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to represent the sex of angels

trans/poetics

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This exegesis utilises writer Rebekah Edwards' definition of 'trans-poetics' as a methodology for the creation of performative and moving image artworks. The linguistic categories within trans-poetics are transcribed through a creative practice, valuing language for its multiplicity, ambiguity and limitations.

The projects outlined in this exegesis focus on queer and trans histories lifted from archival documentation. Trans-poetics are employed to circumvent and rearticulate the problematic legacy of queer and trans representation. The aim of this research is to utilise and push beyond the established oeuvre of queer autoethnographic work.

To take the waters (2017) and *Hardening* (2017) are two moving image works formed in response to the life and events surrounding the internment of Hjelmar Von Danneville on Matiu Somes Island in 1917. As works of significance, they are clear distillations of modes and methods of trans-poetics used in response to narratives within historical material.

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A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

The terms I use throughout this work are often inadequate, insufficient. The meanings may slip between each other, because words are not enough, and sometimes they are too much. 'Perhaps gender, perhaps the self... perhaps just the impossibility of language is what we've got'.¹ For clarification, I have included a glossary of terms as an appendix to this document.

Sometimes they are *they*, because: we are not able to fully know the ways that people do, have, and will identify; to acknowledge the ways that we can/not be visible to each other, or to ourselves; to open up a space of not knowing; to remove assumption; to move towards indeterminacy as a space in which to hold the life of a person; to recognise that we

contain/

become/

are many/

neither/

none/

all/

and everything.

¹Myles, in Tolbert and Peterson, 177

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF TRANS-POETICS

Rebekah Edwards' definition of "Trans-poetics" has emerged as an organising principle and lens through which this research is conducted.

'Trans-poetics' refers to the art and the labor of transgender poets, and to diverse interpretative and compositional strategies attentive to relational movements between/across/within linguistic, embodied, affective, and political domains.'²

I am taking this notion and extending this into the methodology of my own practice. I am suggesting that there are many ways trans-poetics can be realised, not only through methods that are intrinsically linguistic in nature. Trans-poetics can be used as a strategy to circumvent historical representations that are predicated on the lurid fascination with trans lives and bodies. Though much of my work stems from a response to historical texts and materials, the final forms of these works are transformed through a performance-based practice.

The history of trans representation in cinema is of damaging narrative and objectification of trans people.³ Often I am performing for the camera, as well as in live performance. The results are not intended as simple documentations of performances, but rather works in which a performance for the camera is one aspect of a moving image work. My practice employs filmic language as a medium through which to rework and rearticulate the damaging cultural narratives cast over representations of queer and trans people. In this spirit of the diverse strategies of trans-poetics, in addition to moving image I employ text, audio, installation, and found object.

Though the reference points for this research focus mainly on the work of queer and trans artists, there are also ways that queerness can be read into the work of non-queer artists. This exegesis takes both strategies in hand.

² Edwards, R. 'Trans-poetics' in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, Volume 1, Numbers 1–2. P 252

³ Films such as *Sleepaway Camp* and the character 'Buffalo Bill' in *The Silence of the Lambs* depict cross-dressing and transness as related to psychosis. Similarly films like *The Crying Game*, *The Skin I Live In*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Danish Girl* and *Gun Hill Road*, focus on transition framed through tragedy and deception. Uses of cross-dressing or transness for comedy abound in *Tootsie*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and recently in *The Hangover Part II*. For a more detailed discussion see Halberstam, J. *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York University Press, 2005.

I aim to utilise and push beyond the established oeuvre of queer autoethnographic work, using queer subject positions, symbolism and direct representations of bodies. A practice of trans-poetics is an axis from which the possibilities of queer making emerge.

A quote lifted from artist and filmmaker Wu Tsang's blog defines transness in critical and contextual ways that speak to my conception of trans-poetics:⁴

I want to start thinking about *transness* as a history that has unfolded, away from / outside of the mainstreaming trans movement (ie. the so-called trans visibility or transgender "tipping point"). Rather than think in terms of trans "resistance" – I want to think about transness as a mode of being, a fluid medium, inherent in all things, a ritual practice, a mode of improvising – that disrupts the whole gendered system, a system that is broken and that has failed us. This is not meant to be a reaction to those movements that try to fix the broken system, but instead an attempt at illuminating, all around us, across time, a very different way of seeing and being.

I use performative practice to explore ritualistic actions, with improvisation and fluidity. I use my own trans body as medium and message within my work, whilst acknowledging the limits of self-representation. I take Tsang's notion of transness towards a practice that begins from a trans-poetics of linguistic, embodied, affective and political domains. Trans-poetics works from unstable definitions of transness and queerness, to find numerous ways they can be reified. Paradoxically, this concept of poetics could help to articulate experiences that are actually beyond the language of identification immediately available.⁵ The linguistic qualities of poetics are transcribed through my practice, within the notions of voice, composition, rhythm, and affect.⁶

The problematics of this romantic notion are clear; yet there is a kind of urgency for poetry emerging from the social, political, and embodied circumstances. Seen in this way, the cultivation of possibility through trans-poetics can also be a political and ethical aim.⁷ As writer, feminist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde wrote:

⁴ <http://wutsang.tumblr.com/page/5>

⁵ Shipley, in Tolbert and Peterson, 197

⁶ Referring both to the use of physical and metaphorical voice (voice as opinion, style and as representing a collective). Composition as the assembly of a constellation of material and concepts. Rhythm as pacing and timing within works.

⁷ Getsy, 41

'For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change... Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.'⁸

Lorde here outlines the necessity of poetry, and its transformative potential towards the liberation of queer women of colour. Being trans can mean finding oneself with a body that has been historically illegible. Through an intersectional lens it can be seen that the English language, which instantiates gendered meaning, is the same language of colonialism and imperialism. Both the experiences of queer and trans people, and people of colour 'have a lot to do with language, and the way that personhood is defined'⁹. This methodology of trans-poetics requires a cognizance of this intersection; not to suggest that the stakes of oppression are the same, but that they may be contingent in many ways.

For this reason I acknowledge the privilege and limitations of my own perspective, as a tall, thin, white transfeminine, passing person.¹⁰ My definition and methodology is only one trans-poetic of many trans-poetics. The method of trans-poetics must recognise and understand the ways that gender is impacted by intersections with race, class, age, ability, and culture.

I propose that trans-poetics within this research can move towards a radical and transformative imaginary mode, to reconceptualise the world and ourselves.

⁸ Audre Lorde, 37

⁹ Tsang in Akel, 2016

¹⁰ See Glossary

ON INDETERMINACY

As a methodology, trans-poetics can make room for the succession and self-determination of gender and bodily morphologies. It must remain open to mutability, conflict, and a molar constellation of voices. Not only must we legitimise genders and sexes beyond the cisgender binary, and know these positions are named from lived experiences. The binaries referenced here, gendered and otherwise, are particular to the Western world.

Cultural anthropologist David Valentine notes that the question of the relationship between “gender” and “sexuality” is largely an ethnographic and historical one¹¹. Valentine explains that conceiving of “gender” and “sexuality” as distinct arenas of human experience is historically and culturally situated. It becomes problematic when these categories come to be seen as transparent and universal, rearticulating experiences through a category, rather than making sense of those experiences.

Understandings of culturally and linguistically specific gender and sexual identities are predicated upon Western concepts of gender and sexuality. There is an inherent assumption of universalism of the English language, and a demand for meaning and understanding through translation. This is an extension of the colonial process: a linguistic supremacy where indigenous languages, their nuances and cultural specificities are devalued and negated.

This is not to say that someone cannot identify with words in different languages; this is not for others to decide. It is to simply to make it known that cultural identities, some discussed later in this exegesis, cannot be translated accurately. This leads to an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of a person and their identity.¹²

¹¹ Valentine, D. ‘The Categories Themselves’, in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Issue 10.2, 2004, 219

¹² For further discussion on this, see binaohan, b. *Decolonising Trans/gender* 101

'As translation is imbricated with cultural/political oppressions, silences, repressions, and reiterations, the error produced in the discord between two languages offers clues to the limits of the self'¹³

Queer communities historically, have an integral relationship with language and speech. Language is central to gender and sexual self-determination. Queer communities are steeped in their own dialects and idioms.¹⁴ Terminology and their preferred uses are continually changing. The field of self-determination is emergent, with new generations claiming their identity through utilising newly created words. The terms upon which we found ourselves will inevitably shift as we do individually and culturally. Before 'transgender' came into language as a identity categories, gender nonconformity was taken as a causal aspect of queer sexuality. This is not meant to dismiss the value of identification, but to complicate our perception of all the ways to be a 'man' or a 'woman', or in a 'body', or even to have a 'gender' at all.

I take art historian and critic Amelia Jones' broad definition of queer as 'that which indicates the impossibility of a subject or meaning staying still, in one determinable place'¹⁵. This concept of queer continues to greatly inform my research.

Jones further outlines the theory of 'queer feminist durationality' as:

'a confluence of forces that enact one way of thinking about queer: diachronism, desire, temporality, distortion (anamorphosis), unrecognizability... the potential of bodies, images, texts, performances in the visual field to unsettle by opening out the durationality of our desiring relationship to particular aspects of the world'¹⁶

Queer feminist durationality provides a blueprint for how to slow down and complicate the automatic, ingrained assignment of identity that occurs in the first moment of the viewer's encounter¹⁷. These ingrained and objectifying gender based analyses place emphasis on visual cues. These split-second judgements are largely based on learned heteronormative and

¹³ Enke in TSQ, 2014

¹⁴ *Paris Is Burning* documents the New York ballroom language and culture of queer and trans people of colour.

¹⁵ Jones in *Seeing Differently*, 174-5

¹⁶ Jones in *Seeing Differently*, 175

¹⁷ Hall, 2016

cisnormative expectations. Often, these subconscious and conscious expectations are formative in someone's understanding of a new person's gender. An assignment takes place regardless of whether this aligns with the individual's gender identity. The incomplete labour of trans-poetics is 'to reconfigure more than just the materiality of our own bodies. It is to strive to create and transform the lived meanings of those materialities'¹⁸

Conversely, there is a reticence to identify oneself as a queer artist. It is a question of whether artists must self-identify for their differences to matter. Through trans-poetics, my practice takes up stances of ambivalence through and outside of disclosure. This ambivalence lies within direct representation, whilst expanding the capacity of transness to manifest in more abstracted ways.

'Queerness ... is productively understood as a collection of simultaneous differences... [and] valuing the ambivalence of subjectivity is a way to imagine beyond rational binary formations that always use a subject to put an object in its place'¹⁹

¹⁸ Salamon, 42

¹⁹ Gaines, M. 'in *e-Flux Journal*

IN/VISIBILITY

The recent rise in trans visibility, or what has been termed *the transgender tipping point*²⁰ is not necessarily a positive cultural movement. For those who are already too visible, their livelihood is often compromised through sustained hypervisibility.

In 2016, American activist group *The Human Rights Campaign* tracked at least 22 deaths of transgender people in the United States due to fatal violence, the highest number on record.²¹ Already in 2017, 18 other people identified as trans have lost their lives to violence. Most of these people were trans women, transfeminine, and gender nonconforming people of colour. According to a survey by the Williams Institute, 40% of trans people will attempt suicide in their lifetime.²² These statistics predicate the need for a sense of urgency when talking about issues of gender, because trans and gender nonconforming people are dying. These violences don't always kill us directly, but slowly wear us down through microaggressions, discrimination, and marginalisation.²³

When I am working with the narratives and lives of others, there is an ethical and political imperative to stay open to the ways in which queerness is culturally and historically contingent; to 'maintain that the differences are not converted into failures'²⁴. Trans-poetics must ensure that it does not reinforce the systematic marginalisation of queer and trans people.

²⁰ <http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/>

²¹ <http://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2017>

²² The survey can be read in its entirety here, see page 8 for suicide rate statistics
<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf>

²³ For further reading from a local context see the HRC's report of the lives of transgender people in Aotearoa: https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/5714/2378/7661/15-Jan-2008_14-56-48_HRC_Transgender_FINAL.pdf

²⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 154

THE LIVES OF OTHERS

In their essay on “vulnerable research”, writer Tiffany Page suggests that:

‘As well as exposing the fragility of knowledge assembly, a vulnerable methodology might be closely positioned with questioning what is known, and what might come from an opening in not knowing. This involves questions of ethics: the ethics involved in modes of telling, the sensory and affective responses to the material production of research, and the forms of violence committed in narrating the stories of vulnerable others.’²⁵

As an ethical imperative, unearthing the lives of queer people gives an historical precedent to one’s present existence, and counters the effect of social marginalisation. In this way, the research has the potential to work through the history of violations and normalisations of bodies, including those outside the rubric of ‘queer’.²⁶

Trans-poetics in this context requires both an expansion and rearticulation of the histories of marginalised others through ‘an injection of the affective dimensions of conceptions of time, performativity, archival research, and historical preservation.’²⁷ This research involves reading backwards into historical material, to identify content that might be termed “queer”.

‘This raises the question of a certain kind of legibility in the archives... to read the gaps and the margins for what might have been omitted, of what constitutes a presence by its very absence’²⁸

Internationally, the *Museum of Transgender Hirstory [sic] and Art* in San Francisco is the first space of its kind, building its own collection of works and curating shows of queer and trans work. I note in particular the practices of artists Wu Tsang, Cassils, Juliana Huxtable, Elysia Crampton, Emily Roysdon, Andrea Geyer and Patrick Staff, who are all contemporaries working with queer and trans histories in creative practice. Theorist David Getsy, alongside artists Gordon Hall and Jonah Groeneboer explore minimalism and abstraction’s queer and transgender capacities. Getsy notes

²⁵ Page, 14

²⁶ Lorenz, 36

²⁷ Jones, *Otherwise*, 33

²⁸ Erai in Driskill et al., 67

the potential for non-representational practice to engender open-ended readings of objects, and rework the priority of the visual in this process.²⁹

In Aotearoa, there is a dearth of accessible queer and trans representation, recorded histories and cultural producers. Fiona Clark's *Go Girl* series, Ann Shelton's *Redeye* series, Rebecca Swan's *Assume Nothing* project and the artist Yuki Kihara have all represented trans and gender nonconforming subject matter. Shelton and Clark both documented their friends and peers as queer people, with trust built through interpersonal relationships. Clark's *Go Girl* series features photos of drag queens, some of whom are trans. The photographic prints feature writing from the subjects themselves, as informal contextualisation. It is noted that Clark later returned to her subjects from *Go Girl*, tracking their lives since the events of the first images and exhibition.

With the exception of Kihara, the other three artists are cisgender individuals. The problem is not a lack of trans representation, but rather the representation tends to be by cisgender people, and inherently limiting. In some respects, Shelton and Swan's images rely on the sensation of ambiguously gendered bodies, and gender nonconformity (as drag and transness). Swan addresses this through ample context, including a film, and interviews with her subjects. However, Swan still works as an outside agent to the subjects and experiences she represents, and as with Clark and Shelton, her photographic representations reinforce the primacy of the visual in relation to gender.

Kihara's work illustrates a departure from the aforementioned artists through being fa'afafine, and exploring facets of contemporary Samoan society. Kihara's work *Fa'a fafine: In the Manner of a Woman* challenges Western concepts of gender and colonial tropes of photographic representation.³⁰ Kihara's concern with gender comments on the effect that colonisation has on indigenous worldviews.

Currently, the Auckland-based FAFSWAG are a collective of 'LGBT peeps from Aotearoa'.³¹ FAFSWAG host vogue balls and various exhibitions throughout Aotearoa, and are a prime example of queer and trans people of colour representing themselves through interdisciplinary means. Films

²⁹ See Getsy, 2014

³⁰ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/538528>

³¹ <https://fafswag.com/fafswag/>

on Carmen Rupe, Georgina Beyer and Mani Mitchell are the few documentaries exploring the lives of trans and intersex people in Aotearoa.

Historical documentations tend to subsume or misrepresent the roles and experiences of trans and gender nonconforming people. The compulsion is to work with historical material, and to value personhood and embodiment for its transformations and variability, understanding 'gender... as workable beyond conventional static and binary norms [so that] any account of the human or its representations looks different and more complex'³²

Though I am hesitant to ascribe some great autoethnographic meaning to my practice, I cannot disregard the possibility that I am so drawn to redressing traumatic histories because I have spent most of my life redressing my own. There is always a failing in the narration of someone else's life, both in providing adequate descriptions and explanations, and the incommunicability of trauma. Trans-poetics enters the research as a vulnerable methodology, not knowing in advance the forms this will take.

The major works which are discussed in separate chapters below have been selected on the basis that they best illustrate the concerns of this exegesis. Each project addresses particular historical material, and develops an internal logic and poetics. The projects represent a wide experimentation across various media and forms of collaboration. The projects are not conclusive, and remain open to further iterations.

³² Getsy, *Abstract Bodies*, 16

EARLY WORKS

'Sista/Sister' is a work exploring the potential of abstraction and non-representational art to a queer and feminist practice.³³ Using various objects and audio, my own voice relayed a broken narrative about my relationship with a childhood penpal from Vanuatu. The objects were fragile, and mostly made by hand.

I thought about the objects pedagogically, in what potential they had to transform the viewer's embodiment through their experience with them. Equally, the objects were open-ended; creating an imagining of their milieu, the ways they were made and intended use.

Ni-Vanuatu and Pākehā cultural collisions; the objects referenced specific places and cultures, but were obscured by unfamiliar surroundings. The obscuring of these objects resist viewers inquiries into their origin.

the horror of nothing to see, was a video installation in the front window of the *MEANWHILE* Gallery space.³⁴ A single screen played video of my bare chest and documented the rise and fall of my breath. The image exposes physical ambiguity, the swell of breasts and the stubble of chest hair growing out. This work was a response to the documentation that many trans people undertake of their body in medical transition. The image of the chest poses a challenge to the binarist assumptions around whose bodies and what parts of those bodies are considered appropriate to be viewed in public space.

The image is purposely indeterminate, reflecting my own ambivalence about the cisgender fascination with the body in medical transition.

The work acts as an inappropriate display amidst the bustle of the central business district, with an ironic placement next to the police headquarters, who have a history of antagonism towards the queer, trans, black, brown, and sex worker communities. I was not necessarily able to elaborate on the contextual specificities that the work engendered. This exhibition underlined the importance of context in my practice, and the need for an awareness of audiences and their experiences.

³³ See List of works made

³⁴ <http://www.meanwhile.gallery/thehorrorofnothingtosee/>

In subsequent decisions on exhibition strategies, I have pushed for contextual information which is more appropriate to the work, myself, and the communities I am referencing. This is in the form of written text, and in selective decisions about curators and artists that I work alongside.

An audio performance *Pantomime Dames* revealed the context of my own social standing. The work was part of the *DARKMATTER* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Wellington, comprising of local artists, writers, poets and performers. *Pantomime Dames* was fashioned as a guided meditation, on sex change surgery, as outlined by Germaine Greer in her book *The Whole Woman*. Voiced by myself, the audience was asked to lie or sit on the floor, and place their hands over their genitals. The anti-trans content of the text became clearer as the meditation progressed, describing surgery procedures while degrading the audience.

I received a host of complaints from trans friends of mine who were deeply uncomfortable and traumatised by their experience of the work. I had not previously considered the impact of the work on the trans community, having only envisioned the work presented to cisgender people. I was not able to give a verbal preface or trigger warnings for the content in the work.

Recognising that certain elements were out of my control, I take full responsibility for the ways in which my work negatively affected people. I acknowledge my own privilege as an artist that is part of a socially mobile class, with access to networks and resources. As a student I access academia to process and in a sense capitalize on my identity and experience in a way that I know most other trans people do not.

Having a platform to speak to issues that affect my community means being able to recognise and generate a context alongside the work itself.

'Is the space of our work constitutive? Are we still trespassing?'³⁵

This constitutive space is essential to my practice and positioning as an artist working with highly politicised subject matter.

³⁵ Roysdon in Silver and Jones, 232

These experiences forced me to consider the points of access for non-queer audiences in my practice. In each encounter the work may appear differently, and appear to be different. This means working within the conceptual spaces of affect, ambivalence, ambiguity and un/intelligibility that trans-poetics offers. My research began to move away from direct representations of queerness and transness, to explore qualities of language and performativity.³⁶

³⁶ See Butler, 1993. In her critique and redress of this individualistic notion of 'gender as performance', Judith Butler clarifies performativity as a theory of language, an interpellation call, and not of a performance per se, instead focusing of the discursivity of sex/gender.

I HAVE COME AND JOINED MY LOVE WITH YOURS

The departure point for the collaborative work *I have come and joined my love with yours*, is a published conversation between Governor Grey and Wiremu Tako Ngātata (Wi Tako, Te Atiawa, Ngāti Ruanui) in 1896.³⁷ The conversation is a translation of Wi Tako's account of events, dictated in te reo Māori.³⁸ This work considers the politics of translation and conflicts of power through an interpersonal relationship.

This publicised conversation was part of an article detailing the Governor's efforts to dispel the burgeoning Kingitanga movement, mourning 'the fate of the brown man receding before the white'.³⁹ The consequent translation is incredibly cryptic, moving between registers of poetic metaphor, Shakespearean quarrel, and factual information. Throughout the text, both parties often referring to their "love" for each other.

The translation from *aroha* to *love* results in a misreading of the map of political powers where the stakes are the lives and culture of tangata whenua.⁴⁰ Like the Treaty of Waitangi, the effacement of meaning through translation means that there was an unwilling yielding of sovereignty on the part of iwi representatives. The translation of this work reflects what can be seen as a colonial romanticism, where the significance of the political context of this conversation is held at a distance.

From this narrative of *love* arising in translation, Gordon-Stables and I explored the possibility of the conversation being framed around an intimate relationship between the two historical figures. This was not to deter from the political content, but as a reference to the ways in which conflict manifests interpersonally when people involved occupy uneven positions of political power. It speaks to the acts of violence within ordinary language, which insidiously work to reinforce racial hierarchies implemented through colonisation.

³⁷ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WI18621113.2.10>

³⁸ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WI18621021.2.10>

³⁹ Wellington Independent, p3

⁴⁰ Aroha has been more broadly translated to encompass 'to love, feel pity, feel concern for, feel compassion, empathise' See

<http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=aroha>

We approached the material as a readymade script. Our representative roles in the work were chosen on the basis of Nathaniel/Māori/Wi Tako and Me/Pākehā/Governor Grey. Nathaniel works with queer and Māori content from his perspective as takataapui and tangata ira tane⁴¹. Our respective identifications through English and Māori speak to the untranslatability of indigenous identities through a colonial language. As a transfeminine Pākehā person, I cannot ethically translate this word for my identity into te reo. To do so is to enact a negation of the linguistic and cultural specificity of te reo, and to rely on a linguistic supremacy of the English language. Our identities become entangled with those of Wi Tako and Governor Grey, further complicating the reading of the work. The entanglement of the text and context, both immediate and historical, are the poetic fabric of this work.

A primary reference point for this work is Andrea Geyer's six channel video installation *Criminal Case 40/61: Reverb*. The work is based on historical documents that detail the trial and life of the Nazi General Adolf Eichmann. Geyer's work, rather than seeking to recreate an historical moment, entails 'an effort to propose terms and strategies with which one can rethink the past in present times and that have the possibility to exceed a mere re-staging.'⁴² The videos feature the artist Wu Tsang performing as 6 different characters in the work, of different genders and roles within the narrative. This queering of roles through gender, poses ethical questions into the relationship of the individual to the universal, and the universal to the specific. Gordon-Stables and I found our work exploring the same ideas through our processes. Geyer's decision to include Tsang shifting through gender informed the way I approached gender within the work.

Equally, the work *You will never ever be a woman*. by Zackary Drucker informed both Gordon-Stables' and my own approach to the performative aspects of the work.⁴³ Drucker's video work features two characters insulting each other in pointed and personal ways. While this work relates specifically to transfeminine experiences, it's depiction of a tense yet erotic relationship was something Gordon-Stables' and I found intriguing. The shifting agency in the work is brought forth through the language and the character's bodies in relation to each other. In between offensive phrases, there are tender and sexually charged segments. While we did not feel it was appropriate

⁴¹ See Glossary

⁴² http://www.andreageyer.info/projects/criminal_case/CriminalCase.htm

⁴³ The full title of this work is *You will never ever be a woman. You Must Live the Rest of Your Days Entirely As a Man and You Will Only Grow More Masculine With Every Passing Year. There is No Way Out.* available at <http://zackarydrucker.com/video/you-will-never-be-a-woman/>

to imply a queer relationship between Grey and Tako, the tone of Drucker's work and approach to the framing of figures was noted. We paid particular attention to our bodies in relation to each other and the frame of view. We looked for ways to communicate the intent of the text through our body language as well as our voices in recitation. Drucker's work suggests a scene of degrading insults as a preparation for large culture of oppression. This framed our thoughts around the significance and impact of the source material, in context of Aotearoa's colonisation.

We interpreted the relationship between Grey and Tako as one of necessity, formed by the political circumstances of the time. A woolen blanket features in the video and the installation of the work. The blanket can be seen as a metaphor for land, representing the psychic border between individual notions of ownership and personhood, and Indigenous notions of collective peoplehood (in hapu and iwi) and interconnection with whenua. The blanket also references the land in terms of its productivity, through wool farming being a significant economic contribution to Aotearoa. The metaphor of the blanket is the frame around which we articulate the futility of translation, and the placement of Māori struggles for self-determination in a system which is predicated on the illegibility of te reo.

Eventually, the blanket is ripped while Gordon-Stables has it draped over his shoulders. This act was provoked by the Parihaka prophet Te Whiti o Rongomai:

'The land is mine...I am the owner of the whole...

My blanket is mine...You want to cut my blanket in two'⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Quoted in Sinclair, 77



Figure 1 Gordon-Stables, N. and Winter, A, 2017, I have come and joined my love with yours .video still, Image artist's own

Using the metaphorical notion of a blanket as the land, Te Whiti sought to illustrate the absurd processes of land confiscations. Governor Grey had established the system of runanga (tribal councils) having individual ownership, in order to encourage Māori to part with their land and culturally assimilate. Te Whiti's words can be taken as a refusal to cede the land on which the village of Parihaka stood. The blanket in this work represents Te Whiti's metaphor, and the disenfranchisement of tangata whenua. Though there is no direct correlation between Grey, Tako and Te Whiti, but the military invasion and subsequent massacre in Waikato orchestrated by Grey was the strategy used in the invasion of Parihaka. The blankets are rendered incomplete and unable to fulfill their practical intent. Tearing the blankets is a poetic physical action, depicting the violence and impact of land grabs.

The power relation of the conversation is represented visually in the work. We look towards and away from each other, the wall in the background allows the distances between our bodies to be brought to the viewers' attention. This shifting of positions reflects the manoeuvres of tone within the conversation.

'Grey: "I see you are a foolish people, therefore I will carry on my good work"

Tako: "Yes, you know we are fools. You are the knowing race. But why do you not show your wisdom?"

There are several shots of hands throughout, showing the skin colour and texture in detail. The symbolism of the hands is not only about differences in skin colour, but hands as a site of agency.



Figure 2 Gordon-Stables, N. and Winter, A, 2017, I have come and joined my love with yours .video still, Image artist's own

In the installation, the video is projected down onto a brown silk screen. Light catches and bleeds through the screen, falling onto the a grey woolen blanket on the floor. This doubling of the image through dual screens means that the visual is never not mediated through the material. The images can never be seen in the ways we are accustomed: on a flat surface, without distortion. This is a visual translation of projected light. It is a poetic reference to the ways that conversations are mediated through their contexts. The two fabrics engender a duality, the thick wool of the blanket as a practical material for warmth, and silk as a finer, luxury material.

The screen references banners of protest, and flags. The significance of flag pertains to the flag of the kingitanga movement, noted by Grey asking 'am I an ox to be flogged by that thing?'.⁴⁵ The use of the flag was symbolic of Māori self-determination and sovereignty. The brown silk was chosen by Nathaniel to emulate his skin tone, acting as the literal background for the projection. There is a contrast to the delicate fabric and the wooden frame which holds it. It is sewn into the wood itself, and hangs from either side, revealing the methods of making and the nature of the material.

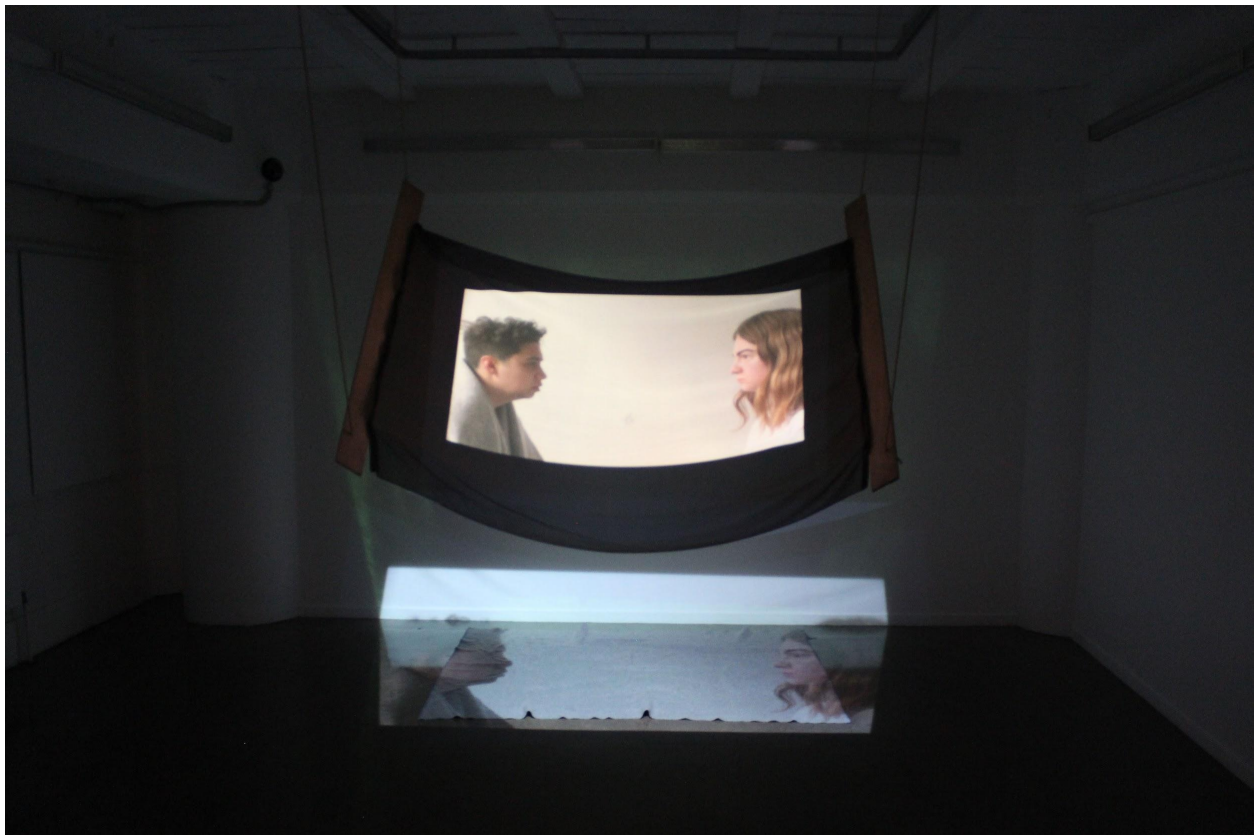


Figure 3 Gordon-Stables, N. and Winter, A, 2017, I have come and joined my love with yours, installation view, Photograph: Laura Duffy

Not including more source material as contextual content may do a disservice to the work, to the violences of colonisation, and the strength of the Kingitanga movement. A test work *Ki te whakapiri i tou aroha ki toku aroha*, was not included in the final installation.⁴⁶ The test work is a long scroll of paper, showing the original transcript of Wi Tako's account in te reo. This was a missed

⁴⁵ Wellington Independent, p 3

⁴⁶ See List of Works Made

opportunity to bring te reo into consideration for its inherent value, and to the role of translation in this project.

I have come and joined my love with yours explores the tension inherent in the conversation between colonial power and indigenous leader, and how shapes a proximity of distance: spatial, temporal and linguistic. The voices in the work speak away from their historical origin, though coming from the bodies represented, just 'passing', and always already mediated through bodies, culture, gender and ethnicity.

TO BE HUMAN ONCE MORE

In one thread of research, I have been working with the poetry and history of the late writer Esdras Parra. Parra was born in Venezuela in 1936, working as a writer, translator and film critic. She left her home in the 70's to go to London where she would eventually transition. Upon her return to Caracas as a woman in the late 70's, she was rejected by family and literary peers, losing her job at *Revista Nacional de Cultura*. Parra passed away in 2012

Her works have been translated into English from the original Spanish by Jamie Berrout, who is also an openly trans writer. The title of Berrout's translation of *Este suelo secreto* is *To be human once more*, which is lifted from one of the translations in the book. *Este suelo secreto* was the first book she published from her return to Venezuela, and the first as an openly trans person. She acknowledges her intent in translating Parra's poetry:

'It happens with translation that some meanings in the original text will be lost and others emphasized or created through the movement from one language to another. So it's this particular (trans) way of reading that informs the way I'm translating and the meanings I try hardest to preserve in the book. I hope this bias of mine will make the translations all the more moving, relevant, and helpful for trans readers, rather than detract from the poems.'⁴⁷

Initially, I began working extensively with Berrout's translations, through auditory and visual means.⁴⁸ There were also experiments with provisional translations through Google Translate, which provided less detail and coherency. How these translations revealed their own provisional nature drew me to work further with them. These translations began to speak to the inherent error of the translation process, and how these errors reflect a distance of understanding through translation. Working with the material, I was cognizant of my place within the work, being a young, white art student on the other side of the world, appropriating the work of two trans women of colour whose lives and circumstances differed greatly from mine, even in our shared trans identity. The crux of this work was to find ways to speak to the geographical, temporal and cultural distance between Parra, Berrout, and myself.

⁴⁷ Berrout, *To be human once more*, 11

⁴⁸ <https://vimeo.com/231956714>

'Transgender demands above all the need for more context, more story, and thus the translation into transgender never arrives and rests. Instead, it begs that we continuously translate from transgender, provide new contextual elaborations that include time and place and all the disciplinary regimes through we which have named and been named, the names that are the precondition of our passing.'⁴⁹

To address this, I extended an invitation for collaboration to Berrout via email. Berrout challenged me on explicitly addressing my position in the work:

'There has to be a way of doing this work without engaging in exploitation, right?... Can the performance itself acknowledge the differences between us and provide a kind of resolution?'⁵⁰

Berrout, here, refers to a performance work *Oh cuerpo/Oh body* in which I sung Berrout's translation of a poem from *Este suelo secreto*.⁵¹ In the end, I could not successfully create a constitutive space for the work, and temporarily left this work to move on to other threads of research.

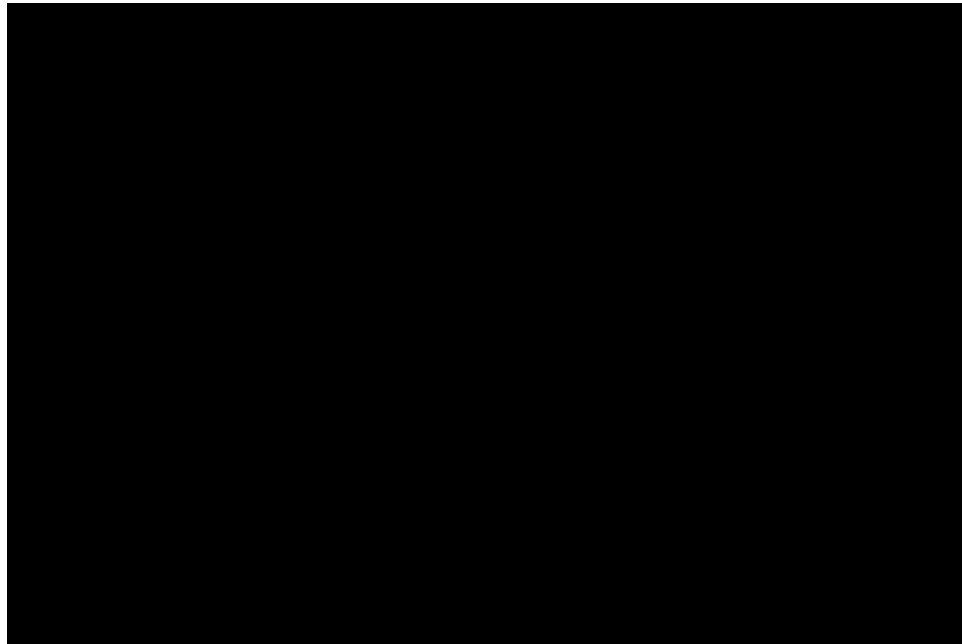


Figure 4 Tsang, W., 2014, *The Shape of a Right Statement*, Installation view

⁴⁹ Enke in TSQ

⁵⁰ Quoted from personal communication

⁵¹ See List of works made

Wu Tsang's moving image work *The Shape of a Right Statement* features Tsang lip syncing to a recording of her own voice.⁵² Looking directly into the camera, Tsang lip syncs to her recitation of a text appropriated from a video by the autism rights activist Amanda Baggs called *In My Language*⁵³. The text reads as a manifesto of autistic rights. Baggs' voice in the source video is from a text-to-speech generator. Tsang mimics the pitch and odd intonation of Baggs' computer generated voice to an uncanny degree. In the framing, Tsang directs attention to only her head and shoulders, the viewer being guided to focus on the movements of the face as she lip syncs in and out of time with her recorded voice. The computer generated voice is channeled through Tsang, doubling its approximation of human speech. Through this channeling, Baggs' words emerge as decidedly queer, in relation to Tsang's mimetic performance using her own gender ambiguous body.



Figure 5 Winter, A., 2017, AUTOERRATO, Installation view. Image artist's own

⁵² <http://tank.tv/exhibitions/2008/the-young-and-the-evil/wu-ingrid-tsang-the-shape-of-a-right-statement-i.aspx>

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hl2jc>

An audio installation work *AUTOERRATO* worked with the provisionally translated version of Parra's afterword to *Este suelo secreto*. The text is spoken by an American text-to-speech generated voice. I was interested in how the approximation of the computerised voice intersected with the content of the text. The installation was sparse, featuring a pair of worn New Balance sneakers, with one shoe resting on a bluetooth speaker box which played the audio track.

AUTOERRATO, the title of the afterword, can translate to 'self-portrait', and certainly, the autobiographical text is both explicit and implicit in its outlining of Parra's life and emotional states. In consideration of the choice of Berrout's titling of the translations, the constitution of the boundaries of the human emerged as a theme in this body of work. The computerised narration becomes reflective of the ways that transness is seen as an approximation of proper gender, and of the human. The heavy emotional language, the dry voice and odd fluctuations of intonation are unsettling as they are distracting. There is a distance from this content in the replacing of the human with a computer generated voice. The sneakers reference an orally recorded legend that Parra wore only one pair of New Balance sneakers in her later years while walking through Caracas. The sneakers are my own, and locate the work within my own life circumstances. They over determine the reading of a journey or pilgrimage. In the end, the work belies the complexity it attempts to articulate, remaining open for further development.

I received infrequent responses from Berrout, and as the engagement wavered so did the research on Esdras. Without relying on the labour of Berrout to progress my practice, I am taking time to think through strategies for addressing the questions of privilege raised by Berrout.



Figure 6 Winter, A. 2017, Untitled, Page work for *No One is Sovereign in Love* publication, Published by Simon Gennard. Image artists own

Above is a page work in the publication for the exhibition *No One is Sovereign in Love*. The pixelation of the text acts as a disruption to the predetermined experience of reading. It was intended that this might be seen as a printing error, and it is purposely unclear whether or not this was a deliberate decision. There is an uncertainty and perhaps a kind of pity towards me or my own artistic intent, that I have made an awful mistake now printed through hundreds of copies. I am interested in this (mis) interpretation, a misfire in reading what is an intentional mistake. This interpretation is reflective of the experiences of misrecognition that trans and gender nonconforming people face daily. The misreading of bodies is mirrored in the misreading of the poem, the words themselves, and in my own intent to dissect the poem through translation.

'Concédete el espacio para la serenidad
oh cuerpo
trabajado por la duda
enhebrado por el dolor
al que siempre vuelves
que alimenta tus incógnitas'⁵⁴

'Grant yourself the space for serenity
oh body
adorned by doubt
threaded with pain
to which you always return
which only feeds your mysteries'⁵⁵

In the translation of this particular poem, which I began to use in later performances, I used a word-by-word method of translation. This allowed multiple English meanings for Spanish words to appear, as well as their masculine or feminine variance. The poem is multiply gendered through this translation process. In this iterative expansion, while awkward in format, is at once more and less than a fragmented translation of a single poem. The 'body' of the poem is multilayered, the poetics and meaning made uncertain. The language is dis/ordered, the intent original poetic intent has been muted through the translation.

⁵⁴ Parra, *Este Suelo Secreto*, 24

⁵⁵ Berrout's translation, *To Be Human Once More*, 24

TO TAKE THE WATERS



Figure 7 Photographer unknown, 1914-1917, Dr von Danneville October 1914 - June 1917, NZ Archives

Dr. Von Danneville's history is the most significant body of research in this exegesis. For this reason, *Hardening* and *To take the waters* are presented for final examination, as the most resolved work to date. The way trans-poetics is utilised in this body of work are the most distinct, and charts my trajectory working with in moving image, and provides a blueprint for future iterations in this medium.

Hjelmar Von Danneville was interned on Matiu Somes island during the first world war under suspicion of being German, as well as of indeterminate gender and sexuality. It was Dr. Von Danneville's nonconformity, gendered and otherwise, that aroused the suspicion of the authorities. Their public speaking on matters of the war, popularity in the local community, and general non-conformity all contributed to the raising of suspicions, and their eventual arrest and interrogation.

During internment, Von Danneville was forced into hard labour and subjected to several medical examinations, only to be discharged for medical reasons, officially described as a ‘severe nervous breakdown’⁵⁶. They were received back to Wellington City as a patient at the same health home where they were a carer only a few weeks prior.

With a tarnished history, the internment camp was surrounded with secrecy, the internees having accused guards of abuse and ill-treatment, with rumours of the squalid conditions abounding⁵⁷.

As the research progress I began to comprehend the complexities of Dr. Von Danneville’s life. I became attentive to the ways in which erasures can occur to the specificities of subjects and their particular bodies. Though the news media ultimately relied on the sensation that the doctor was ‘a man masquerading as a woman’⁵⁸, they were publicly referred to as woman and with female pronouns. The doctor themselves never took much opportunity to speak on the matter of their identification in the records available. It is impossible to know how they identified, or even what identities were possible or available to them in their cultural climate. Though they were determined “female” by several doctors, it is also possible that they were intersex.⁵⁹ The medical lexicon of the period relied largely on the categorisation of exterior anatomy, so an intersex determination could not have been accurately made.

Part of this work is a reluctance for me to identify the doctor in any particular way, to give name to their experience, and in that naming reduce their life to my perceptions of it. This is also in consideration of the ways in which queer studies has historically subsumed the complexity of the lives of people living outside gender norms- by naming sexuality as the primary point of concern.

Trawling through the police case files on Hjelmar at the New Zealand Archives, I couldn’t help but feel as if I was reading backwards from this ordinary violence to find a human story within the bureaucracy.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Stated by the Solicitor-General in the report to police

⁵⁷ For further details of the investigation of the internment camp, see McGill, D. *Island of Secrets: Maitu/Somes Island in Wellington Harbour*, Steele Roberts, 200

⁵⁸ Stated by the Solicitor-General in the report to police

⁵⁹ See Glossary

⁶⁰ For a discussion on Dr. Von Danneville’s case see this interview by Gareth Watkins from PrideNZ with Donal Raethel from Archives New Zealand at http://www.pridenz.com/archives_new_zealand.html?qs=null

2017 is the 100 year anniversary of their internment. Having performed on Matiu Somes Island for an unrelated project a few months prior, I felt winded by the knowledge that I had been there; on the very site they were detained for six weeks. We had walked on the same ground, and perhaps we could share some of the hurt. Maybe we could carry this thing together, notwithstanding the states of time and mortality.

There is a certain impetus for this work to clearly communicate the factual history of Von Danneville. This presents an inherent risk, when what is urgent to be imparted is brought to light at the risk of being bruised and misunderstood⁶¹

While researching for the work *Whakapapa: The Noun and the Verb* with Angela Kilford, we came across a piece of poetry significance of karoro.^{62 63} This phrase and its translation became a departure point for thinking about the place of voice and audio within the performance.

'Tangi amio ana te karoro i te awa.

Ngā tohu o te ipo unuhia noatia.

The gulls circle the channel, crying.

They are signs my beloved is taken from me.⁶⁴

The performance occurring within the work is a direct response to the architecture of the animal quarantine. Not only in reference to the internment camp previously built on the site, but in relation to its use of quarantining of animals. The building, through its empty winding halls, metal railings and pens, both produces the feeling of, and material conditions for isolation and containment.

⁶¹ Lorde, 40

⁶² Karoro is the Maori word for a black-backed gull.

⁶³ See List of Works Made

⁶⁴ Quoted in Orbell, 148–9

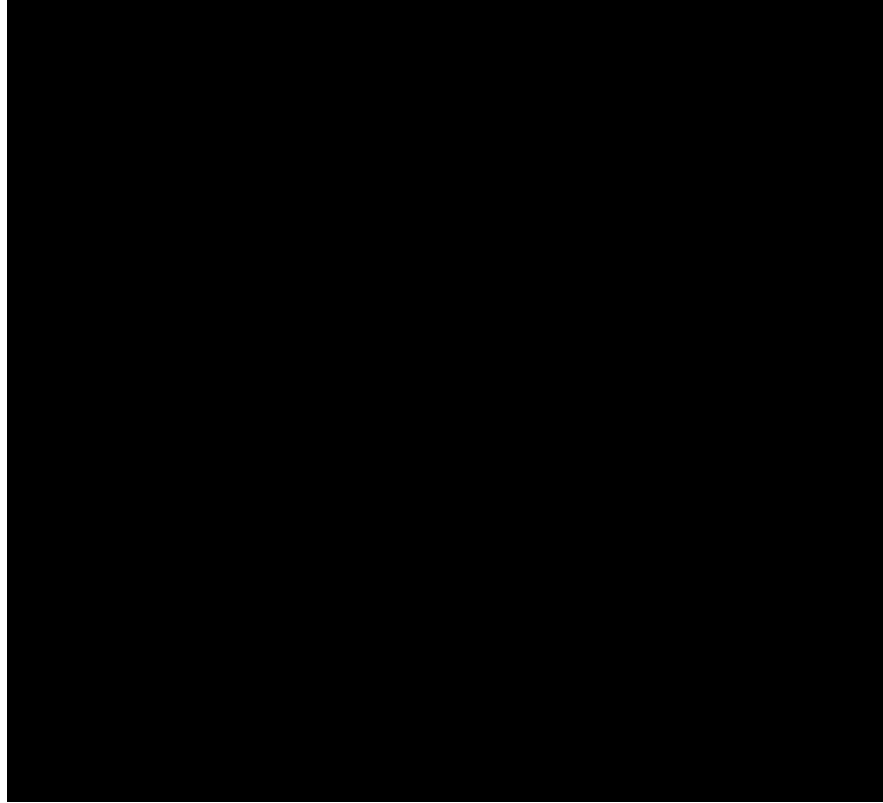


Figure 8 Weems, C., 2006, from the series *Roaming*, Photograph

Artist Carrie Mae Weems' 2006 series *Roaming* was an important touchstone for the following developments of work.⁶⁵ The series of black and white images feature Weems' own figure in various landscapes, showing the scale of the historical sites and structures that her body is placed in relation to. Weems expands on her thinking about the work, saying:

'Architecture... much of the fabric of it, is very much about power... what one is made to feel, is the power of the state in relation to the lower subject'⁶⁶

In *To take the waters*, the body is used as a measure for the power in architecture and landscapes. There is a continuous long, slow shot of my own figure walking up a road, flanked by scrub-covered hills. This act is a procession towards the quarantine building, referencing the marches internees would take while on the island. My figure becomes surmounted by the scale of the hilly landscape either side that close in the edges of the frame. If there is a sense of the sublime in the

⁶⁵ <http://carriemaeweems.net/galleries/roaming.html>

⁶⁶ Weems in Art21

landscape, it is unsettled by the silence and slowed motion in the shot. The viewer is directed to consider the isolation of the landscape, rather than taking pleasure in the island as a sanctuary of biodiverse regeneration.

My face is not seen until I enter the first pen of the quarantine, with the vocalisations increasing. Seeing only my figure from behind, this concealment from view was intended to represent transness and something larger, less specific. The dark clothing also conceals the body, and act as garments for the performance depicted in the work.

The purpose of the ritualistic vocalisation is not immediate, except as a kind of catharsis. The intent is not necessarily meant to act as the character of Dr. Von Danneville in re-enactment, but rather to re-imagine an experience communicated incompletely through historical material. Screaming into and slapping the walls, the performance is frustrated as call without out a response. There is a relinquishing of speech for a mode of vocal articulation outside of language, precisely because language falls short.

The research of this work manifests in an excess, a presence created by an absence from the project of reading between lines and finding only that which is implied, never fully explicated. The specific movements of my figure within the quarantine refer to the points of narrative, like the shovel used in the manual labour of road building, and the walls which contained internees. The performance leaves an impression on my body, now implicating the viewer to wonder what the purpose is of self-inflicted exhaustion.

'Emotions are not "in" either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects'⁶⁷

There is a mesh of sensory and emotive through the trans-poetics of the surfacing body. My sensory and affective response to the history of Von Danneville is both an effect and a reaffirmation of the institutional boundaries which led to their internment. This work is lead from a queer relation to embodiment, where the history of erasure is felt viscerally as invisibility: to be passing in plain sight.

⁶⁷ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10



Figure 9 Winter, A., 2017, *To take the waters*, video still. Image artist's own. Camera: Christopher Ulutupu

Though it partially documents performance-based actions from the island, the entire installation of the work is intended to bring traumatic experience into focus. References can be drawn to multiple cultural traditions of death wailing: Celtic practices of keening, indigenous people in Asia, Africa and Australia.⁶⁸

Angelica Mesiti's three-channel video installation *In the Ear of a Tyrant*, depicts a vocalist's performance of the Prefiche inside a limestone cave. Prefiche is an Italian practice where women were employed to sing songs of mourning for the death of a member of a community.⁶⁹ Mesiti's re-imagining involves a direct response to the history of the cave, used to incarcerate political captives, and quarried in later years. In relation to my practice, I attempt to utilise Mesiti's expansion of Prefiche as the mourning of multiple histories: as a response to the acoustics of the cave, and of the traditional practice of Prefiche, on the edge of extinction. The vocalisations in *To*

⁶⁸ For further reading: Tsitsi Dangarembga's semi-autobiographical novel *Nervous Conditions* gives an account of death wailing in Zimbabwe, and Edward Armitage's writing *The death wail of the Ginginbarra people of Wide Bay* describes the death wail in the Taribelang language.

⁶⁹ <http://www.angelicamesiti.com/selectedworks/#/in-the-ear-of-the-tyrant/>

take the waters are not intended to appropriate or emulate a cultural practice, but to use the voice as a means to mourn a history both known and unknowable.

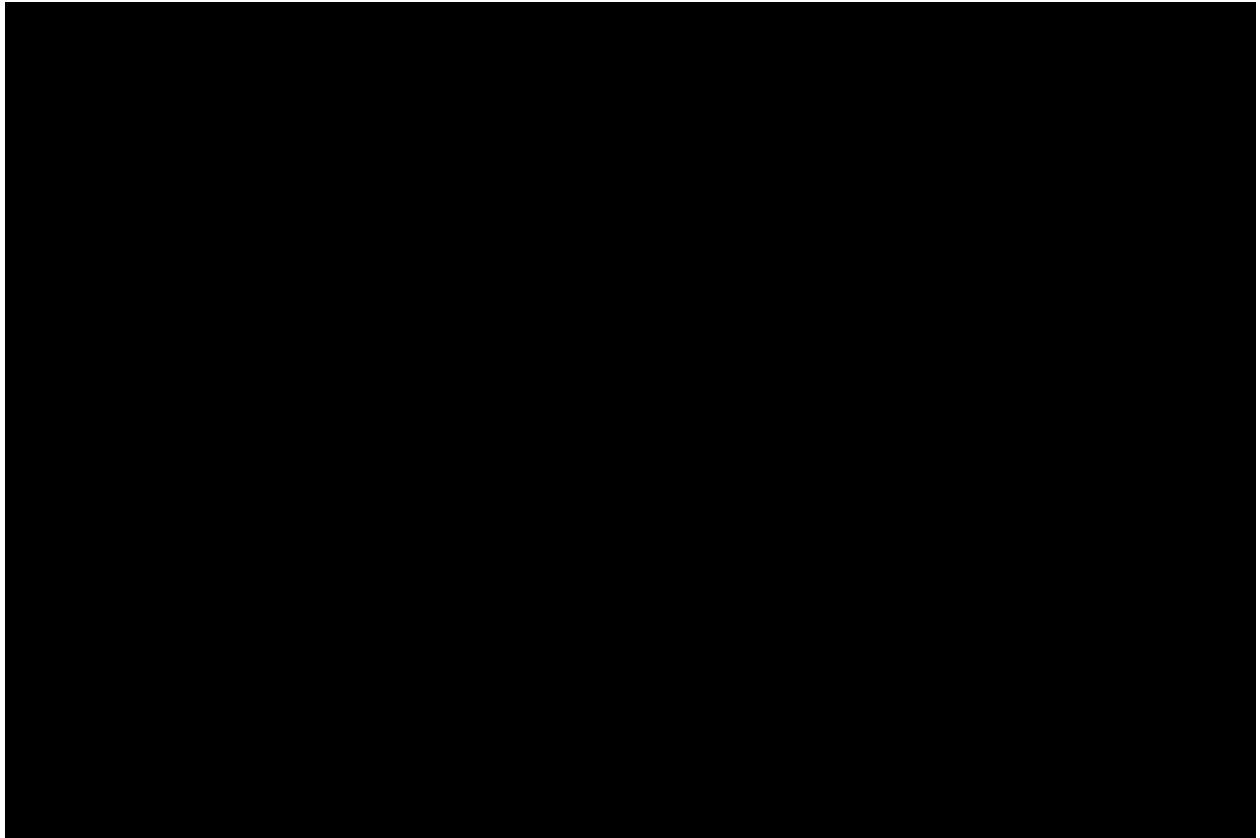


Figure 10 Mesity, A., 2014, *In the Ear of a Tyrant*, Installation view, 19th Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW. Photograph: Sebastian Kriete

The voice stands in for a lament never made, and a trauma never recorded. The frustration is doubled: in not knowing the experience of Von Danneville during internment, and the frustration I imagined Von Danneville felt at becoming a criminal and suspicious subject. The vocalisations from animals are often reduced to ‘noises’, outside of language and meaning. The voice and performance is animalistic in the sense that it moves outside of speech, while intending to impart a meaning and risking dismissal as ‘noise’. This reflects how the voices of trans and queer people have been and are framed as the deranged rantings of the mentally ill. The work seeks to maintain these registers of voice, in an understanding that there may be some “intense and irreducible relationship between being trans and what it is to be communicable”.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Moten in 365 Mission Rd, 2016

The poetics in this work centre around the voice as a failed means of adequate communication. It follows that in order to articulate what is already foreclosed to be spoken, one could not speak at all, remaining open to the voices potential for affect. It reveals the voice as that which subtends the act of speaking, making its own meaning. The strategy of using the voice in this way is to take up incoherence as communication. An attempt at speaking without a readily available grammar.



Figure 11 Winter, A., 2017, *To take the waters*, video still. Image artist's own. Camera: Christopher Ulutupu

'The poetics at work here are of unspeakability or impossibility- what cannot in the first place be said, what is already foreclosed by the thing that seeks to be spoken, what the body cannot hold.'⁷¹

What the body cannot hold, in this instance, is not only the full trauma which causes a nervous breakdown, but ambiguity of gender. There is already a foreclosure in the attempt to speak for Hjelmar's life and identity. The axis of *To take the waters* is a struggle to communicate, and moments when the body cannot hold its own voice. This work determines how voice can speak to alterity, and 'sound out the affective, signifying, and psychic spaces between subjects'.⁷²

⁷¹ Martin in Tolbert and Peterson, 140

⁷² Neumark et al.,16

Von Danneville's history was only made possible through implicit readings, looking between the lines where no circumstance is made evident. There is nothing to be said, and so only the body and voice are employed to convey this incomplete rendering, and the frustration inherent in this process. If there is a primary reason for using my own body in this work, it is to stand in for Von Danneville's narrative.

To take the waters is a Victorian phrase, referring to the practice of bathing in mineralised water with the purpose of healing and rejuvenation, a practice used at Lahmann Health Home. In one shot, bricks are seen on a rocky shoreline, locating the work taking place near the water. The bricks are the remnants of original fumigation house for people quarantined on the island. While this knowledge is not apparent in the work, they appear as architectural fragments of a previous oppressive history. This scene prompts thoughts on the relationship of materiality to history and time, through the erosion of physical objects. Seeing both the full architecture of the quarantine, and the broken bricks, there is a reference to the ways that we recuperate and remember difficult histories of violence.



Figure 12 Winter, A., 2017, *To take the waters*, video still. Image artist's own. Camera: Christopher Ulutupu

'the images ... are a form of recess, which is its own kind of movement, including both the break from and passage back to the unbearable.'⁷³

The move away from a didactic mode of presenting a sequential narrative of Dr. Von Danneville evades the reduction inherent in the attempt to tell a history. This is part of my conception of trans-poetics: that there is never one singular story, but many multilayered and mutable perceptions of that story. Other researchers of Dr. Von Danneville will certainly interpret the events of their life much differently than I have.

Identifying through the categories available to us is necessarily always already a failure. It is a tired trope and imposition upon those of us who are too often demanded to make ourselves known for the comfort of others.

'we can remake and even exceed language but we cannot escape it.'⁷⁴

Though Dr. Von Danneville lived in what might be seen as a very queer and/or trans way, that given language of identification is not enough to attend to the specificities, intricacies, attachments or precarity of a life lived outside normative boundaries.

⁷³ Rankine in Berlant, 2011

⁷⁴ Enke, 2014

HARDENING

'I wonder about the role that the cultivation, protection, and recuperation of things might play in the day-to-day processes of healing necessitated by living as a body that is objectified, misread, or unrecognized... I want to propose the possibility that our relations... function as a means of remodeling our own often-fraught bonds with the materiality that is our own lived bodies.'⁷⁵

The Lahmann Health Home, where Dr. Von Danneville was a health practitioner, is named after the German physician Dr. Heinrich Lahmann. The title of *Hardening* comes from a direct translation of the German word *abhärtung*. 'Hardening' was a part of Dr. Lahmann's holistic method, referring to a regime of exposing the body to the elements in order to stimulate a healthy functioning of bodily systems.⁷⁶ Other practices encouraged by Lahmann included dietary regimes for healthy blood, frequent water bathing, massage and inhalation treatments.

It was perceived that the process of air bathing was a method of strengthening the body, albeit in controlled environments and appropriate to the season. Lahmann's theory of air bathing focused on the skin as porous boundary, regulating the body through the expulsion of toxins. This was popular during and succeeding the Victorian era, and notably was the subject of Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Luftbad*.⁷⁷

This concept of 'hardening' relies on the shock of measured extremities as a means to propel the body into desired adjustments. Rather than a focus on the efficacy of the method, the work makes use of its poetic and metaphorical capacities. *Hardening* here refers to the ways in which oppressed people become hardened to the everyday microaggressions which wear away at their livelihood. More specifically, it refers to the shock Dr. Von Danneville experienced during their internment, resulting in the sudden switch from patient to carer.

⁷⁵ Hall in Walker Magazine

⁷⁶ See Lahmann, H. *The Airbath as a means of Healing and Hardening the Body*, Stuttgart : A. Zimmer, 1901 available at <https://archive.org/details/39002086348464.med.yale.edu>

⁷⁷ <http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/assets/KM-Stories/THE-LUFT-BAD1910.pdf>

'How to care for the injured body?

the kind of body that can't hold
the content of its living?

And where is the safest place when that place
must be someplace other than in the body?⁷⁸



Figure 13 Winter, A., 2017, *Hardening*, video still. Image artist's own. Camera: Laura Duffy

Hardening asks the viewer to enter into and contemplate a state of being through an embodied relation to one's environment, rather than referencing points in a narrative. Where the body in *To take the waters* appears to work against its surroundings, the body in *Hardening* works to become grounded in them.

The parole conditions of Dr. Von Danneville's release from internment were that they did not exceed a two-mile radius of the Health Home. *Hardening* deals with a multilayered and less visible containment than is outlined in *To take the waters*. Instead of defining the material contours of

⁷⁸ Rankine, 143

oppression through landscape and architecture, *Hardening* charts the points of a sensorium and relation of the body to the elements. Both touching and touched upon, the body is demarcated by sensation. There is a recuperation of the body through a willing subjection to environmental stimuli, as well as a containment within that environment.

This is also about the gap in longing and desire to know the experience of Von Danneville through my own body. What happens if I go to the very place, and do the very things done, without a predetermined outcome? The poetic affect in this work is somatic, as well as psychic.

‘How might individual sensation register aspects of collective memory and belonging[?]. . . such a dynamic, in which affective configurations bespeak the presence of unacknowledged political negotiations, historical trajectories, and social formations, can be characterised as a “structure of feeling”⁷⁹



Figure 14 Winter, A., 2017, *Hardening*, video still. Image artist's own. Camera: Laura Duffy

The structure of feeling in *Hardening* is framed around the existence of trans and gender nonconforming people, despite an inability to be rendered legible within language, and institutional

⁷⁹ Rifkin in Driskill et al., 173

systems. This structure of feeling is centred on the vulnerable, healing body. The aim of using this structure is to counter the official consciousness and juridical abstractions present in the archival research with an individual consciousness, foregrounded through bodily sense and experience. The focus on embodiment is able to provide the grounds on which to capture a somatic experience of healing, and to articulate a transness in terms of a desiring relationship to the body. The work engages an eroticism. The trans-poetics in *Hardening* are of a queer sensorium, to register the material, sensory effects that systematic erasure has on the body.⁸⁰

The aforementioned conceptual frameworks manifest through the aesthetics. The use of black and white is a reference to early photographic and film practices, but the high-definition technology firmly ground it in the present. The footage is closely cropped and carefully selected; we never see the entirety of the gardens and house. Instead the sequence is presented as a series of still compositions, a meandering view through single visual moments.

The monochromatic palette mutes the overwhelming greenery of the site, and allows texture and tactility to emerge. The long, slowed, still shots are contemplative, emphasising pattern, form and plays of wind and light. The focus here is on the sensations represented: the body outdoors, fabric against skin, wind blowing through clothes and trees, touching and smelling rosemary, and feet walking on grass. The wind is a connecting element, acting upon both the landscape and the figure.

⁸⁰ Rifkin in Driskill et al., 174



Figure 15 Winter, A., 2017, *Hardening*, video still. Image artist's own. Camera: Laura Duffy

Wearing a large cotton shirt dress, my costuming both considers the dress of Von Danneville and the loose clothing recommended for air bathing by Dr. Lahmann. There is a particular androgyny in the plainness of the garment, and it's similarity to the pattern of a men's white shirt. The plainness allows for ambiguity for the viewers projection into and onto the figure depicted.

The white fabric of the shirt dress blows in the wind, catching against the body to subtly reveal its contours. However, the fabric is mostly opaque, never fully allowing for total visibility. It is tantalising in the way the body almost reveals itself as the dress is whipped in the wind. This functions as a refusal of the viewer's gaze; working against the ways we look for visual signs and signifiers to read gender. Though other readings of hair, skin, and legs might lead to a particular assignment of gender, the dress shields against an objectification of the half-naked body underneath. The refusal is not of gender itself, but of visual cues as its primary indicator. Ahmed remarks that 'the unreachability of some things can be affective; it can even put other worlds within reach'⁸¹ The poetics of this work are present in the concealing, revealing, and unreachability of the gendered body.

⁸¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 153

A performance called *how to care for the injured body* involves ritualistic actions and recitations.⁸² Several bowls are placed around a room, which I fill with hot water, releasing the scent of the oil (vetiver and petitgrain) that lies at the bottom. This is similar to the method of inhalations used at the Lahmann Health Home. This provides an olfactory atmosphere for a series of actions of care for the body, such as tying and untying hair and applying oil to the skin. A kind of manifesto of self-care is read at the end of the performance, while I brush my hair. Remnants and the set up for the performance are also the installation, as a “vanity” area, recalling the performed actions and the objects of private rituals.



Figure 16 Winter, A., 2017, *how to care for the injured body*, Photograph of performance. Photograph: Julieanna Preston

⁸² See List of works made

The objects and overall installation are not necessarily meant to replicate a different era, but rather to bring forth the methods of healing across a temporal distance, between Von Danneville and myself. The performance highlight the ways in which trans and gender nonconforming must people labour to care for themselves in a world which denies their personhood and safety. As writer Sara Ahmed noted, 'the availability of comfort for some bodies may depend on the labour of others, and the burden of concealment'⁸³. Moving through the world as a visibly queer/trans person is to encounter objectification and violence, both aggressively explicit and insidious.

In thinking of what Hjelmar's experience was of moving through the world, it is clear that they battled with constant suspicion. Through this brought me to thinking about the ways that Hjelmar cared for and healed others, and how this relates to the necessity of self-care. For future developments, the work requires a greater dedication of time to practicing. In this iteration I was barred by my own nervousness in performing for an audience. Prolonged states of performing would allow for the internal logic of the work to develop, and distill a synergy between the spoken text and the actions performed.

⁸³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 149

CONCLUSION

Looking to the past for signals of queerness and transness, my knowledge of the problematics of this project of excavation have become richer, and more complex. The potential of working with historical records is to both address particular moments and transform understandings in, and of, the present. These subjects have become a significant and ongoing interest in my practice, in particular with the life and poetic work of Esdras Parra. Having reached out to form a relationship with Berrout, the project is open to the potential of developing new works in new media. Similarly, a project surrounding the murder of Joe Kum Yung by Lionel Terry in Wellington lies unrealised outside of this exegesis. I have subsequently encountered various archival materials in the period of my Masters research sparking new thoughts on production of works and projects. Trans-poetics has provided an expansion and enriching of the methods used in my practice.

The elaboration of context has also become a significant focus, especially working with historical material. There is still much to be explored for how this context manifests, and to avoid the direct reproductions, and didactic approaches.

The title of this exegesis is lifted from an interview with the Arab Canadian poet Trish Salah, speaking on her recent poetry:

'And while it is all well and good to undo the regulatory logics at a certain level of abstraction, there is also the question of how a person's muddling along, unremarkably, with life's small cruelties and exclusions, but also satisfactions and ordinary pleasures, can make its way into language when one is assigned to represent the sex of angels'⁸⁴

Within this quote, Salah is perhaps referencing the french phrase *Discuter sur le sexe des anges* or *Debating the sex of angels*: meaning to focus on minute details by which a larger problem is obscured.

The Angelic body, like the trans body is rendered illegible. They are represented, but their physical manifestations and workings are not fully known. This suggests a shared relationship to

⁸⁴ Salah in Hall

transcendence in the sense that trans bodies are perceived to transcend gender. Transness is transcendent as angels transcend the earthly. There is a simultaneous denial of the condition of being mundane or sublunary, through the collective fascination with a body that defies normative expectations.

To represent the sex of angels is an aim of the ongoing task of trans-poetics tracked through this exegesis. The methodology of trans-poetics makes meaning through and outside of language. It takes the poetic as a strategy to foreground the intricacies, mutability, ambiguity, ambivalence and precarity of queer and trans lives.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Many of these definitions are based on those provided by GLAAD.⁸⁵

AFAB/AMAB/AIAB: “Assigned female/male/intersex at birth” respectively. This is the currently preferred term to previous (and inaccurate) alternatives of “biological male/female”, “male/female-bodied” or “natal male/female”.

Cisgender/Cis: A person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth, also: non-trans

Cisnormative: A term to describe the worldview based on the indoctrinated assumption that all people are cisgender.

Fa’afafine: A Samoan word for someone who is AMAB and takes on particular gender roles in Samoan society.

Genderqueer: An older term than non-binary, for someone who identifies as queer of gender, and/or between/outside the gender binary.

Heteronormative: A term to describe the worldview based on the indoctrinated assumption that all people are heterosexual.

Intersex: an umbrella term for people with variations in hormones, genetic makeup and secondary sex characteristics. Visibly intersex infants are often coercively assigned a gender and have unnecessary and damaging surgical operations to align genitalia with this assignment. While some people are AIAB, many people will not know that they are intersex until later in life, usually through medical records. While some intersex people do identify as trans/non-binary, they are not interchangeable terms.

Non-binary: Someone who identifies as queer of gender, and outside of the binary.

Passing: (also known as being ‘stealth’) refers to the ability to be perceived as a member of a different social group than one you are part of. In the context of gender, passing refers to one’s ability to be read as a cisgender man or cisgender woman, this may or may not align with one’s actual gender and/or sex. It

⁸⁵ <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

denotes concordance with one's gender identity through presentation, behaviours, mannerisms that others can read as aligned with gendered expectations. The reasons for people being concerned with passing could be a combination of many: validation, safety, privilege to be read as cis/straight as opposed to visibly trans/queer. However, many people- particularly in trans communities- reject this term and concept as being relevant. People who are able to "pass" can be considered to have "passing privilege". Other preferred terms to *passing* are *visibly trans* or *not visibly trans*.

Queer: An umbrella term for people of minority genders and sexualities. As a reclaimed slur, to some people use of this word is controversial and offensive.

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including transgender.

Takatāpui: An umbrella term to refer to Māori people of diverse genders and sexualities.⁸⁶

Tangata ira tane: A term to describe AFAB Māori people who identify as male/masculine.

Transfeminine: an umbrella terms for AMAB people who identify as female/feminine-of-centre.

Transmasculine: an umbrella term for AFAB people who identify as male/masculine-of-centre.

Whakawāhine, Hinehi, Hinehua: Some terms to describe AMAB Māori people who have a female/feminine gender identity.

⁸⁶ As defined in the document by Elizabeth Kerekere (in particular the 'Resources' section unpacks the history of this term): <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/ResourceFinder/takatapui.pdf>

APPENDIX B: DID YOU SPIT IN HIS FACE OR EASE THE BURDEN?

This work was not included in the body of the exegesis, primarily because it doesn't directly draw on historical references, through it draws in a personal archive. I have included it as an appendix because of its significance as a developmental work, and to keep the focus on the importance *To Take the Waters* and *Hardening* in relation to the arc of research.

Did you spit in his face or ease the burden? is a video and text work, a reflection on the ending of my relationship with an abusive partner. The title is from the lyrics of a song by the artist Glassjaw, *You Think You're (John Fucking Lennon)*:

'Shiftless mouth of Judas
Did you spit in his fucking face
Or ease the burden?'⁸⁷

These lyrics are deliberately limiting, implying a decision between becoming a saviour or callous action, through the relationship between Judas and Jesus. This limitation acts as a metaphor for the ways the relationship was unhealthy and toxic. Having received waves of messages on many platforms from my ex partner, I had filed them away for legal purposes. There was something constantly devastating about the words he wrote, so hurtful that I felt them in my body. I had to use my body again, to re-work the language, thereby redirecting what I felt were the forms of arrows that the words had become.

In Patrick Staff's 2015 work *The Foundation*, Staff utilises archival footage and a filmed performance at the historic home of queer illustrator Tom of Finland. Staff uses performative actions within a filmic setting to explore belonging and queer intergenerational relationships through archival material. In particular, I note the choice of staff to shoot footage on an iPhone. Similarly, Sean Baker's 2015 film *Tangerine* is shot entirely on iPhones. There is both a mundanity and a temporal signifier in the use of iPhones as camera. Part of this decision was due to

⁸⁷ See https://youtu.be/3-um_QbymK0?t=1m11s

convenience, that the difficulty of dealing with this material could be mediated through ease of use which the phone camera provided.

I consciously decided to take only very small parts of large messages, to preserve the anonymity of my ex-partner and to obscure what was sometimes explicit and triggering content. The phrases oscillate between sentiments seemingly both caring and deeply critical. Without the personal context, the phrases are a one-sided conversation. It is deliberately unclear who is speaking, and what the intent is of their phrasing. What I see as the climax of the piece is a scene of my torso, putting on a strap-on harness and dildo which belonged to my ex-partner. This is a direct reference to our sexual relationship. The words become much more direct and angry over this part of the work, suggesting a relationship between the sex object, the act it references and violence.



Beyond the obvious reading of the phallus, the dildo also queers the narrative, questions of the function and use of the harness arise. Often harnesses are associated with lesbian sex, so without

knowing the context of the relationship in terms of how our respective identifications, and particular ways we engage in sexual activity, the dildo comes to stand in for something more than itself. The association of penetration with power and virility was deliberately downplayed through the slow awkwardness of the application of the harness.



I documented movements through my bedroom; the most intimate of domestic spaces where I had shared a bed with someone, and where we had fucked. Part of this work was a reclaiming of my space, to reorganise my body within it so that it felt like mine again. In a very practical sense, I had been unable to reside in my own room for various reasons. When I finally returned for the first night, I still felt ill at ease, not sure how to orient myself within the space of my bedroom. I was documenting the ritualistic actions I performed a kind of cleansing, through a medium which felt very personal to me, on an iPhone. Presenting the work in a portrait format further pushes this association forward, that the ways people primarily interact with images and videos is in a portrait manner. The process and the work itself became a mode of healing, a trans-poetics through a necessary kind of attentive care. The iPhone video is partially a metaphor for communication, but also a reference to social media such as instagram where some of the messages and video sequences originated from. There is an openness with emotional content on social media, which can be isolating and potentially connective.

APPENDIX C: SELECTED LIST OF WORKS MADE

All images are the artist's own unless otherwise specified.

2016

No Stone Unturned, with Angela Kilford and Te Roopu Raranga o Manaia, Raranga (weaving), performance, and installation

No Stone Unturned #2, with Angela Kilford, Parking Day Wellington

No Stone Unturned, in "Local Knowledge", Enjoy Occasional Journal,

<http://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/the-occasional-journal/local-knowledge/title-tbc-2#article>

Cunty Pakeha Realness, video installation

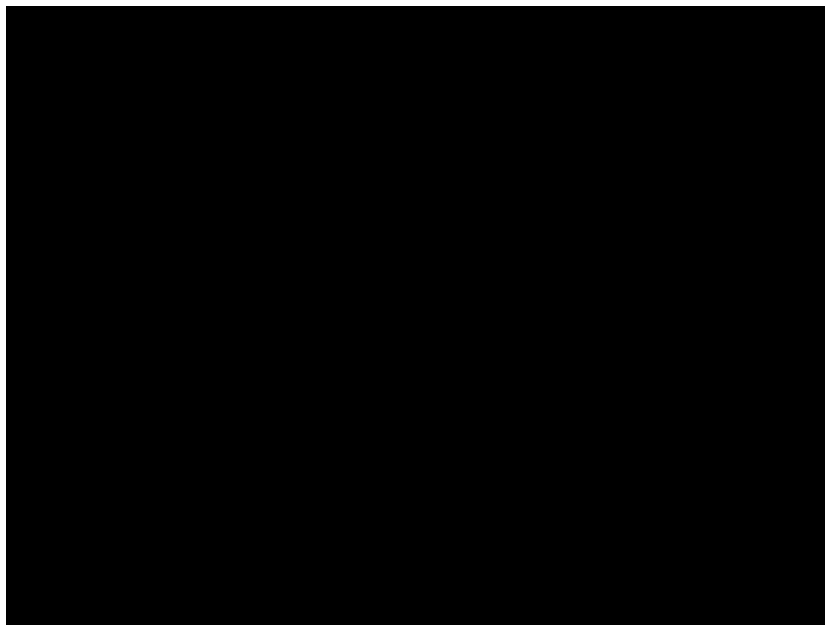
<https://vimeo.com/232594940>

The Horror of Nothing to See

<http://www.meanwhile.gallery/thehorrorofnothingtosee/>

Pantomime Dames, audio performance

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/kmaxu7zf27sra4m/PantomimeDames.mp3?dl=0>



Weight, audio

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/mqirc14298fviup/Weight.mpg?dl=0>

For whom the bells toll, video

<https://vimeo.com/220399532>

A Prayer, text work

When the Great God, advancing, shall inherit all the earth,
When our country shall be governed by the slave,
When love and truth shall be strangled at their birth,
And the noblest shall have won the felon's grave;

When our land shall be polluted by the outcast of the earth,
When corruption rageth rampant at its root,
When our leaders shun their duty for the halls of reckless mirth,
And blended blood shall bear its shameful fruit;

When our land shall seek defenders midst an alien kith and kin,
And shall writhe beneath a scourge of civil strife;
When a mighty hybrid nation shall have won the wage of sin;
Spare us, O God, the bitter curse of life!

L.T.

I have come and joined my love with yours, with Nathaniel Gordon-Stables (*first iteration*), Two-channel moving image installation

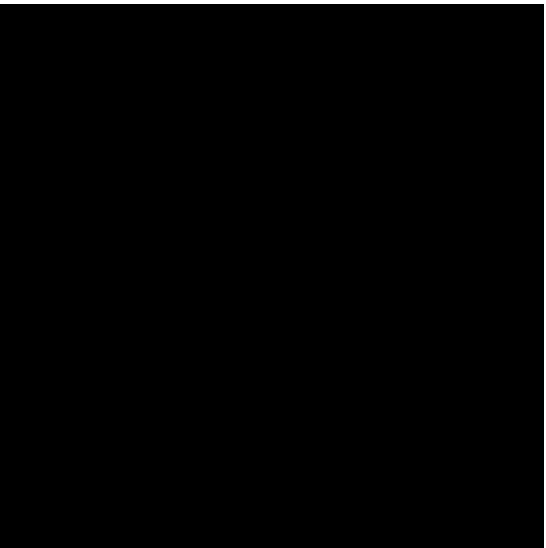
<https://vimeo.com/201609882>

Sista Sista, audio and object installation

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/3xac7yid29viems/SistaSistaAudio.MP3?dl=0>



s i s t a
s i s t a



2017

Wairua, wai-rua, with Angela Kilford and Johanna Mechen, as part of *Common Ground Festival: Groundwater*, Performance and video installation.

<http://commongroundfestival.org.nz/portfolio/wairua-wai-rua/>



Myfanwy, video

<https://vimeo.com/232590861>

Oh cuerpo/oh body, Audio documentation of performance

https://www.dropbox.com/s/w2cn2ezd76ya0nm/OhBodyPerformance_01.mp3?dl=0

Page work in publication for *No One is Sovereign in Love* exhibition.

<http://meanwhile.gallery/nooneissovereigninlove/>



Did you spit in his face or ease the burden?, Moving image

<http://meanwhile.gallery/nooneissovereigninlove/>

Autoerrato, Audio installation

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/vho8x8z96qn2kzb/AUTOERRATO.mp3?dl=0>



Autoerrato (test), Audio

https://www.dropbox.com/s/sosq6xrd7wde77t/Autoerrato_mixdown.mp3?dl=0

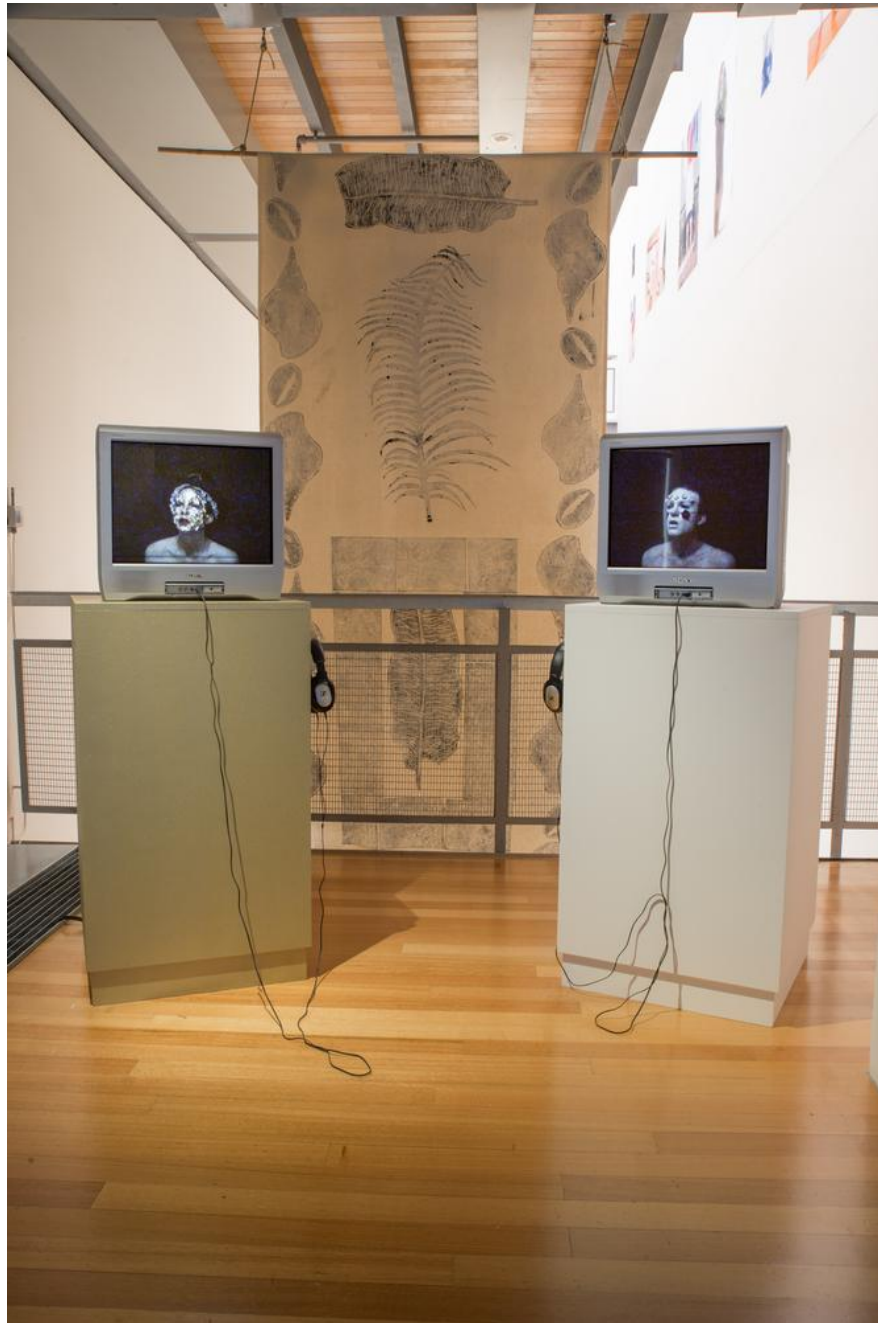
Your words shine (test), moving image

<https://vimeo.com/231956714>

Eli Jenkins Prayer & Danny Boy, moving image installation. Image credit: Shaun Matthews

<https://vimeo.com/154131962>

<https://vimeo.com/220398410>



Letter from an unknown lover, (test works) Text transcribed from letter seized during Hjelmar Von Danneville's arrest

oh my hjelmar, i do want you so. i must
let my hearts love flow out in writing,
it will relieve me. all today you have been
more than usually in my mind, & life with
out you is difficult. How i long to go to
you! Perhaps tonight you may be think
ing of me. you may be near me in the
spirit, as i believe you often are, or
i could not at other times feel so con
fident, so happy, and so secure in the
possession of that treasure.

But tonight, though I am fighting
against the boredom of everything.

I feel so restless, so aching for a
sight of you. are you very tired this
weekend? Are you longing for the
expanses of the ocean?
for the illimitable aerial distances
of the desert? Would to far i could
give you your heart's desire, what
ever it may be!

(heat) blue

tonight i am going to walk through the
rain to hear a violinist, this rather
infant prodigier (protégés?) i believe. they are giving
a sacred concert [as if all music of the
?? was not sacred]. Darling
how i long for yours every night at
the hour i am there, & memory is so
keen, i almost hear and see you ah!
why not quite! a cousin is staying
here. He has ??, he would like
so much to come & hear you play.
When he can get leave from trentham
may he present himself with that
request? I will send a letter of
introduction with him.
He listened? to the prodigies name
& they claim to be St Sandersons of
Tchaikovski.

How to care for the injured body, (test works) Performance, text, installation

Make yourself clean
bathe as often as you can

If you can't bring yourself to
leave the bed it is because
you need to rest

Let your body rest

Eat whenever you can

Drink water, and keep it near
you at all times

Carefully water your plants
and surround yourself with
beautiful things

You are real

Your body is valid

You deserve attentive care which

others could never give to you

This is not a selfish act

You are not broken

You are worthy

You are not only your negative

experiences

You are not your trauma

You are not at fault for the

things that people did to you

You are not the owner of

guilt or shame, that was passed

to you

You are not responsible for the
responses of other people to
your being in the world

You have no obligation to heal
those that inflicted wounds
upon you

You are loved and can love
fully
and wholly

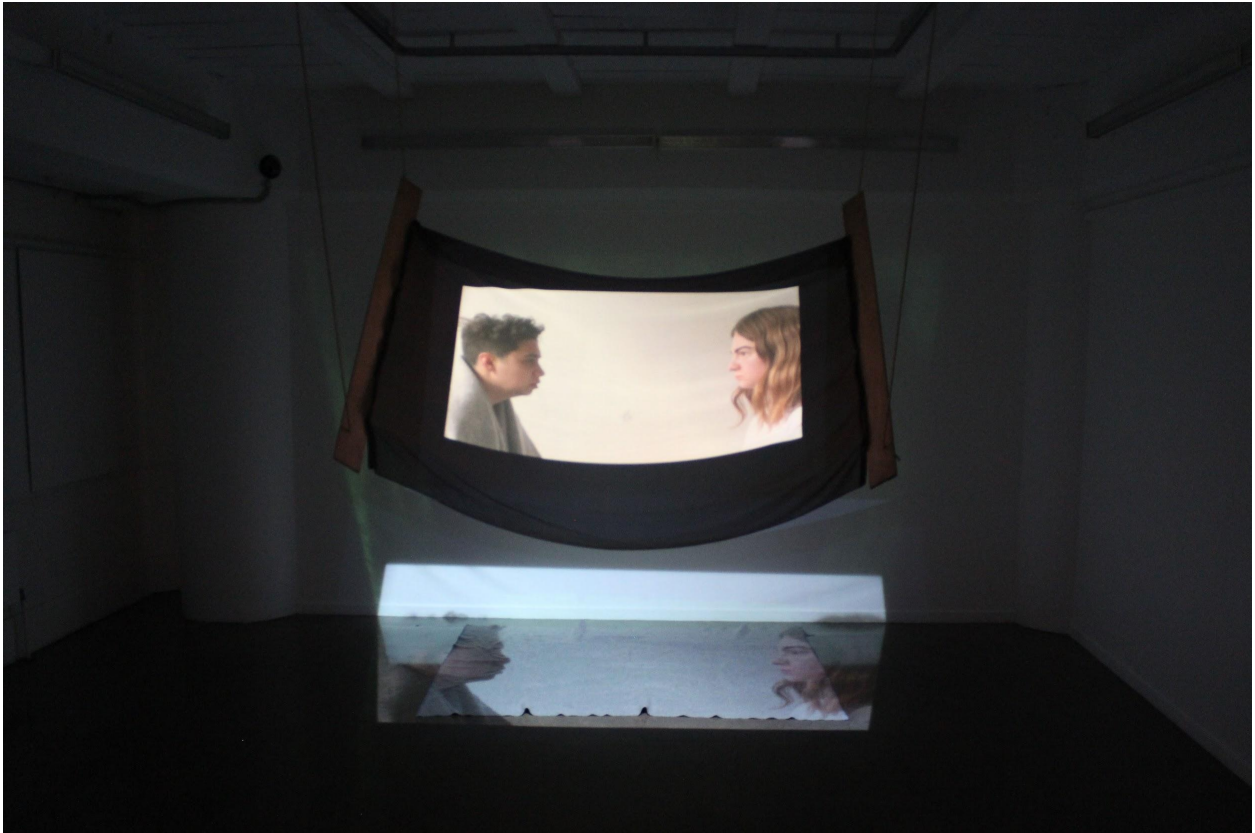
There is an inverse relationship
of the amount of endurance
of pain and the acquisition
of resilience

We accumulate both in equal
measure.

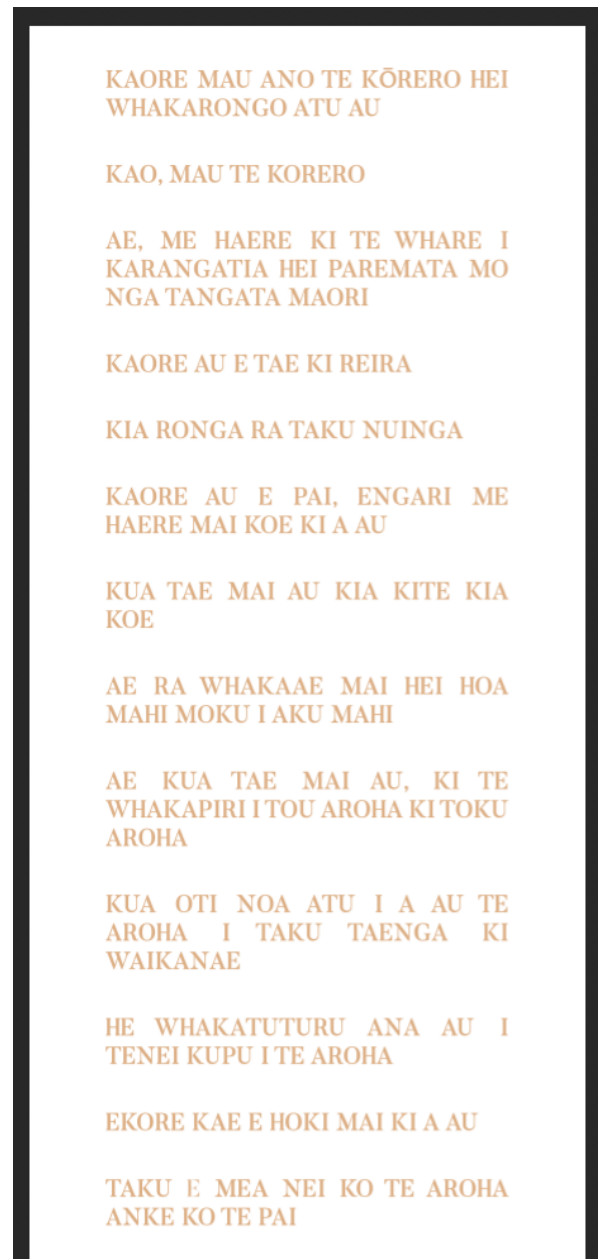


I have come and joined my love with yours with Nathaniel Gordon-Stables (*second iteration*), Installation shot of single channel moving image installation. Image credit: Laura Duffy

<https://vimeo.com/235894043>



Ki te whakapiri i tou aroha ki toku aroha, (test work) Detail, Text is from Wiremu Tako's account of conversation with Governor Grey, Research credit: Jenna-Rose Astwood



Within a two mile radius, Audio, Composed by Stef Animal

https://www.dropbox.com/s/o0en1wtpslat0o/withinatwomileradius_01.mp3?dl=0

To take the waters, moving image, Camera: Christopher Ulutupu

Hardening, moving image, Camera: Laura Duffy