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**Caring Deception:
Community art in the suburbs of Aotearoa (New Zealand)**

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Abstract

In Aotearoa (New Zealand), community art practice has a disadvantaged status and a poorly documented national history. This thesis reinvigorates the theory and practice of community art and cultural democracy using adaptable and context-specific analyses of the ways that aesthetics and ethics can usefully co-exist in practices of social change. The community art projects in this thesis were based in four suburbs lying on the economic and spatial fringes of Aotearoa. Over 4 years, I generated a comparative and iterative methodology challenging major binaries of the field, including: ameliorative vs. disruptive; coloniser vs. colonised; instrumental vs. instrumentalised; and long term vs. short term. This thesis asserts that these binaries create a series of *impasses* that drive the practice towards two new artistic categories, which I define as *caring deception* and *the facade*. All the projects I undertook were situated in contested space, where artists working with communities overlapped with local and national governments aiming for CBD and suburban re-vitalisation, creative city style initiatives, community development, grassroots creative projects, and curated public-art festivals. I worked within and around these structures, by practicing a methodology of *caring deception*. I applied a selection of artistic terms of engagement to vernacular structures such as public fountains, festival marquees, pop-up venues and community centres to negotiate deceit, resentment and care in the making of the art work. This thesis asserts that the methodology of *caring deception* creates a *social ethics in action* that can become embodied in the form of the art work.

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