

PROVOCATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

these two elements within an inseparable bind...[using] digital technologies to play with an ambiguity of medium: not quite painting, looking like etching, or woodcut, or perhaps embroidery...As unique-state stretched canvas though, the works take on the status of painting. I have yet to use the term photography...[he writes]'. Here, one thinks of Andrew McNamara's recent questions: "Today, the ideal of medium-specificity is seen as a thing of the past, being firmly identified with 'high modernism'. But, do post-medium practices actually mark a return to earlier forms of modernist practice? Does their proliferation demonstrate the redundancy of medium as a category...or, is the medium, as some have argued, still crucial...?"¹¹ Further on in this issue, Ana Terry quotes Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari where they write: "You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of signification and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems."¹²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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