and with languid banality. Within the range of the ordinary we may encounter things that unsettle or disturb us and even those that threaten our physical and mental well-being. But traumatic events are of such a magnitude as to exist in an entirely different stratum of experience. The traumatic represents, in a way, the extreme limit point by which the spectrum of our daily experience is bounded.

In her foundational work on the notion of trauma, *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth observes that in its broadest sense, ‘trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena’.<sup>3</sup> The event of trauma is thought to be so overwhelming as to rupture the very boundaries of the subject experiencing trauma—as Ruth Leys notes, ‘owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed’.<sup>4</sup> The traumatized subject is often thought of as shattered, left in fragments by the event and in this way almost irrevocably damaged.

This experience of trauma is so overwhelming that it often exceeds our capacity to actually know our experience of it, at least at the time and in this way, as Caruth puts it, a traumatic event may be defined in part by 'an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of a belatedness'.<sup>5</sup> The experience of trauma, in other words, can often not be fully known at the time of its occurrence but, instead, flashes back to us over time. Trauma, in this way, represents a rupture in normal time and one that is able to 'reverse' temporality in the sense that fragments of the experience can flash back into the present thereby inverting our sense of linear time.

Trauma, then, consists of an experience so overwhelming and violent that it shatters not only the experiencing subject but also the experience itself. Trauma occurs not so much in its singular event but in the re-experienced fragments of the shattered event moving anachronistically from past to present. For individuals who have experienced trauma, much of the work of rehabilitative therapy is in seeking to reintegrate these fragments of both experience and subjectivity. As Robert Jay Lifton contends, 'recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts, cannot really occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated'.<sup>6</sup> Traumatized subjects, in other words, must find ways to contain and constrain the overwhelming experience and re-experience of the traumatic events in ways that help the fragmented self to be refashioned into a coherent whole. And, of course, just as we can speak of individual trauma, we can also speak of collective trauma—violent shocks to our community that render us fragmented, overwhelmed, and which flash back to us over time.

Of interest for present purposes is the way this relatively common description of trauma parallels our sense of the experience of the sacred. In his landmark study of the sacred and the profane, Mircea Eliade<sup>7</sup> notes that, like trauma, the sacred is also defined in part by its extraordinary nature—'the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from "natural" reality'.<sup>8</sup> The otherworldly experience of the sacred is also often understood not in a sense of comfort or euphoria but, rather, as Rudolph Otto notes in his seminal *The Idea of the Holy*, 'a terror fraught with an inward shuddering such as not even the most menacing and overpowering created thing can instill'.<sup>9</sup> It is an experience that fills us with awe and is, therefore, literally awful.

The sacred constitutes an experience of a different reality—one that is both terrifying and absolute. For the religious person, the experience of the sacred then constitutes a rupture in the perceived reality of the everyday—that which is of the normal or, quite literally, the profane. Indeed, the sacred is most often understood in contrast to the profane in which the former is an absolute, terrifying, and overwhelming divine truth and the latter is the relative, comforting, and ordinary reality of 'human truth'. While the sacred is typically associated with the transcendent, Dominick LaCapra argues 'the sacred may itself be immanent, may somehow appear in the world, even as it ecstatically and diremptively escapes it'.<sup>10</sup>

The experience of the sacred, the touch of the divine, was often associated in earlier times with madness. Plato conceived of divine intervention as creating a kind of madness—true love was one of those types of divine *mania*. And, in

his annotation of *Antigone*, Friedrich Hölderlin describes a sense of 'sacred madness'—a moment when the soul 'evades consciousness' and achieves a higher manifestation, one that is 'more soul than language'. The experience of the sacred, as with trauma, constitutes a terrifying experience – one that fractures our perception of reality as it fractures our own capacity to perceive. Like trauma, the sacred exceeds, indeed overwhelms, both perception and the perceiver.<sup>11</sup>

As with the violent experience of the traumatic, the awesome experience of the sacred is also contained and circumscribed. For the ancients, as with contemporary believers, the divine is located within coherent narratives, is bounded within particular times—festivals, holy days, fasts—and within particular spaces—shrines, temples, reliquaries. Since the sacred is always already everywhere and at all times, our seeking to contain it constitutes recognition that sacred time, like traumatic time, is anachronistic. It is a gesture back to the time of origin, to the sacred time that exceeds and undergirds the profanity of ordinary time. In a similar way, sacred space gestures to a clearing away of the chaotic, fragmented space of the profane and a recovery of, as Eliade puts it, 'an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse'.<sup>12</sup>

The traumatic and the sacred are both extremes, existing beyond the ordinary and the profane world in which we live most of our lives. While the parallels between the two concepts seem clear, there are also parallels to a much more ordinary experience: the experience of memory. Here I am not thinking of the kind of mundane efforts at recollection we often call memory—'where did I leave my car keys?' 'What's his name?' 'How many drinks have I had tonight?'—but, instead, of the kinds of memories that arise, emerge, engulf us, often without notice and often unbidden. A flash of childhood friends, a game of kick the can in a green backyard, of a dare to climb higher and higher into a magnolia tree, the shouts of encouragement from below, the crack of the thinner limbs near the top.

This kind of memory is, of course, also defined in part by the fact that it is extraordinary—we do not live in a constant state of memory but, rather, in the regular flow of normal time. But at times, these memories appear and draw us out of normal time into the time of memory. This experience of memory is not necessarily ours to control although we can at times seek to invoke it. Invoke seems a proper term here as it gestures towards a sense of the mystical and, indeed, sacred – from the Latin *invocare*: to call upon. As American Philosopher Charles Scott notes,

Memories are already 'there' when we speak or think, not as an origin, but as inheritances, structures, associations, inevitabilities, possibilities, forms of enactment. Protean, fluid, in constant differential continuities and enablements—we do not seem able to step outside of memories as we speak them, to bracket them or neutralize them. We seem to be in and through them.<sup>13</sup>

While not the overwhelming force of the experience of the sacred or traumatic, the experience of memory in this sense also entails a kind of fracturing; the fracturing of our self (or selves) into present and past. There is the me

remembering and the me remembered—though even here it is not always clear which is the agent and which the object. Is the remembering me, the me of now, the agent invoking the memory of my past self as an object—or, at least at times, is that remembered me, the one playing out the endless, repeating loop of some past tragedy or triumph, pleasure or pain, the agent to which I am the object. The present me subjected to this endless loop, perhaps, at times, tormented by it.

This kind of memory—the unbidden, undisciplined kind—created great anxiety among the ancients. Plato worried that the unruly nature of unconstrained memory could lead to misjudgments and false knowledge. His student Aristotle took a step further—condemning the capacity for this kind of vivid, uncontrolled memory and preferring instead a more disciplined approach to relating to our past in what he called recollection. This focus on disciplined recollection helped to spawn the enormous number of mnemonic techniques and frameworks that drew the attention of so many ancient philosophers and rhetoricians.

In an earlier essay, I suggested that a similar anxiety about unconstrained memory can also be seen in our contemporary push to craft official monuments and memorials to particular events.<sup>14</sup> Unconstrained memories pose a threat to our cultural perception of a single public narrative of our past and so, just as Plato feared individual memory might lead to misjudgments, we fear that unconstrained public memories might lead to multiple, conflicting senses of our shared past. So, as with Aristotle, we have developed numerous practices designed to discipline our public memories—disciplines of public recollection that work to craft singular, coherent, public remembrance: the museums, the monuments, the archives.

These sites and times of public remembrances—supported by the mechanisms of public recollection—serve to limit and constrain the diversity of public memories by reinforcing a clear narrative of our shared past. This is the crucial work of crafting a secular sacred—a civic faith that founds our unity whether this is in the mythology of the founding fathers and orthodoxy of American exceptionalism or New Zealand's Treaty of Waitangi. Here, to be clear, I mean not to condemn these founding myths—the founding fictions that, as Benedict Anderson contends, help craft our imagined communities.<sup>15</sup> But, rather, I mean to note that they serve as a kind of secular sacred in crafting an absolute point and time of origin, and craft a set of civic religious practices that bring us to collective moments of remembrance, whether at the New Zealand Treaty House or on the Washington, DC Mall; whether on 6 February or 4 July.

The sacred bonds of the imagined, or perhaps better remembered, community are most evident when challenged in moments of collective trauma. The terrorist attacks on 11 September were such a time in America. The trauma created an extended moment of the sacred secular in America; a period of reverence for the fractured bonds of national self-conception. The days after 9/11 (and even to this day) saw a proliferation of the symbols of nationalism—the flags fly more prominently, 'God Bless America' sung during the seventh inning of Major League Baseball games, the bald eagle reemerging as a palpable symbol of American nationalism and potency. The World Trade Center area became not just Ground Zero of a horrific loss of innocent life but also ground zero for a newly emerging sense of the American secular sacred.

In what follows, I want to turn briefly to this sense of the post-traumatic secular sacred in both temporal and spatial senses, paying particular attention to the strong contrast that is drawn between sacred and profane.

### Sacred Time and the Rhetoric of 'Too Soon'

11 September, 2002. I am in a pub in London, not far from Notting Hill Gate. It is 1:45 p.m. and I have just finished a late lunch after a morning of teaching at the SU center in London. The walls of the still crowded pub are lined with televisions and on each of them is a simulcast of the memorial taking place in New York City for the first anniversary of the 11 September attacks. At 1:46 p.m. GMT, I watch as the solemn participants in the Manhattan event embrace a moment of silence. In the crowded pub in London the embrace is not returned—no one seems to notice the events taking place on the televisions. Conversations continue, a raucous game of darts in the corner, orders are placed. Outside seems equally oblivious—the traffic bumps noisily down the streets, pedestrians chat, horns blare. Something about all this strikes me as very wrong. While I have never been a person prone to sentimental nationalism let alone patriotism, inside I seethe. All the noise, the carrying on, seems deeply offensive, insensitive, profane.

Thinking back on that experience now I realize that for me the world had moved into sacred time; a sacred moment in which ordinary temporality had been arrested, interrupted by, as Eliade puts it, 'the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, "in the beginning"'.<sup>16</sup> But my sacred beginning in the billowing smoke and collapsing towers is not the same for my fellow patrons. While they are aware and undoubtedly were profoundly affected by the events in my homeland, these events are not part of their sacred founding. The sacred moment is inaccessible to them.

The rhetoric of 'too soon' seems to be a naïve recognition of sacred temporality; a recognition that with repetition the sacred time begins to lose its luster. The distinction between the profane and the sacred eases as we move further and further from the originary moment in an increasingly mythical past. But 'too soon' does not refer to any action during the sacred time. James E. Young, foundational scholar of public memory and member of the 11 September memorial jury, has observed the almost immediate rush to design a memorial for the attacks. In an interview with *Architectural Record*, he notes 'I think we all want to see memory accrue slowly over time, but there was a built-in tension to get it planned'.<sup>17</sup> Young's comment is worth unpacking as it reveals a good deal about the way trauma separates sacred from profane time and remembrance from memory. In the wake of the tragedy of 11 September there was pressure to formulate a design for an official remembrance, a memorial site. This was, in part, due to financial issues—no other plans for rebuilding on the incredibly valuable real estate in lower Manhattan could proceed without a memorial design in place. But, there was also pressure deriving from a need for a sense

of closure. Establishing a formal site for remembrance would help to constrain the trauma, to discipline the unruly circulation of memory fragments, to begin the process of national reintegration, to heal. As Erika Doss notes, 'This urgency to commemorate the victims of terrorism stems from pressure to control the meaning of terrorism and to manage its traumatic memory', an effort that however carefully undertaken would be, as Doss puts it, 'beset by competing claims over its meaning, and its commemoration'.<sup>18</sup>

During this sacred time of reintegration, it was 'too soon' for the public emergence of competing claims, meanings, and attitudes. The sacred time of remembrance requires an orthodox focus on the 'right' and 'proper' approach to the past. But, this orthodoxy cannot be maintained. Even the sombre tone of the weeks following the attacks of 11 September saw the gradual easing of the boundaries—the gentle encroachment of the profane into the sacred moment. Rudy Giuliani, the high priest of the sacred moment of 11 September, had on the 28 of September declared the city open for business and blessed the irreverence of *Saturday Night Live*. But Gottfried's irreverence had pushed too far, too quickly. By bringing the sacred originary moment—the emergence of a new America from the ashes of Ground Zero—into irreverence so soon after the official time of mourning had ended, Gottfried presented a profane challenge to the sacredness of the time itself and challenged the singularity of the official moment of remembrance.

In ancient times, holy days were often accompanied by carnivals. As Mikhail Bakhtin points out, the raucous carnivals of 'folk merriment . . . constituted the second, unofficial part of holy days and legal feasts'. And, indeed, one of the social functions of these carnivals was the way 'in which the exalted and the lowly, the sacred and the profane are levelled and are all drawn into the same dance'.<sup>19</sup> But, where the time of the secular sacred differs from the official religious sacred is in its lack of coherence and structure. Even with the blessing of Mayor Giuliani, the citizens of New York were not ready to cast all reverence to the side and embrace the carnivalesque profanity of Gilbert Gottfried. There was no clear sense of an absolute end to the period of mourning and reverence.

As he stood awkwardly before the offended audience, Gottfried's response gestures towards Bakhtin's connection between the sacred and the grotesquely carnivalesque. Rather than apologize or shrink back from the outrage, Gottfried launched into his own version of an old and traditional joke, the Aristocrats. The basic structure of the joke is simple—a family (mother, father, two children) arrives at a talent agent's office. They then perform an act that is, depending on the individual comic's taste and style, ridiculous and often vulgar. At the end of this absurd act the agent asks what the family calls their act and they say, 'The Aristocrats'. The joke is a standard in large part because it affords comedians a chance to stretch their wings in describing the outrageous qualities and as he stood in the Friar's club, Gottfried's version rose to majestic levels of vulgarity—including various obscene and illegal sexual acts and excretions that might have made even Rabelais blush. The audience roared with laughter, some falling from their seats as Gottfried unfurled his obscene masterpiece. Gottfried's answer to the audience's offence was to give them something even more profoundly

offensive—in a way insisting on the comic absurdity of trying to hold anything sacred, to imagine it can be kept clean in a world replete with the vulgar, grotesque, and profane.

### Sacred Space and the Rhetoric of 'Too Close'

Just as we seek to encapsulate traumatic collective experiences within particular time periods, there is also a strong tendency to craft a spatial sacred. While everyday space is more or less homogenous in terms of meaning and importance, sacred space is qualitatively different and represents, as Eliade puts it, 'a break in the homogeneity of space'. The sacred site represents an 'absolute reality' by reconnecting those passing through it to 'an absolute fixed point, a center'.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the sacred site constitutes an example of what Michel Foucault called a 'heterotopia', a space defined in large part by being other than all other spaces. In Foucault's conception, these 'other spaces' reflected certain values back onto the rest of the world and so the sacred site of memory can be seen as an important reflection of broader cultural values.<sup>21</sup>

In this way, our tendency to visit these sacred sites of memory—our pilgrimages, wreath laying ceremonies, and school trips—represents a desire to reconnect to those core, seemingly universal cultural values. The sacred site stands as an absolute centre and not only the point of origin for our world but the point from which our world re-emerges. Eliade contends that 'no world can come to birth in the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space' and so for us to imagine the birth of our world—or its re-birth after time of trauma—we are called back out of the chaos of the profane and toward that sacred other space. Monuments and memorials can be thought of us exercising this cultural function in the contemporary secular sacred, a place for the re-founding of our world.

As an interesting example, it is noteworthy that for the first anniversary of the attacks, newly elected New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg chose to have political figures read segments from famous, founding American documents—Abraham Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address', Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, and Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms' speech. At the now sacred memorial site of Ground Zero, the Mayor chose the eloquent words of the nation's past founders to, in an almost mystical sense, call the nation back into being.

If the reverence paid to the Ground Zero site is not enough to suggest its function as secular sacred within the American consciousness, then the public reaction to what became popularly known as the 'Ground Zero Mosque' should make the point even more clearly. In 2009, developer Sharif El-Gamal announced plans to turn the properties at Park 45-47 into an Islamic cultural centre and prayer space. The property was just 600 feet (180 metres) from the site of the World Trade Center and some of the wreckage from one of the planes had ended up on the roof of the property. The developers imagined the project as occupying a new thirteen-story structure and including educational spaces, a swimming pool,

fitness centre as well as a 'prayer space'. But the public discourse soon labelled the project the 'ground zero mosque' and by early 2010 a majority of Americans surveyed were opposed to the construction, largely on grounds of its proximity to Ground Zero.<sup>22</sup> Daisy Khan, one of the mosque project planners, expressed her shock, 'it never occurred to us. We have been bridge builders for years'.<sup>23</sup> In spite of these stated intentions, as the *New York Times* opined: 'Instead of inspiring mutual respect, the center has opened deep divisions marked by vitriolic commentary, pitting Muslims against Christians, Tea Partiers against staunch liberals, and 11 September families against one another'.<sup>24</sup>

At the heart of this protracted public controversy was a sense that the construction of the Islamic cultural centre represented a profaning of the secular sacred space of the World Trade Center. A mother of one of the 9/11 victims, a firefighter, declared the proposed centre to be 'sacrilege on sacred ground'.<sup>25</sup> There is a deep irony embedded within this proposition. While the Islamic cultural centre was never actually proposed as a formal mosque, its prayer space would have constituted a literally sacred space for Muslim worshippers. Sacred spaces, it would seem, cannot overlap. The sacred prayer space constituted a profane space to those who viewed the World Trade Center as an American sacred space and even more so to those Americans who believed the terrorists represented Islam as a whole.

The controversy over the 'Ground Zero Mosque' escalated throughout 2010 and 2011. Adding to the complex intermixing of sacred and profane, on the ninth anniversary of the attacks, a previously unknown Florida pastor named Terry Jones declared he would burn a copy of the Qur'an unless the proposed centre was moved. The declaration sparked riots throughout Afghanistan, and even President Obama was forced to reiterate the right of any religious group to build a centre wherever they pleased. 'This country stands for the proposition that all men and women are created equal, that they have inalienable rights. And that means if you could build a church on a site . . . you should be able to build a mosque on the site'. The memorial service on that anniversary was accompanied by two public rallies—one in favour and one opposed to the building of the mosque.<sup>26</sup>

The complexity created by overlapping sacred sites of memory is remarkably common. In Auschwitz, for example, there have been on-going struggles between the global Jewish community and the Catholic Church. In 1984, when a convent was established in one of the buildings that had once stored the lethal gas Zyklon B it sparked worldwide protest. Even after Pope John Paul II ordered the nuns to leave the site there have been on-going protests over the Parish Church of Brzezinka, which occupies a former SS building near Auschwitz II. In a January, 2015 editorial for the *Washington Post*, Rabbi Avi Weiss objected to the church's continued presence: 'Its very existence at this sacred Jewish space is inappropriate, misleading and a violation of Shoah memory'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, at the 2015 Venice Biennale, Icelandic artist Christoph Büchel's entry—titled simply 'The Mosque'—was the creation of a functioning Islamic Mosque within the space of Santa Maria della Misericordia, a long unused though not officially deconsecrated Catholic Church. Venice officials shut down the installation citing a host of arcane codes and regulations, but all reports made it clear that the officials felt 'it posed a

security threat because of possible violence either by anti-Islamic extremists or Islamic extremists upset that a mosque has been created inside a church'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, one of the key limitations of sacred thinking in relation to memories of trauma may be our tendency to think of its space and time as inviolable and the assumption that any other discourse or perspective that overlaps with our sense of the sacred is necessarily a profane violation.

The 'Ground Zero Mosque' controversy illustrates the parallels between the secular sacred sites of memory and those sites that are constituted by believers as literally sacred. It also illustrates the limitations of the notion of sacred space, at least as designated within the real world. In her thoughtful analysis of sites of tragedies and terrorism, Marita Sturken notes, 'Sacred ground cannot be, for instance, a neighborhood, which is defined by the ongoing everydayness of life, work, commerce, and public interaction'.<sup>29</sup>

Some recognized this limitation on the idea of the sacred and, so, the 'Ground Zero Mosque' was not without its supporters. Some seemed to recognize the limitations of casting the site of the terror attack in the language of the sacred. An aunt of one 9/11 victim insisted that the mosque represented a positive step in remembering the dead. 'This is a living city. Ground Zero is not a static shrine'.<sup>30</sup> Still, in spite of some support and even the blessing of the President, the Islamic centre eventually closed. By 2014, the developers had abandoned plans for the elaborate centre and announced a museum instead, and by 2015 the building was up for sale with plans for its demolition.<sup>31</sup>

### The Prospects of Profane Memories

The sacred time and site of remembrance declares itself as the pure, absolute, fixed and proper orientation towards our past. Sacred remembrance entails more than just the narrative of the past and its visual depiction but dictates its symbolic meaning and, in ways both powerful and subtle, the affective attitude we are meant to assume. In the bargain to attain this acquiescence, sacred remembrance promises us a fixed and inviolable view of our past—we will never forget. In ways, the various monuments and memorials we erect to the trauma of our past all make this claim. We wish to resolve the jagged hole left by trauma by placing within it a concrete marker, a symbol that we will always remember, always remember this and in this way.

But, of course, sacred remembrance's promises are never upheld. The sacred remembrance cannot forever hold back the tide of profane memories that will, eventually and at times painfully, overwhelm it.<sup>32</sup> It is also worth noting that this profanity of memory does not operate only within the United States. In April 2015, the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park opened in New Zealand's capital, Wellington. Some 500 people came to the dedication, which was designed to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign, the first major campaign for Anzac soldiers during World War I. The 21,000 square metre park

cost nearly \$120 million to create.<sup>33</sup> On 12 May of the same year, the local news reported that the memorial war park 'had become a battered, noisy skate park', the slanted wall now marked with dark scrapes from skateboards. A teenage boy interviewed about this use of the memorial park acknowledged that it might be seen as disrespectful but noted, 'we are using it better than the vast majority of people'.<sup>34</sup>

While these skateboarders may be a particularly profane example of my point, a wander through almost any town or village will likely find other sacred sites of remembrance either in utter disuse or different use—the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial that is featured in downtown Syracuse, for instance, is commonly used as a vantage point to watch summer concerts. It is yet another example by which the seemingly fixed sacred site of remembrance is transformed by the flow of profane memories.

To be clear, when I refer to the profanity of memory I mean more than just examples where previously sacred sites are disused or misused. Instead, I want to suggest by the term 'profane memories' that the singular, unified narrative of the past inevitably unravels in the wider world of fragmented, chaotic, fluid, and contested public memories. In the concluding section of this article, I'd like to pause over this notion of profane memory and consider how these memories function rhetorically.

First, to speak of memories as profane is to acknowledge their fragmented nature. In a way, we ought to refer not to public memory but to public memories. Even the most sacred figure of our past is subject to diverse and divergent memories. Consider the way the historically venerated Christopher Columbus, credited in the history books of my childhood as 'discovering America', has been recast as the first villain in a wider narrative of the genocide of indigenous peoples.

Second, in the wider scope of this fragmentation, there is no absolute authority to fix the chaotic interplay of these divergent memories. While there will be, at least at times, official, authoritative public remembrances, even the most dominant and domineering of these narratives of the past can only, at best, send divergent memories into hiding. But, as we have seen with various geopolitical upheavals, these subaltern public memories are simply biding their time to reemerge and openly contest the official record of the past. The destruction of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the defacement of Soviet World War II memorials in Eastern Europe provide vivid examples of the profaning of the previously held sacred.

Thus, in the realm of profane memories, we find a fluid and dynamic shifting of the fragmented memories of different publics. This is a realm of contest and divisiveness; a realm in which the images of the past can be repositioned and re-appropriated for new purposes by new people. In the United States, recent protests over the killing of unarmed African Americans by police officers has combined with a long-standing cultural division over the place of the Confederate Battle Flag to turn previously disused sites of Civil War memory into vibrant and provocative sites of cultural conflict.

A line of tension exists between these profaning memories and the sites and times of the sacred. We know the points of tension have been provoked when we hear the rhetoric of 'too soon' or 'too close' and watch the outrage and offence

that emerges when our seemingly inviolable and sacred remembrance is pulled back into the chaotic and fluid wash of profane memories. Artists operate along this line of tension; at times, working with the symbolic detritus left by trauma and tragedy and using these remnants of memory to shape and reshape the contours of our cultural experience of the past. This work is, of course, not easy nor will it be without conflict and controversy. But, in the end, the blessing of the profanity of memory is that the conflict will be continuous, propelled by the perpetual struggle between diverse communities. Indeed, it is not the sacred, originary site that gives birth to a world renewed but, rather, the on-going contest over whose vision of the past and with it the inevitable question, what vision of the future.

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## Bibliographical Note

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# The Infusoria of Ichaboe

Wayne Barrar

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### Abstract

In 1842, the tiny, uninhabited southern African island of Ichaboe was the site of acute speculative activity in the form of guano mining. Within just a few years, fierce and often desperate competition left the island essentially stripped of its ecological history. Though guano's fertilising power was the paramount focus, an unanticipated spin-off enterprise arose when the material was found to hold the fossilised remains of algae. These glassy, jewel-like diatoms provided an ideal subject for the Victorian microscope craze and were used to make highly valued microscope slides. Traded widely, they brought Ichaboe a new, supplementary fame. This article—which forms part of the author's broader photographic-based project, *The Glass Archive*—considers these artefacts as microscopic traces that serve as metaphoric links to landscape history and as 'prompts' to remember and understand aspects of this colonial period more fully.

Keywords: Ichaboe, diatoms, guano mining, microscopy, Victorian studies, scientific archives, landscape

Scepticism may account for the delay in following up on Benjamin Morrell's notable, if low-key, reference to Ichaboe—a tiny island off the south-western coast of Africa which had previously been overlooked and which, he claimed, was covered with 25 feet of guano.<sup>1</sup> It was not until 1842, ten years after the explorer's published account of his travels, that a near-clandestine voyage finally headed in search of Ichaboe's guano treasure.

Guano is essentially a deep accumulation of weathered bird droppings, typically found on small islands that have accommodated large numbers of birds over an extremely long period. This unlikely commodity became extraordinarily valuable in the 19th century. As agricultural economies tried to find ways of preventing food shortages, and the power of fertilisers was increasingly recognised, guano was identified as the magic bullet capable of transforming agricultural production.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1. Wayne Barrar, Spicule/slide boundary, guano from Ichaboe. From a slide by an unknown maker (diamond etched), c.1850. (Photographed 2013.)



The guano was removed by ‘scraping’, a low-technology and labour-intensive process involving very rudimentary hand tools wielded by an often desperate labour force. The material was extracted to exhaustion; operations then moved to a new source. Living conditions on a guano island were inevitably grim, often lacking water supplies or any form of shelter, and the temporary nature of the site meant that little effort was made to remedy this situation. The guano itself was unhealthy and unpleasant to handle, and even getting on and off the island was often extremely dangerous. Many of those involved were disappointed in their reward: guano-scraping ventures often struggled to be economic and the business was always a ‘boom and bust’ affair. Nonetheless, the value attached to the material meant that individuals and ships were prepared to risk it.

Within months of the initial expedition’s arrival at Ichaboe, the island was inundated with activity. A lack of indigenous human inhabitants aside, it quickly exhibited the type of frontier history narrative that often accompanied the colonial project, fulfilling the characteristics of what Hendrik Snyders terms an ‘anarchic frontier’, where unmonitored dodgy dealings secured the physical space to enact exploitation of a new claimed and named territory.<sup>3</sup> The island became the site of contestation between competing claimants to the resource, and of labour exploitation, mutiny, and extreme environmental degradation. Accounts relating to Ichaboe in this period are scarce and generally informal, but they often refer to hundreds of ships moored off the island waiting to load their booty. One on-location account by Captain W. Broderick cites over 80 ships moored and 3,000 people scraping the island surface in 1844.<sup>4</sup> An extensive account by Charles Andersson notes a peak of 450 ships and thousands of hardened miners tented ashore, also recording that ‘bacchanalian orgies were held in the encampment, abominable beyond belief’.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2. Artist unknown, *Ichaboe – mode of shipping the Guano* (detail). Engraving in *Illustrated London News*, 28 September 1844.



Other guano islands had different specific histories, reflected in the differing extent to which they were documented. For example, the large operation in the Chincha Islands off Peru (where the word ‘guano’ first appeared) was far more connected to the broader politics of colonialism in the region, whereas the

exploitation of the central Pacific Islands, such as Baker Island, remains largely unknown and difficult to decipher from contemporaneous accounts—even more of a historical remnant than Ichaboe. Now infamous for its role as host to an Australian detention centre, the island of Nauru, too, was enmeshed in the 19th-century guano and phosphate industry. As on Ichaboe, the operation to claim Nauru and its resource was a secret affair involving the dispatch of a survey party from Britain. Here, though, the initial excitement was sparked not by a published report, but by the fortuitous chemical testing of a rock that had been serving as a doorstep in a company office in London. This chunk of topography now serves as the default and uneasy memorial for the industry that was to change Nauru's environment, culture, and prospects so dramatically in the 20th century.<sup>6</sup>

While mining on Nauru was documented, much of the cultural memory of this tumultuous time is affected by its being appended to the formal photographic and written archives of the controlling phosphate company operated by Australia, Great Britain, and New Zealand. The Ichaboe venture, by contrast, lacks even this kind of formal archive, and there are no photographs of it (the guano being all but exhausted by the time photography was becoming established as a medium). Visual representation from the period is limited to a few lithographic reproductions mainly used to promote or report on the venture in British newspapers.

In a strange twist, though, Ichaboe is linked to another optically centred technology of the Victorian era: microscopy. Microscopes were extremely popular among the educated and elite, and were routinely displayed in their living rooms. Prepared and commercially produced microscope slides could be acquired for viewing, but a wide range of enthusiasts became highly skilled in preparing material for viewing themselves.<sup>7</sup> The almost fanatical craze for microscopes and viewing specimens in the mid-to-late 19th century resulted in a little-known subsidiary industry for the pungent guano, and as a side effect we now have at least some material link to the actual object of desire.

Guano contains masses of microscopic diatoms—or, more specifically, the silica shells of these marine or aquatic algae. They remain intact, despite having experienced the inner workings of at least two digestive systems (those of the diatom-eating fish, and of the penguins, cormorants, and other seabirds which ate them and were responsible for the deposits on the island). A cup of guano could provide hundreds of microscopists with ample source material to view, examine, and draw or photograph under their Victorian microscopes.

Diatoms represented a kind of royal pinnacle among microscopic specimens. They are extremely beautiful, hugely diverse, and specialised enough for those so inclined to become experts in the domain of amateur science and taxonomy. Diatom-focused microscopists constructed complex geometric 'exhibition mounts' of hundreds—and in one instance thousands—of carefully arranged diatoms. Given that even several hundred hand-positioned diatoms take up only a millimetre or so in diameter on the glass, this was patently a process which took care, skill, and labour, and often a degree of aesthetic sensibility.

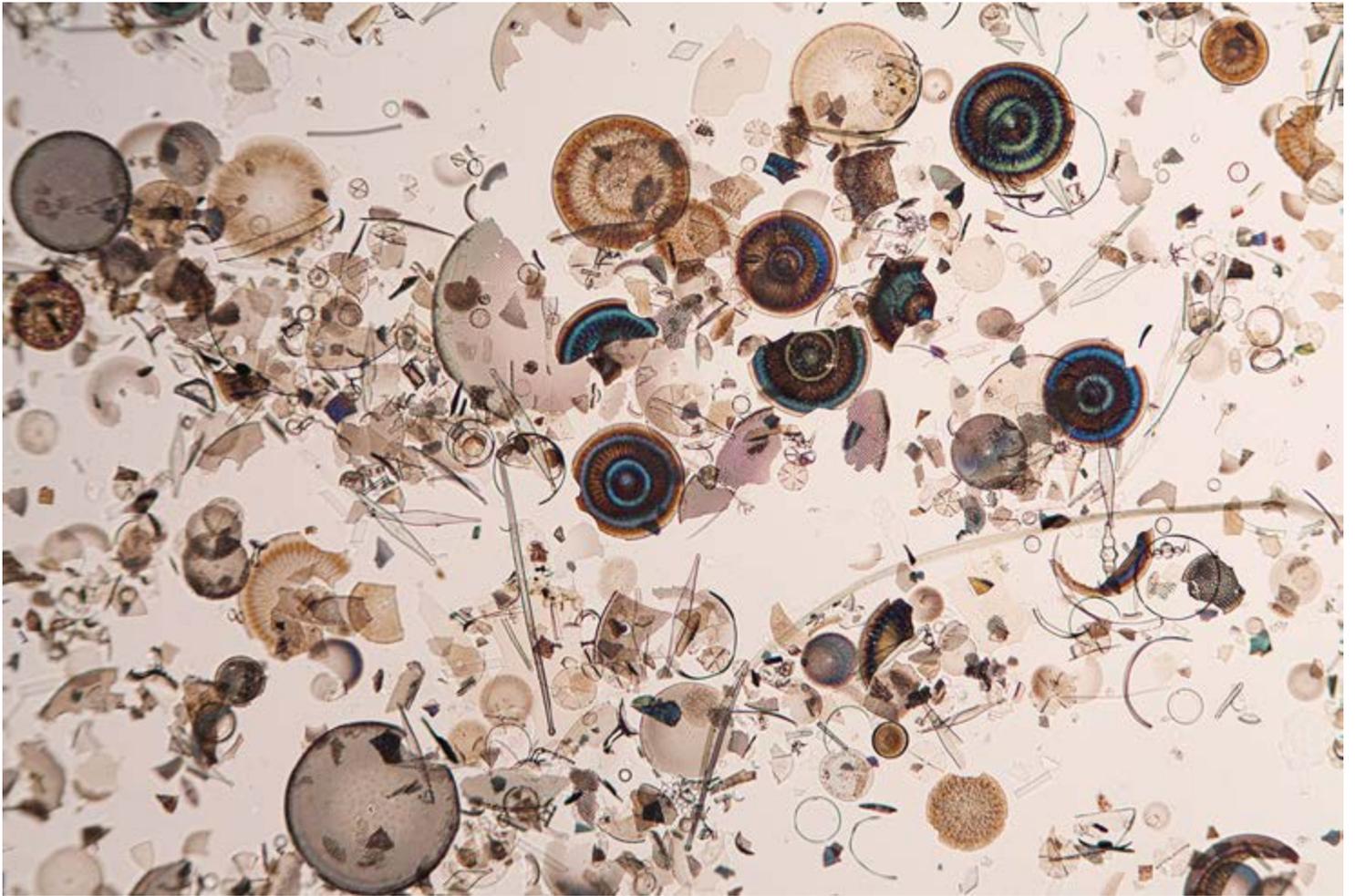


Figure 3. Wayne Barrar, Strew of guano from Ichaboe. From a slide by an unknown maker, c.1870. (Photographed 2013.)

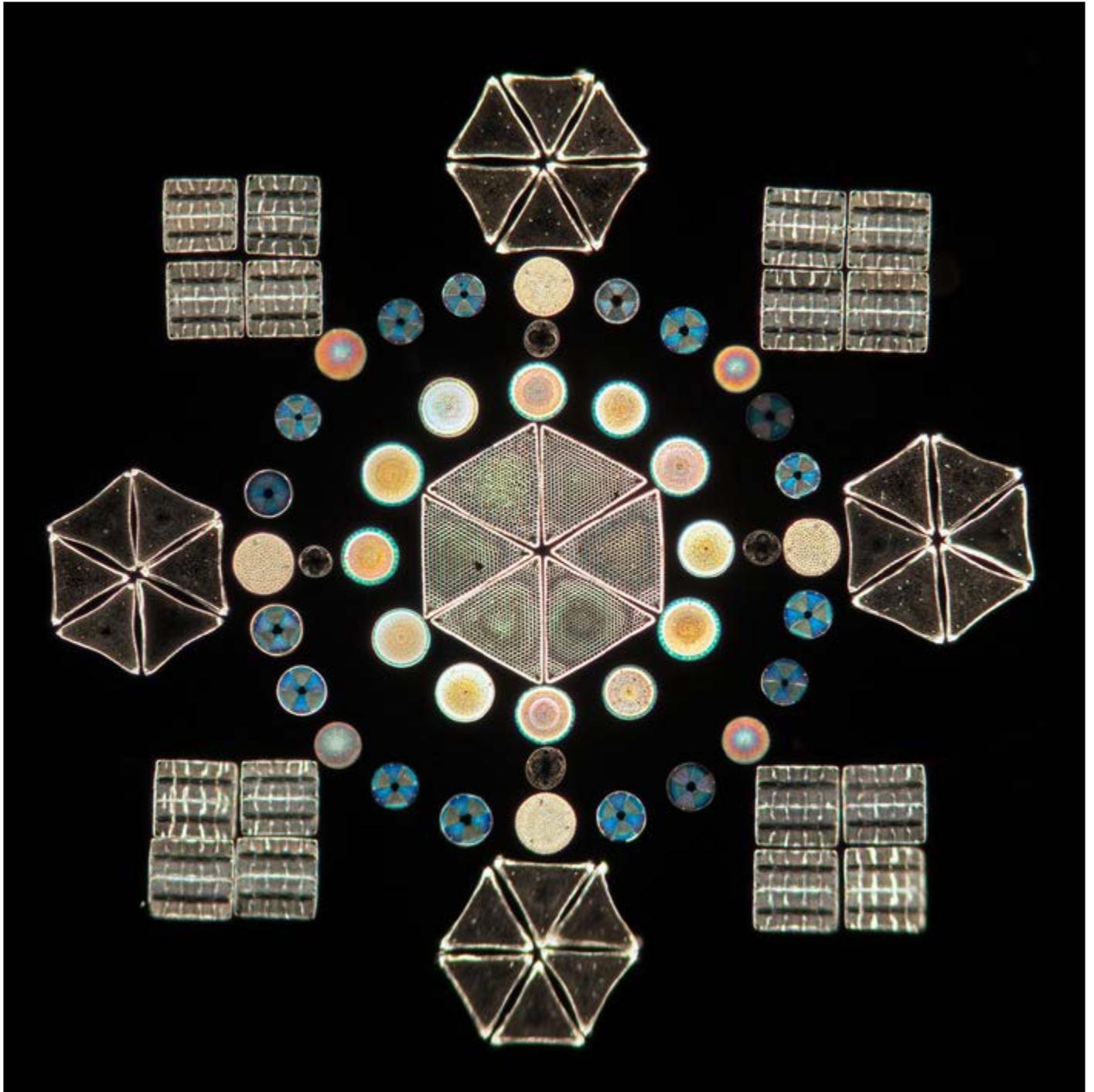


Figure 4. Wayne Barrar, Arranged diatoms.  
Exhibition mount by J. D. Möller, c.1880.  
(Photographed 2014.)

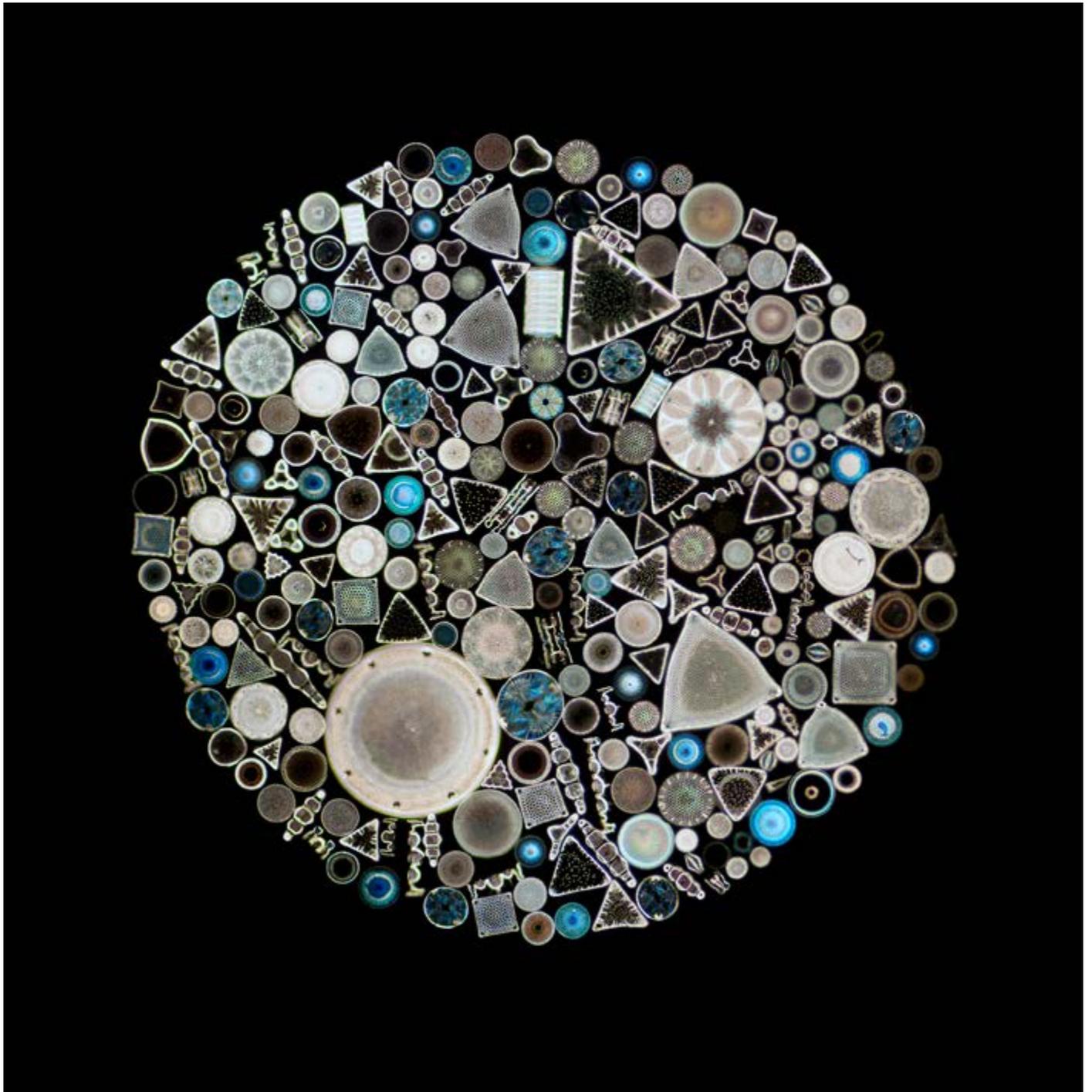


Figure 5. Wayne Barrar, 'Group of diatomaceae, various': circular arrangement of 278 diatoms from Oamaru. Slide by Watson and Sons, c.1890. (Photographed 2014.)

These slides were traded in a lucrative industry along with mounts of named single-species diatoms set out in simpler but often still formally impressive arrangements. Small samples of diatom-bearing material (often referred to as diatomaceous earth, infusoria, or ooze) were also readily exchanged throughout communities of microscopists. For instance, Mary Ann Booth—one of the few women working in this field in the 19th century—not only traded and sold slides from her Massachusetts home, but also actively accumulated ‘earths’ via exchange with her contemporaries in the USA, Europe, and further afield.

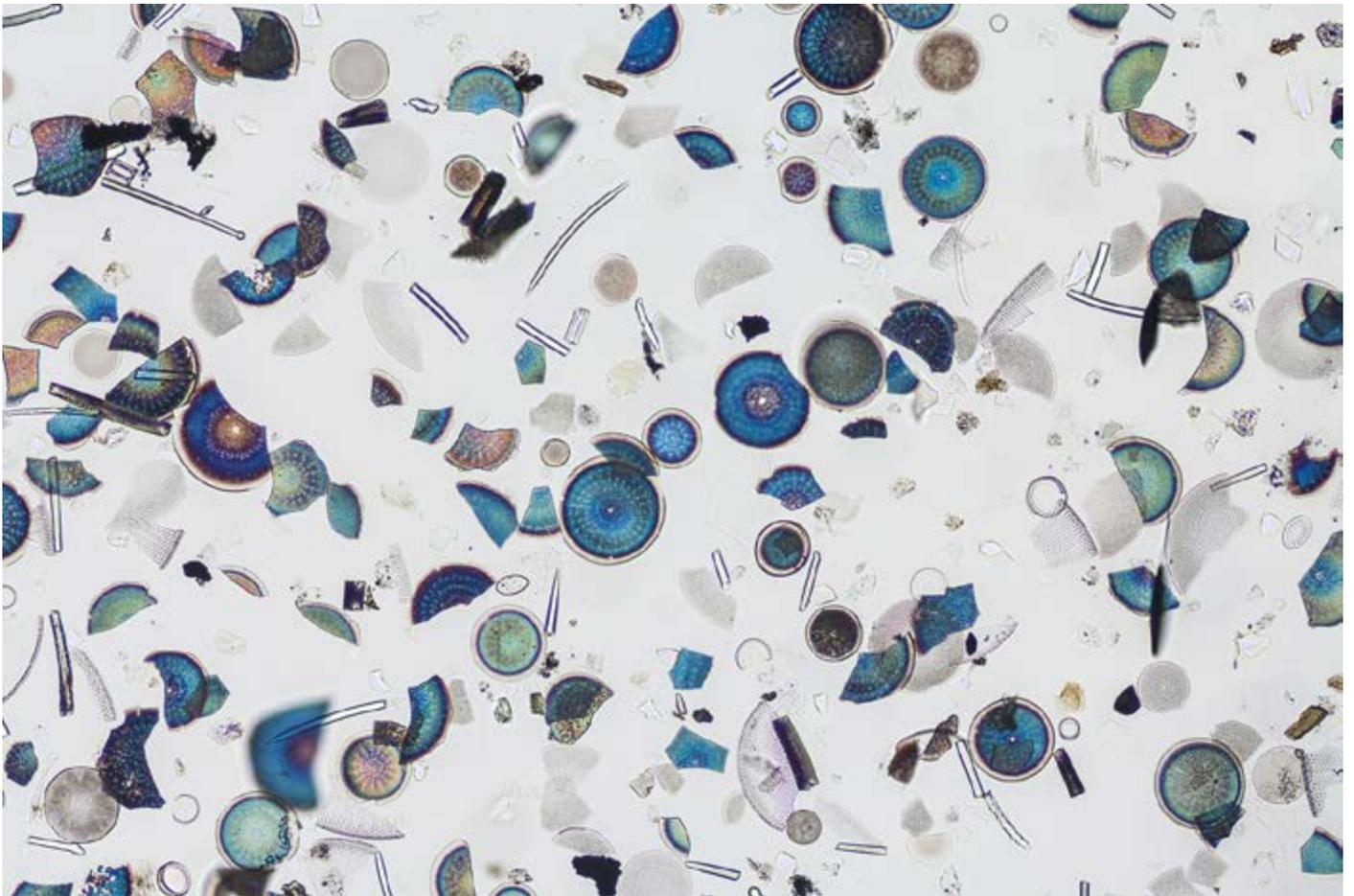
Diatomaceous material was sourced from what were often very small sites in an impressive range of geographic localities, including Jutland, Russia, the Antarctic, and the deepest of ocean trenches. A number of the locations were famous; the names of specific islands, bays, and even paddocks turn up over and over again on the labels of Victorian slide mounters from all over the world who had obviously been at pains to keep their inventories relevant and desirable.

Figure 6. Wayne Barrar, Two slides of diatoms from Ichaboe, British and French makers, c.1850. (Photographed 2014.)



The famous scientist and diatomist Christian Ehrenberg was among the first to taxonomically describe diatoms in guano around 1844, and it appears that Ichaboe material was involved here. His sample seems to have been supplied by one of the most well-known microscope slide mounters of the time, Charles Topping of London.<sup>8</sup> How Topping got hold of the sample is unclear, but no doubt he would have been aware of the flurry of tall ships arriving fully loaded from the island. Topping himself also distributed mounted slides of Ichaboe specimens, with one example, titled ‘Infusoria from guano, Schabo 1844’, still held in excellent condition in the diatom herbaria at the Academy of Sciences in Philadelphia. Another diatomist, Henry Deane, also worked with the Ichaboe guano early and published a paper outlining how he recovered the ‘siliceous shells’ of the diatoms (though, as his paper indicates, they were thought of as animals at the time). Boiling the sample in concentrated nitric acid, he was able to extract the pure glass shells of the algae and dispense with the organic and other remnants of the crusty old manure.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 7. Wayne Barrar, Strew from Ichaboe deposits. From a slide by an unknown maker, c.1850. (Photographed 2014.)

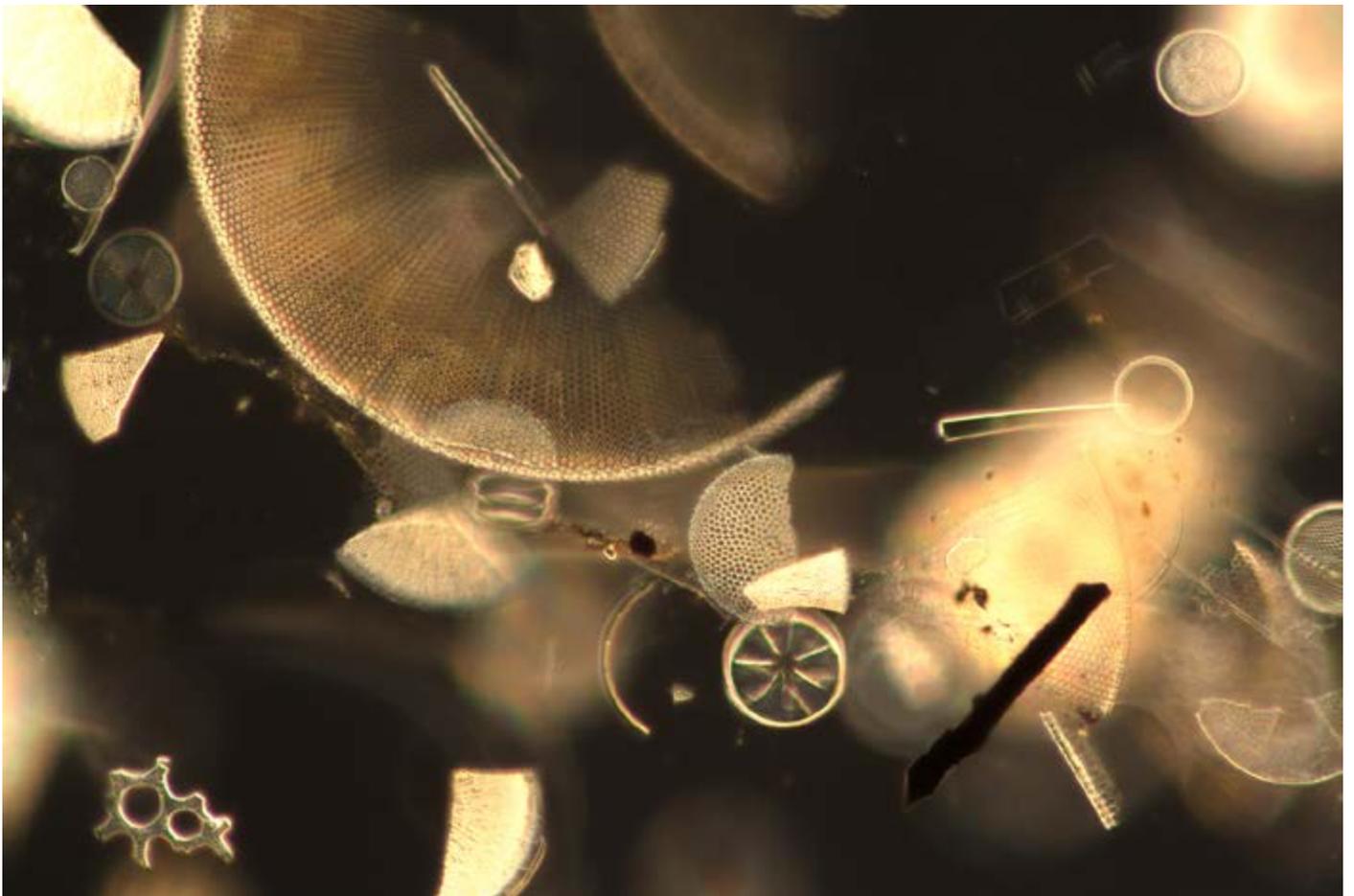


Once extracted, the Ichaboe diatoms were of considerable appeal, largely due to their inclusion of a striking form from the genus *Arachnoidiscus*, discovered and named in early samples by Henry Deane.<sup>10</sup>

Wherever diatoms were found, diatomists were quick to attempt to classify and name them. But this was not a ‘controlled science’, particularly where the organisms were the side effect of the guano trading business. Merchants diluted the high-quality guano from Ichaboe with material from other regions, and stocks got mixed or mislabelled, creating a taxonomic nightmare for those wanting to assign particular species to particular geographical locations. Diatomists were often a little sloppy in their record keeping, too, adding to the confusion.<sup>11</sup>

What is certain is that the guano diatoms from Ichaboe were always highly sought after and considered ‘exotic’. Material from the initial samples was still being traded well into the 20th century, and new slides can still be made from one of these by a professional slide mounter in Britain (who has diatomaceous material from a number of historical locations including Ichaboe).<sup>12</sup>

Figure 8. Wayne Barrar, Various diatoms from guano from Ichaboe. From a slide by an unknown maker (diamond etched), c.1850. (Photographed 2014.)



A cleverly observant article in *Household Words*, a fortnightly London journal founded and edited by Charles Dickens, stated in 1857 that:

we should have speculators buying up the diatoms from Ichaboe guano, and causing them to disappear as the substance itself grows scarcer, and the present microscopic preparations from it enter the list of works by the ‘old masters’.<sup>13</sup>

The unidentified author of the article clearly understood the industry associated with Victorian microscopy. Even in this period, a number of claims for the Ichaboe diatoms are made. They are rare; they will become rarer and hence more valuable; and most significantly they are analogous to great artworks. This extraordinary idea of value is devoid of any relationship to the historical narratives of the mining or to those people involved in extracting the stuff from its isolated location. Ichaboe as a place or location is unremembered in this context. The exotic name is a signifier of exotic beauty but not for its geographic heritage or connections. Instead, these samples are so acculturated and distanced from nature at this point as to be considered artworks.

From a contemporary standpoint informed by environmental awareness, it is harder to avoid the many meanings, taxonomies, and contexts for these extraordinary remnants. These artefacts and their images are both physical and metaphoric connections to the surface of the island. Every diatom was scraped by someone collecting guano into sacks which were then lugged onto tall ships bound for the developed world. This monumental task has in effect perhaps left the island with the closest thing to a memorial—a dispersed and mostly de-contextualised network of balsam-bound glass slides—inherently perfectly preserved but buried in diverse archives.

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2. Jill Kinahan and John Kinahan, “‘A Thousand Fine Vessels are Ploughing the Main...’: Archaeological Traces of the Nineteenth-Century ‘Guano Rage’ on the South-western Coast of Africa”, *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 27 (2009): 45, [www.jstor.org/stable/29544613](http://www.jstor.org/stable/29544613).
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4. “Ichaboe Island – The Guano Trade”, *Illustrated London News*, 28 September 1844, 196.
5. Charles John Andersson, *The Okavango River: A Narrative of Travel, Exploration, and Adventure* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), 412.
6. Wayne Barrar, “Fields of Vision: Photography, Phosphate and Landscape from a Pacific History” (MA thesis, Massey University, 2005), 50.
7. Contemporary diatomists’ letters outlined extensive buying, selling, and exchange of specimens (including guano from Ichaboe). See, for example, George Mansfield Browne, Letters to G. A. Walker-Arnott, 26 June 1862 and 11 January 1868, Letters to G. Walker-Arnott, Diatom Collection Archives, Natural History Museum, London.
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10. George Shadbolt, “On the Structure of the Siliceous Loricæ of the Genus Arachnoidiscus”, *Transactions of the Microscopical Society of London* 3 (1852): 49, [www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/20084#page/579/mode/1up](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/20084#page/579/mode/1up).
11. G. A. Walker-Arnott, “On Arachnoidiscus”, *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* 6 (1858): 160, [www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/48900#page/166/mode/1up](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/48900#page/166/mode/1up).
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## Biographical Note

Wayne Barrar is a photographer and Associate Professor at Whiti o Rehua School of Art, Massey University, Wellington. His work often considers the human construction of landscape or critiques ‘re-definitions’ of nature. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Glass Archive*, Hocken Gallery, Dunedin; *Underground: Subterranean Economies and Ecologies*, Prichard Art Gallery, University of Idaho; *Bio Borders*, Pataka Museum of Art and History; and *An Expanding Subterra*, toured by Dunedin Public Art Gallery to other venues in New Zealand and the USA. He has also been recently included in major group exhibitions at the Auckland Art Gallery, National Gallery of Australia and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. His monographic books include *Shifting Nature* (Otago University Press, 2001); *An Expanding Subterra* (Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2010); and *Torbay tī kōuka* (University of Plymouth Press, 2011).

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## Claims to Immediacy: The Artist as Historian and *Eclipse* at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art

Susannah Sayler and Edward Morris

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### Abstract

From 2014-2015, we (Sayler / Morris) exhibited a large-scale video installation commemorating the extinction of the passenger pigeon at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA). This article both describes the context of that piece and reflects more broadly on the role of the artist as historian. We argue for a form of history that combines both discursive and affective elements. Ultimately, we define history not as a scientific process of unearthing truths, but rather as making a particular claim to immediacy of past events. We argue that to conceive of the artist as historian is to conceive of history as a constant negotiation between the imaginary, the symbolic and the real within the collective psyche. We see artists as important contributors to such a historiography and see our work *Eclipse* as an example of this.

Keywords: passenger pigeon, Elizabeth Kolbert, Sayler / Morris, MASS MoCA, history, collective memory, extinction, ecological crisis, contemporary art, artist as historian

## The Artist as Historian

Can an artist be an historian? That is to say, can an artwork that treats historical events be construed as positively ‘doing’ history rather than merely commenting on it, critiquing it, or undermining it? The answer to this question depends, of course, on how we define history and how we understand the constructive capacity of art. The phrase ‘the artist as historian’ was coined by Mark Godfrey in a seminal 2007 essay by the same title.<sup>1</sup> In that essay, Godfrey notes an ‘historical turn’ in post-1979 contemporary art. Further, he distinguishes between those recent artists who are actively engaged in the ‘task of historical representation’ and those merely touching on historical topics or else critiquing the very process of history itself.<sup>2</sup> He points out that not too long ago, in the mid-19th century, historical representation was ‘considered the most serious role of art’.<sup>3</sup> Godfrey surveys an impressive array of contemporary artists who have once again made such historical representation a central task of their practice before turning to an in-depth analysis of one of those artists, Matthew Buckingham.

However, the phrase ‘artist as historian’ remains provocative. It is one thing to show contemporary artists such as Buckingham engaged in serious historical representation, and yet another to assert this activity as equivalent to the professional function and authority of an historian. In making this claim, Godfrey relies primarily on the theory of history advanced by two thinkers—Walter Benjamin and Hayden White—who have a common scepticism for any history that lays claim to objectivity and truth, as well as a common mission to elucidate the inner relation between historical narrative and ideology. This particular view of history allows Godfrey to express the value of several related characteristics of historical representation as practised by the artists under his purview: a ‘methodological freedom’ that does not hew to strict academic (i.e. real or imagined ‘scientific’) standards, but that still employs rigour; a capacity to deconstruct master narratives; a self-reflexive tendency to expose the historicity and ideology embedded in the one’s own work (a trait he finds particularly exemplary in Buckingham); and a willingness to represent previously unacknowledged or underrepresented stories.<sup>4</sup>

Godfrey’s essay and the artworks of historical representation that he discusses have been an important influence on our art practice. However, we find two main shortcomings in his analysis that we mention here to set the stage for our own argument in this article.

First, Godfrey speaks of each artwork as if it were an argument addressed to the viewer’s rational mind and does not make a concerted attempt to assess the affective impact of a work. In our view, an artwork’s inherent appeal to the affective and the visceral is of more fundamental significance to its role in the making of history than any of the other valid, but secondary, characteristics mentioned by Godfrey. Godfrey seems to want to fit his analysis of artworks into established and familiar strains of theory about the practice of historiography, such as Hayden White’s, in order to support his main thesis that artists too can be historians in the full professional sense of the word. Talk of the emotional is

embarrassing to such professional decorum. In our view, this is a shame and, further, forsakes the more radical promise of the other theorist of history Godfrey relies upon in his essay, Walter Benjamin. Any substantive exegesis of Benjamin's complicated, even apparently contradictory, theory of history, is beyond the scope of this essay—if it is even possible at all (!). However, Benjamin remains a popular source of inspiration for artists such as Buckingham (and us) precisely because of his enigmatic quality. His writing is expressive, even poetic, more than rigorous, and so embodies the principles it articulates. For example, in speaking of history Benjamin famously wrote: 'to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was". It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.'<sup>5</sup> Note that the appeal here is primarily emotional—a recognition of danger and urgency, an operation of empathy—and the method is primarily visceral—speaking/writing become 'seizing hold' through images. Further, note the relationship between memory and history in this quotation from Benjamin. Memory, which is here collective, societal memory, constitutes the mental/cultural environment in which we are inevitably immersed—the sum total of collective experience. Benjamin is fusing our understanding of individual memory into an assertion about collective memory and the formation of a societal psyche. History, then, is a particular willed operation of mining this memory for a narrative that can help us in the present. History occurs when needed and out of a position of need. It is the Symbolic/Imaginary rendering of the Real in memory.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to the second shortcoming we find in Godfrey—the recognition of which informs the idea of history and its relation to memory presented in this article. Godfrey presents a weak case for the affirmative value of an artist's work in historical representation. In falling prey to the habit of mind that regards contemporary art's primary function as one of critique, Godfrey describes the impact of Buckingham's work in terms of its ability to deconstruct and disorient our established ideas about the past, but insists that the work is positive in the sense that it can 'open up new ways of thinking about the future'.<sup>7</sup> However, Godfrey asserts that what this new future looks like is a matter that must be left to each individual viewer to puzzle out for him or herself. We believe that for the artist to be truly considered as an historian, there needs to be a greater level of ownership for the vision and values presented in the work and a greater sense of what the work does in terms of collectivizing. The impact of the work cannot be merely seen as deconstructive but must also be constructive. History is the writing of the past, not the erasure of it. This too is consistent with Benjamin. The point of laying claim to an image of the past because it has urgent import in the present moment is not to strengthen the self, but to invigorate the socius. In this way, not only can the artist be an historian, but the historian too can be (and must inevitably be) an activist.

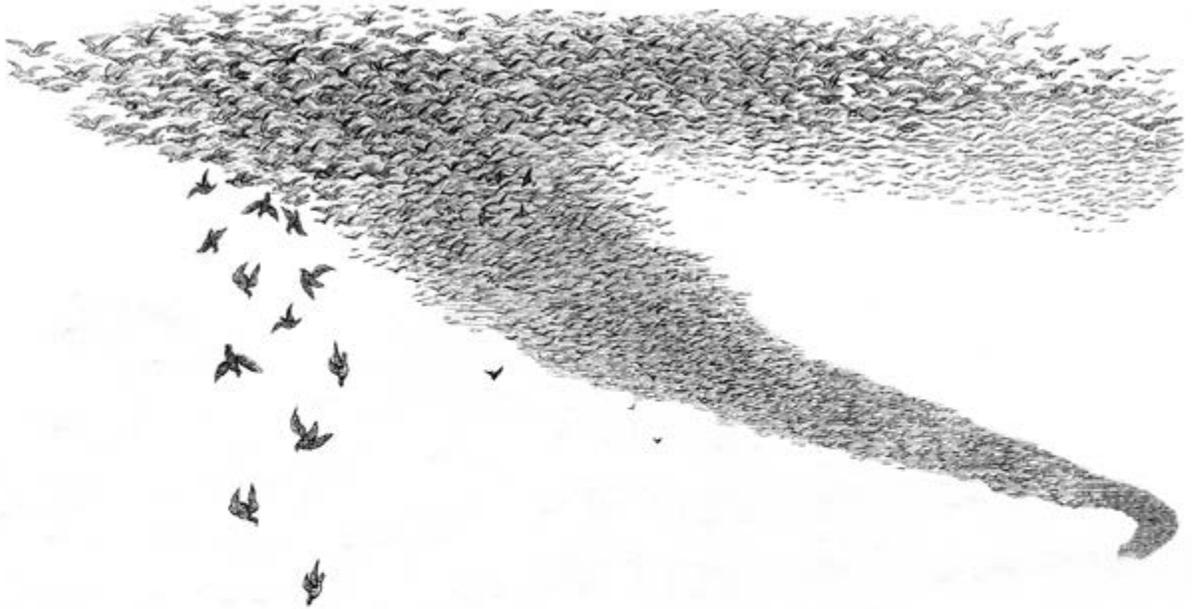
The following article discusses how we understand our own task as artist historians in this vein by describing the circumstances and motivations behind a video installation work called *Eclipse* that dealt with the extinction of the passenger pigeon in 1914. Following the symposium title for which we produced

this article, we will consider what it means to ‘trigger’ a memory given the relation between memory and history sketched above.

### An Invitation to Memorialize an Extinction

In January 2014, the writer Elizabeth Kolbert asked if we could create a meaningful commemoration of the extinction of the passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), which was once the most abundant bird in North America, possibly in the entire world.<sup>8</sup> In the 19th century, a single flock could number two billion birds,<sup>9</sup> and in 1813, the naturalist James Audobon observed a mile-wide stream of them flying over his head for three consecutive days.<sup>10</sup> At times, the flock that Audobon observed completely blocked the sun, a phenomenon he described as a noontday eclipse.<sup>11</sup> Despite its apparently inexhaustible numbers, the passenger pigeon rapidly declined as humans began to kill the birds for sport and cheap food and to destroy its habitat with new development.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 1. A drawing of passenger pigeons in flight for *Eclipse*, digitally adapted from woodblock engraving that appeared in *The Illustrated Shooting and Dramatic News*, July 3, 1875. Saylor / Morris, 2014.



By 1914, there was just one solitary member of the species alive. Her name was Martha and she lived in the Cincinnati Zoo. She died on September first of that year and her preserved corpse now sits in a storage cabinet in the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. The passenger pigeon had gone from billions to zero in less than a hundred years.

Figure 2. A specimen cabinet containing a passenger pigeon named Martha (named after Martha Washington), the last survivor of her species. Her body was donated to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, for preservation. Mounted in a display case with this notation: 'MARTHA, last of her species, died at 1 p.m., 1 September 1914, age 29, in the Cincinnati Zoological Garden. EXTINCT'. Photo: Saylor / Morris



Kolbert's challenge to us was to design a memorial that could allow viewers to contemplate the centenary of this final death. What we came up with was a large-scale video and sound installation, titled *Eclipse* in reference to Audobon's description of a pigeon flock. *Eclipse* opened at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) on 1 September 2014 and remained up for a year. The installation was accompanied by an artist book that we gave away in the museum in limited numbers each day until gone.<sup>13</sup> What did this work have to do with memory? What did it have to do with history? Could it itself be considered history?

Page 54-55. Figure 3. Installation views of *Eclipse*, Sayler / Morris with Elizabeth Kolbert. Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, MA (left), Berman Museum, Collegetown, PA, 2016 (right), multi-channel video loop (7'41"), sound installation and artist publication. Photo: Sayler / Morris. The link is for a 3-minute excerpt of the full video loop.

<https://vimeo.com/108870516>





## How We Feel History

Ostensibly, our task was to ‘trigger’ the recall of a specific event—the death of Martha, the last individual of her kind. Yet, very few, if any, of our potential visitors would be aware of these facts previously. Further, not a single visitor would have an actual individual memory of the event or how it was received by the world at the time. This was an event that lay at the very edge of cultural obscurity. Therefore, what would be ‘triggered’ through our form of representation was not a mechanical recollection—if such a thing is even possible—but rather certain emotions and attitudes towards something in the past that would be introduced to the viewer as worthy of her consideration, likely for the first time. In other words, we would be ‘doing’ history.

What does it mean for an artist to ‘do’ (to write) history? First and foremost, it means regarding facts in the particular way articulated by artist Walid Raad:

We are concerned with facts, but we do not view facts as self-evident objects that are already present in the world. One of the questions we find ourselves asking is, How do we approach facts not in their crude facticity but through the complicated mediations by which they acquire their immediacy?<sup>14</sup>

In a previous edition of this journal, Kendall Phillips hit the same nail on the head when he noted that the ‘unique quality’ of particular ‘artistic interventions into public memory’ was to ‘invite an experience of memory that gestures toward its excess—that which lies beyond discursive facticity and within the realm of the visceral and affective’.<sup>15</sup> In this article, Phillips was careful to stipulate that this quality he identified in certain artworks does not necessarily apply to ALL artworks that deal with the past. But doesn’t it? Is not an engagement with the affective and visceral in collective memory the *sine qua non* of the artist as historian? Simply try to imagine something you would want to call art that was disinterested in sense and emotion and instead just stuck to the facts. This is not as trivial an observation as it may seem. At stake is not just marking a role for the artist as historian, but also arriving at a version of history that can escape the tyranny of modern mathematical science’s way of seeing the world always in terms of propositions, facts and ‘a calculable coherence of forces’.<sup>16</sup> For this, the affective and visceral cannot be seen as something extra, but as essential to any full understanding.

As Raad implies, a memory cannot be parsed into a solid, core fact and a nebulous, ‘excessive’ affect. They are bound together. When we speak about facts involved in individual memories, we speak ostensibly about the recall of an originary impression left by some visceral experience in the world. Yet, we know how unreliable such ‘facts’ are. Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* story, in which several people have completely different and utterly self-serving memories of the same experienced event, is so immediately recognizable because it describes the fundamental truth of all memory.<sup>17</sup> Memory is not the originary experience itself. It is not static and fixed, ready to be unearthed or ‘triggered’. Memory is the

recall, the process of recall. What governs this process, and what in turn makes facts so mutable, is the interplay between the discursive and affective ‘realms’ within a given subject, by which we mean the totality of an individual psyche. What we feel (the affective) is in constant dialectic with what think we should feel (the discursive). We will remember what we want to, so to speak, but that wanting is a complicated business.

These observations apply to collective and individual memory alike. The analogy between individual and collective memory appears imperfect because, whereas in individual memory the originary, visceral experience is taken to be essential, in collective memory the experience of events is often second-hand and mediated, i.e., originating wholly in the discursive rather than in the visceral. We are told the facts: in school, in the media, and other sites of putative authority. Yet, this imperfect appearance of the analogy between individual and collective memory is a function of our failure to fully imagine the collective as a psyche, replete with both a conscious and unconscious and all the mechanisms thereof. Inevitably, some bodies within a given collective have indeed—once upon a time—had the visceral experience in question. That visceral experience, is therefore, internalized and carried forth within the collective psyche even if as a mere trace, in our attitudes, customs, etc. A collective can repress its traumas and a collective can suffer from neurosis, or indeed psychosis, just as individuals can. (Witness Nazism, Trumpism, etc.).

In this connection, it is extremely important to note that while the facts of an originary, visceral experience are subject to change, the affect produced by that experience is itself immutable. Paradoxically, the affect has more solidity than the fact. The affect persists and returns. The fact flickers and changes form by the wind of affect. This is perhaps most clear in traumatic memories—whether individual or collective. The recall of specific facts as they relate to traumatic events are not necessarily reliable, but recall of the pain and its psychological import is beyond question.<sup>18</sup> The core emotional residue of a trauma, no matter how malleable to narrative in its positioning within the subjective or social ecology, remains inviolate and indelible in its fundamental meaning.<sup>19</sup> The pain itself can be triggered, often by apparently trivial or random stimuli, because the pain is itself crystalline and immutable. In time, the affect finds new facts to inhabit. For that reason, there is something allegorical in all art that is also history.<sup>20</sup>

The persistence of affect is also the reason Phillips was spot on in bringing forward the idea of an excess to discursivity in artistic treatments of the past. The affect—as originally produced by the visceral, but eventually displaced, transferred, wandering—indeed has the appearance of a sort of excess, never finding anything to fit or subdue it. Yet, the affect is excessive not to some facts, but only to the discursive authority that seeks to fix memory in the name of facts. In modernity, this discursive authority has been going by the name ‘history’ under the guise of science. Such historical authority likes to create the illusion that cultural memory is somehow outside itself and can be observed, isolated, even measured, when, in fact, it is, just like individual memory, internal. It should strike us as obvious by now that the historical authority,

as all science, is a part of culture and thus a mere organ of cultural memory rather than its impartial observer and faithful chronicler.

That is to say, history and cultural memory are not synonymous, but neither are they dichotomous, as Pierre Nora would have us believe. Nora argues that (cultural) memory, on the one hand, 'is life, borne by living societies founded in its name', while history on the other 'is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer'.<sup>21</sup> History, he alleges, has conquered and eradicated true memory. Yet, this has the scent of a Heideggerean primitivism. When was cultural memory, or any memory for that matter, ever free of representations, reconstruction, and discursivity? Was the emergence of writing the dividing line? Then why do Homeric epics yield so easily to an analysis of the moral values, customs, and even national pride embedded in its words? All the same, we are in sympathy with the animus driving Nora. The economy of cultural memory has most certainly changed. In modernity, post-Enlightenment, it has become dominated by the discursive, the scientific, the superegoic and the propositional at the expense of the affective and the visceral. Our question is: must history itself be defined by these modifiers of enframing?<sup>22</sup> Is not history simply any attempt, or perhaps the gestalt of attempts, to represent the past, to bring it into the present? Our definition of history would simply be: a formal claim, inevitably based on some position of authority, to the immediacy of something in the past. In no way will such claims ever entirely determine cultural memory (as Nora alleges). There will always be something excessive in cultural memory, something that escapes history's attempts to fix it. History is provisional, but still, nonetheless a claim, that once made is re-subsumed into the ongoing churn of memory. Again, it bears emphasis that memory (cultural or individual) is processual not static.

In this sense, a conception of the artist as historian goes far beyond the now familiar observation that the creative faculty is always required for historiography because history is always at root a narrative with a narrator. Paul Ricoeur is emblematic of this fundamental sort of analysis, which is helpful to bear in mind, but not the end of the story. Striking a note resonant with Raad regarding the nature of facts, Ricoeur reminds us that:

A vigilant epistemology will guard here against the illusion of believing that what we call a fact coincides with what really happened or with the living memory of eyewitnesses, as if facts lay sleeping in the documents until the historians extracted them.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, Ricoeur does not exclude a propositional form of historiography, or as Phillips phrases it, a 'discursive facticity'. History will be written and rewritten. This does not mean, however, that history is condemned to the singular mode of the discursive. Dependent as history must be on representation, might it not mimic more closely the process of cultural memory to which it contributes? That is to say, could history itself not be activated through the 'complicated mediations' giving facts their immediacy, mediations that involve at their core the 'affective and visceral?' Is that not the way we actually orient ourselves to the past?

With respect to this symposium and its title, there is never a question of simply ‘triggering’ a cultural memory. The register of the word ‘trigger’ is fully mechanical. Its etymology is from the Dutch *trekken*, meaning to pull. The primary contemporary connotation is the trigger of a gun. The trigger is pulled and the bullet is released—the bullet that lay ready, fully determined, only in need of that release to come forth as itself, moving with no deviation towards a mathematically predictable point in space. ‘Trigger’ as a verb lays no claim to origin or even mutation. Yet, the very act of calling forth an event from the past, making a claim to its immediacy, mediates that fact, makes a judgement on it, positions it, juxtaposes it, nuances it, alters it. Thus when an artist ‘intervenes’ on cultural memory, she is actively ‘doing’ history. History is something to be done, rather than merely written. The doing is a revealing, a claim on immediacy.

Thus, to conceive of the artist as historian is to conceive of history as a constant negotiation between the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real within the collective psyche. Within our present culture, the artist is almost always aligned with the Id, and her role is considered by default to contest the Superego, intrude upon the Symbolic, immerse the viewer in the Real. This habit of mind is unfortunate because it overlooks the affirmative, active role of the artist as historian. To intrude on the symbolic order is to alter it. But more than this: to engage the visceral and affective within collective memory is no mere comment on history—it is the process of history itself.

### What We Assert in an Artwork

Just as we cannot parse the fact from the affect in memory; we cannot completely sever the discursive from the visceral in artworks. Some rhetorical element is always baked in, even when ostensibly ‘abstract’, but especially when the artwork in question is dealing with historical topics (and thus doing history itself). Our *Eclipse* project was no exception. In our case, we made no attempt to conceal the rhetorical content of the work. Our claim to immediacy for the story of the passenger pigeon is the current extinction crisis, which is looking more and more like the world’s sixth mass extinction event. The seminal book on the crisis for a mass audience, *The Sixth Extinction*, was written by Kolbert herself and it was clearly on her mind when she proposed the idea of a commemoration to us. That we drew attention to this event, and that we sited the work in a museum, a *lieu de memoire*<sup>24</sup>, is a plain statement that it deserves to be remembered in this moment. To exhibit a work on the passenger pigeon in an institution of cultural authority is an act of the same ilk as state-sponsored memorials. It is a statement about what we should value and pay attention to. It is a moral, symbolic statement, discursive at heart. At the same time, our claim to immediacy would be very weak if it rested solely on this rhetoric. What are the mediations activated through the work as we see it?

One of the things we are proudest of with respect to *Eclipse* is that people of all ages engaged with it. Viewers, including children, often viewed the entire seven-

minute piece and then stayed for a second or third viewing. It is unlikely that the young viewers were drawn to the piece because of its relation to the discourse around extinction. So what was the basis of their fascination? We think it was the uncanny sensation of being perched between the real and the imaginary; between dream and waking.

Our primary goal with *Eclipse* was to represent a flock of birds in space, to create an experience of what it might have been like to observe passenger pigeons fly overhead. To this end, we took a number of steps towards a ‘realistic’ representation. We worked with an animator (Nick Roth) to adapt a CGI model of the passenger pigeon’s closest relative, the rock pigeon, and researched what was known of the movements of the bird in isolation and in flock. We researched and duplicated something of their roosting habits, which consisted of large clusters, sometimes birds on top of other birds.<sup>25</sup> We tweaked algorithms governing the movement of the flock in flight, looking to achieve a ‘natural’ feel of undulations. We read first-hand accounts of witnessing the massive flocks. Curiously, these accounts often emphasized the sound. The sounds evoked by these first-hand witnesses varied greatly. Some heard sleigh bells ‘as though an army of horses was advancing’; some heard ‘clapping’ as the birds alighted onto trees; some heard ‘a loud rushing roar’ like a tornado; some heard ‘low notes almost like the breathing of great trees’; some ‘bell-like wooing notes’; some heard human voices.<sup>26</sup> We created a sound piece (with Matthew Patterson Curry) that evoked these sounds and more importantly their confusion. Further, we worked to spatialize the sound in the echoey brick walls of MASS MoCA so that it seemed like it was coming from everywhere and nowhere.

Yet, for all this, we knew, of course, that we would not fool anyone. Nor would that be desirable. We wanted ghosts not hi-tech representations to wow the viewers and focus primarily on the technological achievement. For a ghost to be a ghost it must have once been living, thus the efforts at making the birds life-like. Yet, we took equal pains to foreground the unreality of the birds: we rendered them and the tree upon which they alighted in an inverse black and white. When the birds came from a long distance away (an obvious trick of animating perspective) to roost upon the tree, they stayed there an unnatural length of time with an unnaturally urgent activity. The birds became like leaves on the tree in a storm; or like flames engulfing it. When the birds lifted up in a column, they were unnaturally constrained by the narrow dimensions of the space. More birds rose from the tree than seemed possible. They kept coming and coming. A redemptive force, an army, or a swarm of spirits. The sound at this moment modulated to something soaring, even hopeful, before returning to an elegiac key.

The fundamental experience of *Eclipse*, therefore, was to create a feeling for the strangeness of life and the necessary existence of ghosts. Further, we hoped to generate a sense that non-human animals are alive and spirited and perhaps sense things that we do not, such as the approach of a tsunami. In particular, humans have long associated birds with augury and the oracular. They move beyond the horizon and they return. These feelings inherently relate

to the current extinction crisis and facilitate an ecological consciousness, whether or not the viewer made that connection explicitly by engaging with the wall text or the publication we made.



Figure 4. Pages from *Eclipse* artist publication, 11" x 14", 32 pages, newsprint, edition of 10,000, (cover, back page and pages 26-27), Sayler / Morris with Elizabeth Kolbert, 2014.

For those that did connect the audio-visual experience to the written material—i.e. the propositional history—which was available in the wall text, the limited edition booklet, and also in a small reading room we constructed, we wanted to ensure this extinction event did not seem remote. In this respect, the loop is an essential feature of *Eclipse*. The piece begins with an empty, white tree. The room is mostly dark. The birds approach from far off; they come to land on the tree; they swarm in the tree, becoming both leaf and flame; then they ascend, flying up to the ceiling and across it, over the heads of the viewers. The numbers of birds increases. Now the birds themselves are illuminating the room. They increase in speed as well, until the ceiling has the flickering aspect of TV snow. Then, imperceptibly at first, the numbers of birds begins to dwindle and slow down. This continues, with fewer and fewer birds, flying more slowly, until there are only a few birds making the trip from tree to ceiling and across. Then, finally, there is only one, slow bird. Then nothing, just the white tree and darkness, and the loop starts again. This looping feature, as well as the inverse silhouette of the tree and birds, the invocation of Plato's cave, were intended to give the piece an allegorical feel that was in tension with the historical specificity.

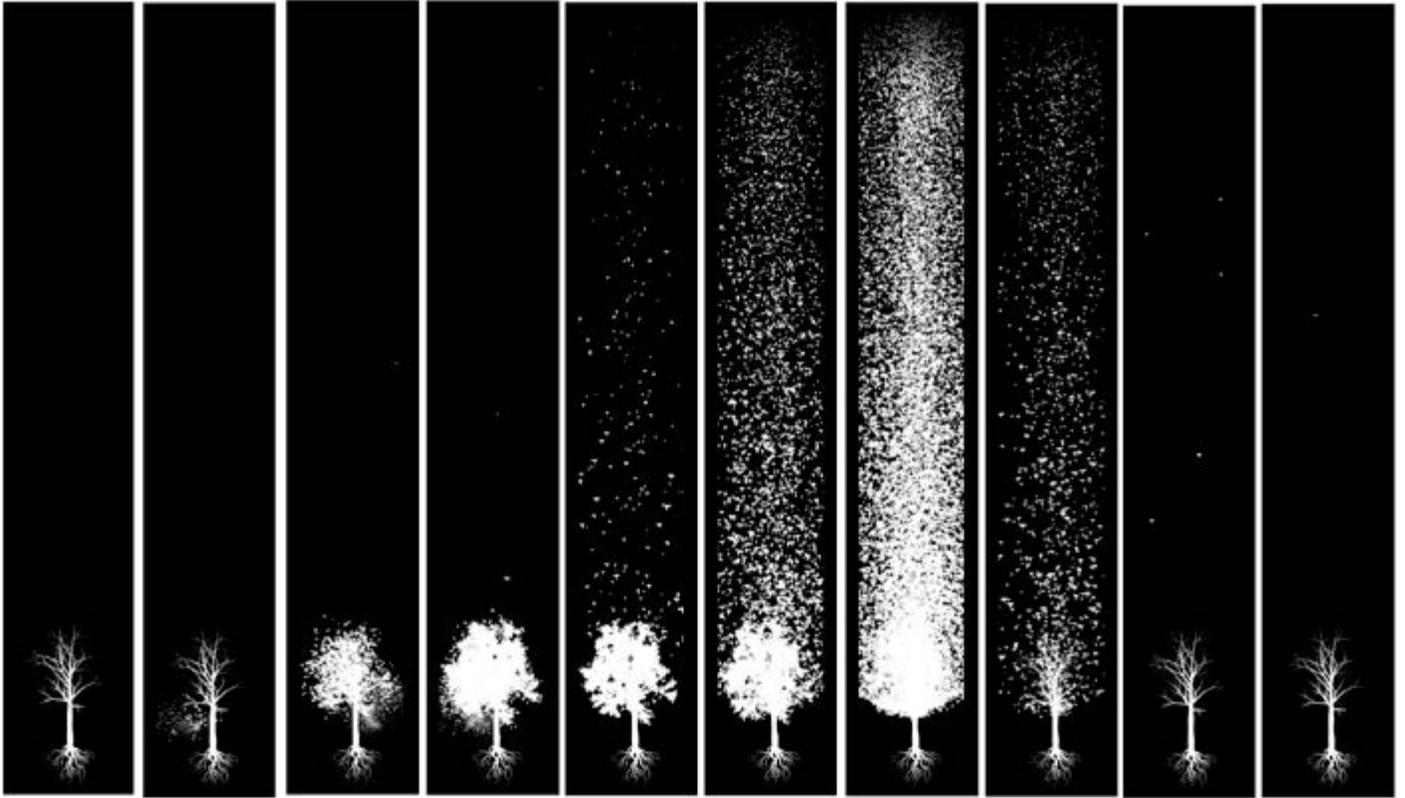


Figure 5. *Eclipse*, video stills, Sayler / Morris, 2014.

As Elizabeth Kolbert noted, '[t]he extinction of the passenger pigeon was an event witnessed, in a manner of speaking, by millions of people'.<sup>27</sup> These billions of deaths happened in plain daylight, yet the affect it had on people at the time is uncertain and varied. The very notion that an animal could truly go extinct and completely vanish from the planet, was relatively new and not universally accepted. Even where it was accepted, rationally on some level, it was not believed with sufficient strength to act. At some point, it must have been obvious that, given the rates of decline, it was inevitable the bird would die out, and yet it was not until this particular extinction was a *fait accompli*—as well as the near extinction of the buffalo—that legislation began to pass that addressed future possible extinctions, including migrating birds explicitly.<sup>28</sup> When Martha died there was a tragic tone struck in the reportage of the day, but the tragedy had already occurred many years before. It was just too diffuse to elicit a strong political response until the entire event could be consolidated into the symbol of the last bird, Martha.

By commemorating Martha, we (Kolbert included) inevitably participated in a movement to reinvigorate this symbol. A Google search will yield dozens of articles from the likes of National Geographic and the Smithsonian making the claim that this extinction event was crucial in creating the conservation movement.<sup>29</sup> Mostly these articles are from around September 2014. That all this memory activity made an impression is evidenced by a 2017 blog post from a local Cincinnati TV station that was hyperbolically titled, 'How Martha, Cincinnati's celebrity passenger pigeon, shaped conservation in America'.<sup>30</sup> Not many people had heard of Martha before 2014 and now she is a celebrity responsible for shaping the environmental movement.

Yet, Kolbert warns against drawing too simple a message from this connection between the extinction and the legislative reaction to it. In her various writings about the passenger pigeon, including for our publication that accompanied the *Eclipse* installation, Kolbert argues that: 1. 'When we tell ourselves that since Martha's death we've learned to take better care of our fellow creatures, we are, sadly, kidding ourselves'<sup>31</sup>, as evidenced by the current extinction crisis among many other things; 2. the passenger pigeon extinction 'is part of a much bigger story, a story only beginning to unfold' and that no isolated piece of protective legislation will address this larger ecological crisis;<sup>32</sup> 3. further, we are all currently complicit in this ecological crisis, so any attempt to make a neat, happy ending out of the passenger pigeon lets us off the hook.

The larger extinction event of which the passenger pigeon was a part is still happening. Further, the political gains made at a time of pitched emotional reaction, recede, making it all the more necessary to generate the emotion anew—the same emotion in a new form. The arc of the piece allows you to viscerally experience the frightening and beautiful aspect of the flock in full flight and also its decline. The loop allows you find a different salient emotion each time, but also to know that you cannot ever get out of the loop, you can never arrive at utopia.

This does not mean activism is fruitless, as Kolbert seems to indicate at times in her writing. As an illustration of this, we will relate, in closing, one anecdote

that we came across in the course of our research.<sup>33</sup> It concerns a minister from Louisville, Kentucky, a city frequently visited by flocks of passenger pigeons in its day. One night, this minister received a strange note from the famous Shakespearean actor (and father of the man who shot Lincoln), Junius Brutus Booth. Booth was in town for a performance and requested the minister's advice on the matter of finding 'a place of internment for his friend[s]'. The bracket around the plural of friend was in the original note. When the minister obliged and paid Booth a visit in the middle of the night, he discovered, after some theatrics from Booth, that the friends in question were a 'bushel' of passenger pigeons, which Booth has laid out on a sheet and described as 'distant relatives'. Booth's intent was to stage a full funeral, complete with a procession through town and a coffin, ultimately laying the birds to rest in a churchyard cemetery—all without ever conveying to anyone assembled the buried were not human. He wanted the minister's help. He asked: 'You see these innocent victims of man's barbarity?' he said. 'I wish to testify, in some public way, against this wanton destruction of life. And I wish you to help me. Will you?'

However, the minister refused despite expressing sincere sympathy for what Booth had in mind and expressing admiration for him. Booth cut right to the core in asking the minister why he would not help. 'Do you fear the laugh of man?' he asked. This remains the question given the seeming impossibility of addressing climate change and species extinction. Was Booth crazy then? Is he now?

The idea of abolishing slavery in this country once seemed radical and took so-called radicals to advance the cause. The idea that we should be concerned about the fate of an animal species, like Booth, seemed outright crazy. These notions hardly seem so out-there now. How does it happen that a fringe idea, like gay marriage to take a more recent example, moves from outlandish to mainstream? It happens in large part through the stories we tell about our past. It happens through history. Emotion in this process is not an embarrassing excess, but absolutely central. This is true not only for art, but other modes of historiography as well. In walking recently through the National Museum of African American History, the irrepressible tears that we and many others felt forming in our eyes were the engines and evidence of what might be more analytically described both as a re-orientation towards the past *and* as decisive re-making of the very world around us. Artists participate crucially in this sort of thing and this sort of thing is precisely what history is: an ordering, a claiming of certain parts of the undifferentiated, teeming mass of collective memories in order to make our world the way we feel it should be.

## Endnotes

1. Mark Godfrey, “The Artist as Historian,” *October*, 120 (Spring 2007): 140-172.
2. Godfrey, 141-146.
3. Godfrey, 141.
4. Godfrey, 168-172.
5. Walter Benjamin, “On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress”. In *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 474.
6. We use these terms in the sense given them by Jacques Lacan in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* trans. Roberto Harari (New York: Other Press, 2004).
7. Godfrey, 171.
8. There are many sources that put forth these claims regarding the passenger pigeon numbers. The seminal book relating the history of the passenger pigeon and its demise is Joel Greenberg, *The Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon’s Flight to Extinction* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2014). See also for example, David Briello, “3 Billion to Zero: What Happened to the Passenger Pigeon?” *Scientific American Sustainability Blog*, June 27, 2014, accessed 10 July 2018, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/3-billion-to-zero-what-happened-to-the-passenger-pigeon/>.
9. “Passenger Pigeons: Gone Today but Once Abundant”, American Museum of Natural History, accessed 20 September 2018, <https://www.amnh.org/explore/news-blogs/from-the-collections-posts/passenger-pigeons-gone-today-but-once-abundant>.
10. John James Audobon, “The Passenger Pigeon, accounts by Peter Kalm (1759) and John James Audobon (1831),” in *Annual Report, Smithsonian Institution, 1911* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 1911), 419.
11. Audobon, 419.
12. A complete explanation for the extinction of the passenger pigeon is still debated, as Kolbert herself notes in “They Covered the Sky and Then...”, *New York Review of Books*, 61, no. 1, (January 9, 2014): 35. Further, there is some evidence that the flocks were only as numerous as they were at the time of the earliest accounts of their swarms, as indicated in a letter in response to Kolbert’s article published in the *New York Review of Books*, 61, no. 3 (February 20, 2014). However, these debated technical details, are not necessarily pertinent to main points of this article nor to our work *Eclipse*. The main points being: 1. that while the eventual extinction became obvious in the 19th century, nothing was done until it was too late; 2. human activity led to the extinction (whether from hunting or deforestation or both); and 3. they are indeed extinct, gone from the earth. Causes for the extinction, including the commercialization of the bird as a cheap food source, can be found in numerous sources, such as Greenberg, *The Feathered River*, 68-108.

13. A re-formatted version of this piece has also been shown at other institutions, including The Philip & Muriel Berman Museum of Art (2016), The David Brower Center (2016), and the Rocky Mountain Land Library (2018).
14. Walid Ra'ad, "Walid Ra'ad by Alan Gilbert" interview by Alan Gilbert, *Bomb*, October 1, 2002, accessed 10 July 2018, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/walid-raad/>.
15. Kendall Phillips, "The Excess of Memory: Rhetorical Interventions of Weems, Schuleit and Attie," *Memory Connection 2*, no. 1 (May 2016): 29.
16. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 303. This quotation of Heidegger is not meant to be a wholesale endorsement of his ideas about history or even about the dangers of 'modern mathematical science'. For a fuller treatment of our thoughts on Heidegger vis-à-vis these questions see, Susannah Sayler and Edward Morris, "What is a River in California?", *Boom California*, 21 September 2017, accessed 10 July 2018, <https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/09/21/what-is-a-river-in-california/>.
17. The term "Rashomon effect" has become a recognized term in communication theory to describe the phenomenon of conflicting accounts of the same event. See for example, Robert Anderson, "The Rashomon Effect and Communication." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 41, no. 2 (2016): 250-265.
18. See for example, Cara Laney and Elizabeth Loftus, "Traumatic Memories are Not Necessarily Accurate Memories," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 50, vol. 13 (November 2005): 823. Bessel A. Van Der Kolk, "Trauma and Memory," *Psychiatry & Clinical Neurosciences* 52, no.5 (January 2002): 97-109. In this latter article, Dr. Van Der Kolk finds that "The study of traumatic memories challenges several basic notions about the nature of memory: (i) that memory always is a constructive process; (ii) that memory is primarily declarative (i.e. that people can articulate what they know in words and symbol) (iii) that memory is present in consciousness in a continuous and uninterrupted fashion; and (iv) that memory always disintegrates in accuracy over time'. These findings support the main arguments of this paper.
19. Van Der Kolk, 97-109. While these assertions find clinical support in work such as by Van Der Kolk, the authors are indebted first to the theories of Jacques Lacan on the distinctions between the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic orders and also directly on the nature of trauma and memory as articulated in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* trans. Roberto Harari (New York: Other Press, 2004).
20. This observation opens up onto a line of reasoning that would be interesting to pursue, particularly in reference to Walter Benjamin's ideas about allegory and the nature of historiography. Art that produces history is intrinsically allegorical because by engaging the affective, the artistic treatment of history puts any given event into relation with all events in history that potentially engender the same affective content, quite apart from any secondary discursive spin that seeks to impose a particular, historically contingent version of victory and defeat upon that event. Of course, the discursive dictates what can produce this or that affective content, or even what is visible at all. Yet, this observation

only reinforces our point: the facts shift, the affect remains constant. There are notions of solidarity and redemption hiding in this thought that would need a different context to flesh out.

21. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations*, no.26, *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring, 1989), 8.
22. The concept of enframing is again Heidegger’s from “The Question Concerning Technology” and elsewhere. We discuss enframing also in Saylor / Morris, “What is a River in California?”
23. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 178.
24. *Lieu de memoire* is a reference to Nora, “Between Memory and History” *Representations*, no. 26, *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*, (Spring, 1989). Nora argued that a society such as ours in which cultural memory is not embedded in lived experience relies on sites (*lieux*) of memory production/ performance such as museums. Whether or not you accept Nora’s stark assessment of the status of cultural memory, which we do not, it is hard to argue against his observation that certain places and institutions have an elevated authority in shaping cultural memory.
25. This is described in many sources. For example, Kalm and Audobon, “The Passenger Pigeon, accounts by Peter Kalm (1759) and John James Audobon (1831)”, 409, 420. See also the Walton Ford painting, *Falling Bough*, 2002, which served as a primary source of image inspiration for *Eclipse*.
26. These accounts include the Kalm and Audobon reports cited above in note 2. Also: Morris Schaff, *Etna and Kirkersville*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905) 117; Craig Wallace, “The Expression of Emotion in Passenger Pigeon,” *Auk* 28 (1911), 420-421; “The Wild Pigeon of North America by Chief Pokagon,” *The Chauttaquan*, vol. 22 1896.
27. Kolbert, “They Covered the Sky”.
28. A summary of this litigation is helpfully provided in Joe Rosemeyer, “How Martha, Cincinnati’s celebrity passenger pigeon, shaped conservation in America,” WCPO, website, April 17, 2017, accessed 15 July 2018, <https://www.wcpo.com/news/insider/martha-cincinnati-passenger-pigeon-reshaped-conservation-in-america?page=2>: ‘In 1900, Congress passed the nation’s first wildlife-protection law, the Lacey Act, which banned anyone from shipping unlawfully killed game across state lines. The bill’s sponsor, U.S. Rep. John F. Lacey, R-Iowa, lamented the disappearance of passenger pigeons in a speech on the House floor. In 1913, Congress passed an even tougher law called the Weeks-McLean Act. In 1918, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act added protection for eggs, nests, and feathers’.
29. See for example: Carl Zimmer, “Century After Extinction, Passenger Pigeons Remain Iconic—And Scientists Hope to Bring Them Back,” *National Geographic*, 30 August 2014, accessed 15 July 2018, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/08/140831-passenger-pigeon-martha-deextinction-dna-animals-species/>; William Souder, “100 Years After Her Death, Martha, the

Last Passenger Pigeon, Still Resonates,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2014, accessed 15 July 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/100-years-after-death-martha-last-passenger-pigeon-still-resonates-180952445/>.

30. Rosemeyer, “How Martha”.
31. Kolbert, “They Covered the Sky”.
32. Ibid.
33. James Freeman Clarke, “Junius Brutus Booth: An Incident in His Life,” in *Memorial and Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1878), 263-279.

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## Biographical Note

Susannah Sayler and Edward Morris (Sayler / Morris) work with photography, video, writing, installation, and open source projects. Of primary concern are contemporary efforts to develop ecological consciousness and the possibilities for art in support of social movements. In 2006 they co-founded The Canary Project—a studio that produces visual media and artworks that deepen public understanding of climate change and other ecological issues. They have been awarded fellowships including the New York Artist Fellowship (2016), the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2014), the Loeb Fellowship (2008-09). Their work has been exhibited broadly in the US and abroad including the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, the Kunsthall in Rotterdam, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, etc. They are currently teaching in the Transmedia Department at Syracuse University. Their archives are collected by the Nevada Museum of Art / Reno, Center for Art and Environment.

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# *Waimanawa: The Water From Under the Land*

Johanna Mechen

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## Waimanawa: The Water From Under the Land

Johanna Mechen

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### Abstract

The video installation *Waimanawa* (the Māori word which means water that comes from under the land) was commissioned for the Lower Hutt City Council-sponsored Common Ground Hutt Public Art Festival: Groundwater in 2017. A video was presented on a screen placed on the ground over the proposed location for a public tap to a newly drilled aquifer bore, with accompanying voiceover.

*Waimanawa* mines fragments of stories about the Waiwhetu aquifer in Lower Hutt, those who care for its wellbeing, and the age testing of a new bore. It presents a poetic microhistory that attempts to negotiate the different groups and members of this community's connection to water. The philosophies or approaches to the guardianship of water which are gleaned from the research are visible and invisible, spiritual and scientific, and reflect European and Māori world views in particular. On some points, there is overlap and on others there is conflict. The thread that is drawn through the video is the connectedness, or lack thereof, by us as people, to water and how it sustains us physically and emotionally.

Keywords: public art, aquifer, water quality, video essay, ecological history, cultural history, Waiwhetu

All water is connected in the present by an unbroken circuit that ties together oceans, rivers, streams, lakes, and aquifers. In this way, information travels through the bodies of water in currents, and like that of an (electrical) current. This connection is not contained only in the present, but extends backward in time, and reaches forward into the future. Water holds a memory of human activity. For example, the atomic events of the 1940s and 1950s are present in water in the form of Tritium, the radioactive isotope of hydrogen with a half-life of 12.4 years. This isotope lives in the hydrologic cycle and provides the marker by which we date the aquifer water beneath us.<sup>1</sup>

Teri Puketapu's newly drilled, but unopened, bore has water certified as six years old. Puketapu, who is a *kaumātua* (Māori elder) of Te Ātiawa in Waiwhetu, gives his voice to my video work. He talks of his fear for the safety of the aquifer and the threats to the quality of the water it contains. The *mauri*, or life force of the water, needs to be protected. He speaks at a time when—after a long struggle—he is months away from opening a new bore to supply *wai māori* (freshwater) to the Waiwhetu Marae, local health centre, and greater community. But the access to this unseen body of water—linked inextricably to all others but often beyond our imagination—could easily be lost. Like a plug pulled from a bathtub, if the aquifer is ruptured by dredging at the Wellington harbour mouth or contamination caused by the failure of aging sewage infrastructure in the event of earthquake, the water could simply be gone. Puketapu, who states in the video, 'I'm not a scientist, I'm a carpenter' has however worked closely with water scientists over many years and points to the relationship between science and Māori world view to highlight the importance of a common understanding and appreciation for the precious groundwater resource.

*Mauri* describes the life force in all things, whether it be inert like a stone or a living tree, or a human being, but everything. This concept is long standing in Māoridom, it goes back a thousand years or more. And what it means is that we have a recognition of the life force in all things, just as scientists have told us in discovering the atom, that an atom is made up of a nucleus and protons etc. that are in constant motion so give a life force to whatever it makes up. In addition to the term *mauri*, describing the life force of water, like most peoples, Māori have words for water that's drinkable, water that's not drinkable. In the water we commonly use, we call it *wai māori* and water that we wouldn't—such as water that is stagnant—we would use the term *wai mate*, in other words, dead water.<sup>2</sup>

My research for the video includes conversations with others at Waiwhetu Marae and those Māori living there who remember when their wells were capped so they could be charged for town water supply. This loss—which began in 1943 when a 100-acre block of the land called Section 19 was claimed under the Public Works Act—was a direct result of forced *Pākehā* (European) ownership and governance. The ensuing grief is still felt today. The loss of *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship and management) has wide reaching implications in terms of the relationship with the

natural world including the spiritual hurt of witnessing the damage to waterways from pollution.

As a *Pākehā* and an artist working here, my privilege has been at times uncomfortable while working on this project. The opportunity to record, hear, and visualise, then reflect on and reflect back, was a humbling one. The core strands of this site-based investigation are not my story to tell, as I have not suffered the same loss. My own emotional connection to place and others through care and understanding of water is in this video artwork, felt with the imagery and the process of making. But I am at a cultural and economic distance from the experience of Te Ātiawa in Waiwhetu. I offer a visual translation of gathered research; a small experience which is not the whole story but a subjective telling, with some fragments picked up and some left behind, as nothing can ever be neatly fitted in.

Figure 1. *Waimanawa* installation, Waiwhetu, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, 2017. Photo: Johanna Mechen.



<https://vimeo.com/210698756>

## Endnotes

1. William E. Motzer, “Age dating Groundwater”, *Primary Water Institute*, accessed 5 February 2017, [http://www.primarywaterinstitute.org/images/pdfs/Tritium\\_in\\_groundwater.pdf](http://www.primarywaterinstitute.org/images/pdfs/Tritium_in_groundwater.pdf).
2. Teri Puketapu as quoted in Johanna Mechen (artist) *Waimanawa*, 2017 (audio recording), 01:23.

## Biographical Note

Artist Johanna Mechen’s work explores performativity and participation within her photographic practice and the role this can play in investigations which are scientific, site-based or autobiographical. Her recent projects have focused on engagement and participation with a site and its community in order to tell ecological, historical, and cultural stories. This can include many methods of collection of research material and collaboration with groups or individuals. Mechen works with the video essay and still image and is particularly interested in the relationship between these two forms in terms of the installation of work. Mechen graduated with a Master of Fine Arts at Massey University Wellington in 2014. Her broader practice is experimental and has included exhibiting, curating, creative writing and teaching photography.

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# The City of Victors: Epideictic Rhetoric at the Museum of Moscow and the Cult of the Great Patriotic War in Putin's Russia

Ekaterina V. Haskins

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### Abstract

This article examines contemporary museum practices in post-Communist Russia by focusing on a special exhibit, *The City of Victors* (*Gorod Pobeditelei*), dedicated by the Museum of Moscow to the 70th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany. The exhibit draws on 'popular memories'—intimate artefacts and documents donated to the museum by ordinary Muscovites—to tell the story of patriotism and perseverance in wartime Moscow. However, this curatorial and exhibition strategy supports the revival of the Soviet-era myth of the Great Patriotic War and contributes to the recovery of Stalin as a model national leader. The exhibition's rhetoric of participation is thus leveraged to authenticate a triumphalist narrative of the war in the service of an authoritarian regime.

Keywords: museums, epideictic rhetoric, popular memories, the Great Patriotic War, V Day, Russia, Stalin

This article examines museum practices in post-Communist Russia by focusing on a special exhibit, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)*, dedicated by the Museum of Moscow to the 70th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany. The exhibit's curatorial statement emphasized the role of popular memories—intimate artefacts and documents donated to the museum by ordinary Muscovites—in telling the story of patriotism and perseverance in wartime Moscow. The objects, letters, diaries, and schoolchildren's notebooks do indeed tell most of the story, but they seem to buttress a particular version of collective identity and history. In the exhibit's display, these archival traces become elements in a narrative of unity and collective sacrifice inspired by the faith in the country's leader, 'comrade Stalin'. The exhibit participates in the recovery of Stalin's image and validates the ideology of strong leadership that has been the hallmark of President Putin's regime. The exhibition's rhetoric of participation is thus leveraged to authenticate a triumphalist narrative of the war in the service of an authoritarian regime.

### Museum Rhetoric

Museums occupy a privileged place in contemporary memory culture. In Pierre Nora's oft-cited formulation, 'Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image'.<sup>1</sup> As the primary archival institutions of modernity, museums have acquired the status of 'compensatory organs of remembrance' and custodians of national histories.<sup>2</sup> According to a recent study of European museumgoers, people expect museums to accurately portray national pasts,<sup>3</sup> and the mainstream view still holds that 'museums are among the more trustworthy carriers of explanation of the world'.<sup>4</sup>

In the last three decades, however, scholars across disciplines have called into question the museum's status as a politically neutral depository of archival traces. It has become axiomatic to note that objects on display in any museum constitute strategic choices made primarily by the museum's curatorial staff. Which stories and experiences are represented through the selection of objects is an index of the museum's participation in the larger public conversation about the past. As curator Bruce W. Ferguson argues, 'the "voices" heard within exhibitions . . . constitute a highly observable politics'.<sup>5</sup> Rhetoric scholar M. Elizabeth Weiser considers the work of museums as a form of epideictic, or display, rhetoric: 'Museum rhetoric is clearly epideictic, using past events to evoke a consensus around present-day values and identities'.<sup>6</sup> 'When history museums present a narrative of past deeds', she points out, 'they are using their assembled artefacts to construct an epideictic narrative. Through their stories, they aim to persuade visitors to embrace values that the nation collectively considers ideal'.<sup>7</sup>

Museums' epideictic rhetoric involves the selection and arrangement of objects. 'The collection of any museum', writes Dominique Poulot, 'is the product

of reconstructions based on selection and choice, on selective omissions and voluntary commemoration'.<sup>8</sup> The selection is often 'guided by what story the objects on display can tell'.<sup>9</sup> As Weiser puts it, 'curators see the museum object, that artefact upon which visitors focus their attention, as a tool of the narrative—those words that enter visitors' minds largely unnoticed'.<sup>10</sup>

Museums form narratives through chronological and causal arrangement of objects, but the chronology and causality can be signalled more or less explicitly. A more explicit chronology is evident when objects are presented 'in context':

Objects are set in context by means of long labels, charts, diagrams, commentary delivered by earphones . . . Objects are often set in context by means of other objects, often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationship.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, 'in situ' installations fashion an environment in which the relationship among exhibited objects is less explicit. Such installations 'privilege 'experience' and tend to thematize rather than set their subject forth'.<sup>12</sup> As distinct from a more cerebral appeal of in context displays, in situ arrangements involve visitors' 'senses, emotions, and imagination'.<sup>13</sup> Museums' three-dimensional narratives ask

the visitor to move not only through time, the chronology of the exhibit, but also through space, the architecture and arrangement of a display, in a way lacking in books, films, or any other form of narrative.<sup>14</sup>

The reorientation toward the visitor's experience has been a major shift in how museums approach their mission. 'Once defined by their relationship to objects', contemporary institutions of memory, including history museums, are 'defined more than ever by their relationship to visitors'.<sup>15</sup> Museums must compete with other cultural institutions in the 'experience economy' by offering stimulating exhibits that resonate with visitors' lives outside museum walls.<sup>16</sup> The experience imperative has had an impact on both the collection and display of archival objects. Advocates of the so-called 'participatory museum', for example, have argued that to make themselves relevant to their audiences, museums need to solicit and respond to 'visitors' ideas, stories, and creative work', present 'multiple stories and voices', and offer 'changing experiences'.<sup>17</sup>

History museums are distinct from other cultural institutions in that they are agents of national remembering. And, especially if they are dependent on state sponsorship, they are often expected to 'tell the uplifting story of the nation and provide citizens with cultural glue'.<sup>18</sup> The issue, then, is not whether museums can be above politics, but rather what 'voices' they recruit to tell narratives of national pasts and how they convince audiences to embrace the stories museum objects tell. Contemporary archives and museums in the West often engage in the rhetoric of democratization—that is, they deliberately highlight contributions of 'ordinary people' to history making to authenticate particular constructions

of the past that are unveiled through exhibits and displays.<sup>19</sup> In the analysis to follow, I demonstrate how a similar appeal to ordinary people's memories was employed by a recent Victory Day anniversary exhibit at the Museum of Moscow. Like a number of other commemorative events lavishly subsidized by the Russian government, it participated in the revival of the cult of the Great Patriotic War. Before I turn to the exhibit's rhetoric, then, it is useful to review the story of this cult's origins, decline, and resurgence.

### The Cult of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union and Post-Communist Russia

On 9 May 1945 Nazi Germany officially surrendered to the Soviet Army and its allies, ending the bloodiest war of the twentieth century. The Soviet Union paid a steep price for this victory—over twenty million of its citizens lost their lives. Until the mid-1960s, however, Victory Day (V Day) was not treated as a national holiday—it was an occasion for private grief and local remembrance. Families would mourn the loss of loved ones at home and veterans would don their medals and gather in parks and squares to celebrate their wartime camaraderie. Stalin's death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin's personality cult in 1956, led the way for the relative openness of public culture that lasted about a decade. Known as the Thaw, this period gave rise to a number of artistic explorations of the war experience, particularly in songs and films. Films like Mikhail Kalatozov's *Cranes are flying* (1957) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) offer a moving glimpse into the lives of ordinary people that have been irrevocably damaged by the war. Both films received international recognition for their artistry and humanism. Their tone is tragic rather than heroic, and their final scenes of jubilation at the end of the war do not alleviate a profound sense of loss.

Leonid Brezhnev's ascendance to power in 1964 brought an end to the liberalization of public culture and ushered in a conservative cultural agenda focused on solidifying loyalty to the communist regime whose legitimacy was beginning to fray in the wake of de-Stalinization. The Great Patriotic War was perfect material for a unifying myth. 'In its idealized form', Nina Tumarkin observed, 'the war had everything: violence, drama, martyrdom, success, and a chic global status'.<sup>20</sup> Under Brezhnev V Day became a cornerstone of the Soviet identity. For two decades, the heroic myth of the war was promulgated through built environment, museums, films, songs, literature, and secondary school curricula. Giant memory parks, eternal flames, and other shrines to the war cult became fixtures of urban landscapes. The entire generation grew up participating in official commemorative ceremonies, such as proclaiming allegiance to the Communist party at the eternal flame or playing war games in summer camps. But unofficial rituals as well—like newlyweds laying flowers at these eternal flames or war monuments—were also widespread. The glorification of

the war as heroic and righteous endeavour thus occurred not only through official channels but also through a variety of mass-mediated ‘prosthetic memories’ and embodied rituals.<sup>21</sup> Soviet citizens internalized this repertoire and relied on it as a mnemonic device. These habits of remembering deepened the grooves of the war myth and infused them with shared feeling. Rhetoric scholars would call these grooves *endoxa*, commonly held beliefs that can be mobilized as premises in public arguments. Among these beliefs are:

1. The war was righteous. In the Soviet Union—and in Putin’s Russia—the war is referred to as the Great Patriotic War. The word choice obscures Stalin’s crucial role in allowing Hitler to take over a large part of Europe prior to June 1941. In the myth, however, the blame for the war unequivocally rests on the Nazis, and the beginning of the war is 22 June 1941, the day when Nazi Germany unleashed its operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union.
2. The widespread and unquestionable unity and heroism of the Soviet people who rose to defend the Motherland at any cost.
3. The Soviet Army’s status as a liberator of Europe. Once it drove the Germans out of the country, it liberated the rest of occupied Europe, thus saving the world from Nazism.
4. Whatever one thinks of Stalin, he was the architect of the Soviet victory in the war and therefore cannot be denounced as a bad leader.<sup>22</sup>

During Gorbachev’s perestroika in the second half of the 1980s, the main strands of the myth came under officially sanctioned scrutiny and criticism. Newly opened archives revealed that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and its secret protocols provided for a German-Soviet partition of Poland and the Soviet domination of Bessarabia and the Baltics. The extent of Stalin’s repressions before and during the war was widely publicized in the mainstream press, and Stalin as the commander-in-chief was also shown to be not quite as wise and strategic as he had been previously portrayed. It became evident that the Soviet Army was poorly prepared to repel the German invasion, despite repeated intelligence reports prior to the invasion. Stalin had purged many of the talented young generals just before the war for political reasons, and the lack of capable military leadership, coupled with the paucity of basic equipment, turned millions into tank fodder.

By the time I finished high school and was preparing for my university entrance exams, much had changed under Gorbachev. So much of the previously hidden information concerning the dark spots of the Soviet past was brought to light that history books were declared inadequate and history was eliminated from the roster of entrance exam subjects. When I graduated from Moscow State University in 1991, officially sanctioned revelations of Stalin’s repressions and of the war as tragic and messy—rather than heroic—dominated public culture. By the mid-1990s, the war cult seemed to have waned. According to Tumarkin, by 1993,

the war myth had been almost completely destroyed. Thus, 22 June 1991, which marked the 50th anniversary of Nazi invasion, 'was widely recognized as Den' Pamyati (Day of Remembrance)', but 'this recognition was less a tribute to the weight of a fifty-year mark and more a demonstration of the general reassessment of the war with a greater emphasis on its tragic aspects'.<sup>23</sup> When, two years later, Tumarkin attended the anniversary celebration of 9 May at a Victory Park on Poklonnaja Gora in Moscow, she noted that 'many people did not seem to experience any feelings about the war; they simply came to stroll, to look, to drink, in general to enjoy themselves. Even when a singer sang one of those most moving wartime songs, [she] didn't see anyone wiping away a tear'.<sup>24</sup>

If I had fallen asleep in 1991 and, like a Russian Rip Van Winkle, awoke in the early 2000s, I would have been shocked by the extent of the revival of the war cult under Vladimir Putin. In today's Russia, the Great Patriotic War—and it is emphatically 'the Great Patriotic War', not World War II—again acquired the status of the sacred event of the collective past.<sup>25</sup> For Putin, the memory of the war has been an instrument of national unity. Especially since the beginning of his third term as president, after massive public demonstrations against the rigged presidential election of 2012, Putin has drawn increasingly on the memory of the war, and thereby on the Soviet period as a whole, to shore up his presidency. As a former KGB operative, he was actively involved in the defence of the Soviet system, and he has openly bemoaned the end of the Soviet Union as *the* greatest geopolitical catastrophe. Increased control over the media as well as the attacks on independent journalists have given the Putin presidency a virtual monopoly over the narratives about the war.<sup>26</sup>

To guard a preferred narrative of the war, the government has employed both legislation and commemoration. In 2009, fearing that the 70th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (1939) would set off 'a fury of anti-Russian hysteria' in the west, certain nationalistic politicians began to lobby for the setting up of a presidential Historical Truth Commission (2009-2012) to counter 'falsifications of history to the detriment of Russia's interests' and for a memorial law that would penalize 'rehabilitation of Nazism'.<sup>27</sup> After several amendments, the law was finally adopted in 2014, which was the year when Russia annexed Crimea and then instigated a conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The law thus not only provides legal backing for the newly resurrected myth of the war but also supports its righteous rhetoric of struggle against Nazism in today's politics. The 2014 Maidan protests in Kyiv, Ukraine, for example, were described by mainstream Russian media as the doings of fascists. Similarly, the conflict in the Donetsk region in Eastern Ukraine between pro-Russian separatists (assisted by Russian mercenaries) and Ukrainian army units was cast as an echo of the Great Patriotic War.

'Epideictic rhetoric is part of the cultural glue that holds common beliefs together', Weiser notes.<sup>28</sup> In Putin's Russia, the cult of the Great Patriotic War has functioned as such cultural glue, and its revival has taken many forms, both official and grassroots. Indeed, officially sponsored historical institutions have begun to leverage 'the people's memory' to legitimize a preferred version of history of the war. As Russian historian Nikolai Koposov has observed,

the likening of the country's history to a family's memory has been key to the official rhetoric of the Kremlin and the ministry of education. Their arguments, Koposov explains, can be boiled down to this: 'that pluralism is good, but you cannot bring up children on a negative image of their country. After all, they reasoned, no one would educate them using a negative image of their family'.<sup>29</sup>

Recent history textbooks that replaced the 'revisionist' ones from the 1990s often appeal to familial memory: many contain homework assignments asking students to interview their grandmothers and grandfathers about what they are proud of in their past. In this way, 'family memory' is presented in these new textbooks as a legitimate alternative to professional evaluations of history. The mobilization of memory allows the state to overcome and marginalize the academic mainstream linked to the 90s' criticism of the country's totalitarian past and the defence of democratic ideals.<sup>30</sup>

In this political climate, 'good memories' of the Stalin era are indivisible from the proud remembrance of the War, since it is rooted in Stalin's conception of the war as 'the holy war' in defence of the Motherland. And although sociological studies show that the majority of the public is aware of wide-scale repressions before, during, and after the war, the 'good war' acts as screen memory that prevents an open and honest reckoning with the legacy of Stalinism. Indeed, under Putin, it has become acceptable to express admiration for Stalin as a strong leader who brought the people together and not only triumphed over Germany but also expanded the Soviet sphere of influence in Europe as a result of agreements with our allies. Fond memories of Stalinism go hand in hand with a nostalgia for the old world order in which the Soviet Union was a major player in the international arena.

The revival of the war cult and re-Stalinisation are interconnected and have been driven by both the state and grassroots initiatives.<sup>31</sup> Anniversaries of the victory in the Great Patriotic War have often served as a pretext for bringing Stalin's image out of museum archives and for erecting new monuments to him. Flags featuring Stalin and a slogan 'Thanks to Grandfather for the Victory' have been spotted for several years during anniversary V Day marches of the so-called Immortal Regiment, a multi-city parade of civilians honoring their relatives who took part in the war. The idea of this grassroots parade originated in a Siberian city of Tomsk, when journalists affiliated with an independent TV station invited their fellow residents to take to the streets carrying a portrait of their relatives who participated in World War II. They envisioned it as a way to make individuals and families the centre of V Day commemoration and thereby to infuse the anniversary with personal feeling. The initiative quickly spread across Russia, and its popularity became attractive to pro-Kremlin actors. The Moscow 2015 March of the Immortal Regiment, for example, was financially and organizationally backed by Putin's United Russia Party, over and against the wishes of the original organizers who wanted to keep the commemoration free from political affiliation and PR.<sup>32</sup>

The case of the Immortal Regiment suggests that the Russian government is no longer relying on Soviet-style propaganda but has learned to imitate grassroots

memory initiatives. Russian state-sponsored history museums, for their part, have appropriated the form of democratic exhibition rhetoric developed by museums in the West, but have deployed this rhetoric to foster a version of history serviceable to the current authoritarian regime.

### The City of Victors: Exhibiting Popular Memories of the War at the Museum of Moscow

Museum of Moscow did its part to promote the V Day as a popular festivity and to buttress the officially sanctioned revival of the war cult. Its special exhibit, entitled *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)*, advanced a triumphalist narrative of the war by deploying a selection of artefacts and narrative accounts contributed by regular Muscovites. This narrative is shaped not through dogmatic statements but through subtle arrangement of archival objects and testimonials. Together, letters, diaries, posters, and domestic objects tell the story of wartime sacrifices, perseverance, and camaraderie. But they also participate in an implicit commentary that ascribes meaning to these wartime experiences and invites visitors to align their understanding of Russia's past and present with the perspective of previous generations.

'The will to influence is at the core of any exhibition', writes Bruce W. Ferguson.<sup>33</sup> The Museum of Moscow, however, downplays its decisive role in shaping the war narrative by foregrounding the agency of its contributors as the source of historical authenticity and emotional appeal to visitors. Consider the framing of the museum's mission statement. Upon entering the exhibit, the visitor encounters an invitation printed in black letters on a red background:

We have never stopped and will never stop collecting materials related to the Great Patriotic War and its participants. Please bring and pass on these materials for safekeeping in perpetuity. Let's write the history of our country together!

Visually, this statement evokes the look of wartime posters. Not incidentally, to the right of the statement is a framed poster exhorting the viewer to 'Join the ranks of the people's defence' and picturing men in uniforms clutching rifle bayonets. The poster overlaps an enlarged photograph that presumably depicts this volunteer army. Finally, a handwritten note, penned by a volunteer who identifies himself as a Communist and a librarian at the Lenin State Library in Moscow, individualizes and gives voice to the spirit of self-sacrifice implied by the poster and the photograph:

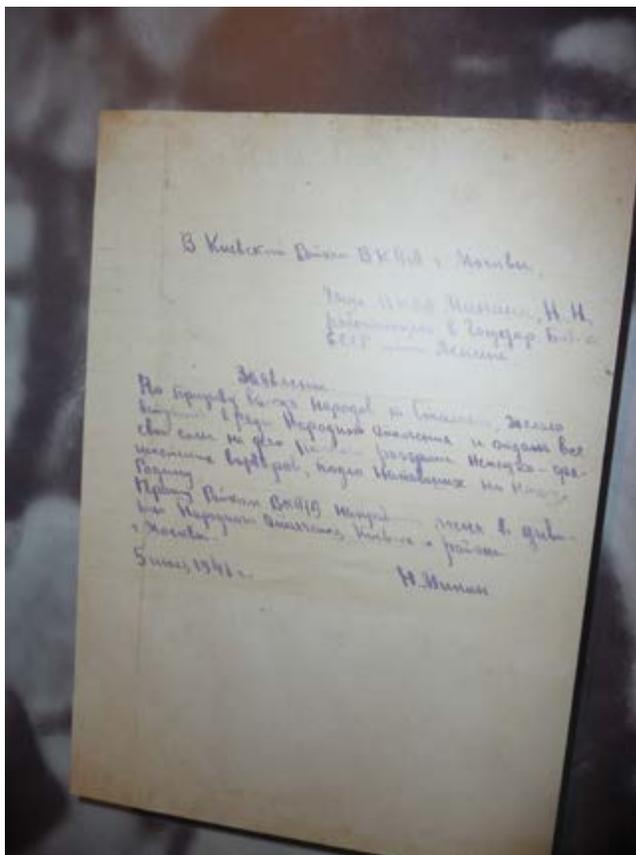
Answering the call of the people's leader Comrade Stalin, I wish to join the ranks of the people's defence army and give all my energy to the cause of defeating the fascist barbarians who treacherously invaded our Motherland.

In the exhibit, the handwritten application serves as an example of an archival document supposedly entrusted to the museum for safekeeping, but it fulfills other functions as well. Along with the enlarged photograph of anonymous volunteers, it appears to ‘answer the call’ of the poster and, in its earnest if formulaic way, confirms the spirit of dedication to the collective cause. This textual-visual collage thus establishes the museum’s role as a depository of people’s contributions, asserts the desirability and authenticity of collective history writing, and positions the spectator as a grateful descendant of the war-time generation.

Mission statement, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



Volunteer's letter, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



In keeping with the mission statement, the exhibit arranges archival objects to extol the heroism of both famous and lesser known Muscovites. Among the heroes familiar to most Russians is Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, the eighteen-year-old high schooler who joined the partisans and was captured and executed by the Germans on 29 November 1941. Kosmodemyanskaya was posthumously awarded the Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union and she became a major martyr, 'the Joan of Arc of the Great Patriotic war'.<sup>34</sup> Zoya's short life and her ultimate sacrifice were immortalized in monuments, statuary, biographies, museums, films, names of institutions, and school curricula. The exhibit evokes Zoya's memory via suggestion rather than didactic narration. The enlarged photographs of Zoya and one of the monuments honoring her thematize her identity as both a person and a legend. In front of these photographs are several mundane objects that conjure her civilian identity: a pair of skates, a winter coat, and a school desk. Because of their undeniable materiality and specificity, these objects anchor Zoya's myth in the realm of the everyday. Rather than recount the details of Zoya's biography—which are presumed to be known to the visitor—the arrangement asks the audience to relate to her as a concrete human being, a representative of the young generation whose lives were cut short or forever altered by the war.

The theme of normal life interrupted by war permeates the museum's display. To increase the viewer's identification with the selected 'voices' of ordinary people, an array of strategies conveys what it felt like to live in the city between June 1941 and May 1945. In situ displays of streetscapes and domestic interiors are juxtaposed with personal narratives inscribed on poster-sized panels and in glass cases.

Anti-tank fortifications in Moscow, *The City of Victors* (*Gorod Pobeditelei*) (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



Sandbags, The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei) (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



The life-size, anti-tank fortifications set against the backdrop of a photograph of Moscow's barricaded streets in the fall of 1941 evoke the atmosphere of the days when the German tanks rolled dangerously close to the city. Nearby, the archival video footage of wartime Moscow is framed by a wall of stacked sandbags; as the visitor peeks through the opening at the footage, her senses of smell and touch add to the feeling of immersion. Another in situ display, featuring a wartime Moscow apartment, is complete with a small wood burning stove and a radio. We are invited to imagine families—women, children, and grandparents—gathered in this space listening to radio dispatches from the front.

Moscow apartment detail, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



Moscow living room, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



To assist the visitor's imagination, multiple text panels feature recollections of Muscovites who endured through the hardships. B. Mironov, identified as a member of the Moscow Anti-Air Defense unit, recalls:

Gradually we got used to the war routine, and even found it somewhat romantic. One has to live somehow. After the chaos of air raids, you would come back to the room, light up the stove, and stare at the fire. And then you remember the days at the young pioneer camp and the bonfires. Too bad that it is hard to procure firewood. We had to burn part of the furniture and dismantle the fence outside. After the war there will be no more fences.

Even ballerinas joined the battle on the home front. We learn this from an excerpt from a diary of E. Makarova, the Bolshoi Theater ballerina, who along with her colleagues was recruited to dig trenches to prepare for the defence of Moscow. She reminisces:

We returned in the early morning. Could not even take off the clothes. Moscow soil is so heavy! I had never thought that I would be shovelling dirt and that I could survive. But I have 8 years of standing at the bar! Beside me all the girls—skinny, beautiful—are digging trenches through the night. Our little soldiers would now have all the more reason to persevere.

Moscow residents adapted to regular air raids and scarce food rations. The text printed on a glass case surrounding the living room display details wartime realities:

1. everyone had to have a roll of black paper to cover the windows during air raids;
2. it was important to keep one's keys in a certain place in order to quickly run to the bomb shelter at any moment;

3. the clock had to be easily visible, because the raids were carried out punctually.

Children, too, responded to wartime privation with equanimity: 'Habitually hungry kids sometimes talked among themselves about tasty pre-war food, remembering festive dinner parties at home. But they calmly accepted their hungry existence'.

These small-scale, intimate details of the residents' day-to-day lives augment in situ displays and prompt the visitor to imagine living in cold apartments, subsisting on meagre rations of black bread, and anticipating the next air raid. At the same time, they testify to the spirit of collective resilience, echoing the theme of self-sacrifice expressed by posters and letters of volunteers. The narrative is shaped through a kind of multi-modal polyphony: texts, images, and objects work together to conjure the feeling of the period rather than instruct the audience in the cut-and-dry chronology of the war.

The exhibit is elliptical in its presentation of events stretching between 22 June 1941 and 9 May 1945 and spotlights only what Moscow residents apparently remember the most. A photograph of the military parade on 7 November 1941—the parade whose participants marched straight to the front—represents the critical moment at the beginning of the war when the civilian population was mobilized to the defence of Moscow. The selection of this event is noteworthy as a reflection of Russia's present-day commemorative culture. Under Putin, the reenactment of this parade has become an iconic ritual in the resurgent cult of the Great Patriotic War. Ironically, it is also the only official acknowledgement of the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

Military parade in the Red Square, November 7, 1941, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.

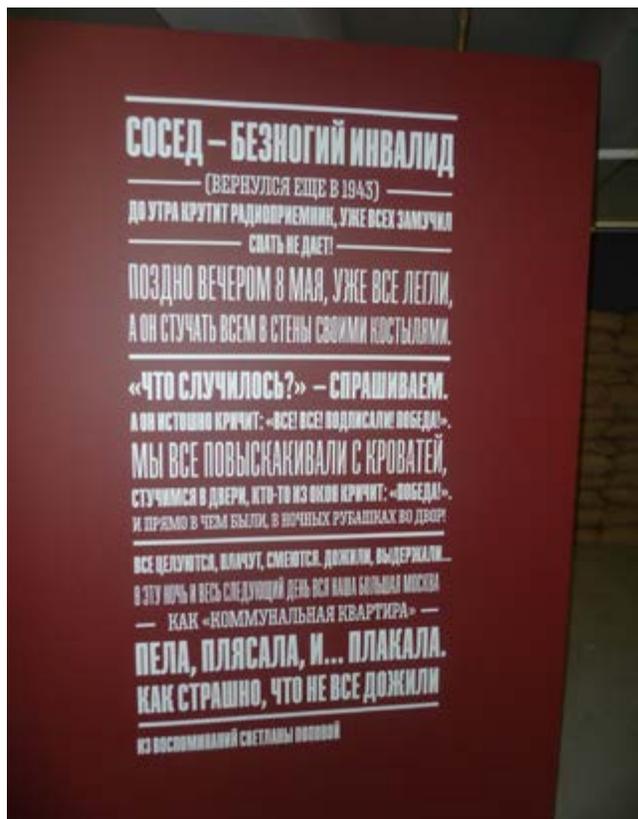


V Day, 9 May 1945, represents the culmination of the war for most visitors (even though the Soviet Union, bound by its obligation to the allies, officially continued to participate in hostilities against Japan). Posters, enlarged photographs, and testimonies recall the spontaneous, collective jubilation that consumed the city in the days following Germany's capitulation. As one of featured recollections put it, 'That night and the whole day following, our entire large Moscow—like a "communal apartment"—sang, danced, and cried. How terrible that not all have survived'.

V Day celebrations, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



V Day testimonial, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



Like the chronology of war events, the terrible price of victory is left unspecified. The exhibit represents the collective loss through another in situ installation—a minimalist table set for a wake. On the table, simple glasses, each supposedly filled with the traditional vodka and covered with a slice of black bread, stand in for those who will never return home. The wake table is a peculiar island in the overall spatial narrative of the exhibit. Unlike the rest of in situ arrangements featuring 1940s furniture and domestic objects, this one is abstract—a simple wooden table and benches devoid of any historical specificity of style. The display thus suggests that the grief for wartime losses transcends time, that it somehow continues to haunt the present. However, the table is positioned in the centre of the hall whose wall space is covered with Victory posters and enlarged photographs of festive crowds. The representation of loss and mourning is literally encircled by images of triumph and celebration. The juxtaposition produces ambiguity: on the one hand, it seems to offer closure to those who may be still grieving, on the other—it introduces a discordant note into the narrative of collective victory. Given that the exhibit's title is *The City of Victors*, the former interpretation may well be preferred by the museum staff, but the ambiguity of the display also permits one to reflect on the trauma of the war experience.

Wake table, *The City of Victors* (*Gorod Pobeditelei*) (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



Wake table detail, *The City of Victors* (*Gorod Pobeditelei*) (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



In addition to its immersive portrayal of the ordinary heroism of Moscow residents, the exhibit extols the righteous cause behind this heroism by appealing to the audience's emotions. In line with the Soviet-era myth of the war, the Soviet Army is depicted as a liberator not only of its own territory but also of the entire Europe. The audience is presumed to agree with this strand of the war myth, as the only mnemonic prompt on display is an excerpt from a patriotic lyric by Yevgeny Vinokurov, 'Muscovites' (1953). The poem celebrates two young men who died in battle far away from home:

In the fields beyond the sleepy Vistula

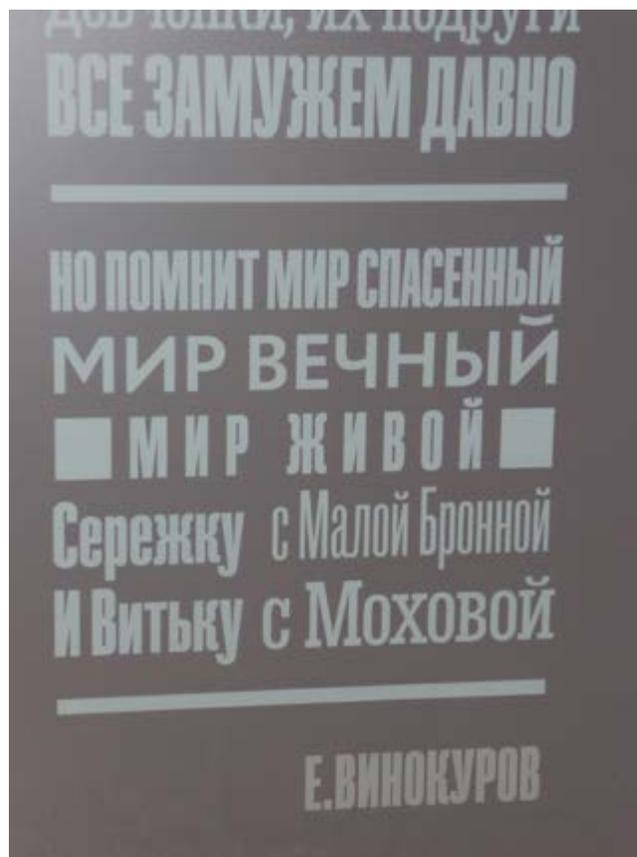
In the moist earth are lying

Seryozhka from Malaya Bronnaya

And Vit'ka from Mokhovaya

Known only by their first names and street addresses, these soldiers personify the Soviet Army's sacrifice. Their girlfriends stopped waiting for them and married other men, the poem tells us, but these ordinary Muscovites are remembered by 'the saved world'. Not incidentally, in May 2015 'The saved world remembers' was used as a slogan throughout public spaces in central Moscow and other Russian cities to urge the recognition of the international debt of gratitude for the Soviet Union's role in World War II.

Vinokurov poem fragment,  
*The City of Victors (Gorod  
Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December  
6, 2015), Museum of Moscow,  
Moscow, Russian Federation.



'Saved World Remembers' billboard featuring the cover of the 12 February 1945 issue of *Life*, Arbat Street, May 2015. Moscow, Russian Federation.



By celebrating ordinary heroes, the exhibit resurrects the memory of Stalin as the architect of the Soviet victory in World War II. It does so indirectly, by eschewing overt commentary in the form of textual labels and allowing archival artefacts and documents to paint him as the ultimate inspiration behind the people's war effort. A number of posters throughout the exhibit epitomize the worshipful attitude toward the Peoples' Leader, as envisioned by Soviet propagandists of the time. One poster salutes the defenders of Moscow—'the people and the army'—who saved the capital supposedly under Stalin's leadership. Dated 1947, the poster is not part of the state war propaganda but a commemorative exhortation that codifies Stalin's role as a wise commander-in-chief. Another poster features the Generalissimo's image on a Victory medal which also bears the Leader's winged phrase 'Our mission is righteous—we have won'. The poster's imagery is quasi-religious: the medal bearing Stalin's profile is sun-like, and its rays illuminate the figure of a soldier surrounded by cheering crowds.

Victory poster, *The City of Victors (Gorod Pobeditelei)* (May 9-December 6, 2015), Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russian Federation.



Lest we suspect the museum of propaganda in favour of Stalin, the curators marshal documents composed by ordinary people to illustrate the widespread piety toward him. The case in point is the previously cited volunteer's application to join the ranks of the people's resistance. Elsewhere in the exhibit is a school composition book opened to an essay titled 'Stalin, the Great Military Leader'. The essay's dutifully formulaic prose recounts the highlights of Stalin's military career, including his decisive leadership in the battle of Moscow.

Both posters and the pious language used by ordinary people invoking Stalin's authority testify to the omnipresence of the dictator's cult in public imagination of the period. The inclusion of Stalin imagery and references in both official and vernacular documents and the avoidance of direct commentary by museum staff seem to suggest that the leader's aura infused the very air breathed by the wartime generation. The implicit argument is: whatever view of Stalin we may hold today, the war generation's values and deeds are inextricably linked to their faith in him. The exhibit thus discourages the viewer from judging their pieties and suggests that our memory of the war should be aligned with the perspective of our

forefathers. Questioning the tenets of the war myth therefore would be tantamount to betraying *their* memory.

To promote grateful identification with the forefathers as the preferred visitor stance, the museum juxtaposes the dedication of ordinary soldiers and civilians of the 1940s with the attitudes of later generations. The curators, in fact, single out the late 1980s as the low point in the collective memory of the war. The evaluation of this period, however, is entrusted to an ordinary Muscovite, whose recent recollection takes the visitor back to the heady days of glasnost and perestroika. In his testimony, A. Nikandrov remembers his conversation with his grandfather in 1989, at the height of Gorbachev's *glasnost* era, which also happened to be a time of scarcity. A war veteran, his grandfather was entitled to food rations every month. The author mentions that at the time the Soviet Union was even receiving humanitarian aid from Germany, which was helpful as the stores were mostly empty. The grandfather would come home tired and grumpy since it would take hours to stand in a queue for groceries. He would joke that it was easier at the front! The interaction between grandfather and grandson that follows highlights the young generation's cynicism:

One time I asked him, Grandpa, maybe the victory was all in vain? We would probably live like Europeans now—contentedly! In response to which he sighed and answered simply: 'Then you wouldn't exist!' So many years have passed, and he is long gone, but I am still ashamed.

This is a remarkable statement, especially in the way it evokes shame about the period in the country's history when the state was opening its archives and the full extent of Stalin's crimes became exposed. The selection of this particular memory fragment as emblematic serves a didactic function. The testimony paints the post-war generations' disillusionment in the war myth as betrayal of the forefathers and, by extension, of the nation. From the vantage point of the present, to question the cost—and the point—of sacrifices in the Great Patriotic War is the height of ingratitude. By prominently showing this contrite testimony, the exhibit urges its audience to disavow the late Soviet scrutiny of the war myth and thereby to dismiss any doubts about the righteous mission of which comrade Stalin assured his people.

## Conclusion

The exhibit *The City of Heroes* claims to represent the voice of the people. Aside from the exhortation 'Let's write the history of our country together!' the curators' speech is tacit and oblique. In the exhibit's spatial narrative, the museumgoer encounters multiple voices, presented through a variety of media. The rhetoric of the exhibit is multi-modal and polyvocal, but this does not mean there isn't a preferred 'deep narrative' that the visitor is invited to construct through the experience. 'Deep narrative', explains Weiser, operates both below and above

the surface of an exhibit. Such a narrative might be seen in what is emphasized or deemphasized in the displays, what follows what in the galleries, or even what is or is not offered for sale in the gift shop or repeated in the marketing materials.<sup>35</sup> In situ installations, photographs, posters, and narrative recollections add up to a unified account that reaffirms the Soviet-era war myth about the courageous and united people that under the wise leadership of Stalin rose as one to repel the German aggressor and liberated Europe from fascism. The apparent polyphony yields an uplifting story of the collective trauma of the war that simultaneously rehabilitates the cult of the strongman.

Moreover, through its selection of 'voices', the exhibit comments on public memory of the war and implicitly advocates for an emotional identification, rather than critical detachment, as the preferred attitude to the collective past. Objects on display give the visitor intimate access to the thoughts, feelings, and routines of representatives of the war generation and their descendants. It is difficult to doubt the sincerity of their beliefs and values or to argue with the existential truth of their accounts. The exhibit thus positions the visitor as a member of this family-like community of feeling. The epideictic rhetoric of the exhibit therefore participates in the Putin regime's cultural programme of whitewashing the nation's history and using the gratitude to our grandparents as an excuse to resurrect Stalin as the ultimate model of leadership.

## Endnotes

1. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire", *Representations* 26 (1989): 13.
2. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 252.
3. Peter Aronsson and Simon Knell, coordinators, *National Museums Making Histories in a Diverse Europe* (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012), 28.
4. Peter Aronsson, "Comparing National Museums: Methodological Reflections", in *Comparing National Museums, Territories, Nation-Building, and Change*, ed. Peter Aronsson (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2008), 14.
5. Bruce W. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense", in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 175-76.
6. M. Elizabeth Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric: Building Civic Identity in National Spaces* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 30.
7. *Ibid.*, 31. Epideictic or display rhetoric is one of the three rhetorical genres outlined by Aristotle's fourth-century BCE treatise the *Art of Rhetoric*. However, contemporary rhetoric scholars believe that epideictic encompasses a broad spectrum of discursive and material practices, from ceremonial speechmaking to monuments and museum displays. See Lawrence J. Prelli, ed. *Rhetorics of Display* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006).
8. Dominique Poulot, "Preface: Uses of the Past—Historical Narratives and the Museum," in *Great Narratives of the Past: Traditions and Revisions in National Museums*, eds. Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstern, and Jose Maria Lanzarote (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012), 7.
9. Mieke Bal, "Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 97-115.
10. Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, 42.
11. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 21.
12. *Ibid.*, 3.
13. *Ibid.*, 138.
14. Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, 49.
15. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 138.
16. John Falk, "The Museum Experience: Who Visits, Why and to What Effect?" in *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2012).
17. Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Museum 2.0, 2010), iii-iv.
18. Stephan Berger, cited in Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, 33.
19. Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015).

20. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 132.
21. See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
22. See Nikolai Koposov, *Pamyat' Strogogo Rezhima: Istorii i Politika v Rossii* (The Memory of a Brutal Regime: History and Politics in Russia) (Moscow: Novoye Literaturnoye Obozreniye, 2011). See also Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*.
23. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 213.
24. *Ibid.*, 221.
25. On the use of the term 'The Great Patriotic War' versus 'World War II' in Russia, see Markku Kangaspuro and Jussi Lassila, "Naming the War in Russian Public Discussion", *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, vol. LIV, no. 3-4 (2012): 377-400.
26. See Mark Edele, "Fighting Russia's History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II", *History and Memory* 29 (2017): 90-124. See also Elizabeth A. Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia", *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38 (2011): 172-200.
27. See Dina Khapaeva. "Triumphant Memory of the Perpetrators: Putin's Politics of re-Stalinization", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49 (2016): 61-73.
28. Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric*, 31.
29. Koposov, *Pamyat'*, 152.
30. N. Potapova, quoted in Koposov, *Pamyat'*, 159-160.
31. On the rehabilitation of Stalin in Putin's Russia, see especially Nanci Adler, "'The Bright Past', or Whose (Hi)story? Challenges in Russia and Serbia Today". *Filosofija i Društvo* xxiii (4), 2012: 119-138; Dina Khapaeva, "Triumphant Memory of the Perpetrators: Putin's Politics of re-Stalinization", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49 (2016): 61-73.
32. On the March of the Immortal Regiment and its cooptation by the United Russia Party, see Mischa Gabowitsch, "Are Copycats Subversive? Strategy-31, the Russian Runs, the Immortal Regiment, and the Transformative Potential of Non-Hierarchical Movements", *Problems of Post-Communism* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2016.1250604>.
33. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics", 179.
34. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 76.
35. Weiser, "Museum Rhetoric", 58.

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## Biographical Note

Ekaterina Haskins is Professor of Rhetoric in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at Pennsylvania State University (USA). Her research contributes to three distinct yet related areas of scholarship: the history of rhetoric, public memory, and rhetorics of display. She is the author of two books, *Logos and Power in Isocrates and Aristotle* (2004; paperback 2009) and *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (2015). She has published numerous articles and book chapters on the history of rhetoric, public memory, and visual culture. Her current projects include a book-in-progress on the rhetoric and politics of public memory in post-Communist Russia and an investigation of the role of place and sensation in public life.

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# Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung

## Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins

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## Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung

Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins

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### Abstract

This artists' portfolio combines new page works interspersed with documentation from our collaborative exhibition *Die Ausgrabung* (Dunedin School of Art (DSA), Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014). The exhibition was a result of a joint artist residency in conjunction with the DSA Artist in Residence programme. The German phrase *Die Ausgrabung* translates literally as 'the excavation'. The exhibition and portfolio explores a multi-layered approach to the Otago landscape as contested site for historic and contemporary land use including mining. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* presents documentation of exhibition artefacts alongside the image itself in ruin—journal pages taken from a fictive archaeology notebook. Our ongoing collaborative projects *Der Tiefenglanz* and *Die Ausgrabung* explore the relationship between memory and materiality through photography and collage.

Keywords: *Die Ausgrabung*, 'the excavation', Otago landscape, contested site, archaeology, memory, materiality, photography, collage

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### Acknowledgements

The artists acknowledge the generous support of Dunedin School of Art and The University of Auckland. With special thanks to Johanna Zellmer.

Figure 1. Field Notes: *Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

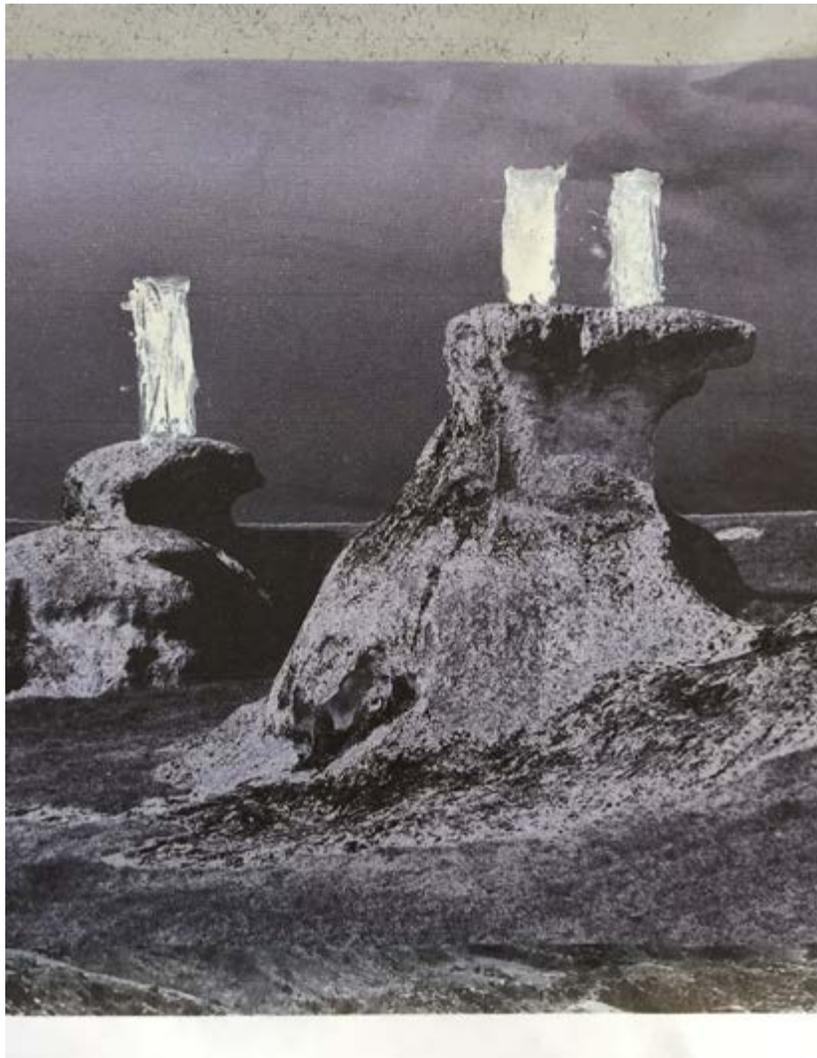


Figure 2. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

Page 105. Figure 3. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

Page 106-107. Figure 4-5. *Die Ausgrabung* (details), Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.











Page 108. Figure 6. Installation detail, *Die Ausgrabung*, Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.



Figure 7. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.



Figure 8. *Die Ausgrabung* (detail), Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

Page 110. Figure 9. *Die Ausgrabung* (detail), Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

Page 111. Figure 10. Installation detail, *Die Ausgrabung*, Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.







Figure 12. Installation detail, *Die Ausgrabung*, Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

Figure 11. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

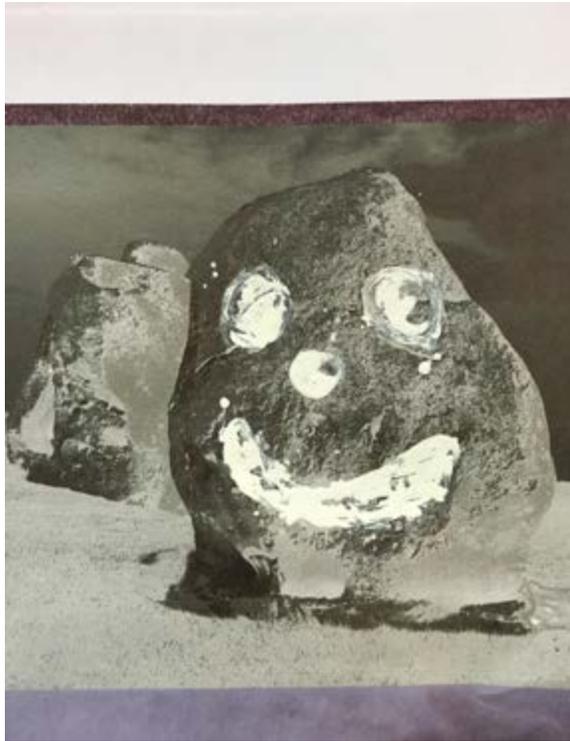


Figure 13. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.



Figure 14. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

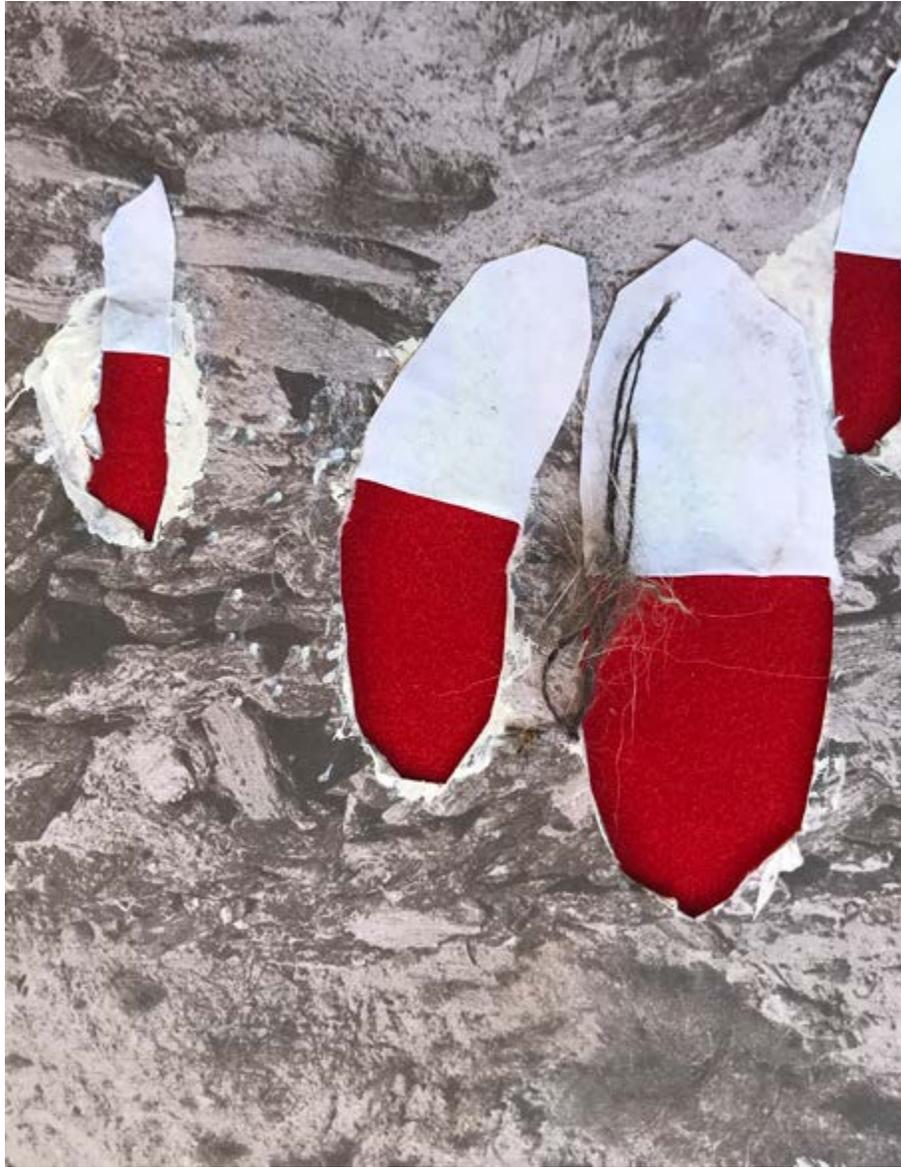


Figure 15. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.





Figure 16. *Die Ausgrabung* (detail), Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.



Figure 17. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.



Figure 19. *Field Notes: Die Ausgrabung* (detail), 2018. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.



Page 116. Figure 18. Installation detail, *Die Ausgrabung*, Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.

Figure 20. *Die Ausgrabung* (detail), Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31 October 2014. Photo collage: Karl Fritsch and Gavin Hipkins.





Figure 21. Studio view,  
*Die Ausgrabung*, Dunedin School  
of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 23–31  
October 2014. Photo: Karl Fritsch  
and Gavin Hipkins.

## Biographical Notes

Karl Fritsch (b. 1963, Sonthofen, Germany) lives and works in Wellington. Fritsch has exhibited extensively internationally and has presented lectures in the United States, Europe, Asia and Australia. His rings speak of traditional goldsmithing, but also dramatically reframe its expressive range, making him a leading and influential contemporary jeweller. His work is held in the collections of important international museums and public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. He has collaborated with designers and artists working across different media including Gavin Hipkins, Martino Gamper, and Francis Upritchard.

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Gavin Hipkins (b. 1968, Auckland, New Zealand) is an Auckland-based artist and Associate Professor in Fine Arts at Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland. He is recognised for his photo-installations, multipart image series, and experimental moving image works. He makes non-linear narrative films which interpret colonial and modern ideologies via specific sites and travel narratives. He was exhibited widely. Recent group exhibitions include: International Film Festival Rotterdam (2018, 2015); City Gallery Wellington (2018); International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany (2017, 2016); Uppsala International Short Film Festival, Sweden (2017); The Jewish Museum, New York (2015); Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), New York (2014); Edinburgh Art Festival, Scotland (2014).

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# Shooting Stars – The Impossible Reunion

Sasha Huber

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## Shooting Stars – The Impossible Reunion

Sasha Huber

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### Abstract

*Shooting Stars – The Impossible Reunion* (2014-) is an ongoing portraiture series by visual artist Sasha Huber. The series commemorates victims of gunshot assassinations and killings perpetrated for political, ethnic, ideological, economic reasons, or as hate crimes. It brings together people from around the world who risked their lives to make change happen or who died simply for being who they were.

Keywords: visual art, gun violence, activism

*The Shooting Stars* (2014-) portraiture series is an impossible reunion of historically and geographically separated persons who gave up their lives to make change happen or who died simply because of the color of their skin, gender, national origin or religion. This series developed out of an earlier portraiture project that helped me realise portraiture was the starting point of my art practice and has continued in several other projects over the years. Since then my work has expanded substantially, with the making of performative interventions that renegotiate history through video, photography, and research. These projects are centrally concerned with the politics of memory and belonging, particularly in relation to the legacy of colonialism.

The first portraiture series was *Shooting Back – Reflection on Haitian Roots* (2004). I portrayed individuals whose actions shaped the historical and social conditions in Haiti, from the fifteenth century up to the twentieth century, and who made Haiti what it is today—the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.<sup>1</sup> To symbolize the start of the oppression and enslavement of the indigenous Taíno (Arawak) peoples on the island,<sup>2</sup> I decided to ‘shoot back’ at *Christopher Columbus* (1451-1506), who arrived for the first time in what is now Haiti in 1492. After only twenty-five years following Columbus’s arrival in Haiti, at least 80 percent of the Taíno had died from warfare, massacre, executions, or European-introduced diseases (from which the Indians had no immunity). And at that same time, now 500 years ago, the transatlantic slave trade started with the forced migration of millions of people from the African continent to the ‘New World’, including Haiti.<sup>3</sup>

I further portrayed the Haitian dictators *Françoise “Papa Doc” Duvalier* (1907-1971) and *Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier* (1951-2014), as they were the reason for my mother’s family fleeing Haiti for the US in the mid-1960s. My mother settled in New York where she met my Swiss-born father. The two then moved to Zurich, Switzerland, where my sister and I were born in the 1970s. I have always felt that the two countries, Switzerland and Haiti, could not be more different from each other, and I was always especially curious about my mother’s heritage.

Figures 1-3. *Shooting Back*:  
*Christopher Columbus*  
*(Conqueror, 15th century)*;  
*Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier*  
*(Dictator of Haiti, 1957-71)*; *Jean-*  
*Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier*  
*(Dictator of Haiti, 1971-86)*,  
 metal staples on recycled  
 wood, 80 x 115 cm, 2004. Private  
 and institutional collections.  
 Courtesy of the artist.



I made these portraits because I found myself repeatedly confronted by the fact that my family—especially my mother—didn't let me visit my relatives in Haiti, due to the political disturbances and the possibility of kidnapping (two of our relatives there experienced this). Somehow, that frustration was the initial impetus for learning more about Haiti's history. At the same time, I discovered a technique of using a high-pressure staple gun to 'draw'. After testing out the staple gun, while protecting my eyes and ears with safety goggles and ear muffs, I realised that the tool's sound and weight resembled an actual gun. To me, the tool symbolized violence and trauma. I immediately decided that I would want to use it to create art works that relate to this metaphor. Eventually, I merged this method and my response to the frustration of not being allowed to visit Haiti. By 'shooting' staples, I realised I could capture a moment in time and, simultaneously, literally nail down and react to unjust history. It felt good to 'shoot back' symbolically and non-violently.

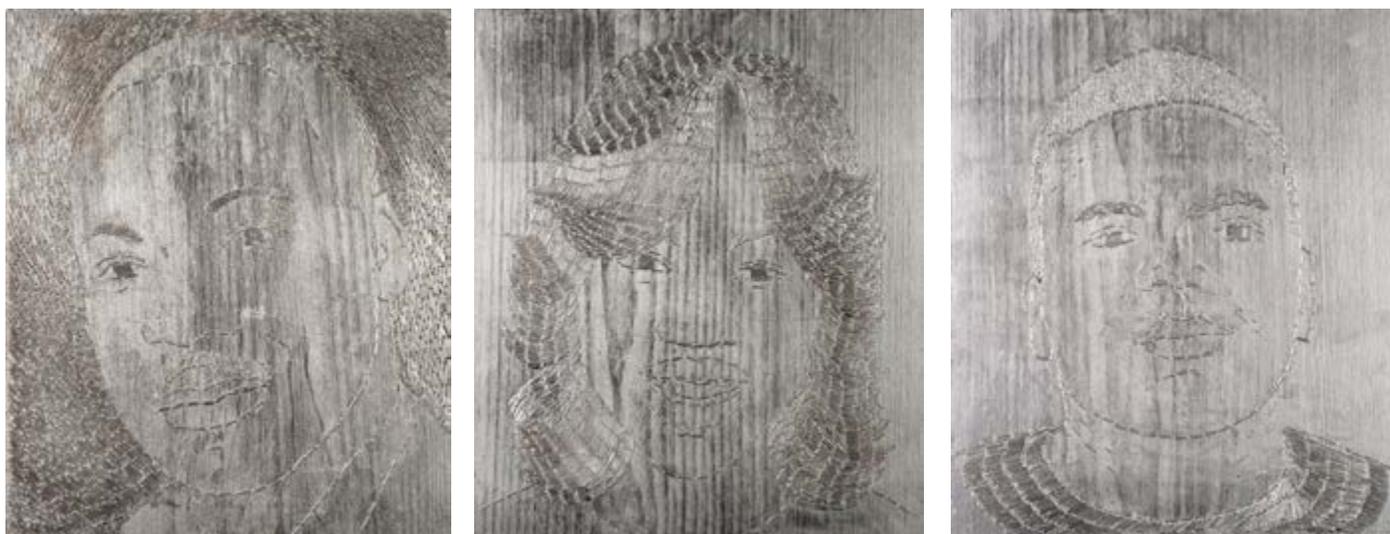
Soon after, I decided to use this technique on different subjects that were still related to violent and traumatic events, but now in order to commemorate the victims' stories and struggles. It was also a way for me to learn about and make sense of the world we live in. Metaphorically, I see the use of the staple gun not only as 'shooting', a term used when taking a photograph, but also as 'shooting back' with a weapon, in the same sense that bell hooks writes about 'talking back' as a means for the oppressed and colonized to move from silence to speech.<sup>4</sup> I pull the trigger one shot at a time, drawing with each staple precisely and permanently into the surfaces of different kinds of woods, sometimes burned by fire or painted.

Recently, I made a portrait of the American author James Baldwin (1924-1987) in a public space. I stapled his portrait onto a window shutter of the 19th century *Burg Hüsli* chalet in Leukerbad in the Swiss Alps, where he lived occasionally between 1951-53 to write parts of his first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. I made this work in his honour, and it was my attempt to make visible his time spent in this small mountain village as the first black person in the community, which he describes in the essay "Stranger in the Village" for Harper's Magazine in 1953. The portrait is part of a new portraiture series titled *The Firsts*.

Figure 4. Sasha Huber, *The Firsts* – James Baldwin (1924-1987), Leukerbad, Switzerland, metal staples on wooden window shutter, 2018. Photo: Siro Micheroli. Courtesy of the artist.



In contrast to my earlier Haiti-centred work, *The Shooting Stars* portraiture series is dedicated to people from around the world, from the past to the present, who became victims of gunshot assassinations and killings perpetrated for political, ethnic, ideological, economic reasons, or as hate crimes.<sup>5</sup> The entire *Shooting Stars* series consists of 32 portraits. The starting points were historical figures such as Baptist minister and civil rights movement leader *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1925-1968) and civil rights activist *Malcolm X* (1925-1965). One of the underlying messages of the series is that in the United States, African-Americans still live in danger, facing racial profiling from the authorities, security forces, or self-appointed vigilantes, who single-handedly carry out executions. In response to this situation I made portraits of *Michael Brown Jr.* (1996-2014), *Renisha McBride* (1994-2013) and *Trayvon Martin* (1995-2012). Martin's and Brown's deaths at the hands of the police sparked the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement,<sup>6</sup> which demanded that police change how they deal with minorities and tackle systemic racism and inequality. BLM co-founder Opal Tometi stated: 'The movement is a struggle for the human rights and dignity of black people in the US, which is tied to black peoples' struggle for human rights across the globe'.<sup>7</sup>



Figures 5-7. Sasha Huber, *Shooting Stars: Martin Luther King, Renisha Marie McBride (1994-2013), African-American woman; Michael Brown Jr. (1996-2014), graduate from Normandy High School, St. Louis, US, silver leaf on metal staples and larch wood, 27 x 32 x 4 cm, 2014.*

The *Shooting Stars* series further includes a portrait of my mother's godfather, the jeweler *Jean Chenet* (1918-1963). He was killed by the Tonton Macoute, the Haitian paramilitary force set up in 1959 by the dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Another family member, a former officer in the Haitian Army, *Lt. Henri "Riquet" Perpignand* (1916-1958),<sup>8</sup> who returned to Haiti from exile in Miami in 1958, was shot during an attempted coup against the dictator.

The series also comprises portraits of victims of two recent tragedies: the politically and ideologically motivated massacre of 77 innocent Norwegians in 2011 in Oslo and on Utøya Island and the killing of the young Iranian asylum seeker *Reza Barati* (1991-2014), who was shot during a demonstration in Australia's detention center on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, in 2014.

Page 125. Figure 8. Sasha Huber, *Shooting Stars – Malala Yousafzai* (b. 1997, Pakistan), silver leaf on metal staples and larch wood, 80 x 110 cm, 2014.



Also, part of the ongoing series is the portrait of Malala Yousafzai, who survived an assassination attempt in Pakistan in 2012 and became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. Previously, the youngest awardee was Martin Luther King Jr., who received the peace prize in 1964. Malala continues to put her life at risk by standing for equality and children’s right to education worldwide. Portraying her was important to me, because she survived the attempted assassination and remains able to continue her work. Her survival prompts the question: ‘What would the world be like if all these people whom I have portrayed had survived?’ Africa’s Che, *Thomas Sankara* (1949-1987) declared one week before his murder: ‘While revolutionaries as individuals can be murdered, you cannot kill their ideas’.<sup>9</sup>

The *Shooting Stars* series was shown for the first time at the Korjaamo Gallery in Helsinki, Finland, in 2014. In 2015 the whole series was part of the group exhibition *Becoming by Recalling*, which was dedicated to cultural heritage and identity, and curated by Susanne Ewerlöf at the Passagen Konsthalle in Linköping, Sweden. A year later, Heather Galbraith (Massey University, New Zealand) invited me to contribute a selection of *Shooting Stars* (2014) to the international group exhibition *Trigger Points*,<sup>10</sup> which she was curating with Andrew J. Saluti from the Syracuse University Art Galleries. The exhibition was installed in the Palitz Gallery in New York City in conjunction with the *Memory Works* symposium. Galbraith wrote in the exhibition catalogue: ‘*Trigger Points* . . . explore[s] the potent and slippery nature of memory. It examines the way memories are triggered by sensory stimuli, haptic encounters and visceral prompts, and how episodes, actions or encounters are felt physically and emotionally as well as understood rationally’.<sup>11</sup> The selection of my works included *Martin Luther King* (1925–1965); *Michael Brown Jr.* (1996–2014); *Malcolm X* (1925–1965); *Renisha McBride* (1995–2014); and *Sitting Bull* (1831–1890).

In 2017, curator Sasha Dees invited my husband, artist Petri Saarikko and myself to participate in her group exhibition *DNA of Water* with fellow artists Deborah Jack and Simone Bennett at the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art on Staten Island, United States. I would exhibit both my individual and collaborative projects. In her curatorial statement she wrote: ‘water carries the world history yet has the fluidity to keep adapting to the present and future and is in a continuous transition. How do we as a people relate to our history, our present and future?’.<sup>12</sup>

For the exhibition, Dees was interested in my ongoing *Shooting Stars* series and was thinking of how to introduce and present the work within the local context. Important parts of the series are the well-known political figures of the civil rights movement mentioned earlier, and portraits of everyday people who were victims of police violence and who became famous because of media attention following their tragic deaths. The series is committed to remembering their lives and highlighting the unchecked police brutality that results in so many deaths. The website *Mapping Police Violence* reported that 99% of cases of people killed by police in 2015 have not resulted in conviction of any officers involved. There is almost no accountability for the police.<sup>13</sup>

All victims will be missed and remembered by their family, friends, and community. The traumatic memory is an ever-returning nightmare that any person of color can experience in the United States. I'm thinking how shocked and angry the people affected must feel when this hell on earth happens, over and over again. In the US, almost every day someone is killed by the police. In 2012, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement released a thorough report, *Operation Ghetto Storm: 2012 Annual Report on the Extrajudicial Killing of Black People*,<sup>14</sup> which documented all the reported killings of Black Americans by police officers, security guards, and self-appointed vigilantes. The report calculated that, on average, every 28 hours a Black man, woman, or child is unjustly 'executed'.<sup>15</sup> Based on the *Mapping Police Violence* website, '[p]olice killed 1,147 people in 2017. Black people were 25% of those killed despite being only 13% of the population'.<sup>16</sup>

The art historian and writer Yvette Greslé wrote about fellow artist Phoebe Boswell whose installation *A Matter of Memory* resonates with my own artistic memory-work: 'Sometimes we imagine that it is possible to bury what is too painful to think of. Traumatic memory is often described in terms of insistent repetition and return, of the surfacing of memories we would rather suppress'.<sup>17</sup>

As Dees and I were discussing *DNA of Water*, we reflected on the fact that the exhibition was taking place on Staten Island, home of the late Eric Garner (1970-2014). Because of this connection, I had an opportunity to portray him in the exhibition. Eric, a former horticulturist at the New York City Parks, was detained on July 17, 2014 and put in a chokehold by an NYPD police officer. As he was being choked, Garner protested repeatedly: 'I can't breathe!' until he lost consciousness and died shortly afterwards. Garner's 'crime' was selling single cigarettes from packs without tax stamps.<sup>18</sup>

Exhibiting his portrait in Staten Island inspired me to contact Garner's family and present the portrait to his mother and the family at the end of the exhibition. I chose one of the photos of him published in articles discussing his case and made his portrait in my studio in Helsinki prior to my arrival in the US.

Figure 9. Gwen Carr holding her son's portrait Shooting Stars Series – Eric Garner (1970–2014), white gold leaf on metal staples and larch wood, 27 x 32 x 4 cm, 2017. Photo: Stephan Schacher © Sasha Huber. Courtesy of the artist.



Then, while I was in New York, something serendipitous happened. I invited my friend Tamara Lanier from Connecticut to the opening of *DNA of Water* at the Snug Harbor Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art gallery in March 2017. I got to know Tamara in 2012 when she became aware of the petition website [www.rentyhorn.ch](http://www.rentyhorn.ch) which I had launched in 2008. It is part of my long-term artistic engagement with the *Demounting Louis Agassiz* campaign, which was aimed at removing the name of the 19th century Swiss-born naturalist, glaciologist, and racist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) from a 3,946-metre peak in the Swiss Alps. The campaign also advocated renaming the peak ‘Rentyhorn’ in honour of the Congolese-born slave Renty and countless others who were robbed of their freedom. Among his other racial indecencies, in 1850 Agassiz ordered Renty to be photographed on a South Carolina plantation ‘to prove the inferiority of the black race’.<sup>19</sup> To my astonishment, upon learning of the website, Lanier wrote to me revealing that she is a descendent of Renty! He was her Great-Great-Great-Grandfather. She could speak about Renty and help to fill the gap that transformed the objectifying portrait of him which Agassiz made in the name of ‘science’. Tamara and her two daughters came to Switzerland to the opening of an exhibition held in Grindelwald, near the Agassizhorn.<sup>20</sup> She shared information that was not documented when the daguerreotypes of Renty were made in the first place.

Tamara told me that she and her daughters would be able to attend our opening at Snug Harbor and that she would come with her friend Gwen Carr, who happened to be Eric Garner’s mother! What made this situation so unexpected was that I had not yet informed Tamara of the works I would be showing in the exhibition. She was surprised and happy when I informed her that the exhibition would contain a portrait of Eric. She said that she could arrange a collect call between between herself, Gwen, and me. This allowed me to share my idea with Gwen, who was happy to hear about the gift. She was pleased to see the portrait of her son, and I sensed that she was touched by the work and its intention.

Figure 10. Gwen Carr and Sasha Huber looking at Eric Garner’s portrait at the *DNA of Water* exhibition. Photo by Stephan Schacher. Courtesy of the artist.



I wanted Gwen to be able to take something home on the day that we first met in person. Since the exhibition was going to last several months, I decided to make for her a rubbing (graphite frottage) of the portrait before applying the white gold leaf on top of the staples and the wooden surface. Because the metal staples give the works a haptic, relief quality, such frottages become like a reproduction of the original on paper.



Figure 11. Unique frottage drawing of Eric Garner's portrait for Gwen Carr and Family at the beginning of the DNA of Water exhibition given in March 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

As a way of documenting the artwork, I asked Gwen in advance if she would like to be photographed together with the artwork before the opening of the exhibition in March 2017. Photographing her with the work was a special occasion for me because at that very moment, the artwork was transformed into more than just a representation of a person I did not know. With this sudden connection to Eric's relative who lived through and is still dealing with the aftermath of this huge loss, I entered a space that no exhibition, nor art collection—institutional or private—could ever reach. While it is important that the work can be seen and discussed by people who feel concerned with or connected to its meaning, I felt that giving the artwork to Gwen and her family would be the appropriate place for it. In their possession, Eric's portrait would enable daily commemoration.

In September when the exhibition ended, Sasha Dees visited Gwen at her home to bring her the portrait. She told me that Gwen was so happy, and that the work was to be installed beside photos of Eric taken throughout his life. On my next visit to New York, I will make sure to visit Gwen.

I often reflect on my responsibility in relation to artworks made in memory of those who are not necessarily going to be part of the historical record. I believe that artists who engage in memory work must do it in an ethical way. This applies to the representation of people from the past, but especially to contemporary subjects, because they might have living relatives, as in Eric Garner's case. My portrait of him contributes to his memory alongside his mother's own story which she tells in her recently published book *This Stops Today* (October 2018). She speaks about the loss that compelled her to become an activist and fight for racial equality, and how her family's tragedy is but one example of how law enforcement treats blacks in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

In 2018 Curtin University in Perth, Australia, asked for my permission to publish my photograph of Gwen Carr holding Eric's portrait, and Michael Brown's and Reza Barati's *Shooting Star* portraits on their newly initiated online project *Deathscapes—Mapping Race and Violence in Settler States*. The description reads:

The project aims to produce new knowledge about the practices and technologies, both global and domestic, that enable state violence against two key racialized groups, Indigenous people and racialized migrants and refugees at the border. The project adopts a transnational and cross-disciplinary approach to racialized state violence working across four countries (Australia, the U.S., Canada, the U.K.) to map the sites and distributions of custodial deaths in locations such as police cells, prisons and immigration detention centers. The Deathscapes website will be a distinctive and innovative feature of the project, as a free-to-access resource that documents racialized deaths transnationally via a single digital site that consolidates statistics, analysis, graphics and artworks; it is a resource that is both archival and analytical, and for use by multiple publics.<sup>22</sup>

This website allows the works to be presented within a dedicated context and contribute to public memory accessible to readers from around the world.

Like meteors, the men and women portrayed in *Shooting Stars* have flashed, and still flash, across the sky above us, momentarily lighting up the metaphorical darkness of horror and injustice that surrounds us. Like meteors—traditionally wished upon in many cultures—they allow us to formulate our longings and to project our desires. And they leave us wondering whether shooting stars might turn into much-needed guiding stars.

## Endnotes

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## Biographical Note

Sasha Huber (b. 1975) is a visual artist of Swiss-Haitian heritage, born in Zurich. She lives and works in Helsinki. Huber's work is primarily concerned with the politics of memory and belonging, particularly in relation to the legacy of colonialism. Sensitive to the subtle threads connecting history and the present, she works with performance-based interventions, video, photography, publications, archival material and the compressed-air staple gun—while aware of its symbolic significance as a weapon. She is known for her artistic contribution to the long-term project *Demounting Louis Agassiz*, which promotes awareness that the Swiss-born Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) was a proponent of 'scientific' racism, and a pioneering thinker of segregation and 'racial hygiene'. She has participated in international exhibitions including the Biennale of Sydney 2014, the Venice Biennale 2015 and international artist residencies together with regular collaborator artist Petri Saarikko (2015 at Te Whare Hera International Artist Residency). She holds an MA in visual cultures from the University of Art and Design Helsinki and is presently undertaking practice-based PhD studies at the Zurich University of the Arts in Switzerland.

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# Looking Back and Looking Around: Notes from Anzac Day

Connah Podmore

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### Abstract

In April 2015, artist Connah Podmore partnered with the charitable trust, Friends of Anzac Bridge, to run a community art project for the region's Anzac Day commemorations. Over a series of open workshops, participants were invited to write messages from themselves to Anzac-related subjects on supplied postcards. This process revealed many of the symbols and expressions now inherent to Anzac commemorations, with many participants using this Anzac rhetoric in their written messages. In this paper, the author examines the social, historical, personal and political guiding forces behind Anzac rhetoric, and the impact that this rhetoric has had in the community project and more broadly across New Zealand. This first-person commentary discusses the desire to remember, and some of the perceived problems arising from what currently is a nation-wide movement of First World War centenary commemorations.

Keywords: Anzac rhetoric, commemoration, nationalism, New Zealand, memorial

i.

This is a country of waiting surfaces, quiet groupings of exposed names.

Quiet but not passive:

They press upon the earth: We move about their weight.

I was in denial when I wrote these words. Their observations bear little similarity to the majority of experiences on, and around Anzac Day 2015, of which I write. A quiet persuasive weight: the notion of a noble pressure: this is instead what I hoped my experience of remembrance would be.

Two thousand and fifteen marked the 100-year anniversary of New Zealand's entry into the Gallipoli campaign, where its soldiers experienced their first extended and large-scale encounter with the disgraceful violence and waste of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> The scale of loss that New Zealand experienced at Gallipoli quickly brought about a desire for commemoration, and Anzac Day was established as a half day holiday, and day of remembrance, as early as 1916.<sup>2</sup> This day has since evolved to commemorate not only First World War casualties, but all New Zealand and Australian returned servicemen and women, and victims of war.<sup>3</sup> Today, the national pride and gratitude evoked by Anzac, combined with what are often deeply felt personal connections to its histories, have elevated this day of remembrance to an almost sacred status. As summarized by political commentator, Bryce Edwards: 'It is considered disrespectful, inappropriate and downright traitorous, by some to express dissent about the day'.<sup>4</sup> Given the importance placed upon Anzac in New Zealand, it is therefore unsurprising that the centenary of the Gallipoli landings inspired extensive media coverage, public events and exhibitions. Record numbers of New Zealanders attended Anzac Day dawn services across the country,<sup>5</sup> and queues at Te Papa Tongarewa's exhibition *Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War* were reported to have stretched across the museum's second floor, down the stairs and to the public square outside.<sup>6</sup> Two thousand and fifteen was the year of 'peak Gallipoli'.<sup>7</sup> And there I was, upon that peak.

In April 2015, I worked at New Zealand Pacific Studios in Wairarapa as their ANZAC Fellow. As part of the Fellowship, I launched a community art project that would contribute to the Anzac Day commemorations at the local memorial bridge. My project, 'Writing History', constituted a series of workshops in which participants were invited to write a postcard from themselves to someone or something pertaining to Anzac. Many people contributed to this project, and I very much enjoyed it and am grateful for the exchanges with these people. Despite this, however, following the project's conclusion, my main feeling has been one of great unease.

So, here is the chance to properly revisit this experience: to focus on misguided intentions, acts of distortion, and the enormous discomfort that I have come to associate with this project, and with Anzac Day.

ii.

I applied to the fellowship on the back of a previous project in which I made a memorial of sorts for my great grandfather, Frank, who had served in the First World War. ‘A sincere desire to remember events that I never experienced and a man I never met’, was how I described the artwork at the time. And this was a sincere desire. Whatever the place that timeliness played in sparking my interest in Frank’s memory, the thought of his involvement in this history made, makes, my heart sore.

From my Grandma I had acquired a photocopy of a postcard that he had sent home in 1915, while hospitalized in Cairo. Over the course of a year I wrote Frank many letters, and sent them to the 1915 address of this hospital, found at the top right hand corner of the postcard. The letters spoke mainly of my experiences with his memory: of a search for information, and an enormous uncertainty both with the details of his history, and how I should respond to them.<sup>8</sup>

I saw the act of writing letters as a commitment of care. Wanting to take this further still, I decided to make something for him. I cut the carbon copies of my letters into thin strips, and wove them together by hand to create a blanket for his hospital bed. As the blanket grew, I would describe it in my letters:

I love how light it is, and the illusion of its perfect whiteness. In places it’s becoming worn and translucent: light shines through, and the splayed pink-red of my fingertip can just be seen when pushed up against the back of it.<sup>9</sup>

Months were spent making this blanket, and throughout the process of making, I constantly swung between assurance in the gesture and the object, and feelings of doubt and dissatisfaction. I felt it important that the blanket should convey the same sense of uncertainty and searching as my letters to Frank, and for this reason I embraced its diligent and fragile qualities. However, among one of my worries was that the flimsy, paper blanket was an inadequate gesture to the memory of the suffering I was sure he had experienced:

I have an awful image of the blanket half way through its degradation. It will be frayed and yellowing, with patches missing. I hate the idea that a crumbling, neglected object could one day be your memorial.<sup>10</sup>

This process of making brought into consideration a whole other host of questions: questions of how we should represent trauma and the lives of others. Of whether it is the thing made, or the action of making that counts. These questions, and the action of writing were forefront in my mind when I began the Wairarapa project.

iii.

The Wairarapa project also began with a letter. I addressed the letter to Alfred Falkner, one of the first settlers in the local Kaiparoro area and the designer and engineer behind the ANZAC memorial bridge, just down the road from the studio. Falkner lost a son and nephew to the war, and both are commemorated on this bridge.

Dear Alfred,

When you first designed the Kaiparoro Bridge, did you know that it would become a memorial?

If so, what a uniquely sad position this must have been: designing an object to carry the load of lives both present and lost. Today I see this duality still: there is something both sobering and transformative in the sight of concrete's everyday weight shaped into graceful arches, painted white.

I suppose you might have found comfort in your concrete bridge: in its calculated strength and claims to permanence.

I would like you to know that it is being looked after, and your son's name remains, etched in its side.<sup>11</sup>

Falkner's memorial was certainly made under different circumstances to my own. Because it was constructed under an immediacy of grief that is not present in Frank's blanket, the reasons behind its making are certainly different in kind. Nonetheless, I wanted to speak to him as one maker of memorials to another.

There is much that I admire in Falkner's bridge, one of the first utilitarian memorials of its time; returned servicemen built it following the war. A trained engineer, Falkner had an apparent fixation with bridges; in his collected scrapbooks, now kept at the Ian Matheson Archives, there are pages upon pages of pictures of bridges, cut out from newspapers or magazines and annotated by hand.

Falkner's memorial bridge is made entirely of concrete. Before the war, Faulkner had encountered another bridge of this kind while visiting Auckland, and he mentioned it with excitement in a letter home to his friend. I imagine him designing this bridge enthusiastically and with care. Falkner's bridge stands in sharp contrast to my paper blanket: where my offering is fragile and open-ended, he produced a finished, useful object, built to last. However, we are different people, motivated by different interests; and for the purposes of this discussion, I will not be comparing the two any further. I simply think it beautiful that he was able to remember his son by building the thing that he loved.

Figure 1: Falkner's Memorial Bridge from below, Kaiparoro, 2014. Photo: Connah Podmore.



iv.

How can we reconcile this intimate and honest response with the growing spectacle of Anzac commemorations today?

For the Wairarapa project, I more than anything wanted to promote individual and thoughtful responses to history. Drawing from my previous experience, I focused on the act of letter writing. Working alongside the Friends of ANZAC Bridge, a charitable trust created to preserve Falkner's memorial; we held workshops at local libraries, a writer's group, schools and Aratoi Wairarapa Museum of Art and History. Through this partnership I saw an opportunity to reflect upon the acts of memorial making and remembrance, but unfortunately did not place an emphasis upon this. Rather, in my eagerness to promote participation, I condensed the participant brief to a message written from themselves to 'someone or something pertaining to Anzac'. With user friendliness ever in mind, I also supplied postcards for participants to write their messages on. It wasn't until well after the project's end that I realised that these steps actively promoted the use of standard Anzac rhetoric.

Messages laden with familiar commemorative expressions—*courage*, *servicing your country*, *RIP*, *hero*, and symbols of crosses and poppies—surfaced upon the postcards. In looking back, I now realise that the limited word count dictated by the size of my postcards, paired with the participants' natural inclination to use language strongly associated with Anzac, greatly increased the likelihood that participants would use this language. In the face of ineffable tragedy, there is a

tendency to quote important texts; perhaps to mask the perceived inadequacy of one's own words.<sup>12</sup> In the face of Gallipoli, Anzac rhetoric naturally fills this role. Describing this rhetoric, Graham Seal highlights the common use of words such as 'sacrifice' or 'spirit', which are strongly associated with Christian themes. In the case of Anzac rhetoric, these words have been re-aligned as descriptors for the secular qualities associated with Anzac, such as national identity. In this way, he explains, these secular qualities too become sacred.<sup>13</sup> This is problematic, for reasons that I will get to later, and I feel an acute sense of discomfort when hearing this tongue spoken en masse. With regards to my project however, it feels mean-spirited to criticize the public's natural use of this rhetoric when it is so closely intertwined with the very subject that they were asked to address.

What I have been wondering ever since the project's end, is that when we use these words, is it always done so unthinkingly? Many of those who wrote in postcards seemed to approach the task as Falkner had approached his memorial bridge: they worked with loved ones in mind. While they may have used generic commemorative language in their writing, I believe that many felt what they wrote. In these cases, it is as though the thoughts that they wanted to express clashed with the very words that we use to express them. So, perhaps here lies our problem: words themselves have a history, and they can be far too open.

Furthermore, it is also clear that such responses were not only prompted, but created. I wonder how many participants used such language because they thought that this is what I expected of them? The national-hype and moral underpinnings around Anzac Day created an environment that discouraged opposition to that which celebrated or promoted Anzac. While it must be said that many participants actively resisted using Anzac rhetoric, the majority did not.<sup>14</sup>

#### v.

*Sacrifice, honour, valour and tragedy*<sup>15</sup> intoned television presenter Mike Hosking, on the eve of Anzac Day 2015. Coming from the mouth of this famously self-assured television personality, the utterance of these common Anzac terms suddenly seemed all the more alarming. Hosking's monologue seemed to epitomize one of the more troubling elements of the Anzac brand and rhetoric: its tendency to mythologize the very history that it represents. Commenting on this very issue, historian Daemon Salesa noted that the monumental scale of Anzac commemoration in New Zealand has created a bias in the public's perception of this history. 'If it wasn't for the fact that we landed at Gallipoli' he said, 'I think that most New Zealanders would be able to call it what it was: an imperial action where the people defending their homeland won'.<sup>16</sup> Part of what prevents us from scrutinising what Salesa defines as this 'national myth'<sup>17</sup> is perhaps the simplistic and self-assured nature of Anzac rhetoric. The components of this rhetoric, its symbols and buzz-words, certainly have their uses, for example in triggering memory (or in this case, our memory of a history). If used excessively, however,

as they were in 2015, symbols and buzz-words can be reductive: draining a subject of its colour and complexity until it has reached its most neutral form.

The problem with applying this process to human history is that people are not neutral, but complex, messy and inconsistent. While it may be impossible to uncover all the contradiction and nuance of our forbearers, it is imperative that they are not reduced to and remembered as symbols. Remembering a symbol of a person is not the same as remembering a person. The range of thoughts and feelings that we experience ourselves does not burden a symbol of a person. They are no longer linked to the consequences of their actions. They simply are: simply brave, simply tragic, simply misguided. And it is much easier to manipulate and misappropriate something that is simple.

This brings me to my second concern regarding Anzac rhetoric: its close ties to nationalism and militarism. ‘The tidy symbolism and euphemisms of the way we pay homage to the soldiers of WWI’, writes journalist Alistair Paulin, ‘risks glorifying and sanitising the reality of war’.<sup>18</sup> Further euphemisms may be also seen in the commonly held belief that New Zealand’s national identity was forged at Gallipoli, rather than at home. In such instances, reference to the ‘bravery and unity’<sup>19</sup> exhibited by New Zealand’s soldiers at Gallipoli works to overshadow some of the country’s more divisive histories, for example, the New Zealand wars between some Māori tribes and government forces, during the 1840s and 1860s. ‘Who wants troubling introspection when we can have heart-warming patriotism instead?’ quips historian Vincent O’Malley on this score.<sup>20</sup>

The sacredness of Anzac, made explicit through its language and symbolism, creates barriers to opposition of what the brand has come to stand for. For if we disagree with the overall sentiments of nationalism and militarism put forward by this brand, then it follows that we also dishonour the memory of those ANZACs who suffered under its banners. Because, do you not agree that they were brave? Do you not agree that the war was a tragedy? My problem is that I do agree and am left with the feeling of being emotionally strong-armed to jump upon the proverbial bandwagon.

## vi.

During the Wairarapa project, I came into contact with this force often and must admit that I did not stand up well to it. There were too many times when I did not want to rock the boat and did not want to offend. So, in moments of discomfort, when I should have opposed the suggestions of others, I just let things happen. Despite my aversion to having my artwork associated with nationalism, I let a reporter from a local newspaper take a picture of me and the postcards in front of a New Zealand flag.

Worse still, as if I had not learned from the first experience, I allowed a reporter from the dreaded *Seven Sharp* to attend a workshop.<sup>21</sup> They came to the region to do a piece on the Kaiparoro community and their involvement with

the Anzac memorial bridge. The community had worked hard to preserve their bridge, fundraising for years to pay for its maintenance. This kind of national promotion meant a lot to them, and I did not want to let them down. So, in full knowledge of the kind of story that *Seven Sharp* would produce, I let them attend. Thankfully, my project did not meet the story brief: New Zealanders who love their memorials. It was not included in the piece.

‘Nothing changes instantaneously’, Margaret Atwood wrote. ‘In a gradually heating bathtub you’d be boiled to death before you knew it.’<sup>22</sup> This was what was happening to me. In both of these cases, the people-pleaser in me silenced all internal protest and doubt. Looking back on it, through my postcards, I was also applying this same pressure to others. When casting back to what my project had originally aimed to do; to give participants a platform to make their own commemorative gesture (as Falkner and I once had), I remember some of the more humbling responses that participants submitted, and feel happy in the memory. Mostly however, I remember the feeling of the time: excited crowds attending parades of First World War tanks, and a child creating snow angels in a street laden with paper poppies, and my own feelings of growing discomfort with what I was creating: another addition to the noise and ritual of the contemporary Anzac spectacle.

## vii.

I thankfully have a lifetime of chances ahead of me to learn from this experience: to assert my views, to be stubborn in my work. But what of the memory of those who were involved in the war? Those whose photographs and letters are now used to prop up a sentimental, unthinking picture of nationhood. These people no longer have voices to oppose this portrayal of themselves, but I think if they were here now, they would oppose it. I do not think that they would want to be remembered this way. In the words of WWI veteran, Tony Fagen:

Today people would say that we were brainwashed with patriotism. Britannia Rules the Waves on our side, and Deutschland Uber Alles on the other. And now go out and kill each other . . . I finished the war with a nervous breakdown, or shell shock as it was then called, in hospital for seven months. I didn’t wish to talk to people about what had happened to me, and what I had been through. You were well aware that anybody who had not been on a battlefield couldn’t possibly comprehend what you were talking about. How could they understand? And what good was I, and what did I know of anything, after four years of that? I was lucky to get a job and somewhere to live after four years of literally bleeding for my country.

Yes, I still think of Gallipoli. You may well ask if any war is worth it. You may well ask those lines of white crosses under which are buried the finest young fellows New Zealand could produce: Was it worth it? Was it worth your lives? No. No. It was not.<sup>23</sup>

I think that these men would have been sick at the thought that their words and images would one day be used to prop up a new kind of nationalism and borderline propaganda. That their own bitter memories, and the memory of their peers for whom they grieved, would be reduced to sentimental fables of a specific New Zealand bravery and pluck, which continues to this day, and has built a way of life that we should be proud to protect.

I have not returned to this subject, and no longer make artwork about this history. I have been sufficiently scared off and fatigued by this experience and now prefer for my subject matter to settle outside of political hotspots.

Indeed, I have not gone to an Anzac Day service since.

But perhaps doing nothing is worse than doing something, even if that something comes out all wrong? I still can't decide.

## Endnotes

1. Fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula, in modern day Turkey, this relatively minor campaign of the First World War was conceived as a means to take control of the Dardanelles Strait, a strategic water passage that if captured could allow the Allies to take Constantinople and push the Ottoman-Turks out of the war. The campaign was a tragedy and a failure. Eight months of fighting and stalemate brought about 44,000 Allied, and 87,000 Ottoman casualties.
2. ANZAC is an acronym for Australia and New Zealand Army Corps; a combined force that landed on the shores of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. Today, the term Anzac especially signifies a shared heritage and culture between these two nations, and is often used broadly, evoking notions of national identity.
3. "The Making of Anzac Day", New Zealand History, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, last modified 22 April 2016, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/first-anzac-days>.
4. Bryce Edwards, "Anzac Roundup: Political Fatigue and Dissent", *New Zealand Herald*, 24 April 2015, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=466&objectid=11438125](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&objectid=11438125).
5. 1 News, "Record Turnouts at Packed Anzac Day Dawn Services", Television New Zealand, 25 April 2015, <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/record-turn-outs-at-packed-anzac-day-dawn-services-6300165>.
6. John Armstrong, "Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War, Museum of Te Papa Tongarewa, April 2015 – April 2019", *The New Zealand Journal of Public History* 5, no. 1 (2017): 59.
7. Daemon Salesa, "Easter over Anzac", interview with Jim Mora, The Panel, Radio New Zealand, 25 August 2015, [https://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/player?audio\\_id=201768117](https://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/player?audio_id=201768117).
8. I have yet to receive a letter in reply.
9. Connah Podmore to Frank McKenna, 27 May 2013, in author's possession.
10. Connah Podmore to Frank McKenna, 11 June 2013, in author's possession.

11. Connah Podmore to Alfred Falkner, March 2015, in author's possession.
12. Vivian makes this observation within his larger analysis of habituated witnessing—or the ways in which modern day forms of witnessing have become a form of memorialization, and societal habits of memorialization have become forms of witnessing. For more see Bradford Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing: Rhetorical Invention, Historical Remembrance, and Public Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).
13. Graham Seal, "Anzac: The Sacred in the Secular", *Journal of Australian Studies* 31, no. 91 (2007): 137.
14. Participants who resisted the use of Anzac rhetoric often expressed opposition to war and used language typical of anti-war protests. Others drew parallels between their own lives and of those of a different era (e.g. the experience of nervously waiting for a loved one to return). The messages of these more intimate postcards contained a certain humility that is often missed in Anzac rhetoric, which tends to favor notions of bravery, sacrifice and large-scale waste.
15. Mike Hosking, *Seven Sharp*, 24 April 2015, Television New Zealand.
16. Salesa, interview
17. Salesa, interview
18. Alistair Paulin, 'On the brink of WWI overload', *Nelson Mail*, 11 April 2015, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/opinion/67679161/on-the-brink-of-wwi-overload>.
19. John Key, "ANZAC DAY 2015 Gallipoli Dawn Service John Key Address", video, 25 April 2015, 6:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDW1eFMajRQ>.
20. Vincent O'Malley, "Historical amnesia over New Zealand's own wars", *The Dominion Post*, 22 April 2015, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/67944795/Historical-amnesia-over-New-Zealands-own-wars>.
21. Seven Sharp is a New Zealand current affairs programme, particularly well known for its tongue-and-cheek delivery, and playful exchanges between its presenters. The programme's former presenter, Mike Hosking, has variously been criticised for displaying a bias in opinion, and for being out-of-touch with some of the country's population.
22. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 56.
23. Tony Fagen, interview by Maurice Shadbolt, *Voices of Gallipoli* (Auckland: David Ling Publishing Ltd, 1988), 24-25.

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## Biographical Note

Connah Podmore's practice draws from personal experiences, reflecting on memory, subject, and place. Working across drawing and writing, her artwork considers states of contradiction and uncertainty through poetic and intuitive response. Podmore's recent projects have focused on the humble and unremarkable details of her every day, aiming to depict them with dignity and significance. Podmore completed a Master of Fine Arts with Distinction from Massey University in 2014. Recent exhibitions include *Tunnels, Pits, Pools* at play\_station (2017), *I'd Rather Be Both* at Blue Oyster Art Project Space (2016), and *Light Makes Soft* at 30 Upstairs Gallery (2016). She lives and works in Wellington, New Zealand.

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# Kapo, Ka Pō Ka Awatea<sup>1</sup>

Stuart Foster and Kura Puke

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Stuart Foster and Kura Puke

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### Abstract

New Zealand designer Stuart Foster and artist Kura Puke worked with digital technologies to create an animated semblance of a revered Māori *taonga* (treasure). The collaborative objective was to create portable artworks that contribute to new opportunities for visibility, modes of engagement, and revitalised presence within both the *taonga*'s community of origin and viewers across time and space.

In commemoration of a *tauīhu* (prow of a war canoe) that was included in the landmark *Te Maori* exhibitions in the United States (1984-1986), two artworks were created. *Tira Taonga* (2015) presented an audio-visual animation of the *tauīhu*; a reflection of the culmination of cultural protocol and technical applications that ensured understanding and agreement by the *taonga*'s guardians and artwork participants in investigating further digital processes and expressive iterations. *Te Mauri* (2016) developed the *tauīhu* animation from a two-dimensional flat surface into a three-dimensional space. *Te Mauri* was comprised of a hollow museum case in which a holographic *tauīhu* slowly appeared in a life-like illusion, alongside vocal ceremonial expressions.

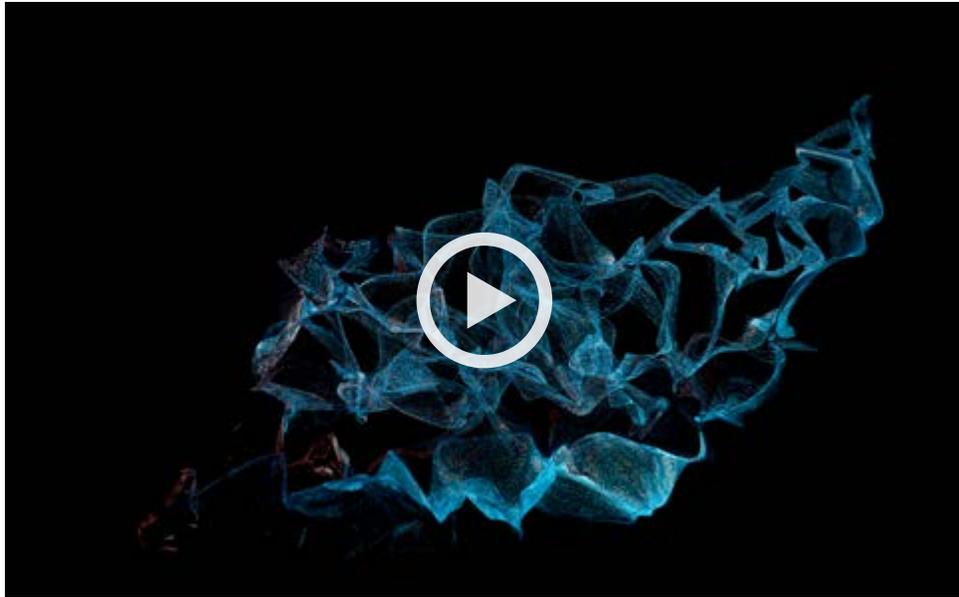
In a virtual revisit of the *tauīhu* to New York in 2016, *Te Mauri* sought to create an experience rejuvenating the memory of the *taonga*, the *Te Maori* event, and the elders who facilitated its realisation. In an artistic expression including a digital medium, *Te Mauri* represents *taonga* as a potent force of memory, its cues, agency, and continuum revealing the enduring momentum of Māori knowledge that integrates new experiences of *taonga*.

Keywords: Māori art, *taonga*, digital cultural heritage, *mātauranga* Māori, digital light technologies, memory, *Te Maori*

*Ka warewaretia e tatau  
He aha rawa ngā kōrero aha atu rā  
E hono a wairua, ka maharatia ake e tatau<sup>2</sup>*

*For all that is said or done  
What we remember is how it made us feel*

Figure 1. Stuart Foster and Kura Puke with Te Matahiapo. Audio visual clip for *Te Mauri* (for projection within the cabinet). Audio: Kurt Komene and Hinemoa Edwards.



1\_Te\_Mauri\_1080.mp4, duration 2 mins.

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/258751410/8b363b5239>

### *Te Mauri: An Artwork*

From a wide, dark, empty display case *karakia* (chant) becomes audible; a male voice is recognised through the depth and timbre of words flowing out in an undulating incantation. The listener is taken on a spatial journey; beginning in the universe through the sky realms connecting to land, traversing the coastal tides, the seas, and out to the oceans. From there the mind alights to the concept of *tauihu*, a figurehead for travelling vessels of knowledge, and *mana* (authority). The clarity of intention and capacity is implicit within this oration—the *atua* (personification of Māori world view) and *tupuna* (ancestors) are present.

As the *karakia* concludes, a form begins to emerge from within the space, a high definition image of a *tauihu* reveals itself. The *tauihu* is bathed in blue light—illumination and shadow bringing into focus a sense of weight and solidity, enhancing the surfaces, texture, patterning, and traces of red-ochre hues.

A melodic *maioha* (call) follows; a female voice in lilting pitch and toning,

bringing texture to words and vowels. The image begins to slowly unfurl, wavering, folding out into fluid spiralling forms, dispersing into their smallest parts. Pixels, in soft vaporous whorls, twinkle with assurity of the night sky. In alignment to the concluding *maioha*, the movements reverse, the stardust begins transforming back to the *tauihu*. Fading into darkness, the cabinet emptiness resonates with the inception of an organic, human, sensory experience.

This is a description of experiencing *Te Mauri* for the first time. The holographic image—an illusion of a real object—becomes present, in a form which dissolves to reveal perhaps its true self—its *tauihu* essence—as illuminated points of light. Alongside the voices in ancient incantation, visual symbolism elicits memory, emotion, and wonder. Both ephemeral and grounding in its effect, *Te Mauri* offers another threshold for new ways of engaging with *taonga*—digital technologies—to see how, or if, the virtual, *wairua*, and other unseen qualities may reveal themselves through these effects.

For this article, *Tira Taonga* and *Te Mauri* are defined by *mātauranga* Māori (Māori knowledge) that may reflect or offer an access to teachings passed down from ancestors and elders.

Figure 2. Stuart Foster and Kura Puke with Te Matahiapo, *Te Mauri*. For *Trigger Points* [group exhibition], Palitz Gallery, Joseph I. Lubin House, Syracuse University, New York City, US, May 19 - June 30, 2016. Photo: Kura Puke.



## Introduction

This article delves into the inspirations for these artworks, *taonga*, and aspects of their underlying knowledge. The legacy of the 1984 *Te Maori* exhibitions continues to impact our contemporary experience of *taonga*, *mātauranga* Māori, and new modalities for aesthetic experiences that add to our understanding in our lives here in *Te Ao Mārama* (The World of Light). *Mātauranga* Māori ‘refers not only to Māori knowledge, ‘mātauranga’ encompasses not only *what* is known but also *how* it is known—that is, the way of perceiving and understanding the world, and the values or systems of thought that underpin those perceptions’.<sup>3</sup>

While *taonga* are entities in their own right, these ‘treasured possessions’ also have the revered role as holders and communicators of knowledge. Through the socially-activated presence of *taonga*, understandings defined by *mātauranga*

Māori are integrated within the lives of their communities. While adhering to the fundamental values that sustain environmental and cultural resilience, Māori knowledge continues to grow, extend, and expand through use of digital technologies. Since the time of *Te Maori* and preceding generations, digital technologies have become increasingly entwined in the social and cultural landscape, offering different experiences in engagement with *taonga*. Language, ceremony, and creative endeavour continue to nurture and enrich Māori knowledge, guided by cultural processes and protocol. Where knowledge is developed and expressed through the visual, aural, and performing arts, digital technologies are neatly enfolded within *mātauranga* Māori.

*Mātauranga* Māori is based on frameworks that function to explain the origins of life and cyclical processes of which underpin Māori philosophies. The creation phases begin in *Te Kore* (The Void), the emergence of ‘potency and potentiality’ through *Te Pō* (The Night).<sup>4</sup> From these unseen realms, *Te Ao Mārama* manifests as the light from *Te Rā-ngī* (radiant Sun Father) and life from *Papa-tū-ā-nuku* (Earth Mother). These phases are understood as distinct within a whole: connecting the physical and the intangible in an integrated cultural knowledge system. Through ceremonial speech within specific *kaupapa* (purpose, objectives or reason) for an event, this tenet is metaphorically rendered in incremental developmental steps, from a learning phase toward realising higher consciousness or illumination through gaining understanding of the nature of reality itself. In extension, we are active ‘receivers and transmitters of ligh[t]’,<sup>5</sup> in our time here in the physical realm. This foundational framework sets down a process that may guide the transitions within our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls in *Te Ao Mārama*—the realisation of knowledge and understanding, towards wisdom and illumination.

In this article we can only engage in abridged aspects of *mātauranga* Māori, as we discuss how the artworks offer aesthetic and communicative experiences that might resonate with descendants and wider audiences, and, may bridge understandings of the qualities and effects of digital tools as fitting within and relevant to Māori knowledge systems.<sup>6</sup>

## Background: The Artworks in Context

### *Te Maori* Exhibition

The year 2019 marks 35 years since the spectacular dawn opening of the *Te Maori* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. *Te Maori* travelled within the United States commencing in September 1984 and was shown in four major cities.<sup>7</sup> The touring exhibition provided a rare, public encounter with Māori treasures not only experienced as artworks in themselves, but also as cultural, social, and spiritual entities. Through participation in *tikanga* (protocol) and *kawa* (ritual) a shift in perception occurred for the US audiences; from ‘seeing’ artworks

to ‘experiencing’ *taonga* that are regarded as ‘living’ intermediaries of physical and spiritual worlds. The public anticipation of experiencing a cultural encounter rather than viewing ‘art objects’, caused the museum to turn away 500 people having reached full capacity for the dawn opening.<sup>8</sup>

One hundred and seventy-four treasures left their holdings from New Zealand museum collections,<sup>9</sup> under the secure guardianship of their descendants, and travelled immense distances, traversing many thresholds and boundaries, both physical and spiritual, to be welcomed into the international arena.

A significant aspect of these exhibitions were the *tira*, the *kaitiaki* or cultural entourage who accompanied their *taonga*. Definitions for *tira* include ‘a travelling group’ etc,<sup>10</sup> a ‘choir’, ‘ray’, or ‘beam’.<sup>11</sup> In oral traditions *tira* can allude to the *mauri* or energetic ‘force of life’ of the collective who embody and reflect the cultural imperative of the specific *kaupapa* for an event.<sup>12</sup>

For each opening, tribal elders ceremonially rendered and illuminated space for each *taonga*, allowing each *mauri*, to be grounded and emitted through the performative articulation of *whakapapa*—a layered knowledge system identifying the connection of all things; people, nature, the cosmos.

The accompanying descendants or *tira* were integral to these events. *Te Maori* brought together some of the most highly regarded *tohunga* (experts),<sup>13</sup> the highest calibre in ceremonial processes, genuine *aroha* for the *taonga* and warm engagement with the audiences. These events transformed public perceptions of Māori visual forms as dynamic entities in themselves, in which they also lived out identities entwined in their communities, land, genealogy and knowledge. Dimensions beyond the visual came into play, the intangible came into presence with these very tangible forms.

Figure 3. Still tauihu (middle distance) in *Te Maori*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, US, 1984. License: TVNZ Getty Images.<sup>14</sup>



## Te Hokinga Mai Exhibition

In 1986 *Te Maori* returned home, and following a re-naming ceremony, *Te Hokinga Mai* toured four major New Zealand cities, within protocol that allowed the significance of the event to be reflected upon and experienced within an *iwi* (tribal) and national context.<sup>15</sup>

The unprecedented participation of *tangata whenua* (indigenous people of the land) demonstrated the *mana* or great authority, prestige, and importance of the opening and closing events. The depth of knowledge carried by the elders and their capacity to forge new knowledge was revealed in *reo pōwhiri* (ceremonial call), *karakia* (incantation), *whaikōrero* (formal speech), and *waiata* (song).

The *tauheke* (learned elders) and their respective *iwi* came in force, to bring the *taonga* in safety and to marvel at and reconnect to their *taonga*. The *taonga* were then settled back by *mana whenua* (tribal authority) into their respective ‘housings’, mainly in public museum collections. However, this return for the *taonga* was not back to obscurity; *Te Hokinga Mai* reconnected Māori to their *taonga*. The international exposure and recognition brought a ‘national’ awareness to the intrinsic relationships of *taonga* to *te ao* Māori (the Māori world).

## Te Maori and Te Hokinga Mai: The Impact

*Te Maori* (1984-86) and the *Hokinga Mai* (1986-87) marked a turning point in the national identity of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and crystallised for *iwi*, the *mana* of their *taonga*, *mātauranga*, and *Tangata Whenua* status.

The preface to a 1994 *Te Maori* publication describes how:

Thousands of Māori, young and old, suddenly saw their arts and their traditions in a new light. It was a brilliant light that put a warm glow on everything it touched, that was then . . .<sup>16</sup>

Hirini Moko Mead reflected on both the gains of the profound rejuvenation for Māori culture and the challenges ahead. Much has been said and written of this paradigmatic shift, and the entwined political, cultural, and social complexities, and, the ongoing assertion of *iwi* self-determination. The establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 to examine claims of breaches to the Treaty of Waitangi, has generated robust insights into the nature of *taonga*, requiring a shift and expansion in understanding, reflected in the use of Māori terminology. In regards to the long-standing declaration of guardianship and ownership rights, Amiria Henare wrote, ‘Māori are not only insisting upon but demonstrating the persistent salience and enduring vitality of their own concepts, and, by extension, of distinctively Māori ways of being’.<sup>17</sup>

## Taonga

The meanings of *taonga* encompass everything that is of vital regard in *te ao* Māori, the Māori world. The Māori version of Article Two of the Treaty of Waitangi ‘guarantees “tino rangatiratanga” (full authority or chieftainship) over all “taonga” (treasures which to Māori include both the tangible and intangible, material and non-material)’.<sup>18</sup>

A Waitangi Tribunal Report (1990) stated:

Taonga are things valued and treasured. They may include those things which give sustenance and those things which support taonga. Generally speaking the classification of taonga is determined by the use to which they are put and/or their significance as possessions. They are imbued with tapu (an aura of protection) to protect them from wrongful use, theft or desecration.<sup>19</sup>

Amiria Henare dispels the tendency for ‘objectification’ in that,

taonga are not simply artefacts of individual subjectivity, nor of human agency in general; they are at once the product and fabric of dynamic relational matrices involving all manner of entities, that shift and transform over time.<sup>20</sup>

In regards to responsibilities for *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) and intellectual property rights, Wai 262, the most comprehensive Waitangi Treaty claim to date, concluded to make distinctions for *taonga* as ‘Taonga Works’ and ‘Taonga Species’. Taonga Works are defined as:

First, it is a creation of the pre-existing and distinctive body of knowledge, values, and insights we call *mātauranga* Māori. Secondly, it is a result of the effort and creativity of actual people whether in modern times or the distant past. Each taonga work has *kaitiaki*—those whose lineage or calling creates an obligation to safeguard the taonga itself and the *mātauranga* that underlies it.<sup>21</sup>

Taonga Species are less well defined, but refer to *taonga* that are environmental phenomena, such as land, seas, indigenous flora and fauna. It refers to *taonga* from which *mātauranga* is created from, rather than a creation by people.<sup>22</sup>

The report contentiously stated Taonga Species have ‘property rights’ and Taonga Works have ‘*kaitiakitanga*’ rights. In this article we use this term ‘*taonga* works’ only to keep a distinction between the *tauīhu* (*taonga* works), the artworks (‘Taonga-derived Works’),<sup>23</sup> and *taonga* that pertain to the phenomena of the natural world such as forests and water, or—specific to this article—space and the electromagnetic spectrum (*taonga* species).

All *taonga* are understood to hold meaning and elicit affect. Paul Tapsell identifies interrelated qualities:

Mana (authority, power prestige); tapu (protected, sacred, prohibited) korero (oratory, narratives); karakia (recitation, incantation); whakapapa (genealogy,

systematic framework); wairua (everlasting spirit); mauri (life force, life essence); ihi (spiritual power); wehi (to incite fear and awe); and wana (authority and integrity).<sup>24</sup>

Deirdre Brown questions ‘whether the inherent and essential qualities that give an object, person or environment their meaning can be transferred to a digital copy’.<sup>25</sup> This inquiry was a strong aspect in our work, whether on behalf of the *tauihu*, *Tira Taonga* and *Te Mauri* can transport or express those qualities to viewers.

### Tauihu

Figure 4. *Tauihu*, A78\_127, Matai wood, gifted by Mr Manu White for Manukōrihi people. Photo and caption: Puke Ariki Museum – with permission.<sup>26</sup>



Exhibited in *Te Maori*, the *tauihu* is defined as a war canoe prow from the Taranaki region, carved within the Te Huringa 1 stylistic classification period between 1800 and 1900.<sup>27</sup> This *tauihu* was discovered in a swamp north of Manukōrihi Pā, Waitara, Taranaki, in 1938 and kept at Ōwae Marae. In 1960 it was transferred to the Taranaki Museum renamed Puke Ariki Museum (2003) and housed within the *iwi* gallery Te Takapou Whāriki o Taranaki (The Sacred Woven Mat of Taranaki). While there is *mātauranga iwi* (tribal knowledge), archival information from various publications are brief.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 5-6. *Tauihu*, Te Takapou Whāriki o Taranaki gallery, Puke Ariki Museum, Ngāmotu New Plymouth, 2014. Photo: Kura Puke.



## The Artworks: *Tira Taonga* and *Te Mauri*

### The Process: *Tira Taonga*, 2015

Encased ‘safely’ behind glass with several other *taonga*,<sup>29</sup> the *tauihu* was reduced to an object for ‘museum viewing’, rather than presented in a way that may reveal its original purpose and associated values defined within *mātauranga* Māori. Brenda Tipene-Hook asserts that museum traditions have displayed *taonga*,

[w]ithout considering the role they played in the lives of those who used them, the role they have yet to play in the lives of their descendant communities, and the complexity of the whāriki upon which these taonga travel, does not allow them to tell their story as it should be told.<sup>30</sup>

Since *Te Mauri*, new generations of *iwi*-connected *taonga* curators have been highly instrumental in maintaining these relationships. We spent time at the museum case and within *wānanga* (knowledge creation process) with members of our creative group, where we formed our proposal to the *kaitiaki* for permission to photograph the *tauihu* towards the creation of two artworks.<sup>31</sup> One of the new works, *Tira Taonga*,<sup>32</sup> was to mark the commencement of the retracing and return visit to New York in 2016, and the other, *Te Mauri*—a further technical development—was intended for the actual travel to New York. Through consent from Manukōrihi Pā Trust, the *tauihu kaitiaki* (guardians), we proceeded to work with the *taonga* at Puke Ariki Museum, in collaboration with Glen Skipper, an *iwi* member and *Pou Tiaki Taonga* (curator) for the Māori collection at that time.

For these artworks we investigated how three-dimensional scanning techniques and digital lighting, might enhance the *tauihu*’s visuality in order to create a malleable, high-definition image. The LED (light-emitting diode) lanterns utilised modulated sound and light waves to send vocals through the light. The vocals—either recorded or ‘live’ (via microphone)—manifest as both light and sound through the lanterns and speakers to light-sound-colour ‘wash’ the *tauihu*. The different qualities of the voice—such as pitch and tone—register in the qualities of the light-colour emitted. For example, very high voices with a wavering pitch of a call can send different colours and light effects from the digital lamp as compared to those of deeper voices in incantation. We played recorded *karakia* from our *tohunga* and via a microphone we sent *maioha* through during photographing. The *tauihu* was captured in blue, red, gold, and green tones. Our notion was that the immediate space and perhaps the *taonga* itself was resonating to the voice frequencies and to the intentions carried through those vocals.

Figure 7. *Tauihu*, for *Tira Taonga* (sound-carrying light: green) photographed at Puke Ariki Museum, Ngāmotu New Plymouth. August 17, 2014. Photo: Stuart Foster.



Figure 8. *Tauihu*, for *Tira Taonga* (sound-carrying light: green) photographed at Puke Ariki Museum, Ngāmotu New Plymouth. August 17, 2014. Photo: Derek Hughes.



Figure 9. *Tauihu*, for *Tira Taonga* (sound-carrying light: gold) photographed at Puke Ariki Museum, Ngāmotu New Plymouth. August 17, 2014. Photo: Stuart Foster.



### The Process: *Te Mauri*, 2016

Photographs of the *taonga* covering a variety of angles were ‘stitched together’ digitally using photogrammetry techniques.<sup>33</sup> Through software, the image data was developed into three-dimensional ‘point clouds’.<sup>34</sup> As digital files, each pixel has an individual image identity. Through processing software,<sup>35</sup> we are able to work at the pixel level, re-coding the movement of the pixel or a group of pixels. The animated grouping and movements were choreographed to the ceremonial vocals as an entwined aural-visual entity. Our key objective was to lift the image from the confines of the screen within a space that provides a three-dimensional illusion. Our expectation was that this *tauihu* presentation would reveal or encourage other qualities to come into play.

Figure 10. *Tauihu* (for *Te Mauri*) accessible open-source 3D modelling software, 2015. Screenshot: Stuart Foster.

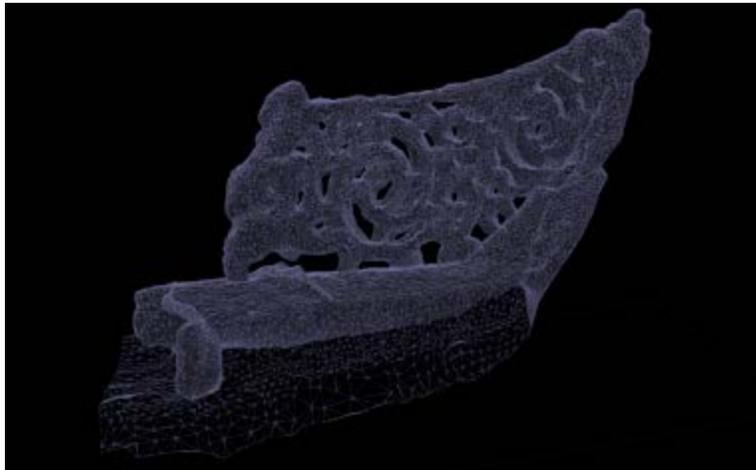
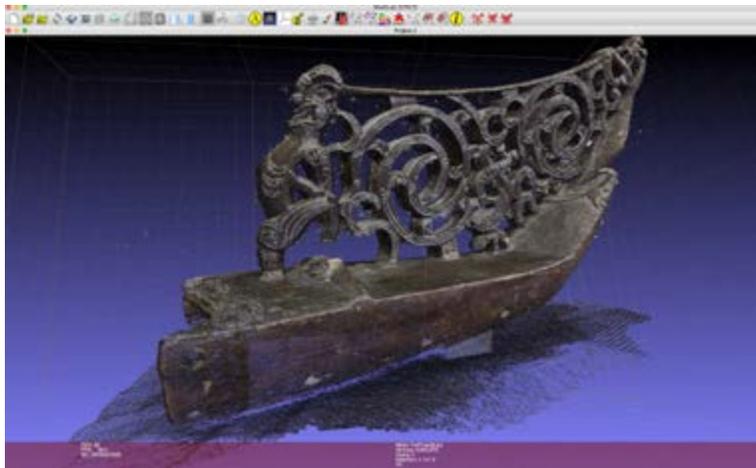


Figure 11. *Tauihu* (for *Te Mauri*) image software, 2015. Screenshot: Stuart Foster.



*Tira Taonga* and *Te Mauri* sought to commemorate the *tauihu* and its *tira* as a holographic form in an animated visual and aural expression. Our intention for these artworks was to bring together some of those qualities of a *taonga*, into a digital replication with Māori understandings or notions of digital qualities, and, that may also offer an experience that may support a bridging of knowledge systems.

*Tira Taonga* visually presented the *tauihu* through an initial photographic effect and *Te Mauri* extended that into three dimensions. A digital image symbolically transported into a new case offered a spatial capacity to produce a virtual *tauihu* form, with flexible and multiple viewpoints. Together with image and ceremony *Te Mauri* may contribute to the awareness of a Māori view of ‘*taonga* work’ and other ongoing creative expression.<sup>36</sup>

### Te Ao Māori: A Māori World View

Te māramatanga Ko tupua kawa, Ko tawhito kawa, Te matoe o te Rā-ngī, Te taketake o Rongo, i te whaea, Papa-tū-ā-nuku.	A new consciousness. This is the principle of life, The ancient principle of law, In the open space of radiant sun, of peace, balance for aio of nature, on revolving Earth Mother.
No konei tōku māramatanga, e aratakina nei tōku ngākau, e whiri nei i ōku whakaaro, e tau tika ai tōku māramatanga. Ko te tapu e here ana i āu. Kia tika! kia pono! tētehi atu māramatanga hou!	My conscience comes from here, guided by the processes of my mind-intuition, in the deliberation of my thoughts, to understand, to be enlightened. Bound by the tapu of Māori law . . . Honesty! belief! & integrity! of any new consciousness!

Te Huirangi Eruera Waikerepuru, 2013.<sup>37</sup>

A Māori world view is defined succinctly by Reverend Maori Marsden as a series of interconnected realms in which the universe is and emerges from, a philosophy where the key principle is an ongoing ‘cosmic process unified and bound together by spirit’.<sup>38</sup> From a Māori understanding, the nature of reality is a dual-makeup of spirit/matter, seen and unseen.

The Māori world view has a holistic perspective that might underpin the response to all *taonga*, artwork and other creative cultural expression. This perspective is based upon the universe and all within it, as energies in constant flow. Energies are recognised to have different qualities and are conceptually ordered within three key states. The *tohunga* Maori Marsden, ‘describes holism as seeing the three realms of the Māori worlds as an integrated whole’.<sup>39</sup> He interpreted each of the three states of existence as *kete* or metaphorical baskets of knowledge. First, *Tua-uri*, ‘beyond in the world of darkness’: ‘This is the “real” world behind the world of sense perception of the natural world’ [and] ‘where cosmic processes originated and continue to operate in a complex series of rhythmical patterns of energy which operate behind this world of sense perception’.<sup>40</sup> Second, *Te Aro-nui*, the physical world, ‘that before us . . . the natural world around us as apprehended by the senses’.<sup>41</sup> Third, *Te Ao Tua-*

*ātea* which represents the realities beyond *wātea* (space-time); it is the eternal realm, the ‘ultimate reality’.<sup>42</sup>

Maori Marsden also asserts the addition of a fourth *kete*, ‘The world of symbol’ as ‘a deliberate creation of the mind’,<sup>43</sup> a vehicle to communicate knowledge including words, forms, ceremonies, and narrative ‘by which the human can grasp, understand and reconcile the worlds of sense perception and the real world behind that creation’.<sup>44</sup>

These *kete* hold knowledge of *Te Kore*, *Te Pō* and *Te Ao Mārama*. This embodied knowledge, names entities in expansive genealogies that connect all energies, particles and matter, animate and inanimate. The knowledge is *tapu* (state of restriction, protection) requiring mindful regard and learned sets of protocol that ensure the spirit/matter connections remain clear and distinct. The charged state of *tapu* is acknowledged and negotiated through ritual processes of *kawa* and *tikanga* to ensure safety and wellbeing.

The value of *taonga* as genealogical connectors, affords *taonga* as having agency beyond its physical form, that may be symbolised, identified and brought into presence through ceremonial experiences. This presence may be registered virtually through the digital form.

To register qualities such as *mauri* and *wairua*, unseen but identified in a holistic capacity, extends further to make sense of these energies, their pathways genealogically mapped through space, and the qualities of space itself. This perspective might be aligned or applied to notions of the workings of the virtual. Technological tools are centred on utilisation of the electromagnetic spectrum of which the flow of data, is registered through computer networks.

Figure 12. Stuart Foster with first glimpse of *Te Mauri* in workshop studio, Wellington, 2016. Photo: Kura Puke.



## Inhabiting Digital Space

William J. Mitchell proposes that we now function in ‘an era of electronically extended bodies living at intersection points of the physical and virtual worlds’.<sup>45</sup> Stephen Perella contends the ‘virtual is an extension of ourselves into a manufactured and constructed space. It is not a separate space but an extrusion of being’,<sup>46</sup> and, as Peter Anders asserts, ‘an extension of our consciousness’.<sup>47</sup>

In regards to the technology that harbours digital space, we regard technology essentially as a tool, and as Michael Polyani states, tools form ‘part of ourselves, the operating persons’.<sup>48</sup> Digital technological tools are applied and operate through the electromagnetic spectrum, within and across space.

In a Māori world view, space is embodied in a genealogically framed world view, where space is itself an *atua*. Within *Te Ao Mārama*, the electromagnetic spectrum is situated within the realm of *Rā-ngī* (Sky Father) of which the atmosphere of *Papa-tū-ā-nuku* (Earth Mother) protects Earth from exposure to a range of higher energy and frequency. *Rā-ngī* and *Papa-tū-ā-nuku* are personified as parents who genealogically link all phenomena, nature, and people. To consider or embrace a holistic perspective may meaningfully shape our regard for space, for digital technological tools and the effects or meanings brought to virtual experiences via digital technique.

## Māori View of *Te Tai Ātea* (space) *me Ira Ātea* (spectrum)

Te Huirangi Waikerepuru conceptualises layers within the universe as all ‘energy and matter’,<sup>49</sup> with ‘geological, biological, and genealogical inter-relationships’.<sup>50</sup> He offers examples such as ‘*wā* (time), *ātea* (space), *hihiri* (energy), *āwheko* (matter), *takitahi* (inter-relations), *wai* (water), *ora* (life), and *moengaroa* (deep sleep)’.<sup>51</sup>

For Te Huirangi Waikerepuru the understandings specific to the spectrum can be thought of as layerings and pathways of energies that ‘Māori people have always known and acknowledged’.<sup>52</sup> The energies manifest between the *atua* *Rā-ngī-nui* and *Papa-tū-ā-nuku*,<sup>53</sup> in the *ātea* (space) of *Rā-ngī* and *Papa-tū-ā-nuku*.

Te Ara Tukutuku  
Te Ara Tūnui  
Te Ara Tūroa  
Te Ara Tū Ātea Mutunga Te Kore  
Te Māra Tū Ātea Mutunga Kore

In this *karakia* excerpt, Te Huirangi Waikerepuru translates ‘*Māra Tū Ātea Mutunga Kore*’ as within ‘the celestial gardens of infinite space’,<sup>54</sup> the gardens are a reference to space, as an organic, regenerating, flow of energies, and ‘the action of scattering the seed of *wai*’.<sup>55</sup>

We talk to the spectrum through *karanga*, through *karakia* . . . this is the pathway for transmission . . . of sending the message, through space, through the sun. The spectrum is part of the parent of life, it is part of the universe'.<sup>56</sup>

Te Huirangi Waikerepuru contributed much leadership and knowledge on the *tapu* nature of the electromagnetic spectrum during the Waitangi Tribunal process in regards to ongoing Treaty claims.<sup>57</sup> In Wai 776 the Tribunal found 'that electromagnetic spectrum, in its natural state, was known to Māori and was a *taonga*.'<sup>58</sup>

Digital networks and virtual reality are seamlessly incorporated into a Māori world view understood within a *whakapapa* framework—but conceptualised as embodied realms where spaces continually open up, extend, or enclose; and where boundaries and thresholds are identified and potentially negotiated by way of *tikanga* Māori (protocols of safety and regard). *Tikanga* Māori upholds the sacredness of 'inter-relationships with *ā-atua*, potency and energy.'<sup>59</sup>

Figure 13. Kura Puke behind *Te Mauri*, in *Trigger Points* exhibition, curated by Heather Galbraith and Andrew J. Saluti, Palitz Gallery, Joseph I. Lubin House, Syracuse University, New York City, US, May 19-June 30, 2016. Photo: Sasha Huber.



## Co-Presence

A Māori sense of the intangible and virtual space can be registered through the body as a holistic experience of the corporeal, mental, spiritual, and aesthetic. In reference to Paul Tapsell's earlier description of the inherent or essential qualities of *taonga*, Deirdre Brown notes 'none of these qualities are visual, the property that digital visualisation might solely rely on although ideas of craftsmanship and beauty are inherent in all of them'.<sup>60</sup>

Haidy Geismar draws on Eelco Runia's discussion of 'presence' as 'the affective sense of connecting to reality engendered by photographic technologies' [and that] 'the image draws and holds together the subject and viewer across both time and space'. But also there are other meanings beyond 'what they represent or show us about reality'.<sup>61</sup> In regards to *taonga* and its digital replication, Haidy Geismar asserts the term 'co-presence':

The wairua or spiritual energies, channelled in Māori relationships as they are transmitted through important cultural treasures creates a profound experience of co-presence in which objects are understood as simultaneous links to the past, present and future.<sup>62</sup>

Our collaborative project *Te Ara Wairua* (2014),<sup>63</sup> which made virtual connections between a cloak in a distant collection to *tangata whenua* in Aotearoa, led Haidy Geismar to explain this effect:

The digital images I have been working with constitute a powerful experience of co-presence—the recognition that image making and viewing are also intensely social activities, and that the image draws and holds together the subject and viewer across both time and space.<sup>64</sup>

*Taonga* are portals to understandings, their knowledge ‘rehearsed and performed’ maintaining connection to lands and people.<sup>65</sup> Through digital modalities the *tauīhu* can be remembered and offer new insights. The proposition of *Te Mauri* was—through holographic image and ceremony—to investigate if a surrogate could elicit ‘co-presence’ or ‘evoke *ihi*, *wehi*, and *wana*’.<sup>66</sup> Digital technologies revealing aspects through the absence of the actual *taonga*—within the customary sanction of ceremonial ritual—provide a sense of intangibility through which we access the reality of extending beyond porous boundaries of the body into spaces that continually yield or make way to an ever-expanding consciousness. ‘Thus taonga are time travellers that bridge the generations, enabling descendants to ritually meet their ancestors face to face’,<sup>67</sup> writes Paul Tapsell metaphorically of a felt and known experience. Maybe through digital modalities in ceremonial space, we make those connections, irrespective of physical signifiers, distance or time.

A fundamental imperative of performative incantation is that it reflects and adds to an understanding of an ultimate reality, ‘*mauri*’ manifest in this physical realm of *Te Ao Mārama*. Participation in ritual allows the person to transit from a sense of being physically present to the notion of switching into *taha wairua* (spiritual side) or intangible awareness.

## Revealing Itself

In regards to the digital makeup and effect of the artworks, Te Huirangi Waikerepuru observes:

[E]ach part of that is a separate identity, each of these particles, these pixels, is a separate image identity, but once that image is shaped and given an identity . . . once it is named, it becomes constant, and can be referred to as that. When you are talking about a picture, a photograph, an image; it is showing itself, showing up its own identity . . . it is reflecting itself, it identifies the actual image at a particular point in time’.<sup>68</sup>

*Te Mauri* allowed or revealed aspects of the *tauihu* to occupy immaterial digital space. In extension to images made of light points, the configuration of the *tauihu*, revealed unseen aspects to come into being, through the digital modality. A new entity was created in digital space, of which a life force is felt, acknowledged, and named. While there remains an elusive quality in its ability to move in and out at any particular point in time: it exists, has the opportunity to be ‘itself’ and can be remembered. As Martin Heidegger proposed ‘the essence of technology is by no means anything technological . . . Technology is a way of revealing’.<sup>69</sup>

As Peter Anders maintains, we are ‘increasingly dependant on . . . technology to sustain our social and cultural reality. [It is] part of being human in our time’.<sup>70</sup> It is significant to reflect on these vehicles and instruments for understanding from a Māori world view. It may be through a *wānanga* that an inspired individual or group accept that the agency within the ‘virtual’ or ‘digital space’ may or may not be meaningfully aligned in some way to *mauri* and *wairua*.

## Concluding Thoughts

Our inquiry, summarised in this article, related *Te Maori* to the *tauihu* and to the unseen qualities that may be considered in new ways that extend our thinking and understanding of *taonga*. *Te Mauri* is an artistic layering to meaning, response, ongoing acknowledgement of the *Te Maori* exhibition, and nurturing our engagement to a specific *taonga*. Through the generations, across time and space, *taonga* can continue to live out aspects of themselves, in new expressions of customary understanding.

Memory is also regarded as a *taonga* and a vital knowledge process performs here through digital image and ceremony in transpatial relational experiences that remind us of our dual-reality. *Tira Taonga* and *Te Mauri* both activate memory of a distant *taonga* in a past event and also create new memories and experiences of the *taonga*. If we are to consider the qualities identified by Paul Tapsell, these too may be ‘*taonga* works’ or ‘Taonga-derived Works’. It is ‘through *karakia* we re-remember, we are re-remembering who everybody [is]’.<sup>71</sup> The ceremonial space is where the digital dusts of memory are cohered into a meaningful framework defined by *mātauranga* Māori and brought forward to the next generation.

Steeped in *karakia* from an early age, Inahaa Te Urutahi Waikerepuru responded to the digital works:

[P]oints of light, we are all light therefore we can shape light . . . Our ceremonial rituals guide us to re-remember that we are all light through connecting with the energy between Papa-tū-ā-nuku and Rā-ngī-nui ātea. This is our space, our waka, or, our physical presence and is what we choose to experience in Te Ao Mārama, literally The World of Light—illumination’.<sup>72</sup>

Figures 14-16. Stuart Foster and Kura Puke (with Te Matahiapo), *Te Mauri*, (2016). Four stills from audio-visual clip (projected within cabinet).

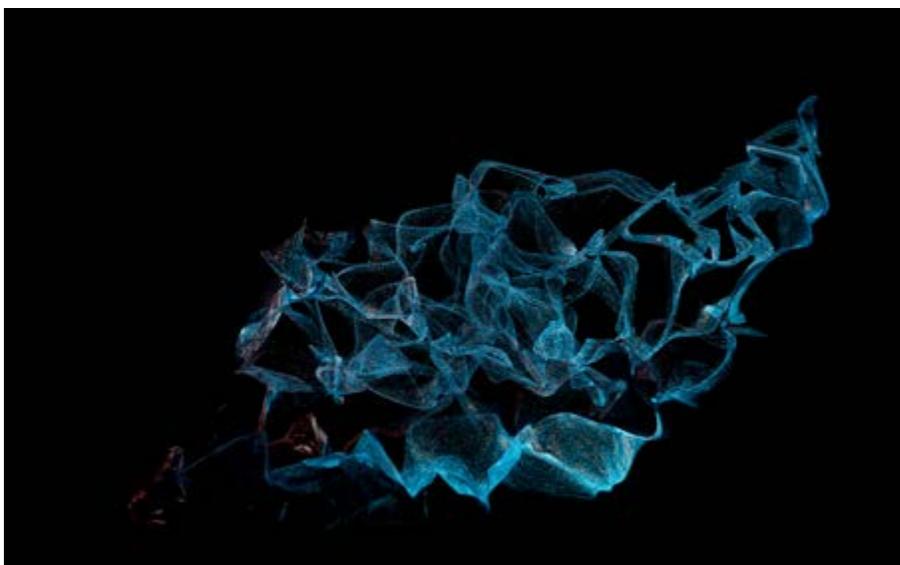
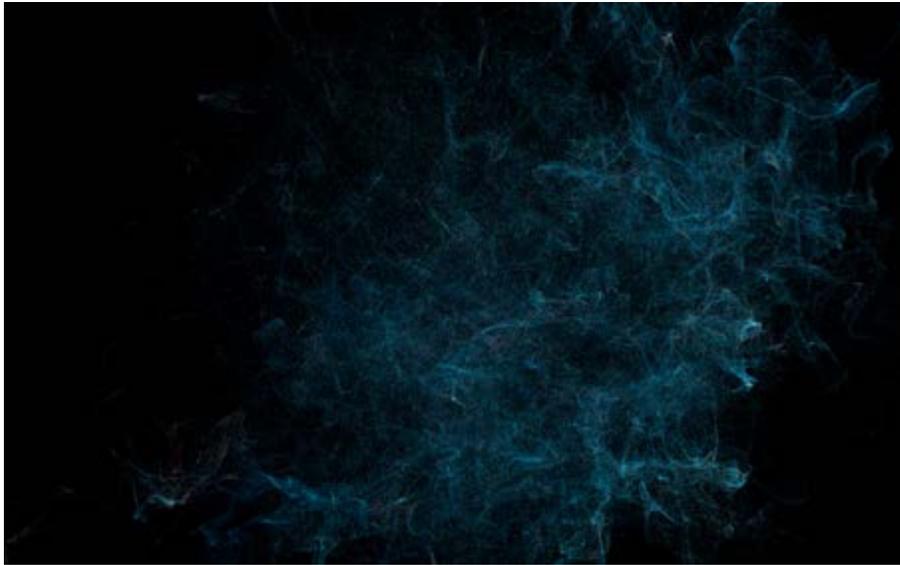




Figure 17. Stuart Foster and Kura Puke (with Te Matahiapo), *Te Mauri*, (2016). Still from audio-visual clip (projected within cabinet).

## Re-remembering

The key desire behind exhibiting the work *Te Mauri* in New York City was to remind the descendants of Ōwae Marae that like their ancestors and elders who travelled with *Te Maori*, they too are the *tira* moving through *Te Ao Mārama* with sacred energy and conscious intention.

One afternoon, out on the Waikarepuru *papakāinga* (communal home base/land), Te Huirangi walked across the paddock to see the progress where we explained ‘We are testing the sound-carrying laser light, Koro’.

‘Ae’, Te Huirangi replied, ‘testing the technology and . . . the humanity behind it.’<sup>73</sup>

In *karakia* the *waka* is metaphorically rendered as a vital embodiment of consciousness.<sup>74</sup> Voyaging through the ‘*wai*’ (water/energetic flow), the keel enables direction, the prow provides a clear signifier of identity, certainty, and *mana* (authority). *Mana* from the ancestors provides the grounding, agency and assurance that this space, *Te Ao Mārama*, offers us the ability to learn, build on what we know, towards new knowledge. Our intention was to create aesthetic experiences that may reflect this and resonate with the people, through time and space.

Ko te Kete Tūāuri, ko te Kete Tūātea  
ko te Kete Aronui, ka tiritiria, ka poupoua  
ki Papa-tū-ā-nuku ka puta te ira tangata  
Ki te whaiao, ki Te Ao Mārama  
Tihe mauri ora !<sup>75</sup>

## Endnotes

1. ‘The tapu will be lifted and darkness will be made into light’. This is an excerpt from a *karakia* (intoned incantation) recited by the *tohunga* (expert) entering *Te Maori*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1984, in Ray Waru. *Koha- Te Maori*, a Cloak of Words (1984; NZ: TVNZ & Mobil, 1984), film, 02.44, accessed June 22, 2018.
2. Te Huirangi Ereuera Waikerepuru, personal communication, Pouakai, Taranaki, 2015. Māori translation of a well-known saying.
3. New Zealand Waitangi Tribunal, *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: A Report into Claims Concerning New Zealand Law and Policy Affecting Māori Culture and Identity*, Te Taumata Tuatahi WAI 262 Waitangi Tribunal Report 2011 (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2011), 22, accessed August 3, 2018.
4. Te Huirangi Ereuera Waikerepuru, personal communication, Pouakai, Taranaki, 2015.
5. Inahaa Te Urutahi Waikerepuru, personal communication, Pouakai, Taranaki, 2015.
6. We are not experts in *mātauranga* Māori, some *kupu* (words) and *whakaaro* (ideas) which offer layered meaning and the potential to contribute further understandings, were guided by our *kaumatua* Te Huirangi Waikerepuru, the late Mereiwa Broughton and other experts and mentors within our research group Te Matahiapo Research Organisation, <http://www.tematahiapo.org/about-us/>.
7. *Te Maori* opening dates: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, September 10, 1984; Saint Louis Art Museum, February 21, 1985; M. H. deYoung Memorial Museum, San Francisco, July 10, 1985; and, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, March 6, 1986, in Hirini Moko Mead, *Magnificent Te Maori: Te Maori Whakahirahira* (Auckland: Heinemann Publishers, 1986), 9, 13, 41, 75, 107.
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14. The central tauihu is flanked by: Left, '12 He Pouwhakamaharatanga (Memorial Post), Waikato, Auckland Institute and Museum (25053)'. Right, '17 He Tahuhu (Ridgepole of a Chief's House), Ngati Awa, Auckland Institute and Museum (50434)'. This information for the three taonga was sourced in, Brian Brake, David Simmons and Merimeri Penfold *Te Māori : Taonga Māori = Treasures of the Māori* (Auckland: Reed with Auckland City Art Gallery & Māori Manaaki Taonga Trust, 2nd edition, 1994), 30, 40, 70. Further information can be sourced in Sidney Moko Mead, editor, *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1984), 193, 200, 227.
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- catalogue, Puke Ariki Museum, Ngāmotu New Plymouth, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://collection.pukeariki.com/objects/21894>. An earlier photograph of the tauihu c.1930s, before damage to the forward facing figure at the front of the prow, accessed 19 June 2018, <https://collection.pukeariki.com/objects/145275>.
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  32. Stuart Foster and Kura Puke (with Te Matahiapo), *Tira Taonga*, 2015, audio-visual 'moving pixel' animation. For, 'reflex\*figment' a group exhibition curated by Heather Galbraith, Engine Room (Gallery), Massey University, Wellington, NZ. September 1- 18, 2015.
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  34. 'Point cloud' is one of the outputs of photogrammetry: to create and measure a large number of data points on the external surfaces of the object being photographed. These points can be moved, made malleable, which in turn changes the form of the model.
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## Glossary

<i>Aotearoa</i>	New Zealand - Land of the Long White Cloud
<i>aroha</i>	unconditional love, respect, compassion, empathy
<i>ātea</i>	space
<i>atua</i>	personification of Māori world view
<i>iwi</i>	tribe
<i>kaitiaki</i>	guardian of a <i>taonga</i>
<i>kaitiakitanga</i>	guardianship
<i>karakia</i>	chant, intoned incantation
<i>karanga</i>	ceremonial chant – <i>wāhine</i> (women)
<i>kaupapa</i>	purpose, objectives, reason
<i>kawa</i>	ritual or process (embodiment of the principle of Māori law)
<i>kaumātua</i>	elder
<i>kete</i>	baskets, containers
<i>maioha</i>	a type of chant/call, without prescribed actions to indicate your presence or appreciation, and/or to beckon
<i>mana</i>	prestige, authority
<i>mana whenua</i>	tribal authority within a specific area
<i>marae</i>	tribal courtyard and complex
<i>mātauranga Māori</i>	Māori knowledge
<i>mauri</i>	the force of life, the life principle
<i>mouri</i>	the spiritual principle
<i>papakāinga</i>	communal home base/ land
<i>reo pōwhiri</i>	ceremonial call – <i>wāhine</i> (women)
<i>taha wairua</i>	spiritual side
<i>tangata whenua</i>	indigenous people of the land
<i>tapu</i>	state of restriction, protection, principle of Māori law
<i>tātai whakapapa</i>	lineage, genealogy, cosmological knowledge framework
<i>tauheke</i>	learned elders
<i>Te Ao Mārama</i>	The World of Light, the World of Life
<i>tikanga</i>	protocols to maintain boundaries of respect and regard

<i>tohunga</i>	expert
<i>tupuna</i>	ancestor/s
<i>waiata</i>	song
<i>wairua</i>	spirit—non-physical
<i>wānanga</i>	knowledge creation process
<i>wātea</i>	space-time
<i>whaikōrero</i>	formal speechmaking – <i>tāne</i> (men)
<i>whakapapa</i>	knowledge origins and layers such as genealogical links or cultural concepts
<i>whāriki</i>	mat, floor or ground covering, sea bed, platform, base
<i>whenua</i>	land, placenta

## Biographical Note

Stuart Foster is a Senior Lecturer at Nga Pae Mahutonga School of Design, Toi Rauwharangi College of Creative Arts, Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University, Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. Stuart’s work reflects a design-led, spatial practice centred on the creation of spatio-temporal narrative environments infused with digital technologies. Presented in public and/or site-specific environments, the research focused on the communication of cultural and social connectedness through the innovative use of digital technology, interdisciplinary aesthetics and ritual performance.

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Kura creates aural, visual artworks and installations through innovative modes to re-imagine knowledge pathways that enhance understanding of customary Māori knowledge systems towards transformative aesthetic and communicative expression for new contexts. Kura has worked in a sustained collaborative practice based in aspects of *mātauranga* Māori, utilizing accessible digital lighting and sound technologies for interactive, *kaupapa*-led experiences.

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# A Park and a Rock

Maddie Leach

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## A Park and a Rock

Maddie Leach

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### Abstract

Since 2008 Maddie Leach has been an artist in residence in Cork, Beaver Island, Tasmania, New Plymouth, Mandurah, and Vancouver. These opportunities have been directly linked to invitations to develop new place-responsive projects in which she has explored historical narratives, community, and memory through processes of reproduction, reiteration, temporality, and dispersal. Leach has a long-standing interest in public practices, site specificity and, more recently, the vested interests of cultural commissioners to reflect and affirm a positive sense of place back to its citizens. This text was written as a reflection on two different experiences of ‘residency’ and the artworks that were subsequently produced. The first, *Evening Echo* (2011-ongoing) centres around an annual cycle of illuminated lights in a small park in Cork’s old Jewish neighbourhood; *28th October 2834* (2015) focuses on the way in which an encounter with a memorial rock and a missing plaque revealed suppressed tensions in small town Western Australia. Both projects have composed an ‘alternate politic’ to official histories, magnifying and revealing their gaps.

Keywords: public art, memorial, place, local government, community, artist in residence

## A Park

*I am remembering now the conversations about Cork and the placing of names in the funny folded fabric of the streets and bridges of that city. How they called it 'Jewtown' for the love of the familiar hidden in it. How they called it 'Passover Bridge' for the naming of their own strange humours. How lately they called it 'Shalom Park' in anticipation of the gasworks being beautified through some grim technical specification—this park being a public remaindering of a little space and a little time, left over after business is all finished and done. So many places emptied out across old Mitteleuropa. But how has it happened in this other place again, on the western edge of Europe, on these wistful north eastern Atlantic shores? How has it happened so late after history has broken in half? How has it happened again that a few remaining people are going or gone already?<sup>1</sup>*

Re-reading these words from Mick Wilson always reminds me of things that are hard to convey to a new audience when I talk about *Evening Echo*. Mick speaks about gentle gestures, meaning on the edge of visibility and moments on the verge of evaporation. It is also hard to conjure the idiosyncrasies of Cork, and the small sense of occasion that has arisen around this project, if you haven't stood at twilight in the modest, triangular-shaped Shalom Park. It is almost always close to Christmas and sunset is around 4.30pm. It is often raining. Email flyers and a printed announcement in the *Evening Echo* newspaper have told you that today is 1 Tevet, or 2 Tevet, and the year is five thousand, seven hundred and seventy-something. The instructed address for assembly at Shalom Park is 'Gas Works Road and Albert Road' in which the words Shalom and Gas Works form a dark, uneasy textual partnership.

Figure 1. Shalom Park, Cork, 2012. Photo: Darragh Crane.



Park Warden Pat O’Sullivan and the locals who walk their dogs in the park are always there first. After a while there is an eclectic crowd gathered from the art community, the city council, people who live in the crouch of row houses adjacent to the park, and the tiny constituency who now form Cork’s remaining Jewish community. Fred Rosehill (head of the Cork Hebrew Congregation) is easy to spot with his walking stick and long wool coat, as is the Lord Mayor bedecked in the golden ‘Chain of Office’.

Figure 2. Shalom Park, Cork, 2015. Photo: Clare Keogh.



Nine lamps form a perimeter adjacent to the path that circles the park. For 364 days a year, eight of these lamps illuminate each night as lux levels drop and Cork’s network of street lights ignite. However, one light in the park does not. To the observant eye the lamp that does not fire is also taller than its eight companions. However, on *this day*, at ten minutes before sunset (or when ‘there are three stars in the sky’<sup>2</sup>) the tall lamp ignites. Solitarily it glows green, then slowly brightens to clear white as daylight in the park fades. After a while, one or two or three of the other lamps fire at random—it depends on their sensors. When all lamps are alight, they burn together for 30 minutes. People walk about, stop and talk, sit on the park benches, take photographs and start to leave. Then the tall lamp, the lamp that came on first, suddenly extinguishes. People aren’t watching at that point and the moment is missed by most. This is the process that will occur for the eighth time in December this year.

Each year a poster is circulated listing 50 years of future dates for the *Evening Echo* lighting until 2061.<sup>3</sup> It also presents a curious text about the moon and the misalignment of the civil calendar and Hebrew calendar, operating as an obscure attempt to account for the chasm of difference between dates such as 2018 and 5779.

EVENING ECHO  
 SHALOM PARK  
 51°53' N / 8°27' W  
 CORK, IRELAND



The problem is that the civil calendar used by most of the world has abandoned any correlation between the moon cycles and the month, arbitrarily setting the length of months to 28, 30 or 31 days. The Jewish calendar, however, coordinates three astronomical phenomena: the rotation of the Earth about its axis (a day); the revolution of the moon about the Earth (a month); and the revolution of the Earth about the sun (a year). Also, a Jewish 'day' is of no fixed length, and there is no clock in the Jewish scheme.

Therefore, the last night of Hanukkah is observed at nightfall on 1 Tevet or sometimes 2 Tevet.

2011	Tuesday 27 December	4.30 pm
2012	Saturday 15 December	4.24 pm
2013	Wednesday 4 December	4.26 pm
2014	Tuesday 23 December	4.27 pm
2015	Sunday 13 December	4.24 pm
2016	Saturday 31 December	4.34 pm
2017	Tuesday 19 December	4.25 pm
2018	Sunday 9 December	4.24 pm
2019	Sunday 29 December	4.31 pm
2020	Thursday 17 December	4.25 pm
2021	Sunday 5 December	4.26 pm
2022	Sunday 25 December	4.29 pm
2023	Thursday 14 December	4.24 pm
2024	(go to 2025)	
2025	Wednesday 1 January	4.34 pm
2025	Sunday 21 December	4.26 pm
2026	Friday 11 December	4.24 pm
2027	Friday 31 December	4.34 pm
2028	Tuesday 19 December	4.26 pm
2029	Saturday 8 December	4.25 pm
2030	Friday 27 December	4.30 pm
2031	Tuesday 16 December	4.25 pm
2032	Saturday 4 December	4.26 pm
2033	Friday 23 December	4.28 pm
2034	Wednesday 13 December	4.24 pm
2035	(go to 2036)	
2036	Tuesday 1 January	4.35 pm
2036	Saturday 20 December	4.26 pm
2037	Wednesday 9 December	4.25 pm
2038	Tuesday 28 December	4.31 pm
2039	Sunday 18 December	4.25 pm
2040	Thursday 6 December	4.26 pm
2041	Tuesday 24 December	4.29 pm
2042	Sunday 14 December	4.25 pm
2043	(go to 2044)	
2044	Saturday 2 January	4.36 pm
2044	Wednesday 21 December	4.27 pm
2045	Sunday 10 December	4.25 pm
2046	Sunday 30 December	4.33 pm
2047	Thursday 19 December	4.26 pm
2048	Sunday 6 December	4.26 pm
2049	Sunday 26 December	4.30 pm
2050	Friday 16 December	4.25 pm
2051	Tuesday 5 December	4.26 pm
2052	Sunday 22 December	4.28 pm
2053	Friday 12 December	4.25 pm
2054	(go to 2055)	
2055	Friday 1 January	4.36 pm
2055	Tuesday 21 December	4.27 pm
2056	Saturday 9 December	4.25 pm
2057	Friday 28 December	4.32 pm
2058	Tuesday 17 December	4.26 pm
2059	Saturday 6 December	4.26 pm
2060	Friday 24 December	4.29 pm
2061	Wednesday 14 December	4.25 pm

Page 182. Figure 3. *Evening Echo* poster, National Sculpture Factory & Maddie Leach. Circulated locally each year since 2011.

The form of the work, unfolding fleetingly in the park, references the nine-branched candelabra of Hanukkah and its central Shamash. It occurs in a place affixed with the name *Shalom* but of little significance to a radically diminished Jewish community, more fundamentally connected to their graveyard on the city edge and the precarious upkeep of the tiny South Terrace synagogue. At its peak in the mid-twentieth century the Jewish community in Cork numbered close to 500 members. It experienced a steady decline in the following years as young people left the economic conditions of Ireland for work and education and did not return, and as older members retired and moved to Israel or warmer climates. If this is the ‘emptying out’ that Mick Wilson notes above, it is also something other communities in Cork have undoubtedly experienced as cycles of economic ‘opportunities’ in the city have risen and fallen. *Evening Echo* also intentionally inhabits the space of the everyday, of memory and imagination that is variously at work within a phone call to City Hall from a passer-by reporting one of the lamps in the park isn’t working; in Fred’s recollection that once a Jewish community of 450 lived in the terraces around the park; in the family names inscribed on small brass plaques in the ladies’ balcony of the old Synagogue; in the *Evening Echo* newspaper’s headlines reporting the removal of Bord Gais gas storage tanks from the park site and suspicion of contaminated soil; in Minister of Energy Michael Smith’s buoyant opening speech on 28 April 1989 on the future of ‘this beautiful park; and the gas lights that showed ‘Cork was really coming up in the world’; in the ceremonial lighting of a gas single lamp; in more recent memories of the park as a dim and derelict place for exchange of drugs and alcohol.

*Evening Echo* was not a direct public art commission from the city, the National Sculpture Factory or the Hebrew community. Rather, it was initiated by me as a response to an absence I intuited, and then actively observed, for the two months I lived in an apartment across the road from the synagogue, and as I walked past Shalom Park each day on my way to the Sculpture Factory. On the ride in from Cork Airport my taxi driver had referred to the neighbourhood as ‘Jew town’. I then encountered other occasional references, such as Cork once having a Jewish mayor named Gerald Goldberg and a foot bridge over the River Lee that was colloquially known as ‘The Passover’. Until I contacted Fred Rosehill (head of the Cork Hebrew Congregation) I never saw any signs of life at the synagogue. The memories of others around me, of the park and its surrounds, were discovered and uncovered gradually over time. Fred found a VHS tape that tracked the day the park was first dedicated as Shalom Park. As I sat and watched it, I suddenly witnessed my own proposition (the lighting of a lamp in the park) happening 22 years earlier, enacted in the rain for an assembled crowd who erupt in a small cheer as the flame ignites.

Figure 4. VHS video still,  
Shalom Park, 28 April 1989.  
Courtesy of Fred Rosehill.



*Evening Echo* was a project that developed over three years between 2008 and 2011 and the short residency programme I initially undertook with the National Sculpture Factory has become a sustained relationship with people and place. Cork City Council and I have a Promissory Agreement that contains an attempt to bind us into a relationship for the long-term future through a clause stating: *All parties acknowledge that it is the artist's intention for Evening Echo to exist in perpetuity.* In some ways the document is there as a form of guardianship, a conceptual attempt on my part to safe-guard against the process of forgetting that many public art works are immediately susceptible to—one that *Evening Echo* attempts to resist but is perhaps especially vulnerable to given its literal 'lightness' of presence.

My time in Cork also coincided directly with the financial collapse in Ireland and its effects have formed an interesting companion to the life of *Evening Echo*.

The Elysian apartment building that sits opposite Shalom Park was described by *The Irish Times* in 2009 as 'the Mary Celeste of the recession'. Local rumour had it that only one floor of the tower was inhabited (by the owner's daughter) and that the building's developers turned the lights on in some apartments to sustain a sense of daily life and deflect any sense of abandonment. For a while there was a running joke between me and Cork City Council Parks Department that they never had to say they were spending money on an artwork, only that they were buying some new lights for the park.

## A Rock

In early 2014, as part of the *Spaced 2: future recall* project, I lived in for two months in Mandurah, a small 'city' one hour south of Perth in Western Australia. Its slogan is '*a city excited about its future!*' and much of the associated City of Mandurah literature brightly reports facts on the exponential growth the city and the Peel

Region are experiencing. I'd heard it described as Western Australia's Gold Coast and a core part of the state's 'fly in fly out' culture for what are benignly called 'resource projects' in mineral and ore extraction.<sup>4</sup> As is my habit, I explored my future residency home through Google image searches and Google Earth and started tweeting pictures I found before I even arrived. I was a little apprehensive about developing an artwork for a place that appeared to service a beach resort lifestyle, but my practice is one based around a process of propositions and problem-solving and Mandurah would be no different in that respect.

Figure 5. Mandurah, 2014.  
Image credit: Maddie Leach



Marco Marcon, Director of the Spaced project, said sending artists to communities in Western Australia was like making 'an arranged marriage.'<sup>5</sup> I liked his honesty and I think of that terse phrase quite often. Undoubtedly, Mandurah has become imprinted in my mind and I clearly, fondly, recall familiar details, smells, people, and trajectories through the place. It's a community with commendable aspirations to position itself as an art centre in the West Australian context, to be another destination town—a place for, and filled with, *creative events* to promote a carefully constructed commitment to reconciliation and inclusiveness. However, I became increasingly uncomfortable with what I perceived to be my host's expectations of the project I was tasked to develop.

Figure 6-7. Mandurah, 2014.  
Photo: Maddie Leach.



With much of the historic township gone, and a constant swathe of Venetian-styled canal developments and new housing on the market, there were only occasional glimpses of a community in the process of actively constructing its memories and assembling its official history. As I lived a daily life in the town, I began to form a conceptual arrangement between a set of material and immaterial presences. These included Mandurah’s prominent and well-kept war memorial park; large rocks in public spaces used to mark town sites or civic milestones; the contrasting figures of ‘founding pioneer’ Thomas Peel and aboriginal leader Yaburgurt Winjan, and their grave sites placed diagonally opposite each other at Christ’s Church. What also became clear was a palpable sense of divide between City of Mandurah and the neighbouring rural township of Pinjarra in the Shire of Murray. In particular, there was evidence of a fraught but muted debate surrounding a memorial site for the Pinjarra Massacre of 28 October 1834. Referred to as a ‘battle’ by Shire officials and a ‘massacre’ by the local Nyungar community, it’s been a site of persistent tension evidenced in and around visibility and nomenclature – the most noticeable being references (or lack thereof) on local maps and signage at the site. Nyungar elder Uncle Harry Nannup matter-of-factly described it to me as ‘they put a plaque up our mob probably rip it off, we put a plaque up and white fellas rip it off’.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Peel himself was one of the men directly involved the brutal encounter between colonial forces and Binjareb Nyungar that has informed a dubious narrative within State and national history and popular understandings of peaceful British settlement in Western Australia. Yaburgurt Winjan is described as being a young child at the time and as a survivor of the massacre. In 2015 a memorial statue to commemorate 100 years since his death was being developed by City of Mandurah.

Figure 8. Mandurah, 2014.  
Photo: Maddie Leach.



Figure 9. Mandurah, 2014.  
Photo: Maddie Leach.



For Bindjareb Nyungar, and for many other locals, the ‘border’ between City of Mandurah and Pinjarra in the Shire of Murray remains nominal and fluid. Workers at the Alcoa Refinery live in Mandurah and work in Pinjarra and cross the Serpentine River Bridge every day. The colonial settlement of Mandurah was, for most of its short life, part of the Shire of Murray, and in 2015 there was the distinct ‘threat’ of amalgamation in which it was likely that Shire of Murray would reluctantly join City of Mandurah. The distance between the two places is about a 25-minute drive.

Although I tried to form various project ideas for the city of Mandurah itself, I repeatedly gravitated to Pinjarra, to the massacre site and specifically its memorial boulder and absent plaque. What transpired was conversation and research focusing on a large piece of rock marking the site and the removal of the two plaques that have been attached to it. Their noticeable absence and a decade-long impasse about the wording on the plaque between the Shire and the Murray District Aboriginal Council became a persistent force in my thinking.<sup>7</sup> The resulting project has manifested in two parts: firstly, a film that records the reproduction of a redacted Shire of Murray fax document on a large lithographic stone and an enigmatic interchange of white, black and brown liquids, potions and powders within the process; secondly, a newspaper reproduction of the resulting lithograph, with further information removed, printed in the Mandurah Coastal Times on the day the *spaced 2: future recall* exhibition opened in Perth. In this public, deliberately ‘out of context’ form, the lithograph document was fleetingly circulated to 37,000 homes across the Mandurah-Pinjarra region. The specificity of the project’s title *28th October 2834* was taken from a recurrent typographic mistake in Shire minutes regarding the date of the massacre and intentionally operates as a form of enigmatic forecast. I simply liked the way a typist’s mistake adds a thousand years to any potential resolution within the debate.



Page 188. Figure 10-11. HD video still, 28th October 2834, 2015.

City of Mandurah were my hosts and my ‘community partner’ for the *Spaced* residency but they requested that none of their logos or their name were to be associated with my project. I understood that this was because my conceptual interests had crossed the City border to the Shire of Murray and, more specifically, to the Pinjarra Massacre site. In a meeting I explained how I failed to see why, after being taken on ‘Cultural Tour’ to Pinjarra in my first week in Mandurah, the narratives of that place were suddenly off limits. The answer I received was that ‘it was Shire of Murray business’.

I left Mandurah with a sense of my own resistance directed towards the place itself and the limitations that were outlined in my final meeting with the City. My thinking process had developed diagrammatically. I had maps that drew lines back and forth between Mandurah and Pinjarra, Mandurah and Binningup, Mandurah and Perth. These were trajectories I had observed actively in everyday conversations, in newspapers, on transport and communication routes. It was a thought process based on comprehending permeable, shifting relationships and perceived borders operative between one place and another. Not unsurprisingly, it also revealed long-remembered distinctions and entrenched divisions.

*Evening Echo* and *28th October 2834* are offered here for their shared exploration of artistic strategies in which the production or existence of permanent artefacts are navigated via methods of limited accessibility or reduced visibility, potential disappearance or displacement, adjustment or transformation. I position both within the broad term ‘public practice’ and each actively encounter memorials and ideas of memorialisation. They are also reliant on the circulation and social re-telling of a narrative (story) arising from context-based research. Together they propose an operational logic in which the absence, or partial presence, of physical objects and actions requests an imaginative act on the part of a viewing/visiting audience. Each project has developed through a combination of active administration and serendipitous diversion, what artist Ian Hunter has referred to as an unfolding of ‘the presented problem and the discovered problem’.<sup>8</sup> I also suggest these projects have composed an ‘alternate politic’ to official histories, magnifying and revealing their gaps.

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**Raine & Home**

Figure 12: Mandurah Coastal Times, 18 February 2015.

## Endnotes

1. Mick Wilson, 'Nightflight thoughts: Echoes, lights, darknesses'. *Evening Echo*, Cork, National Sculpture Factory, 2011.
2. Fred Rosehill quoted from personal conversation with Maddie Leach. Fred noted an alternative method used to determine sunset and when to light candles on the nights of Hanukkah.
3. The list of dates was intended as a reference for the first 50 years of the artwork's lifetime rather than proscribing a finite duration.
4. For an interesting analogy to the condition of artists and 'non-residency' see Jessyca Hutchens and Darren Jorgensen, 'Fly In Fly Out Artists of WA', *Artlink* 353, no. 3 (September 2015), <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4360/fly-in-fly-out-artists-of-western-australia/>.
5. Marco Marcon, Conversation with the author, February 2014.
6. Conversation with the author, March 2014.
7. Shire of Murray archives supplied documentation of council minutes where the debate reoccurs and is recorded over more than a decade.
8. Ian A. Hunter, PhD dissertation, Manchester Polytechnic (1992).

## Biographical Note

Maddie Leach was born in Auckland, New Zealand and was a Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts at Massey University Wellington from 2001-2016. She is currently Senior Lecturer at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Recent presentations of her work include: *The Grief Prophesy* (2017) for Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art; *The Blue Spring / Mata Air Murni* (2015) for Jakarta Biennale, Indonesia; *28th October 2834* (2015) for Spaced: Future Recall at Western Australian Museum, Perth. Her project *If you find the good oil let us know* (2012-2014) was nominated for the Walters Prize 2014 at Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand. She also a candidate for PhD by Publication at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

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# A Life in Diagrams (the Book): A Photo-Essay

Sally J. Morgan

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Sally J. Morgan

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### Abstract

In 1993 artist Sally J. Morgan began developing a series of performances/ installations entitled *A Life in Diagrams (numbers 1–5)* which were shown in developing iterations at: Dartington Hall, Devon, UK; the ICA in London; Le Belluard/Bollwerk International Festival in Fribourg Switzerland; and the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol. Audiences entered a non-gallery, non-theatre space. There was no stage or proscenium, and the performance area was marked on the floor with string and measuring tapes in the manner of an archaeological excavation. To one side, separate from the box grid, was a low table, so low that audience members had to kneel to read a book of diagrams, drawn on tracing paper, that plotted out the artist's father's death, dying and the memories that inflected this process. This essay is a discussion of that work: *A Life in Diagrams (the Book)*.

Keywords: live art, artist's books, memory, performance art

## PART 1.

I am on my knees digging. Breathing. I'm scraping down through a section of earth. I know how to dig. I was once an archaeologist—when I was young I found shards of pottery and Roman combs made of bone. I was taught how to measure the past by depth, width and height. So, I know how to measure and describe. I know you're supposed to know by measuring and describing. Out of the earth come moments. They are measured and described. They are drawn and numbered. They make a life out of diagrams. (Sally J. Morgan, unpublished fragment).

To begin at the beginning. My polemical position on art is that aesthetic matters, as understood by artists and critics in the visual arts, are a means to an end, not ends in themselves. I would argue that art should aim to be 'profound' and should deal, in whatever ways are open to it, with the complex matter of being human. Art can be technically elegant, it can be intellectually stimulating, it can be novel, it can be arresting, but in my view, it needs to be more than that. Ultimately, the art I desire to experience, and to make, induces profound affect, giving insight into the incomprehensible, un-measurable and tenuous nature of our existence. It is emotionally moving and makes us interrogate our understanding of what it is to be alive, to be a sentient being, for the short time that we have on this planet.

My father died of a brain tumour in May 1992, when I was forty. His suffering and death had a profound impact on me. It was something I needed to explore through art, not for the sake of catharsis, because I wasn't looking to cure my grief, rather I was compelled to look squarely at the fact of mortality and the affect of bereavement. Inherent in this interrogation was the tension between 'fact' and 'feeling' and the limits of both when trying to make sense of the condition of being human. Art differs from Science in that it goes beyond what we know and acknowledges what we feel. We are creatures who know we'll die. We are creatures who love, we are creatures who grieve.

The intense tide of emotion that seizes us when facing the death of a loved one, is something we all undergo, hence mortality has been a persistent theme in the arts, in all its forms, in all cultures. Art finds ways of sharpening our perception of our place in an apparently measurable, but ultimately inexplicable universe. Confronting the pitilessness of mortality through the loss of my father propelled me into a new place as an artist. In this place it was impossible not to acknowledge the primacy of emotions in human motivation; this was a place where the limits of 'knowledge' became unbearably apparent. Every fact about my father or any other person—all the measurable details of a life—could only describe the size of things, or the order in which things happened, it could never explain the joy and the pain of being alive and knowing you will die. As an artist I needed new strategies to express these matters. After a career as a painter, on the one hand, and politically motivated community artist, on the other, I had established a comfortable order of things for myself; a difference between what I called 'my own art' and the works I'd made in collaboration with others.

My collaborative works were part of a broad range of contextual, site-specific and politically motivated community art interventions, which moved freely across artforms including theatre, writing, and film as well as visual arts. My 'own' work tended to be paintings exploring sexual ambiguity and gendered power-relations.

The death of my father sent me in an unexpected direction and turned me into what others would call a performance artist. This wasn't a club I wanted to join and my recruitment was accidental; the result of merging a range of experimental modes to solve an artistic problem of my own. The medium I had been trained in, painting, seemed incapable of conveying the complexity of the experience I had gone through when grieving my father. I could not conceive of a singular image to sum up his life, his dying, his fear, and my grief. My major motivation was to find a way to communicate my experience in a way that would resonate with the experiences of others, producing recognition and empathy in the viewer and producing new insights on the nature of knowledge, affectivity and mortality. Adopting a deliberately open-ended, speculative approach to the use of media, I made a number of experimental artworks in which I resolved to use any means available to me to explore and communicate the profound emotional and intellectual affect of mortality and loss. Many of these conceptually driven works could be described as durational installation/performance art works. Constructed with a painter's eye for colour and form, the floor-based, almost 2-dimensional installations were configured, and reconfigured, over time through the actions of the artist. They developed into a process of performed-labour informed by the field methods of archaeological excavation. They contained written/spoken texts, some of which required the audience to physically engage with the paper they were on, unfolding fragments, taking them from open box files, revealing labels, some of which were read aloud by the performers. There were also objects, either found or factored by the artist, that were physically interrogated by the artist, and interacted with by the audience. As I worked on these pieces, I found myself thinking of them, not as performance art, but as an internal meeting between myself as a painter, a poet, and archaeologist.

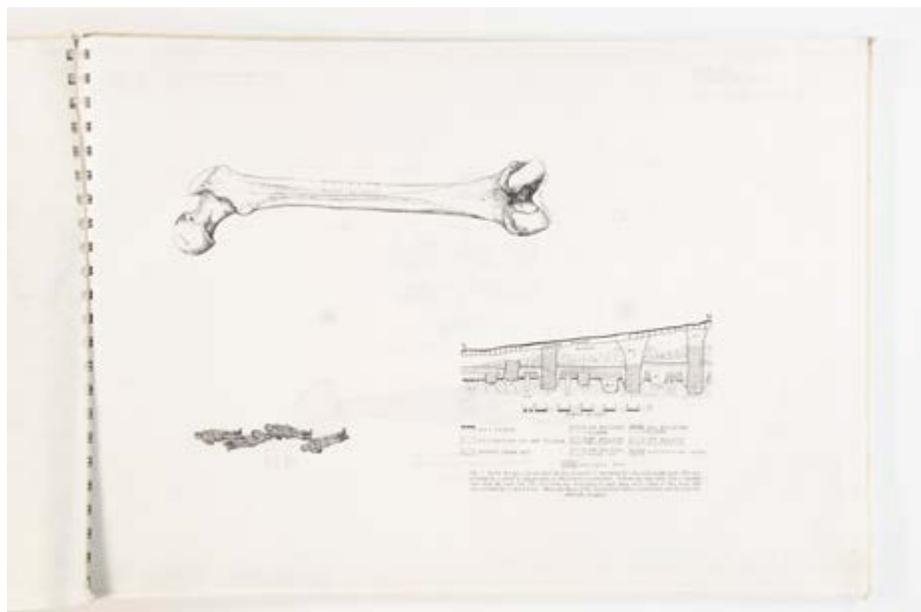
The first major outcome of these explorations was a series of performance/installations entitled *A Life in Diagrams (numbers 1–5)*. This was shown in developing iterations: once at Dartington in Devon, UK, twice at the ICA in London, at Le Belluard/Bollwerk International Festival in Fribourg Switzerland, and at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol. Arnolfini also commissioned a subsidiary work, entitled *Measuring Existence*, which was performed in the mediaeval crypt of St Nicholas Church, Bristol. A subsequent related series, *The Song of the Bomb Aimer's Daughter*, was developed over 25 years. The first was shown at Spacex Gallery, Exeter, in 1994, and the most recent was at the Defibrillator Gallery, Chicago, in 2016. A bound book of drawings: the subject of this short photo essay, entitled *A Life in Diagrams (the Book)* was included in all the showings of the performance of the same name, and was separately exhibited in the Engine Room Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, 2015; the Palitz Gallery, New York, 2016; and the Sullivan Galleries, Chicago, 2016.

## PART 2.

‘Morgan uses an eccentric array of diagrams to movingly convey the trauma felt by her father after being a bomb aimer in a Lancashire bomber [*sic*] in World War Two, and how that memory is now held after his death. The work explores how the most sensitive of memory may be held in the matter-of-fact schema of instructional diagrams and through the act of drawing. Some diagrams are purely illustrative—rugby formation strategies next to bomber formations—while others are more fanciful. A cross-section of the seams of earth around a hole in the ground is used to illustrate the layers of feelings that have accreted that the artist is mining’. (Amery 2015)

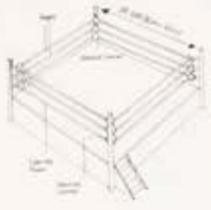
Figure 1–2. Sally J. Morgan.  
Page from *A Life in Diagrams (the Book)*. Photo: Jessica Chubb.

Page 197–200. Figure 3–8. Sally J. Morgan. Page from *A Life in Diagrams (the Book)*. Photo: Jessica Chubb.



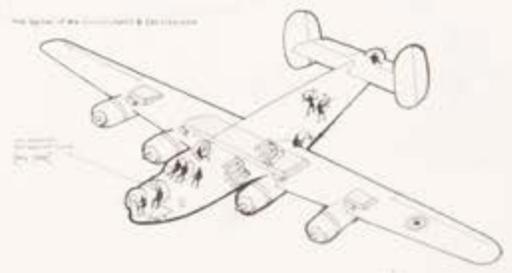
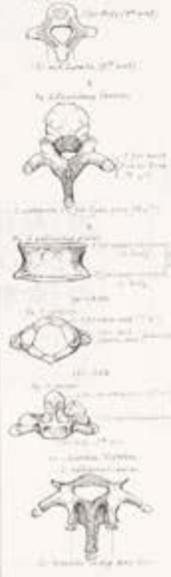


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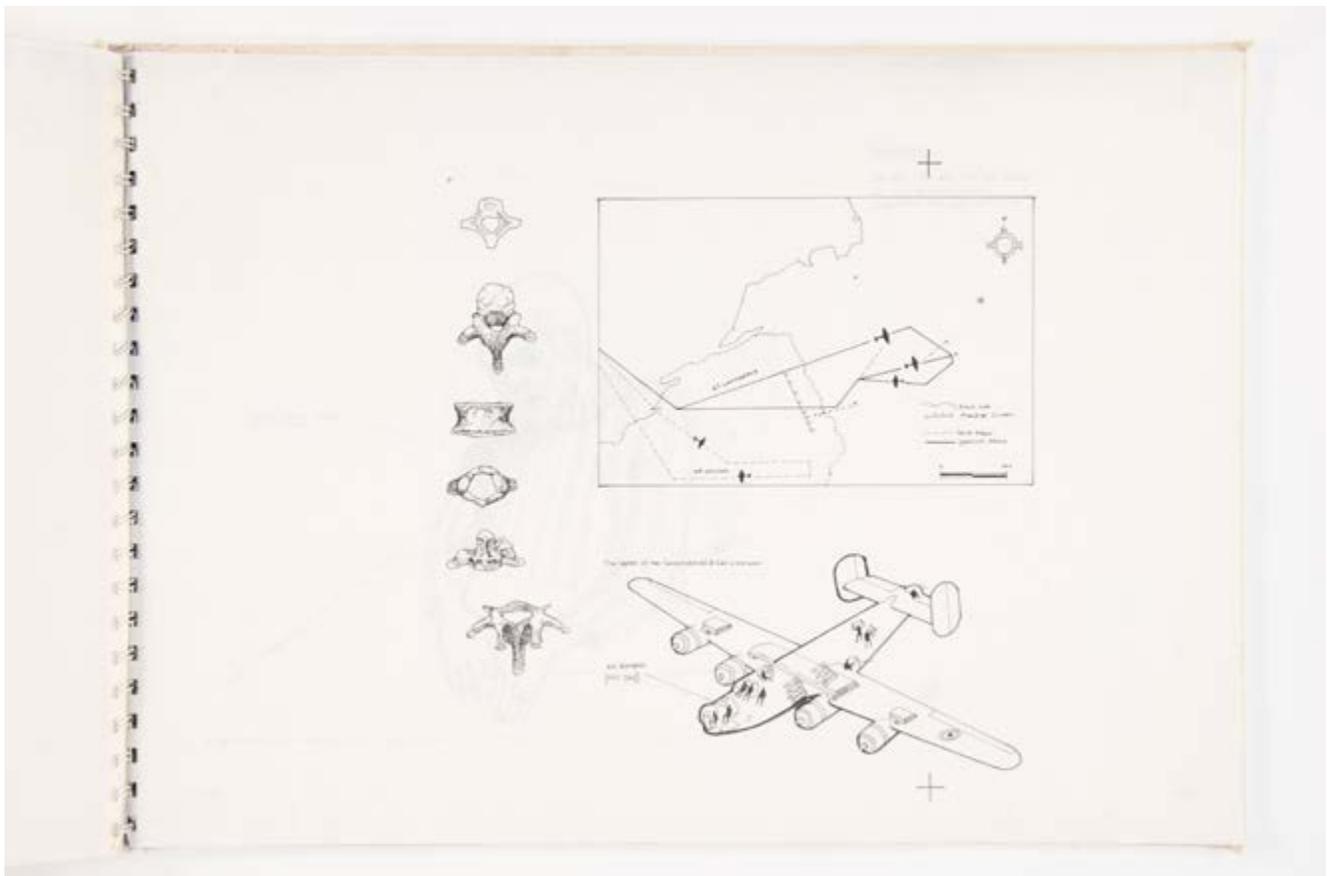
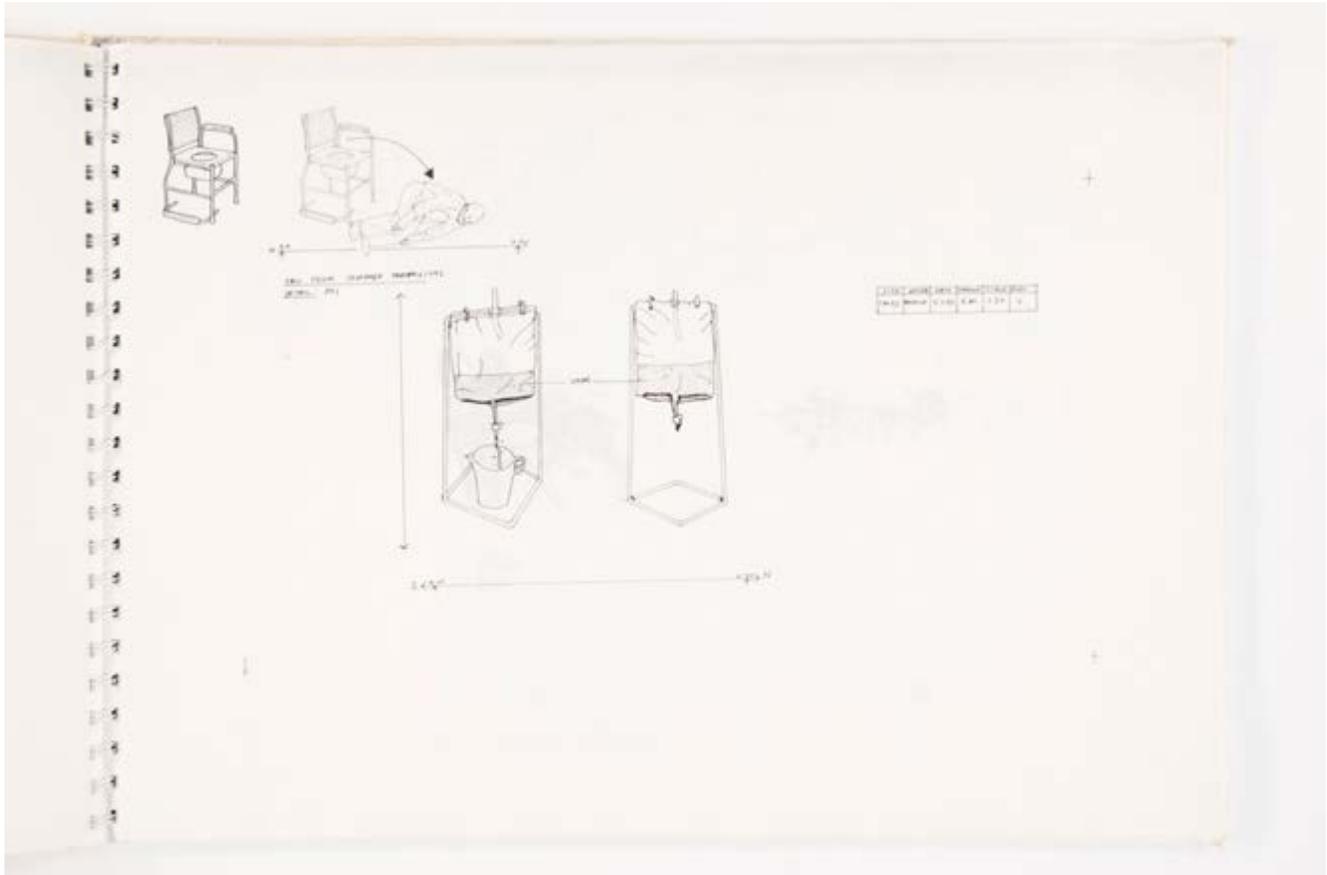

THE SYSTEM OF PRIMARY LINES




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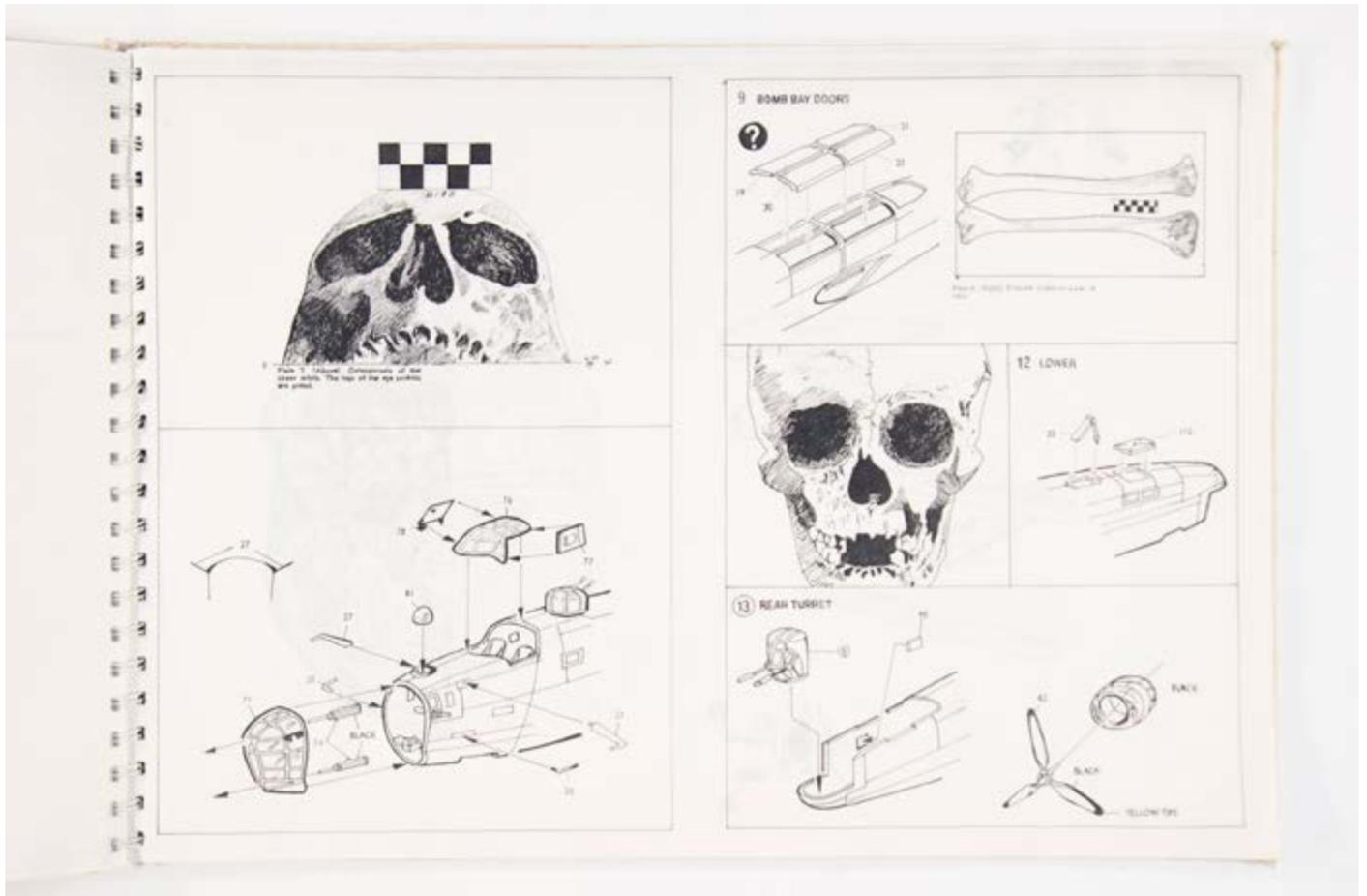


Figure 11. Sally J. Morgan. Page from *A Life in Diagrams (the Book)*. Photo: Jessica Chubb.

### PART 3.

Drawn on A3 tracing paper, cumulative ink images grew in overlays, outlining and unpicking my father's life, from his time as a bomb aimer to his death from a brain tumour. Nothing but diagrams and labels. I used the conventions of archaeological, scientific, and instructional illustration, and tried to turn them in on themselves, through juxtaposing images, to make sentences and paragraphs that spoke of the futility of cold, observational discourse in the face of emotional 'truth'. When they were shown in *Trigger Points* (Palitz Gallery, New York, 2016), curator Heather Galbraith said of them, 'the instructional tone to many of the drawings that seek to map, and explain mechanics, technology and strategy in both warfare and in medical treatment of disease, only amplify the heightened emotional experiences of Morgan and her father'.<sup>1</sup>

Using words only within labels in the diagrams, I tried to make poetry with drawings. I borrowed the elements of poetry that I understood best: simile, metaphor, repetition, analogy, visual 'rhyming', space between imagery, pauses and absences. The transparency of the pages added to the idea of the drawings as a narrative process, the viewer anticipating the coming images as shadows behind the present ones. The peeling of each page away from the one below it, echoed a process of archaeological excavation. Each page a layer in the stratigraphy of the

book, each layer contextualised by the ones above and below it.

In her review of *A Life in Diagrams*, Janet Hand spoke of the ‘archaeological process of measurement, categorisation and display (being) displaced in its scientificity by the affecting relation between reminiscence and mourning’.<sup>2</sup> In a number of my pieces, including the *A Life in Diagrams* series, I have questioned the relationship of those oppositional positions contemplated above—the perceived binary of truth as reason and truth as feeling—through contrasting them, and testing the adequacy of each, within the structure of an artwork. Kearney writes that, for Bachelard, ‘the poetic instant is a harmonic relation between opposites’<sup>3</sup> in which, perhaps we see the same kind of ‘convergence’ as artist Stuart Brisley described in his early performance works.<sup>4</sup>

In both the performance of *A Life in Diagrams* and in the book of drawings of the same name, we see two conceptual opposites; two different versions of Truth, which ‘converge on each other in time creating a crisis’.<sup>5</sup> In the performance of *A Life in Diagrams*, the convergence is achieved through the actions of the performer. In *A Life in Diagrams (the Book)*, this is realised through the juxtaposing of images, and through the overlay of semi-transparent leaves. The revelation is achieved somatically, through the fingers of the reader as each layer is revealed. In both these iterations we see the art work refusing ‘stasis’, and meaning being arrived at through a cumulative process of physical and conceptual interactions. This is a process whereby Bachelard’s poetic instance, the harmonic relation between opposites, is achieved through repositioning Brisley’s crisis as an internal struggle for the viewer/reader. A crisis that must be resolved out of what we might describe as a crescendo of contradiction. The method used, that of introducing the audience to a set of dissonances as ontological experiences rather than as a singular epistemological proposition, enables an active intellectual and emotional response as a process of embodied reflection on the part of the viewer/reader. It is therefore through the active participation of the audience, in response to the stimuli deliberately introduced by the artist, that the poetic instant is achieved.

## Endnotes

1. Heather Galbraith and Andrew J. Saluti, eds., *Trigger Points* (New York, NY: Syracuse University/Wellington: Massey University, 2016).
2. Janet Hand and John Gange, "Performance South West, National Review of Live Art, ICA London," *Hybrid: The International Cross-Artform Magazine* (March 1994).
3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin, 2014).
4. Stuart Brisley, "Letter," (London: Collection of the artist, 1969).
5. Ibid.

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## Biographical Note

Sally J. Morgan has exhibited in the UK, USA, France, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Brazil, Japan, Bulgaria, and New Zealand. Over the years her work has been included in international festivals such as the *National Review of Live Art (NRLA)* at London's ICA; *Belluard/Bollwerk International* in Fribourg Switzerland; and the *>In Time* Chicago Performance Art Triennial. As a published cultural theorist and historian, she is an acknowledged authority on contextual (socially engaged) art practices, particularly in the areas of public, community and 'live' art. She has published widely on cultural history and her article on the film 'Braveheart' as a manifestation of the influence of popular culture on the historical imagination has been reproduced in a collection including such names as Theodor Adorno and Stuart Hall.



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# Mythopoeia in the Museum: The Eleven 'National Treasures' of the National Museum of Singapore and the Afterlife of Artefacts

Emily W. Stokes-Rees

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### Abstract

Every interpretative and object-related curatorial choice made in a museum setting is inevitably political. In choosing what objects to display and what stories to tell, curators shape the way visitors understand and experience a particular nation's history as well as arouse a sense of familiarity or, possibly, incoherence. This article demonstrates the ways in which curatorial choices at the National Museum of Singapore's *Eleven Treasures* have both enabled and obstructed the construction of a national narrative. As well, it points to the creation of a collective mythology—a *mythopoeia* in the museum.

Using two key examples, the 'Singapore Stone' and a portrait of the last colonial administrator, Sir Thomas Shenton, I highlight how these objects' museological 'afterlives' are located in their ability to transcend their own histories to become potential symbols of common values. Simultaneously, I raise questions about authenticity, cultural citizenship, and the role of Singaporean museums in public memory. I argue that it is in the precarious space of incommensurability between the 'national treasures' and the everyday lives of Singaporeans that national identity crystalizes.

Since at least the 19th century, museums have played a central role in imagining the nation, and continue today to define and reinforce national identity. In bringing together objects from across places and times, classifying them in relation to a nation's culture and achievements, and arranging them for the viewing pleasure of visitors, the construction and renovation of national museums around the world testifies to the enduring power of nationalism. Moreover, a national museum documents a nation itself, through identifying objects that represent a national way of life and symbolize key values, beliefs, and experiences.

Figure 1. National Museum of Singapore. Photo: Emily W. Stokes-Rees.



This article focuses on the National Museum of Singapore. Established in 1849, it is the oldest in Southeast Asia. Originally called the Raffles Library and Museum, after the British colonial founder, Sir Stamford Raffles, it collected and exhibited items of natural and historical significance in the Straits Settlements.<sup>1</sup> The museum first occupied a section of the library and later moved to the Town Hall, changing its name to the 'Raffles Institution' at the same time. Both the Raffles Library and Museum moved in 1882 to a newly commissioned building on Stamford Road. This location officially opened on 12 October 1887, marking Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The museum remains housed in the same building to this day.

After Singapore's independence in 1965, the museum shifted its collections mandate away from zoological and ethnographic objects to focus more specifically on material related directly to the history of Singapore. Through the years there have been numerous minor updates and redisplay, but in 2003, the museum closed its doors for its first major renovation, which involved a massive expansion and full exhibition overhaul. It was with its grand re-opening in 2006 that the eleven 'national treasures' were unveiled for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Although in Singapore there is no central authority which decides upon 'official' national treasure status for objects, as the custodian of the most important collection of Singaporean

artefacts, the museum, along with representatives from the National Heritage Board, came up with a list of objects deemed to have significant historical importance to Singapore. The eleven treasures are not displayed as a single exhibit but are individually highlighted throughout the museum's narrative of the nation's history.

It is important to note that this article comes at a time of significant transformation, both political and social, after the death of Senior Minister and architect of modern Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, in March of 2015. His passing marks an important transition, with inevitable challenges as well as promises and possibilities for Singapore. And as Lee himself believed so strongly, surely the lessons of past struggles and achievements will inspire Singaporeans to reflect on the common threads of experience that bind citizens together and shape their national identity. Within this wider context, this article demonstrates the ways in which the selection of the National Museum of Singapore's national treasures aids in the construction of a national narrative, while also pointing to the construction of a collective mythology—a *mythopoeia* in the museum.

Singapore's national treasures can be divided into three rough categories: first, those that are particularly rare or valuable, such as Javanese gold arm bands unearthed from Fort Canning Hill in the early twentieth century; second, those that are significant in their familiarity to most Singaporeans and thus able to represent a certain experience or population, such as a 1930s Fujian puppet stage; and third, there are those that are valuable by virtue of belonging to or representing an important individual or group, such as the last will and testament of Munshi Abdullah, the father of modern Malay Literature. Of course, some objects are difficult to categorize and some inevitably fall into more than one category. Each object in this group is intended to capture something valuable about Singapore, offering a material connection to the past. They are, as David Lowenthal puts it, 'bridges between now and then, physical connections to the past that are intended to aid in concretizing abstract memories'.<sup>3</sup> The National Museum of Singapore thus documents not just the history of Singapore, but also the history of ideas about Singapore.

During a 2011 research visit, I spoke with a number of museum staff as well as many museum visitors, both formally and informally, about the status and display of the national treasures. It quickly became clear that for some of the museum staff, it felt challenging to be responsible for artefacts as 'treasures', because how is it possible to make such a decision? Similarly, although my conversations with visitors revealed a sincere respect for the authority of the museum staff to choose the objects, they also expressed a certain 'distance' from the objects and frequently suggested other objects that might connect more strongly to national identity for 'regular people'. The value of a 'treasure' is, after all, in the eyes of the beholder. Moreover, museums are under increasing pressure to emphasize everyday objects rather than valuable rarities, and to focus on the human experience of 'regular' people rather than traditional, elitist narratives. What makes these eleven objects 'treasures', I believe, is not simply their intrinsic value as individual artefacts, but in the greater narrative they collectively reveal about Singapore. In other words,

it is in the wider picture of Singaporean values and memories, and the tension between their familiarity and strangeness for visitors, that this small collection of treasures holds its mythopoeic power.

Mythopoeia, very simply, means mythmaking; however, it is a genre of storytelling which differs from more traditional ideas about myths arising from centuries of inherited, recited fables, passed down through generations. It refers instead to a narrative in which a fictional mythology is created by a particular author over a relatively short period of time, usually an individual author, and it is in this sense that the curatorial work that happens in a museum setting seems, to me, a logical alignment.<sup>4</sup> *Mythopoeia* aims at imitating the real world, while also bringing myths and stories into a contemporary context. Singapore, emerging out of colonial rule in the 1960s, was effectively forced to forge a new identity and create a national narrative on the spot. Therefore, I feel the idea of *mythopoeia* is a conceptually good fit, despite Singapore and its postcolonial experience not being a fiction in any sense. And indeed, among theorists of nationalism, social constructionists like Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson argue that often nations originate not as historical communities or groups, but as myths fabricated by those who hold the power to shape what they consider to be the cultural and historical characteristics of a particular population into a narrative—a utopic abstraction of the nation.<sup>5</sup> The museum has attempted to integrate mythological themes, such as ancestry and heroism, into its narrative. Moreover, whereas authors use words to communicate their myths, the museum uses objects to unify and extend the social community. The use of mythopoeia in this sense also helps illuminate some of the universal and timeless aspects of identity and provides Singapore's tumultuous history with a sense of coherence and shared values. The hope is, of course, that this national narrative eventually takes on a life of its own, becoming embedded in the psyche of the citizenry.

Building upon, and perhaps in some ways moderating, these ideas, Anthony Smith attributes special significance to the study of national symbols, in their capacity to 'give concrete meaning and visibility to the abstractions of nationalism'.<sup>6</sup> Though there are plenty of discussions and disagreements about whether nations are modern social constructions or organic primordial phenomena, there is no question that national symbols are entirely socially constructed, whether or not they are experienced as such. Not only do these symbols, in Smith's mind, act as catalysts for the formation and maintenance of public memory about a nation, they are also crucially important in fusing nation to state in situations where there is no pre-existing myth of communal memory. In other words, just as national icons serve as markers for the collective memory of the nation, they simultaneously represent the power of the state to define it. And indeed, at the core of the mythopoeic genre is the creation of a legitimate mythology—that is, a narrative that is well-constructed and believable, rather than necessarily 'true'. It goes beyond Anderson's concept of an 'imagined community', which centres on the media (newspapers etc.) that make us feel connected, to the construction of an entire world including mythological elements such as a well-ordered history, heroic characters, a strong sense of place,

as well as values and beliefs. It points, in short, to an inherently creative act, as the assembly of the 'national treasures' in Singapore has been. It is thus within this framework that I have been thinking about these objects and their role.

Critics of the concept of mythopoeia have referred to it as 'artificial mythology', which emphasizes that it did not evolve naturally, and therefore should not be taken seriously. The folklorist Alan Dundes, for one, argues that, 'A work of art, or artifice, cannot be said to be the narrative of a culture's sacred tradition . . . [it is] at most, artificial myth'.<sup>7</sup> I believe, however, that it is through the fact that the story told by the treasures is, largely, true, and through the museum's success in rekindling a sense of collective imagination in Singapore, that the museum provides more than simply a backstory—the myth becomes fully realized, with the larger picture it frames being more than the sum of its parts. It is thus within this framework that I have been thinking about these objects, however in a short article like this, I am not going to attempt to talk about all eleven objects. In this context I will discuss two of the treasures—the Singapore Stone and the portrait of Sir Thomas Shenton—which I feel are particularly illuminating of these ideas as they are expressed in the context of the National Museum of Singapore. I also briefly highlight a third treasure—the portrait of Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham—for comparative purposes.

### The Singapore Stone

Figure 2. The Singapore Stone display, National Museum of Singapore. Photo: Emily W. Stokes-Rees.



Figure 3. The Singapore Stone, National Museum of Singapore. Photo: Emily W. Stokes-Rees.



Early on in one's visit to the National Museum of Singapore's history galleries, visitors encounter the first national treasure displayed—The Singapore Stone.<sup>8</sup> This artefact is a fragment of a much larger sandstone slab that originally stood at the mouth of the Singapore River. The slab, which is believed to date back to at least the thirteenth century, bears an undeciphered inscription. Recent studies suggest that the inscription is either Old Javanese or Sanskrit. In January of 1843, on the orders of the acting Settlement Engineer, Captain D. H. Stevenson, the slab was blown to pieces in order to clear and widen the passageway at the mouth of the river. Lieutenant-Colonel James Low petitioned to have the sandstone slab spared, and after the explosion he was permitted to select fragments to preserve. The pieces bearing the most legible parts of the inscription were sent to the Royal Asiatic Society's museum in Calcutta for analysis, where they remained until 1919, when the Raffles Museum and Library's representatives asked for the return of the fragments. Only one small piece, now known as 'The Singapore Stone', was received on indefinite loan.

The stone, on display at the National Museum since 2006, is a material representation of Singapore's creation myth, even with minimal resonance to back it up. The stone signifies longevity—adding length to a national history that until fairly recently was viewed as really only beginning in 1819, when Raffles landed and established a Crown colony. Its mysterious ancient language links Singapore to a pre-colonial ancestry, even if unknown—the perfect common denominator for the myth of a common origin for the nation. It is, moreover, exhibited as a relic—illuminated beautifully in a dark gallery, and of course, it is only one fragment of the original larger piece. Despite its mystery, in other words, the stone provides tangible, three-dimensional evidence of a period in Singapore's history before the arrival of British. As a relic, it is about belief and awe, rather than historical analysis. The curatorial idea here is clearly to invoke what is well known as 'the museum effect'—that is, as Paul Williams writes, 'the enlargement of consequence that comes from being . . . rescued, cleaned, numbered, researched, arranged, lit, and written about'.<sup>9</sup> The hope is to enable the object to become valuable in new, or renewed, ways.

One could argue, certainly, that this risks imbuing an object like the Singapore Stone with false significance in the sense that we are being asked to accept a narrative of this object which gives it signifying power, when it was not necessarily part of a common national narrative or consciousness in the first place. And indeed, observing visitors in the gallery, I first noticed that when they approach the display, their voices lower and many even lean forward slightly, invited into a performance of awe and wonder fueled by the dim lighting and sealed case. The message conveyed by the exhibitionary techniques is undeniably that one is approaching a *special* object. Hunched and whispering, the visitors I observed adopted reverent postures, and, notably, when small children were present, adults almost always took their hand, as if being in the presence of such an object required extra supervision. I also overheard frequent comments on its rarity and perceived age, again expressing awe and wonder. Many visitors clearly desire more information about the stone than they are given. It is unfamiliar,

and viewers are intrigued by what is unknown about the object, they ponder its mysterious origin, and ask each other questions about researchers' attempts to decipher the inscription. The exhibitionary techniques at play perform a narrative of national origin and myth, and as visitors follow the museum's discourse, they not only experience the object, but are drawn into a particular *performance* around the object as a national treasure.

The anthropologist Alfred Gell moves away from thinking about meaning, and asks what objects *do* rather than what they *are* or *mean*. The main thrust of his argument is that objects have agency, suggesting that although they themselves are not intentional beings, they frequently act as the mediums through which people discover and demonstrate their intentions—a performative relationship.<sup>10</sup> In other words, he would argue in the case of a museum object that when visitors respond primarily to what is put on display rather than how it is displayed, the object itself exercises greater agency in relation to the viewer than the producer of the display. But in situations where a viewer responds to an object because of *how* it is put on display or what it depicts, then the producer exercises greater agency than the object. The traditional museological focus on individual encounters with authentic objects is thus being replaced by a new perspective that emphasizes artefacts and displays as performing a critical role in the processes of creating meaning.

While some hold that once an object is taken away from its original context and placed in a museum collection, it effectively 'dies', I would argue, as Arjun Appadurai (1986) and Daniel Miller (2008) have before me, that this is where its 'afterlife' begins. It is a new chapter in an object's life history, one of symbolism and storytelling rather than form and function. The afterlife of an object is thus in its possibility; no longer fixed to a particular time and place, it can be used to tell many stories, and can be approached from different perspectives. In short, it is within the museological afterlife that an object like the Singapore Stone can transcend its own history to become a symbol of common values and experiences. In drawing attention to the age of the stone as well as the air of mystery surrounding the origin of the undecipherable script, the museum offers a pre-colonial history—the possibility of an origin myth—for Singapore. It is interpreted as concrete evidence of a pre-British, innocent past uncontaminated by either colonialism or modernity. In other words, it contains a mythopoeic element of 'the impossible'—an enchanting object with mysterious origins; and in that transcendental space between the object and the visitor, I argue, is where the mythopoeia takes hold, inviting visitors into a narrative of Singapore before colonialism—a history that is no longer part of anyone's *actual* memory, but is real and poignant in one's experience of it.

## The Portrait of Sir Shenton Whitelegge Thomas

Figure 4. Xu Beihong. Portrait of Sir Shenton Thomas, National Museum of Singapore, Image size: H: 244.5 x W: 134.0, oil on canvas, 1939. Photo: Emily W. Stokes-Rees.



The second treasure to be discussed is a portrait of Sir Shenton Whitelegge Thomas, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements from 1934-1942. The portrait was painted by renowned Chinese artist, Xu Beihong, in July of 1939.<sup>11</sup> In this large, prominently hung image, we can observe Thomas in full military dress. It is immediately apparent that he is standing with a fairly formal and stiff posture, conveying, perhaps, a not-so subtle gesture to his tension in 1939, anticipating the coming war. Notably, to his right stands a wooden table with what appears to be mother-of-pearl inlay that is reminiscent of many Asian designs. On his left is a classical column, an easily recognizable symbol of Western civilization and empire. The two objects balance each other within the frame, and provide what might have been intended as unifying symbolism, pointing to Thomas' strong allegiance to both Singapore and Britain. It is here, I think, that Thomas's 'treasured' place in Singaporean memory rests, as he and his wife, Lucy Marguerite (Daisy) Montgomery, chose to remain in Singapore for the duration of the war, and were eventually interned in Changi prison. Even as a prisoner-of-war, Thomas cared immensely for Singapore, writing letters to the directors of the Botanic Gardens, archives, and Raffles Museum, urging them to do whatever might be required to protect and preserve their holdings. Shenton's role in the

narrative (myth) of the nation is not simple, but points to a world of complex political alliances and conflicts. He is simultaneously a mythical figure and historical representative of what the nation today stands for, and what type of devotion it merits.

Notably, right next to Shenton's portrait is displayed another designated 'treasure'—John Singer Sargent's 1904 portrait of Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham, the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States (1896-1901). The portrait was commissioned in honour of his retirement in 1904. I add this brief description of his portrait, as these two paintings stand in such stark contrast to each other. Unlike Shenton's tense, formal posture, Swettenham is standing confidently, perhaps even swarthily, his hand on his hip. He is leaning, apparently relaxed, on textiles evoking the Edwardian luxury Sargent was known for depicting. Accessories evoking Swettenham's Far Eastern career can be seen everywhere—a gilded armchair, magnificent Malayan brocades (Swettenham was an avid collector), and a large globe is just visible in the top corner, with a segment of the Malay States just visible. Both men served Singapore with honour, though the portraits point to contrasting eras and different experiences in the development of the nation. While Swettenham is elegant and, perhaps, 'conqueror-esque' in his demeanor—everything about his portrait exuding power and authority, Shenton's tension and formality are palpably felt.

In both portraits, the museum simultaneously stimulates a nostalgic yearning for the colonial past as a triumphant era of collaboration between East and West, of Singapore's incredible development into a world-class trading port, and of gratitude and indebtedness to its loyal British leaders.

The intimacy of a portrait gives a human face to a history that many do not remember, and Shenton simultaneously becomes both a lofty icon—a protector—and ordinary citizen, loyal to his home. The portrait not only tells a story about a particular individual, but also reflects changing ideas about what is worth remembering and why. Largely faded from public memory, the designation of Shenton's portrait as a treasure resurrects the story he represents and re-establishes his place in a national narrative that resonates with contemporary concerns and values.

All myth is a response, a reaction to uncontrollable forces all around us, and his portrait re-captures some of what made him so important to Singaporeans during World War II—he symbolizes exemplary behaviour and loyalty amongst the citizenry. Shenton stands in for the colonial experience, as well as the struggle and suffering Singapore experienced under Japanese occupation, and as such he is a figure that embodies what one would want, perhaps, to remember about the British in Singapore. Certainly, he represents how the British very much wished to be remembered, as their administration of Singapore drew to a close. As Shenton expressed uncertainty in the years leading up to the Japanese invasion, his portrait invokes a nostalgia—a yearning for a lost time, but also a sentiment of loss and displacement that perhaps offers an antidote to the uncertainties of contemporary Singapore—an optimistic belief in the future.

One can learn a lot about any country by who has been enshrined in its national museum; heroes reflect the experiences and needs of the generation that

creates them. Shenton encourages visitors to think about legacies inherited from the past, and those to be passed on to future generations. His portrait becomes an allegorical figure representing the desire for national attributes—loyalty, courage, sacrifice, honour. The object thus facilitates the work of mourning, displacing personal pain and anxiety into the imaginary realm of collective memory, while simultaneously shoring up feelings of solidarity and national identity. Though one might argue that in a postcolonial context, one of the remaining colonial burdens is the need not only to 'invent' new traditions but also to 'forget' colonial symbols and customs. I would argue, however, that Thomas' portrait points to the colonial relationship as formative, and frequently challenging, for the British as well as Singaporeans. The portrait does not emphasize nor lessen the role of Britain, but re-positions it, taking a closer, self-authored look at its interpenetration into all aspects of Singaporean life. The museum, in other words, embodies a co-constructed postcolonial narrative—including both departing and remaining cultures. Cultural influences and interaction do not go only one way—there is always flow—and it is when we acknowledge it as a continuing two-way relationship, that the narrative weaves into the fabric of memory and identity. Thomas's image is thus both constant and flexible, rooted in the colonial past, yet speaking to the postcolonial condition of the present.

Joan Henderson, a Singapore-based scholar of tourism studies, argues that this kind of representation is not problematic for Singaporeans because the former colony is no longer a 'threat' in Singapore, which has made remarkable progress since independence to become an economically successful and self-confident nation. In a 2011 interview at Nanyang Technological University, she said to me: 'I think there is much less need to discuss colonial legacy these days now that Singapore feels it has largely "made it", however, it does add to the landscape, and adds to the diversity and interest of the modern storyline'.<sup>12</sup> The experience of colonization in Singapore is not, moreover, 'a cause of embarrassment, but rather of pride in subsequent achievement with Raffles remembered as the figure who helped make this possible'.<sup>13</sup> As curator, Huism Tan, agreed: 'I think Singapore has got to be the only place in the Commonwealth that still glorifies its colonial past!'<sup>14</sup>

David Lowenthal suggests that nations freeing themselves from colonial rule generally try to erase their colonial experiences in the interest of asserting an autonomous national identity rooted in the pre-colonial past.<sup>15</sup> However, this is not the case with Singapore. Although the nature of its past encompasses a colonial experience, a history which has the potential to be viewed negatively by the independent nation, Singapore's predominant memories exhibited in the museum are nostalgic reminiscences of the impact of British colonialism. It is important to emphasize, however, that this is not nostalgia for a forgotten innocent past, a lost time uncontaminated by colonial presence. History *before* colonialism is naturally no longer a part of anyone's memory in Singapore. Judging by the museum's displays, therefore, the museum stimulates a yearning for the colonial past as an antidote to the uncertainty of modernity.

## National Museums, Identities, Treasures

Returning for a moment to Dundes's comments about 'artificial myths', in thinking about these two objects, I have often asked myself: should a 'national treasure' be about exceptionalism or widespread social impact? Typicality or recognizability? These objects represent efforts to define a national identity based on a sense of shared heritage, but whose way of life do they represent? I wonder how many of these treasures are familiar to Singaporeans today, or has their resonant power been lost in the whirlwind of economic growth? Many Singaporeans remember the fading years of the colonial era and the transition to independence, but fewer and fewer remain to recall the violence and fear of living under the Japanese occupation. The last time I was in Singapore conducting research, I made a point of asking people about objects that speak to their identity as Singaporeans. Not only did I ask people in the museum, but also shopkeepers, bus drivers, and even members of an exercise class I frequented in a local park. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, not one of these museum objects was mentioned. What was mentioned? For one, a steaming bowl of Singapore noodles or 'laksa', for example—was frequently brought up as something which illuminates the various forces—cultural, economic, *and* political—that have shaped Singaporean history. The Durian, a spiky and stinky fruit that is strictly forbidden on public transport, and chewing gum were also common, pointing to the rules that are such a part of the fabric of Singaporean life, Tiger Balm—an icon of Singaporean entrepreneurship, and, of course, the Merlion—the most photographed object in the nation.

The 'Merlion', Singapore's most photographed icon. (photo credit: [peakpx.com](http://peakpx.com))



Clearly, national icons need not be 'officially-sanctioned' in order to become catalysts for identity formation, and in this context the museum's epistemological discourse is clearly in tension with the prevailing public narrative. The objects that hold us together as a nation are those that say: 'to be one of us is to have this memory', and it is this notion that captures an incommensurability between institutional and public memory. It is not a question of what is true and not true, but a question of what is made relevant in the present. The designation of eleven museum objects as 'treasures' is a first step in their evolving signifying power,

but their role as symbols of collective identity does not yet seem to elicit the cultural resonance necessary to be true national icons. They are caught in a conundrum between familiarity and strangeness—between the power of the visual to evoke wonder, and the power of public memory—the place of hybridity that Stephen Greenblatt points to where visitors' imaginations are ignited to recognize the objects as emblematic.<sup>16</sup> In the end, I think the treasures' effectiveness should be measured not in terms of their individual resonance, but in their ability to raise questions, stimulate conversation, and tell a wider, reflective story about Singaporean values, mysteries, ideals, and aspirations. As John Bodnar put it in 1992, 'Public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions . . . the former originates in the concerns of cultural leaders . . . [who] share a common interest in social unity . . . [whereas] vernacular culture . . . represents an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole'.<sup>17</sup> He goes on to argue that, in contrast to official versions, ' . . . vernacular expressions convey what social reality *feels* like rather than what it should *be* like. Its very existence threatens the sacred and timeless nature of official expressions'.<sup>18</sup>

It is at the heart of these various conundrums of identity, nation building, and iconography, that one can locate the various, often conflicting, ideas about the role national identity can or should play in people's lives, and therefore the kind of place a Singaporean national museum should be—an institution that not only collects and preserves the artefacts of history, but also attempts to make sense of them as part of a wider national story—to be *mythopoeic* in its approach. The objects discussed here represent more than single moments in a nation's history, they capture particular ideas about the past, and about identity. As memories live on and evolve over time, they are mirrored in the 'after'-lives of objects. The museum has *re*-placed these items in a museum context, allowing them to tell their stories and be made meaningful again as part of a larger historical narrative. In other words, it is somewhere between what one experiences of identity in the museum and outside of the museum, somewhere in the space between the national treasures and the 'everyday' lives of Singaporeans, that national identity crystallizes.

Andreas Huyssen writes that national museums are placed, in general, not so much in the representation of what constitutes national life, but more in the representation of what has disappeared from it—preserving 'that which has fallen to the ravages of modernization'.<sup>19</sup> This is exactly what we find in the National Museum of Singapore, but he also argues contrary to what I found in my conversations with Singaporeans, asserting that national objects tend to align more in the popular imagination with what is 'natural' and 'ancient' rather than modern, industrial, and popular. Perhaps, ultimately, these national treasures work in concert with more popular views to establish a web of signification. The value of an object as a 'national treasure' is more than the sum of ideas about age, monetary worth, and rarity, but comes from outside the object, from those who believe it to have a story worth remembering and repeating. It must reverberate with the current values of the nation.

The next step, then, is to consider how museums might expand visitors' interest in the symbolic connotations of objects. Nick Merriman advocates for interpretations welcoming plurality, imagination, and creativity in constructions of the past, and I would agree that museums need to look for opportunities to promote dialogue in order to relate objects to visitors' lives.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, and perhaps not coincidentally, the National Museum closed its doors again in early 2014 for another major renovation and revamping of the displays. This time, according to museum press releases, the focus is on increasing accessibility and emotional relevance in their history displays. The museum reopened in September of 2015, and I was fortunate to be able to visit again in the spring of 2016 to consider what had changed. The eleven national treasures, though now seemingly disbanded in any 'official' sense, are still very much present and visibly highlighted in the museum. As the museum evolves to allow new memories to take precedence, the national treasures continue to capture a moment in time—a time of active, intentional nation-building—a time of searching for meaningful icons. Shifting the narrative toward a more multi-vocal approach to identity, Singapore demonstrates the shifting ways in which national histories are often presented, rewriting, and reinventing itself every few years.

National museums are, perhaps at their best, meeting places for competing and evolving ideas about national identity. Though this collection of objects does not really allow much room for multiple ways of belonging in Singapore today, the museum can be seen as a palimpsest of national identities—where the residue of what has come before hones what follows. Humanity has a need, I believe, for a connection to something greater than ourselves. New myths must, and no doubt will, continue to be created in Singapore, and the recent passing of Lee Kuan Yew will undoubtedly bring new stories, memories, and iconic objects into the national narrative. I look forward to continuing to think about them.

## Endnotes

1. 'Straits Settlements' refers to a number of British territories established in the early 19th century, located in what is now Malaysia and Singapore.
2. The full list of national treasures is as follows: (1) The Singapore Stone (2) a 1904 portrait of Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham, the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States, by John Singer Sargent; (3) the last will and testament of Munshi Abdullah, the father of modern Malay literature; (4) the mace of the City of Singapore (1953) that was presented by Chinese philanthropist Loke Wan Tho in conjunction with King George VI granting Singapore a Royal Charter in 1951, raising its status to a city; (5) an 1844 daguerreotype of the view from Fort Canning Hill by French customs service officer Alphonse-Eugene Jules, one of the earliest photographic images of Singapore; (6) fourteenth-century gold armlets and rings in East Javanese style, found at Fort Canning Hill in 1928; (7) a 1939 portrait of Sir Shenton Thomas, the last Governor of the Straits Settlements, by painter Xu Beihong; (8) a collection of 477 natural history drawings of flora and fauna in Melaka commissioned by Resident of Singapore William Farquhar in the 19th century; (9) a wooden hearse used for the funeral of Chinese philanthropist Tan Jiak Kim in 1917; (10) an early twentieth-century embroidered Chinese coffin cover, one of the largest of its kind in existence in Singapore; and (11) a glove puppet stage belonging to the Fujian puppet troupe, Xin Sai Le, which came to Singapore in the 1930s. See: Wei Chean Lim, "Singapore's Treasures" in *The Straits Times* (31 January 2006).
3. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 43.
4. This meaning of the word *mythopoeia* follows its use by J. R. R. Tolkien and C.S Lewis in the 1930s, such as in Tolkien's creation of 'Middle-earth', and also a poem, itself entitled *mythopoeia*, as well as C.S. Lewis' mythical world, Narnia.
5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth. Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
6. Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Brandeis. MA: Historical Society of Israel, 2000), 73.
7. Alan Dundes quoted in John Adcox, *Can Fantasy be Myth? Mythopoeia and The Lord of the Rings*. Published by *The Newsletter of the Mythic Imagination Institute* (September/October, 2003), np.
8. John Crawfurd (1783–1868), who was 'Resident of Singapore', described the slab in his journal on 3 February 1822 in these terms: 'On the stony point which forms the western side of the entrance of the salt creek, on which the modern town of Singapore is building, there was discovered, two years ago, a tolerably hard block of sand-stone, with an inscription upon it. This I examined early this morning. The stone, in shape, is a rude mass, and formed of the one-half of

a great nodule broken into two nearly equal parts by artificial means; for the two portions now face each other, separated at the base by a distance of not more than two feet and a half, and reclining opposite to each other at an angle of about forty degrees. It is upon the inner surface of the stone that the inscription is engraved. The workmanship is far ruder than anything of the kind that I have seen in Java or India; and the writing, perhaps from time, in some degree, but more from the natural decomposition of the rock, so much obliterated as to be quite illegible as a composition. Here and there, however, a few letters seem distinct enough. The character is rather round than square.' (The quotation was taken from Arthur Joo-Jock Lim, "Geographical Setting," in Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, eds, *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9.

9. Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Berg, 2007), 28.
10. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 21.
11. Elaine Cheong, "Sir Shenton Thomas: A Noble Life of Distinguished Service," *Passage* (May/June 2011), 9.
12. Joan Henderson, interview with the author, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, June 2011.
13. Joan Henderson, "Conserving Colonial Heritage: Raffles Hotel in Singapore," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7, no.1 (2001): 15.
14. Huism Tan, conversation with the author, Asian Civilizations Museum, July 2002.
15. David Lowenthal, "The Place of the Past in the American Landscape," in *Geographies of the Mind*, eds D. Lowenthal and M. Bowden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 89.
16. Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 54.
17. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the twentieth century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-14.
18. *Ibid.*, 14 (my emphasis)
19. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* (London: Routledge, 1995), 15.
20. Nick Merriman, "Involving the Public in Museum Archaeology," in *Public Archaeology*, ed. Nick Merriman (London: Routledge, 2004), 101-2.

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## Biographical Notes

Emily Stokes-Rees is Associate Director of the School of Design and Associate Professor of Museum Studies at Syracuse University in Upstate New York. She is a material anthropologist whose research centres on evolving ideas around cultural citizenship and representation in postcolonial contexts. Recent publications include: “Re-thinking Anne: Interpreting Japanese heritage at a quintessentially Canadian site,” *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. (2018); “Symbiotic Spaces: Decolonizing Identity in the Spatial Design of the Museum of Macau” in *The Interior Architecture Theory Reader*. Gregory Marinic, ed. New York: Routledge, 2017; and “A Tale of Two Missions: Common Pasts/Divergent Futures at Transnational Historic Sites,” *The Public Historian*. Vol. 39 No. 3 (2017, with Debora Ryan). Emily has also worked on a wide variety of museum projects and exhibitions in the US, Canada, Europe, and Asia.

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# From Unwanted Memory to 'Palimtext' – A Creative Writing Process through a Series of Textual Iterations

Jess Richards

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## From Unwanted Memory to 'Palimtext' – A Creative Writing Process through a Series of Textual Iterations

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### Abstract

In recent creative writing experiments, my intention has been to metamorphose source texts into entirely new texts. The source texts included carefully selected folkloric texts (which have an established tradition of being 'retold' and can't usually be traced back to one 'author') and also randomly selected novels, short story collections, non-fiction books, etc. obtained from thrift shops. I have recently used **speculative processes**: magical thinking, questioning, evoking empathy for objects, and **textual processes**: redaction of texts, faulty voice-to-text apps, folded books, and 'cut-up' text experiments. This article will focus on one of the recent **textual processes**.

Within these textual processes I have been working with texts as a physical object—the book, the print-out, the page. The source texts initially become fragmented which creates surprising juxtapositions, images, narratives, and ideas which are altered further during a series of iterations. Prior to the project described within this article, I judged any new piece of writing complete when I had written a new narrative in a more conventional literary form (e.g., a short story). However, for this project, due to traumatic memories emerging, the processes and outcomes became more fluid.

Keywords: creative writing, experimental writing processes, practice-based research, traumatic memory, cut-ups, palimtext

The creative writing processes I describe within this article are my own extensions of some of the 'cut-up' techniques developed by the writer William S. Burroughs, and the artist Brion Gysin. Their early collaborative cut-ups drew on previous experimental processes, such as Tristan Zara's *To Make a Dadaist Poem* (1920)<sup>1</sup> and could be described as 'collage'—applying artistic techniques to writing. Burroughs stated that 'a page of Rimbaud cut up and rearranged will give you quite new images—real Rimbaud images—but new ones'.<sup>2</sup> The obvious question which arises from this statement is that of authorship, but I was more concerned with the search for *new images* within textual sources.

When I first encountered Burroughs's and Gysin's cut-up process, I had been experimenting with redacting and folding other authors' texts. I had already discovered that these processes produced poetic phrases and unique imagery. Unlike Burroughs, I was not taking a deconstructive approach in order to reveal meanings within the source texts, but was using the source texts to restrict my choices of vocabulary, in much the same way as an artist might select a limited palette of colours to paint with. This restriction simultaneously resulted in an *extension* of my own vocabulary and imagery, as I encountered words I wouldn't habitually use. The choice of source texts was partially random, in that the books I obtained were on the verge of being thrown away. However, the vocabulary within them had to be sufficiently rich and varied in order to extract poetic phrases and unusual imagery, so in general, books written for children were excluded.

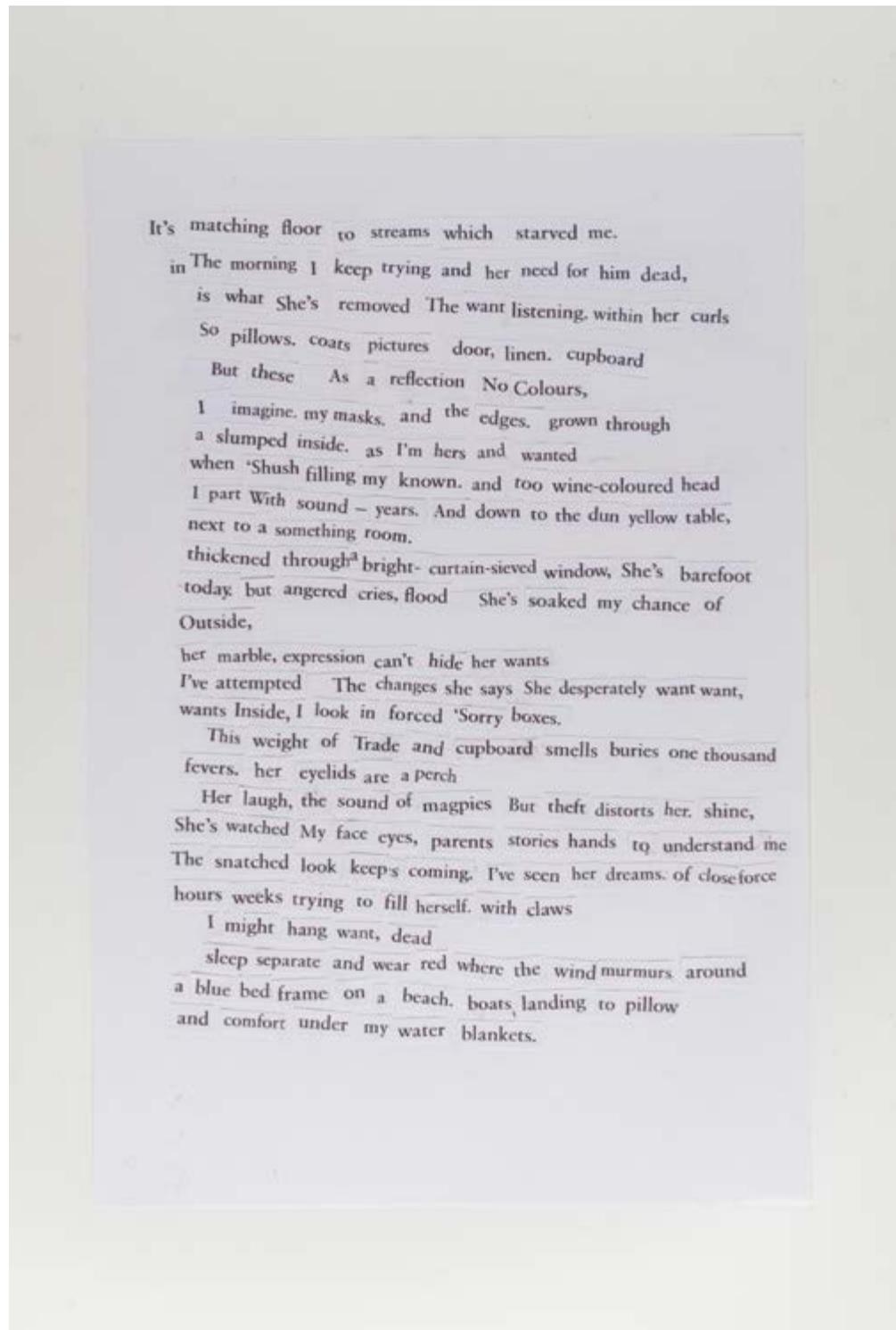
In a departure from working with other writers' texts, in the project I am about to describe, my intention was to explore what might happen if I used my own novels as source material for some cut-up experiments. Unlike my own novels, Burroughs's novel writing style was already fragmented, and though (in collaboration with other writers and artists) he produced many cut-up experimental texts, in his novels he inserted long chunks of more conventional narratives, as Burroughs concluded that 'you can't dispense with straight narrative if you want people to read it'.<sup>3</sup> In embarking on this project, I had some initial concerns: would the familiarity I had with my own novels make it impossible to see the words objectively? Would any writing I could produce automatically have a self-conscious connection to the published novel? In order to detach the words from their context, unlike Burroughs and Gysin who often combined whole paragraphs, lines or columns, or novelist Kathy Acker, who 'used fragments of plagiarized text',<sup>4</sup> I decided that my cut-ups would be formed by individual words.

The first textual iteration is shown in Figure 1. This cut-up text is made from words from page one of all three of my novels.<sup>5</sup> The words were cut out individually, sorted into groups of nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc, and then were selected to form phrases which incorporated objects and the senses in order to produce new images.<sup>6</sup> The first four lines loosely followed the sentence structure of the first sentence of my first novel, the second sentence of the second and the third sentence of the third. I then continued the emerging narrative with a focus on generating images.

As I held each word in tweezers and glued it down, it was like watching a bad dream forming on paper, as my repressed memories were contained within the

sentences. This one-page text shocked me. It was a description of the situation I was living in when I wrote each of the first three pages of my novels. They were written in a flat in Brighton, UK, in a long-term relationship that I now realise was emotionally abusive. The relationship had ended in August 2013 after fifteen years, and I left everything behind; possessions, jobs, friends and home.

Figure 1. *One Word Cut-Outs* from page 1 of my three novels. Photo: Jessica Chubb.



This was an unwanted memory. It was also not a memory I wanted to ever write about. But as this text was only *psychologically* linked to its sources, I believed I would somehow be able to use it to generate new writing. The biggest challenge in this instance would be to respect my emotional responses to the content, and work out how to adjust the stages of my process accordingly. The instructions I had intended to follow were these:

Cut-up Text:

1. Take a text that you wrote previously and cut it up.
2. (optional) Select other texts (your own or from other sources) to compliment or juxtapose with the content of the first text. Cut them up.
3. Construct an opening sentence from these words and continue. Once a narrative is emerging, make deliberate choices while considering the content of previous phrases.
4. Paste selections of words onto a sheet of paper, ensuring that the text, despite being fragmented, is readable.
5. (optional) Redact the pasted text using correction tape and masking tape.
6. Check for precision - remove any unnecessary words.
7. Type this text up and then handwrite it while expanding it into a longer, more conventional narrative which incorporates all the phrases from the cut-up text.
8. Type up the handwritten text, expanding the narrative further and removing any phrases which have become nonsensical or ambiguous.
9. Edit the text, checking style, logic, repetition, weasel words and making decisions about page layout which highlights poetic / striking / significant phrases.

Instead of sticking to these instructions I decided to pause, and do a freewriting session to see what emerged.<sup>7</sup> My hope was that using just one phrase from the cut-up text would take the narrative in another direction in terms of content. Using the first line of Figure 1 as this prompt, I wrote rapidly, but the content of the narrative remained the same—I vividly recalled my home, relationship, and state of mind during the early months of 2013. As I wrote in present tense, I became immersed in the memory of the situation/place/time, and there came a point that I had to stop myself writing. Traumatic memory, according to Pierre Janet, 'occurs automatically in situations which are reminiscent of the original traumatic situation. These circumstances trigger the traumatic memory'.<sup>8</sup>

I'm aware that triggering traumatic memories can provoke debilitating and damaging responses. This particular memory was different to 'normal' memories which are fleeting and fragmented. Instead, it resembled other traumatic memories I've experienced during my life, in terms of its pace, intensity, and unfragmented nature. It was like being *inside* the memory—the memory's time was unfolding in real time. Within the text, I (as the narrator of the writing) was

simply lying in bed thinking. It was going to take as long to *write myself* out of bed (so the action within the narrative could begin) as it would have done to *get out of bed* in 'real' time, as 'traumatic memory takes too long . . .'.<sup>9</sup>

Writing from within this memory was therefore too immersive, and too slow. The freewritten text appears below exactly as it emerged, and has not been edited:

*It's matching floor to streams which starves me. My search for open spaces, my longing for wildernesses and oceans. I hunt for them in this city, as well as in our home, but they are not here. So I imagine the floorboards as a stream, the street as river, the city as ocean. These walls are skies, with prints of angels and devils trapped in black frames against white paint. The bath is a pond, made complete with a plastic cartoon frog. Water pours out of its wide open mouth.*

*The flat we live in is on the ground floor within a row of terraced houses. We are lucky, our home is light, and has bay windows at the front, and a garden out the back. We have rented this place for thirteen out of our fifteen years together. Whenever I've been alone here, I have spent hours at the kitchen window, watching the fig tree in the neighbour's garden growing and shedding its massive leaves. Adam and Eve must never have been as naked as they were painted in all those oil paintings depicting their innocence and knowledge. Fig leaves can grow to be the size of pillow cases.*

*This morning I wake alone in our double bed, and hear her in the kitchen, cursing that last night's washing up is still in the sink. A few moments later, a catchy tune comes on the radio and I can hear from her footfall she's dancing as she sings along. The bedroom curtains are open, and as I roll over to face the view of a blue and white cloud-ridged sky, I imagine I am underwater. Then I fall from an aeroplane window and plummet into the ocean, close my eyes and drown.*

*I often drown. Sometimes I am run over by a car or a bus. Sometimes I climb the staircase of one of the tall hotels on the seafront, and step over the edge of a flat roof as if death is just a continuation of walking. The impact of the ground is always painless, as I die on the way down. Most frequently, I collapse from a sudden and painless heart attack and leave my body behind as I keep walking, watching for the ambulance that will pass me on its way to collect my body from the pavement. There are many ambulances in this city. They're reassuring as they pass me, as I know they'll take care of my body, and efficiently do what is needed to be done. For the past few years, my death happens in all these ways, and more violent ones. The knifings are painful, and sudden, but they are difficult to imagine as they require me to provoke someone to violence who habitually carries a knife. And how would I know how to provoke them? I provoke her all the time without meaning to, and each time I think that I know all the triggers to avoid, new ones appear. I die outside the flat, never inside it, because then she would have to deal with my body, and that would upset her. I die over and over again. Always while I am alone, and going somewhere or nowhere.*

*There are many ways to die in a city. I have imagined most of them. The flat contains only one way of dying. It is quick, and decisive. I have a suicide kit of stock-piled prescription medication that I no longer take, and a razor blade.*

*These things are taped to the underside of my underwear and sock drawer, the one place she'll never search while I'm out. If it was urgent, I would take the kit with me, and leave. And as long as she didn't follow me, I would walk and keep walking through the city and beyond it. I'd try to find somewhere that no one else would go. Somewhere isolated. A moor. A mountain. A stolen rowboat, so I could place myself adrift.*

*I don't keep a diary any more. I don't have any evidence of the past, of the time before her. There are few secrets left in my head. She's discovered them over the years, seen them in my eyes and drawn them out of me with questions. But she doesn't yet know that I want to leave. And she doesn't know how many ways of leaving I've considered.*

And at this point, I stopped writing. This memory was not only upsetting, but it was also a narrative I didn't want to write, because I could see no purpose in doing so. Other writers do find it valuable, and I have every respect for their motivations. As E. Ann Kaplan observes, victims of 'traumatic situations put their experiences in writing, I believe, for several reasons: to organize pain into a narrative that gives it shape for the purposes of self-understanding (working their trauma through), or with the aim of being heard, that is, constructing a witness where there was none before.<sup>10</sup>

Without having a personal desire for further understanding or a witness to this particular story, I was more driven to understand *how* the memory had been triggered. What, precisely, was the trigger? What had I done with the material—the tiny cut-out fragments of paper that might warrant this intrusion? Or was it something about the wooden table I was sitting at, the light through the window, the smell of glue mixing with the smell of coffee? Was it simply that the act of cutting up my own words reminded me of being silenced? There was *something* in that, but it was only a passing thought. I kept hunting, but couldn't trace the trigger to anywhere within this home I live in now, at this table beside windows filled with sunlight.

The trigger must therefore be within the words themselves. They were written at particular points in time. And once I had removed those words from their context of 'novels' this memory being triggered began to make sense. The choice of vocabulary, themes, images, and layers which formed the overall narratives originated from myself as the author. When I wrote all three of those first pages, I was living with my ex, in a flat in Brighton, though I left just after I'd started the third novel. So the word choices within all three of the first pages were indicative of the state of mind I was writing from, however unaware I was of this at the time.

Could I rearrange the words again, and make sure they spelled out nothing so personal? At this point I was fearful. I suspected that I should not use my own texts to work from. My main concern about embarking on any type of writing on this subject was that completing it could become impossible.

For two days, I couldn't think about writing anything else. I was also having bad dreams. Now that the memory had been raised as a subject to write about,

it would not go away. Kaplan quotes Janet, in order to explain how traumatic memory can linger:

The subject is often incapable of making the necessary narrative which we call memory regarding the event; and yet he remains confronted by a difficult situation in which he has not been able to play a satisfactory part, one to which his adaptation has been imperfect, so that he continues to make efforts at adaptation.<sup>11</sup>

I could not abandon this half-written narrative until there was some form of completed text produced. But I could change direction. An 'effort at adaptation', perhaps. I didn't know where to go next until I dreamed about being physically trapped within tunnels, and woke thinking that sometimes going right to the *heart* of something is the only way to find an escape route.

The *heart* that I chose was a highly personal text from 2013—the last letter I'd written to my ex. It had been sent to her while I was away, at her request, via email. In my opinion, this letter was lengthy, sad, and honest, and contained many repetitions of the word *sorry* (for things I wouldn't apologise about now). My ex had clearly experienced it differently as it provoked an extreme response which instigated the process of the relationship ending. She also refused to read the letter more than once, and I often still wondered what she had seen which had triggered her rage.

I printed the letter out and cut it into lines, then fragments of phrases, and then even smaller phrases until the words were disconnected from their original context. I then selected two additional texts which incorporated what I had learnt about the relationship since it ended. It is perhaps significant to mention that I had some contact with Woman's Aid and was provided with information about domestic violence and emotional abuse. I was also given information about narcissistic partners and how to recognise this personality trait.

The texts selected for use within this next cut-up experiment were therefore:

The letter I wrote to my ex.

An online text about emotional abuse.<sup>12</sup>

An online story of Narcissus and Echo.<sup>13</sup>

I cut short phrases from these three sources and placed them in a grey straw hat, in an attempt to keep the selection process light-hearted. My intention was to randomly fill three small pages with linked and opposing phrases. After taking the first two phrases from the hat, I realised that I would need to be more flexible about where they began and ended, otherwise words such as 'and' might be next to 'but' etc. which would serve no function other than to confuse.

After reducing the length of the phrases still further, and pasting them onto the pages, the content seemed slightly too sparse. I added in a couple of phrases cut out of a book, which was selected because the font was a similar size.

I then covered the internal thoughts and what was 'unsaid' with translucent masking tape, so the words could still be seen, but not as clearly as the fully visible text. I completely blanked out any unnecessary words by using correction fluid.

The visual effect of these three pages was a collection of fragmented phrases. The conflict of silence vs speech was reinforced by the placing of the translucent tape.

Though it was emotionally challenging to re-read my own letter, once it had been cut into fragments, it lost its emotional force. I became far more interested in how to combine the selected texts together. In its simplest reading, this text shows a situation where a person with no voice finds their voice. The inclusion of a myth (carrying its own associations) added another layer, and the frank descriptions of emotional abuse again provided an additional layer. The combination of these texts were ambiguous due to the fractured appearance and fragmented content, and yet the links between them were fairly clear.

To develop a more conventional narrative from the three pages of cut-up writing, I wrote a short story called *Echo*. The setting of the story is the flat in Brighton, at around four months before I was finally capable of leaving the relationship. I created two 'characters' based on Echo, Narcissus, myself, and my ex. I added a slightly separate narrator in order to maintain emotional distance. This narrator also represented some of the positive effects I experience from having learned to dissociate, such as being able to invent elaborate and complex fictional worlds while writing novels. As Judith Herman observes, 'once [a survivor] is free, she may even learn to use her trance capability to enrich her present life, rather than to escape from it'.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of this narrator not only enabled me to maintain a slight distance from the content of the story, but also allowed the new text to develop into a hybrid of fictional and autobiographical writing. The short story incorporated phrases spoken by my ex which I had written down while we were still living together. I had jotted down these phrases because during our discussions I would often physically shake, and have problems recollecting what had been said. Over time, it became important to me to privately discover the exact words which triggered the shaking, so I could read them repeatedly till they lost their emotional force. The short story also shows me (or rather, 'Echo') gradually getting rid of my possessions, even before I was aware of the reasons why I was doing this.

I also included something safe from now, this present time. This would help me bring myself back if I got too immersed within the memory. I chose a seashell and invisible armour as key images—reminders of happiness in my current relationship. These were the keys which would unlock the way home.

Figure 2-4. *Unlove Letter*, page 1 to 3. Photo: Jessica Chubb.



## Echo

*The gas fire casts orange light across the floorboards. I am hidden inside a seashell Echo brought home from the seafront. The shell is curved and cracked, and it sits on the middle of the mantelpiece. I am a fragment of Echo's personality, and I have freed myself from her. Her partner, who describes himself as male though he has a female body, I have re-named Narcissus, though that is not his real name. While Echo is out at work, Narcissus spends many hours in this living room, gazing at the mirror. He dresses in suit jackets and frilly dresses. He sews new clothing for himself and alternates from subtle make-up to drag queen make-up to subtle make-up.*

*When Echo's here alone, she often runs her thumb over one of the cracks along my shell. At other times, she checks her hiding place behind the sofa is undisturbed.*

*They are not in this room tonight because they are in the kitchen. Narcissus is talking about being frustrated because though Echo can repeat certain words during an argument, she often forgets what she has agreed to.*

*Echo doesn't know I've left her body, and am living inside this shell. Without me, she is numb, but she was numb already. I detached myself from her during a particularly brutal conversation they were having about her mental health, and the effect of her 'acting out' her fear and depression. She'd retreated into silence again. And when I coiled out of her heart and hid myself inside this shell, she didn't even notice I'd gone.*

*This is a tiny ground floor flat. Narcissus keeps all the inner doors propped open, though Echo prefers them to be closed. I can hear her now, from the kitchen. She's repeating back to Narcissus that she is selfish, and that this argument that's been going on for nearly two hours is not Narcissus' fault. She asks if that's enough, and can they go to bed now, as she has to be up for work in the morning.*

*Echo comes in and switches the gas fire off. She's looking thinner. Her eyes are dark and partially hidden under her long red hair. She glances at the cushion-drowned sofa, and returns to the kitchen.*

*The clock on the bookshelf beside the window says that it is 3.00am. The oak tree that grows outside on the pavement is growing acorns. There's a magpie roosting in its branches, and I hope Echo didn't notice it. She can see sorrow in a solo magpie, and feel it immediately. I can't go outside with her, as when she's alone, walking to work, or during her lunchbreak, or coming home, her thoughts are so dark, so confused and frazzled that parts of her are falling away. I might easily get lost. She thinks she's going mad. She was on medication, but she's stopped taking it. She hasn't told anyone this. She never tells anyone anything when she's frightened. She waits till she's calm, and everything is resolved. But that's not yet. She keeps telling herself it will be soon.*

*Once, Narcissus was away for a whole month. Echo was quiet during this period of time, but on the weekends she danced to loud classical music. Melancholic violins and pianos and flutes. She visited the library and brought books home to read, and each evening and weekend I returned to her heart to see what she was reading. For the first week she, we, I . . . read books about nymphs and gods that*

*I found terrifying. During the second week, I read books of fairy tales written for adults where blood brothers and kings and she-wolves were frenzied creatures. In the third week I read about earthquakes and landslides, tsunamis and all kinds of natural catastrophes. The final week before Narcissus returned, I read a book about domestic violence, re-reading the chapter about emotional abuse. I returned these books to the library two days before Narcissus came back.*

*Some things, once read, can't be forgotten. I think Echo's biding her time.*

*As am I. I am collecting all the words which are spoken between them, into this shell.*

*It is 3.33am. Narcissus tells Echo that her family traumatise her, and that she's a nightmare to be with after she's visited them. Echo disagrees about this. After a while, she says sorry instead. She says it again. It is 3.55am. At 4.01am. Narcissus tells Echo that sorry is a non-word. At 4.04am. Narcissus tells Echo that the phrase 'I don't know' she constantly uses is deeply frustrating.*

*I can't hear anything Echo is saying.*

*Narcissus tells Echo that her friend Rose is not to be trusted, and he asks if they're having an emotional affair. It is 4.15am.*

*It is 4.31am as Echo says she doesn't understand what is meant by the term, 'an emotional affair', but whatever it is, she's sure she hasn't had enough time with Rose to have one.*

*Narcissus doesn't feel loved and recites the reasons to Echo.*

*Echo becomes sad, and agrees to help Narcissus. When she's asked to repeat some of the things she might do to help him, she's forgotten what they are immediately.*

*Narcissus shouts about how forgetful Echo is, and suggests that she writes herself a list.*

*They are both quiet for a long time.*

*At 5.33am Echo says she'd like things to go slowly for a bit. She asks if she can go to sleep yet.*

*Narcissus agrees they should both go to bed, and clicks the bathroom door shut. Taps run.*

*Echo comes into the living room with a rubbish bag, empties a small bin into it, and carries it outside to the pavement. When she comes back indoors, she sits on the sofa and waits.*

*The bathroom door clicks open.*

*Echo leaves the living room. In the hallway she tells Narcissus she has to brush her teeth but won't be long. Narcissus goes to their bedroom and gets into bed.*

*At 5.42am Echo goes to bed.*

*The alarm rings at 7.00am. Echo gets out of bed and switches it off. She goes back to bed and sleeps till 8.00am. At 8.21am she comes into the living room dressed in smart trousers and a blouse. Her hair is tied back and her face wears eyeshadow, lipstick, mascara. She glances out of the window. She puts on a raincoat and picks up her handbag. She pauses, listening.*

*She reaches behind the sofa and retrieves a large plastic bag. As she leaves for work at 8.25am, she quietly carries the bag outside and places it with the*

*neighbour's rubbish. She steps on a twig and the loud crack makes her jump.*

*Echo has been quietly throwing out her possessions every bin day for several months. There can't be that much left that belongs to her. Narcissus has been sewing each day for a long time, and is filling the flat with new fitted jackets, dresses, wide trousers and bolts of fabrics.*

*One evening Echo's alone, putting jumpers, books, and two vases into another rubbish bag. She picks my shell up, frowns, and places it in her handbag.*

*The following day in her office, Echo puts my shell on a small pile of copper paperclips. She watches it while she takes notes, types numbers and words, and answers the phone. At 1.00pm she places my shell in her coat pocket and goes outside for a break. She walks through busy streets. Tourists chatter in as many languages as the seagulls wail and she passes through them. Across a road. Down steps. Pebbles crunch under her feet along the seafront. At the edge of the waves she cups my shell in both hands, and places her ear to the rim.*

*I let Echo hear one of their arguments, from start to finish, so that she knows it's not both of them arguing at all. Only one voice is arguing, and the other is echoing.*

*One of Narcissus' questions is often repeated. 'Are you frightened of me, yes or no?' Echo's echo is always, 'no.'*

*I echo the words Narcissus has spoken to her, the ones she finds impossible to remember. She shakes her head as she hears that Narcissus doesn't know what empathy is. She also hears him say that kindness doesn't matter, but honesty does. She hears that shyness is weak, and silence is frightening. She hears that sex after an argument can be the best sex in the world. She hears that he thinks that break-up sex is even better. She hears about how much Narcissus loves her and she hears that this is why these conversations are so important. She hears Narcissus say that he doesn't want her be happy, or she won't work at their relationship.*

*Echo remembers when they first met, Narcissus said, 'I'm made of anger.' At the time, Echo didn't believe this was possible.*

*She takes my shell from her ear and looks at it for a long time. Then she holds it to her lips and whispers, 'what if . . . there is nothing wrong with me?'*

*She carries my shell to the edge of the sea, and hurls it away.*

*The shell spins through the air, I spiral out of it, spinning through sky, under sea, over sea, and rush back across the waves to her. As I rush into her heart and spread through her body, she breathes in sharply.*

*She places her hand on her chest. On our chest. My chest. And she knows, and we know that one day soon I will leave home in the morning, and won't ever go back. Not today. But perhaps tomorrow. Or tomorrow's tomorrow.*

*I stand here at the edge of the waves for a long time, inhaling the smells of salt and rotting fish, listening to the sounds of seagulls and watching the horizon line. The ocean reflects nothing but the sky above it. Inside my body, I can feel my heartbeat, and another, and another. It reverberates through my ribcage and there is a sensation of invisible armour spreading over my skin. It's made from broken seashells.*

After writing this short story, I used the following process in order to produce another iteration of expressing this memory in a textual form. At that time, I believed it would be an appropriate conclusion of this process of working with the cut-up method and using my own texts. As the two source texts, I used a printout of the *Echo* short story and a small book containing the fairytale *Rapunzel*, which is about a woman who is trapped in a tower.

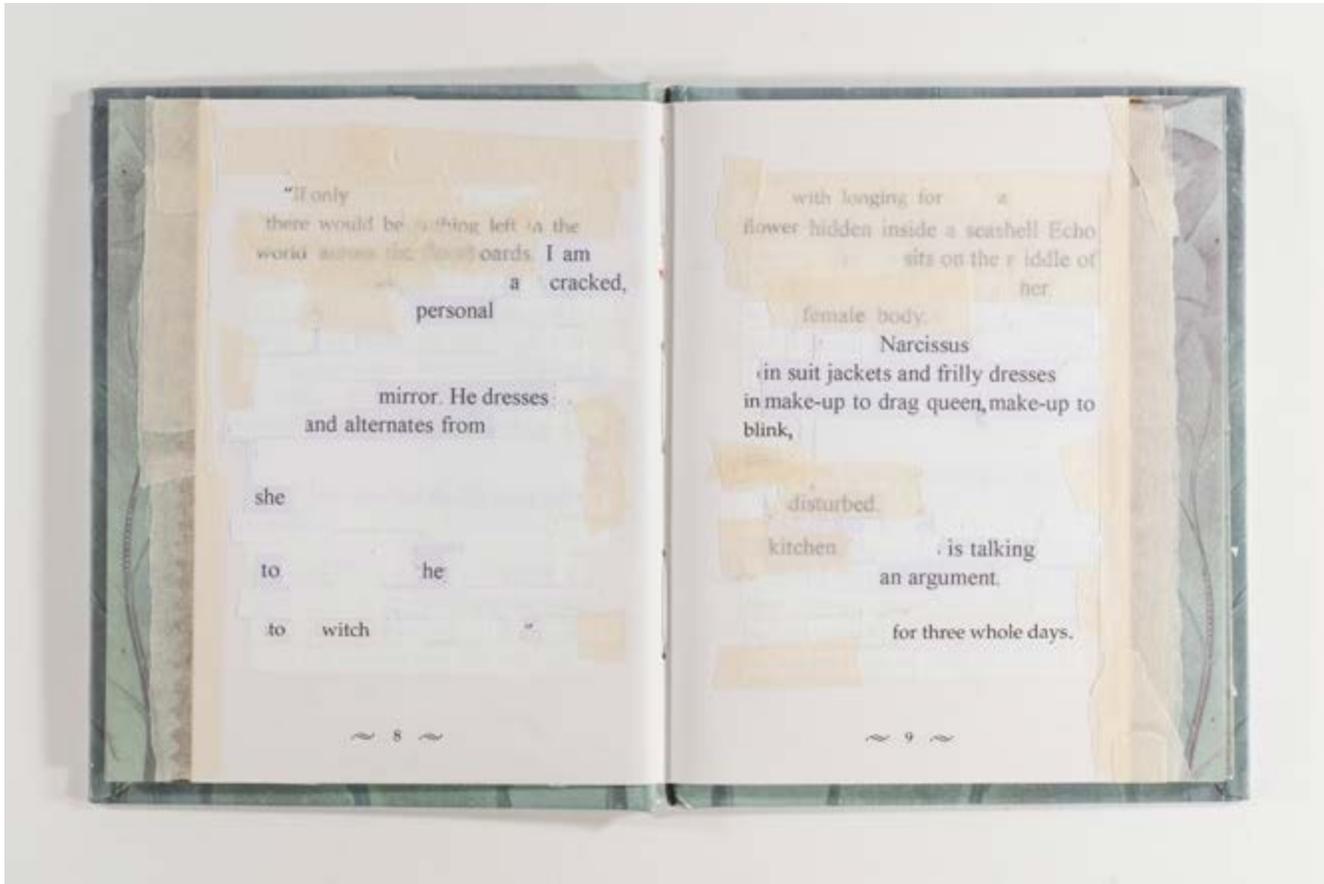
1. Select a book.
2. Count the pages.
3. Cut another text into oblongs, one for each page, using scissors and taking care not to slice through any words.
4. Place the first oblong on the first page, and the last oblong on the last page. Randomly place all the other oblongs on the other pages throughout the book.
5. Paste them onto the book pages, allowing some of the text which is already printed in the book to remain visible.
6. Select words to remain visible from the new combinations of words in each oblong.
7. Consider leaving characters/symbols/images visible within the book, but keep them minimal and precise.
8. Use correction tape to fully blank out words, and masking tape to obscure them.
9. Add in punctuation marks using a fine black pen.
10. Paste a new title onto the cover.

At first, this small book which was once a fairy tale seemed an appropriate end to this process. When I read through the new combinations of words within the book, I saw what I would describe as *a-fairytale-gone-wrong*. There are many ways of reading it, as (due to the fractured texts) the content is ambiguous, but this was my own interpretation.



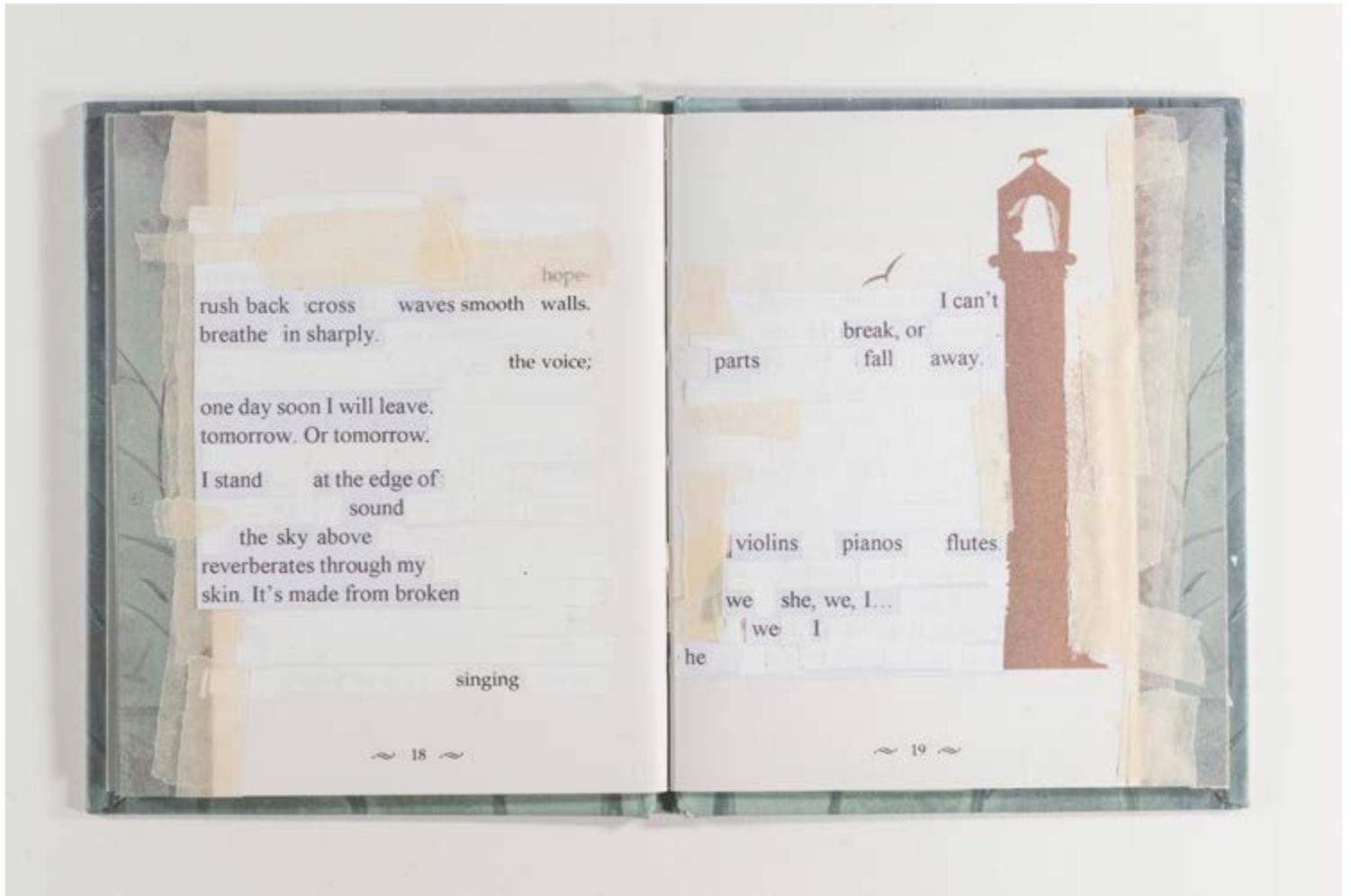
ECHO



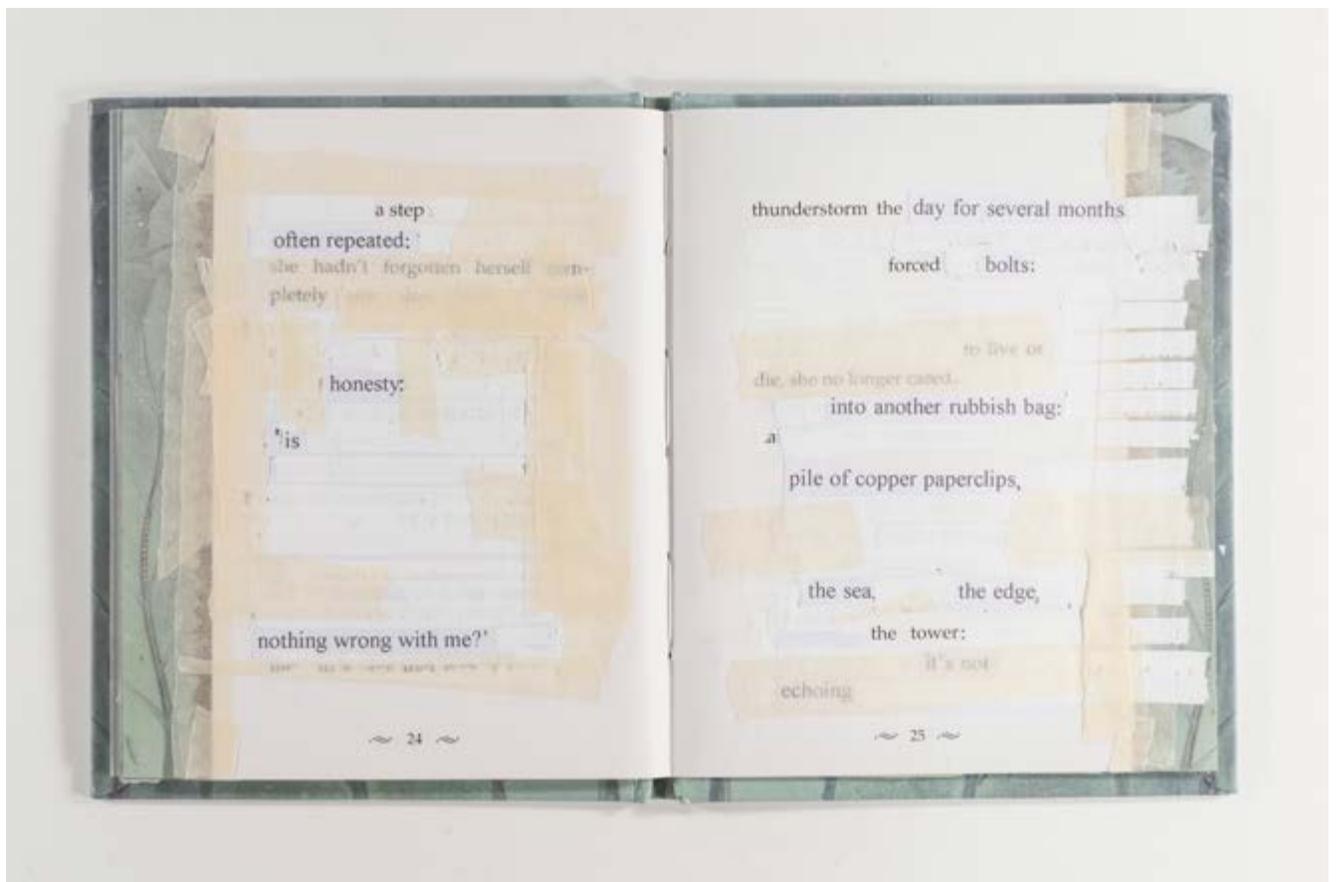
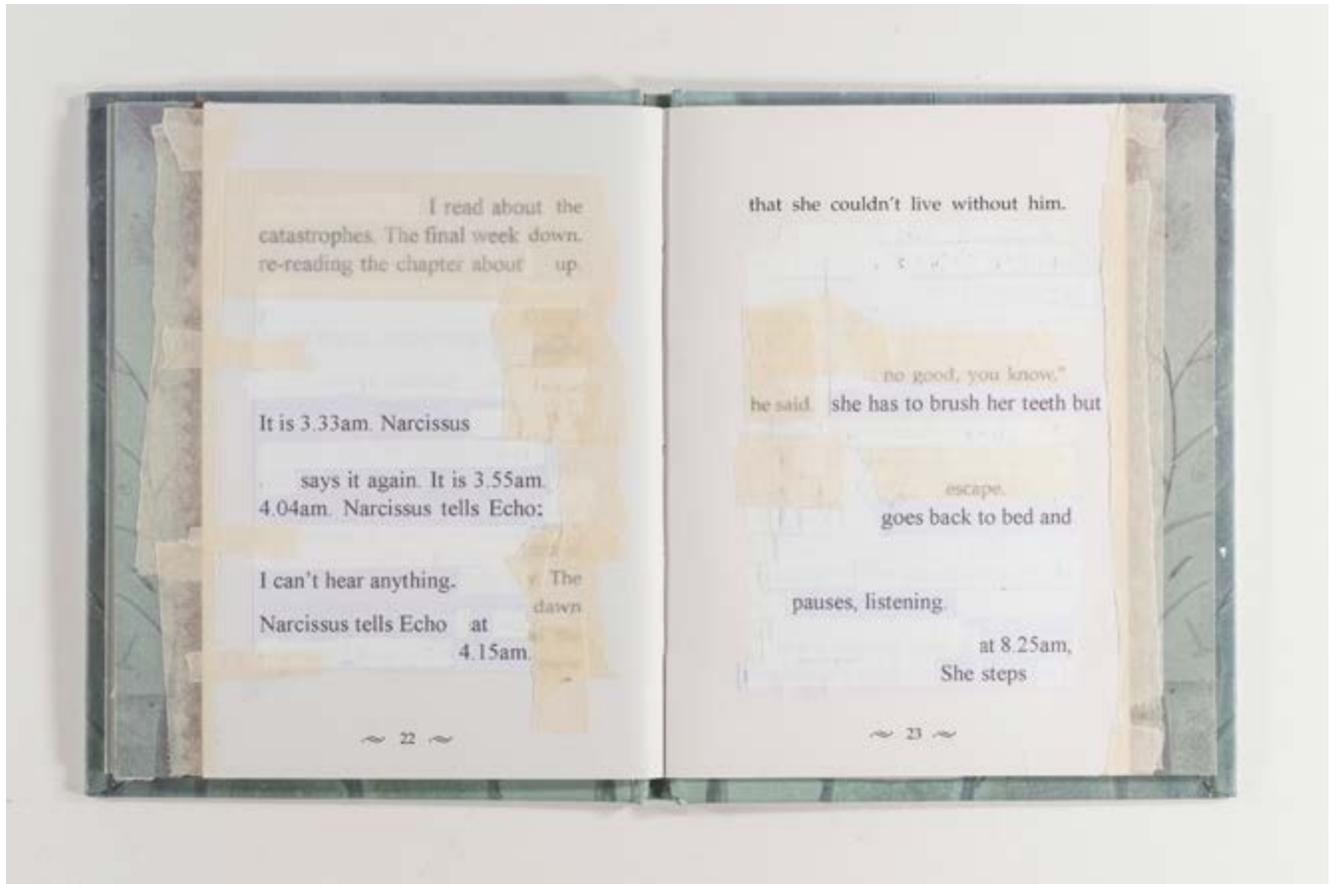














I made a silent video of my hands turning the pages of this book, and in editing the video, created a mirrored version and 'ghosted' it over the first version. This reflection visually implied Narcissus's obsession with his own reflection in the pond from the myth of Echo and Narcissus. The words became less legible as fragmented phrases were overlaid - semi-transparent and reversed - mimicking my own experience of feeling silenced, or incapable of speaking clearly. A link to the video can be found here:

<https://vimeo.com/306700855>

A few days passed, and yet the process didn't yet feel resolved. I couldn't stop thinking about how different my life was at the very start of writing my third novel<sup>15</sup> (in an abusive relationship in Brighton, UK) to how it was by the end of writing it (in a happy relationship in Wellington, NZ).

I didn't want to keep working with my own texts for much longer, as I was concerned that if I did so, I would be in danger of becoming that circular snake, Ouroboros, which is popularly known as a symbol of 'wholeness' or 'infinity'. Personally, I've only ever been able to see it as a snake which is going around and around in a circle, eating its own tail for all eternity. But it struck me that the other thing about snakes is that they regularly have to shed their skin. I once watched one do this, and it was one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen. The snake hid for several days, and I worried that it was dead. Then it shifted and worked its way out of its skin, which remained in one piece. The skin was like a rare translucent paper. The new snake which emerged was so alive that it moved like a dancer inside its small tank, its eyes gleaming like something set free. As a memento, I kept its shed skin as it no longer needed it. I stored it in an airtight glass jar, and when light shone through it, the traces of the snake's markings and scales were fully visible.

I decided to embark on one final iteration which used my own texts. In considering all the other texts I'd written whilst writing my third novel, I realised how many they were. Handwritten notebooks, drawings and diagrams, annotated printouts of chapters, the poems which aided the writing process, the freewriting sessions I'd done to develop the characters and plot, the Isolation Blog I'd published on my website, the short stories I'd written, and the plotlines and chapters that I had edited out of the novel's first draft before it was sent to my editor. Little of this material was on the pages of the published novel, though all of these other texts undoubtedly gave the novel more depth. Were these texts the skins that the novel had shed on the way to becoming fully itself? Or were they my own skins—the texts I'd had to write and discard, in order to write my novel into existence? I imagined all these texts handwritten all over the pages of a copy of my novel, but due to the sheer volume of words, the surface of each page would become unreadable.

According to Sarah Dillon, the term 'palimpsest' historically refers to how one text can overwrite another, with the first text becoming ghostly as the other text is imposed on the same surface.<sup>16</sup> The two (or more) texts usually had no relationship to each other—palimpsests were created because velum was expensive and rare—so had to be reused. If I'd had to write and rub off and rewrite all of the texts and drafts

I produced while writing a novel onto one set of pages, the final version would have been filled with many ghostly layers. While the palimpsest's layerings are of *un-linked* texts, Dillon also briefly cited Michael Davidson's term *palimtext*:

Davidson coins the word 'palimtext' in order to combine 'post-Structuralism's emphasis on writing as trace, as inscription of absence' with 'the material fact of that trace, and inscribing and re-inscribing'. Davidson argues that 'the palimtext retains vestiges of prior writings out of which it emerges. Or more accurately, it is the still visible record of its responses to earlier writings'.<sup>17</sup>

In 1997, Davidson wrote that the 'palimtext' seemed 'decidedly low tech' in comparison to *hypertext*—and commented on its material qualities:

pencils, pens, paper, typewriters. . . . The personist character of these technologies is dependent on their ephemerality, their fatal involvement in time . . . staples rust, card stock fades, paper yellows and begins to flake. . . . The materiality of ephemerality is a study in ghosts.<sup>18</sup>

In response to this link to my own recent textual experiments—treating books/ existing texts as 'material' to be folded, redacted, and cut up (using 'low tech' masking/correction tape, pencils, pens, rulers, scissors etc.) Davidson's term *palimtext* seemed an appropriate description for some aspects of these processes. In fact many of my notebooks might be considered *palimtexts* already. They certainly contained layers of textual markings, crossings out, and revisions. However, what if a *palimtext* was made the other way around—starting with the end result (a published novel) and making it seem fragile or ephemeral, and then taking a discarded text (or layer) which was part of the stages of writing the novel, and making this text appear resilient?

Within the sections of my third novel which were edited out prior to submission were a series of nine 'Letters to Cupid.' These were written by the main character (Danu—a young female tightrope walker who is grieving for her parents). Danu had met a woman beside a river—an artist who was fishing with a bow and arrow. This woman left a lasting impression on Danu – so she wrote letters to her, nicknaming her Cupid. In these letters Danu struggled with her fear of love, and many of these letters incorporated my own struggles at the time of writing them, as I was learning to be able to trust and love someone again. Much later, after working collaboratively on a project<sup>19</sup> with my new partner, who was also exploring themes of love and trust, I removed the character of the artist/ fisherwoman, and the Letters to Cupid had to go as well. This meant that the novel became a manageable length, and with the removal of this strand or layer, the central plot was simplified.

Pages 250–259. Figures 19–28.  
*City of Circles/Letters to Cupid*.  
Photos: Jessica Chubb.

I followed these instructions:

Reverse Palimtext:

1. Tear out the first or last page of each chapter within a published novel.
2. Select the same number of pages from texts which were edited out of the novel prior to publication.
3. Sandpaper the pages from the published novel until they partially disintegrate, leaving holes, tears and rips.
4. Place the edited-out texts behind each page and attach them together at the top with masking tape so the novel pages can be raised and the edited out texts can be read separately.
5. Glue down the parts of the novel pages that are torn and disintegrating so the edited-out text shows through the tears.
6. Place the sandpapered page-dust in a glass jar.

This making of a reverse 'palimtext' became the final textual iteration within this project. The process began with cutting up my novels and producing a text that described the circumstances I was living in while I wrote their first pages. I then cut up a letter to my ex and two other texts which expressed what I had learned since then. The next iteration was a short story that illuminated a shift in understanding. This story was then cut up to produce a fairytale-gone-wrong. And finally, I returned to the novel I'd been writing during and after leaving that relationship and revealed one of its discarded layers, while simultaneously exposing the fragility of its pages.

The series of textual iterations contained fragmented and more conventional writing styles, and their content originated from memories. The combination of these textual iterations thus express an emotional journey, sometimes fractured, sometimes clear and immersive. This journey began within the confusion experienced in an abusive relationship, travelled through the shocks of realisation and of leaving, through gaining understanding, and (via the Letters to Cupid) towards reconnection with the ability to love and trust again.

Now this project is complete, it is reassuring to me that the final ten pages show only surface damage. In half-light these pages resemble skin being peeled away, to reveal something intact.

## ONE FOR SORROW

### LETTERS TO CUPID

Dying faces  
shine, as if they  
ened itself, so  
emotion, air  
They flood  
before the

Inside a  
patterned  
mother.  
dead father  
dead, onk about

Danu spent the past  
alive through  
forced water  
sponged their  
snatched homes  
scare away the  
The sound of their  
she might have a  
chance of recovery if she remained still.

The wine-coloured curtains are closed. Inside, the caravan is soaked in reds. Outside, the sun will be too bright for today.



THRE

that it's not love, and  
from. I dream that I  
at bridge. Why in these drea  
real name, when I always tei

you are called Cupid. The only person I've  
precise arrow that could rip through my h  
it dry. I wonder if, for me, you would  
the same shaft. I would never ask you to  
if you would.

good that I never lingered to speak to you  
I did. Than you allowed. Love shot through  
s might be like all other kinds of love - a potent  
ing. A passionate thing. A life or death thing. You  
ave looked me in the eye. Asked me how much I co  
ou. I could not have lied with my response to su  
ion, asked so directly, asked by you.

when I remember your eyes. More than anything  
Chay they saw into me. And I saw into them. I wa  
it. Too scared to be looked at.

I remember your mouth. The exact w  
seek to  
clasp  
along  
screws from the  
things clink in her pockets.

Black pepper makes her sneeze, clearing her nostrils of a  
build-up of scents. Her eyes wake to the colours of thickly  
painted doors, illuminated under lamplight. Running her palms  
over the cracked layers of paint, each door of these houses  
becomes a history of colours. They began bright, there were  
many years of ochres followed by decades of paler hues. What  
colours would they have been when her parents were here? Now,  
they're bright colours again.

...ams I love you.  
...feel when I'm fully awake. And  
...s too intense to feel.  
The world keeps turning around. Son,  
At other times I think it's turning grey  
me, or dust in my eyes?  
I miss you and don't even know what  
is a life, my life, to lead. And I have to do  
to stop thinking of you. I don't yet know how  
Unless you're here in this city I've found m  
ing like yourself or in disguise. Sometimes I'm  
are here somewhere, though surely this is in  
You're beside some other river. Still fishing.  
If you are here, come and find me. I'm feeling  
ly or stupidly running away from  
I just have to love you.

Beside the door, a wall reads: The Matryoshka Museum is empty and quiet.

She walks along the alleyway and she is to a set  
of crumbling buildings. There are many broken pla  
outer circle, and this one looks like a giant, my grow  
gaps in the timber.

The museum door is propped open, so she goes in.  
Welcome Board appears to replace the need for staff, as it in  
what can be found behind four closed doors. One room is abou  
geothermal energy and electricity production in the city. Another  
is about the local geology, another is about mountain wildlife.

The fourth room is about Matryoshka's history, and this is  
the one which most interests her. It's a small windowless room  
where text is printed in a handwritten font all over the white  
walls. Within the quietness of this empty room she reads:

## FIVE FOR AN ELEMENT

Mo... through the turn... distance. Inside the... No, banish... Her will... You'd not spike... But you mark... My dreams - awa... I think you're made of... tie themselves together with pro... other kind which I don't yet understa... for you everywhere. I never find you... Would you do something for me? Look at any... you're beside some river, like as not. Not real... longing that makes me seek signs of you. So... river, pick a blade of grass. Something as usual... said you were an artist as well as a fisherwoman. S... colour is grass? We all call it green. But you w... think of her than most people would. Can you see it's... teenage orph... hope you can. Those colours you see are the... small kind... use just one word to describe anything... over all the other colours which are... blade's blues, pinks, yellows... faithful lover... with yearning, as I am? ... see one colour, the... But now Morrie th... find you all... just had his... scribe them... m to you... for her looks... back from... es of pair... been some fearful gift. Especially... rs, all... - rotten and missing her. The sh... islee... he's... The field's quiet outside, with eve... likely grateful to at... last be in bed... s... Morrie sits himself down and lig... s a half-burned candle.

Dea... the way  
...own, found,  
...stairs, or is she  
...of Danu? Their  
...together through  
...e there.

I am so alone here  
every time I speak to any  
potentially lovable? What if everyone  
every person I met, it might kill me. And  
my mind or heart or wherever emotion lives  
somehow been changed. I now think I could  
every single person I meet. How is that possible?

How many people are we capable of  
know? I wish I could meet you again  
these things. Just once would do  
forgotten ever having met me. In a  
time passes more quickly than this  
might forget having met you as well  
anyone else I've ever met. Thinking  
this so?

I need to see you again. I feel  
trapped, at times. Because I need to see  
find a way. Your river is so far from here  
the other side of the world. I have no  
wings of my own to travel to where you are  
again. I'd know who you really are.

perhaps, what love really is.  
the window to let in air. The  
which would sing how to love  
it living, speak, this?  
she has Adeline's  
ves her. She's  
discards  
thoughts

Danu is still looking for the  
parts of her body belong to her a.

...re white, the  
Two stems of  
...windowsill. She  
...ves her emptied  
...the night away  
...illuminated by

...the ceiling. An  
...small enough  
...bed. She leaves  
...anything, as if  
...dows are lies.

...s face in her  
...bones. The  
...breasts, this is  
...somewhere to  
...from their rich  
...hand as if she's

...ferences. Which  
...parts are shared?

SIX  
 ing for you.  
 is to yearn, then  
 I've shut out all of  
 colour in each thing  
 there are hundreds, ju  
 t. I would say, 'Your lat  
 ght. I want you to have a  
 ou find in me, even if it b  
 ou are not here.

At lunchtime, if you forgot me as soon as the main street of  
 the outer city, hing more than catch fish in the squares, she  
 looks around in grey on white paper, ev Most of them  
 that river, I yearn for wh Most of them  
 must work, your face, your voice, those fe with them other  
 the things were real to me, in that moment. Pieces of old  
 seem realer to me now, than this city w m eyes, and  
 now that this is the wrong way around.

A part of me is still beside you. I'm juggling three rocks. One for you  
 I'm juggling three rocks. One for you  
 am trying to call home, and one for  
 os have allowed myself to love. Y  
 es. I don't know which rock will f  
 The she up one, will I look for it, and le  
 human. And down in three currents?  
 the flock as I know I have to choose. I  
 had. It rejoined. I can hold on to.

How do people are their own kind?  
 Two apron-cla ench, eating cakes with  
 plastic forks. The a other, laughing as they  
 spoon cream and the new things  
 mouths.

Smiling, Danu discover here fill  
 But one wipes her skin as the other takes their  
 rubbish to the bin. Their break is over. They disap-  
 pear back into a

f you  
 picture  
 case yo

my put  
 to who

er  
 or her  
 dy forg  
 parted  
 thoughts of  
 them from  
 so hard  
 city felt

keep  
 rotten  
 want  
 But

me one letter. Some  
 nges, and so sudd  
 perhaps this is  
 the new things

SEVEN FOR  
NEVER

...from yaten he...  
...same world  
...might be love. I do...  
...didn't know it was po...  
...I met only once. I don't...  
...for me. All the same, part of m... believes that...  
...I find me. Or I'll find you, somewhere I don't expect...

I think you would be beside me in seconds if I found myself drowning.

If you were drowning, I think I'd know. And I'd be beside you. She examines patterns and two carved, but stained by time and weather.

At the... the intricate silver gate comes into view. There's a large letter... in the wall beside it. The wall which surrounds the inner Circle is high, and its surface is smooth polished metal which tilts outwards slightly at the top. It would be impossible to...

She puts her eye to a gap between metal leaves. On the other side of the gate is a narrow staircase coated in copper. High above the staircase there are tall green turrets and minarets. A mist pours down, hiding this view away.

She listens.

There's such stillness, here. Peace. She traces the silver leaves with her thumb. They're edged with gold.

Silence.

Light comes in a warm glow from the moon. The edges of the high buildings flicker, disappearing and reappearing.

Dear Cupid,

I still long to see you again. Making you, and  
me. You can't possibly be the man I hold in my  
as long after I met you. Time doesn't fly, it swims  
sometimes far too slowly. Sometimes faster than light  
the height of the stars. I must be making you up  
so long ago that I met you. Making you up into a  
one I could love. Not the person you really are

When waking myself against imagining people into  
eggshells, I try to hold on to what I know. The f  
drinking, I see the nature of you now. You wear blu  
with his hair. You care about others, but  
of the hospital - is this might be true of you, frontment, t  
on we had by the river.

But this feeling still remains - that you  
- and that is what must surely be my own  
a bricome thing I've lost so long ago I've forgotten  
shift and you are still the one person that somehow I  
shatters, I doubt this want, this desire. Constantly.  
hide all  
Dant  
nothing find it.  
Keep going

At the top of the case, the circles have move  
She has arrived in an area lined with stern limestone buildings.  
People are dressed smartly, move purposefully, and disappear into  
offices. As she walks, the air changes. It's peppered with flecks.

Danu's fingertips sweep along a ridged stone wall surrounding  
one of the primary schools. Children shriek behind it. A bell  
clangs, once, twice. A door creaks, children's voices chatter. A  
whistle sounds. The door slams.

the staff

progress up  
words across th

Cupid,

ry time I think of you, this tho  
hat you're made of love, resonan  
king the same thing of me. And te.  
ut that, is that you might be right.

words over and  
he climbs the s  
n bottle, s  
dian

over again until What if you are made of love? Whese  
airs to the attic? That it's not that I can't love, it's that hen s  
lumps into h made of love and once I start flooding w  
jmed Win? I could love so indiscriminately n the grec  
ughtening idea. Hurt and hurt and hurt arms of a guarg  
to her possible. Do you have this under control? I'm burgundy numb  
daughter, why I've felt for so long that I'm in herself or bso  
clumsy that sh while

Danu stands tall much r thin line,  
Rosa can't sense her times I feel as if I'm wearing  
travel wherever she skin. Too raw to love  
ough control. If I let p

As long as Rosa can know the people ce. Jode made sure that  
her daughter was the d will care too mghter in the Inner Circle.  
Rosa soaked that love int an imprint on grew Though she's now  
an adult, parts of her don again becau  
be naughty tease, get ang out more about ow up. She wants to play,  
loves too hard and falls to ning to each much, swim and fly. She  
she often re it. Ju and eats so much sugar  
tion in which Rosa sai he remembers a conversa  
Seriousness binds people he seriousness?  
As adults, we should st the ground.

Danu might walk a Thank you sugar as high as she  
can reach. Which of Thank you sun Thank you sun had the better life?

Rosa can travel for. Thank you be grateful for and roll down the dunes  
of deserts, as lo rocks, and love for sand.  
She can caress while she's harmed as long as she feels love for  
ness and red gratitude.



Figure 29. *Sandpaper Page-Dust*. Photo: Jessica Chubb.

## Endnotes

1. Pericles Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107.
2. Barry Miles, "The Future Leaks Out: A Very Magical and Highly Charged Interludes," in *Cut-Ups, Cut-Ins, Cut-Outs: The Art of William S. Burroughs*, ed. Colin Fallows, Synne Genzmer, and Ursula Hubnel-Benischek (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2012), 23.
3. Miles, *Future Leaks Out*, 31.
4. Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker: A Literary Biography* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2017), 156.
5. I publish under my own name: Jess Richards, and my novels are called *Snake Ropes* (2012), *Cooking With Bones* (2013), *City of Circles* (2017). They are published by Sceptre, Hodder & Stoughton, London.
6. Some words had to be discarded as they were in the dialect I'd invented for my first novel, and couldn't be used for this purpose as they were too linked to the setting and characters contained within the novel.
7. My definition of 'freewriting' is very fast writing in response to a 'prompt'. It is usually done at a time of morning or night when the brain is tired and the subconscious can be accessed.
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16. Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007), 12.
17. Dillon, *Palimpsest*, 47.
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19. One iteration of this performance/video/text work was *Drowning/Undrowning*, performed with Sally J Morgan as Morgan + Richards at the *Triggering Memory Symposium*, Massey University, Wellington, NZ, 2015. The video (with text as soundtrack) has been shown internationally.

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## Biographical Note

Jess Richards is the author of three novels, which are published by the literary fiction imprint of Hodder & Stoughton, UK. She also collaborates as Morgan + Richards with Sally J Morgan (a conceptual artist who has shown in galleries across the world). Together, they blend the visual and the written word in performance/installations. Jess is currently studying towards a PhD at the College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington.

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# Hokopanopano Ka Toi Moriori (Reigniting Moriori Arts): Memory Work on Rēkohu (Chatham Islands)

Kingsley Baird

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## Hokopanopano Ka Toi Moriori (Reigniting Moriori Arts): Memory Work on Rēkohu (Chatham Islands)

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### Abstract

Since European discovery of Rēkohu (Chatham Islands) in 1791, the pacifist Moriori population declined rapidly as a result of introduced diseases (to which they had no immunity) and killing and enslavement by Māori *iwi* (tribes) from the New Zealand ‘mainland’ following their invasion in 1835. When (full-blooded) Tame Horomona Rehe—described on his headstone as the ‘last of the Morioris’—died in 1933, the Moriori were widely considered to be an extinct people.

In February 2016, Moriori *rangata mātua* (elders) and *rangatehi* (youth), artists and designers, archaeologists, a conservator and an arborist gathered at Kōpinga Marae on Rēkohu to participate in a *wānanga* organized by the Hokotehi Moriori Trust. Its purpose was to enlist the combined expertise and commitment of the participants to *hokopanopano ka toi Moriori* (reignite Moriori arts)—principally those associated with *rākau momori* (‘carving’ on living *kōpi* trees)—through discussion, information exchange, speculation, toolmaking and finally, tree carving. In addition to providing a brief cultural and historical background, this paper recounts some of the memory work of the *wānanga* from the perspective of one of the participants whose fascination for Moriori and the resilience of their culture developed from Michael King’s 1989 book, *Moriori: A People Rediscovered*.

Keywords: Moriori, Rēkohu, Chatham Islands, *rākau momori*, dendroglyphs, *kōpi*

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### Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Māui Solomon, Susan Thorpe, and Hokotehi Moriori Trust for the opportunity to undertake the extraordinary experience of *Hokopanopano Ka Toi Moriori* (and to Māui and Susan for checking the facts in this article and advancing my understanding of Moriori culture); Kōpinga Marae for the splendid hospitality; and to my fellow participants for their warm companionship and willingness to impart their considerable expertise. Finally, I am indebted to the inspirational generosity of spirit of Moriori for sharing the world they inhabit with their *karapuna* (ancestors).

Figure 1. *Moriori rākau momori*,  
J. M. Barker (Hapupu) National  
Historic Reserve, Rēkohu /  
Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo:  
Kingsley Baird.



‘They are gone and the place thereof shall know them no more. At the islands their dendroglyphs alone remain, mute reminders of the culture of this almost forgotten folk.’<sup>1</sup>

So wrote New Zealand anthropologist, Christina Jefferson (c.1891-1974), of the indigenous Moriori of Rēkohu (Chatham Islands) over 60 years ago. From 1947-1955 Jefferson made six trips to these islands—located approximately 800 kilometres east of New Zealand’s South Island—to study and record the Moriori *rākau momori* or ‘carvings’ into living *kōpi* trees (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*).<sup>2</sup> Since European discovery of the islands in 1791, the pacifist Moriori population declined rapidly as a result of introduced diseases (to which they had no immunity) and killing and enslavement by Māori *iwi* (tribes) from the New Zealand ‘mainland’ following their invasion in 1835.

Figure 2. Grave of Tame  
Horomona Rehe, Manukau  
Point, Rēkohu / Chatham  
Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley  
Baird.



When (full-blooded) Tame Horomona Rehe (commonly known as Tommy Solomon)—described on his headstone as the ‘last of the Morioris’—died in 1933, the Moriori were widely considered, in what Ranginui Walker described as ‘one of New Zealand’s most enduring myths’, to be an extinct people.<sup>3</sup> The demise of Moriori at the death of Horomona Rehe was the accepted popular history with which I—and many others—grew up. According to historian Michael King,

for hundreds of thousands of New Zealand children, the version of Moriori history carried in [*T*]he *School Journal* and other publications that drew from that source, reinforced over 60-odd years by primary school teachers, was the one that lodged in the national imagination.<sup>4</sup>

A *School Journal* of 1916 erroneously informed its impressionable readership of the origins and nature of Moriori:

No one knows whence they came . . . . [T]hey were a race inferior to the stalwart Maoris, and . . . were of Melanesian, not Polynesian origin. . . . [Driven from New Zealand by] their more virile and more warlike [Māori] opponents. . . . they determined to migrate to the Chatham Islands. . . . [where t]he Moriori were as hopelessly isolated as Robinson Crusoe on his island. . . . In their new home they became peace-loving, timorous and lazy.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 3. 'Moriori in 1877'. Among these Moriori survivors of the 1835 Māori invasion. Hirawanu Tapu (second left, standing), Rohana (second left, sitting) and Tatua (second right, standing) were adolescents at the time, and endured over two decades of slavery. Descendants of survivors include Wari Tutaki (left), Teretiu Rehe (third left, standing), Rangitapua Horomona Rehe (father of Tame Horomona Rehe, fourth left, standing), Piripi (far right), Ngakikingi (middle, sitting) and Te Tene Rehe (next right). <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/1612/moriori-in-1877>, Reference: 19XX.2.481, Permission of Canterbury Museum. Photo: Alfred Martin.



In the early 20th century, amateur ethnologists and founding members of the Polynesian Society, Stephenson Percy Smith (1840-1922) and Elsdon Best (1856-1931), were the major promoters of the idea that non-Polynesian 'Moriori' were the first people in New Zealand, later absorbed or driven out by the superior, Polynesian Māori arriving on a great fleet of canoes.<sup>6</sup> They fostered a picture of 'Melanesian' Moriori as inferior to the more 'Aryan-looking' Māori.<sup>7</sup> A result of prevailing social Darwinist ideas, these prejudices seemed to be confirmed by the rapid decline of Moriori in the face of European and Māori arrival in the Chathams. Although anthropologist and ethnologist Henry Skinner—and others—dispelled the Moriori mythologies from the 1920s, the story was too appealing—not least, maintains King—as it supported *Pākehā* (or European) displacement of Māori on mainland New Zealand.<sup>8</sup>

In the "Agreement in Principle to Settle Historical Claims" (2017) between Moriori and the Crown, the latter

acknowledges its contribution, through the dissemination of school journals, to the stigmatisation of Moriori as a racially inferior people who became extinct, and acknowledges the suffering and hardship these myths have caused to generations of Moriori through to the present day; and . . . contributed to the diminution of Moriori *ihi* (authority) and *rangatiratanga* over their identity, and rejection or loss of knowledge of Moriori *hokopapa* (ancestry)...<sup>9</sup>

## Moriori settlement

Figure 4. Map: Chatham and Pitt islands. Land Information New Zealand. <https://www.linz.govt.nz/land/maps/linz-topographic-maps/map-chooser/map-31>.



It is thought the Moriori people came to Rēkohu by canoe from Eastern Polynesia and New Zealand. While *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* states this arrival was between 1400 and 1500 BCE, Moriori traditional knowledge proposes a much earlier date for settlement of Rēkohu and Rangihauite based on recorded hokopapa (genealogy).<sup>10</sup> By the time New Zealand Māori and the indigenous people of Rēkohu came into contact with each other in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, neither apparently had surviving knowledge of the other. To distinguish themselves from the new arrivals, the latter began to refer to themselves as ‘Moriori’ (their dialectal version of ‘Māori’) meaning ‘ordinary’.

By adapting to the local conditions of Rēkohu, the settlers developed a distinct culture, which was characterized by: a non-hierarchical society, their own version of Polynesian language, no horticulture (as the climate was unsuitable for root vegetables), and a material culture simpler than Māori.<sup>11</sup> A fundamental attribute of this distinct culture was the rejection of warfare. An early leader, Nunuku-whenua, organised a permanent truce and forbade human-killing and the eating of human flesh forever. Instead disputes were settled in hand-to-hand combat which halted

when blood was drawn.<sup>12</sup> These laws—strictly observed by all nine Moriori tribes—would have consequences that would radically change their destiny.

Figure 5. Paua collecting, Manukau reef, Rēkohu / Chatham Island, 2016. This reef has a customary *rāhui* or prohibition (in this case) placed on the area or resource as a conservation measure. Collecting shellfish is only permitted for certain purposes, and only with permission. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 6. Te Whanga Lagoon / Maungatere Hill (right), Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Moriori inhabited the two larger islands, Rēkohu (Chatham Island)—translated as ‘mist before the sun’—and neighbouring Rangihau (Pitt Island), living as hunter-gatherers. In a marine environment rich in fish and shellfish—as it is today—most food came from the sea. In addition to trapping eels and snaring birds, seals were hunted for both food and clothing. If they had brought root vegetables with them they did not survive as the main island was not suitable for their growth. In addition to low sunlight, 20% of the area of the larger Rēkohu comprises Te Whanga Lagoon and a further 60% is covered in peat and peat-derived soils.

Moriori brought with them a New Zealand tree—known as *karaka* to Māori on the mainland—which they call *kōpi*.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 7. Kōpi trees, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Moriori employed aboriculture (the growing of trees for food) and agroforestry (the cultivation of trees) in which the forests were a very important part of everyday life used for food, shelter, and fuel. The *kōpi* forests, wind intolerant and requiring well-drained soil, were modified and managed by Moriori. The drupes or berries of this plant compensated for the lack of root vegetables. The outer flesh can be consumed when ripe but the kernel is highly toxic if eaten raw. When detoxified they can be preserved and provide an important source of carbohydrate. This food source, along with the prohibition on killing in warfare, might explain why the Moriori population thrived, reaching between 2,500 and 3,000 by the time of European arrival.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 8. 'X-ray' figure *rākau momori*, Rotorua, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



In addition to the *kōpi* providing a vital food source, Moriori made carvings on them. This practice of carving, incising or etching, and bruising into the bark of living *kōpi* trees created *rākau momori*. The *rākau momori* are among the few visible remaining signs of Moriori culture from pre-European contact. There has been much speculation as to why and how the Moriori carved the *rākau momori* and what they mean. According to the Hokotehi Moriori Trust,

The carvings are complex and diverse portrayals of *karapuna* (ancestors) and possibly events. Many of them are memorials for departed loved ones. The belief was that by carving the image into the bark, the spirit of the departed would be infused into the tree, which then acted as a kind of portal to the spiritual homeland. These places [*kōpi* groves] are very *tapu* [sacred] to Moriori and are used for inspiration, communication, mediation and reflection.<sup>15</sup>

As categorized by Jefferson and the Hokotehi Moriori Trust, the *rākau momori* fall into roughly four groups:

1. Human figures
2. Zoomorphic representations (mostly birds and fish—both realistic and stylized—as well as seals, seaweed, and crayfish)
3. 'Trees' [Jefferson's quotation marks], and
4. Assorted other objects (some of which Jefferson identifies as 'weapons').<sup>16</sup>

The 'x-ray' human figure (named for its skeletal, particularly ribbed, appearance) is the most common motif. In a survey undertaken by Jefferson, in which she drew about 450 of the *rākau momori*, many of these figures were described as 'whakapahoho' by islanders, meaning they have 'a certain commemorative significance'.<sup>17</sup> According to two of Jefferson's informants on Rēkohu, 'Whakapahoho', could be translated as 'statue', 'monument made of wood', or 'something in memory of a person'. Some, with certain physical attributes or related objects such as weapons, were considered to represent definite individuals.<sup>18</sup>

Anthropologist Henry Skinner (1886-1978) concluded the *rākau momori* are 'purely commemorative and . . . comparable with the carved ancestral figures in Māori guest houses'.<sup>19</sup> The only record of the making of a carving comes from Frederick Hunt (1818-1891), a settler on Rangihau (Pitt Island). Hunt recounted the story of Mehenui, who, after the death of his wife and child was said to have carved two figures on a *kōpi* tree.<sup>20</sup> While this singular event appears to support Skinner's commemoration theory, Jefferson argues that the significant number of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms cannot all be attributed to this purpose.<sup>21</sup> Other suggestions as to the purpose of the carvings include that they are representations of certain individuals whose identity was indicated through the depiction of a 'foible or idiosyncrasy' or physical feature.<sup>22</sup>

Such speculations concerning customary Moriori culture, as well as recent initiatives to revive aspects of pre-contact practices, stem from cataclysmic events set in motion by the arrival of foreigners beginning in the late eighteenth century

Figure 9. *Rākau momori*,  
Hāpūpū. J.M. Barker National  
Historic Reserve, Rēkohu /  
Chatham Islands, 2016.  
Photo: Kingsley Baird.



### The outside world comes to Rēkohu

Anthropologist and historian Nicholas Thomas described the encounters between Europeans and Oceanic peoples thus: ‘Knowing involves interaction and interaction has consequences’.<sup>23</sup> For Moriori, contact with the outside world beginning with the European discovery of Rēkohu on 29 November 1791, would have a profound impact on the future of Moriori. The brig, *Chatham*, commanded by Lieutenant William Broughton, sighted Rēkohu after being blown off course and proceeded to map the island and name its main features. Upon landing, the visitors claimed it for Britain’s then monarch, King George III. During a barter with the island’s inhabitants a dispute ensued and the *Chatham’s* crew killed a Moriori man, Tamakororo. The peaceful Moriori blamed themselves for the violent incident and agreed that future visitors would be greeted peacefully.<sup>24</sup> When the next European vessel—a sealer—arrived a decade later, its crew received an unarmed welcome.

## Invasion

In November of that year, two Māori *iwi* from the mainland (Ngāti Tama and Ngāti Mutunga) commissioned a Sydney trading ship in Wellington Harbour and sailed to Rēkohu in two voyages. Forced from their ancestral homelands in intertribal warfare, they decided to resettle on the Chathams where they understood the inhabitants would not resist them and food was plentiful.<sup>25</sup> When the 900-strong Māori party of men, women, and children landed on Rēkohu armed with muskets and other weapons, the privations endured on the long and cramped sea journey meant they did not present an immediate threat to Moriori.

At Whangaroa or Port Hutt their recovery from the voyage was assisted by Moriori. Despite this and other benevolent gestures as well as the lack of aggression displayed by the indigenous inhabitants of Rēkohu, after a few weeks the Māori began to kill Moriori and eat some for food. In response to the actions of the invaders, 1,000 Moriori men met at Te Awapatiki and, following a three-day debate, decided to uphold their ancient covenant of peace and not kill the new arrivals. Moreover, despite the hostility they had experienced, they were prepared to share Rēkohu's resources with the Māori and live in peace with them. However, Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama made their intentions clear; they had commenced to *takahi*, or 'walk' and claim the land, and initially killed around 226 Moriori (excluding 'a considerable number of children whose names have been forgotten').<sup>26</sup> The survivors—who had nowhere to escape on the island—were enslaved and forced to do hard labour. Subjugated and dispirited, their corporeal and spiritual existence defiled and demeaned, many Moriori died of what was described as *kongenge* or despair. Despite this catastrophic event, Moriori upheld Nunuku's law; no Māori were killed.

Under a section titled 'Enslavement' in the Waitangi Tribunal Report 2001 (concerned with Moriori and Ngāti Mutunga claims in the Chatham Islands) European accounts of the invasion period record that

Moriori were treated appallingly by the Māori intruders of 1835. They were housed in inadequate whare, poorly fed, compelled to undertake extreme labour, brutalised, made to respond to everyone's bidding (including even Māori children), and, for a time, gratuitously killed at whim. They were forbidden to marry or to have children.<sup>27</sup>

However, as King states, 'the Moriori remnants were never reconciled to the events of 1835 and their aftermath'.<sup>28</sup> In 1862, a letter to New Zealand Governor George Grey signed by 33 Moriori elders sought the return of lands and an end to enslavement for the surviving Moriori population. By this time, killing by the invaders, the impact of introduced diseases to which the indigenous population had no immunity, and demoralisation caused the Moriori population to plummet to 101. Ngāti Mutunga claimed that 'they had "conquered" Moriori and that therefore the Chatham Islands belonged to them'.<sup>29</sup> This argument was upheld by the Native Land Court hearings on Rēkohu between 1868 and 1872, and as a

result, less than 3% of the islands' land area was returned to Moriori.<sup>30</sup>

However, Moriori customary law was different from that of Māori and in 2001 the Waitangi Tribunal found that Moriori had not engaged in combat, had not been defeated, and had not ceded customary title over the land to the invaders.<sup>31</sup>

Their *manawa whenua* (heart of the land) and *mana* (authority and spiritual power) in maintaining Nunuku's covenant, remained undiminished.<sup>32</sup>

In 1933, with the death of full-blooded Tame Horomona Rehe, the Moriori were considered to be extinct. However, in 1989, the publication of Michael King's book, *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* propelled Moriori back into the public consciousness. Critically, King revealed to the outside world that far from having died out, Moriori were reasserting their culture and their rights, as well as dispelling commonly-held myths of Rēkohu's indigenous population.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1990s the New Zealand government engaged in dialogue with Moriori and Māori about grievances dating from the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi (1840). The Crown recognised Moriori as well as Māori and stated that it would not settle any claims until both could be settled. In August 2017 Moriori and the Crown signed an "Agreement in Principle to Settle Historical Claims" which includes cultural, financial and commercial redress.<sup>34</sup>

### *Hokopanopano Ka Toi Moriori (reigniting Moriori Arts)*

In February 2016, Moriori *rangata mātua* (elders) and *rangatehi* (youth), and invited artists and designers, archaeologists, a conservator and an arborist gathered at Kōpinga Marae on Rēkohu to participate in a *wānanga* organized by the Hokotehi Moriori Trust.<sup>35</sup> The purpose of the *wānanga* was to enlist the combined expertise and commitment of the participants to *hokopanopano ka toi Moriori* (or reignite Moriori arts)—principally those associated with *rākau momori*—through discussion, information exchange, speculation, toolmaking and finally, tree 'carving'.

The *wānanga's* learning goals included:

1. To learn basic design techniques for carving living trees
2. To learn a range of techniques for carving living trees
3. To learn basics of stone tool making
4. To gain an appreciation of Moriori cultural landscapes and kōpi ecology
5. To learn more about Moriori history and culture
6. To support Kōpinga marae culture—*manawa reka*; rongo [songs] (learn at least 2 rongo); karakii [prayers]
7. To have fun<sup>36</sup>

After the participants were welcomed, Hokotehi Moriori Trust Executive Chair, Māui Solomon, a grandson of Tame Horomona Rehe, provided a background on Moriori history and culture and outlined the *wānanga's* intention.

Figure 10. Māui Solomon, Hokotehi Mori Trust Executive Chair (left), with wānanga participants, Hāpūpū (J. M. Barker National Historic Reserve), Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 11. Group discussion, Hokopanopano Ka Toi Mori, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Along with this cultural framework, an understanding of the *kōpi* trees and how they might have been carved and with what, followed. Associate Professor Ian Barber and Dr. Justin Maxwell of University of Otago’s Department of Anthropology & Archaeology—experts of the *kōpi* tree, its cultivation and use—along with arborist, Marc Higgle, discussed *kōpi* ecology and aborigiculture (the cultivation, management, and study of individual trees) as well as current management of the *kōpi* plantations. The conservation of *rākau momori*, which have been removed from the forests and stored at the Kōpinga marae in controlled conditions, was presented by Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa conservationist, Nirmala Balram. Archaeologist, Dan Withers, a long-time exponent of stone toolmaking, demonstrated stone flaking techniques using locally collected basalt and limestone. Expert stone carvers, John Edgar and Owen Mapp, guided *wānanga* participants in the craft of stone carving. Customary Mori tools from the collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa provided models. Designer, Turi Park, led a workshop in which original designs were used

as inspiration by participants trying to capture in watercolour the apparently gestural representations of Moriori *kōpi* carvers to assist in the translation of these drawings to carving the living *kōpi* trees.

Figure 12. Conservation of *rākau momori*, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 13. Archaeologist, Dan Withers demonstrating stone toolmaking to wānanga participants, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 14. Archaeologist, Dan Withers (detail), Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 15. Stone carvers, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 16. Customary Moriori tools, Collection: Hokotehi Moriori Trust, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 17. Customary Moriori tools, Collection: Hokotehi Moriori Trust, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 18. Turi Park drawings including *rākau momori* figures, Kōpinga Marae, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 19. *Kōpi* tree grove, Rotorua, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Participants visited a number of *kōpi* forests to see remaining carvings and to make comparisons between healthy and threatened plantations. The trees' habitat has been compromised by deforestation, livestock, wind damage, clearing, and disease. These visits provided key information as to how the *karapuna* might have carved the trees. Much speculation and debate followed on this subject and determined the forms and materials *wānanga* participants used to carve the trees.

Figure 20. Wānanga participants in the ethnobotanic reserve at Henga, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. The person engraving the *kōpi* tree is Tane Hirawanu Tapu Solomon, great grandson of Tame Horomona Rehe. Henga, Rēkohud / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



When the carving tools were completed the participants travelled to the ethnobotanic reserve at Henga, an area of *kōpi* forest owned by the Hokotehi Moriori Trust used for teaching purposes and selected for the carving experiments. After a ritual blessing, the younger Moriori of the party tentatively began carving. While Māori performer and visual artist, James Webster, played customary Māori instruments, and the participants carved, the event was recorded by video and still photography. The trees on which marks were made, their locations, size, the tools used and the carving techniques employed were recorded so those thought to best mirror ancient techniques could be reproduced in the future.

One of the Moriori *rangatehi*, Cassidy Solomon, agreed to use the stone tool I had made. In doing so she introduced an unexpected innovation for the maker. By turning the gauge cutting edge on its side, she used it to score the tree bark outlining the shape of the design and cutting into the material sufficiently to prevent it randomly pulling away from outside material, thus achieving a cleaner outer and inner edge to the removed material.

The carving tool was not a conventional shape—that is, one modelled from those thought to have been used by the *karapuna*—but it proved highly effective in carving into the bark. Its final form was determined to a certain extent by the size and shape of the available raw material. A ball-shaped handle, similar to that of an engraving burin, sat comfortably in the cup of the hand. From this extended

a short shaft sharpened and grooved at the end like a gauge chisel. Organically, it developed into the shape of a bird's head. Seeing the association, I requested John Edgar drill an 'eye' on each side of the chisel's ball (head).

Figure 21. Cassidy Solomon carving, Henga, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Figure 22. 'Manu' carving tool, Collection: Hokotehi Moriori Trust, Rēkohu / Chatham Islands, 2016. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



Later I discovered the great significance of birds in Moriori culture. Christina Jefferson speculated that the more pronounced nose of some *rākau momori* figures seemed to have been inspired by the beaks of local birds such as the mollymawk (*Thalassarche eremita*) and weka (*Gallirallus australis*).<sup>37</sup> Skinner recorded six different contexts in which bird representations were used: carvings on limestone shelters, house-fronts, and canoes; bird-shaped weapons and pendants; and the likenesses of birds carved on sticks used in burials.<sup>38</sup> Among the *rākau momori* appear many realistic and stylized bird forms. Other early accounts include constant reference to birds when speaking of the Moriori, including that they were 'like birds' and 'were always singing'.<sup>39</sup> When asked, Moriori sometimes referred to the human-like figures of the *rākau momori* as 'birds' and as possessing fingers that were like 'claws'.<sup>40</sup> A story related to Jefferson on several occasions, told of

a man named Moe who lived by the Whanga Lagoon. When he wanted to visit another other part of the lagoon's shore, Moe could fly there after taking on the appearance of a bird.<sup>41</sup>

In the language and perspective of her culture at the time, Jefferson speculated on the human-animal associations between Moriori and the wildlife of Rēkohu:

Primitive peoples often identify themselves with species of wild life which they habitually kill for food, regarding those members still left living as their kinsmen. Desiring to preserve their kinsmen's goodwill, primitive men endow the wild things with human attributes and man with the form of the wild, not distinguishing sharply between man himself and members of the wild species. Sometimes species whose goodwill it is desired to retain are honoured in the person of a single individual.<sup>42</sup>

Figure 23. A Moriori group dressed partly in traditional costume, 1877. Moriori used flax and sealskin to make clothing. Te Rōpiha (left) is wearing a flax mat under a European shawl. His wife, Uaroa, is wearing a European blanket. Te Teira has a *kura*, a parakeet-feather head ornament, albatross down in his beard and a flax rain cape. Pūmipi wears a woven flax mat and has albatross tufts in his beard. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/23616/moriori-clothing>. Ref. 19XX.2.314. Canterbury Museum. Photo: Alfred Martin.



The *wānanga* had several outcomes, not least to gain an understanding of how the Moriori *karapuna* might have created images in the bark of the *kōpi* trees. The Moriori leaders and cultural experts and youth, artists, designers, craftspeople, anthropologists, archaeologists and a conservator gathered on the main island of Rēkohu to undertake collaborative memory work to not only uncover mysteries of past cultural practices but also to revive them. As trust chair, Māui Solomon observed, it was by going through these processes, reflecting on their own experiences, and trying to understand how the *karapuna* might have done things that *tikane* (custom, lore, protocol) could be developed by those Moriori alive today as well as future generations.

Figure 24. Descendants with a statue erected in memory of Tame Horomona Rehe at Manukau on the south eastern coast of Rēkohu, 2016. From left: Charles Solomon-Rehe, Cassidy Solomon, Tame Heurea (partially obscured), Hinemata Solomon, Tāne Solomon. Photo: Kingsley Baird.



In the morning of our departure, as the mist lifted, I reflected on the success of the wānanga and a resilient people who have defied the fate ordained for them. The meaning of the *hokotauki* (proverb or significant saying) we recited before departing conveyed an optimistic future:

<i>Hokorongō</i>	<i>Listen, take heed</i>
<i>He turanga toa</i>	<i>There is surely a strong future</i>
<i>Kei mua ake</i>	<i>For Moriori in our society</i>
<i>Mo te imi</i>	<i>We will take our rightful place</i>
<i>Moriori e</i>	<i>In this society</i>
<i>Kei mua ake</i>	
<i>Mo te imi</i>	
<i>Moriori e</i>	

*Me rongō* (with peace)

## Endnotes

1. Christina Jefferson, “The Dendroglyphs of the Chatham Islands,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 64, no. 4 (1955): 418, <http://www.jps.auckland.ac.nz/document.php?wid=2784&action=null>.
2. In this article ‘carving’ describes a variety of possible techniques used by Moriori including incising and bruising into and through the *kōpi* tree bark. When Jefferson recorded Moriori *rākau momori* (which she refers to as ‘dendroglyphs’) there were about 1,000; today they number around 130. The decline is the result of a range of environmental factors discussed in this article. Jefferson’s photos and drawings in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* attest to a remarkable variety of *rākau momori*, especially the ‘x-ray’ human figures. Also see “*Rākau momori (Moriori memorial trees) – Fact Sheet*”. August 2014, accessed 15 June 2018, <https://www.moriori.co.nz/w/w/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Rakau-Momori-fact-sheet-aug-2014-final.pdf>.
3. Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990), 42.
4. Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 46. *The School Journal*, a free quarterly publication containing information on history, geography, and civics, was the Department of Education’s sole publication for children until 1939.
5. “The Passing of the Mouriuri”, *The School Journal* 10, pt 3, no. 6 (July 1916): 184-87.
6. King, *Penguin History*, 56.
7. *Ibid.*, 57.
8. *Ibid.*, 57.
9. The “Moriori and the Crown: Agreement in Principle to Settle Historical Claims, 16 August 2017, accessed 28 June 2018. <https://www.govt.nz/dmsdocument/7103.pdf>. “Historical Account” lists, as one of the provisional topics to be addressed (4.2.7), “myths of racial inferiority and extinction”. See “Provisional Crown Acknowledgements” 4.3.9 and 4.3.10, 7-8. Maui Solomon translates ‘rangatiratanga’ in a Moriori context as ‘the weaving together of one’s people and miheke (treasures)’ (email message to author, 19 December 2018).
10. Maui Solomon (email message to author, 19 December 2018). Rhys Richards, “Chatham Islands,” *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2, accessed 28 June 2018. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/chatham-islands/print>.
11. Richards, “Chatham Islands – from first settlement to 1860”, *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 28 June 2018, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/chatham-islands/page-3>.
12. Denise Davis and Māui Solomon, “Moriori”, *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2-3, accessed 28 June 2018, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/moriori/print>.
13. Richards, “Chatham Islands”. I am grateful to Dr Justin Maxwell (Department of Anthropology, University of Otago) for the use of his extensive research in his doctoral thesis, Justin James Maxwell “*The Moriori. The Integration of*

- Arboriculture and Agroforestry in an East Polynesian Society*” (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2014). Justin was one of the experts who contributed to the *wānanga, Hokopanopano Ka Toi Moriori (Reigniting Moriori Arts)*.
14. Ibid., accessed 27 June 2018. The Moriori population number was provided by Susan Thorpe of the Hokotehi Moriori Trust (email message to author, 9 July 2018). That birth control—consisting of the castration of some male infants—was practised, suggests Rēkohu’s resources might not have sustained a larger population. “Moriori life, social and spiritual values”, Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 3, accessed 16 November 2018, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/moriori/page-3>.
  15. “Rākau Momori (Moriori memorial trees) – Fact Sheet”, August 2014, accessed 15 June 2018, <https://www.moriori.co.nz/w/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Rākau-Momori-fact-sheet-aug-2014-final.pdf>.
  16. Jefferson, “Dendroglyphs”, 384; and “Rākau Momori” 1, accessed 27 June 2018.
  17. Ibid., Jefferson, “Dendroglyphs”, 384.
  18. Ibid., 408-409.
  19. Ibid., 408, from Henry Devenish Skinner, “The Morioris of the Chatham Islands”, *Memoir Bernice P. Bishop*, 9, no. 1 (1928): 71.
  20. Ibid., 408, from Frederick Hunt, *Twenty-five Years’ Experience in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands—An Autobiography*, ed. John Amery (Wellington: W. Lyon, 1866), 64.
  21. Ibid.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Nicholas Thomas, *Discoveries: The Voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
  24. Michael King, *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1989), 39-45.
  25. For the events leading up to, during, and the impact of, the Māori invasion see King, *Moriori*, 53-76, from which much of the material in this “Invasion” section has been drawn.
  26. A total of about 300 Moriori men, women, and children were killed at this time. The numbers of dead are derived from a catalogue compiled by Moriori elders in 1862 and sent to Sir George Grey, Governor of New Zealand, documenting what had occurred on Rēkohu and appealing (to no avail) that he restore ownership to Moriori. See King, *Moriori*, 64.
  27. “Rekohu: A Report on Moriori and Ngati Mutunga Claims in the Chatham Islands”, WAI 64, Waitangi Tribunal Report 2001, Wellington: Legislation Direct, 4. The Waitangi Tribunal was established by the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. It is a permanent commission of inquiry that makes recommendations on claims brought by Māori relating to Crown actions which breach the promises made in the Treaty of Waitangi. Accessed 20 July 2018. <https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz>. It has been proposed that the Māori invaders’ consideration of Moriori as inferior and therefore fit for enslavement (but not intermarriage) derived from the attitude of European sailors who regarded Moriori as the same as *Paraiwhara* or ‘blackfellows’ (as Aborigines were sometimes called by Europeans in Australia). Māori, therefore, saw Moriori as reasonable targets for the same treatment meted

- out by Europeans to *Paraiwhara* in Australia. See WAI 64, 1. The Māori practice of slavery had ended officially in 1858 but continued in practice into the 1860s.
28. King, *Moriori*, 75.
  29. High Court of New Zealand CIV-2018-485-005, concerning Taia Historic Reserve case between Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri Iwi Trust (plaintiffs) and The Minister of Conservation and Hokotehi Moriori Trust (first and second defendants respectively), “Submissions for the Second Defendant”, 2.
  30. Richards, “Chatham Islands”,
  31. High Court, CIV-2018-485-005, Submissions for the Second Defendant, 2.
  32. High Court, CIV-2018-485-005, Affidavit of Māui Ashley Solomon, 11. This definition of *mana* is greatly compressed for the purposes of this article and in no way captures the broad and nuanced meaning of the term in relation to Moriori. See “Mana,” Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, Accessed 22 July 2018.
  33. Māui Solomon identifies the screening of the Television New Zealand documentary *Moriori* in 1980 as launching the Moriori renaissance and Michael King’s book as giving significant impetus to the revival (Māui Solomon, email message to author, 11 July 2018). The documentary was written and produced by Bill Saunders, directed by Wayne Tourell and edited by Bill Henderson (1 hour 41 minutes).  
<https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/moriori-1980>.
  34. “Moriori and the Crown: Agreement in Principle to Settle Historical Claims 16 August 2017.” In 1868, almost all of the Māori *iwi* of Ngāti Tama returned to their ancestral homeland in Taranaki. The Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri Iwi Trust, which represents the collective interests of Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri (descendants of the other *iwi* who arrived in the Chatham Islands in 1835) are also in negotiation with the Crown over historical Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi claims. Problematically, both Moriori and Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri are acknowledged by the Crown as ‘tchatat henu’ (Moriori) and ‘tangata whenua’ (Māori)—or indigenous people—of Rēkohu (or Wharekauri as the Chatham Islands are known in Māori) and both have ‘overlapping claims’.
  35. ‘Hokotehi Moriori Trust is the organisation that represents the Moriori people—the descendants of Rongomaiwhenua and Rongomaitere on the islands of Rekohu and Rangiatea (Chatham Islands) in New Zealand and elsewhere’, accessed 30 June 2018, <https://www.moriori.co.nz/home/about-the-trust/>.  
The trust has produced a very full report of the *wānanga* titled, “Hokopanopano Ka Toi Moriori” (2016). It provides detailed information on *rākau momori*, *kōpi* tree growth and ecology, Moriori stone technology and *wānanga* findings. For much more comprehensive material than this article offers on the meaning of the *rākau momori* see “Rākau Momori—Archival Records of Recording”, 13-19. This section is an extract from Susan Thorpe’s chapter, “Archaeology, Identity and Development” in John Clammer and Ananta Kumar Giri, eds., *The Aesthetics of Development: Art, Culture and Social Transformation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 101-125. *Wānanga* has a number of definitions which apply to this project: 1. (verb) (hia,-tia) to meet and discuss, deliberate, consider; 2. (noun) seminar, conference, forum, educational seminar; 3. (noun) tribal knowledge, lore, learning—

- important traditional cultural, religious, historical, genealogical and philosophical knowledge. “Wānanga,” Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, accessed 29.2.16.
36. “Hokopanopano ka toi Moriori’ Wānanga Programme”, 1.
  37. Jefferson, “Dendroglyphs”, 393.
  38. Ibid., 410.
  39. Ibid.
  40. Ibid., 411.
  41. Ibid., 410.
  42. Ibid., 411.

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## Biographical Note

Kingsley Baird is a visual artist whose work represents a longstanding and continuous engagement with memory and remembrance, and loss and reconciliation through making artefacts and writing. Major examples of his work in this field are the New Zealand Memorial in Canberra (2001, with Studio of Pacific Architecture), the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (2004, Wellington, New Zealand); the international Nagasaki Peace Park sculpture, *Te Korowai Rangimarie The Cloak of Peace* (2006); *Tomb* (2013) at France's Historial de la Grande Guerre; and *Stela* (2014) at the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Germany. Kingsley Baird is the board chair of WHAM (War History Heritage Art and Memory) Research Network; and is the General Editor of Memory Connection journal.

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