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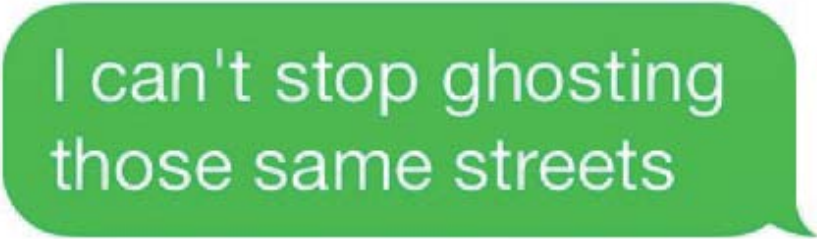
# Ghosting About

Exegesis for MFA at Massey University

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I can't stop ghosting  
those same streets

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## Abstract

There are more things I have forgotten than I care to remember, yet, I go looking for them. My work uses light, sound, cardboard boxes and ghosts to help me remember. It is an exploration of memory and daydreaming whilst wandering around the urban-scape of Wellington. Memory has a disruptive influence on the architecture and spaces we occupy. Using Mark Fisher's lost futures version of Hauntology I investigate how my memories have been tied up in a particular part of the city. I use *ghosting* as my framework to look through windows, peer into the past and imagine the future that never was. My mobile phone has become a note taking device as I go "ghosting those same streets".



# Introduction

*"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,' says the White Queen to Alice."*

— *Lewis Carroll*

Let me take you for a walk through my city. I won't show you the sights though. Instead, I want you to see ghosts; the ghosts of memory. They butt up against my vision, invade my mind and distract me from what I'm supposed to be doing. They are my daydream, given life and space to exist here amongst the quaint ugliness that is this squatty, rolling city.

In the following exegesis, I intend to describe this act of walking through the city of my memories, punctuated with examples of the artworks I have produced within this MFA project. In my ghosting exploration, I bring together three key strands of interest: animation, poetry, and architecture.

I'll introduce you to *ghosting* as a way of not being present, and living via filters. It's a new way to isolate yourself, and not participate in the now – an anti-mindfulness. I'm interested in the memories that inform my practice and in this project the physical locations induce my own internal population of ghosts to rise up. They exist everywhere and nowhere, and collectively, they comprise the ghosting to which I refer.

Ghosting is a fairly common phrase. Yet I am not talking about the type of ghosting that is disappearing without notice, without permission, and without acknowledgement. When dating someone who you thought you were getting close to suddenly drops contact and blocks you. Leaving a social gathering without saying goodbye is an example of ghosting – but this is not my interpretation of ghosting. Ghosting can also be the noisy lines on older analogue televisions appearing due to a bad signal, interference makes the image have a double, a ghost. But again, this is not my ghosting. Ghosting is also following close behind, mimicking a stranger. An internet meme/viral video activity from the early days of YouTube, as a modern flaneur-as-prankster would follow a stranger down the street, close behind, mimicking their movements until caught. None of these are my ghosting.

I found my ghosting when wandering around the city of Wellington, past my old haunts. Before I had an appropriate term for it, I had a method: I set out a path in order to walk through my past and determine what I felt I was missing. While taking these journeys, I composed fragments of verse in my head, short word plays and brief observations. To remember them, I texted these short lines to myself. These would become the basis for the first book of poetry I'd written in 21 years. The one line that stuck the most was: "I can't stop ghosting those same streets". This simple line summed up the activity I was performing. I was not walking through the streets of urban Wellington in the present, I was wandering through itineraries prompted by my memories. Other

fragments: "The more I look the less I find of you"; "Why don't people have tails? People would look better with tails"; "Narrativise our histories, we all do it"; "Streets paved with my pasts". The phone I sent these cryptic messages to belonged to the past as well - I sent them to an old phone number I no longer have. I have decided not to try ringing this number; I like the idea that someone is receiving these messages but isn't responding.

As I continued, these messages became a significant method of notetaking rather than solely transcribed memories as I consciously used them material, building towards the current body of work.

Ghosting is a state of mind, a simultaneous presence and non-presence that I occupy when moving about the urbanscape. I am here now but reacting to the contexts of my memories. I see signs for places that no longer exist, recall other usages of spaces, different road layouts, and people I talked to that are no longer here.

*"Who has not experienced that flood of images of people long gone, or people when they were younger, while revisiting an old "haunt," as we say? Who has not had that slightly chilly, and yet very warm, feeling of almost being able to see your friends from when you were eight dashing down the sidewalk as you walk through the neighborhood where you grew up? Who has not had that sense, while creeping into some room where one really should not have been, that someone unseen was watching? Ghosts.... constitute the specificity of historical sites.... [they] haunt the places of our lives. "*

*(Michael Mayerfeld Bell quoted in Beisaw, 2016)*

These ghosts travel with me also. They echo of the past. They may be a person who was familiar, a missing sign for a shop that is no longer there. A street the bus route used to pass through before it was moved. All these things echo also.

My definition of ghosting is close to the term "hauntology", coined by Jacques Derrida. Hauntology (a portmanteau of haunting and ontology) refers to a state of temporal, historical, and ontological disjunction in which presence is replaced by a deferred non-origin, represented by "the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive". (Davis, 2005, p. 373).

When I create my animations, I have a similar approach. I am not visibly present in the work itself, but I am integrally involved in the process. I am the ghost behind the scenes controlling the movements, sometimes with precision, and sometimes haphazardly. Often on the verge of boredom, causing new unexpected, unplanned ideas to come into being within the work. I approach animation as the slow, selective documentation of an event intended to express an idea when the captured (documented) frames are isolated. This very act tricks the eye as the animator/artist is removed from the resulting animation.

In this exegesis, I will consider how ghosting relates to how we remember, and to memory itself. I will explore notions of place and the architecture that has been occupied by my ghosts.



*So, there is this cityscape, tiny yet full, and running around it, rattling around,  
are mellifluous and discordant memories.*

*And times are mixed/remixed in places*

*corners turn angles*

*around bends are angels and hidden demons.*

*Joy seeps with daylight's effects.*

*Ghosts go about their whispery work whilst we bustle by.*

*Some ups come down and we stop too long for coffee,*

*food and fitness, art in crevices.*

*Filth is scrubbed away for another day.*

*Stop/go streets*

*people are wrapped in cars and buses.*

*Creeping through is an evil unsettling wind.*

*(Steelsmith, 2016)*

Take old feelings/  
songs and reuse them.  
Give them new  
meaning

Streets paved with my  
pasts

Back to haunting

I can't stop ghosting  
those same streets

Selected text messages to my old phone (2014 – 2015)

## Two accidents

Everything exists within memory and memory can't be trusted. My work is indefinite, yet it is definitely an exploration about who I am, where I am and what I use to make sense of who I am, where I am and what I am. I began this current investigation by accident, or more precisely by two accidents. Less accidents per se than creative responses to my feelings and surroundings and to provocations by colleagues and other artists.

The first instance occurred while I was busy thinking through ideas for a previous artwork entitled *Black Dog: Failure* (2015). This was *Ghosting* or as I thought of it at the time, merely escaping the office at lunch and taking a walk to explore and to find space to clear my head.

Closely resembling these walks, my practice follows a path in which I am often distracted by the shape of a specific building, the trigger of a location, or a face, or a poem I had thought I'd forgotten. I have long used walking and running as ways to generate new writing and ideas. In the summer of 1993, I drove into Auckland City centre from my home suburb to register at Auckland University, and afterwards I walked back to my car via Albert Park next to the campus. As I walked through the hot day words came to me. This was before I had a phone to text with. So I turned the walking verse into a story of that walk, that I repeated to myself as I walked, then wrote down as soon as I found a scrap of paper in my car. The verse took on a backwards movement as I remembered the lines in the opposite sequence:

***Car park / hot day***

*Some woman's crying at the counter  
But I move on up the steps  
Over ever spiralling stairs  
French perfume*

*"I'll have stilettos  
with that, thanks"*

*Man's lost his home  
In searing concrete  
Heat towers  
Machines waiting for a rest,  
Breathing out their fumes  
Adds atmosphere  
to a sea, city, people,*

*Hot day in park  
Fountains giving water  
Always water*

*Half naked, fully clothed  
Stretched out green grass  
Paved with trees  
Steel, wrought iron*

*Diving, always water*

*(Words come as climbing stairs, Auckland, January 1993)  
(Steelsmith, 1993)*

I did not fully grasp the significance of this walking activity until Mick Douglas, an artist visiting from Melbourne<sup>1</sup>, conducted a Masterclass<sup>2</sup> in March 2015 with the task to set a predetermined course through the city and make some kind of record of the course by observation or activity. I realised that I had already been doing just that with my text messages, so I began to examine the environment that I was passing through more closely, to create other recordings, and to see if I could better situate my ideas within that landscape. What had seemed an accident was in fact a mode of producing work.



I started my MFA course with the plan of investigating animation, but soon found that to be problematic in a gallery context. Our second project asked us to connect our practice to this context by exhibiting in the University's Engine Room Gallery, a white wall space. I had already begun to screen my animations within a cinematic black box situation but was not entirely happy with the audience interaction with a short work: sitting and observing, then leaving. It felt like a wall of exactitude falsely controlling the viewing, a forced situation. By showing a projection in a white wall gallery, I took the animation into a situation where it couldn't be seen in the daylight and it fell into a contextual abyss. I found projection in a gallery space uncomfortable as I felt I had to compete with other works and light sources. This was fine when the weather was overcast or during the evening but in sunlight - as when we had the critique - it transformed into another type of work. I did enjoy the scale of the work, and how people could become immersed, when it was visible!

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mickdouglas.net/project-page/container-walk/>

<sup>2</sup> As part of the Master of Fine Arts programme at Massey University we encounter many occasions when practising artists visit our studios and run master classes in which the visiting artist will introduce us to theories, processes, and concepts that inform their works.



I needed to create a context specifically for the work. And as the second “accident” of my process, I began building models that referenced actual places, which were in turn also referred to within the animations, as sculptural contexts and, in effect, containers for the animations. This led me to build a small cityscape, painted white in order to project my animations onto. This gave me more control and broke out of the normal “this is a video being projected” mode and baggage. I also liked the idea of building models again.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I had experimented with building models for two music videos. The Livids - Doo Doo (2007): <https://vimeo.com/47350494> and Elbow vs Knee (2006) – Two Floors: <https://vimeo.com/230555678>



In investigating the significance of place, I feel compelled to acknowledge a historical view. There are various strands of history that encompass the area of Te Aro. Firstly, there is the pā that gave its name to Te Aro, an area now only remembered by a park.

Te Aro Park is the public memorial to what remains of the Te Aro Pā, which was a home of the Ngāti Mutunga hapu from the Te Āti Awa iwi once they arrived in Te Whanganui a Tara in the 1820s and 1830s (New, 2017). It has been designed as a waka by artist Shona Rapira Davies (Bowen, n.d.): “Te Aro Park in central Wellington (between Manners and Dixon streets) marks part of the site of the major pā, Te Aro. The park... is in the shape of a canoe, with the prow on the extreme right...”

Te Aro Park is also colloquially known as Pigeon Park due to the ever-present abundance of those beasts. Calling it Pigeon Park is typical Pākehā disregard for the history and mana whenua of the place.

Intriguingly, especially in relation to my purposes, Te Aro also has a history that never was. In 1948, the Architectural Centre proposed a rebuilding of Te Aro Flat with all the vision towards modernism as Oscar Niemeyer had when designing Brasilia. This is not just architecture but urban design at its grandest. These were grand plans to wipe the slate clean and start again, to rebuild Te Aro Flat anew. Gone would be the shanties, the haphazard growth, the rotting buildings, the misplaced monumentalism of the staid business and commercial districts. Instead they were planning a city built for living, spaces that work for people. These dreams were left unfulfilled and forfeited as this grand plan was never implemented. (Gatley, 2014).

## Ghosting Animations

To collect more research material to incorporate within the project, I went to Te Aro Park, and recorded video clips, pans, on my phone. This is a location within central Wellington that has personal significance for me as it sits halfway between my former animation studio in Imperial Buildings on Dixon St (occupied from 2001 to 2004), and a previous flat on Manners St (2006 to 2007). These sites represent two tremendously different periods of my life, the first when a married man trying to run a business, and secondly, as a divorced man working as an artist. Out of this one video came a number of experiments based upon a rolescope<sup>4</sup> of the footage.



Pigmask (2015)

Pigmask<sup>5</sup> was the first new animation that came out of the roscoping. The frames were printed out with a self-portrait, hand-drawn figure wearing a pigmask standing in the foreground of the shot. The pigmask figure stands with his back to my old flat in Manners St., and looking towards my

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<sup>4</sup> Rotoscoping is an animation process where footage is traced over frame by frame to give a hand-crafted feel and flatten the space. It can be painterly or quite graphic. *Waking Life* (Linklater, 2001) used this process. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk2DeTet98o>

<sup>5</sup> Pigmask can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/128938135>



old studio in The Imperial Buildings. This work has no apparent clue to the meaning of the location of the Pigmask figure<sup>6</sup>.



Ghosting001 (2015)

Ghosting001<sup>7</sup> was the subsequent iteration of this animation. It included more frames and more elements added, with 5 different versions of the pan looped together. These included the Pigmask self-portrait, a butterfly flying through the shot, randomly coloured elements, and additional words and symbols<sup>8</sup>. The words came from my ghosting texts. This work was still quite opaque in its meaning, as any direct meaning of the symbols or corresponding significance of the places remained unexplained. I felt that there needed to be more involved in the interaction between the traces of memory and the structures, and other ways to present animations than as a video screened on a wall. So, I began constructing physical environments for my animations to exist within, and I started to make sculptural buildings.

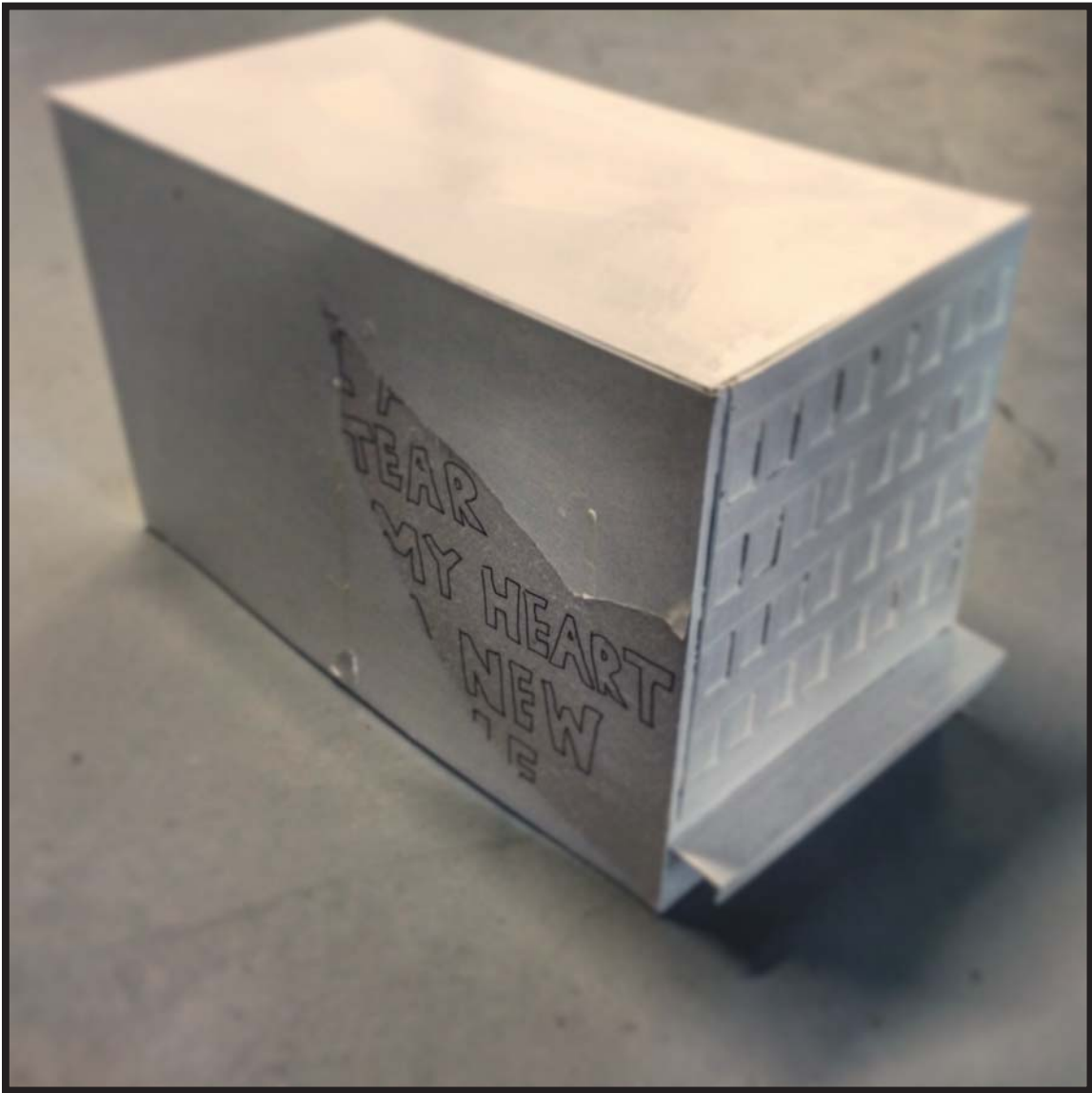
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<sup>6</sup> The Pigmask is a signifier I have used in my works over the last 15 years. It is the next stage down from Man as Dog, I.E. Man as Pig. This character is so wrapped up in his own view of the world he lives within pig-headedness. Some Pigmask examples can be seen here:

<http://blackdogfailure.weebly.com/gallery-of-sorts.html>

<sup>7</sup> Ghosting001 can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/128571335>

<sup>8</sup> Symbols I have used throughout my practice include the Pigmask, Man as Dog – referring to Man’s (gendered) animalistic tendencies, the butterfly – for magic and freedom, the happy pink balloon – a foreboding malevolence and the bullhorns Viking hat to connote the minotaur/male sexuality.



Building from *Ghosttown* reworked with “hidden” poem (2015 – 2016)

## Ghosttown



*Ghosttown*<sup>9</sup> was a work I developed to incorporate structures based on some of the buildings in the Ghosting animation cycle/Te Aro Park video with animations.

*Ghosttown* was deployed in a TV studio at the art school, in a light-controlled area. I was really pleased with the detail I included in these buildings (many of which I have re-used in subsequent works). I contrasted the solidity of the models with a dreamlike instability by putting the models on balsa-wood stilts.

In its first iteration *Ghosttown* with its balsa wood stilt legs had pink helium balloons tied to the buildings. The pink balloons were a too obscure addition which was lost on the viewer and were

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<sup>9</sup> Reflection written July 2015: I was explaining my new work to another artist yesterday and used the term that I've named the piece "ghosttown" and had a response I hadn't thought about. I have become totally focused on the language of "ghosting" I've created and applied to my activities that I have forgotten previous meaning of terms such as ghost towns. There is a tension there I like by making my own meanings that are in almost opposition to the original meanings. A ghost town is an abandoned place whilst my "ghosttown" is still alive and is constantly being repopulated by my memories and re-imaginings.

removed in later iterations. I also projected the Ghosting001 animation on one of the buildings which had a busy surface of many windows, this didn't make the animation easy to see.



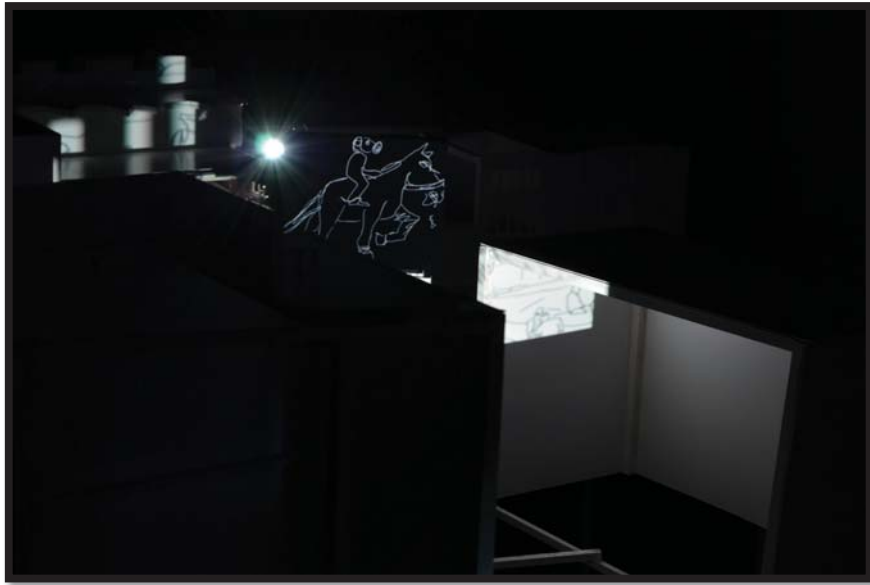
As the work developed the balloons were absent and the arrangement fitted the layout of the Te Aro Park area. Two animations, one of a clock face with the Roman numeral 'IV' changing between its proper form (iv) and the more common form on clock faces (iiii)<sup>10</sup>. The other animation deployed speech bubbles showing a series of texts from my ghosting texts, including "I can't stop ghosting those same streets".



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<sup>10</sup> This refers to the nature of memory via a thought experiment regularly conducted by psychologist Chris French: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/psychology/staff/french/>

In its final version, the buildings were grouped more closely together, and all were linked by balsa-wood cross members to lend more rigidity to the structures. In the centre of the buildings I erected a miniature monument in the “town square”. On either side of the monument, I projected different animations: on one side, my ghosting text messages, and on the other, a Pigmask wearing rider on a horse.



*Ghosttown second version (2015)*

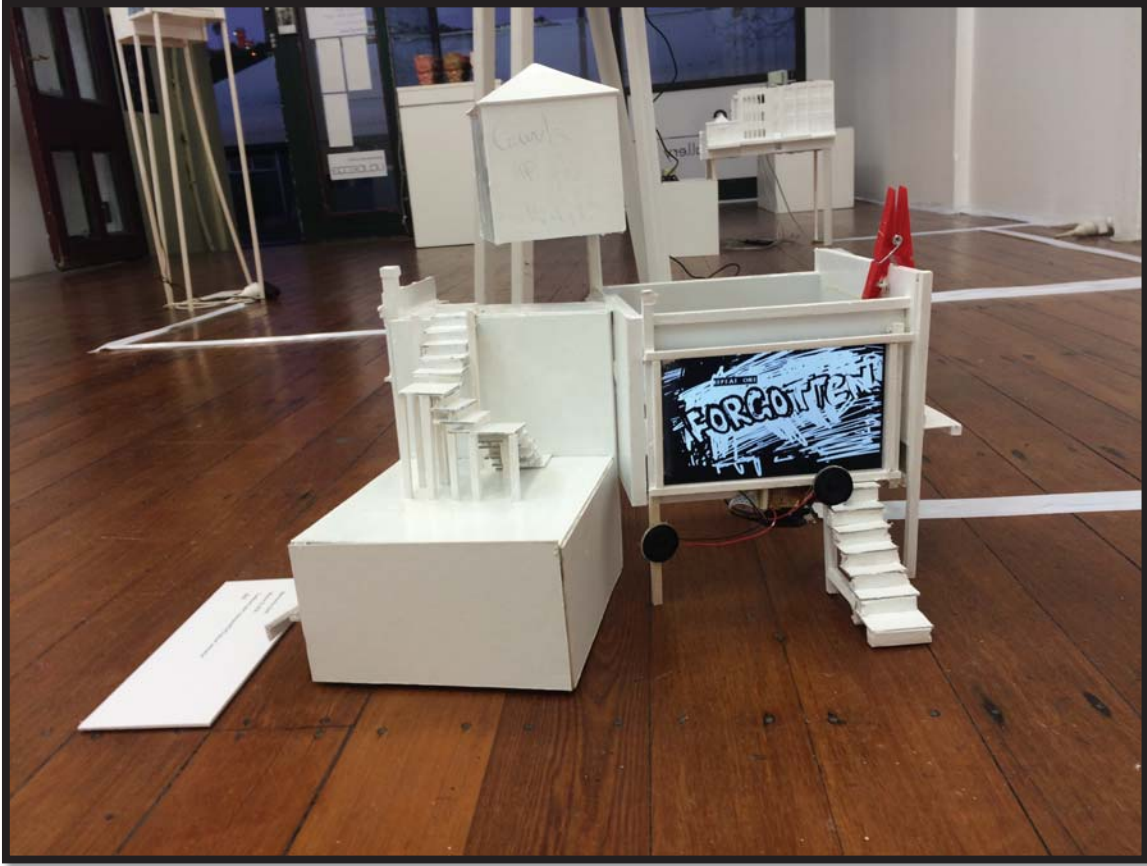
## Other Ghosts



*Other Ghosts* (2016)<sup>11</sup> was my first exhibition of the buildings, at Space Studio Gallery in Whanganui. I took animations into the buildings themselves and mixed in some of the written text from my wanderings. Some of the buildings were repurposed and others were built to contain the animations. The animations were displayed on 7" screens from torn down portable DVD players.

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<sup>11</sup> Other Ghosts – Space Gallery: <https://spacestudiogallery.co.nz/past-events/craig-williams-mark-antony-smith-wgtn/>



The aim was to look at memory in boxes. The boxes were made as devotional pieces, fashioned from obsessions. As memories were replayed they took on importance by their selection and repetition. I wanted to question the mechanism that we use to select memories we want to recall, what do we want to make part of our ongoing narrative? Do these shift through time? Do we "game" these memories?

I realise from experience it is easy to believe that certain memories have a resonance that makes them seem magical or precognitive. You can construct your imagined future based on memories. You can fall into a "memory game" full of "ah ha!" moments and co-incidences made real. And the next thing you know you have been diverted from where you thought you were going. What are the elements that can divert us? A longing, a need, a habit, an anxiety?



By building around electronic devices that I had ripped apart I was exploring also the internal mechanisms to replaying electronic memories. Once stripped bare the devices that serve up digital media invoke a feeling of the analogue - the analogous reproduction. This is a golden feeling, and a great feeling for someone who grew up with the idea of getting dirty to fix things. Now these digital machines were being rehoused in cardboard and balsa wood with dollops of PVA. I re-found my infantile home model railway side. Pegs and all. Sticky fingers and everything.

The animations playing inside weren't exactly coherent<sup>12</sup>, as I was pursuing a dream-like quality. The buildings themselves didn't have to represent real buildings, just indicate them. The space inside the buildings mirrored the outside, and vice-versa. Wallpaper can be outside, signage inside. Such is the muddle of my memories.

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<sup>12</sup> Example of one of the animations, based around a poem from the *Other Ghosts* book:

<https://vimeo.com/167352081>



*The walls have memories,  
ghosts have danced and trails of vapour chewed edges frame this place.*

*Pretty, my pretty.*

*Pretty brutal.*

*You are still here with me my unfound twin.*

*I give you other people's faces, other voices form at your lips,  
yet you grab my hand again and we fly.*

*NeverNeverland has no palaces as grand as the ones in my heart.*

# The architecture of ghosts

## A case study of Imperial Buildings



My wandering often brought me to the site of my old studio. Imperial Buildings was built circa 1930. It is totally utilitarian in design, purpose built to house clothing manufacturing and had life as a home for a jeweller too. Adverts for Carr and Haley Ltd Jewellers (established 1902) tell that they closed down in 1932 (Evening Post, 24 Nov 1932). Samuel Pizer and Company Wholesale Manufacturing Furriers hung onto the prestige of the fact they were located opposite the now long gone Royal Oak Hotel (Evening Post 9 May 1944). Otherwise there is no mention of Imperial Buildings in a newspaper search via the National Archive. It appears to have done its job of housing various enterprises throughout its life unremarkably. It is now a building no-one cares for, evidenced by the fact it is not a heritage building and has now become the home of art studios, a tattooist and alternative health practitioners. Imperial Buildings is on the Earthquake Prone Buildings list with a notice that requires strengthening work done on it before 15 June 2027 (Wellington City Council, 2016). This fact makes the possibility that it will be demolished in the next 10 years quite high. It is a squat, four-story concrete building. It exemplifies no architectural prowess, no modernist ideals. A little art deco flair on its facade is its only tilt at any style. It has a strong, solid core of a narrow winding staircase surrounding an antique iron gated lift.

What former lives have been in this building? If I was Shimon Attie, what would I project on its facade? In his work *The Writing on the Wall*, (1992 - 1993) Attie projected images of how buildings in Berlin used to look when they had been inhabited by Jewish people before they were ejected by the Nazi regime. A guerrilla action with the light of photos past – confronting present owners with uncomfortable past.



Here I see ghosts. Phenomenological ghosts. Memories playing out in front of my eyes, given life and flesh, heat and chill, hard yet ephemeral. As I climb the hard, slate stairs that were so tight, so treacherous when wet I remember they once caused me to fall and scrape my palms. I pass the lift whose iron gate doors I'm sure inspired many animations I made with creatures that had sharp teeth. I come to the first-floor landing foyer where Becs Arahanga pretended to play with stars for a day for a music video I made (Steelsmith, 2004). To the door of the massage therapy practice that now takes the place of my animation studio that I shared with my then wife who ran a printmaking studio. This place is now barred to me, inaccessible. Yet my memory carries me inside. I see the three large printing presses, the end windows letting in natural light, the makeshift sound booth built into the corner. I smell honey and resin and ink. I hear RadioActive playing on the dinky stereo. I want to stop and stay and get something done. I'm drunk, I'm crying, I've been awake too long and I'm singing and dancing. There is so much to be filled between a floor and ceiling.



Frame from "Take it from me" (2004).

These internal spaces could be filled in and made solid like Rachel Whiteread's *Ghost*, (1990). The space cast to carry "the residue of years and years of use" (Gibbons, 2007). The air is solidified, the space is totally filled up. This is the space we exist in. The air is thick and we move slowly as it solidifies us into place.

These are just my ghosts. What other ghosts reside in this place? Romanticism kicks in. Did someone toil their whole life away here making fine clothes they could barely afford? Were there affairs between people, perhaps fights? Did someone bleed on this floor? What is the constant hum of all the piled-on voices overlaid with machines that drill and sew and press. Did anyone else have a flood that closed the businesses downstairs like we did in February 2004? Such is the nature of these ghosts, they keep circling around like creation myths for stories that never happened. The narrative of all the days I spent in this place blur into one solid yet shifting mass. Was there a routine I followed going to this place trying to be there by 9am in the morning in time to then leave and go get coffee in the café Eva Dixon's Place (another relic of a once-was Wellington).

I heard a mistaken remembrance of Imperial Buildings from an ex-police detective where there had been a gay nightclub called "The Maze" in the building and someone had died there from an overdose of Rush. The police had been called in as there was a question of foul play. I wanted to talk to the ex-police detective but he was reluctant to be interviewed by me as his memory was "sketchy". Here is a difference between myself and the ex-detective, I was happy with dealing with

defective memory as a narrative but he wasn't. Maybe having imprecise memories was an uncomfortable notion for someone who dealt with "facts" in their professional life. I did a search through newspapers and found two things: that there wasn't any mention of a nightclub called "The Maze" and that there is a giant hole in digitalized newspapers in New Zealand from about 1946 to 1991.

A crowd sourcing search about "The Maze" on Facebook gave me the info I required. The nightclub wasn't called "the Maze", instead it was "The Sanctuary" and it wasn't in Imperial Buildings but in the building next door. Thus, my interest in the subject waned. This story is now a ghost and the real or not real person who died there is now a ghost twice removed.

In spatial terms, Imperial Buildings is a contingent space. It was built for a specific purpose early in the 20th century and is soon to be demolished. It is a building few will miss. It is hard to think of a building as being ephemeral but now this one is. Once the interactions of the people who have known it, spent time inside it, have filled it with memories it is only another passing vessel. Soon it will be gone. The memories attached to its physical form will be set free. This building is my Memory Palace (Kunzru, 2013), my mnemonic device (Yates, 1992), as I walk around I see the past stacked in corners, smeared on the walls, tripping me up, muddling joy with pain and the mundane with absurd. These memories no longer have a real function of order or reason. I am here but transitory. What other ghosts are here with me? What is the Hauntology of this place? Which futures that could have had occurred but will now never happen? (Fisher, 2014). All now becomes speculative and collapses in on itself.

THE GALLERIES PRECINCT

07

## IMPERIAL GHOSTS

Mark Antony Smith  
NEW ZEALAND

What do we remember of the places we have been? Are they fragments of missed hopes, over erring joy, crushing sadness, nostalgia for a fire that never existed? Here we find ghosts. The work "Imperial ghosts" looks back at the past of the Imperial building (41 Dixon Street) where it is housed, mixed in with lost futures of the artist, Mark Antony Smith, who once worked in this space. Smith has constructed a series of models of buildings both real and imagined. Inside the buildings are small video screens playing animations based on ghost remembrances and false nostalgia (Hauntology). The buildings are made out of balsa wood and cardboard with exposed electronics treasuring through them. The animations and various LEDs light up the buildings.



**LUX**  
#wgtnlux



The interest in *Imperial Buildings* led me to propose and then create *Imperial Ghosts*<sup>13</sup> as an artwork for the 2017 Lux Light festival in Wellington (12 – 21 May 2017). The location for this work was Imperial Buildings in the *Potocki Patterson Gallery* in the space right next to where my old studio was. In the context of a large gallery based show, I began to explore various set-ups and configurations, making use of light and projection. I included over 80 small buildings along with a video piece grouped into 6 assemblages/installations. The two main pieces comprised a large, projected video, simulating the act of climbing stairs within a tower constructed from balsa wood and cardboard and an anti-utopian skyline consisting of about 40 small buildings set along on the gallery floor, including animations projection mapped onto them. These animations were fragments derived from ones I had produced during my 2002 – 2004 tenure in *Imperial Buildings*. In a departure from my previous constructions, I used many small recycled boxes to enable making the buildings as quickly and efficiently as possible. I also used larger boxes as plinths in order to create the appearance of a hill-scape.

This exhibition gave me an opportunity to consider audience interaction and to spend time with the works, reflecting upon the directions in which my overall project was heading. These reflections have assisted in relation to the final work presented with this exegesis.

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<sup>13</sup> *Imperial Ghosts* on the Lux festival website: <https://www.lux.org.nz/imperialghosts>

The buildings were defined with shadows, but not shadows as they were made of flickering colours, disassociated as memories. The sound was stripped away and instead in its place the fans of projectors fighting the heat of the light, cooling, averting a fire-disaster.



Instead of music or recordings of the buildings, such as the sound of footfalls, the building as it is now, provided its own auditory backdrop. There were Asian voices coming from a kitchenette, with clinks of crockery. There was the heaviness of the city around, the low hum of buses and outside people. The sound of now rumbled into the space. The living, moved around unaware of my ghosts.

Everywhere was roughly hewn. For how much time is put into the creation of dreams, memories. How polished are they? Rubbing at them to give them shine only makes them dissipate, for the more they are inspected the less spectral and fleeting they remain. Looked over, they become too concrete and fixed. Re-recorded and falsified. They enter the realm of what A. S. Byatt calls "The Memory", given meaning that they could not have contained at the time they were created (Byatt, 2009).



## Experiments toward a final work

After *Imperial Ghosts* I made a series of experimental pieces looking at pulling apart elements of that work and pushing them in different directions. This activity was to explore what elements could be retained for my final works. The first piece I called *Small awkward room* as it was based in a small test space in the bowels of the museum building, where we have our studios.



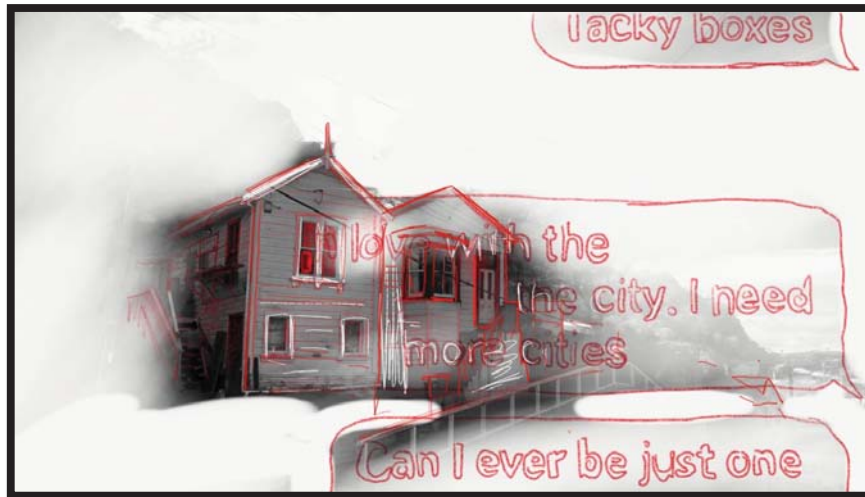
*Small awkward room* (2017)

For this work I made a small replica of the test space room. The animation that played inside replica was shot in the very room the model represented. The model with animation inside was then displayed in the room they both were replicating. Selected buildings from *Imperial Ghosts* were moved, destroyed, and written on as part of the stop-motion animation process<sup>14</sup>. With this particular work, I came back to animation, and began developing the concept of the animator as a

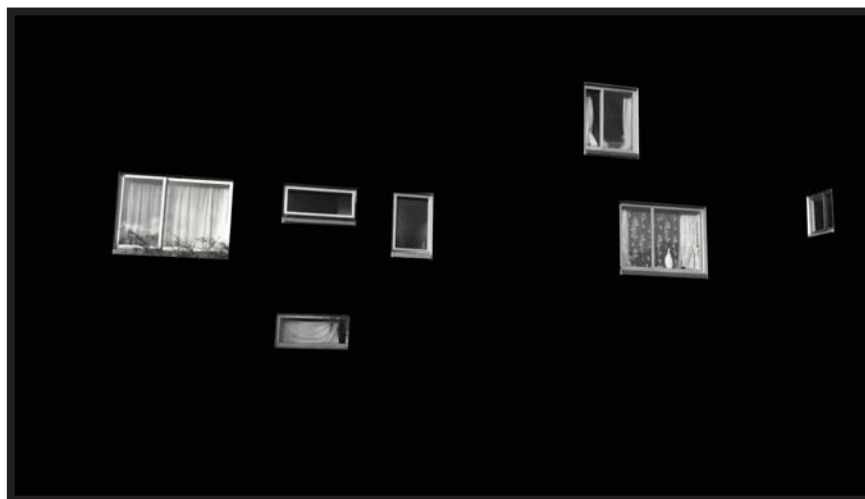
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<sup>14</sup> Small room stop-motion animation: <https://vimeo.com/230585901>

ghost. The work forced people to adopt a specific viewing position. Religious associations emerged from the viewers' kneeling to see the interior of the work.



Walking through Aro Valley in late July, along Aro St gave rise to the Aro Wanderings. I videoed the buildings as I passed them in a similar fashion to how I created the ghosting animations. This was partly a visual notetaking, partly a record, or proof to my travels from home to work. I approached the video in a similar way, drawing over the frames one by one and adding in other elements, including phrases from my ghost texts.

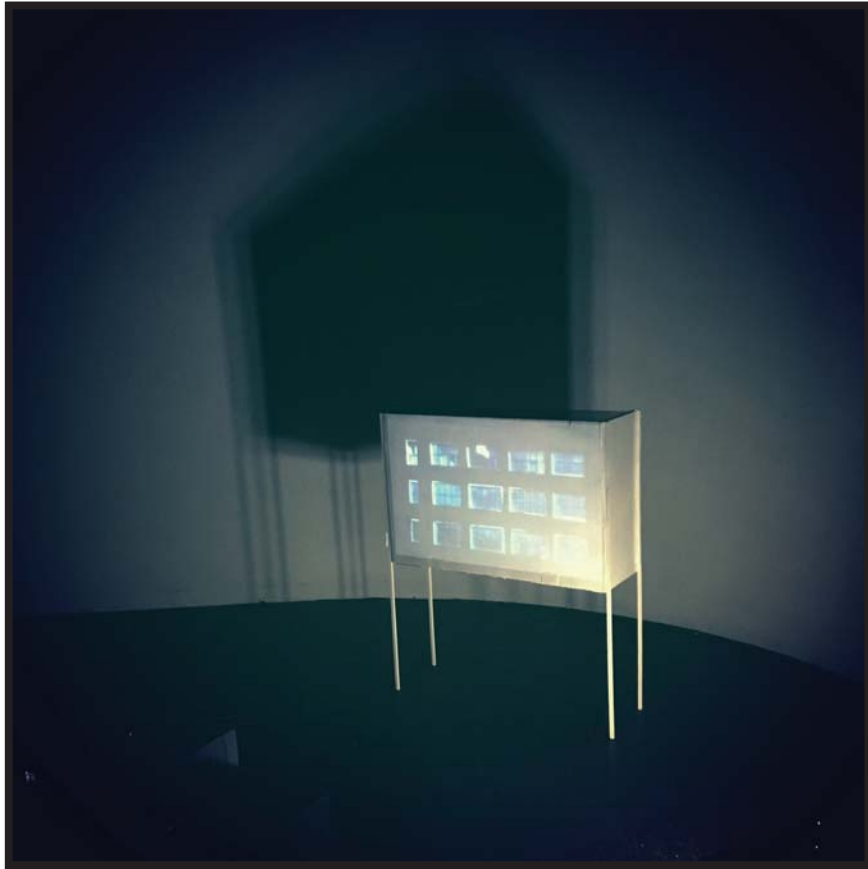




Frames from *Aro Valley walking* (2017)

## Windows

My final work for the project combines window animations projected onto a building to cast the light of memories.



Windows are elements that have appeared during this project, firstly in the ghosting animations then in the cardboard buildings. Seeing ghosts stand at windows awaiting something in *A Ghost Story* (2017) informed my investigation. A key aspect that emerged from this exploration is the seeming magic of the windows depicted in the animation when isolated. From my perspective, this brought me back to the figure wearing a Pigmask who stands in the window of my old flat on Manners Street in *Ghosting 001*. I imply a number of ghosts by their exclusion or non-presence.

There is a difference in perspective between being outside looking in and being inside and having lights shining through the windows. I select the windows and delete their surroundings. The fragments of the items are the ghosts of the past that they were taken from.



*Findley windows (2017)*

## Memory ghosts

It's possible that many of my earliest memories are only what I've been told or things viewed on television. I recall memories of my family holidays to Rotorua but wonder if they have instead been "corrupted" by a short film I watched on the children's television show *Spot On* as part of their video competitions in the early 80s, or even the foggy sounds of *Charlotte Sometimes* by The Cure<sup>15</sup>. These are re-mixed in with ghosts of a trip to Whanganui and not being old enough to enter the tunnel to the Durrie Hill elevator, while my siblings were. These are, in effect, distortion lines, ghosts of a TV past. Such are the jumps in memory that come together and have no direct meaning except in my experience, becoming narratively linked and spiralling forever.

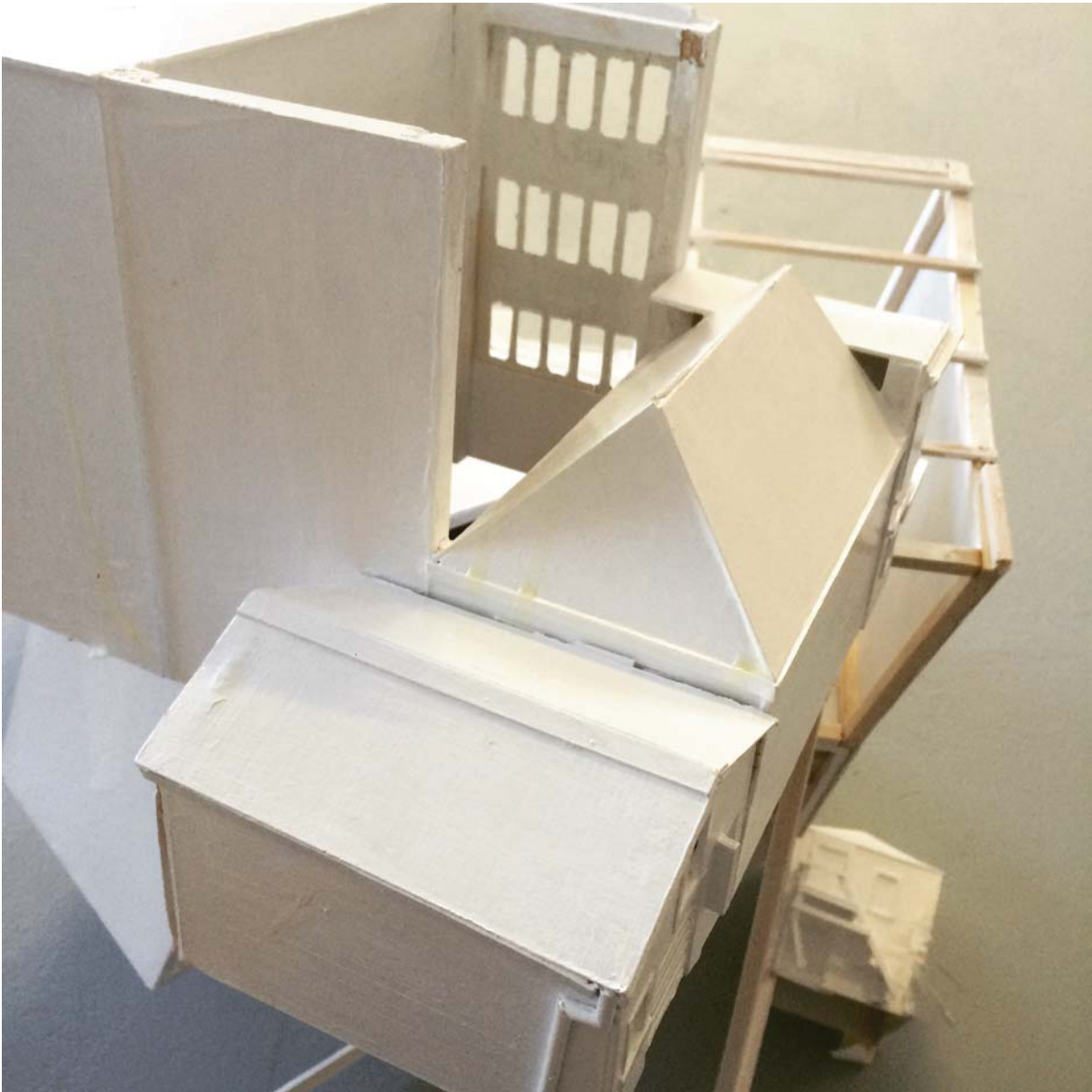
The study of memory is already a highly-occupied space as it is a place we all visit, dive into, pass through, get enveloped in, and taken over by every day. Many of the memory studies that I have encountered in my research process concern mass or public remembrances or the redefining, subverting, or forgetting of publicly installed "monuments". But what I'm more interested in is private remembrance narratives built around the public space. It may be a corner where I had a first kiss that is now re-contextualised as public space as a memorial to a mass remembrance.

The act of ghosting is selfish, it's not a community endeavour, running counter to that, potentially becoming disruptive. This act involves my memory/memories and the trails they leave through this space. Sometimes these memories include you and become entwined in your memories. But these are not totally together, as we both come to this point from our own paths and have our different separate modes of remembrance wrapped in this moment. In December 2016, I went to see Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds play live. In the venue were about six thousand other people, the majority were there because their music had touched us all in some way over the past 40 years. But these experiences coloured how we felt coming into this collective moment that is now a memory. Not many in the crowd were at my friend's house in New Plymouth in 1994 trying to sleep, whilst he blasted "Let Love In", and I have no idea how many people also got sick of hearing "Wild Rose" as their (now ex-) wives overplayed it. I don't know the constructs that frame this shared experience that becomes totally individualist even if we want to share it on Facebook to make it seem like a collective moment. I still have the song "No more shall we part"<sup>16</sup> stuck in my head even though it wasn't played in the two-hour set. Eventually, I may even remember it being played that night. Arguably, there is no collective experience, as we approach our shared spaces in the same disruptive way with our individual memories.

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<sup>15</sup> *Charlotte Sometimes* music video also has crappy colour keying and architecture inferring ghosts, thus greatly appealing to my gothic sensibilities.

<sup>16</sup> This song means more to me than any other Nick Cave song, for me it is a ghost song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InhyZUOnfyA>



*Debuild/rebuild test (2016)*

Ghosting/ghostwalking is a solitary endeavour. I have tried walking with others as part of a writing workshop run by Tim Brennan where we walked around in silence through the Block 10 Museum Building. But ghost walking with others made me want to both retreat more from the people around me and also play at being a fool. I found myself repeatedly entering and leaving a performative mode. I was half there in synch with the others, half not. I saw spectres of what had been the museum both in my experience (visiting there in 1995, doing a radio show at the now defunct student radio station in 2007 etc.) and in what I thought of as “museum-ness”. This was a combination of images I’d seen of the place – like old photos of the “tea-gardens” in the 1950s-60s and experience of the Auckland War Memorial Museum from my childhood. “Massey-ness” and the act of both studying and working in these surroundings also influenced my reading of the space. I know that in the life of the building and place (formerly the site of a prison and barracks after the arrival of Pākehā) this Massey-ness will be fleeting as the place again gets taken over by a museum.

There are memories in life that we think of as “The Memory” (Byatt, 2009). It is a memory that seems to get bigger, more potent and more meaningful the further away we move from it. It becomes more meaningful as we learn more about the world, give it more context and find new words to express the memory. The psychoanalytical term *Nachträglichkeit* (in its original German) tells us that with retroactivity and hindsight an original experience is reconstituted, re-transcribed or rearranged in relation to ongoing circumstances. Therefore, is that original memory, “The Memory”, an illusion as we do not remember it as it was?

Memory is fallible, slight changes may not be noticed as they don't fit our narrative of what is "correct". The Mandela effect is of interest as it explores<sup>17</sup> the (erroneous) concept of alternate memories and alternate worlds based on the idea that some people believe Nelson Mandela died in prison and never became President of South Africa because somehow those people remember him dying in prison.

Memories can be illusory, they can only be imagined as I can never be sure how accurate the memory is, whether it has been distorted by emotion, confusion of time, other people's narratives, urban myths or even something I've seen on TV. This fits with ideas from the neurologist and science communicator Steven Novella: “When someone looks at me and earnestly says, “I know what I saw”, I am fond of replying, “No you don’t”. You have a distorted and constructed memory of a distorted and constructed perception, both of which are subservient to whatever narrative your brain is operating under” (Novella, 2014).

I interpret my memories in narrative forms and create space for them to exist by evoking these constructed spaces from the Wellington urban-scape. Cyclic, repetitive narratives that take the form of short repeating animations now exist within these re-constructions. I am interested in the heroic quest that never ends, the movement to potential success but not having success as it will

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<sup>17</sup> <http://mandelaeffect.com/about/>



destroy meaning. Is a hero without a quest really a hero, or even a potential hero? Sisyphus keeps pushing that stone up the hill (Camus, 1942). My narrative memory form hopes to sit between diegesis, a verbal storytelling act built around language, and a mimetic narration, a shown story where memories are given images and symbols (Herman, 2010). The diegetic element being my voice reading out my texts in situ.

To be a daydreamer is a curse and a gift. Daydreaming means I tend to drift off and not focus at tasks at hand, and I feel most at home in a dreamlike state. Daydreaming seems to run counter to “adulthood” and corresponding “seriousness”. But then it's beneficial to have an imagination ready at hand, it makes problem-solving on the fly easier, which is great for both my work and my art. To be focused is to be present, yet I am not. I am a floating point. My wishes and desires take me away and I have to deal with the cold reality that we aren't just row-row rowing a boat gently down the stream. So here I am unfocused, drifting between past and future regrets and desires. But then I have travelled well and have accumulated many shiny things to put into my memory boxes.

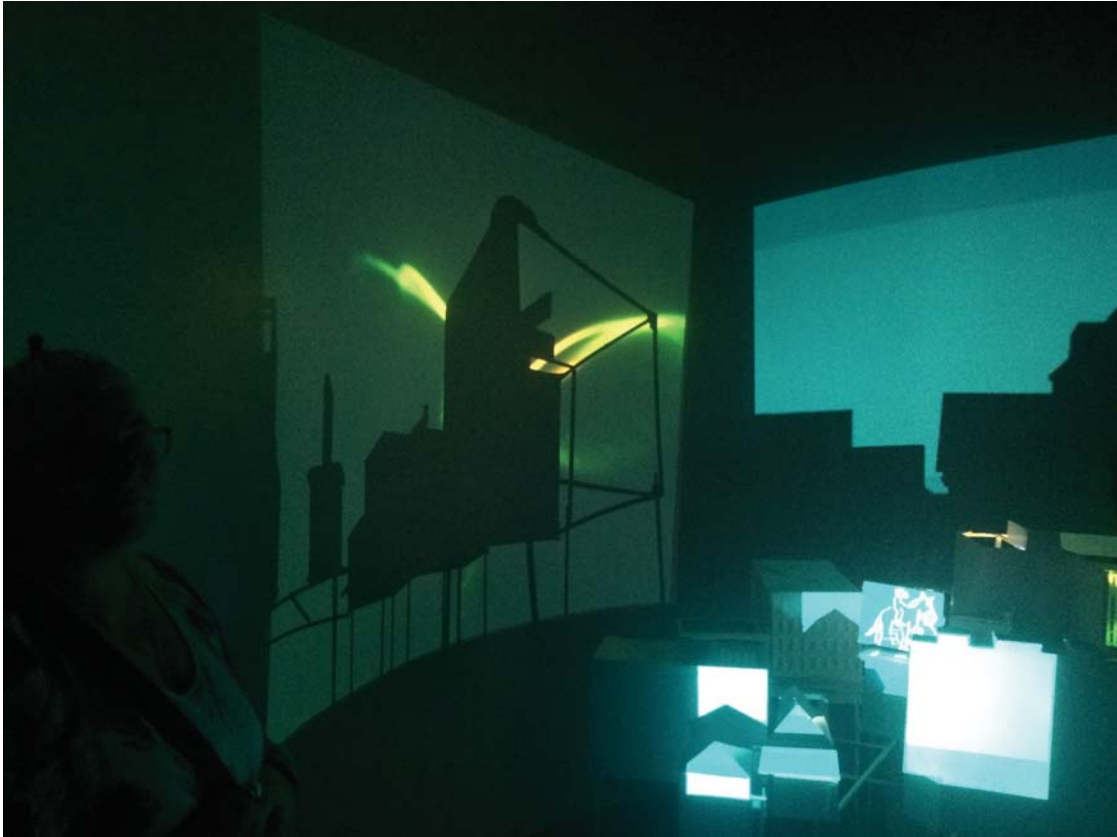
*I always expect to find  
it just waiting  
don't expect it to be polished  
don't mind it  
being overused and  
discarded  
by previous lost souls  
It happens between beats  
of the heart  
these moments constant*

*It is more likely we will  
know the first time we meet  
But never know the  
last goodbye  
and it may not be a goodbye  
It may be a  
fuck off  
Or I wish you well  
or I will be right back  
And next minute  
all that remains  
are ghosts*

*Ghosts are never willing to  
remain constant  
They may repeat  
forever  
Or come and go  
they may be feckless  
and unwilling to play  
They can creep in between  
those infinite possibilities  
that get triggered from  
now to then*

*Would I choose to forget you?  
would your ghost let me?*

*(Steelsmith, 2016)*



*Ghosttown second version (2015)*



*Suite Gallery (2017)*

What parts do we remember or forget owing to traumatic experiences? Mike Kelley raises this question in his work *Educational Complex* (1995), an architectural-scale model reconstruction of the places where he learned, including his childhood home and educational institutions. Kelley deliberately tried to leave out parts of the architecture he didn't remember. And what can be said about why some things are not remembered? Is it because they were too dull to remember or do I not remember some things through trauma or repression? Or shall I, as Kelley did, fetishise the forgotten and dull areas. These could be filled in with poetry, cartoons, or daydreams. "It is much better to fill in these empty spaces with fiction... [fill] in the blanks with pastiches of things that had affected me... cartoons, films and the kinds of stories one finds in the literature of repressed memory syndrome..." (Kelley, quoted in Miller, 2015, p.23)

Memories can be created by an unusual occurrence or omitted by trauma or our attention may avoid anything unusual as it doesn't coincide with our perceptions of what is "normal" within our scope of attention. This is shown in the selective attention test<sup>18</sup> in which the viewer is asked to count how many times people pass a basketball in a video and while they are concentrating on this they don't see the unusual occurrence of someone wearing a monkey suit walking through the centre of the scene.

I now use digital storage as a way of remembering - the text message sent as a memory cue, mostly in the hope of a poetic undertaking sometime later, after it's become a memory. Half thought out ideas then have latency that they may not have otherwise. Every idea becomes just as important if it can be filed away for a future self's attention. This is something the writer Philip K Dick has warned us about, when we use machines to remember the nature of subjective reality and thought starts to bend. In *The Electric Ant* (1969) the main character comes back from the hospital after a car accident in shock after finding out he wasn't a human after all. He was a robot and his memories, all his thoughts, his very being is travelling through his head on a piece of magnetic tape, from one spool to another. If we rely too much on digital (or analogue) means to remember we risk finding out our subjective reality is all a lie and we were pre-programmed with "reality" via a tape-movie that plays in our head.

Michael Landy has shown us how we can destroy the objects of our memories in the artwork *Breakdown* (2001). Over a two-week period Landy shredded all of his worldly possessions, save for the clothes he was wearing. This included precious objects such as photos of his dead father and practical items such as his Saab motor car. He made an inventory of all that was shredded so that in the end all that was left was the documentation of the objects that had memories attached (Gibbons, 2007, p. 142). In the end this banal list is meaningless.

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<sup>18</sup> A video of the selective memory test: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo>

*“...the longer I think about it the more it seems to me that we who are still alive are unreal in the eyes of the dead, that only occasionally, in certain lights and atmospheric conditions, do we appear in their field of vision.”*

— W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

## Ghosting is not haunting, or is it?

The haunt is that place we never go to anymore, it is full of longing and pangs. I remember these haunts from my early adolescence: The forts, the golf course, water wars, hiding in half-built houses (I’m staying at yours, you’re staying at mine). And later in adulthood: a bar that is now gone (a ghost business).

Though ghosting is not haunting, and has a lot in common with hauntology (discussed below) there are elements from ghost stories, that inform my current practice. Pop culture and film give a perfect frame to investigate either implicit or explicit notions of haunting.

When I walk in my ghosting mindset I myself take on the position of the ghost. I am the living haunter, not at all present in the now. At the end of *The Others* (Amenábar, 2001) the main characters, a mother and her two children stand at the second story window of their house looking out as the people who invaded their house leave. They chant “this house is ours, this house is ours”. This is a ghost story in reverse, we join the story along with the ghosts as they come to realise that they are the dead and are the ones who will continue to haunt the house and have to sometimes put up with an invasion of the living.

In *The Others* and *A Ghost Story* (Lowery, 2017) the trope of the window connotes a place of waiting and loss. A location where ghosts stand and wait.

The slow mundanity of *A Ghost Story* opens the viewer to the fact that it is the ghosts who are haunted by their own loss.

“In fact, Lowery’s management of time and pace throughout the film is superb, and the events seems to run outside the particular and peculiar tempo of *The Ghost* himself in a subtle confirmation of his existence outside the world of the real” (Debruge, 2017).

Lowery got the idea for the film after an argument he had with his wife over not wanting to leave an old house and abandon the echoes of memories that he and previous tenants had left in the house (Redhead, 2017).

And the living can also haunt as horror tourists. The Amityville horror house has become, unwittingly, a site for trauma tourism, an attraction for imagined trauma/memories. So haunting were the tourists that the house had to be renumbered to try hide its location (Bever, 2016).

In ghost hunting television/YouTube shows, a growth industry since the turn of the century<sup>19</sup>, the living deliberately scare themselves in dark, atmospheric, old buildings. From the sceptical viewpoint, they become the ghosts that they hunt as they are the only ones haunting those spaces.

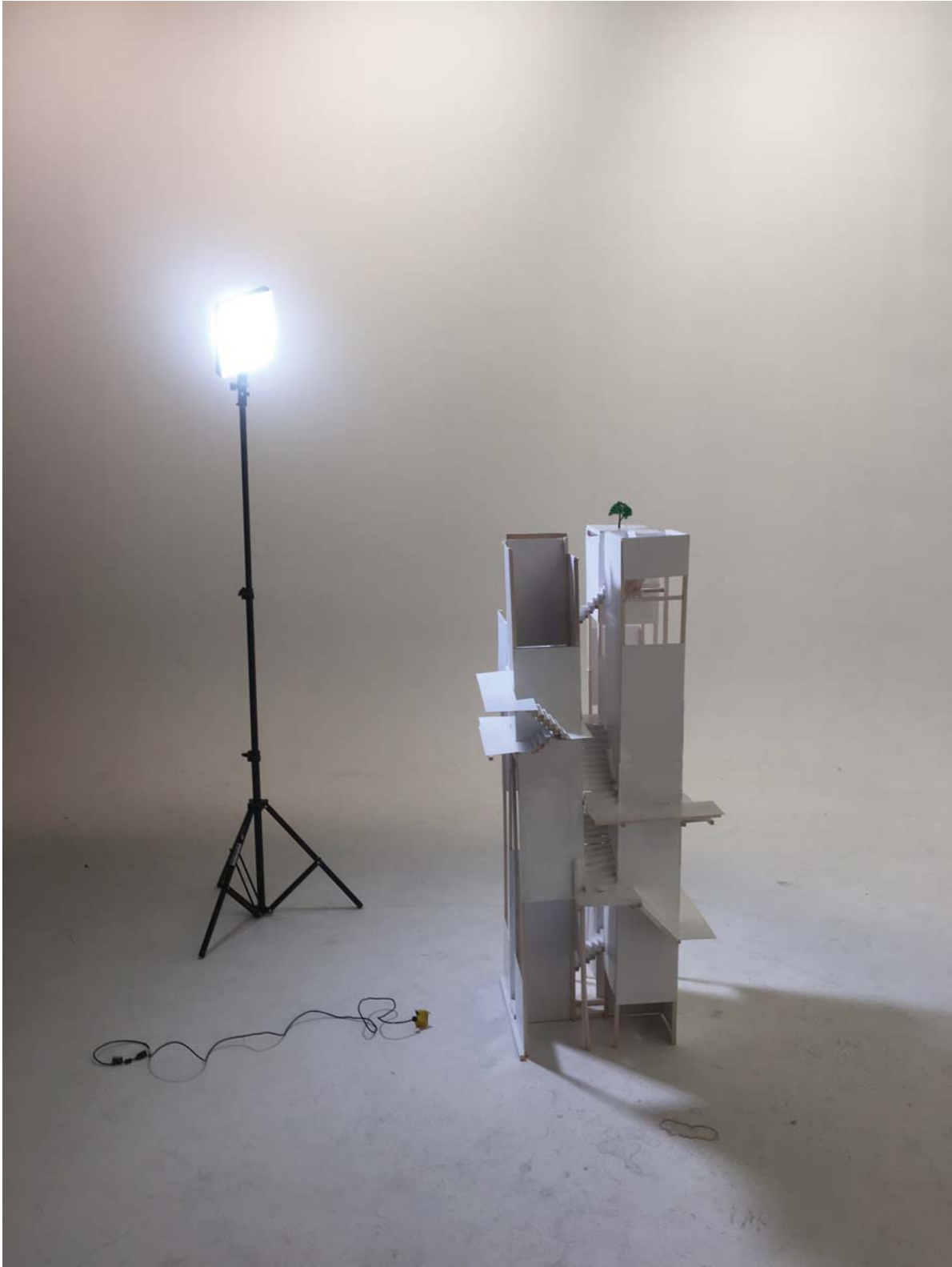
Getting closer to the notion of hauntology we start haunting from the future. In the film *Arrival* (Villeneuve, 2016), the main character, Louise (Amy Adams) sees memories in dreams from what we initially think are of her dead daughter but are in fact echoes from the future. She realises that time is not linear and the dreams she has been having are in fact ways for her to see into the future and send knowledge back to herself. These memories are determinative, fixed and become “real” not speculative and changing.

*“It seems to me then as if all the moments of our life occupy the same space, as if future events already existed and were only waiting for us to find our way to them at last, just as when we have accepted an invitation we duly arrive in a certain house at a given time.”*

— W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

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<sup>19</sup> Ghost hunters on Syfy channel etc [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost\\_Hunters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_Hunters)



*No-where stairs (2017)*

# Ghosting and Hauntology

I have applied Derrida's hauntology concept via Mark Fisher's lens to a building in central Wellington where a nostalgia for an unrealised future "exists" for me. Ghosts of futures lost.

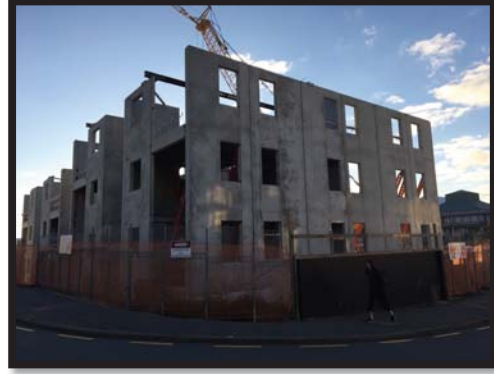
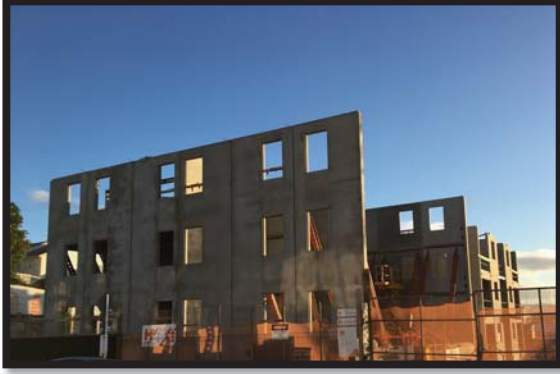
Hauntology (a portmanteau of haunting and ontology) refers to a state of temporal, historical, and ontological disjunction in which presence is replaced by a deferred non-origin, represented by "the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive". In the book *Spectres of Marx* (1993), where it first appeared, Jacques Derrida argued that Marxism would haunt Western society from beyond the grave. In the original French, "hauntology" sounds almost identical to "ontology", a concept it haunts by replacing - in the words of Colin Davis - "the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive".

Mark Fisher expands on Derrida's hauntology to look at ghosts of futures lost in his book *Ghosts of my Life* (2015). To Fisher the crackle of the LP record and the hiss of the analogue tape remind us that we are interacting with something that is a recording of that which is past. There is a melancholy that haunts us as we realize that popular modernism has faded from our lives. The hopefulness of the new only sets about to haunt us now as we are forever looking backwards instead of forwards (Fisher, 2015, p. 21 – 22).

So, I wonder is the future collapsing? In a broader sense, we have passed the future Marty McFly went back to, October 21, 2015 (*Back to the Future 2*, Zemeckis, 1989). That future has not happened. Even the stories we have told ourselves about the future have been remade. *Robocop* and *Total Recall* are two examples. I put myself in the realm of cultural theorist as I feel all the culture, pop and otherwise, that surrounds me mediates my subjective view of this world.

In my family history, there are many ghosts of the future that have not come to pass. My maternal grandfather, whom I never met, travelled to England at age 19 to train as an architect. This was a future that never arrived because when he got there the training fell through as the person who had arranged this opportunity had died. My father wanted to join the RAF as a radio technician when he was 17 but was not able to because his mother refused to sign the consent forms and told them he was too ill after having had pneumonia as a child. Both of these "lost futures" lead ultimately to my own existence in the world and ability to write these words and speculate about futures that never were.





The Arlington council estate in Wellington is being rebuilt. They tore down the old flats on the corner of Hankey and Taranaki streets at the end of 2016. The new flats will be completed by 2018. These new buildings have ghosts of the future and past. As the new domiciles are built I can image the future occupants and the lives they may lead within the spaces that are currently just concrete slab walls. I can also remember the buildings that were there before after walking past them for over 10 years. I also remember the day in 2016, after the tenants had been shuffled along but before demolition, when the police used the empty houses for role playing with guns and explosives. Memories of the past and what is yet to come join together.

## Walking into the future via the past.

How shall I take my city exploration to another step? Describe *Invisible cities*? Look for something lost? Be more of a flaneur? The artist Bas Jan Ader walked across the city then tried to search for the miraculous by sailing across the Atlantic alone, only to get lost. Tim Brennan conducted walking tours in places he hadn't been to before, making the participants in his walks lead them and inform him.

Can I ghost walk in new places? I tried ghost walking in Melbourne, the first time I went there in October 2016, but was not able to get a hook in, a reference point. It was not until my second visit that I was able to ghost there. I was able to walk through the city following the paths I had already been on. I was even able to mentally wander the streets of Melbourne in a memory cocoon before returning. But without lived experience about a place I can't ghost there.



I would like to investigate *Ghost songs*, those songs that encapsulate a time and can transport you back. They get stuck in your head or just unexpectedly drift in. The very mention of them brings back a super nostalgia. I have not investigated these for this project as copyright around music is not something I want to tackle just yet.

Reworking buildings in a similar way as the artist BLU<sup>20</sup> has, is also enticing. Going to a grand scale to cover walls with scrawls of words and images. Figures and forms running over the landscaped buildings. To combine the real and imagined and create an interface between the projected narrative and the architectural urban landscape. Here animation could bring life through the persistence of memory and the use of remembered coded symbols. New life given to old buildings.

This is where I am - attempting to describe the city of my memories to you. But my task is different as my audience may already know this place, or similar cities, and have their own memories and ghosts running around. Or they may see the city-scape as a universal, a place to live, die, get carried away, a place of trauma, pain, obsession or (dreaded) nostalgia. The buildings and park spaces, roads and walkways were built with purpose and the humans have moved it to invade that initial intention. My memories, my ghosts now haunt this place as much as anyone else's as we go about ghosting.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Muto* (2008) by BLU – <https://vimeo.com/93998>

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**Appendix:**

Supporting images and videos available on the webpage:

<http://blackdogfailure.weebly.com/ghosting-about.html>

