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Temporal Landscapes

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

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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 17th 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 17th 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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Nature as Entity

The Divine

The *Temporal Landscapes* project concerns itself with the contemporary mineral exploitation industry in New Zealand, focussing specifically on goldmining in the Hauraki region. The visual component began with creating source material, in the photographing of pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial sites in the specified locality (Fig. 1, see also Appendix, Plates 1-12). The project holds an interest in current views on natural resource management and sustainability, and the temporal nature of the landscape through phases of industrialisation. So a starting point for discussion here is, what is ‘nature’ and what do we – humankind – expect from it?



Fig. 1, Shelley Jacobson, *Tailings Lake, Martha Mine, Waihi* 2008.

There exists a Post-Enlightenment Western tradition of placing nature within an Edenic narrative, in its representation in art discourse and practice.¹ While Judeo-Christian in origin, this narrative has seen different incarnations over time in the support of various ideologies, whether regarding nature as an original or a potential Eden. Of discussion here are several such agendas of interest, namely 17th and 18th Century links between nature, morality and the sublime;² the notion, in the same time period, of nature as a wilderness needing to be controlled and cultivated by man for a return to ‘the garden’;³ the concept of nature as fragile in need of preservation, evident in environmentalist discourse from the 1950’s onwards;⁴ and nature and the post-modern in the form of a contemporary sublime.⁵ These ideologies are interesting to consider in relation to how they have shaped – and still shape – contemporary understanding and expectations of nature, with an interest particularly in a New Zealand context.

The theorist Edmund Burke (1730-97) writing in 1756 defined the sublime, saying; “Whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*. That is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”⁶ Burke described this emotion as

resulting from experiencing the grandeur of nature or a work of art; it arises out of an acknowledgement of the Divine, and humankind being comparatively inconsequential.⁷ Burke advocated that moral enlightenment was to be gained from engaging with nature, given nature's divine status.⁸ A subsequent theorist, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), shared Burke's view of nature as offering moral enlightenment.⁹ Emerson, who heralded the idea of Transcendentalism; a philosophy seeking intuition and the divine, had a noticeable influence upon other writers and artists, notably Thoreau, and painters of The Hudson River School,¹⁰ for example Thomas Cole (Fig. 2-6). Both parties followed theories of communing with nature for spiritual benefit, resulting in an essentially romantic depiction of nature.



Fig. 2, Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire – Savage State*. 1836.



Fig. 3, Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire – Pastoral State*. 1836.



Fig. 4, Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire – Consummation of the Empire*. 1836.

The 17th and 18th Century was a period of transition, with an increased focus on mechanisation and industrialisation in Western society. Thus, cultural thinking surrounding nature was changing, with the idea of man asserting dominance over nature gaining currency.¹¹ This can be seen as a conscious step away from the notion of nature as divine. This shift has been described as nature being understood as a wilderness after the Fall, with cultivation required by man to return it to garden status.¹² This intervention can be seen in Thomas Cole's series *The Course of Empire*, 1836 (see Fig. 2-6), displaying an awareness of culture's desire to control the environment. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), known as a pioneer of modern science, advocated the view of nature as subservient to man,¹³ and he has been cited as bringing science to a point of moral neutrality.¹⁴ Arguably Bacon's thesis is a view that has held sway ever since, in the context of industrial capitalism. This ideology in a contemporary context will be discussed in the following section, *The Rational*.



Fig. 5, Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire – Destruction*. 1836.



Fig. 6, Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire – Desolation*. 1836.

In recent times, given the realisation of the wide-ranging environmental effects of industrialisation, nature has been guised as a fragile entity requiring protection and preservation. Theorists such as Rebecca Solnit have suggested that environmentalist discourse has developed as a modern take on the – formally religious – morality of nature, with the belief in man as sinful, and in a paradise lost.¹⁵ The guilt associated with this belief has been described as integral to the Western psyche, in effect implicating society as a whole as carrying a cultural burden of remorse.¹⁶ The landscape photography of Ansel Adams in post-World War II America is an early example of the advocacy of wilderness preservation (Fig. 7). His views of pristine wilderness reinforced the notion of nature as external to humanity, in this sense following the tradition of the romantic sublime.¹⁷ Both depictions of nature were intended to inspire awe, but the difference is that nature went from being an all-powerful divine entity, to a fragile, dominated one. It is worth noting that given Adams' position on the importance of nature preservation, he did acknowledge, verbally, humankind's place in nature and its consequent adverse effects,¹⁸ thus it is arguable that he was using this notion of separateness as a strategy to promote the saviour of wilderness.



Fig. 7, Ansel Adams, *Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite National Park, California*. 1944.

While Ansel Adams' work was successful in raising awareness of the importance of wilderness preservation, and in advocating controls over natural resource management, it has in more recent years been criticised for its narrow view of land preservation.¹⁹ The practice of preserving one piece of 'wilderness', to the detriment of other sites, has been

described as insufficient and essentially hypocritical.²⁰ In New Zealand, the photographer Craig Potton has favoured a similar approach to Adams, in his depiction of untouched wilderness areas, and his role as a wilderness preservation activist (Fig. 8). Often collaborating with scientists, such as ecologist Geoff Park, in publications, this work takes on an educational intent. Both Adams and Potton have sought to create work with a moral imperative, calling for the viewer to act upon and redress their ‘cultural guilt’.



Fig. 8, Craig Potton, *Storm, Milford Sound, Fiordland National Park*. n.d.

Explorations of the sublime and romantic depictions of nature have also been utilised outside of activist discourse, reassessed and articulated in relation to contemporary concerns of industrialisation, post-industrialisation and globalisation.²¹ Focussed on here will be the work of contemporary German photographer Andreas Gursky and the 1960's and 70's Earth Art of Robert Smithson in America. Smithson's work is interesting to consider as it came about at a time when humankind's dominant place in nature was being critically explored. Nature and humanity became understood as inseparable, and the study of the ‘cultural landscape’ became a discipline in its own right, with the theorist J. B. Jackson a pioneer in the field. Jackson produced key literature exploring landscape as an entity, entwined with culture in its social and political complexities, as opposed to separate.²²

The Earth Art movement of the 1960's and 70's saw artists venturing out of the gallery space and into the landscape, creating site specific artworks, often constructed with resources found onsite. Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* 1970 (Fig. 9) is one such example, where he created a large-scale spiral in Great Salt Lake, Utah, made of boulders and earth. An ongoing concern in his work was the state of post-industrial land and land-reclamation, and in describing the site of *Spiral Jetty*, he claimed that it “gave evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes.”²³ The practice of Earth Art has been linked to Emersonian ideals of Transcendentalism and to Romanticism.²⁴ Supporting this theory, such work was a form of communion with nature, often resulting in large scale, grand interventions in the landscape. In contrast with romanticism and transcendentalism

however, the works factor in the damaged landscape, with an interest in geology, entropy and degradation.²⁵



Fig. 9, Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake, Utah, April 1970*.

Andreas Gursky has been linked to Romanticism, in his depiction of a contemporary sublime (Fig. 10). His large-scale photographs, featuring homogenous scenes of buildings and people en masse, place globalisation as the source of the sublime.²⁶ The teaching he received from topographic photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher (Fig. 11) is evident in his work in his rigorous image making technique. He departs from their method in that the Bechers sought to create a visual typology of physical manifestations of industry, situated in a modernist discourse of the 1950's.²⁷ Gursky, situated firmly in the post-modern, photographs varied scenes, utilising manipulation as he sees fit, seeking to convey meaning through allegory. Surprisingly, his work has been described as celebrating the potential of globalisation,²⁸ which one could suggest, is an ill-founded claim. As Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe has said, "technology has subsumed the idea of the sublime because it, whether to a greater or an equal extent than nature, is terrifying in the limitless unknowability of its potential."²⁹ One could suggest that rather it is this terror, this unknowability, which interests Gursky.



Fig. 10, Andreas Gursky, *Paris, Montparnasse*. 1993.



Fig. 11, Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Pitheads*. 1974.

On an international scale, as well as in New Zealand, landscape as a practice has supported –and still does – ideologies concerning nature and land use. It would seem that all such ideologies situate themselves on a line between respect and exploitation; one could suggest that in practice many fall somewhere in the middle, grey zone. In New Zealand, the aforementioned photographer Craig Potton is exemplarily of the conservation movement

that gained prominence in the 1970's. The implications of this movement for industrial practice, alongside public awareness and views of nature, will be discussed in *Towards Utopia?*

Notes

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- ² Ohlin, A. (2002). 'Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime'. *Art Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 4, pp. 23-35. p. 23. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778148>
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- ⁶ Edmund Burke, cited Ohlin 2002, p. 23
- ⁷ ibid
- ⁸ Egan, N. (2007). 'Loaded Landscapes'. *Museum of Contemporary Photography*. n.p. Retrieved from http://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2007/08/loaded_landscap.php
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- ¹⁰ ibid
- ¹¹ Solnit 2001, pp. 20-21
- ¹² Merchant 1996, p. 134
- ¹³ Smith, N. (1990). *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. p. 3. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd.
- ¹⁴ Solnit 2001, p. 20
- ¹⁵ Solnit 2001, p. 11; Strand, G. (2008). *All the Limits: Landscape, Landscape and the Land*. In Markonish, D. (Ed.). *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, (pp. 81-88). p. 86. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art; Nelson Limerick, P. (1999). *Paradise Altered*. In Pool, P. E. (Ed.). *The Altered Landscape*, (p. 1-21). p. 12. Reno: University of Nevada Press
- ¹⁶ Candee Slater, cited Solnit 2001, p. 12
- ¹⁷ Southall, T. W. (1999). *Where We Stand*. In Pool, P. E. (Ed.). *The Altered Landscape*, (p. 33-49). p. 34. Reno: University of Nevada Press
- ¹⁸ Ansel Adams, cited Stillman, A. G. & Turnage, W. A. (1992). *Ansel Adams: Our National Parks*. pp. 112-113 Boston: Little, Brown and Company
- ¹⁹ Southall, 1999, p. 34

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- ²⁰ Lopez, B. (1990). 'Unbounded Wilderness'. *Aperture #120 Beyond Wilderness*, pp. 2-15. p.2;
Jackson, W. (1990). 'Wilderness as Saint'. *Aperture #120 Beyond Wilderness*, pp. 50-55. p.50
- ²¹ Ohlin 2002, pp. 23-24
- ²² Jackson, J. B. (1979). The Order of a Landscape: Reason and Religion in Newtonian America. In Meinig, D. W. (Ed.). *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, (p.153-163). p.153. New York: Oxford University Press
- ²³ Robert Smithson, cited Beardsley, J. (1991). *Earthworks: The Landscape After Modernism*. In Wrede, S. & Adams, W. H. (Eds.). *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (pp. 110-117). p. 115. New York: The Museum of Modern Art
- ²⁴ Volk 2008, p.180; Rosenblum, R. (1993). 'A Postscript: Some Recent Neo-Romantic Mutations'. *Art Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 74-84. p.74. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777241>
- ²⁵ Volk 2008, p. 180
- ²⁶ Ohlin 2002, p. 24
- ²⁷ Ohlin 2002, p. 25
- ²⁸ Begg, Z. (2005). 'Recasting Subjectivity'. *Third Text*, Vol. 19, No. 6, pp. 625-636. pp.625-6. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528820500381640>
- ²⁹ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, cited Ohlin 2002, p. 31

The Rational

It has been argued in cultural geography discourse that industrial capitalism has shaped the way nature is viewed in contemporary society, and that a human-dominated nature is accepted as reality; whether decried or celebrated.¹ The advent of industrial capitalism has ensured that Baconian ideals have lived on, with natural resources being viewed and treated as commodities. Carolyn Merchant has described this domination as a “nature-culture dualism”, a hierarchy resulting in the advance of civilisation at the expense of nature.² She has posited that this hierarchy along with mechanisation are the core concepts of modernity.³ This issue is visible, and can thus be examined, in the genre of survey photography, looking at 19th Century, 1970’s and contemporary examples, in its use to justify or alternately critique industrial expansion.

The 19th Century survey photographer Carleton Watkins produced views of the American West in the 1860’s, a time when industrial and residential expansion into the area was imminent (Fig. 12). He undertook surveys for the California State Geological Survey and Pacific Railroads among others, representing the land as a wilderness awaiting and welcoming exploitation.⁴ At this time photography enjoyed a reputation as scientific, mechanical, and objective. Watkins’ approach, in its representation of wilderness, is said to have been revered and appropriated by many photographers in America, up until the time – and inclusive of – Ansel Adams.⁵



Fig. 12, Carleton E. Watkins, *Malakoff Diggins, North Bloomfield, Nevada County, California. Ca. 1871.*

From the 1970’s a re-emerging interest in topography is evident in photographic practice, notably the 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man Altered Landscape*, held at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. The term ‘topography’ has been defined as, “The detailed and accurate description of a particular place, city, town, district, state, parish or tract of land.”⁶ In *New Topographics*, an interest in cultural land use and the changing state of land typified the work. Also in the 1970’s, Mark Klett undertook a

rephotographic survey in the American West, with a team of photographers and art historians. Entitled *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project 1977-9*, the work involved rephotographing 19th Century views (1860s-70's) produced by photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan and William Henry Jackson. With a precise approach to reproduction, including location, angle of view and lighting, information was learnt regarding the 19th Century photographers' techniques, and the project effectively charted changes in the landscape – whether natural or cultural – over the course of a Century.

Mark Klett went on to produce *Third Views, Second Sights: A Rephotographic Survey of the American West*, between 1997 and 2000 (Fig. 13). This essentially updated *Second View*, adding an additional timeframe. An interesting aspect of *Third View* is that an emphasis was placed upon recording the context of making the work.⁷ This included field notes, on site video and audio clips, and interviews, resulting in a DVD accompanying the *Third View* publication, as well as a web based version. Klett has described the project as encompassing multiple fields, including photography, history, the natural and social sciences, and interactive media; favouring collaboration in the quest for a new model for landscape practice.⁸ Klett's training as a geologist prior to becoming a photographer would have no doubt factored into this multi-disciplinary approach.



Fig. 13, From left to right: Timothy O'Sullivan, 1868. Virginia City, Comstock Mines. (University of New Mexico.), Mark Klett for the Rephotographic Survey Project, 1979. Strip mines at the site of Comstock Mines, Virginia City, Nev, Mark Klett and Byron Wolfe for the Third View Project, 1998. Strip mines at the site of Comstock Mines, Virginia City, Nev.

In New Zealand, the photographer Wayne Barrar has, since the 1970's, produced work exploring cultural land use (Fig. 14). Aligned with the Topographic Movement in America, his work utilises documentary and survey techniques to articulate issues of interest. Barrar, in his 1993 *Shifting Nature* catalogue stated, "We (in New Zealand) are experiencing a strong shift towards a controlled and modified landscape. Land is a resource that must "perform"... We encourage a clean green New Zealand image while our surroundings become increasingly humanised."⁹ Barrar's work, as that of the rephotographic survey projects, and New Topographics, critiques the man-altered landscape in opposition to 19th

Century survey photography, when such practice was utilised as a tool to promote expansion. It would seem that this critique, established in the 1970's, still holds currency today, and will be discussed further in *Landscape Re-envisioned*.



Fig. 14, Wayne Barrar, *Twin tunnels, Manapouri Underground Power Station*. 2005.

Notes

¹ Smith, N. (1990). *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. p. 1. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd.

² Merchant, C. (1990). *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. p. 144. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers

³ Merchant 1990, p. 2

⁴ Snyder, J. (2000). *Territorial Photography*. In Mitchell, W. J. T. (Ed.). *Landscape and Power*, (p.175-201). p. 185, 187. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

⁵ Snyder 2002, p. 183

⁶ Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 2nd ed., cited Jenkins, W. (1975). *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*. p. 6. New York: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House

⁷ Klett, M. (2004). *Third View Second Sites: A Rephotographic Survey of the American West*. p. 5. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press

⁸ Klett 2004, p. 8

⁹ Barrar, W. (1993). *Shifting Nature: A Photographic Series by Wayne Barrar*. p. 6. Wanganui: The Sarjeant Gallery

Towards Utopia?

Rebecca Solnit has stated, “Eden and Paradise represent what we often desire when we go into the unaltered landscape or alter the landscape to make it suit us, and Eden, Paradise, Arcadia and the Promised Land lurk behind most political and environmental arguments, since they are arguments about how to make the world better.”¹ These aspirations, like utopia, are motifs used in agendas to dictate and control use of the environment. In New Zealand, the recent push for sustainable management of natural resources – perhaps most obvious in the implementation of the 1991 Resource Management Act (RMA) – suggests a form of utopianism.

Utopianism has been described not as an ideology - given its various manifestations - but rather “a method of reflecting on politics and society...”² The word “utopia” was coined by Thomas Moore, derived from the Greek words “ou” and “topos”, meaning “no place.”³ Utopias exist primarily as literary fiction, often depicting an ideal society based upon rationality, order and harmony.⁴ Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1623) (the scientist introduced in *The Divine*) is one such example. Utopian vision, quite popular in the 20th Century has however been recently criticised; its ‘humane’ nature questioned, given the rejection of human freedom in Utopias.⁵ In fiction, utopias can subscribe to the idea of a mechanical utopia, or alternately an organic utopia. W. H. Auden has described Utopians, in one would assume a mechanical framework, saying that technology is seen by Utopians as a tool in the creation of what they believe to be a perfectible future.⁶

Looking at the contemporary mineral exploitation industry in New Zealand, which is governed by the RMA regarding environmental effects, and the 1991 Crown Minerals Act controlling rights to mine, a delicate balance is being sought between conservation and the industrial economy. Gold mining companies place great emphasis upon the planned rehabilitation of land post-mining, and the creation of conservation programmes in the area. Gold of course is a non-renewable resource, and thus gains special mention in the RMA, when it describes one of the legislation’s core purposes being, “...sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations...”⁷ This point is raised not to suggest that an entirely preservationist view is the right one, but rather it should be acknowledged that mineral exploitation is not a sustainable practice, and any mitigation during such industrial operations can not make it so. This point, alongside industry’s advocacy of industrialised land as temporal – with the land as rehabilitated emphasised – raises the interesting query of

whether – and if so how – this ‘image’ has and is shaping our view of both nature and industrial land. The revised research question for *Temporal Landscapes* thus became: In considering contemporary industrial land use in New Zealand within a utopian framework, has our ideal in nature become that of a controlled, even post-industrial, landscape?

Notes

¹ Solnit, R. (2001). *As Eve said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender, and Art*. p. 1. Georgia: University of Georgia Press

² Goodwin, cited Donskis, L. (1997). *The End of Utopia*. In Buck-Morss, S., Stallabrass, J. & Donskis, L. (Eds.). *Ground Control: Technology and Utopia*. (pp. 122-172). p. 136. European Union: Black Dog Publishing Ltd.

³ Solnit 2001, p. 22

⁴ Wiener, P. P. (1973). ‘Utopia’. *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. n.p. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. Retrieved from <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv4-62>

⁵ Donskis 1997, p. 124

⁶ W. H. Auden, cited Solnit 2001, p. 8

⁷ Ministry for the Environment. (2006). *Your Guide to the Resource Management Act*. p. 6
Wellington: Ministry for the Environment

Landscape Re-envisioned

Topographic Revival

The widespread and ongoing interest in topographic photography resulting from the *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man Altered Landscape* exhibition of 1975 (introduced in *The Rational*) raised the still relevant question; what should photography provide the viewer with, by way of meaning, in the articulation of land use issues? Furthermore, what can it provide? What follows is a discussion of the topographic style showcased in the aforementioned exhibition, alongside several key opinions on this approach, and its impact on contemporary articulation of the landscape in photographic practice.

In *New Topographics*, contributing artists including Robert Adams (Fig.15), Lewis Baltz (Fig. 16) and Bernd and Hilla Becher (see Fig. 11, p.13), utilized a deadpan, morally ambiguous, ironic aesthetic, to portray landscapes as created or affected by society.¹ Man's dominant role in nature was at the forefront, in opposition to dominant Western landscape tradition of nature as external and eternal;² thus this exhibition acted as a departure point for future photographic landscape practice. The Topographic Movement initially sought realism and truth, a reaction to the typical beautified landscape image.³ The desire for objectivity⁴ is evident not only in the deadpan aesthetic of the work, but also in the use of the word 'topographics', a term that has been said to reference mapmaking, "an act of description in which an infallible and impossible perspective is given to its user for the purpose of navigation."⁵



Fig. 15, Robert Adams, *Mobile homes, Jefferson County, Colorado, 1973*.



Fig. 16, Lewis Baltz, *Alton Road at Murphy Road looking toward Newport Center, 1974*.

However, it is this distanced view – and its resulting ambiguity – which has caused contention over the integrity of the work. Writing in 1985, Deborah Bright, in her rather scathing commentary of current photographic practice, shunned *New Topographics* for its lack of apparent social criticism.⁶ It has since been claimed that Bright failed to recognise the irony implicit in the work.⁷ Recently writing in relation to *The Altered Landscape*

Collection at the Nevada Museum of Art, Patricia Nelson Limerick praised the work in *New Topographics* for making viewers think for themselves, in that the work offered no easy answers.⁸ In the wider context of ‘altered’ land, Nelson Limerick is wary of the polemic paired terms in circulation, such as “good and bad”, “improvement and injury”, which in her view over-simplify and structure attitudes and legislation regarding this field.⁹ Thus, her opinion regarding *New Topographics* correlates with this. With this in mind, does the approach of *New Topographics* encourage a wider latitude of viewer responses? Is this effective?

Kelly Dennis has claimed that the ethical ambiguity and irony favoured by *New Topographics* photographers were artistic devices; ambiguity to critique the viewer,¹⁰ and irony to “expose false consciousness.”¹¹ If this were the case, then one would assume it was a calculated approach on the part of the photographer, thus a call for the viewer to piece together the meaning of the work as they saw fit. As to its effectiveness, this is an endlessly debatable point. At the time of production, the work was of an approach new to many; thus one could argue that effectiveness could be derived from the shock departure from the known. As a practice today however, when topographic photography is widely known and used, this approach needs conscious deliberation and revision in order to contribute to landscape practice and dialogue. Instances of contemporary topographic photography will be considered in the following sections, *Beyond Dichotomy* and *The Systematic*.

Notes

¹ Dennis, K. (2005). *Landscape and the West: Irony and Critique in New Topographic Photography*. A paper presented at the Forum UNESCO University and Heritage 10th International Seminar “Cultural Landscapes in the 21st Century” Newcastle-upon-Tyne, April 11-16, 2005. p. 4. Retrieved from <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/unescolandscapes/files/DENNISKelly.pdf>

² Hickey, D. (1999). *Shooting the Land*. In Pool, P. E. (Ed.). *The Altered Landscape*, (p.22-32). p. 25
Reno: University of Nevada Press

³ Hickey 1999, p. 32

⁴ Hickey, D. (1999). *Shooting the Land*. In Pool, P. E. (Ed.). *The Altered Landscape*, (p.22-32). p. 5.
Reno: University of Nevada Press

⁵ Miller, A. (2005). ‘Making Land’. *Camerawork: A Journal of Photographic Arts*, vol. 32 no. 1, pp. 14-19, p. 18.

⁶ Bright, D. (1993). *Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Man: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography*. In Bolton, R. (ed.). *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, (pp. 124-142). p. 133. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press

⁷ Dennis 2005, p . 2

⁸ Nelson Limerick, P. (1999). *Paradise Altered*. In Pool, P. E. (Ed.). *The Altered Landscape*, (p. 1-21). p. 2. Reno: University of Nevada Press

⁹ Nelson Limerick 1999, p. 10

¹⁰ Dennis 2005, p. 4

¹¹ Craig Owens, cited Dennis 2005, p. 5

Beyond Dichotomy

“Landscape, in its many incarnations from the picturesque to the sublime, documentary or imagined, has been a vehicle of ideology, constructing our perception of nature out of a sociocultural complex of ideas and beliefs.”¹ With this in mind, what are landscapes saying today? Or perhaps more accurately, who is using landscape, and to what end? Looking at two large-scale group exhibitions held recently in America, *Ecotopia* (2006) and *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape* (2008), interesting dialogue comes to light.

Curator Brian Wallis described the work in *Ecotopia*, the International Centre of Photography’s second photography and video triennial, as by and large ‘anti-landscape’; that is, a rejection of traditional landscape depiction.² The question that immediately comes to mind is; what are the links between this work and the iconic ‘anti-landscape’ work of the 1970’s, notably the Topographic movement? Where does this work depart from what has come before? This also can, and will be asked of the *Temporal Landscapes* project. Wallis also makes the claim that landscape is an outmoded genre,³ which one would take to mean traditional notions of landscape, as opposed to more recent incarnations of landscape practice, given the work of topographic photographers of the 1970’s continuing through the 1980’s and beyond. Discussed in relation to this issue will be the video work of Marine Hugonnier, featured in both *Ecotopia* and *Badlands*, and the digital imagery of Jane D. Marsching, shown in *Badlands*. Also discussed will be the issue raised by both *Ecotopia* and *Badlands* in what role photography can play – if any – in environmental activism, in relation to two concepts touched on in *The Divine*; ‘cultural guilt’ and what David Maisel describes as an ‘apocalyptic sublime’.⁴

The works in the *Badlands* exhibition were organised into four categories; ‘The Historians’, ‘The Explorers’, ‘The Activists and Pragmatists’ and ‘The Aestheticists’. Curator Denise Markonish described these categories, referring to ‘The Historians’ as critiquing traditional landscape practice, ‘The Explorers’ as utilizing site-based practice, ‘The Activists and Pragmatists’ as highlighting environmental problems or offering solutions to such, and ‘The Aestheticists’ as exploring the beauty of nature.⁵ These categories represent different approaches to engaging with the land and landscape practice, attesting to the diversity of the exhibition.

The category that held the most affinity to *Temporal Landscapes* was ‘The Explorers’ category, with its focus on site based, experiential practice as methodology. Marine

Hugonnier's film *Ariana* 2003 (Fig.17) was included in this category, part of a trilogy also including, *The Last Tour* 2004 (Fig.18) and *Travelling Amazonia* 2006 (Fig.19).

Interestingly *The Last Tour* was featured in *Ecotopia*. Each of the three films were shot in different locations, and had different concerns, but the underlying link was an interest in 'the gaze'; *Ariana* in Afghanistan was centred on the military gaze; *The Last Tour* in Switzerland focussed on the tourist gaze; *Travelling Amazonia* in Brazil, on what inspires the gaze.⁶ In Afghanistan, the work developed around the film crew's failure to access a vantage point to create a panorama of the Panjshir Valley; in Switzerland, the Swiss Alps featured as a backdrop to a fictitious 'Age of Spectacle' at its end, with tourist sites about to be closed off; in Brazil, dolly and tracks were constructed upon the Trans-Amazonian Road – a 6,000 mile long road across the Amazon – in order to create a 'travelling shot' along an idealistic, pioneering route that is the Trans-Amazonian.⁷ Thus, this body of work assesses the culture of viewing, and landscape as spectacle.



Fig. 17, Marine Hugonnier, Still from *Ariana*. 2003.

Fig. 18, Marine Hugonnier, Still from *The Last Tour*. 2004.

Fig. 19, Marine Hugonnier, Still from *Travelling Amazonia*. 2006.

This work is relevant in its explorative nature, in that it was formed around a preconceived idea, but then relied on site-based experience and discovery in its culmination. Its finished state as a three part piece is interesting also, in that such an approach allows for a more complex reading of the work; they can be viewed separately, but also as a linked whole, making cross references. For a discussion of linked output in *Temporal Landscapes*, see *The Acceleration of Loss*. When relating Hugonnier's trilogy to topographic photography, one could describe it as imagined topography; given that one of the films was set in a fictional age, all of them refer to the desire behind looking at landscape and using land, and the work is of an inherently individual, subjective nature. This departs from the traditional expectation of topography as objective and accurate. Given that it is an exploration of culture's place in nature and human expectations of nature, the work could be seen as a contemporary interpretation of the 1970's 'anti-landscape'.

Jane D. Marsching's ongoing research project *Arctic Listening Post* (2005-2009), was featured in part in *Badlands*. This is interesting to consider in relation to her placement in 'The Explorers' because she did not travel to the Arctic to produce the work. Rather, her initial work for *Arctic Listening Post* was *Deep North: A Virtual Expedition to the North Pole* (2005), which involved web-based research – or exploration rather – and a weblog. *Future North: Ecotarium* (2008) (Fig. 20) displayed in *Badlands*, was a collaboration between Marsching and the organization Terreform, consisting of a video piece predicting the effects of climate change over the next hundred years on the habitat of human populations, with the design of 'ecotariums' as a new kind of city.⁸ Like Hugonnier, Marsching's *Arctic Listening Post* favours a kind of imagined topography, in her technique of creating computer-simulated landscapes and with her utilisation of web-based exploring.



Fig. 20, Jane D. Marsching and Terreform, *Future North: Ecotarium*. 2008.

Arctic Listening Post is notable in the level of collaboration utilized across a variety of disciplines, including art, climatology, and glaciology to name a few. It's suitability to a web-based output means that the research is very accessible, and its multi-disciplinary nature and thoroughness place the work as a usable resource for those interested in the Arctic and key issues affecting the region, such as climate change. This approach, like the *Third View* project outlined in *The Rational*, gives an indication of the potential for such diversified collaboration in contemporary art. While collaboration was not utilised in *Temporal Landscapes*, it is relevant to the discussion of contemporary strategies of topographic photography and wider landscape practice. Also key to both projects is a level of transparency in the documenting of processes, such as Marsching's weblog and the field notes of *Third View*. In the following section, *The Systematic*, such attention to methodology in contemporary photographic landscape practice will be discussed.

The issue of art and activism is prominent in the curatorial and artist led discussion in the *Ecotopia* publication, and in the text of the *Badlands* publication. Focussing on *Ecotopia*, many artists in the exhibition did not believe that art could induce concrete social change.⁹ Some believed that art, alongside other impetus could produce change, and several of the

artists did in fact see their work as activist.¹⁰ Notably, Mark Dion raised the idea of a ‘cultural guilt’ that Western society feels over our treatment of the landscape,¹¹ a notion discussed in *The Divine*. It could be argued that landscape photography such as that by David Maisel (Fig. 21), in its seeking of an ‘apocalyptic sublime’,¹² could be a response to this guilt because it reads like a lament, to a nature lost. The work of Maisel, that of Gursky who was discussed in *The Divine* (see Fig. 10, p.13), and that of others favouring industrial grandeur such as Edward Burtynsky (Fig. 22), places the altered landscape as sublime, industrialisation, globalisation as sublime; a depiction equal parts wonder, fear and sadness. Like the Earth Art of the 1970’s discussed in *The Divine* (see Fig. 9, p.13), it favours grandeur yet also entropy. The dichotomy of respect versus exploitation creates a dilemma for critical thought and action.



Fig. 21, David Maisel, Surveillance 976–8, 2005.

Fig. 22, Edward Burtynsky, Carrara Marble Quarries # 28, Carrara, Italy, 1993.

Notes

¹ Miller, A. (2005). ‘Making Land’. *Camerawork: A Journal of Photographic Arts*, vol. 32 no. 1, pp. 14-19, p. 15

² Brian Wallis, cited Lehan, J. (2006). *Ecotopia: The Second Triennial of Photography and Video*. p. 11. Gottingen: Steidl Publishers, in conjunction with the International Centre of Photography, New York

³ *ibid*

⁴ David Maisel, cited Lehan 2006, p. 23

⁵ Markonish, D. (2008). *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*. p. 14. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art

⁶ Markonish 2008, p. 108

⁷ Hugonnier, M. (2009). *Marine Hugonnier: Works*. n.p. Retrieved from <http://www.marinehugonnier.com/film.php?media=1&serie=1&oeuvre=1>

⁸ Marsching, J. (2009). *Arctic Listening Post 2005-2009*. n.p. Retrieved from <http://www.janemarsching.com/arctic/index.html>

⁹ Lehan 2006, pp. 25-26

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Mark Dion, cited Lehan 2006, p .17

¹² David Maisel, cited Lehan 2006, p .23

The Systematic

Liz Wells, in her essay *Landscape, Geography and Topographic Photography* (2006), argues that today, the landscape photograph's authority relies on the methodology of the photographer; outlining a framework that places the artist as a landscape researcher.¹ If this is the case, then must this methodology be evident in the finished work for it to be credible? If so, how can this be achieved? Discussed here will be the quintessential systematic photographers, Bernd and Hilla Becher, providing a historical precedent, and more recently, *A System of Edges* (2003-2006) by British photographer Mark Power, as well as the work of an American organisation, the Centre for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI). Also discussed will be several motivating factors in the methodology of *Temporal Landscapes*.

As outlined in *The Divine*, the Bechers (see Fig. 11, p.13) began producing typologies of industrial architecture in the 1950's. They paid great attention to achieving flat light, monotone grey sky and a consistent composition and angle of view. Thus, they created large archives of various forms of vernacular industrial architecture. Like the topographic style, of which they were to contribute to, the work sought a detached, objective view.² The way their images were presented, formed in grids, emphasises their act of compiling and comparing instances of modern industry. Their systematic methodology is clear at face value, which fits Wells' model. From a contemporary perspective, the Bechers' approach has its context in the era of its production, due to its now famous and iconic status (as mentioned previously in relation to *New Topographics*). Furthermore, if this approach was to be appropriated by others in a contemporary context, it is possible that it would be received as too straightforward, too literal in the current art climate favouring allegory, metaphor and the ambiguous. For a discussion of this situation, see *Ambiguity and Incomprehension*.

Mark Power, who is mentioned in Wells' discussion of the artist researcher, undertook and exhibited a project *A System of Edges*, (Fig. 23, 24) which was also released as a publication under the name of *26 Different Endings*. The work documented sites that fell just outside of the boundary of London, as dictated by the *A-Z London Street Atlas*, whose borders tend to change year to year, in different editions.³ Each photograph is entitled with map coordinates, including the direction of view looking outward from the map edge. The views depicted range from a row of well cared for homes, to a refuse filled no-mans land, to a container filled industrial park, to a communal park. All are captured in flat light, with a subdued palette. Careful composition is apparent, and notably, all are given equal

importance. The titles of the work, alongside Power's introduction, ensure that his methodology is evident when viewed by others. Compared with the photographic approach of the Bechers, Power's photography is similar in that the work is stylistically very consistent. What he photographs though, unlike the Bechers, is purposely diverse and disjunctive. Additionally, there is a level of ambiguity in the images, seemingly an elusive underlying narrative.



Fig. 23, Mark Power, *6 North*. n.d.



Fig. 24, Mark Power, *57 East*. n.d.

CLUI, established in 1994, is an organisation that compiles information about land use in America, outputting analysis of such in forms such as exhibitions, publications, an online land use database, an artist-in-residence programme in Wendover, Utah, and public site-based tours (Fig. 25). Interesting to note is their emphasis upon a neutral or 'hands off' stance regarding their opinion of various forms of land use, though admitting a level of subjectivity.⁴ This work embraces the 'straight' interpretation of cultural landscape favoured by *New Topographics* – if minus the claim of objectivity. Like Klett and Marsching, discussed in *The Rational* and *Beyond Dichotomy*, their work acts as a resource for the public; in CLUI's case this is a continual accumulation of material on a variety of subjects and localities. Despite its presence in exhibitions such as *Badlands*, introduced in *Beyond Dichotomy*, in 'The Activists and Pragmatists' section interestingly, this work does not fit into a solely art context. Rather, it encompasses art and science,⁵ yet another example of a multidisciplinary, collaborative practice in contemporary art. In its varied yet pragmatic approach, the organisation fits very well into Wells' model of methodology as paramount.



Fig. 25, Steve Rowell, CLUI, *Centre for Land Use Interpretation Great Salt Lake Bus Tour*. 2005.

In *Temporal Landscapes*, a topographic intent was driving the approach taken in the act of photographing. A variety of views around the sites were captured using a medium-format camera, often in wide-angle, though some close-ups were also taken in the early stages. Colour seemed integral to the depiction of the temporal state of the landscapes, such as mounds of monotone grey gravel, and a stretch of freshly planted green grass. Additionally, in viewing these sites as part of a utopian scheme, colour seemed intuitively appropriate. The work seemed to segregate itself into categories of pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial sites. The strategy for uniting them by utilising a combination of projection and print as output will be outlined in *The Acceleration of Loss*. Focussed on here, rather, are several motivating factors and their impact upon the work. Like ‘The Explorers’ of *Badlands*, *Temporal Landscapes* consisted of site-based practice, favouring an experiential way of working. While there was a documentary agenda, a checklist as it were, there was also flexibility for experiential decisions, and also working to constraints such as photographing from the available vantage point, and at the time of day that site access was allowed.

The journey to these sites, in the chosen region, was originally conceived and implemented because they were an example of large-scale industrial land use, and the project developed around what was found there. It turned out – bearing in mind that this is an individual and subjective interpretation – not to be a case of bad environmental practice requiring an activist response. Rather, it was experienced as an industrial surreality; a morphed landscape where environmental factors and rehabilitation are so planned that it is a landscape controlled to a seemingly unprecedented level.

Notes

¹ Wells, L. (2006). *Landscape, Geography and Topographic Photography*. A paper presented at the symposium *The Rural Citizen: Governance, Culture and Wellbeing in the 21st Century*. Plymouth,

United Kingdom: The University of Plymouth, 2006. (n.p.). Retrieved from
<http://www.ruralfuturesconference.org/2006/Wells.pdf>

² Matheson, N. (2007). *Gursky, Ruff, Demand: Allegories of the Real and the Return of History*. In Sutton, D., Brind, S. & McKenzie, R. (Eds.). *The State of the Real: Aesthetics in the Digital Age*, (p.38-47). p.39. London: I. B. Tauris

³ Power, M. (2009). *26 Different Endings*. (n.p.). Retrieved from
<http://www.markpower.co.uk/index.cfm?g=1>

⁴ Markonish, D. (2008). *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*. p.140. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art; Matthew Coolridge, cited Markonish 2008, p.140

⁵ Markonish 2008, p.140

Camera and Consequence

Memory Device/Devising Memory

Allan Sekula has been quoted as saying, “Documentary (photography) has amassed mountains of evidence. And yet... the genre has simultaneously contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, to voyeurism, to terror, envy and nostalgia, and only a little to the critical understanding of the social world.”¹ If we are to agree that photography has lost its early reputation as an objective “memory machine”,² and that in turn its claims to fact, truth and objective memory have been found wanting, how can the contemporary documentary photograph be read? Can the desire for knowledge and the exploring of history and memory be reconciled with photography, given this shift in expectations?

It has been suggested that 17th Century science’s development of scientific method as we know it today – controlled conditions, repeated experiments – allowed for an alternate social understanding of history and memory based upon scientific processes such as exact repetition.³ By the 19th Century, the idea of ‘objective’ memory had taken hold, and the camera’s place in the mechanical arts was equated with realism and thus fact,⁴ saw it used as a ‘disinterested memory machine’.⁵ However in the past decades, particularly the 1980’s onwards, photography has come to be understood as inherently subjective,⁶ thus ideas of truth and fact, especially in a documentary context, require careful consideration.

In a recent symposium held at the first Berlin Photography Festival, *Fading Documents* (2005), various opinions arose on the state of documentary photography, asking questions of the document’s function, its use, and what it even is.⁷ Discussed here will be the claim of contributor Stefanie Grebe that “...a verbalizable clarity cannot be the claim of images, not even of documentary photographs which aspire to be more than they illustrate.”⁸ This essentially regards the role of the documentary photographer and what can be achieved photographically. Considered will be the work of The Atlas Group and Allan Sekula.

The Atlas Group’s work shown in the publication *Documentary Now!* (2005), is interesting to consider in relation to Grebe’s disillusionment with documentary, because their work consists of an archive of found and fictional photographs depicting the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990, focussing on Beirut, and they do not care for the representation of truth per se. In *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair* (2004) (Fig. 26), consisting of a scan of the front and back of a photograph, a group of military personnel is inspecting what looks to be the remains of a car after a bomb has exploded. The men look to be Turkish or from

somewhere geographically proximate. Such guesswork is dispelled by the categorical information displayed with the image,⁹ reading:

Date: 2 July 1988

Archive: As-Safir (Beirut)/The Atlas Group Photographer: Unknown

Notes: Lebanon – Crimes and Criminals – Explosions – 1988 – Beirut

This effectively mimics a cataloguing system like those found in institutions such as libraries, online databases, and archives. The group describes their process as highlighting the flawed nature of the belief in facts as “self-evident objects”, and rather believe in facts as ‘processes’.¹⁰ This aligns with Mikhail Bakhtin’s assertion that images themselves do not have meaning, but rather that a process of consummation is required, involving artist, image and viewer.¹¹ It could be stated that The Atlas Group agrees with Grebe’s assertion of the fallible, partial nature of the documentary image, and in fact critiques this in their practice, in the embracing of the fictive.¹²



Fig. 26, The Atlas Group/Walid Raad, *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair*. 2004.

Allan Sekula’s photographic approach can be termed documentary, yet he is critical of traditional documentary claims. His work *Fish Story* (Fig. 27), is concerned with globalisation and its social cost, focussing on the domain of the sea.¹³ Sekula is prolific in his picture making, and his finished projects reflect this, often featuring a very large number of photographs. Text plays a key role in his work, and in the publication *Fish Story* this consists of text interspersed within photographic chapters, and also an accompanying essay. In exhibition form, text was also prominent. His working method has been described as controlling, in his desire to contextualise his work through image-to-text relationship, and image-to-image relationship.¹⁴ This is perhaps a more illustrative approach than the favouring of ambiguity by many contemporary artists utilising documentary (see *Ambiguity and Incomprehension*). It seems that Sekula, in his exploration of social, cultural, political and economic factors, feels the need to provide the viewer with an arsenal of information, in order to combat photography’s partial conveyance of information.



Fig. 27, Allan Sekula, *Dismal Science: Part I. Middle Passage. Panorama. Mid-Atlantic*. November 1993.

Jan-Erik Lundstrom, in speaking of documentary photography has stated “...the verbs related to vision – look, observe, gaze, scrutinise, view, sight, spot, eye, recognise, regard – bring us along a path of possibilities; especially if we understand this attentiveness as generative, interventive, productive, transformative. And just as productivity includes the possibility of failure, sight also contains the possibility of non-sight, of blindness, of the failure to see.”¹⁵ In answer to the question concerning the reconciliation of documentary photography with a desire for knowledge and the exploration of history and memory, it would seem that it can, and has, been achieved. Certainly Lundstrom speaks of such possibilities. Work that is successful in this regard, such as that of the Atlas Group and Allan Sekula, relies on the realisation that photography is not objective or complete, and that its subjective, partial, and fragmented nature in fact offers a framework for individual and unique enquiry and practice.

Notes

¹ Allan Sekula, cited Campamy, D. (2003). *Safety in Numbness: Some Remarks on the Problems of 'Late Photography'*. (pp. 123-132). p.132. In Green, D. (Ed.). *Where is the Photograph?*. Brighton & Kent: Photoforum & Photoworks.

² McQuire, S. (1998). *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera*. p. 165. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

³ McQuire 1998, p.166

⁴ Chevrier, J. (2005). *Documentary, Document, Testimony....* In Gierstberg, F., Heuvel, M., Scholten, H. & Verhoeven, M. (Ed.). *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, (pp. 46-56). p. 47. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers

⁵ McQuire 1998, p. 167

⁶ Coppock, C. & Seawright, P. (2006). *So Now Then*. p. 6. Cardiff: Ffotogallery

⁷ Polte, M. (2005). 'The Document Between Fact and Fiction'. *European Photography*, vol. 26 iss. 2, pp. 10-15, p. 10. Berlin: Andreas Müller-Pohle

⁸ Stefanie Grebe, cited Polte 2005, p. 11

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- ⁹ Gierstberg, F., Heuvel, M., Scholten, H. & Verhoeven, M. (2005). *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*. pp. 4-5. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers
- ¹⁰ The Atlas Group, cited Gierstberg et. al. 2005, p. 121
- ¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, cited Gevers, I. (2005). *Images that Demand Consummation: Postdocumentary, Art and Ethics*. In Gierstberg, F., Heuvel, M., Scholten, H. & Verhoeven, M. (Eds.). *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, (pp. 82-99). p. 99 n. 20. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers
- ¹² Lundstrom, J. (2006). *Look and Tell: Some Further Thoughts on the Documentary Genre*. In Coppock, C. & Seawright, P. (Eds.). *So Now Then*, (pp. 168-171). p. 170. Cardiff: Ffotogallery
- ¹³ Lundstrom 2006, p. 171
- ¹⁴ Gevers 2005, p. 89
- ¹⁵ Lundstrom 2006, p. 170

The Acceleration of Loss

Paul Virilio, in his 1994 publication *The Vision Machine*, quotes the historic figure Nicophorus of Constantinople as saying, “If we remove the image, not only Christ, but the whole world disappears.”¹ In a contemporary context, with the prominence of the image in society, this thousand-year-old statement rings true. In his essay *Topographic Amnesia* within the same volume, Virilio posits that the proliferation of, and reliance on, optical devices, including the camera, has altered our understanding and use of mental imagery,² and has adversely affected mankind’s memory and imaginative capabilities.³ He also claims that such devices have changed our understanding and expectations of vision and perception, in a favouring of the mechanical.⁴

Virilio’s argument will be discussed here, with input from other theorists as illuminated by Scott McQuire, including Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Frederick Jameson. This matter is considered with an interest in a set of self-generated questions that arose in considering the output of *Temporal Landscapes*. If our memories have been impaired by visual technologies such as the camera, as well as the news media – as described by Virilio and Jameson – and if the photograph is violent – as Barthes believes – can photography be used to explore these issues? If one utilised photography’s ability to be a violent spectacle – in the Barthean sense – how would this work be received? Will this simply reinforce its supposed dominant nature? Intent and technique of the resulting investigation in *Temporal Landscapes* will be outlined, as well as a discussion of Alfredo Jaar’s *Lament of the Images* (2002), Naoya Hatakeyama’s *Blast* series (1995).

In speaking of the modern psyche, Scott McQuire has said, “The contemporary stockpiling of images to ward off loss – of species, of habitat, of culture, of the past in general – registers the acute anxiety affecting memory in the present.”⁵ This alludes to both the aforementioned inclination toward an apocalyptic sublime in contemporary landscape photography – lamenting the loss of nature (see *The Divine* and *Beyond Dichotomy*), and to Virilio’s theory that visual media has a – problematic – primary role in memory preservation. Like Virilio, McQuire cites a shrinking of historical consciousness, in the contemporary dampening down of memory requirements: an age of hypo-mnemonics.⁶ He claims that camera technologies actually encourage a “generalised amnesia.”⁷

Alfredo Jaar’s *Lament of the Images* 2002 (Fig. 28) considers the role of information and images in contemporary society, alluding to forces that control and in cases repress the

availability of visual information.⁸ The installation, which featured in *Documenta 11*, consisted of two rooms; the first with text panels, the second with a projection with no image, simply white light. His exploration of the cultural framework that governs image production and dispersion can be seen also in his work *Inferno & Paradiso*, which utilised projection to show reportage style images, with each image having a duration of 18 minutes. There were 18 images in total.⁹ In these two bodies of work, Jaar's utilisation of a blinding non-image and an audience waiting time, respectively, defy conventional expectations of viewing experience.



Fig. 28, Alfredo Jaar, *Lament of the Images*. 2002.

Linking to the work of Jarr, the discussion surrounding 'cultural amnesia' has considered the role of television based news reportage. It has been said by Frederick Jameson that, "...the very function of the news media is to regulate... recent historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past. The informational function of the media would thus be able to help us forget, to serve as the very agents and mechanisms for our historical amnesia."¹⁰ Interestingly, this encouragement of a temporal remembrance of events, a lulling of historical consciousness, is aligned closely with previous discussion (see *Towards Utopia?*) of the advocacy of industrialisation as temporal and in New Zealand, sustainability as a consolation for any remaining concerns. This indicates that 'cultural amnesia' is being encouraged across a wide range of platforms.

The methodology of Naoya Hatakeyama, in his *Blast* series (Fig. 29) shown in the *Consuming Landscape* group exhibition held at Museum of Contemporary Photography (2004) is interesting to consider given its focus on temporality. In this series he was exploring the mineral extraction industry in Japan, photographing limestone quarries which he captured during the act of rock extraction, mid-explosion. The work alludes to the temporal quality of the landscape depicted and the photographic process itself. It is a rapidly changing landscape, yet frozen in a heightened state of tension and drama. Curator

Natasha Egan describes the work as dramatising this industrial act, making it appear threatening to the artist, and in turn the viewer.¹¹



Fig. 29, Naoya Hatakeyama, *Blast* (#0608). 1995.

Like Naoya Hatakeyama's *Blast* series, *Temporal Landscapes* has an interest in the temporal nature of landscapes enduring mineral extraction. While Hatakeyama utilised the frozen as a motif, *Temporal Landscapes* came to use momentary flashes. This came about as a result of a dilemma in the process of collating visual material from site visits. In placing a photograph of a pre-industrial site, an industrial site and a post-industrial site alongside one another, they formed a narrative implying a seamless process of change in the landscape, more celebratory than was intended (Fig. 30-32). At this point, a need was felt to disrupt this flow. Experimentation with projection was undertaken, with the temporal capabilities of this output harnessed to meet the needs of the project.

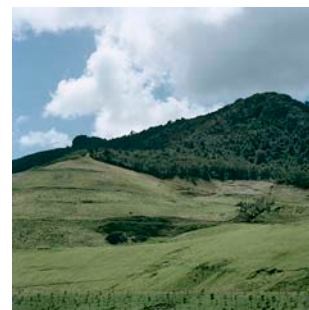
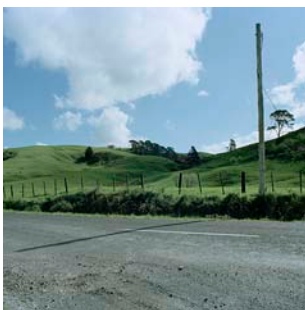


Fig. 30, Shelley Jacobson, *Prospecting site of Heritage Gold Ltd, Golden Valley*, 2008.

Fig. 31, Shelley Jacobson, *Pit, Martha Mine, Waihi*, 2008.

Fig. 32, Shelley Jacobson, *Former pit, Golden Cross Mine, Waitekauri*, 2008.

What eventuated was a loop, *23 Views*. (*Prospective gold mining site, Golden Valley, Hauraki*, 2008 / *Martha gold mine and Favona gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki*, 2008). Depicted in this is a pre-industrial site, seemingly static for the majority of the duration, with an occasional change to one of a number of images of industrial sites for a fraction of a second (Fig. 33-35, see also Appendix Plate. 13-15). Also, flashes of white are integrated to heighten the sense of rupture. This referenced the view of Virilio, Sontag and Barthes, in their belief in the power or force of the photographic image. Virilio has described the

‘phatic’ image as a targeted image, forceful in its visuality.¹² Sontag has claimed that the camera re-writes history, in the belief that photographs invent and replace memories.¹³ Barthes has gone even further, citing the violence inherent in the photograph, given that it blocks memory, “The photograph is violent... it fills the sight by force... nothing in it can be refused...”¹⁴



Fig. 33, Shelley Jacobson, *Developmental work for 23 Views (dominant image)*. 2008.



Fig. 34, Shelley Jacobson, *Developmental work for 23 Views (dominant image, CU)*. 2008.



Fig. 35, Shelley Jacobson, *Developmental work for 23 Views (paused on split-second flash, CU)*. 2008.

With regard to the dominant static image utilised, there was a choice of using a pre- or post-industrial site; the difference being that the ‘pre’ implies future change, and the ‘post’ implies prior change. Given that the region has experienced and is experiencing such, both are appropriate. However, the post-industrial sites were to have a different role in presentation. It was felt that photographs of such sites benefited from the detail, clarity and delicacy of print form, given the consideration of them as ‘finished’ utopias. Thus a small set, *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)* (see Appendix Plate. 15-16), is presented in this form alongside *23 Views*, the prints spot lit in the darkened room. This method, like *23 Views*, highlights the popular advocacy of industrialisation as temporal, and an emphasis on rehabilitation of the land as an end goal. This re-articulation of industrial (and in fact governmental) ideology in one sense re-produces it, but it also poses the view in a way that implies a partiality and unease, in the disjointed nature of *23 Views* and with the partial illumination of *Untitled 1*, *Untitled 2* and *Untitled 3*.

Notes

¹ Nicophorus, cited Virilio, P. (1994). *The Vision Machine*. p. 17. London: The British Film Institute in association with Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana

² Virilio 1994, p. 4

³ Virilio 1994, pp. 6-7

⁴ Virilio 1994, p. 13

⁵ McQuire, S. (1998). *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera*. p. 174. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

⁶ McQuire, 1998, p. 127; Virilio 1994, pp. 6-7

⁷ McQuire, 1998, p. 130

⁸ Schneeman, P. J. (2006). *Overwhelming: The Sublime as the External Dream of Aesthetics of Effect*. In Kania, E. & Spieler, R. (Eds.). *The Sublime is Now!: das Erhabene in der zeitgenössischen Kunst : Museum Franz Gertsch, (April 2 – July 30 2006)*, (pp. 10-18). p. 16. Berne: Benteli Publishers

⁹ Gierstberg, F. (2005). *From Realism to Reality? Documentary Photography in the Age of 'Post-media'*. In Gierstberg, F., Heuvel, M., Scholten, H. & Verhoeven, M. (Eds.). *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, (pp. 124-145). pp. 140-141. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers

¹⁰ Frederick Jameson, cited McQuire 1998, p. 129

¹¹ Egan, N. (2003). 'Consuming Nature'. *Museum of Contemporary Photography*. n.p. Retrieved from http://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2003/12/consuming_natur.php

¹² Virilio 1994, p. 14

¹³ Susan Sontag, cited McQuire 1998, p. 128

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, cited McQuire 1998, p. 128

Ambiguity and Incomprehension

In criticism of contemporary art photography in recent years, the issue of ambiguity has been widely discussed, a “dilemma of meaning” as it were.¹ David Campany has described the displacement of the event in photography, for example in the style of ‘late photography’; a term for the post-event or aftermath.² Some, such as David Travis, have called for narrative to be used in photography to combat such vagueness.³ The issue of ambiguity relates to previous discussion of *New Topographics* (see *Topographic Revival*), but will be discussed here in relation to current and future implications, considering the following questions. Is the recent favouring of ambiguity in art photography a response to debates of photography’s authenticity (see *Memory Device/Devising Memory*)? Given that universal and empirical values are questioned, must one turn to the ambiguous in order to encourage independent thought? Or are we, as Campany cautions, paralysed in a state of incomprehension?⁴ Discussed in relation to this will be the work of Joel Sternfeld, that of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, and *Temporal Landscapes*.

In the group exhibition *Loaded Landscapes* held at the Museum of Contemporary Photography (2007) the artists, including Joel Sternfeld, were described by curator Natasha Egan as questioning photography’s ability to document a place in a way that reveals its history, given their choice in photographing “politically charged sites”, yet not revealing this in the images.⁵ Joel Sternfeld’s (1996) publication *On This Site: Landscapes In Memoriam* is interesting to consider because the images have a quiet, banal beauty, with little hint to the tragic events that have occurred at the sites depicted. Travis has pointed to Sternfeld’s use of extended captions as adding a layer of narrative to the images,⁶ effectively tying together the site-based images into an itinerary of hidden violence. Reported are events such as murders and industrial chemical spills. Sternfeld’s *Metro Bus Shelter* 1995 (Fig. 36) has a caption that reads, “Yetta M. Adams froze to death sitting upright in this bus shelter across from the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington D.C., on November 29, 1993. The forty-three-year-old mother of three grown children had reportedly been turned away from a homeless shelter the night before.”⁷ This methodology highlights Sternfeld’s premise that an image’s projected meaning is tenuous at best.⁸



Fig. 36, Joel Sternfeld, *Metro Bus Shelter, 7th Street at E Street, Southwest, Washington, DC., April 1995*.

While Travis cries “the need for narrative”,⁹ one could point out that there are different strategies available for conveying meaning, such as the methodologies discussed in *The Systematic* and *Memory Device/Devising Memory*. In the case of Sternfeld, one could argue that it is the disjunction between his quiet, banal images and the tragic violence depicted in the captions that makes the use of narrative successful. This tension would not have been achieved if the captions reinforced what was represented in the images.

Interestingly, the duo Broomberg and Chanarin create narrative successfully through photography. Granted, text often plays a role in their work, but the photographs themselves do create a narrative of a kind. Looking at the presentation of their work in the publication *So Now Then*, featuring a range of documentary practitioners, is a case in point. Their *Chicago* project (2006) (Fig. 37, 38) consists of photographs of a fake Arab town in the Negev desert, a training facility for the Israeli defence force, as well as photographs of suicide bombs disguised as everyday objects. The images take on a staged, surreal quality, with an underlying theme of death by political and religious imperative. This work aligns itself with Campany’s discussion of the displacement of the event in photography, in this case pre-event; an observation Campany makes in his essay in *So Now Then*.¹⁰



Fig. 37, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Bomb 4*. 2006.

Fig. 38, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *Chicago*. 2006.

David Campany’s discussion of displacement of the event, in the form of the ‘late photograph’ is relevant here, given that Sternfeld’s photographs were taken after crimes

had taken place – after even visible traces of them had been lost – effectively after the aftermath. In this respect they are a step further removed from what Campamy focuses on. Campamy cites the emergence of late photography in photojournalism of the first Gulf War, when journalists were denied entry into Kuwait until after the fighting had ceased.¹¹ The quiet, sombre, cool, straight images that resulted had a distinctive style, one that has since been adopted in documentary and art photography.¹² Additionally, the contemporary use of video in live news reportage has seen photography take secondary role; thus the late photograph offers an alternate means of reportage.¹³

Campamy describes late photography as a central trope in contemporary art, which in his view on the one hand can be useful in offering an allegorical commentary on documentary claims.¹⁴ While on the other hand it can “flatter the ideological paralysis” of an audience lacking in the social or political ability to comprehend it.¹⁵ Art historian Thomas W. Southall backs the more positive view, describing the use of the ambiguous in contemporary photographic landscape practice as a means to explore the complex relationship between culture and nature, encouraging critical reflection.¹⁶ This is in opposition to the false security that traditional landscape practice offers, in the form of an oversimplified relationship between culture and nature.¹⁷

Temporal Landscapes does not employ the use of explanatory captions, and it in fact favours the quiet, cool, peopleless aesthetic of late photography. Both these factors locate it in the realm of the ambiguous. Travis’ concerns have already been addressed in the consideration of strategies for providing meaning (as described in *The Acceleration of Loss*). Given that the work follows *New Topographics* in ideology, and has an interest in site-based art production relying on individual experience to shape the work, a didactic view was not sought or put forth. Rather, the project explores and expresses visually that which seems to have been taken at face value: land that exists within an industrial, utopic continuum.

J. B. Jackson wrote in 1984 that, “It may be that I am on the track of that elusive landscape concept: the ideal not defined as a static utopia dedicated to ecological or social or religious principles, but as an environment where permanence and change have struck a balance.”¹⁸ In thinking of landscape as an entity representing real space, it would seem – writing 25 odd years later – that such an ideal remains an ideal, and cannot be realised. Forces of change and preservation, governed by ideologies Jackson mentions, among others including political and economical, are in a constant tug of war. In a New Zealand context, legislation has been helpful in addressing environmental pollution traditionally associated with

industrial practice, and in finding middle ground on issues of sustainability, but by their very definition, preservation and change can only be in opposition. Thus, land and landscapes exist in a constant state of flux, determined by dominant ideology. *Temporal Landscapes* expresses this, in the form of a visual temporal.

Notes

¹ Lippard, L. R. (1998). 'Outside (But Not Beyond) the Landscape'. *Aperture #150 Moments of Grace: Spirit in the American Landscape*, pp. 60-61, p. 60

² Company, D. (2006). *Straight Pictures of a Crooked World*. In Coppock, C. & Seawright, P. (Ed.). *So Now Then*, (pp. 8-11). p. 11 n. 3. Cardiff: Ffotogallery

³ Travis, 2003, p. 81

⁴ Company, D. (2003). *Safety in Numbness: Some Remarks on the Problems of 'Late Photography'*. (pp. 123-132). In Green, D. (Ed.). *Where is the Photograph?*. p. 132. Brighton & Kent: Photoforum & Photoworks.

⁵ Egan, N. (2007). 'Loaded Landscapes'. *Museum of Contemporary Photography*. n.p. Retrieved from http://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2007/08/loaded_landscap.php

⁶ Travis, D. (2003). *At the Edge of Light: Thoughts on Photography and Photographers, Talent and Genius*. p. 84. Boston: David R. Godine

⁷ Sternfeld, J. (1996). *On This Site: Landscapes in Memoriam*. n.p. San Francisco: Chronicle Books

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Travis 2003 p. 81

¹⁰ Company 2006, p. 10

¹¹ Company 2003, p. 123

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Company 2003, p. 127

¹⁴ Company 2003, p. 130

¹⁵ Company 2003, p. 132

¹⁶ Southall, T. W. (1999). *Where We Stand*. In Pool, P. E. (Ed.). *The Altered Landscape*, (p.33-49). p. 48. Reno: University of Nevada Press

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ John Brinckerhoff Jackson, cited Southall 1999, p. 37

Appendix

Plate 1, Shelley Jacobson, *Garden, perimeter of Martha Mine, Waihi*, 2008



Plate 2, Shelley Jacobson, *Former pit, Golden Cross Mine, Waitekauri, 2008.*



Plate 3, Shelley Jacobson, *Waste water treatment, former Golden Cross Mine, Waitekauri.* 2008.



Plate 4, Shelley Jacobson, *Tailings Lake, Martha Mine, Waihi* 2008.



Plate 5, Shelley Jacobson, *Conveyor Martha Mine, Waihi 2008*.



Plate 6, Shelley Jacobson, *Pit, Martha Mine, Waihi, 2008.*



Plate 7, Shelley Jacobson, *Future lake level/current pit, Martha Mine, Waihi 2008.*



Plate 8, Shelley Jacobson, *Water treatment, Martha Mine, Waihi 2008*.



Plate 9, Shelley Jacobson, *Waste rock, Martha Mine, Waihi 2008*.



Plate 10, Shelley Jacobson, *Prospecting site of Heritage Gold Ltd, Golden Valley, 2008.*



Plate 11, Shelley Jacobson, *Prospecting site of Heritage Gold Ltd, Golden Valley, 2008.*



Plate 12, Shelley Jacobson, *Prospecting site of Heritage Gold Ltd, Waitete, 2008*.



Plate 13, Shelley Jacobson, *Developmental work for 23 Views*. 2008.



Plate 14, Shelley Jacobson, *23 Views*. (*Prospective gold mining site, Golden Valley, Hauraki, 2008 / Martha gold mine and Favona gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki, 2008*). DVD, 4 minutes in length. Installation view, 2009



Plate 15, Shelley Jacobson, from left to right: *23 Views*. (*Prospective gold mining site, Golden Valley, Hauraki, 2008 / Martha gold mine and Favona gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki, 2008*). DVD, 4 minutes in length, *Untitled I*. (*Garden, pit rim walkway, Martha gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki, 2008*). Inkjet Print, 44" x 44", *Untitled II*. (*View of pit, former Golden Cross gold mine, Waitekauri Valley, Hauraki, 2008*). Inkjet Print, 44" x 44". Installation view, 2009.



Plate 16, Shelley Jacobson, from left to right: *Untitled I. (Garden, pit rim walkway, Martha gold mine, Waihi, Hauraki, 2008)*. Inkjet Print, 44" x 44", *Untitled II. (View of pit, former Golden Cross gold mine, Waitekauri Valley, Hauraki, 2008)*. Inkjet Print, 44" x 44", and *Untitled III. (View of water treatment pond, former Golden Cross gold mine, Waitekauri Valley, Hauraki, 2008)*. Inkjet Print, 44" x 44". Installation view, 2009.



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