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## **Mobile Labour beyond the Film-Set**

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# **Mobile Labour Beyond the Film-Set**

**An exegesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of**

**Masters**

**in  
Fine Arts**

**At Massey University, Wellington,  
New Zealand.**

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## **Abstract:**

This exegesis follows a trajectory that starts with Jonathan Beller's observation that the contemporary spectator now 'labours in the image'. Essentially, Beller suggests that vision and perception of the screen image is the fundamental value-productive labour for the modern spectator. The central argument of this exegesis is to refute Beller's concept of the 'looking as labour'. I suggest that sensual, corporeal and phenomenological perception, as embodied in a range of labour practices surrounding the physical film-set, has the potential to offer slippages and ruptures in the homogenising cinematic mode of production of the 'screen image'. This is developed through analysis of how my own, and some other artists' practices explore unexpected areas: marginalised and forgotten histories, new narratives, material realities and imaginings. Therefore the narratives that unfold in the exegesis range across film extras' personal stories, reports of communities' interactions with film-sets, artists' re-creation of classic film-sets, archival research and my own industrial film production experience and exploration of abandoned sets. Starting with the 'looking as labour', the exegesis moves to a consideration of 'labour in the film-set' to a concept of 'mobile labour beyond the film-set'. Notions discussed include forms of the underground, film noirs, the world fair, crazy house and film-set ruin. Through discussion of my own work and that of other artists and theorists, this exegesis illustrates the ways in which the cross-fertilisation of these concepts can lead to far more variegated, and dynamic, uses of 'labour' than Beller suggests. Artist's brought into the discussion include Peter Brosnan, Krassimir Terziev, Sean Lynch, Goshka Macuga, Abbas Kiarostami and Pierre Huyghé, while critics and theorists mentioned include Susan Stewart, Michel de Certeau, Vivian Sobchack, Martin Heidegger, Paul Virilio, David Pike and Henri Lefebvré.

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## **Prologue:**

*In 2004 The Last Samurai was filmed around the Taranaki region of New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> In addition to Taranaki getting ‘star fever’ it gained international media attention along with millions of dollars in foreign investment. So successful was this production’s attempt to lend the area a sense of identity that local venture capital trusts were established with power companies and the New Plymouth District Council as stakeholders in an effort to ensure future film investment in the region.*

*When I arrived in New Plymouth in 2007 to design Anthony McCarten’s film Show of Hands there was an aura resembling a Wild West movie script in the city itself. A new oil boom was fueling the economy and speculation of all kinds was rife. However, the company Fat and Thin Productions’ vastly ambitious seven film package, starting with an 18 million dollar film based on war hero Charles Upham,<sup>2</sup> was foundering, eventually going into receivership in 2008, reportedly owing \$1.4 million in taxpayer-funded investment.*

*Our low budget drama did get filmed, partly due to much generous local support, including that of a car-yard owner who drove a leather-studded late model Harley-Davidson ‘trike’ and had a genuine Colt .44 slung around his office chair.*

*Another benefactor to the production, a real estate agent, approached me mid-way through the filming, to ask if I could leave the car-yard set standing as he had a church group (his own) that would rent it; they thought it would make the ideal buildings and grounds for the congregation. This set had been designed for a camera and a character; more specifically, a corrupt and paranoid secondhand car-dealer was required to view every angle of his car-yard from his office window, so it struck me as ironic that a fundamentalist Christian pastor would find the set so appealing. I had to inform the real estate agent that this set was fake, that it leaked, and that it was in fact a temporary structure that bypassed all building codes, but strangely this still did not deter him. It turned out we had created the ideal church structure by*

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<sup>1</sup> Passages in italics are used when describing, often anecdotally, the unfolding of my own practice.

<sup>2</sup> Company making Upham film goes broke. 2008. 3news.co.nz.

*hiding all the windows in the old warehouse, adding the mock-modern glass front showroom and installing bright floodlights in the yard.*

*As with many film productions, at completion of filming we had three days to bulldoze the structure down and return the old warehouse to normal; thus there was no time for further negotiation with the church group.*

## Introduction:

As Jonathan Beller states, “Cinema and all its succeeding formations.....are deterritorialized factories, in which spectators work”.<sup>3</sup> One of the central points of departure for this exegesis is to extend this idea of Deller’s of the ‘looking as labour’ where he theorises that the modern spectator’s attention and perception of the screen image is the core value-productive labour with which capital dominates the majority of people on the planet.<sup>4</sup>

I will set out to reveal how the physical film-set possesses unique characteristics in space and time that enable some people’s work to break free of the globalised ‘value-productive’ labour that cinematic visuality produces.

As a departure point for this research I asked the general question: How might the physical film-set be used as a model in which theories and practices of labour and spectatorship studies can be applied. I was seeking to re-site my own labour in commercial film production into a critical practice. This developed into research on how the film-set’s particular material, spatial and temporal qualities enable some groups and artists to extend, question and challenge the types of labour that industrial cinema seeks to produce.

In the following exegesis the physical film-set is positioned as a nexus out of which radiate a variety of labour relations: material, imaginary, mystical, economic and political. I will argue that the film-set is a specific illusionary construction that enables particular groups and communities to form their own narratives reaching far beyond both the frame of the filmed script and the actual cinematic production.

The above story is intended to indicate how far a film-set can extend its meaning into the outside world in two ways. The first, and most obvious, is how the industrial film production departments themselves create global and local social relationships in which labour can interact with a film-set. However, these social networks are fundamentally based on political and economic relationships which terminate in the end commodity product, the set as a filmic image.

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<sup>3</sup> Beller, 2006, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Beller, 2006, pp.1-5.

The second way, more relevant to both this study and my own practice, occurs when this network of interconnections extends to unexpected areas; marginalised and forgotten histories; new narratives, material realities and imaginings. In this manner, a variety of other peoples' stories and imaginings become activated, locating the film-set as a site for the production of new and often unexpected meanings.

This exegesis positions these extended stories and imaginings as narratives. Therefore the narratives that unfold below range across film extras' personal stories, reports of communities' interactions with film-sets, artists' re-creation of classic film-sets, archives and my own exploration of abandoned sets. Labour is therefore considered as a range of practices working outside or around the central industrial cinema program of the 'cinematic mode of production'.<sup>5</sup>

As typified by the set that was bulldozed in three days, the film-set has a temporary material existence, sometimes constructed in minutes or months but always rapidly and often surrounded in secrecy. It disappears even faster, yet has a temporal existence in the image that may live on forever. It is connected to its location by situation alone. Whether it is for economic, scenic or other reasons the film-set rarely *belongs* to the place it is situated in. It sits between the immaterial and the material and its image is therefore open to interpretation and modification. In historical time it has an accelerated material afterlife, it can be recycled, fall to ruin or even be uncovered in archaeological digs. These factors, I will argue, give the film-set a unique ontology.

Moreover, studies of the cinematic tend to negate the film-set entirely. It is already treated as an 'other'. Perhaps this is due to current discourse on the 'post-cinematic'<sup>6</sup> whereby cinema is considered an originary visual system for the many contemporary visual technologies. We are more accustomed to analysis of the cinematic around discourses of the film's internal iconography or particularly in spectatorship studies in terms of how it might affect the screen viewer.<sup>7</sup> In critical discourse analysis often begins and ends with the film-set's complicity with the production of illusion. However, further exploration is potentially fruitful as the film-set seems to indicate a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Friedberg, 2006, p.6.

<sup>7</sup> Cinematic studies have therefore traditionally focused on aspects of spectatorship, psychoanalytic theory, narrative forms in the script, ideology, forms of embodiment, the relationship to photography, aspects of mass culture and the apparatus as essentially; a camera, projector, and theatre.

model for many postmodern ideas on globalisation, border crossings, placelessness, and micro-histories.

In attempting to examine this nexus of relations between the film-set and labour, I will divide the exegesis into four separate yet interconnected sections. The first chapter considers the globalisation of the film-set. I look at two central concepts of this phenomenon, in which the film-set can travel to foreign labour and location and conversely the foreign labour can travel to the film-set. I consider art projects such as those by Sean Lynch and Krassimir Terziev as well as my own documentation and recycling of abandoned film-sets in Wellington. Michel de Certeau's historiography, in which slippages and erasures inevitably occur, is considered in relation to some narratives of labour occurring at these sites. Susan Stewart's concept of 'the souvenir' is applied to the 'locked up desire' in nostalgic visits to ruined film-sets and forms a starting point for my project at The New Zealand Film Archive.

In the second chapter, I consider narratives relating to both the underground and the collection. The film-studio is considered as a metaphorical underground zone to be populated by new objects and narratives. The film noir criminal is a point of departure for a borderless form of labour. I link Goshka Macuga's recent art projects with my own movement through archival collections and their re-presentation in re-created film-sets. I consider Macuga's labour as akin to the 'set dresser' of a film set who brings together objects from disparate sources to create a display of Susan Stewart's inscription of the 'collection'. In this way, I suggest, with an artist's intervention a film set may achieve a Heideggerian transformation from the concept of the technological object as merely 'standing by'. In addition, Macuga's interest in mystical practices encourages some ideas that are also partly drawn from H. P. Blavatsky.

In the third chapter, I take a model of the film-set as related to mobile spectatorship, world fairs and the 'crazy house'. This peculiar form, also an underground zone, was also related to early Hollywood film-sets and film noir narratives. I consider the crazy-house of the New Zealand Centenary Exhibition (1940), as an extension of the site of an abandoned *Kingdom Come* set on the Miramar peninsula. In this section the influence of the industrial set on public space, mobility and labour is discussed in terms of Roger Caillois' and Henri LeFebvre's ideas on the festival and transgression. The festival is considered as a site with the potential to break down

patterns and rituals of daily working life. This leads to reflection on how mobile spectatorship has been taken up as a core strategy by some contemporary artists.

The final chapter extends the world's fair model into a discussion of other contemporary artists who have used film-sets to explore the ambiguous relationships between reality, fictions and spectatorship. These projects use a film-set that is a 'real' site to question the very boundaries of labour, ritual and memory in mass consciousness. Projects by director Abbas Kiarostami and artist Pierre Huyghé exemplify the notion that there can be mobile labour beyond the film-set. My own strategy as a prop-maker and set-designer of blending a historical form of labour with the present will be briefly outlined.

Over the four chapters I will attempt a conceptual trajectory that moves from the 'labour of looking' to labour *in* the film-set and ends with mobile labour *beyond* the film-set.

By way of a conclusion, I will review how by using aspects of the film-set and notions of labour, artists are able to generate new conceptions of what constitutes history and the present, to explore marginalised and repressed histories, and to offer new models for the interface between mass cultural forms and everyday labour.

It is the intention of this exegesis to keep the definition of what constitutes a film-set open. Therefore, although often responding to the social control and homogenising cultural effects of the large scale industrial film-sets, what is recognised in many of the artists discussed and my own practice is that the film-set can be a fluid interpretation of space, more like a phenomenological unfolding. Therefore too, I do not see the film-set as solely the product of the production designer's labour but the production of a network of: site, 'dressings', location, architecture, history and memory.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Therefore reflecting Lefebvre's notion of the body's relationship to space through networks of modalities. "the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body and all other bodies". Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 189.

## 1. Mobile Labour and Mobile Film-Sets

“These Jews streamed out of the great gates with tears running down their cheeks, and then without prompting or rehearsal, they began singing in Hebrew the old chants of their race, which have been sung in synagogues for thousands of years.”<sup>9</sup> Hallett Abend

The phrase ‘on location’, in contradictory fashion, describes a non-place. When a film crew are on location they are situated neither at the production base nor at the studio. The meaning of this term can be found in the continual movement occurring in the process of finding the good shots. The film crew can be anywhere on location, whether atop a hill, in a house, a valley, or a constructed set. This suggests one of the fundamental aspects of the film-set on location, namely that this is an invented place, a temporary and shifting place. The situation of place is the film crew and the location shifts with them. So, in most industrial film, the location has been dislocated from place, and this rupture occurred the moment the film camera was invented.<sup>10</sup> With the invention of cinema, the film/stage-set became liberated from the audience and was able to travel anywhere in the world.

This aspect of the film-set as site and signifier has enabled particular social groups to identify with the script of the film as well as to produce their own meanings around this placeless architecture.

### 1a. On mobile labour traveling to film-sets

Since 1983, Peter Brosnan has been trying to raise the funds to excavate Cecil B. DeMille’s Lost City from the sand dunes at Guadalupe, California.<sup>11</sup> The legendary capital of Rameses from the film-set of DeMille’s first, silent version of *The Ten Commandments* (1923) is considered one of the costliest ever to have been made, with approx 2,500 extras and 3,000 animals populating it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As quoted by, Weiss. *A Sanctuary out of the Exodus*.

<sup>10</sup> There is a fundamental difference to earlier optical devices such as panoramas, the claude glass or camera obscura and lucida that only enabled images of exotic sets or locations to be *brought back* to a site of spectatorship.

<sup>11</sup> Brosnan and Stuart, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Ramírez. 2004, p.124.

To raise interest in the project Brosnan recounts the story of the recent immigrant orthodox Jews that DeMille hired as extras for the 1923 exodus scene.<sup>13</sup> The Jews were recent immigrants from eastern Europe escaping persecution. The on-set stories from the 1923 shoot relate how the Jews spontaneously and openly wept and chanted at the gates of Pharaoh and how in the scene of Moses parting the Red Sea the cloudy skies cleared and “the nearly level rays of the sun made a halo around the figure of the prophet, gave a startling radiance to his face.”<sup>14</sup> Again the extras gasped, sobbed and wept. These scenes are positioned in Brosnan’s re-telling and the earlier reportage as an authentic arrival in the Holy Land of America.

By contrast, Paul Virilio writes that DeMille was mythologised himself, in that by the end of production he was seen to have assumed the role of a military commander, if not a god. In a discussion on the similarity of 20<sup>th</sup> century military dictators to film directors<sup>15</sup> due to the same mastery of the new technological/industrial technology he draws attention to the fact that Hitler stated his historical hero was Moses, and how DeMille can be seen as leading the Jewish people himself to sanctuary.<sup>16</sup>

To complicate further the blurring in this particular example between real and fictional narratives, as Miwon Kwon states “Production of difference .... is itself a fundamental activity of capitalism, necessary for its continual expansion.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore in the context of this early film, Hollywood discovered that it was possible with a ‘dislocated’ film-set to absorb an authentic ethnic experience into their commodity product. The film-set ‘on location’ could become a site of seeming authenticity for a specific ethnic group.

This might indicate why Hollywood has not funded the archeological dig. The Jewish group seemed to actually relive the events of the miracle and the opening of the gates, or perhaps incorporate the historical narratives within their flight to the US. Michel de Certeau explores this ability in non-Western cultures to incorporate past narratives actively into the present.<sup>18</sup> In his view, such incorporation may undermine the erasure inherent in Western progress. Hollywood is the epitome of what de

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Weiss.

<sup>15</sup> Virilio, 1989, pp. 11-30. This forms the central argument of Virilio’s book *War and Cinema*.

<sup>16</sup> Virilio, 1989, pp. 52-53

<sup>17</sup> Kwon, 2002, p.159.

<sup>18</sup> Certeau, 1988, p.4.

Certeau would call the forgetting inherent in Western history. Progress, both scientific and technological, must by necessity continually erase to move forward.<sup>19</sup> By uncovering DeMille's set, Brosnan is attempting a return of the repressed, a direct challenge to the historiography of Hollywood. He is exposing a fissure in history more than simply uncovering an old film-set.

Brosnan is also making a documentary that tells the stories and memories from the locals of Guadalupe and crew members. This approach is not unlike that of Dutch filmmaker Peter Delpout's documentary *Go West Young Man* (2003).<sup>20</sup> Delpout visits the still standing film-sets in the midwest from some of the golden age Hollywood Westerns. By interviewing old cowboy extras and locals the narrative seems tinged with nostalgia, longing and a sad ruinous quality that echoes like the undertakers grave-digging on Boot Hill. This labour has remained living in the film-set, they appear infused with loss and nostalgia.

Most of Peter Delpout's films use archival footage, as he is a filmmaker, archivist and film historian. 'The film archive is a strange tomb, characterized by what it lacks, and slowly decomposing.'<sup>21</sup> Habib discusses the relationship between the film archive and the ruin in Delpout's films mainly from the point of view of the ruin as an image of an object, and how it becomes a cultural artifact. All films are described as documents, in that they show something of the trace of the time in which they were created. He talks of how all films are a monument or a non-intentional monument.<sup>22</sup>

Consideration of the above, labour *in* the film-set, encouraged me to consider further aspects of labour, nostalgia, archive and the film-set.

This nostalgia for the film-set also seems akin to literary theorist Susan Stewart's reading of the souvenir in terms of desire: "We need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative."<sup>23</sup> The souvenir of the film-set is in the

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<sup>19</sup> Certeau, 1988, p.1-14.

<sup>20</sup> Delpout, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Habib, 2006, p.122.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.124.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart, 2003a, p.135.

perceived authenticity of the visit to the site and the photograph of oneself in the actual location or old set if it still stands. The visit to the old film-set participates in the recovery of desire: based partly in the language of the scripted film, partly in the missing narrative from the surface visual experience,<sup>24</sup> partly in the fetish commodity value that is missing from merely viewing the film and finally, in the re-creation of a communal experience of longing that is at work in cinema viewing.

There seems to exist a curious tension between aspects of the film-set as a site for both personal and public experience of nostalgia, through the real location of the place of filming and its imagined existence in the filmed document.

It is also film labourers', in this case film extra's, who have traveled to foreign locations and then return home, who bring back souvenirs as reminders of these recovered or missing desires.

“Just like the warriors from [The Iliad] they brought home their trophies and ransoms in the shape of photos and video recordings...”<sup>25</sup>



***Background Action***, Krassimir Terziev.(2008). SPACE #4. Video projection and installation

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<sup>24</sup> Flusser, 2002, p.78. This argument of Flussers indicates the potential of artistic approaches to the intersubjective analysis and phenomenological practice of history, those engaged in a material “doing” as well as historical study.

<sup>25</sup> Terziev, 2006, <http://www.terziev.info/en/works/still-image/item/24-background-action-stillimage> website

Like Virilio, Bulgarian artist Krassimir Terziev equates war to the globalised film industry. *Background Action* (2008) is a study of the 300 Bulgarian extras who Warner Brothers shipped to Mexico for the filming of the battle scenes in the production of *Troy* (2004). Terziev displays global maps of the journeys, interviews, video and photographic records drawn from the extras' personal documentation of this experience. *Background Action* draws an analogy between the warriors who were recruited from all over the Homeric world for the Achaean and Trojan armies and the Bulgarian army of extras who were also fighting with and alongside 1,000 Mexican extras. Dreams and aspirations of the Bulgarians as tourist fighters making it big in Hollywood are contrasted with the reality of their labour camp-like working holiday, the harrowing battle scenes and Terziev's ongoing interest in 'a kind of portrait of Bulgarian character, distributed in international mass consciousness'.<sup>26</sup> Here again is Hollywood attempting to capture the authentic ethnic experience; Terziev fights back by presenting the extras' own everyday stories, and the mass cultural representations of the 'exotic' Bulgarian character as the real script.

*In my installation 'Angel for May: revisited' [Appendix 1], I re-situated a range of documents and objects from the feature film 'Angel for May', that I had art-directed in Yorkshire, England in 2001. These were the souvenirs: props, photographs, drawings, research and a re-created model set that represented my recovered desire of this experience. It brought back to mind the strange synchronicity that had occurred on September 11, 2001, as the World Trade centre was falling down, I had been building a bombed re-creation of a 1942 London street-set in a crumbling mining estate town called Grimethorpe. I had laboured in foreign sets including in The United Kingdom, Europe, South Africa and Australia. I was attempting to expose this tendency to collect material from every production I have worked on so as to render it into a monument to my global wanderings as labour in the film-set.*

*As part of my primary research in 2010 I also documented lost and forgotten film-sets in the Wellington region. In Whitemans Valley one finds the remains of a 'New Zealand version' of the archetypal Western town [Appendix 2], a colonial township used in local drama productions for at least 20 years. Like the Western town all the*

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<sup>26</sup> Terziev, 2006, <http://www.terziev.info/en/works/still-image/item/24-background-action-stillimage> website

*essential services of pioneer myths are catered for: the bank, hotel, post office, garage and general store. This became in addition a dumping ground for other sets and props, such as a midwestern style barn and an aeroplane fuselage in an oil-filled ditch. Reminiscent of writer Nathanael West's description of the Hollywood back lots in Day of the Locust* <sup>27</sup>, *much of this place was in a strange arrested state of decay and possessed bizarre transitions between international locations and a breakdown of sense of place("he went through the swinging doors of the saloon. There was no back to the building and he found himself in a Paris Street. He followed it to it's end, coming out in a Romanesque courtyard")*.<sup>28</sup> *Although weeds grew inside houses, it was carefully tended by a caretaker who lived there in a caravan with his ducks. I was searching for a narrative; some way I could transform this town with my own labour. I thought of how West goes on to describe the Waterloo accident. I also thought of the language Robert Smithson used in describing the sublime decay of Hotel Palenque, (1969), which positions decay as a mystically guided and intended resurrection.*<sup>29</sup> *I also considered that this pioneer township film-set has largely departed from New Zealand screens over the last 10 years, thus I decided there was nothing I could add to this site and to leave my labour as a straight documentation. Susan Stewart's comments on the social disease of nostalgia*<sup>30</sup> *made me wary of any possibility of working directly from this film-set. I desired to find a site with more contemporary and fluid meanings.*

*For my installation at the New Zealand Film Archive, The Reel World: Home-made Movies (2010) [Appendix 3], I researched archival footage from early New Zealand amateur filmmakers. I was searching for a particular group of everyday film labourers so as to screen their films inside some re-created Hollywood film-sets. The selection was assisted by several curators and archivists including Mark Williams, Kathy Dudding and Jane Paul. The chosen filmmakers worked on the boundary of amateur and professional practice; most had a small photographic or film studio or were very active members of the regional cine-clubs. In keeping with an observation by James Moran that many amateur film practices overlap with industrial ones,*<sup>31</sup> *this group comprised a cultural 'other'. Their labour transgressed the usual (or*

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<sup>27</sup> West, 1997, pp.239-317.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Smithson, 1969-1973,

<sup>30</sup> Stewart, 2003a, pp. ix-xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Moran, 2002, p.65-75.

*perhaps old-fashioned) divisions between art, commerce and the home. This group sat outside the usual categories that are maintained in discourse on spectatorship, the spectator was themselves, their family or immediate community so I saw their films as experimental for a variety of reasons, in general by way of their deviation from standard home movie subjects or via an intensification of them. Some of the filmmakers brought to mind Walter Benjamin's notion of the social dream world in which individuals are able to wander with chance encounters and unplanned itineraries<sup>32</sup> such as in Leo de Castro's film's staged in the botanic gardens and those of D. G. McMillan's at the ice-skating rink. Elga Hinton incorporated multi-layered unstructured narratives with technical experimentation while Ngaire Cooper revealed how her location and style of filming could transgress the boundaries of private and public space.<sup>33</sup>*

*The home movie film-set was never created for immortality. As a document of personal record it has a unique ability to sit outside the fate of becoming a monument to nostalgia and ruin. Of course if the films depict one's own history they can be viewed as monuments to nostalgia (or family horrors). Despite this, the home film-set does not offer the same nostalgic promises of the industrial film with its exoticised locations and structures. Even a home movie of a trip to the Taj Mahal does not offer the embodied experience of a fictional narrative. In the fictional film architecture is embodied in characters,<sup>34</sup> and there is the triumph of the 'irreal' over the 'real'.<sup>35</sup>*

*The home movie has its own favourite locations. The public and private garden is one of the most popular. The garden provided a stage for the intersection of private and public worlds, the natural and cultural. Special events were particularly popular as they came already 'dressed' with decorations: the birthday, the wedding, the picnic and the trip to the beach (yet the funeral often was too dark for the low film speeds of the time). bogging. This gave me an insight into 'the festival' and its relationship to labour and the film-set, a relationship which is examined further in chapter three .*

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, 1999, pp.152-196.

<sup>33</sup> Dudding, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Ramirez, 2004, pp.162-178.

<sup>35</sup> Sobchack, 2001, pp. 258-285. In her essay "The Charge of the Real", Sobchack discusses the viewing of documentary modes within fictional narratives of film as a 'phenomenal experience'.

## 1a. Conclusion

The globalised labour that traveled to film-sets appeared intertwined with aspects of identity, nostalgia and desire that could be represented in the souvenir. In my own projects I sought to understand and escape the film-sets complicity in this longing, I started to research artists' who were considering labour that was connected to yet situated outside the main film production.

## 1b. On film-sets Travelling to Labour

“Archives make up the world of this technical game, a world in which complexity is found, but sifted through and miniaturised, therefore made capable of being formalized”.<sup>36</sup> Michel de Certeau.

The migration of large scale industrial film-sets to the southern hemisphere is a relatively recent phenomenon occurring essentially in Australia from the mid 1980s and in New Zealand not until the 1990s.

New Zealand does not usually ship in labour for large-scale films, yet it provides plenty of local labour. This is the other side of the film-set 'on location' where the film-set goes in search of cheap labour. Indeed here again the film-set on location deploys perceived national characteristics into the cinematic product to give it authenticity.

The enduring pioneer myths of a DIY nation that continue in films such as *The World's Fastest Indian*,(2005) play out in strangely reversed real life narratives in the recent controversies surrounding the labour market and filming of *The Hobbit*,(2011) Ironically, narratives featuring industrious, pastoral 'little guys' taking on the evil in the world seem to be only permitted in a deregulated labour market. The Combined Trade Union are publicly vilified while Warner Brothers executives are fêted by the Prime Minister. The film labourer's protest in the streets', desperate to retain their jobs they trade their right to any future arbitration in a Labour Court. What is more in a small economy like New Zealand's there is not only the potential for the country to

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Sobchack states this intersection of the viewers experience of the real and the unreal, has the ability to arouse in the viewer a 'documentary consciousness' an 'ethical and embodied form of spectatorship'.

<sup>36</sup> Certeau, 1988, p.9.

create new labour laws for the film-set,<sup>37</sup> but the entire country can become a film-set. New Zealand is not ready to give up its avatar as Middle-Earth just yet. This is labour in the film-set, like the capital of Rameses, the myth can be resurrected in the simulacrum.

*I saw the potential of incorporating into my work in the MFA narratives of the labour of local film technicians on commercial film-sets: the unavoidable pride in the DIY myth, self-reliance and resourcefulness. I thought of drawing on my own work history as a film technician within the industry. I wondered how to challenge Beller's theory of an exploitative and homogenising mode of production, the looking as labour seems to emerge from the labour in the film-set. I thought of using the very skills I had been trained in, set-construction and set-dressing, to challenge this idea that the 'looking is labour'*

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<sup>37</sup> Small, 2010, p.1. The Dom Post 'We'll change the law to save The Hobbit'. (Vernon Small)



*Views of Dublin, Sean Lynch. (2008). Image of Saint Christopher's school.*

Sean Lynch's *Views of Dublin* (2008)<sup>38</sup> is an exhibition of photographs and booklet release that extends the narratives and politics of labour surrounding the building of the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie film-set in Smithfield market, Dublin, for the Hollywood film *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, (1964). Lynch weaves together a series of micro-histories surrounding the construction, filming and dismantling of the set that offer an alternative and discursive approach to social relations of the time, labour practices and the present.

The core narrative appears to be the subsequent re-use by an indigenous Irish 'Traveler' community of parts of the demolished Berlin Wall set to build themselves a school, appropriately named Saint Christopher's. Lynch documents the community spirit of the indigenous Irish group and the attempted suppression (if not extermination) of them by the local corporations, a struggle reminiscent of that of the Gypsies under the Nazis. There is also a parallel, decades later, with the origins of the Berlin Wall, which itself attempted to suppress inter-community contact (and thus, incidentally, also in a sense to ban knowledge or education).

There is also an ironic association to the later use of the broken parts of the real Berlin Wall as souvenirs. The Travelers' labour has traditionally included the tinker, being the collector and recycler of scrap materials. The Travelers have minimal use-value for commodity society. In the context of Beller's 'deterritorialised factories' Lynch suggests an alternative mode of production.

Lynch extends the political implications of the meta-narrative of the Berlin Wall, in relating it to the Travelers' exclusion from society and the historical divisions within Ireland. The Berlin Wall forms a material, historical and metaphoric back-drop for socio-economic and ethnic divisions in Dublin and by extension elsewhere, between city and periphery, North and South, US / Ireland, and so forth. In 2010<sup>39</sup> the Irish Travelers are situated in England and about to be moved on by the local council yet again. The idea that globalisation is a homogeneous phenomenon is critiqued in this scenario, in alignment with Zygmunt Bauman's claim that a lot of globalisation discourse 'merely articulates a caste bound experience of the globals.'<sup>40</sup> The Travelers posit a flip-side to the placeless wanderings of a relatively small

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<sup>38</sup> Lynch, 2008. Exhibition Publication, *Recent Finds: Sean Lynch*, The Gallery of Photography, Dublin, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Sheridan, Richard. 2010. Available at [www.dalefarm.wordpress.com](http://www.dalefarm.wordpress.com). Richard Sheridan.

<sup>40</sup> Bauman, 1998. p.101.

contemporary elite. Peter Lang describes the future as belonging to minority immigrant groups, as they bring new ideas and change, yet , similar to Kwon's comment on the production of 'difference', Beller states "the mode of domination shifts in order to maintain hierarchical society."<sup>41</sup> The Travelers represent a group who, although marginalised, embody aspects of late Capitalism: dissolution of borders, wandering, loss of the family, contested public and private spaces and the struggle for indigenous rights and self-determination.

Hollywood's industry of mass culture, which locates cheap labour in foreign countries, is undercut by local initiatives and labour acting in a productive exchange with the Berlin Wall set. Correspondingly, Lynch's new script is packed full of subversive humour from the organised crime that profits from the film production being in town, to the boy whose bike is run over by Elizabeth Taylor's limousine, to the journalist who, in retribution, fails to turn up to Liz's interview.

The Travelers and other groups stories surrounding the Berlin wall film set are examples where, through Lynch's re-telling, one hopes the local narratives may have colonised the principal set of the film production.

*I had been documenting another abandoned film-set in Wellington [Appendix4 ], the house of Caiaphas from the failed Biblical epic Kingdom Come, sited on Miramar peninsula in Wellington. This film production, still in limbo, still owes millions of dollars to many small and larger businesses throughout New Zealand. I considered what local groups may benefit from the Caiaphas House set and to what other uses it might be put. The abandoned film-set was used by graffiti artists and walkers, escaping the work zones; rapidly it was being vandalised. Every time I visited the site small changes could be noticed, another container broken into, a trolley shifted, a polystyrene rock smashed up. This had become a playground for a sub-cultural group so it became a priority for officials to dispose of the set. I designed a proposal [Appendix 5] for a future plan to bury and flood the cavernous set so it could be opened as a new themed dive experience for tourists. In this proposal the new Caiaphas Dive Experience would be staffed by prisoners from the nearby Wellington Prison, thus I was suggesting a (perhaps ironic) new utopian scheme for prisoner*

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<sup>41</sup> Beller, 2006, p.5.

*rehabilitation. This also contrasted with a long running campaign to close the adjacent prison to turn it into a luxury hotel with a cable car running from the prison to the re-developed Shelley Bay nearby*

### **1b. Conclusion**

'View's of Dublin' explored a range of micro-histories surrounding the 'Spy' set in Dublin, which suggested a movement away from labour *in* the film-set towards labour *beyond* the film-set and into the contemporary moment with the crisis of the Traveler group. In *Caiaphas Dive Experience* I proposed an imaginary future use of the *Kingdom Come* set and an alternative model of labour.

## 2. Narratives of the Underground and the Collection:

“Thus the essential unfolding of technology harbours in itself what we least expect, the possible rise of the saving power..... So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain transfixed in the will to master it. We press on past the essence of technology.”<sup>42</sup> Martin Heidegger.

If there is a clear opposite to the film-set on location, it is the film-set on the sound-stage or the film-studio. The film-studio can be any controllable darkened interior space, not just the grand sound-stages belonging to the large studios. This space is a sophisticated technological empty space, a machine waiting to be filled with a technological object (the film). The film-studio therefore represents a very high end of visual technology with an interface between digital compositing, sophisticated mechanics, optics, construction and shopping technology. To further Jean Paul Guen’s idea that the sound-stage represents Heidegger’s concept of ‘standing-reserve’,<sup>43</sup> much labour on the film-set during filming is termed ‘stand-by’, as these labourers’ purpose is defined by whatever the apparatus asks of them at any given moment. Labour has become a pure function of technology, an object itself. However, Heidegger offers some glimmer of hope in his epistemological ‘unfolding’ or ‘revealing of’ the nature of meaning in the technological. I would propose that with the added benefits of ‘space-time media’,<sup>44</sup> artists are able to unfold the technological film-set to many other levels of perception.

In this chapter, I consider the film-studio as a technological and metaphorical underground, a darkened and empty vessel that has the potential to be filled with challenging and mystical objects. This underground is also a borderless zone where the ‘looking as labour’ can freely roam.

Following Lewis Mumford’s description of the underworld as a manufactured and inorganic environment, Rosalind Williams describes the underground as the ultimate technological zone.<sup>45</sup> As opposed to the motif of the spaceship, the underground

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<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, 2003, p.263.

<sup>43</sup> Geuens, 2000, p.114.

<sup>44</sup> Flusser, 2002, p.78.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, 1990, p.6.

reveals the reality of 'enclosure in a finite world'.<sup>46</sup> David Pike considers the myriad literary and metaphorical connections of the devil and its relationship to the underground and the metropolis over the last two centuries. In a less apocalyptic reading of underground spaces he discusses what he calls the 'view from above' and 'the view from below', which includes the impact of everyday life.<sup>47</sup>

Although the city always pushes down on underground spaces, once recognised our labour in the image has the potential to be freed, with the imaginary able to roam in any direction. It becomes a space in which movement is possible in any direction.

Developing from 1920s crime fiction narratives of industrialised cities descending to poverty, decay and crime, and intensive post-World War II urbanisation, the classic film noir underground set was increasingly filmed in semi-documentary style in real locations.<sup>48</sup> These were often filmed in an expressionist style, influenced by European émigré directors, and in them the sewers came to represent the only 'real' place left in a world where borders were radically shifting. One of Pike's modern day devils, the criminal, often inhabits the film noir underground and he comes to represent the character who does not need to work, escapes labour,<sup>49</sup> as the underground has given him free access to the city and its treasures.

Thus too, in *The Third Man* (1949), the supposedly dead underworld figure Harry Lime (Orson Welles) is able to magically appear at any point in the city, as the network of storm water drains under the war-torn Vienna enables him to move beneath the surface borders of the east/west divisions of the post-war city, becoming a transitional figure between Capitalism and Communism.

In another key film noir, *He Walked by Night* (1948), murderer Roy Martin has likewise gained access to all areas of a post-war Los Angeles through the underground drains. Martin is an electronics expert in communications so he becomes the ideal representation of the loss of borders brought about by the latest technology, and how this may in turn bring about the collapse of physical and ethical

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.7.

<sup>47</sup> Pike, 2007, pp.46-54.

<sup>48</sup> Pike, 2007, p.212.

<sup>49</sup> Pike, 2007, p.47.

borders of the city. This is a zone full of oppositions, however. In this respect it is similar to Lynch's history of the Travelers, who are oppressed and yet labour on, and of the whole Dublin underworld, which benefits in an unintended or unanticipated way from the *Spy* set. Martin is like the set-dresser / prop-buyer of a film-set, having to beg, borrow and steal (and murder) from multiple sources to decorate the set.

The underground of the film-studio can be interpreted as a zone for the collection of multiple groups of objects, the props and set-dressings and the set elements (architectural details). This recalls Susan Stewart's writings on 'the collection'. Unlike the exchange value of the souvenir, which represents labour as acquired through material exchange, this is a magic and abstract acquisition and mode of production.<sup>50</sup> Stewart constructs the collection as something that is found, or rather finds you, so that through its abstraction from labour it is freed from fetishisation.<sup>51</sup>

Stewart's collection is a very pure form that comes to individuals and has meaning for their home, their private dwelling, most often as handicrafts or found objects. In this way it transcends the separation of labour from production that the search for the souvenir completes. She hints that a museum collection may be similar, that if acquired in a particular manner a collection could function in a film-set that transcends the labour of looking. The labour of the set-dresser crosses boundaries of a museologist, snake-charmer, archeologist and shopping fiend, as the set-dresser may have to assemble collections of heterogeneous objects from all manner of sources. In essence, the set-dresser will establish networks with numerous personal and public collections and commodity traders. If this new collection could be taken away from the homogenising effect of the technological product (the film),<sup>52</sup> this could shift the technological object of the film-studio to an understanding of technology as 'revelatory'. The film set and the collection may be changed forever.

*This was one of my motivations in the project The Reel World: Home-made Movies, namely to combine objects and images from multiple archives and collections. Home movies from the New Zealand Film Archive (NZFA) collection were combined with re-created model underground sets from the films noirs mentioned earlier and material objects from a range of collectors and traders.*

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<sup>50</sup> Stewart, 2003, p.164.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

*New Zealand never had any of the 'real' physical underground spaces of the cosmopolitan centres overseas.<sup>53</sup> For the New Zealand spectator and home-filmmaker the underground was possibly only ever an imaginary space, sited in large-scale film-sets. My aim was to screen the home films hovering in underground spaces from these international films, constructed in both the European and United States sewers.*

*I see the process of archival research as a material and phenomenological action. There are numerous intersections with archivists, curators, collectors, members of the public, other artists and so on that form a meandering trail that moves physically in all directions. Labour in the archive reveals ideas on how history and memory unfold as well as the question of what is stored and displayed in archives. Also the home filmmakers themselves generally had large collections of films, and in abstracting individual films from the personal souvenir collection of the individual I explored the possibility that this could be Stewart's 'collection', not defined by nostalgia or by the alienation of labour inherent in the souvenir.*

*I recall one afternoon researching home films in the basement of the NZFA overhearing a conversation from an elderly woman who was watching for the first time a colour film her father's theatre group had made in Ashburton in the 1930s. The viewing brought forth a flood of memories of gin parties, singing round the piano, local affairs and gossip ('and you know everyone knew Cedric was gay') as she struggled to put names to faces: 'I've almost got it, it was Peacock, no maybe Peabody.' Yet she could always pick the locations and the props. 'They filmed that in what's-her-name's house, and there's my father's favourite chair.'. The strange thing was she was talking to ghosts, as no-one else was in the room apart from myself in a far corner.*

*Cummings and Lewandowska discuss the increasing cultural importance of archives, as they are spatial and now designate territories.<sup>54</sup> These new territories are ripe for exploration.*

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<sup>53</sup> Although NZ does not have the equivalent metropolitan undergrounds, there does exist many of the manufactured and technological undergrounds for instance in the mining and hydro-electric industries, and artists' Wayne Barrar and Neil Pardington have documented these places ( and archival storage spaces) as underground zones.

<sup>54</sup> Merewether, 2007, p.149.

*I sought to extend this notion of archive to a material relationship to the abandoned film-sets. I considered how in film theorist Vivian Sobchack's analysis of the real and unreal the viewing of documentary modes within fictional narratives can lead to an "ethical and embodied form of spectatorship".<sup>55</sup> If I could obtain the residues of a real abandoned set, combined with other artifacts and fictional narratives, this form of spectatorship could perhaps be activated further.*

*The Caiaphas house set from Kingdom Come, almost completed was (it has now been dismantled) situated on the Miramar Peninsula at the entrance to Wellington Harbour. A site that retrospectively extends back to strategic Māori and then Government defence occupation, it now houses a prison, a farm, a prime minister's tomb and abandoned gun emplacements.*

*I considered the potential of exploring a film-set that cannot be traced. This Kingdom Come set exists only as a memory of a future imagining. As this film-set was unrealised, the kind of 'institutionalised forgetting' that Habib suggests the archive initiates cannot even apply. With its lack of nostalgia Caiaphas' house struck me as having the potential to inscribe the meanings of labour that had never been presented to a spectator.*

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<sup>55</sup> Sobchack, 2001, pp. 258-285.



***The Sleep of Ulro*, Goshka Macuga. (2006).**

In *The Sleep of Ulro*, (2006),<sup>56</sup> Polish artist Goshka Macuga traverses the boundaries of the film-set, the underground and the collection even further. Basing the installation on the plans of the *Der Sturm* set designs from *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920),<sup>57</sup> she then works as a set-dresser to populate the re-created set with an array of objects and props from various museums and other artists' work that seem to have an associative relationship to notions of sleep, hypnosis, modernism and mysticism. Her underground is the classic dream-world from Expressionist filmmaking, yet the exterior platforms and stairways also functioned during the Liverpool Biennale of 2006 as a site for presentations and performances. The interior is a pristine display of vitrines and objects from multiple museum collections. A somatised figure of Madame Blavatsky (the theosophist socialist clairvoyant) and Cesare (Caligari's somnambulist), hallucinogenic prop mushrooms, stuffed birds, modernist art-works from L.S. Lowry and Paul Nash and contemporary artworks<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lewis, P, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Sherwin, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, 2007, Artforum article.

are just a few of the objects that encourage open narrative readings as the spectator meanders through the labyrinths of jumbled archives. Macuga liberates these objects from where they have been slumbering, the locked up desire of backroom museum collections. There is no nostalgia here as the erasure of history in Communist era Poland left a gap in memory that she can now fill with her own new 'ideal museum'.

In discussing post-Communist Poland, Macuga states how the sudden impact of Capitalism created an increasing interest amongst the population in mysticism.<sup>59</sup> Often she intertwines aspects of modernism and spirituality,<sup>60</sup> and in her comments on late Capitalism we are given insight into the labour implied in her film-set. She presents a way for the viewer to escape the labour of looking by moving through and creating history. This is a labour to be liberated from the materialism of modern science and theology.<sup>61</sup> Indeed Blavatsky's theory is similar<sup>62</sup> to Heidegger's statements of the need for an interpretation of technology using Plato's search for truth through revealing.<sup>63</sup> Central to Blavatsky's programme for transcendence were the 'modern mesmerized subject'<sup>64</sup> and 'the secrets of the herbs of dreams and enchantment',<sup>65</sup> which included the mandrake root and hallucinogenic mushrooms. Blavatsky's description of the state of clairvoyance as a commingling of the past, present and future, is an intermediate state to true seer-ship, and it seems to be this subject 'tinctured with the terrestrial perceptions of the objective world'<sup>66</sup> that Macuga sets free in her film-set archive, she suggests there is another plane to reach.

The *Der Sturm* designers<sup>67</sup> who attempt to mesmerise the movie spectators with their dizzying set design are not just depicting a dream world, they depict the spirituality

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> In Macuga's Sao Paulo project *The Headless Mule*, 2006, she included live Brazilian plants that reportedly had mystically healing properties.

<sup>61</sup> Blavatsky, 1877, Vol.1. p.ix.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. xi,xii.

<sup>63</sup> Blavatsky writes of Plato's transcendence in terms of the Mysteries while Heidegger of revealing,

<sup>64</sup> Blavatsky, 1877, Vol.2. p.589.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p.590.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Vol.1.

<sup>67</sup> Another of the *Der Sturm* group's Expressionist architects, Bruno Taut reacted to both industrialisation and the atrocity of war with a return to spiritual values, and rural utopias, garden cities linked by rural communes and fanciful multi-coloured glass cathedrals atop mountains that would divert the pernicious evils of man's energies. Taut's drawings reflected Paul Scheerbart's texts that the spiritual transformation of man would require new multi-coloured glass architecture, to refract and transmit all forms of light and energy. Also propounded was the return to artisanal labour, a familiar idea from the arts and crafts movement and became a model for Bauhaus ideas on labour and industry.

of Cesare that is being crushed by the institution (psychiatry). Macuga uses the same physical structure and perhaps a mesmerising array of objects and associations. Macuga points to several kinds of labour in the *Der Sturm* film set: lost or marginalized products of modernist artists, the inherent utopianism of artisanal craft (including her own) and the notion that the spectator's labour of imagining can be liberated in her 'nonhierarchical' museum.

Yet Macuga's 'mystical', similar to Lynch's descriptions of alternative labour surrounding the *Spy* set, is positioned in a relationship to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century world politics of exclusion, domination and repression. If we interpret the *Caligari* film-set as Elsaesser does,<sup>68</sup> it is a direct challenge to the early Hollywood cultural imperialism, being an attempt instead at an indigenous style. Macuga might be presenting an inviting return of the repressed that opens toward the possibility of an empowering archive.

*As part of my research into the site of the Caiaphas house abandoned set on the Miramar peninsula, I considered the history of the Miramar area as a film production site. This was partly to 'look beyond' the space being produced by the nearby international film production facilities: Weta studios, Stone Street Studios and Park Road Post. Miramar had been the first industrial site of film production in New Zealand with the Government Tourist Board, followed by the National Film Unit based there from the 1930s onwards.*

*As I had been researching the home-movies in the NZFA I had repeatedly noticed the quantity of records of the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition (NZCE) of 1940. This was the largest world fair ever to be constructed in New Zealand and was built at the base of the Miramar peninsula in Wellington.*

*As with most world fairs, it was to be a propaganda exercise, showing off the progress of the country to the world. As I researched the NZCE architect Edmund Anscombe and his plans and drawings at the Turnbull Library, I realised this monumental site was a large-scale film-set; it was clear it had been designed for a camera, making it the biggest film-set ever to be built in New Zealand.*

*The overall design was modernist, what might be called streamlined Art-Deco utopian. Streamlined deco was possibly most often used in picture theatre design of*

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<sup>68</sup> Elsaesser, 1997, p.97-123.

*the 1930s. Anscombe's overall design was an immersive 'ideal' city in which he had plans to extend networks of healing energies into the city.<sup>69</sup> He spent a lifetime overlapping work and ideas on world's fairs,<sup>70</sup> cinemas and urban planning projects.<sup>71</sup>*

*Anscombe applied many of the techniques from the design and construction of film-sets including: façade construction, forced perspective, reflective surfaces and mid and foreground props to create a sense of depth. His background in the design of early 'atmospheric cinemas'<sup>72</sup> gave him a unique perspective into the emerging immersive and themed construction of space, on previous world fairs with their utopian dreams of a technologic future and cinema sets with their simultaneous desire to spread to new markets and to display exotic locations.<sup>73</sup> Importantly this was also the era of the home movie, and the NZCE site seems created for the home filmmaker, as Ngaire Cooper's home film proves, the entire set' could be captured in one 'take' if 'shot' from the people-movers (little trains) on site.*

*Anscombe's plan of the design indicates an axial design based either on an inverted cathedral design<sup>74</sup> or, I would suggest, possibly the Tau of the Theosophists, (illus5). What remains to be researched is the extent of Anscombe's involvement in theosophy and spiritualist ideas: the connections seem so strong with the importance given to the emanation of light, the radiating healing energies of the extended urban renewal plans and a multi-sensual central source of power<sup>75</sup> at the exhibition site, perhaps theosophy had become deeply imbedded in the modernist world fair programme.<sup>76</sup>*

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<sup>69</sup> McCarthy, 2001, pp 193-197

<sup>70</sup> Ramírez, 2004, p.162. Ramírez claims the Californian Pavilion at the Chicago Fair of 1893 started the vogue for the Spanish mission, what would become important in Hollywood film-set and theatre styling and modernism.

<sup>71</sup> McCarthy, 2001, pp193-197.

<sup>72</sup> McCarthy, 2005, pp249-254.

<sup>73</sup> Ramírez, 2004, pp.162-178.

<sup>74</sup> Toomath, in Renwick, 2004, pp 39-53.

<sup>75</sup> Elder, R.Bruce, 2008, pp15-33.

<sup>76</sup> Elder reminds us how many of the major figures of abstraction and the avant garde, for instance Kandinsky, Eisenstein, Mondrian, The Blaue Reiter, were connected to spiritualist and mystical practices and groups, in other words practices of the occult. Non objective art, like the expressionist movement sought to locate the hidden reality behind nature.

## **Conclusion**

*I have been attempting to locate my own practice through the NZFA project. I compare the collection I bring together as like the set-dresser's labour and liken the re-creation of Macuga's Caligari set to my re-building of miniature set's from classic film noirs. I moved outside the film archive and into the real site of Miramar peninsula and the historical NZCE desiring to make my own labour more mobile and create a full-scale installation using part of the abandoned Caiaphas House set.*

### 3. Mobile spectatorship and the crazy house:

“It is a pleasure founded upon excitement, illusion and disorder that has been agreed to, falling and being caught, blunted shocks and harmless collisions.”<sup>77</sup> Roger Caillois

“The spectator must lend himself to the illusion without first challenging the décor, mask or artifice which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself.”<sup>78</sup> Roger Caillois

The New Zealand Centenary Exhibition (1940) contained a large amusement park ‘Playland’ that functioned as an attraction to the main propaganda events. In World Fair’s with their simultaneous program of celebrating the material results of industrial and technological progress and creating a site for the festival is the potential for a space that disrupts the illusion of the labour in the image. This site seemed to suggest the space of mobile labour in the film-set.

Central to the experience of the crazy house was physical disorientation, distorted perspectives, shocks to the senses and personal embarrassments as the public are directed around disorienting mazes, mirror illusions, slides and moving floors.<sup>79</sup>

The evolution during the 20<sup>th</sup> century of the crazy house had an intimate relationship to the cinematic experience. Crazy houses seem to have evolved from the earlier funhouses. One of the most famous early funhouses is Playland in Rye, New York, (1928) one of the few original ones that has been restored and is still active.<sup>80</sup> In this particular popular amusement installation were bright spaces where the public could wander at their leisure observing and joining in the general chaos of everyone falling about making fools of themselves. There was a coercive loss of control with the clowns wielding electric cattle prods, electric shocks applied to devices to force people to lose their hold, and the continual tripping up gags and skirts blowing up.<sup>81</sup> Rye’s Playland was originally decorated with ultra mock Spanish baroque facades that imitated the current Hollywood vogue for exotic film sets and picture palaces.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Caillois, 1962, p.135.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> McLean, Gavin, in Renwick, 2004, p.87-96

<sup>80</sup> Luca, Bill, Playland after dark, <http://www.laffinthedark.com>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ramírez, 2004, pp.162-178.

The participant at Playland could take a voyage to the set styles of their favourite movies to assume the identities of film characters, and they themselves could be transformed by distorting mirrors. However, Caillois' suggestion that the spectator 'lends' themselves to the artifice without questioning the reality of it is hard to believe here. The high level of mock baroque artificiality suggests that also in this amusement is the possibility of the mockery of the film set itself: no-one was fooled, it was silly and fun, and the artifice of the film-set unfolded in real space.

If there is any authenticity to this Playland it is in its relationship to the escape from the working week, the rigid social and physical structure of the visitor's new Fordist and Taylorist industrial lives was thrown asunder, and hierarchies broken down with the electric shocks induced to random victims.

The crazy house became modeled more on the expressionist and horror film set<sup>83</sup> and copied directly from a model from British Holiday camps.<sup>84</sup>



The Crazy House from the Glasgow Empire Exhibition of 1937 (modeled on the early Butlins Holiday Camps Crazy House).

<sup>83</sup> The NZCE crazy house was modeled on that from the Glasgow Empire exhibition of 1937. Copied from Butlins Camps Felixstowe.

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.butlinsmemories.com>

In negotiating the space of the crazy house the mobile spectator descended to a darker and more foreboding subterranean zone where a determined path was followed. Down in this underground they could act out the narratives of utopian labour absorbed from the expressionist and horror film set. These included the release from repression of natural and spiritual forces by institutions and industry as well as the suggestion of the utopian architects and designers whose response to industrialisation was glorious technicoloured glass ‘cathedrals’ surrounded by happy rural villages of workers<sup>85</sup> who all play and pray together. Emerging from the underground and confronted with Andscombe’s utopian cathedral the appropriation of earlier utopian (some say fascist) visions by the Hollywood film set seems complete.

It would seem that in the world fair, and the crazy house in particular, the mobile spectator was now labouring in a globalised film set. The closing scene of *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), places all the characters (who all turn out to be criminals) in a disorienting, perspectival vortex of the Coney Island crazy-house.<sup>86</sup> Like all film noir undergrounds this is an ambiguous zone: expressionist in style, it represents the human senses, the possibility of a return to nature, yet this crazy house is also defined by its opposition to the ultra rich lifestyle of Mr. Bannister with his borderless global wanderings as he sails around the world.

The crazy house promises an illusion of immersion in the world of the film set, positioned somewhere between the everyday of work and the home. Real shocks and physical instability in negotiating space are induced, yet on emerging from these depths the mobile spectator could always wander around and visit the ‘house of tomorrow’<sup>87</sup> with its promise of the latest home commodities.

Caillois positions the festival as a site of transgression and sacredness working in opposition to the rituals of daily life and to the drudgery of work. The festival is a period of excess, transgression of taboos and a sign of renewal, where life is rejuvenated.<sup>88</sup> The festival requires a level of intoxication that demands collective passion.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Eaton, 2002, p.164-178.

<sup>86</sup> This crazy house is designed much like an early expressionistic film-set, such as the Caligari set.

<sup>87</sup> Colomina, 1998, pp. 126-165.

<sup>88</sup> Caillois, 2001, p.101.

<sup>89</sup> Caillois, 2001, p.101.

Going further Henri Lefebvré believed the body's cycles have the power to cause radical change, in an echo of Marx and Marcuse's<sup>90</sup> concept of the emancipation of the senses,<sup>91</sup> where the individual's body has the ability to break out of its imposed 'spatial shell developed in response to labour'.<sup>92</sup> Lefebvré considers the space of leisure and the festival as having the 'tendency' towards transgression, as it can reveal 'where the vulnerable areas and potential breaking points are'.<sup>93</sup>

*Perhaps one of the advantages in thinking of aspects of the mobile labour of the crazy house is that it was relatively easy to see the thread of how the film set was expanding globally into other forms with a suggested relationship to mobility and labour.*

*The question became for me what the potential might be for the crazy house for an extended relations of labour. It appeared as a threshold area, in which the usual rigid space of the film set may become unhinged, even though this seemed well under control in the NZCE.*

*In the terms of Pike's myths of the devil of the metropolis and the underground, what the NZCE crazy house lacked was a simultaneously 'ideological and subversive'<sup>94</sup> devil. Pike held that as long as social space is divided into a "high and low"<sup>95</sup> any radical energies will be dispersed into the underground. I considered how the two fundamental spaces of the Centennial Exhibition, the playland and the propagandistic, could have morphed together and offered a radical challenge to the labour in the film-set.*

*This model of mobile spectatorship seems to have a relationship to contemporary art practice where disorienting and immersive environments are often cited as core strategies.<sup>96</sup> Artist Carsten Holler employs amusement park devices in his installations such as slides, carousels and revolving mushrooms. Yet as a strategy these works seem to offer a similar form of labour to playland, the transgressions of the amusement park simply being relocated to the site of the art institution. Caillois'*

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<sup>90</sup> Marcuse, 2000, pp. 257-267.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Lefebvré, 1991b, p.384.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Pike, 2007, p. 42.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.43.

<sup>96</sup> Bishop, 2005,

*and Lefebvré's mobile spectator simply release their bodily vibrations, go through a regenerative act of renewal then get back to the day job.*

*Lefebvré was wary of the rationality of language, which he saw as a product of rationalist philosophy.<sup>97</sup> Yet Susan Stewart opens up language to all kinds of spatial and sensual possibilities, patterns of thought and forms of meaning. As she states 'writing gives us a device for inscribing space.'<sup>98</sup> Perhaps language and history can reveal further aspects of the social space at the festival?*

### **Conclusion**

*I thought the disappearing form of the crazy house could form a model with which to rebuild a set from the Kingdom Come location. The Caiaphas set represented an arrested piece of labour. I wanted to populate the new underground crazy house with slippages in history from the NZCE, excluded or banned amusements, home movies from the same period, labour that was not permitted through the gates. I also wanted to consider some artists who were considering the film-set as a site that intersected with the so-called real.*

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<sup>97</sup> Lefebvré, 1991b, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Stewart, 2003, p.3.

#### 4: The Real and Imaginary Film-Set:

“The cinema of the future will empower the viewer.” Abbas Kiarostami

Destabilising environments, immersive and performative installations, interactivity and ambivalent approaches to the audience became fertile modes in which artists engaged their spectators increasingly through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



(Illus.5). *The Host and the Cloud*, Pierre Huyghé. (2010). View of Pierre Huyghé's live event *The Host and the Cloud*, on Feb. 14, 2010; at the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires.

Abbas Kiarostami and Pierre Huyghé take these strategies and apply them to ‘real’ sites imbued with meaning to challenge the idea that we are now merely mobile labour in the film-set. Reality and fictions, history and the present, the real and unreal, the image and the event become blurred. These artists still work within a meta-narrative of how mass-cultural representations can become events themselves. Kiarostami works in a classic cinematic mode while Huyghé indicates how far the film-set has spread to other cultural institutions: museums, universities, art fairs and commercial galleries. In these events it becomes by no means clear who the spectator

even is: perhaps the artists explore what Anne Friedberg calls the loss of the spectator.<sup>99</sup>

In Abbas Kiarostami's *Under the Olive Trees*,(1993) the principal film set is a rural house ruined by the devastating Iran earthquake of 1990. Most of the actors are local villagers affected by the quake. The house is the central motif of the narrative and forms the potential for the boy to build his future dreams/plans for a life with Tehera, "I can rebuild this house, I used to be a stone-mason". The house is clearly a ruin: it appears to be a façade. It is freshly painted for the film shoot and through the doorway are seen crumbling walls and weeds growing. Kiarostami relates the real space of his actors and the earthquake zone to the artifice of the film-set to draw attention to the real life space he is situating his actors in.

In the production of this film there is only one production assistant, who performs multiple duties from set-dresser and wardrobe designer to assistant director. As a one-woman multiple production department she is the very antithesis of a large-scale industrial film. As viewers of this film we are often positioned with the crew sitting watching the production. We get to experience the repetition of take after take and soon realise this is a film for the villagers, not for us as viewers. It is a local event that Kiarostami has staged for them. It is also an event to challenge our Western-mediated consciousness of the Iranian people and the usual mode of production in Western film-making in general. Authorship and spectatorship are blurred. The Iranian villagers are productively labouring in this film-set.

By comparison, Pierre Huyghe sites his 2009-2010 festival, *The Host and the Cloud*, in the abandoned Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris, adjacent to an old amusement park. The Musée becomes an expanded film-set with multiple performance zones, behind-the-scene areas, dressing rooms and cast parties through which the 'guests' can roam. Events range over festival days during a year and involve costumes and props that both evoke the museum's material-culture past and point to a science-fiction future. Narratives of this 'experience' are written partly by the actors performing.<sup>100</sup> Mobile labour is thus positioned in relationship to the

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<sup>99</sup> Friedberg, 2006, pp. 1-8. Friedberg states this is a consequence of contemporary technology, specifically the computer and windows interface.

<sup>100</sup> Adams, 2010.

festival days of Halloween, Valentine's Day and May Day and in relationship to the history and future of the popular arts museum.

The museum's original establishment as a museum laboratory,<sup>101</sup> combining field research (particularly of rural French techniques) and material culture, also involved collecting popular tales and songs. The site, or film-set, is a museum in transition to a new paradigm of material culture at the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (MUCEM, in Marseille),<sup>102</sup> 'where past and the everyday intermingle with dreaming of the future'. MUCEM opens in 2013 on a symbolic anniversary celebration day.

With the rhetoric of the new ethnographic MUCEM (which seems to echo a populist reading of Blavatsky and de Certeau) as a living, placeless museum, for all peoples of Europe and the Mediterranean, the labour of 'spectators' has moved to the film-set as cultural museum. Huyghé offers the potential for a festival in a film-set that lacks borders, a transitional material culture museum that has not yet touched down to earth, perhaps never will, and is open for inscription of meaning. Yet this labour has its own borderless threats as power figures and symbols run as rampant as the cute French puppies in the foyer. Scenes of power and control are combined with frivolous fun such as the trial of someone accused of internet rape contrasted with a French supermodel in lingerie. The invited guests are left free to wander then gradually shepherded in one direction. The real, fictions and mass-cultural signifiers are all intertwined in this underground, and of course most people will still experience this event as a filmed document.

*The Host and the Cloud* indicates the shifting function of festivals as cultural and media events. Yet this project is situated in a site that, unlike most large-scale art fairs, is not defined by its desire to present an exotic location, with a wandering elite of artists to display a nation's cultural sophistication. Huyghé's art festival is un-sited and non-ideological. The freeing up of the imaginary may be presented as a mass mediated event but Huyghé frees up the location of the site, suggesting a mobile labour beyond the film-set.

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<sup>101</sup> Bouquet, 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Available at [www.musee-europemediterranee.org](http://www.musee-europemediterranee.org).

*“The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again”<sup>103</sup>*

*In thinking of de Certeau’s erasures and slippages inherent in Western historiography, and of Stewart’s dictum that writing ‘inscribes’ space, I sought some such slippages from the history of the Kingdom Come and NZCE sites. A range of alternative narratives seemed to radiate out from the potentiality of these sets: narratives that were either never narrated or were omitted by officials for their disruptive potential and so never could become inscribed for a spectator as a screen image. There was the potentiality of the crazy house at the NZCE to truly disrupt mobile spectatorship, and in the script of Kingdom Come, the film which remains unrealised, was included the omission from the Bible of what happened overnight to Jesus, the son of a carpenter, after he was flagellated in the house of Caiaphas. Stanley Murphy, choked to death in the observation hole of the Petone jail, who almost made it into the waxworks of the NZCE but was either erased in airbrush fashion or more innocently slipped out. W.B. Sutch’s report “Poverty and Progress in New Zealand” was likewise excluded from the Centennial publications. These slippages seemed to slip through earlier historiography of the original events yet to be making a re-appearance in the contemporary portrayal of the Passion of Christ<sup>104</sup> and the accounts of the NZCE.<sup>105</sup>*

*Sutch’s damning report, with its prose like socio-economic analysis ( he quotes from Dickens and popular pamphlets) was described as un-literary. Yet, possibly these slippages in history pose no challenge now. They indicate the potential at that time that real space and movement and historical accounts has to transgress the spatial shell of labour at the festival. There is the potential at the festival for a mobile labour beyond the film-set.*

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<sup>103</sup> Benjamin, 1999, p.247.

<sup>104</sup> Available at. [www.biblewalks.com](http://www.biblewalks.com).

<sup>105</sup> Maclean in Renwick, 2004, p.87-96.

## Conclusion

Jonathan Beller's analysis of the 'cinematic mode of production' has been central in posing a fundamental problem/ paradigm shift in contemporary spectatorship studies. This suggests that human vision and perception are now the predominant form of labour: they are productive for capital and this labour structures all social life. Although in the labour of looking Beller includes the sensual, affective spectator, his theory would seem to negate the practice of everyday life as it is formed in real space.

I used this paradigm shift and my own background in industrial film-set production as a launching pad for the research on how I might theorise and form a practice around new and unexpected labour relations that radiate outwards from the physical film-set. I also discovered a number of contemporary artists were finding the film-set fertile territory with which to re-inscribe meanings of labour.

Brosnan and Terziev's projects studied the experience of film extras on the large-scale Hollywood film production on location. With the set's unique ontology, its spatial dislocation from the site of authenticity and temporal transcendence, the extras, through evoking myth, could re-live and create anew the dreams of a better life in a new land. Yet these myths were also already inscribed within the meta-narrative of the film's script. Stewart's theories on longing and de Certeau's theory on erasures in history suggested that the film-set has the potential to recover desire and repressed and forgotten histories of particular ethnic groups. The simulacrum that the film-set creates enables it to function as myth and desire.

Lynch extended the cast of the film script to micro-histories of everyday individuals and groups benefiting from the *Spy* set in Dublin. His new script seemed to break free from the diegetic narratives of labour, yet the Travelers were still implicated in the politics of repression and separation embedded in the Berlin Wall set, and contemporary society.

For my installation at the NZFA I curated a group of early home filmmakers who crossed boundaries of amateur and professional filmmaking, as indicated by their experimental films. In re-creating sets from classic films noirs I positioned these

filmmakers in an international imaginary of the underground exemplified by the film noir criminal's escape from the labour of everyday life.

I wondered how Stewart's concept of the collection, with its magical and abstract nature of acquisition, might find me and transcend the fetishised labour inherent in the souvenir. Macuga's collection from multiple museum collections, curators and artists situated in the modernist Caligari set referenced utopian ideas of labour and transcendence in the metaphoric underground, potentially liberating a mobile spectator. The underground always represents and embodies an ambiguous zone caught between the limits of human labour and the promise of escape from the material world.

As I explored the sites of abandoned film-sets around Wellington I desired to work beyond the archive as ruin and monument, beyond a Heideggerian technological object as 'standing reserve'. I focused the research at the site of the Caiaphas house *Kingdom Come* set on the Miramar Peninsula, and by association the nearby film-set of the Centennial exhibition of 1940. I considered how theorists Caillois and Lefebvré positioned the festival as a site in opposition to daily work with the potential to break the 'spatial shell of labour'.

In considering how filmmaker Kiarostami and 'event manager' Huyghé situate their productions in 'real' sites imbued with cultural practices of labour, the festival is taken to a form where there possibly is no spectator, or the very notion of viewing as value-productive labour is shattered, yet problematised within the context of a global borderless mass imaginary that can potentially be controlled.

In the discovery of a locked away kitset film-set from *Kingdom Come* that had never been constructed, I saw the potential in inscribing a mode of labour that escaped the cinematic mode of production. My own film-technician's labour could be transformed, the labour of looking that this Biblical epic never managed to captivate could be inscribed with a priori meaning. This set could then possibly be set-dressed with a collection of narratives of a festival of truly productive labour.

In all this, I am seeking to prove that it is possible for artists to challenge the dominant visual realm associated with the film set. Hopefully my own work, but certainly that of many other artists, offers alternative models, revealing repressed

histories and aspects of social control, but perhaps most importantly pressing forward beyond the technological object of the film-set.

I seek to show that the analysis of labour associated with the film set opens up a network of diverse labour practices, imaginations and implications beyond Beller's labour of looking.

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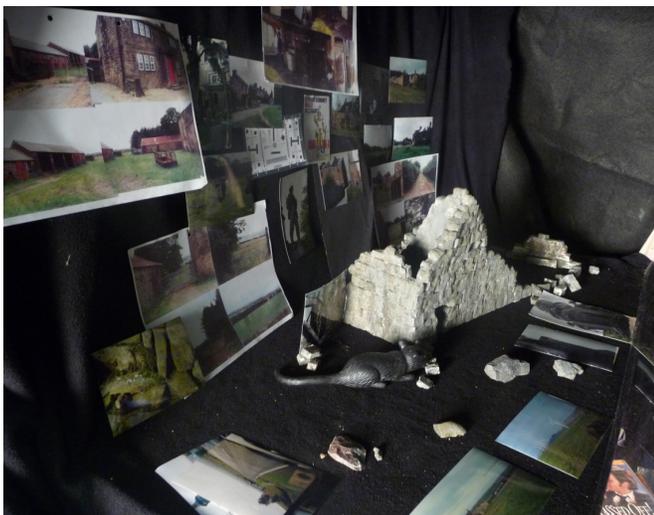
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## **Filmography:**

- 1920 The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene)
- 1923 The Ten Commandments (Cecil B. Demille)
- 1947 The Lady from Shanghai (Orson Welles)
- 1948 He Walked by Night (Alfred L. Werker)
- 1949 The Third Man (Orson Welles)
- 1965 The Spy who Came in From the Cold (Martin Ritt)
- 1993 Under the Olive Trees ( Abbas Kiarostami)
- 2002 Angel for May (Harley Cokeliss)
- 2003 The Last Samurai ( Edward Zwick)
- 2004 Troy (Wolfgang Petersen)
- 2005 The Worlds Fastest Indian ( Roger Donaldson)
- 2008 Kingdom Come ( Dean Wright)
- 2011 The Hobbit ( Peter Jackson)

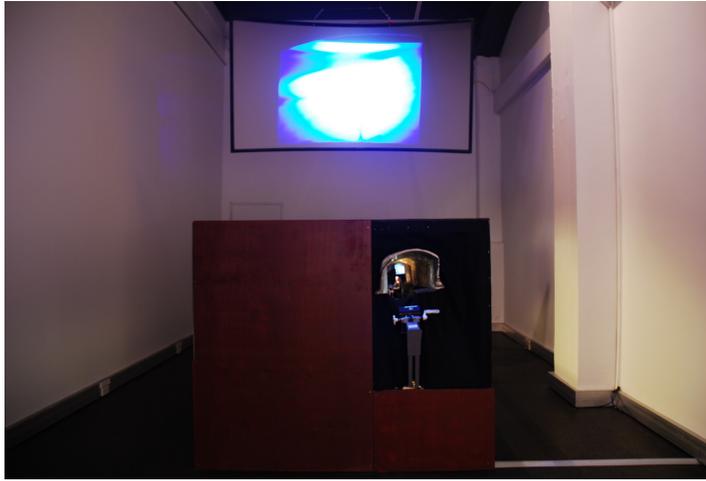
**Appendix 1. Angel for May: revisited (2010, Multimedia)**



**Appendix 2. Whitemans Valley Ranch, (2010, Digital Photographs)**



**Appendix 3. The Reel World: Home-made Movies (2010, Mixed media, NZFA).**



**Appendix 4. Caiaphas House, (2010, Digital Photographs)**



**Appendix 5. Caiaphas House Dive Experience (2010, Concept)**

