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# Temporal Landscapes

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

At Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

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2009

# Abstract

*Temporal Landscapes* is a research project concerned with culture-nature relations in the context of contemporary industrial land use in New Zealand; explored visually through the photographic representation and presentation of gold mining sites – former, current and prospective – in the Hauraki region. In the current period of industrial capitalism, featuring the mass exploitation of natural resources, nature is commonly thought of as subservient to humankind. This stance, with its origin in scientific ideology of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, is interesting to consider in relation to contemporary notions of landscape, and the ‘ideal’ in nature.

In New Zealand, a balance is being sought between interests of sustainability and conservation, and of industry and economy. This is not to say that industry opposes environmental safeguards; in contrast, sustainable management including the rehabilitation of land post-industrialisation is integral to modern mining practice in New Zealand. With this emphasis on controlled industrial progress, two key factors emerge. Firstly, this level of control implicates itself as a utopian vision, and secondly, industrialisation is advocated as a temporary situation, with industrial land as transitory, on the path to rehabilitation.

The research question of *Temporal Landscapes* asks; in considering contemporary industrial land use in New Zealand within a utopian framework – focussing specifically on gold mining in the Hauraki Region – has our ideal in nature become that of a controlled, even post-industrial, landscape? The photographic representation of these sites offers a means to explore and express their visual temporality. With the expectation of industrial sites as fleeting and rehabilitated sites as static utopias, it would seem that this industrial process is a kind of contemporary ideal. Presented as a flickering projection piece, *23 Views. (Prospective gold mining site, Golden Valley, Hauraki, 2008 / Martha gold mine and Favona gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki, 2008)*, and a set of selectively lit prints, *Untitled I. (Garden, pit rim walkway, Martha gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki, 2008)*, *Untitled II. (View of pit, former Golden Cross gold mine, Waitekauri Valley, Hauraki, 2008)*, and *Untitled III. (View of water treatment pond, former Golden Cross gold mine, Waitekauri Valley, Hauraki, 2008)*, they act as landscapes of partial comprehension.

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# Preface

This body of writing constitutes the written component of *Temporal Landscapes*, and consists of three main sections; *Nature as Entity*, *Landscape Re-envisioned* and *Camera and Consequence*. These are broken down into three sub-sections per section, covering subjects as follows.

*Nature as Entity* provides a context in which to explore contemporary culture-nature relations, with an interest in industrial land use. In *The Divine*, *The Rational* and *Towards Utopia?*, several ideologies concerning nature are introduced, spanning the 17<sup>th</sup> Century – the era of early modern science – to the present. This discussion of ways in which nature has been viewed and its resources utilised, relates directly to the premise of *Temporal Landscapes*, thus an introduction to the project is outlined here.

In *Landscape Re-envisioned*, a background of photographic landscape practice relevant to the *Temporal Landscapes* project is given, focussing on the time period of the 1970s to the present. The subsections *Topographic Revival*, *Beyond Dichotomy* and *The Systematic*, outline respectively the 1970's critique of traditional landscape practice, the multi-faceted nature of relevant contemporary large-scale group exhibitions, and the concept and framework of an artist as landscape researcher. These sections focus on methodology and intent in recent and contemporary photographic landscape practice. Discussed alongside this, are methodologies utilised in producing the studio component of *Temporal Landscapes*.

In *Camera and Consequence*, it is the medium of photography itself and the camera device that are under scrutiny. In *Memory Device/Devising Memory*, the recording ability of the camera and its documentary claims are discussed. *The Acceleration of Loss* is centred on a discussion of Virilio's concept of 'cultural amnesia' resulting from the proliferation of optical devices and the role of mass media in contemporary society. In *Ambiguity and Incomprehension*, issues of communication between the contemporary fine art photograph and the viewer is discussed. These topics relate essentially to problematic issues encountered in the production of the *Temporal Landscapes* project, and thus conceptual and practical strategies utilized to address these concerns in the work are noted. Also outlined is what *Temporal Landscapes* seeks to achieve, as a body of research.

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