(un)settling: Performing Landscape, Woman, Aotearoa

by

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Attestation

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and, that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

Date
8 August 2024

Abstract

This practice-led doctoral research explores my relationship to landscape, land and whenua as a Pākehā woman in Aotearoa New Zealand, through video mediated performance works. Recorded and edited as temporal markers of live events, these works actively reflect on my uneasy relationship with 'settling', as they tease my Pākehā self as a beneficiary of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Positing landscape as a western constructed narrative of dominion over the natural world enmeshed with colonial grasping of land, I focus on unsettling the landscape habits I have in an exploration sensitive to decolonial possibilities.

This creative research engages with decolonial discourse, which seeks to re-imagine the world on alternative epistemic foundations (Gallien 33) with the aim to dismantle colonial systems of domination (Bell et al. 605), while centering Indigenous voices (Smith *Decolonising Methodologies*). By utilizing the guidance inherent in a decolonial and feminist approach, these works consist of a series of creative acts which challenge the "common sense" of settler-colonial logic (Rifkin 322) and western landscape conceptions. As a whole these creative works add up to a" 'decolonial gesture", an act or series of actions that intentionally refer to and challenge colonial norms and systems (Mignolo 14).

The moving locus of these works is *The Chrysalis*, a 1973 home-built horse float repurposed into an off-grid base and home. Living out of a paddock in Tangimoana was a return to my birthplace and a metaphorical access point to the landscape dreams of my farm labourer forebears. Following the feminist/decolonial strategy to *think out of place*, this creative body of work is sited in Manawatū, the rohe (home territory) of Rangitāne o Manawatū, Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Kauwhata, where my family has lived for five generations.

Framing my relationship to land in terms of Barclay's Fourth Cinema, as a "view from the ship," I draw upon the writings of Eduardo Glissant, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Rosi Braidotti and Maria Lugones, and an awareness of feminist positioning, all of which lend wisdom to subjectivity, relationality, decolonisation and the processual nature of these creative thought/acts. I unpack aspects of the work through the avant garde cinematography of Maya Deren and the performative practices of artists Julieanna Preston, Sally J Morgan, Holly Walker and Marja Helander. With these feminist and decolonial thinkers by my side, this research unfolds over time to become a moving constellation of reflections where works sit in

relation to each other. This research contributes to a burgeoning decolonial discourse, including its expression and communication via a performative and lens-based practice. The research offers visual and physical evidence of a person of settler descent grappling with these historical and current cultural and geographical tensions in a series of doings.

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Finally to my family: Dad, Cherie, Scott and Rachel, I love you all very much.

This work is dedicated
to Mum and Luna.

Contents

Prologue

The origins of this creative practice research can be traced to a particular swimming hole and stretch of the Ōroua River frequented by many people in the local community. Located in Manawatū, this is the place that I was born in the 1970s and where I enjoyed a rural childhood. Imagination and the outdoors ran hand in hand. Whole worlds were dismantled and put back together again.

Fig.1. Still from *Section* (04:05).

> *I am with my twin sister, and we are approximately 10-years-old. There is long summer grass brushing our legs. It's hot, sticky, and noisy with insects and the crunch and swish of our footsteps. All barriers cease to exist once we are here, surrounded, and sensitive to many living things, including the land and river.*
>
> *There is this one moment, outside of linear time, that sticks like a burr and tickles my consciousness intermittently. This brief frisson occurs when I look*

back towards our house and see the fences gridding the paddocks as strange. Time stretches. These constructions are overbearing and brittle over a space that seems so expansive and alive. Briefly, this alters the world I thought I knew, and the moment we reach the river, this feeling washes away. The river is a different space.

Perhaps this memory is an amalgam of many physical moments, but I am certain of the tilt of my body, the angle of my head, and the stubs of grass and dusty soil under my small bare feet. I know where I stood and how faraway the fences were.

Fig. 2. My twin and I at the swimming hole, 1970s.

This awa, this river, the Ōroua, curves along the eastern edge of the Manawatū township of Feilding. The swimming hole was near the junction of the Kiwitea puna (stream), and Ōroua awa, both of which are ancestral to Ngāti Kauwhata iwi. In the mornings, my mother would look out the kitchen window, across the paddocks to the Ruahine Ranges to see what the weather was doing. As kids, the paddock and the awa were a free space where we could muck around away from our mother's all-seeing eye. This is a place from my childhood that has a physical geographical constitution and yet, it is also present in my body as something I knew intimately. The local swimming hole used to be deep and I remember the chime of stones and silt and the smell and taste of the water. There were whispers of past generations of our family involved with water divining; this was one of the many taboo activities in our Christian household. Sometimes inert pools stinking of cow manure would appear at the Kiwitea junction, so much warmer than the faster flowing water. We knew where they came from. We also knew that the fluctuating gravel piles nearby were related to

my father's earthmoving job and that excavation for gravel changed the flow and path of the awa.

In my childhood, the awa was open to everyone. It had lots of bends and swimming holes. People used to walk freely all along it. It was home to some large eels; the swimming hole was deep. It had a log to climb on and swim through and trees from which to jump. Pākehā and Māori families would go there, especially those of us who lived on Kimbolton Road and Seddon Street, which backed onto land near the awa. There were various ways to access the awa. You could float or walk down it as far as you wanted, or walk through the paddocks behind our house. In the past, families gathered along the river for swimming, food collection, and various activities (Smith *Porirua Ki Manawatū Inquiry*176), but this has diminished due to pollution and increased restrictions from landowners and authorities. As a result, traditional practices have declined, leading to a loss of cultural practices, shifts in community relationships, diminished mauri and mana, and reduced rights to exercise kaitiakitanga (guardianship and protection) (176). In the Waitangi Tribunal report *Porirua Ki Manawatū Inquiry Inland Waterways Cultural Perspectives,* Lorraine Searancke (Ngāti Kawhata) describes the deep connection between her iwi and the awa, emphasizing their traditional use for sustenance and barter rather than commercial trade (Smith *Porirua Ki Manawatū Inquiry*176). Searancke recalls being scolded for crossing the "Pākehā" paddock, once her iwi's land, to return home and says as a child her mother instilled the significance of the Ōroua River to their marae before she "ever went there" (176).

This fleeting frisson I felt as a child is a measure of something intellectually not fully accessible by words, and best left expansive. It is like a small area marked (fenced) off from a surrounding surface (Merriam-Webster). This resonates with how French literary critic and philosopher Roland Barthes used the term 'punctum' to refer to "an incidental but personally poignant detail in a photograph which 'pierces' or 'pricks' a particular viewer, constituting a private meaning unrelated to any cultural code" (Chandler and Munday).

Manawatū is the rohe (home territory) of Rangitāne o Manawatū, Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Kauwhata iwi**,** within the lower regions of Te Ika-a-Māui, the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. Generations of my family have lived in Manawatū since 1876; I was born here. Highly prized by original colonial settlers, it quickly became dominated visually,

economically, and socially by Pākehā farming and industry (Ream 213). As a feminist, I am drawn to resist this patriarchal construct and I wonder at Pākehā ways of being on land. I wonder at this dominance that does not seem to recognise the interconnected nature of te taiao (the environment) that contains and surrounds us; the whenua (soil and land), wai (water bodies) and their connections and koiora (life and all living communities): human, plant, animal (McAleer). Western landscape forms hold similar tensions in how they amalgamate all this into view or an image that, for me, seems reductive. I wonder about this cultural way of seeing land. The inquiry of this exegesis brings these concerns together as a gesture of feminist curiosity that hopes for decolonial possibilities.

My art practice takes place outside; it is playful and physical in the same spirit that my sister and I used to climb trees and make huts. I live in this research inquiry much like I live in the horse float *The Chrysalis*. In this doctoral project, I am a lone figure in a white jumpsuit with my white dog. I can be seen pacing paddocks, sitting with ducks, rolling on lawns, lying on hedges, wandering through dunes and forest. This is my way of entering my own landscape imaginary as I explore ways to alter and understand my relationship to Aotearoa New Zealand as a place I live in and call home. I have a desire to be *with* land, to lie on it, to include its inhabitants, and to be immersed in its living fabric, and yet, I feel this connection is elusive.

Introduction

This creative practice-led research enquires about my relationship to land and landscape, how they are different, and how that relationship is bound up with my identity and its ongoing formation. This exploration takes me to my settler colonial heritage and my position as a woman within the ongoing patriarchal paradigm of settler colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand, where, for all intents and purposes, land is life. I use the ideologies and art forms of landscape to tease the intersections of my Pākehā (European settler descendant) self as a beneficiary of colonisation, in relation to land and whenua in Aotearoa, and to consider the gendered implications and lived experience of being a Pākehā woman embedded in this space. Before I discuss the research invested in the creative works it is necessary to contextualise it.

The research is motivated by a curiosity about Pākehā relationships to land, or more so, what I have come to recognise as a distanced, disconnected, unattached notion of land, literally framed as a western European cultural projection and renamed “landscape.” Aotearoa New Zealand is officially a bi-cultural country that recognises its Indigenous people, Māori, tāngata whenua, as the first people of the land. This research recognises there are two very different perspectives and attitudes towards land, which are credited to past and on-going tensions stemming from the impacts of colonisation. Central to ideas about cultural and national identity, the concept of land has special meanings for both Māori and Pākehā, and provides each people with a sense of belonging and a sense of place (Byrnes 2).

In my work, I draw from a specific framing of Pākehā womanhood that comes from my heritage as a descendant of settler farm labourers. When considering how ‘woman’ is enacted in this context, I speak from my own embodied perspective rather than for all Pākehā women. My farm labourer background significantly influences how I perceive my relationship to the land, as well as how the women in my family historically engaged with socio-cultural practices rooted in settler-colonial logic. Settler colonial logic is a framework which justifies the ongoing presence and expansion of settlers on Indigenous lands by denying the legitimacy and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, involving the systematic displacement and erasure of Indigenous cultures and histories to normalize and perpetuate

settler dominance (Veranci 2010). This heritage situates women within this logic where they were traditionally confined to domestic roles supporting the colonial economy by maintaining households and raising large families while men undertook external labour and engaged in public spheres outside of the domestic space.

As social scientist Helen Gibson notes, Pākehā womanhood has been "characterized by colonial ideals that emphasize the virtues of 'wifehood,' 'motherhood,' and 'frontier resilience,' reinforced by societal norms and early enfranchisement" (Gibson 33). Relevant to the feminist aspect of my research, Gibson references Grimshaw (1987) and Olssen (1999) stating that New Zealand feminism initially focused on political rights, but post-1920s, there was a notable shift towards prioritizing domesticity amidst rising living standards and technological advances, reflecting societal values centred on monogamous, single-family households (33). This research project and my creative practice progresses with reference to this historical view of Pākehā women to assist in making visible the political nature of these gendered expectations.

To contextualise the feminist frameworks informing my work and their influence on my performative actions, I integrate Haraway's situated knowledges, which emphasize context and perspective with ecofeminism's examination of gender, environmental issues, and colonial histories (Gaard 2017). These insights are further enriched by Braidotti's nomadic thinking (*The Posthuman*), which encourages fluidity and the questioning of fixed identities. This approach enables me to challenge traditional settler codes and explore alternative ways of relating to land. For example, my performances subvert conventional gender roles by engaging with the land in unexpected ways, such as where I vacuum outside in a paddock. In addition, Glissant's concept of relation, which highlights interconnectedness and diversity, informs my understanding of the land as a dynamic network. This perspective helps me navigate and reinterpret the effects of settler colonialism on both the land and its inhabitants through my art practice which visually and performatively reveals how these feminist frameworks interact with and critique colonial dynamics in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This doctoral research grapples with who I am, here, now and in this context. I ask myself, what does it mean to explore land and landscape through modes of performance art that critique settler landscape tropes and sensibilities? Throughout this creative research, I wrestled with how I, as a Pākehā woman, can articulate my curiosity about my relationship

to land in a manner sensitive to, and generative of, decolonial possibilities, and how this tension is manifest in my everyday life.

The title of this research project, *(un)settling: Performing Landscape, Woman, Aotearoa*, relates to my uneasy relationship to settling. I am not alone in this, and as my research has progressed, I have noticed a proliferation of research papers and books using 'unsettling' as a key term on the subject of settler colonisation. This is fast becoming a long list, and a brief set of examples includes educational academic and author Alison Jones's book, *This Pākehā Life: An Unsettled Memoir* (Jones), and other papers such as *Unsettled Bliss of Cruelty: Pākehā in Aotearoa* (Cook), *Unsettling Pākehā Fragility* (Leach), *Decolonize This: Settler Decolonization and Unsettling Colonialism* (Stirling), and *A Tale of Two Stories: Unsettling a Settler Family's History in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Shaw). At the outset of this doctoral research project, there were only a few Pākehā artists working in performative modes who were exploring these themes from a settler perspective, such as Rebecca Ann Hobbs (Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland), who works across performance, collaboration, and site with a focus on tauiwi (non-Māori) Pākehā allyship and collaboration. Though her practice is a tremendous resource for my own project, the matter of tauiwi allyship lies outside of the boundaries of this research project.

Before engaging as Hobbs does, I feel I need to heed Tina Ngata's advice to Pākehā to become a good treaty partner. Ngata's "non-exhaustive" list includes these points:

> Be tau (at peace) with your position. Even in describing your own class, gender, ability or sexuality based oppression, you should know how the legacy of colonisation influences your experience of that oppression; Respect boundaries; Discussing what it means to be Pākehā; Dispelling fear of decolonisation; Stand with us for our rights; Benchmark the discomfort of your decolonisation experience against that of our colonisation experience, and Nothing is automatically a 2 way street (Ngata).

This is the mahi (work): knowing and accepting oneself as Ngāti Pākehā, its strengths and responsibilities. This mahi (work) gives an opportunity to recognise and reshape toxic colonising modes and patterns in play that affect this relationship in order to come to this

relationship in a healthy way. This is the mahi (work): to get ready to engage, a limit which frames the scope of this research project; getting ready.

In this exegesis, I have drawn on the work of other Pākehā artists, namely Holly Walker and Julieanna Preston (Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington). Walker explores her relation to land and tangata whenua through embodied and symbolic gestures, and Preston engages with these issues through her feminist and new materialist performance art practice. This research is made at a point in time where many Pākehā are becoming sensitive to the need for self-awareness and growth as a better partner with Māori in bi-cultural Aotearoa, a place underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This has two versions: Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, Māori and English. It was meant to be a partnership between Māori and the British Crown, but different interpretations and its violations have caused tension (Orange). My work actively pursues self-awareness to arrive at a healthy and respectful position as a Pākehā in Aotearoa. These video works are my way of articulating what this work of unsettling can be, and are offered as stories and gifts that take that responsibility to heart. My practice's performative nature allows me to see myself as a Pākehā woman actively working through undoing and reconfiguring myself and these acculturated perspectives I have inherited in an embodied, open-ended process. What it means to be landscape, a woman, and in relation to place are concepts that are grounded in culture, with many meanings. This exegesis unpacks what these terms and realities were and are now in my life and art works.

Additionally, this difference between what land and landscape is and isn't are aspects conjured by the work. It is about the unsettling of settler modes and my settler habits. As a Pākehā woman, to make this work I need to unsettle the patriarchal dominance central to these colonising modes. This work is not about noting the settler unhomely (Bell, *Relating Māori and Pākehā* 112). The awkwardness I embody is uncomfortable. This is because I'm getting myself unsettled. I'm noticing and unsettling the certainty I have as a settler. I'm noticing different ways of engaging with the life surrounding me. It is not about how this is resolved. At this moment of research, I cannot know the conclusion. That occurs after this research project. This research is the throwing up of pieces into the air. These things are still falling into whatever shape this may be.

To write to this process of self-realisation requires that I share with you how I am using terms in this written text. Though this is a common feature in doctoral exegeses, here it is significant because of the power of language to house one's world views. As a predominantly English-language speaker, writer and reader, I take this power for granted and yet over time, I have become well aware of Māori advocacy for reviving their language, Te Reo, as the portal to resisting/ protesting colonisation and keeping their culture alive. The anti-colonial, poet-philosopher Edouardo Glissant, a key influence within this research, affirms this connection of language to world-making, when he says, "The landscape of your word is the world's landscape" (Glissant 33). Glissant refers to the earth as having many worlds, making the distinction that the "Western world is not a world, it is a project of Oneness positioning itself as the One world on the earth. The frame by which all is seen" (33). Focusing on questions of identity and language from an anti-colonial and decolonising perspective, Glissant does not approach language from a reductive viewpoint but from one where language is a relation that allows untranslatability to exist without assimilating or subsuming the other.

Much of my work in this inquiry is a reaction to Glissant's description of the grasping nature of imperial expansion, "arrowlike nomadism" and its opposite, "the non-projectile imaginary construct" (35). These concepts inform my performative ponderings and also affect the way I consider words. In this context, instead of the authority of knowledge (and its colonial connotations), I allude to burgeoning, growing, awareness and learning instead of the European colonial modes of discovery, which brings things into existence on its terms without acknowledging its prior fullness. I link my movement to conversation, awareness, and being with. These words speak of attitudes that are not grasping, not trying to own or dominate; they have a relational movement. This thinking has influenced my gesture of the sidestep, which in this work is a strategy of disarmament by means of playfulness and a reorientation to an affirmative non-head-on engagement that gains its strength by not mirroring the logic it comes up against. I see my works as a series of small forces that can add up almost unassumingly, rather than direct confrontation. Like most artists, I find myself borrowing, adapting, and adopting terms from many bodies of knowledge and disciplines other than art; this is what some might recognise as art's penchant to be 'un-disciplined' – a true hybrid and generative space of meaning, inference and associations garnered from many sources, times and places. This diversity of viewpoints reflects my curiosity, and in keeping with the themes of this research and a resistance to the siloing of knowledge, takes

the position that all knowledge, while structured by themes and domains, is interconnected and a socially shared experience.

What holds these together is my use of media, performance art and moving image. As an artist, I work across a variety of media, including sculpture, video, installation, and performance. This practice is a mixture of live art process and performative acts documented by the camera and edited into art video. As a critical reflection of the work, this exegesis regularly considers how my practice plays out relative to my use of the camera.

Land, Whenua, and Landscape

This exegesis uses working definitions of the terms 'landscape', 'land' and 'whenua.' The concept of land and what it is, is very different to landscape, just as landscape and whenua—the Māori concept of land—are two very differing and distinct ontologies. I use the term 'whenua' in this document to refer to Māori concepts of land, just as I use landscape as a code to refer to Pākehā and western concepts of land. When I refer to land in this research, I refer to the solid ground of the earth, which encompasses all the living things on, under and above it, which necessarily includes human beings. This is a view that regards the earth as "a complex ecosystem where humans are merely one part in a larger loop of processes" (Braidotti and Hlavajova 110). In the context of the complexity of these ecologies, research scientist and ecologist Geoff Park writes that "to enfold Aotearoa New Zealand within this context is to recognise its colonial legacies, particularly that of the colonial pastoral obsession that, caused more than just trees and birds to disappear but also vast genetic libraries in the soil, millennia in the making" (Park *Ngā Uruora* 377).

When I consider the land in Aotearoa New Zealand from a personal perspective, I instinctively associate it with the rich whakapapa (ancestral connections, actions and stories) that permeates it. I approach whenua in with care and respect, knowing that there are many things I do not know or understand and that not everything can or should be defined, but that being present and open is a key to a deeper relationship. My relationship to whenua is framed through my identity as Pākehā, and this is contextualised through my relationship with tangata whenua as tangata Tiriti, a person of the treaty. Aotearoa New Zealand is a multicultural

country where Pākehā aren’t the only grouping brought together with Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Dewes)). To identify as Pākehā is to align back to those subjects of Victoria, the Queen of England who agreed to Te Tiriti with Indigenous Māori” (Newcombe and Amundsen 480) and an acknowledgment which includes confronting my colonial heritage.

‘Whenua’, the Māori term for land, carries a dual meaning as the physical earth and the placenta, symbolizing its role as a nurturer and source of life (Royal). For Māori, Papatūānuku embodies the essence of land, sustaining all life forms and providing unity and identity to her people (Royal). As Charles Te Ahukaramū Royal notes, "All things are born from her and nurtured by her, including humankind"(Royal). This spiritual connection to Papatūānuku is deeply ingrained in Māori culture, evident in rituals where the whenua (placenta) is ceremonially buried upon a child's birth, thereby linking the newborn to their ancestral land. In the words of Royal,"Traditionally, the whenua (placenta) and pito (umbilical cord) of newborn babies are buried in a significant place," underscoring the significance of this act in reinforcing the bond between individuals and their birthplace. This practice, known as 'te wāhi i kotia ai te pito,' marks a pivotal moment of emergence and foundation in each person's life (Royal).

Māori philosophy reflects a holistic relationship with the natural environment, encapsulated in the proverb 'Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua, ko au' – 'I am the land and the land is me,' highlighting the inseparable connection between people and their environment (Harmsworth 41). According to Mason Durie, the concept of tangata whenua emphasizes the unique relationship between members of an iwi (tribe) and their ancestral territories, affirming the central role of land in Māori cultural values. Durie asserts, "Land was both an economic mainstay and marker of collective identity," reinforcing family and tribal unity while imbuing the concept of tūrangawaewae – a sense of belonging and identity derived from a specific home base (59).

Maori educational academic and Tohuna *Dr Rangimarie* Turuki *Rose Pere* writes “The placenta embracing and cherishing the child in the womb, is called whenua. The land which is also called the whenua offers one the same feeling of warmth, security, nourishment and sustenance, a feeling of belonging” (22). Whenua as a connection to land resonates deeply with me in my spiritual belief that all life is interconnected, as is past present and future. The mountains, rivers, and forests are deeply intertwined with the cosmological narratives,

histories, and ancestral connections of tangata whenua who have stewarded this land for generations. To me, the land represents this tapestry of natural and cultural significance, intricately interwoven. I resonate with the Māori concept of whenua as both land and placenta because it prompts me to reflect on the profound connections in my life. Although not the same, the connectivity and bond to land entwined in this concept reminds me of my identity as an identical twin. My twin and I not only emerged from the same egg but also shared the same placenta, embodying a deep, relational connection to the world. This bond signifies that while we are united as one, we also maintain our individuality and autonomy. Even when we are apart, this connection remains strong and any disruption is deeply felt.

As someone who "belongs to the land by the right of Te Tiriti" (Durie 1989), it is foundational to this work that I consider the land I am on as whenua. This reminds me that as a settler I am on ancestral land alive with whakapapa (ancestral connections, actions and stories), whether it be a paddock, stream, river or beach. Judge Edward Durie in his 1989 speech at Waitangi defined Pākehā as tangata Tiriti, "those who belong to the land by right of that Treaty" providing a path to a deeper connection with the land (Reese). Pākehā are accorded an identity within Te Tiriti alongside rights and responsibilities (Reese). Honouring these responsibilities to tangata whenua requires me to "shape" myself "in response to this land and the people of it" and "to be clear in my identity as Pākehā — to embrace it, not escape it" (Margaret). Calibrating to this notion as a settler causes a different land to emerge "into view once the full human history of that place is acknowledged, and embraced" (Turner). Part of the process of this research involved making myself aware of the Waitangi Tribunal claims and the stories from mana whenua in their own words about this area, which anyone can access through the Waitangi Tribunal website. In this research I didn't want to over-speak or grasp at Māori values or claim an intimate knowledge of whenua but instead, to follow and acknowledge, be with, rather than a stance of colonial authority.

In my practice this positionality is not just reflection or observation; it is actively pursued and embodied. I turned to Glissant's words describing "Relation" as "Gives on and with" (Glissant) and the movement of nomadic thought (Braidotti *The Posthuman*). This is the spirit of how I introduced myself in the prologue, which was guided by the structure of the mihi (introduction), in which I place myself as near to the ranges and the river, situating, not claiming, my relationship to them as I make work. This is a response to Linda Tuiwhai Smith's landmark book *Decolonising Methodologies* (2012), in which she critiques the

hierarchical nature of Western research practices, in particular the Enlightenment and Positivist traditions (Smith 49), which present research as a scientific and "objective" process (Smith 49). This prompts critical reflection on Pākehā “culture, values, assumptions, and beliefs”, urging recognition that “they may not be the 'norm'” (Newcombe and Amundsen 486).

As a Pākehā, I cannot speak for whenua, but I can speak for my connection to land and landscape. The western perception that I am separate from land is perpetuated by colonisation. This is deeply ingrained in my relationship to land just as the connective nature and meaning of whenua is embedded in Te Ao Māori. My response through my practice is to consider how to create a habit of relation, and to learn how to be in relation (Bell et al. 607) rather than “colonisation which is non-consensual, and designed to benefit Pakeha” (Margaret). As part of my practice this was simply to be ‘with’ land, learning to be in relation rather than colonial dominance. For example, this was the ethos of living out of *The Chrysalis* off grid, the physical base for my practice, and the modes of play, following and allowing that are present in the video works. This is a commitment to orient to land and a process of being alongside something, and present in the same space.

To see the physical land of Aotearoa New Zealand in relation to the concept of when, yet as a Pākehā is a reorientation that unsettles ‘landscape’ as an overriding settler story about land that normalises settler occupation. As an artist, the creative works bring me physically close to land, to the puna, the beach, the awa of this place, and if I recognise it as being alongside or with whenua, then I am closer to the experiences and stories of mana whenua of these places. This allows for forms of recognition and connection. This reminds me that as a settler I am on ancestral land whether it be a paddock, stream, river or beach. Calibrating to this as a settler causes a different notion and practice to land to emerge “into view once the full human history of that place is acknowledged, and embraced” (Turner). Part of this involved making myself aware of the Waitangi Tribunal claims and the stories from mana whenua in their own words about this area, which anyone can access through the Waitangi Tribunal website. Not wanting to claim an intimate knowledge of whenua, I wish to be following and acknowledging with it.

I chose to use the term ‘whenua’ in my research due to its relational aspects which I could access through my practice. Within Te Ao Māori, whenua embodies a way of being that emphasizes connection, encompassing not only humans but also the entire environment. Individuals relate to ancestral mountains, rivers, ecosystems, and species through whakapapa (ancestral connections, actions and stories), forming deep personal connections and recognizing them as sentient beings” (Smith *Decolonising Methodologies* 234). In my practice I interact with land through my body as a form of communication, and I have wondered if I can relate to whenua in this way. This is how I engage with the land and whenua without any props or artefacts, e.g., crawling in the stream, and moving between pockets of light in *Portal*. My approach is straightforward: to get to know someone as a friend, you spend time with them, and because play is a central modality in my practice, as discussed further in Chapter 3, this process can be seen as playful and, at times, childlike. A large part of this process was allowing agency to the elements there with me in the land.

Fig. 3. Still from Stream (00.44).

R Cooper's description of whenua as “purposeful intimacy” and “detailed familiarity” (qtd. in Smith, Ailsa 40) influenced how I approached the land in Portal, which was described as “something to be cherished” (Smith, Ailsa 40). In chapter 3, I describe my gestures touching the land which *shifted* me through space in the work, as coming to the land with gentleness, and why, in the live moment of the performance, I followed the sunlight, I let it

lead me, and touching small specific areas and details of this place along the way. A significant characteristic about these exchanges is being present, something enabled by the liveness of the performance, in which moments of connection happen. The other vital aspect is the notion of following; such as following the sunlight in *Portal* (Fig.4) and the current in *Stream* (Fig. 3). How the water of the puna echoed out in ripples from my body and the silt trail that appeared and settled over time in my wake is an example.

Fig. 4. Still from Portal (02:40).

Writing on Māori and Pākehā attitudes to land, architecture academic Neil Challenger states that the Pākehā attitude to land is concerned with prospect, saying, “when Pākehā consider land, they are considering its surface and its cover. If they own the land, they are also considering its ability to fulfil their requirements'' (Challenger 31). This is the prospect of economic return and the prospect of scenic beauty, “both of which are concerned with advancing man's condition, the one physically, the other psychologically” (29). This view of land is entwined with the notion of property. English property law defines this as “the dominion over which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe - this being necessary so that a man could enjoy the fruit of his labours” (Salmond 248). This logic originates in the stadial, hierarchical theories of British thinking that trace back to the creation story in Genesis, and the Great Chain of Being, with their assumptions that when God made the

world, he “told them to subdue the earth and gave them dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and all the living creatures” (248).

Geoff Park observed that Pākehā have a utilitarian relationship to land, while historian Beaglehole describes a heartfelt “tenderness and pride” towards it (*Ngā Uruora* 393). This tenderness is in the words of South Waikato farmer Gordon Stephenson:

> Our landscape, here at Waotu, is one where, for us, every feature carries a meaning, a connection – its own history. Having lived here for forty-five years, I suppose we are now part of the landscape, albeit rather more ephemeral than the hills and valleys. It is somewhere we love. And it has influenced us and changed us as we have changed it, just as is true of any long-lasting and loving human relationship (Abbott et al. 39).

In relation to land, Challenger notes a general “element of neo-animism inherent in Pākehā thinking” that “is ill defined, erratically held and frequently more subconscious than conscious” (Challenger 30). He says that this Pākehā inability to express what they think about land does not mean a lack of feelings as much as a difficulty in finding the words for them (32). These observations align with my life experience, in which methods of reflection, digestion and articulation help me to concretise these feelings into an art form. In art discourse, the belief that nature is animated has a potential to be articulated through new materialist ideas where materials appear alive, constantly changing and continuously becoming. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, this is explored in the book *Animism in Art and Performance*, a collation of essays on Indigenous and non-Indigenous entanglements with this animism as a different approach to new materialism, the post-human and the anthropocene (Braddock).

What is Landscape?

> *Landscape* ... It is a slippery word, a shape-shifter (Stilgoe 80).

In my performative interactions with landscape as a material and cultural surface (as in the outer limit of something), I have taken up Canadian horticulturist and writer Alexander Wilson's suggestion that landscape is a kind of *activity*, "a way of seeing the world and imagining our relationship to nature" (Lippard 8). How I frame 'landscape' in this inquiry is influenced by W T J Mitchell's introductory statement to *Landscape and Power* in which he guides us to think of landscape not as a noun but a verb, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed (Mitchell 39). To define this further, I quote environmental historian Thomas R. Dunlap:

> Landscape is the culture's picture of the land. It may include the landscape of geographers, which John Stilgoe defines as 'shaped land, land modified for permanent human occupation' but more commonly it is the picture of the land people see as having significance for the nation and their culture… It is a continuing construction, shaped by each generation from the land, the culture and experience. (Dunlap 5)

Historian Jock Phillips writes that "describing a complete landscape," or the "practice of climbing a hill to see the view" and turning land into scenery had only begun in the centuries just before Europeans reached Aotearoa New Zealand. Phillips observes that although Māori often described land in symbolic or metaphorical ways, Māori art did not include landscapes, and their oral traditions did not involve aesthetic descriptions of outdoor scenes (Phillips *Perceptions of the Landscape*). In his book Theatre Country : Essays on Landscape and Whenua. Parks expands on Phillips, saying that,

> Historically, landscape in New Zealand has mainly been about viewing the country, the essentially European or settler perspective of the visitor. But as we head into the second half of the second century of human settlement, the landscape idea is becoming increasingly the matter of heart and home that whenua is (10).

In my approach to creative practice, I use the farming paddock as a space to work within; I see it as land and landscape. When I interact with this Pākehā cultural overlay, I am also

interacting with land as a tangata Tiriti settler descendant and treaty partner with Māori. With this logic, my creative work takes place on land with a focus on *landscape,* the Pākehā cultural construction of land.The paddock was integral to the European settlement and colonization of New Zealand and the Rangitikei-Manawatū Block that I made my work on; it was considered by settlers to be one of the finest blocks in the country (Fallas 5 wai 52). When I interact with this Pākehā cultural overlay, I am also interacting with land as a tangata Tiriti settler descendant and treaty partner with Māori. This involves recognising that the land was acquired in breach of Tiriti and the historical injustices and ongoing impacts of this on local iwi (tribes). In Manawatū, the Crown purchases were facilitated through legal mechanisms such as the Native Land Acts rather than forcible confiscation or large-scale clearance that prioritised the Crown and settlers' interests exclusively from the start (Hearn *The social and economic experience of Porirua ki Manawatu Maori* 96). The Crown mostly extinguished the Indigenous system of land tenure through its right of pre-emption, war and confiscation, and the individualisation of title through the Native Land Court (Kohu-Morris 5).

Land tenure in Māori culture differs fundamentally from Western perspectives. As Mere Whaanga notes, contrasting views of land as a commodity with Māori beliefs that they belong to the land (Hill and MacMillan, eds. 119). Mānuka Hēnare further explains this concept as "mana i te whenua," where mana is derived not from control over the land but from the inherent connection to it (119). Traditional Māori practice involves kin groups managing lands through kaitiakitanga, a form of trusteeship based on ancestral deeds and whakapapa (ancestral connections, actions and stories) , intertwining resource management with cultural stewardship (119). Key principles of Māori customary land tenure include collective tribal management, rights based on whakapapa, and the non-transferability of land rights, reflecting a deep-seated commitment to preserving ancestral lands for future generations (119).

The Crown, through the Native Land Court and related legislation, aimed to individualize Māori land ownership and control the colonial land market, which historian Banner argued actively disadvantaged Māori rather than being distributively neutral (Hearn *The social and economic experience of Porirua ki Manawatu Maori* 18). The Crown purchase of the Manawatū Rangitikei block was highly disputed due to the complex tribal relationships and movements of Māori in the region (Hearn *The social and economic experience of Porirua ki Manawatu Maori* 17). Land sales negotiated under the Native Land Act promised Māori

reserves adequate for living, but the Crown failed to fully honour these agreements, leaving insufficient land for sustenance and economic opportunities (692). Such provisions were of little value to Māori because most lands in the area had been alienated (692).

The Rangitikei-Manawatū block purchase is regarded by Justice Durie (former Chair of the Waitangi Tribunal) as one of the most dishonest land acquisitions by the Crown. Durie states that despite its appearance of being contractual, the sale deed was coercive, lacking proper consent, and bypassed hapū leaders' opposition, similar to confiscatory practices observed in Taranaki. Durie underscores the Crown's deliberate strategy to maximize land acquisition while minimizing reserves, likening it to historical injustices such as confiscations, which severely impacted Māori economic opportunities and necessitates redress after decades of silence (Hurihanganui). From an iwi perspective, Huhana Smith (Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga,Ngāti Tukorehe) highlights the profound impacts of pastoralism, agriculture, and intensive land use over generations and the complex intergenerational legacies of colonial control, land alienation, reinterpretation of histories which have shaped the challenging realities confronting contemporary Māori (Smith *Porirua Ki Manawatū Inquiry* 156).

> Colonization devastated customary land and water use in Porirua ki Manawatū, causing significant pain for Māori, changing water from a valued taonga to a commodity for farming and industry, leading to deforestation, drained wetlands, and polluted waterways, severely limiting access and health of these resources (155).

The paddock taps into the western dualism of pastoral/wilderness which is also expressed in western landscape paintings. In various works, I go to the Tangimoana pine forest which protects the surrounding farmland from the encroachment of the dunes. The forest is a European landscape just as delineated as the one of the paddock that refers to ancestral divides of the pastoral/wilderness deep within my DNA. As in the paddock, these boundaries are more than utility, and point to dormant cultural beliefs. Research scientist and ecologist Geoff Park offers a brief synopsis of these dualisms and their complex histories in the context of European landscape. Park summarizes the evolution of European attitudes towards nature, noting that “for nature to become scenery” shifts were necessary (*Theatre Country* 115). This transition required a belief system, exemplified by Christianity,

which created a detachment spiritually and emotionally from the natural world as interconnected with existence. Initially rooted in Christian ideology, humans began to perceive themselves as separate from and superior to nature. This detachment was furthered by moving away from animistic beliefs. Eventually, Park writes, societal norms influenced by imperial order conditioned people to see forests with a mix of relief and apprehension, often juxtaposed with ruins, symbolizing prosperity and grandeur(115). Park suggests that encountering these landscapes allowed reflection on past civilizations, reinforcing a sense of human progress (115). This shift reflects viewing nature as scenic rather than spiritually significant, as a vehicle for progress particularly in the European industrial age (115).

I frame my performative actions so they appear on video in a manner that visually refers to early settler and colonial painting and its use of composition, light, and colour. This is to insert myself into a western landscape imagery in a deliberate and far from passive manner. In the actions and imagery of my work, I am inside it, questioning it, wondering about it, and unsettling my previous understanding of it. This ‘performing’ is realized through a series of performative acts that recontextualize traditional domestic activities within the landscape, challenging and redefining both the space and the associated roles of settler womanhood. This performative engagement with the land highlights a dynamic, relational process that co-creates meaning and identity, aligning with Thomas R. Dunlap's view of landscape as a continuously shaped cultural construction (Dunlap 5) and W T J Mitchell's concept of landscape as an active, shaping process (Mitchell 39). Influenced by American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler's theory of performativity (Butler), which posits that gender is constructed through repeated acts, my work interacts with how actions constitute identity and how landscape is an active participant in this process.

Creative works such as *Vacuum* and *Solar Oven-Fire Starter* exemplify this interaction as they subvert traditional performative gestures of womanhood by relocating domestic tasks like cooking and cleaning to public outdoor spaces. This shift challenges the conventional separation between private and public roles. In contrast, the measured pacing in *Section* critiques imperial expansion and questions land ownership bringing attention to the surveyance of land and western modes of measurement which are all calibrated to the white property owning male (Braidotti *The Posthuman* 27), while *Electric Fence* uses the struggle to climb a fence and colonial explorer attire to interrogate settler identity and colonial

control. Additionally, *Electric Fence* employs humour to further undermine the 'naturalness' of colonial, heroic, male assumptions, reinforcing this critique through attire traditionally associated with masculinity. Together, these performances unsettle the norms of gendered roles and land control within settler colonial contexts and traditional performative gestures of womanhood such as cooking and cleaning by placing them in unconventional settings and contexts. This approach questions and unsettles the hierarchical and restrictive constructs of 'woman' within settler societies to offer an alternative narrative on female identity and autonomy. My videos depict a Pākehā woman engaging with land independently, without the presence of a masculine counterpart. I am not defined by a domestic space; instead, I am depicted freely wandering outside. My actions are curious and playful, rather than being driven by a sense of conquest or traditional roles. I am neither a caretaker nor a wife. Rather, I portray myself as resourceful not for the purpose of land ownership, but for living harmoniously with it. These actions may not actively confront patriarchy directly, but they serve as an oblique rejection of its control. By interacting with the land and its non-human inhabitants as equal partners, I foster dialogue and mutual respect, subtly challenging and deconstructing traditional settler patriarchal structures and conventional notions of ‘woman. within these.

Landscape and the Colonial Project

In the early colonial period, landscape imagery in paintings and literature was widely used to promote settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand. Australian historian Patrick Wolfe writes that colonial control of territory is not only the physical seizure and occupation of land but also an ideological process of cultural engineering, which fits land into a colonial imaginary, projecting settler value systems onto Indigenous lands (Wolfe 389). Early landscape paintings were barely distinct from their European counterparts with their imagery of arcadian paradise and romantic wilderness that tapped into powerful cultural ideologies to make claims about the legitimacy of the colonial project (Bell and Matthewman 56).

In the first half of the 19th century the New Zealand Company was one of the main drivers of this propaganda, taking a small group of artists to survey the country, record its features,

find land suitable for settlement, and to depict the New Zealand Company settlements in an attractive light. The New Zealand Company promoted New Zealand as a fertile land with a benign climate, “reserved by Providence for the use of men” (Phillips). On this theme, Michael Dunn, writing on the history of New Zealand painting, notes that these “painted views often anticipate the expectations of the settlers by making a scene in the image of what is wanted rather than what was there” (Dunn 9).

In her book, *The Financial Colonisation of Aotearoa*, Catherine Comyn outlines the significant role played by The New Zealand Company in the colonization of New Zealand. The Company, founded in 1839 by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and others, was a private enterprise driven by capitalist ideals of systematic settlement and speculative land acquisition. The company's primary aim was to facilitate British colonization through aggressive land purchases and settlement schemes (Comyn 37) by attracting workers by pricing land just beyond the reach of average labourers, but accessible through extended employment, thus establishing a hierarchy between property owners and those without land (Harris 6). While the Crown provided legal frameworks such as the Treaty of Waitangi (Comyn 68-69), ostensibly safeguarding Māori rights, the company leveraged these for financial gain, leading to tensions with the Crown's governance objectives (Comyn 37). Both parties benefited from the dispossession of Māori land, facilitated by mechanisms like the Crown's pre-emption clause (37) under the Treaty of Waitangi, which prioritized land sales to settlers over Māori interests(Hearn *The social and economic experience of Porirua ki Manawatu Maori* 96).

The New Zealand Company system was a form of pure capitalism (Marx) justified by the assumption that because Indigenous lands were not enclosed and developed according to agrarian property relations they were *terrae nullius* (Comyn 45). A wasteland, not belonging to anyone, because it was not cultivated or improved by labour, it was considered ownerless (45). This entitlement to land overrode the fact that it was already in use, occupied and maintained as a fluid territory with centuries of Māori management and land tenure. The colonialist ideology of entitlement, coupled with a belief in the moral and economic imperative to "improve" both the land and its Indigenous inhabitants, justified the New Zealand Company's actions and significant ideology driving the dispossession of Māori land and the establishment of settler society in New Zealand (45).

I cannot be certain of the expectations, attitudes and intentions of my first known forebears; they are listed as a labourer and seamstress from Kent, England on a New Zealand Company Ship (Archives New Zealand, Passenger Lists, 1839-1973). I recognise values and attitudes that they may have brought with them in the way that landscapes were worked and represented. Most strikingly are the similarities between the contemporary pastoral landscape of Kent and that of the Manawatū where parts of my family settled in the 1870s.

The Labourer's Paradise as a Landscape Sensibility

I consider myself to have inherited a landscape sensibility that historian Miles Fairburn terms "the labourer's paradise" (Fairburn 1989). This is a set of habits towards land originating from my forebears that comes from a working lineage rather than a property-owning class, patterned from generations of working as farm labourers and their response to the changing of lifestyle after migrating from Britain to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 19th century. The vestiges of the labourer's paradise of landscape live on in the way my parents arranged their lives and their embodied relationships to the interior/exterior spaces of the home. I see the labourer's paradise as landscape at play in the spatial dynamics of my work, especially how I frame and move myself within the landscape and the performance. This is a bodily activity; it is a performative way of thinking, being and sensing in and with the world.

The labourer's paradise draws upon the early settler era, British arcadian ideologies that, while conforming to the Victorian sensibilities of the time, were transposed onto Aotearoa New Zealand. Commonly known as a rural paradise, arcadia was a strategy for 'normalising' and 'naturalising' European occupancy in New Zealand (Evans 2007; Fairburn 1989; Ream 2018). Greek mythology's Arcadia was a peaceful utopia of man and nature in harmony. In the British version, man (and not a woman), is an active participant, with nature at his disposal, and a moral duty to be a steward and caretaker (Fairburn 1989 29). Fairburn describes the "labourers paradise" as the 19th century popularised view of New Zealand as a land of milk and honey, a promised land full of natural abundance that the working man could harness through the virtues of hard work to become materially independent (29).

Social and cultural historian Tony Simpson states, “New Zealand was a much more open society than the one they left, which allowed those who wished to do so and were prepared to work the chance to do well and realise their ambitions” (Simpson 9). Property ownership for the deserving labourer was central to New Zealand's identity as a *labourer’s paradise* (Fairburn 29). Home was discussed in terms of productive land. The 19th-century colony was seen as a place for people to achieve independence through pastoral or agricultural land ownership (33), a predominantly male narrative (42).

Fig. 5. My father and uncle at a dam excavation on Manawatū farmland near Feilding in the 1970’s.

I am of Scottish, English and Irish descent, like many Pākehā. My third great grandfather Stephen Pilcher, a labourer, arrived on the New Zealand Company Ship, The Coromandel, on 29 August 1840 (Archives New Zealand, Passenger Lists, 1839-1973). Maybe the *labourer's paradise* myth was a factor in his immigration, and thus, in my life. My ancestor left Kent, England, likely in pursuit of a better life, as many immigrants did. Colonial recruitment agencies heavily targeted Kent, which had been affected by the agricultural and industrial revolution. Later generations of my family moved to Halcombe, Stanway, Feilding, Opiki, and Palmerston North in Manawatū.

My family has a history of altering land. My grandfather and great grandfather used to walk from Halcombe to Stanway to clear a small farm plot (bought in 1876) near Feilding. They built the farmhouse from wood on this property, where my father grew up and I lived until I was two years old. My dad worked in large-scale earthworks, mostly in Manawatū, but also

on projects like the Clyde Dam. He operated and maintained big machinery, grading roads, building subdivisions, and digging dams (Fig. 5).

The Painting in the Lounge

Fig.6. The landscape painting that hung in the lounge of the childhood home.

This painting is emblematic (Fig. 6). It represents all that I am and am not. It represents many of the values that I inherited but somehow did not stick. And yet, they still haunt me. I have wondered about those settler values in my creative work to understand how it affects me, how it repeats and reinforces colonisation. I have hope that this effort to decolonise myself – how I live on, in and with the land – will unsettle things in my life that do not sit well. How to un-inhabit old habits?

If a way of being could be simplified as a type of template overlaid on top of a lived life, it is with this notion that I recognise *the labourer's paradise* as a predominant form of patterning within my family. In its most pared back form, this is a type of looping survival script, similar to that of the "factory worker" that poet artist CAConrad describes as active in their family enacted and produced through body and mind with specific rules and methods, particularly in attitudes towards gendered roles, land and work (Mitchell 3).

This painting (Fig. 6) was the one painting in the house, hung in pride of place above the piano, in the best room, the lounge. I grew up in a house where people didn't look at paintings that much. This was seen as a high-status object despite the assembly line canvas because it was hand-painted in oil. My parents were inspired by the image of an ordered imaginary *wilderness*, not cultivation. Perhaps lingering bourgeois cultural mythologies used to frame, control and orchestrate nature and refine taste may have played into this. Although it may seem kitsch now, this landscape painting is a contemporary example of the picturesque aesthetic, a landscape category of the romantic era defined by English clergyman William Gilpin (1724 – 1804). The picturesque is characterised by "illusionary accounts" of nature, either "glorified, sometimes pastoralised, always treated reverently" (Schenker 46). This involved compositional conventions such as scenes rendered in naturalistic detail with undefined borders to suggest an 'infinite extension of the imagination"(45). The idea of going out into nature just to see it and doing activities like tramping did not register in my family. This painting is useful as a focal point to contextualise the origins of the spatial sensibilities of my work and its relationship to the *labourer's paradise* sensibility. To my mother, this painting was an aspirational reminder of God's handiwork. This fits the model of the *labourers' paradise* and its promise to the moral serving, hard-working man with a Protestant work ethic that my parents embodied.

Every day, after working long hours, my father would lay down to nap in front of this painting in the lounge. I recall the painting on the wall, my father on the floor, both existing in parallel, never to meet, much like the Christian idea of heaven as a different realm. This is a placement of the body that I echo in my work. It is reflected in my work, in which I inhabit a parallel, staged space in front of the camera. In my videos, I present my body as always active, perhaps unconsciously reflecting my parents' work ethic. And yet, I maintain that my practice allows me to understand and interact with landscape in a playful way.

My childhood home was governed by Christian morality and the Protestant work ethic, which valued hard work, thrift, and efficiency (Protestant Work Ethic). This experience aligns with Schama's (2004) description of British arcadia as "a product of the orderly mind" instead of "the playground of the unchained senses" (Schama 530). This life had strict boundaries, and a view of physical scarcity that contradicted its belief in a transcendent God as provider. My family's self-reliance was marked by practical skills and the capacity to do much with little. This value was reflected in our lives through resourcefulness, skills, and

hard work. It was an unquestioned part of our stories. These are all qualities I embody in this research. I chose to bring my work to the paddock and use non-agonistic play to shift my way of being.

How I Refer to ‘Surface’ in this Work

Fig. 7. Still from *Projection Screen* (00:21).

I refer to landscape as a surface with multiple meanings that change with context. I gravitate to the idea of it as the outer limit of something that holds it together. In an early work *Projection Screen* I contemplated landscapes as cultural projections, a way of expressing and narrating land, as something I live in, view from, and how it could be an action, image, and material reality. I took a projection screen to the overgrown backyard and filmed myself setting it up. As usual, I used a camera tripod to frame the scene like a landscape painting, creating a stage-like space. The heavy vinyl screen blocked the view, like a wall. Keeping it up required maintenance and I saw this as an intervention and an insistent white space of inscription. I wanted to stand back and look at it in the space, to have a sense of it, and to

feel how it changed the space, if the space changed it or if I changed this space. It felt like setting up a mirror.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines surface as the outside part or uppermost layer of something (Stevenson Ed.). In Manawatū, I see the agricultural landscape as a dominant surface on top of the land, expressed as layers of turf, grass, substrates, and how paddocks appear flat from a distance. I am interested in landscape as a surface layer and "a condition that exists as a threshold or interface between fields" (McGuire 21). From the perspective of landscape architecture Marcy McGuire states that surfaces mediate relationships as "a mediative substance or site of reaction and interaction" (21), for example the surfaces of landscape and land "are both interfaces, set in relation, defined by each other, and manifest through interactions" (21).

I refer to landscape as the view from the ship (Chapter 3: The Ship). This Pākehā story is the top layer, calibrating all stories to itself, telling them in its voice and terms. As a Pākehā woman living here, I am part of this story. This inquiry is me (a piece, a bit, a particle) shaking loose and my impression of this story is that it is like encountering a force-field, that I must interrupt. For example, I think of the paddock as a material layer of Pākehā culture over land. It has lots of little stories in it, but these interlock to create an overriding story, an expression of a monoculture (a surface) disrupting previous and current ecosystems, which must be maintained constantly, so it is always active.

In terms of my work, surface also refers to the surface of painting, a two-dimensional painted surface (Greenberg 1982), that brush strokes move across. I use a lens-based medium to capture my performances (on the surface of grass, the paddock, the ground, land) which end up on a screen, another surface, that my body can be seen moving across. This medium of video is an expression of a surface of time in its movement through frames. All these surfaces come into play when I think about and refer to surface in this work.

Decolonial Discourse and My practice

Decolonial discourse is directed at dismantling the fundamental systems of domination that characterise colonialism (Bell et al. 605) emphasising the importance of centring Indigenous voices, knowledge systems, and research practices (Smith *Decolonising Methodologies* 2012). This work focuses on unsettling, and in decolonial terms this is a series of doings to "re-experience, re-imagine, and re-think the world based on different epistemic foundations and ontologies"(Gallien 33). The decolonial/feminist aspect in my work speaks in its movement, imagery and engagement with materials and the earth. This is an affirmative stance and the playfulness of my practice in conjunction with nomadic thinking offers insights/strategies aimed at destabilising the 'grid' and interrogating the 'common sense' of settler-colonial logic (Rifkin *Settler Common Sense.* 322) and westernised conceptions of landscape.

In the context of my research, defining decolonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, a settler colonial society where the enduring structures and impacts of colonialism persist (Veranci 2015), is essential. In Aotearoa New Zealand decolonisation involves addressing and dismantling these persistent impacts to restore Māori sovereignty and lands (Bell et al. 4). These decolonisation efforts are fundamentally shaped by honouring the ethics and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi (Showden et al. 664). Signed in 1840 between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, the Treaty establishes principles of partnership, protection, and participation, defining the Crown-Māori relationship. It guarantees Māori rights to land, culture, and self-determination, and outlines settlers' responsibilities within the Treaty partnership (Waitangi Tribunal).

In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that decolonization involves more than just political and legal changes; it includes reclaiming and revitalizing Māori knowledge and cultural practices. She emphasizes the need to dismantle colonial structures and create spaces where Māori perspectives can thrive, stating this effort must go "beyond critiquing colonialism" to "open up possibilities for understanding and knowing the world differently" (xiii). For settler

societies, this means engaging with Indigenous worlds in ways that challenge “deeply habituated logics and practices of domination” (Bell et al. 4).
This aligns with decolonial thought, which advocates moving away from Western-centric perspectives to embrace diverse ways of knowing and being (Maldonado-Torres 98). Originating in Latin America, decoloniality critiques the intersection of modernity, coloniality, and capitalism, coming from a different theoretical base from settler colonial studies which focuses on the ongoing effects of settler colonialism (Bell et al 607). In Aotearoa New Zealand, decolonisation is a localized project addressing how colonialism affects Indigenous and settler dynamics, focusing on restoring Māori sovereignty and dismantling colonial regimes (Bell et al 607). This illustrates how decolonial and decolonising frameworks vary by context, as they are led by the Indigenous peoples involved. This challenges the rigid colonial construct of singular definitions, supporting a multifaceted approach to colonial issues (Opara).

I am coming to this as a descendant of settlers, and as such the place from which I am interrogating these issues is different from Māori and this is partially reflected in how the term "decolonisation" is debated In Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori scholars prefer "Indigenisation" or "re-Maorification" as alternatives (Bell et al 607) Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones argue that decolonisation diverts from what is possible by often focusing too much on critiquing the existing system, stating that “decolonisation is seen by some as the proper work of Pākehā and other non-Māori allies, while Indigenous colleagues lead self-determining indigenisation work” (Hoskins and Jones 309). Pauwai Cairns argues it centres the coloniser rather than Indigenous interests, while Moana Jackson views "Maorification" as an "ethic of restoration" (Cairns 2020). Mahdis Azarmandi and Sara Tolbert argue for "unsettling" instead of "decolonisation," stating it is co-opted and inadequate in Aotearoa, where, as India Logan-Riley notes, "land back, oceans back" remains unfulfilled. They believe full decolonisation is unattainable while colonisation's effects persist (Azarmandi and Tolbert 2023).

Settlers enacting 'decolonial' or 'decolonising' tactics must navigate the tension of working within and against the structures from which they benefit. Engaging in decolonial work as a Pākehā involves navigating several complexities, including issues of authenticity, the risk of appropriation, and the need to address structural power imbalances. This necessitates a critical self-examination and an acknowledgment of complicity in these colonial systems. Scholars like Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) and Joanna Kidman (2019) caution against

the superficial or uncritical adoption of decolonial rhetoric by settlers, which can inadvertently reinforce colonial dynamics. Tuck and Yang (2012) particularly warn against 'moves to innocence' where settlers might use decolonial language to absolve themselves of guilt without making substantive changes to their power and privilege (Tuck and Yang 3). Therefore, my response through my practice involved a careful and reflexive approach, positioning myself, interrogating my motivations, actions, and their potential impacts on Indigenous realities and ontologies. I use the terms "settler descendant" and Pākehā to acknowledge historical context and reflect my evolving identity in relation to Māori. These terms highlight my proactive stance toward reconciliation and recognition of settler status, emphasising a commitment to engaging with Māori culture and addressing historical injustices, rather than passively inheriting settler status (Tuck and Yang 3).

My response through my practice is to genuinely engage with decolonial principles in a lived and contextual manner by referencing personal and familial histories in a commitment to feminist and decolonial frameworks while maintaining context-specific relevance such as making this work out of Manawatū and engaging with these principles in a lived manner as the base of my research. I drew upon on Braidotti's (2011) notion of nomadic thinking, Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*(1997) and Haraway's concept of situated knowledge (Haraway 590) to emphasise the importance of being accountable and mindful of my positionality and the specific contexts of this work. This approach aligns with Bellingham's idea of thinking through place (Bellingham 37), ensuring that this research remains grounded, respectful, and contextually relevant, rather than abstracted from its source. In my work I have aimed for a non-grasping approach, inspired by Glissant, and not overwriting other voices but speaking from my position inspired from Linda Tuhiwhai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies* (2012) and situated feminisms. Part of this was being on land in the form of a gift, not owning it, being there as a guest, and a visitor which opens to a different schema of living on land that's not about property. This is an opening as Max Harris asserts in his *State of the Pākehā Nation* address 2024, the idea that different norms of property produce different lives (Harris 6). The possibilities this points to also relates to Tuck and Yang's statement "decolonisation is not a metaphor"(Tuck and Yang 3).

My Creative work and Decolonial Discourse

Michel de Certeau argues that "tactics ... rely on the time of the moment" and "use and reuse a field of action that is not of their own making" (De Certeau xix). This perspective supports the view that video-mediated performance work does not directly 'decolonise' but employs tactics to 'unsettle' entrenched colonial and Western conceptions of landscape. By destabilizing the 'grid' of settler-colonial logic, these tactics interrogate and challenge dominant narratives.

My creative work generates a space to explore how video-mediated performance contributes to the wider discourse on decolonization. Rather than relying on text, it communicates through movement, imagery, and engagement with materials and the earth. This approach challenges the grand narratives of settler colonization through small, cumulative actions that unsettle colonial logic and Western landscape conceptions. Documenting these performances on video makes this practice accessible to a broader audience, emphasising decolonisation as an ongoing, immediate process.

I do this by using a lens-based process, including the use of a tripod to frame the work in a way that questions colonial modes of ownership and enclosure. The tripod draws attention to my body's movements within a static frame, visually opposing boundaries. By not using voice or written text, my performances resist colonial impulses to name and define, instead creating space for interpretive engagement. This approach highlights the instability of unsettling and invites viewers to consider the deliberate, nuanced ways in which actions and imagery contribute to the decolonial *discourse.*

The Decolonial Gesture

The embodied gesture is central to my practice. Its place in the processual nature of this research is how I question my settler colonial habits. I define this body of work as a decolonial gesture. The concept of the colonial matrix, described by Argentine philosopher and semiotician Walter Mignolo as a system defined by its own unique signs, signals, and framings (Mignolo 14) offers a key to contextualising my work. These elements are recognisable in my creative works and by deliberately making these signs and signals appear strange and unsettling them through my performative actions this challenges and

disrupts the colonial matrix. As a result, my work becomes a decolonial gesture, a defiance that works to destabilise this matrix. To further unpack this, Mignolo argues that any action, whether in fiction, art, or real life, that directly challenges colonial systems can be seen as a decolonial gesture. Such gestures are purposeful, aiming to resist or undo colonial influences, and they must be understood in relation to existing colonial norms. For a gesture to be decolonial, it must be recognisable in the context of colonial gestures. This implies that those who see or experience the decolonial gesture should be able to identify it as a response or opposition to colonial norms and practices (Mignolo 14). A decolonial gesture brings the potential of decolonial joy (Negrón-Muntaner 170).

Scholar, writer and artist Frances Negrón-Muntaner describes de-colonial joy as “a specific form of joy that arises when individuals and communities feel the possibility of a different present, one where neither colonialism nor coloniality rules over their lives” (170). This leads me to wonder at the possibilities of a joyful way of *being*, one beyond coloniality, and to wonder what kind of space that could be. This idea of joy offers an authentic way to move through this research. It asks for a commitment to working towards a present beyond coloniality, what a decolonial attitude could mean to me and this exploration. The first thing I consider in the creative work of this research project is that landscape is active, and second, that I am using a particular dialect of landscape, a labouring nuance within landscape, filtered through the dreams and habits of my labourer forebears. In this work, the decolonial attitude that I refer to rests in the choice to recognise and unpick white settler habits.

How is this Exegesis Structured?

This exegesis travels through thematic sections from the vantage point of *The Chrysalis*. I picture the thematic sections as a terrain that unfolds as I focus on particular works. I prescribe to the idea of a whole made of parts, such that they are not totalising. There is an aspect of tone present in how the videos tell one or many stories and how these stories are held together. In this sense, the narrative is a bundle of parts that exist together as a collective. There's no hero in these stories. These videos are snapshots using everyday acts

to play with habits that are so mundane they can often be difficult to locate. The videos unfold in any order; the longer narrative is found in how they accumulate.

Fig. 8. Still from *April Morning.*(01:29).

This research project has been a journey marked by numerous life experiences. The making of the artwork tells a story of the momentum of those experiences. As a research activity, this making as research includes reflection and analysis of other artists and their practices, reading histories and reading critical theory. This is an accumulative process and the thematic groupings that structure this exegesis are demarcated by a video (or group of videos), or an image leading from the artwork or based on location or events. A list of all the works can be found at the front of this exegesis including the links in the image captions.

I consider the creative work as pockets of encounter, and rather than a disembodied voice from above, I am aiming for a horizontal tone, one on the ground, as I was when I made the works. I am struck by how they appear to be acts of wandering around. I continually recognise the processual nature of this overall research project, and hence, this exegesis develops as the accumulation of wonderings and wandering actions that inform one another. This process of unfolding, moving through, unpicking the subjectivities, and noting

details such as colours, site, camera, the weather, the dog, and the props are equally important to me; these matters matter. All of these matters are part of the encounter and contribute to what I learned along the way, profound or not.

This writing begins with *The Chrysalis* as a touchstone (as it was when I made the work). *The Chrysalis* has a likeness to a ship but also to a house, which refers to my complicated relationship to land as a settler descendant, which is to be of this place and to have roots from somewhere else.

Chapter One: The Chrysalis

This chapter is the story of *The Chrysalis*, how it came into being as a lived art process, the dynamics of it as an object and prop, and the influence it has in the videos.

Fig 9. *The Chrysalis* on site at the paddock.

The Chrysalis is a mobile living space that began its life as a double horse float registered as a home-built trailer circa 1973. It is a shapeshifter of an object. On the road it's a horse-float reminiscent of a gypsy caravan. It is an artwork, and it is also a prop, a sculptural object and a house. It has been a shelter and home for me and this body of artwork. In the videos, I draw upon its aesthetic qualities, its colour and sculptural characteristics and properties as the vehicle that brought me to the different sites. When I made these works, I considered it in the same way as I do the camera; as a tool entwined with my physical process and something in which my body is in close reference. I lived out of *The Chrysalis* off-grid in a paddock in Tangimoana from February 2020 to September 2020, arriving 10 days before the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020. It has moved to and from many sites – the paddock; the river; beach; dunes; and from Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Tangimoana and to Titahi Bay, Porirua; where, as I write, it currently sits.

Coming to the paddock and living out of *The Chrysalis* was a type of landing that was akin to alighting. This situation touched on deep issues of shelter, belonging and support, which is significant because this research didn't take its feet until my feet were uprooted and forced back onto the land by a life event and the necessity to find a new home. This prompted me to adopt a nomadic existence. A nomad doesn't own land; they're on the move. Often like Roma, an ethnic group of traditionally itinerant people originating in northern India, who live worldwide, principally in Europe, they rely on the hospitality of others to enable them to perch briefly in a place before moving on to the next place (Britannica). *The Chrysalis* is symbolic of a mobility of thought and the hospitalities of its wider context. In the relationship between my life, my practice and the nomadic stance of this research, The Chrysalis was a portal to a more open mode of relating to land. In this situation, shifting to the land in Tangimoana was made possible by virtue of a gift by friends.

The Paddock

Living out of the paddock in Tangimoana was a return to my birthplace and a metaphorical access point to the landscape dreams of my farm labourer forebears. I came to the paddock to live close and intimately with land and to wrestle with these settler conceptions of landscape that create distance. I aimed to traverse the spaces between these two things. I went to the paddock understanding it as both land and as a Pākeha cultural surface, a material resulting from settler imaginations, dreams and economy. In Aotearoa New Zealand, I consider the site of the paddock, a fenced enclosure to hold livestock in and encroachers out, and a marker of property ownership, to be a physical symbol of colonisation, an expression of an externalised relationship to westernised constructions of ‘landscape’ and ownership.

Reflecting on a larger scale, this urge could be considered to be an ancestral pull to the field as the genus loci, the sense of place of my culture. Historian John Cawte Beaglehole (1936) described the imperial vision of the New Zealand landscape as pasturing its soul in classical English fields (Park *Theatre Country* 108). In a 1984 commentary on British landscape photographer Charles Waites, writer Adam Nicolson referred to the field

as “the dream place” because of its profound associations (Nicolson qtd. Park *Theatre Country* 107). As Nicolson explains, the field simply referred to open space amidst forests, but its meaning, intertwined with the landscape, has evolved into an image of civility, a polite division of spoils”(107). Fields, though enclosed, create a connected pattern that signals “a network of agreements,” offering a sense of security and defining clear boundaries between spaces (107).

Historian John Stilgoe writes that enclosure forms a crucial part of the concept of the field (Stilgoe 8). He goes on to discuss the field as a site rich in historical associations, a sunny and cleared space much like the modern-day lawn, free of the forest, its lawlessness, and dark fears (128–129). It is here that the paddock also taps into the western dualisms of pastoral/wilderness expressed in western landscape painting. I interact with this cultural surface when I frame my performative actions with the camera in a manner that visually refers to early settler and colonial painting and its use of composition, light, and colour.

How I Came to Live There

I made *The Chrysalis* to explore an embodied immersion in my research subject and because I needed a place to live because of a sudden marriage split. My mother died a few days after this dissolution and the impact of her death and the grief associated with it blew my family apart for a time. This happened amid a nationwide housing crisis and I could not find affordable accommodation for my dog and me. My twin sister and friends helped as much as they could, but this was not sustainable. This was a difficult situation because to live anywhere in Aotearoa New Zealand requires owning land, either as your own property, paying rent or being a guest in someone’s house. The conjunction of these factors was a powerful catalyst for this research. I wondered about the paddock as a landscape of my ancestors and, although they had a different relationship to land, I wondered if I could somehow connect to them through it. These circumstances and the personal need for shelter kicked in a powerful survival urge and encouraged me to find clarity about my position as a settler descendant in Aotearoa New Zealand. My mother’s death made me

more aware of the presence of generational family patterns and their place within this exploration. My instinct was that I could access the order binding these habits to my present life and digest them through the embodied processes of my practice. Through this activity, I might become more aware of my states of being in relation to land. These reflections were compounded by feeling cut off from my family and the isolation of the COVID-19 lockdown. Adding to this, the horse float parked in the expanse of grass seemed like a lone ship in the middle of the sea.

My works have developed and expanded from this process of returning to Manawatū and even to the paddock and this is a physical and metaphorical step in this research that I position as part of 'knowing oneself' as a step to calibrating my *vital compass* (de Oliveira Andreotti et al.). I make this art from a place that relates to my personal histories, where these habits grew and were embodied in my family in a type of generational patterning that fits in with feminist and decolonial modes of positioning. On a practical level, to make this work elsewhere is unthinkable because it would be out of context and dislocated from its source. This is a physical mode of nomadic thinking (Braidotti 2011) that takes on the accountability of situated position (Haraway 590). These factors contribute to an activity of thinking through place (Bellingham 37).

A Transformation

Fig 10. *The Chrysalis* in its original state.

Making this battered, old horse float into *The Chrysalis* was the first transformation of this research. The custom, hammerite pink paint was iridescent in different lights, and its shape, despite its clunky bulk, reminded me of a monarch butterfly chrysalis (Fig. 8). In the insect world, a chrysalis is the housing a caterpillar makes for itself as part of the process where it gestates into a butterfly or moth. The insect wraps itself in a material coming from its own body and undergoes a complete state change, including stages of liquefaction as it transforms into a butterfly. This metaphor is apt for my personal life, which has liquified and is still in the state of being reconstituted into a different shape.

My research tracks an individual transformation from the site of my art practice which is about spreading out into an awareness that links to a larger turn from “colonisation to restoration” (Bell et al. 613). This awareness once unfolded cannot be denied, but with this expansion as Bell put it comes “response-abilities,'' which Bell (2014) describes as the ability to respond” (614). It is in this sense that this research tracks a series of encounters that relate to my uneasy relationship to settling and the generation of decolonial possibilities.

From the outside this effort looked like an act of independence. I was a one-woman unit taking matters into my own hands to solve my living situation. Life is not a silo, and what looks like independence is actually interdependence behind the scenes and a taste of

relational movement in a real-life situation, a fact evidenced in the acknowledgements of this exegesis. Refitting the horse float at the university drew a lot of attention and many conversations were had. After negotiating a space to build it on campus, people offered help such as holding wood for me as I hammered and drilled. There was a lot of moral support. Sometimes being an independent woman is drilling at least forty holes into metal with the wrong drill setting until finally, someone tells you the right way. It is bartering to shift bricks in exchange for learning how to frame doors that do not leak, without reading the building code.

The choice to refit an old horse float was a practical, low-cost decision: it was readymade, roadworthy, and registered. Because this horse float was obviously homemade, it had an unusual shape and seemed to access a humble and rural history rather than a sporting, equestrian one. The horse float was strange and seemed to hold personal relevance because it was something my grandfather, who designed and built farm equipment, could have made. Like my grandfather, my father can fix and build most things. I tried to draw on their resourcefulness to make *The Chrysalis*.

I made *The Chrysalis* without a place to go, in the faith that once it became a solid object ready to go somewhere, the universe would provide. My allotted time to use the university space was nearly up before this act of faith and desperation culminated in a random conversation and an invitation from a friend to go to Tangimoana. I had a horse float house to live in, but I was without a towing vehicle. This too, was an affirmative act of faith that I could link to Braidotti's writing on the affirmative ethics of nomadic thought. This was, in essence, a physical experiment with this “intellectual style,” that “consists not so much in being homeless as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere” (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* 45).

Living With Land

The Chrysalis and the works that arise while living out of it are embodied acts of nomadic thinking that are physical re-imaginings of settler spaces, first by making them visible and secondly, by way of processes that sift and shift bits of them together. In this doctoral project, I am manifesting a political imagination of those settler spaces with an approach that places me as a guest in this land. I have no intention to assume ownership or to operate with fixed notions about the stories that the land and I share. This process with *The Chrysalis* links to the physical terms of nomadism, which are oriented toward living 'in' and 'with' nature, rather than dominating and exploiting it (Science Direct). Within a settling schema, this embodied mode of being affects how I think through my work and the motions of making and performing it. Rather than the static stance of claiming space as a dwelling, home or house, *The Chrysalis* is more like an engaged pause that induces reflection as well as a house on wheels that can shift within the environment. My practice considers how such literal movement in the landscape exerts nomadic thinking as a form of spatial, political and cultural responsiveness.

Fig 11. In the paddock, view of the back of *The Chrysalis*.

The Chrysalis is a mode of living with land rather than over it. I felt like I was turning towards land and found this to be a calibration to a relational way of being in the world and a decolonial gesture of turning towards relational enmeshment instead of being an isolated individual separate from it. *The Chrysalis* shook in the wind and the outside came in easily as dirt, spiders, flies, ducks, and rain leaks. *Fire starters-Solar Oven* is a work outside with

all of this. I cooked with the sun, and gathered water when it rained. Nothing could be taken for granted and I became very aware of what was there, of where my water came from, what I brought to the situation, what came out of my body and the importance of all aspects of the living environment.

Fig 12. Still from *Fire Starters-Solar Oven* (00:18).

Fig 13. Still from *Fire Starters-Solar Oven* (01:53).

This video offers a creative enunciation of living with land, in its depiction of everyday simple tasks such as opening out the solar oven to the sun and existing with the flows of living others through this open plan outdoor kitchen. This is a simple image of connecting the consciousness of self to the surroundings. It is my idea of a "gives, on and with" type of relation, and that “understanding in Relation is the sense of generosity and a sense of looking out towards” (Glissant 212).

Fire Starters-Solar Oven is a moving image work that expresses the grid in a different way to the early work *Section*, which preceded the building of *The Chrysalis.* It involved measured linear pacing on an empty section as a response to the town grid. I was struck by the resonance of this measuring instinct to Glissant’s description of imperial expansion and its grasping nature as ‘arrowlike nomadism’ (Glissant 12), the opposite to the openness required by relationality. I understood this response as a reaction to the enclosure of land into ownership. Other works where I stride around in straight lines like an *arrow* refer to this idea and its linear mentality. *The Chrysalis* was the opposite — not putting all the differences of life and living around me into oppositional divisions or subsuming them, but allowing them to move and exist. This is not fighting settler patriarchy; it is a non-head-on engagement with place and land that gains its strength without mirroring that binary logic. I see *Fire Starters-Solar Oven* as a depiction of affirmative resistance. A small force that is soft but persistent. It depicts consistent small acts of connection rather than direct confrontation that have a cumulative effect. I want to channel my energy into these new habits, and “when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting, you are that much less fostering” (Massumi 13) and less open to relational modes of being.

I saw that living off grid in this manner looked like a literal and physical experiment of American writer and scholar Mark Rifkin’s (2017) call for a project of reorientation to the grid, the structuring of settler colonialism that treats itself as a neutral, natural, self-evident frame for understanding reality (Rifkin *Beyond Settler Time* 25). Living off grid turns away from what Rifkin (2013)terms *settler common sense*—the everyday feelings, sentiments, and practices that normalise the disappearance of Indigenous people (Rifkin Settler Common Sense 330). Literary and cultural studies researcher Sarah Heinz frames this as settler subjectivity (Heinz 4). *Fire Starters-Solar Oven* shifts these things because it is not a typical interior domestic scene; it happens outside. Instead of a kitchen, I angle the solar oven to the sun, while sitting on the ground next to the ducks and my dog. *The Chrysalis* is

a warm pink bulk in the sunlight behind me and the whites of Luna the dog, the sheet and my jumpsuit stand out. This is not a house; it has wheels, it moves. I am not trying to say I am from this land or of it, nor that I own it; this is a form of being in communion with it.

This video shows a different relationship to everyday activities and my surroundings. It acknowledges what is taken for granted in houses connected to the power grid and council water supplies. Being off grid is a physical orientation that signals what philosopher and critical theorist Brian Massumi terms as a relational and philosophical shift (Massumi 180). In terms of orientation, this action is like a landmark (180) that works differently than reading a map, in that landmarks are what you habitually head away from or towards (Massumi 180). I would describe settler common sense as a set of habits. Massumi describes a habit as "an acquired automatic self-regulation residing in the flesh" (11). From a performative practice perspective, this is an empowering access point because it can be expressed in an embodied manner. If a settler's common sense is a set of subjectivities formed by habit, this subjectivity can be unsettled and transformed by the interruption of these habits.

Fig 14. Still from *April Morning* (00.34).

April Morning portrays the strangeness of getting used to a new habit, but the unsettlement here is more to do with noticing the environment and feeling aware of it differently. In this work I embody a type of waiting and listening that is not anxious or hurried. I made it because I was trying to imagine what this environment sounded like before settlers arrived. Hints of this former state can be found in this place. In the video, I am standing in a wetland drained for agricultural purposes. It looks like a paddock of grass, but where *The Chrysalis* sits is ankle deep water during the wet season. This water-logging is the natural movement of the water-table. These changes are slow but perceivable and it felt like the land was breathing. *April Morning* is inspired from stories of the cacophonous bird song of this area before the massive forest clearances between 1870 and 1890 and when native birds became scarce (McKinnon 3).

Fig 15. Still from *Surfing the Chrysalis* (2:00).

In *Surfing the Chrysalis* I stood on its roof. This was not to escape rising water; it was to see where I was in relation to the land around me. Birds also feature in *Surfing the Chrysalis*, an uneasy work compared to the calm waiting of *April Morning.* I look out over a domestic landscape and I fall into contemplation, not the bold certainty of conquest, but in a manner of the process of becoming more sensitive. Crow calls as a sound from the land of my origin augment the soundtrack.

In this work I refer directly to the famous painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (1818)*, which depicts a man standing upon a rocky precipice with his back to the viewer, gazing out on a landscape covered in a thick sea of fog (Friedrich 1818). This image of a masculine hero is a counter to my attitude of living with land rather than over it. I wanted to disturb its patriarchal format by being a woman, yet also to keep in mind the settler colonial implications of claiming a view in this way. In contrast to the stance of the wanderer looking over the wilderness, this work depicts bed sheets hung up behind *The Chrysalis* lending it a distinctive domestic air. I stand, crouch then sit on *The Chrysalis*, and in the edits these moments overlap, and my body appears to be changing perspectives and doubling and tripling as a challenge to the stance of man on top of a mountain like an explorer claiming the view.

The Chrysalis's wheels suggest it is capable of movement, but it requires another vehicle to pull it and because I will move at some stage, this is more like an engaged pause. My presence here is ephemeral, and I do not need to alter the land or to make monuments to engage with it. This is a state of being at home that does not involve piling a house onto land I own. The paddock is directly linked to agricultural settling modes which expand themselves over land, and rather than mining it as an economic resource, I was in companionship with it, relying on and affected by its flows but able to move with them.
I had never examined how my sense of the familiar permeated these habits of landscape. What had seemed like a backdrop to me, was more like a space of stubborn, well-worn habits. These were so familiar to me that the simple act of being off grid was a reorientation to these habits that skewed everything to make this obvious. My reliance and immersion in the daily life and lives of the paddock shifted this sense of separation. Turning to it, being with it rather than on it or over it, changed my relation to the land. *Fire Starters-Solar Oven* prompted a new habit of consciousness towards land by virtue of that the tweak of living off grid gives to everyday domestic activities. I felt this reorientation in my body; it changed my awareness of the land around me. Living off-grid in the paddock side-steps the symbolic order of settler certainty. I don't fight with the grid. I'm experimenting with living without it, and as such, it is an affirmative relational process.

Chapter Two: Works of the Paddock and a Nomadic Counter

This chapter discusses creative works inspired by living out of *The Chrysalis* and what the making of those works taught me. The first section relates to works that reflect on settling habits and the second section discusses works that transition from this way of being to a form of embodied nomadic thinking.

Vacuum and Busy Work

Fig. 16. Still from *Vacuum* (02:47).

In *Vacuum,* I take a rectangle of carpet to the paddock and vacuum it. A white woman vacuuming in a paddock in Aotearoa New Zealand is like a satire of all the fears of the rural masculine. This is a woman out of the house, tidying up the property in what traditionally is a male domain. By vacuuming the outside environment, I bring an activity associated with women and the domestic interiors of the home to an exterior sphere associated with masculine activities and the transformation of land into farmland.

Where does this work come from? *Vacuum* was inspired by the ways that my mother controlled the domestic sphere. I performed it; I found a source of comfort in the wake of her passing. *Vacuum* originates from my experiences growing up in the 70s and 80s in a small, rural town that was conservatively Pākehā, centred on farming, with rugby, churches, and manicured gardens dominating its external sphere. I wanted to draw attention to the settler transformation of landscape in Manawatū and the normalisation of settler ideas of managing and domesticating land, which tended to clear it to make it productive and erase its history. This work is a feminist gesture, a reaction against the sense of oppression I feel living within a patriarchal settler paradigm that does not live solely in day to day individual interactions. It also relates to its structure and conditioning.

These works are not simple oppositional acts. Because I am embedded within this landscape scene as a settler descendant and woman, my art practice imagines the landscape from an external perspective as well as outside of myself. The masculine attitudes that I encountered as a girl and young woman growing up in Manawatū came out of the “tough rural pioneering white masculinity naturalised by association with the landscape” (Jock Phillips 1987 qtd. Bannister). In essence, all of my performative acts and videos speak back to this “hyper-masculinity and white human exceptionalism” (Ream 2) that Aotearoa New Zealand white studies scholar Rebecca Ream calls out as part and parcel of New Zealand’s version of arcadianism (2). This masculinity, from the perspective of Christina Vogels, a New Zealand academic specialising in feminist media, studies and discourse analysis is “so threatened by notions of femininity that it stabilises its dominance in rural sites through the exclusion and repudiation of the feminine” (Vogels 191). To be the picture of unsettling this dominance, all I need to do is to play to these fears, be a Pākehā woman right in there with a vacuum. If these fears are so great, then all that can happen is some barking like the dog in the video.

In *Vacuum*, I am now deep in this terrain. As a Pākehā woman operating on feminist terms, I am able to explore this surface through my practice and to enact and redefine these mythologies on my terms. This is me talking back to these discourses “central to the construction of Pākehā cultural identity”, that New Zealand academic Matthew Bannister summarises as “masculine homosociality, male autonomy and independence from the "feminising" influences of domesticity, "polite" society and imported mass culture”

(Bannister). My response is in the same vein as of the dry satirical humour of men in black singlets and gumboots that reverberated throughout the 70s and 80s pop culture of my childhood. These were portrayals of typical farming blokes such as Murray Ball's *Footrot Flats,* a farmer and his border collie sheepdog (Harker 2013), *Bogor*, Burton Silver's woodman (Labrum 2008), *Fred Dagg*, comedian John Clarke's (*The Very Sensible Fred Dagg* 2017) and Barry Crump's semi-autobiographical comic novels of a rugged outdoors man (Magner).

The image of me ruling the paddock with the vacuum upsets these gender portrayals. I am definitely not meant to be here like this, which upsets this construction centred on masculine "pragmatic, physical industry" (Bannister) to dominate nature. Being 'controlled' or domesticated by a woman is not part of this natural order. These gender portrayals come out of "a very strong settler and farmer tradition described as a man-going-bush thing" says Auckland University media studies lecturer Dr Misha Kavka, "It's both the man going back to nature, and who can control nature – that's the farmer aspect"(Yates). In performing this role in this video, I also tag the anti-hero of this mythological construction, the *Man Alone,* (Mulgan 1939). This is shorthand for a common motif in New Zealand fiction: the rugged male individual, isolated from ordinary society" (Wevers). Perhaps in the satire of *Vacuum*, I do not need to worry about cleaning that mythology, because as Jasmine Gallager, author of *Pākehā Poetics: a Socio-Historical Study of Pākehā Landscape Mythology,* points out "the alienated masculine" has already been "running to the land" (Gallager 91).

This *land* that the man alone is running to is just as much a cultural construction as this paddock where my practice has brought me. Through my practice and a performative act, in this very real material place, I can physically stand on and metaphorically interact with this cultural landscape. My practice not only gives me the agency to do this; I can see an empowered representation of a Pākehā woman doing this on a screen later. This highlights the fact that these discourses of the Kiwi bloke as a media representation are not a simple reproduction of reality but one that serves a hegemonic function expressed "through socially constructed codes and languages which privilege certain points of view, often associated with hegemonic groups" (Bannister). These roles came about in the early settling stages of Aotearoa New Zealand in which colonial authorities actively promoted the immigration of single women, mainly from Britain, to fill the role as "the colonial helpmeet" to these pioneer men (Dalziel 1977). Historian Barbara Brookes says that "women were

defined in relation to men as daughters, wives or mothers, acting within society as an index of civilization" (Brookes 2) and confined to the domestic sphere. The domestic labour of women made it possible for men to devote their energy to labour of all kinds outside the home. To take the domestic outside and into the paddock as I do in *Vacuum* not only breaks a gendered settler code, it also plays with the sense of the settler control of land as being a normal construct.

My mother would never leave the house without making herself presentable, which became the inspiration for dressing up and wearing lipstick in *Vacuum*, as though to summon her as I go into the paddock. In this video, she seems uncannily present; I recognise her body language in my movements. What I find strange is that, as odd as it is to vacuum a paddock, once I started the activity did not feel like I was performing. It felt like housework, and its familiarity overrode the disjuncture. Apparently I tidy as my mother tidied, and as her mother tidied before her. What I realised is that these and other experiences are the texture of my world shaped by my heritage and youth. So, of course, my experiences are loaded with these handed-down notions of landscape I write about. What I know now is that the habits of my family are ordinary to me, and the landscape they make is predictable.
If this landscape is normal to me, it's because I cannot access where it came from or have the experience with the biota of Aotearoa New Zealand that writer and performance artist Sally J. Morgan writes of when she arrived from Britain with the eyes of an outsider to "a home more homely than the one she just left" (Morgan108). She says, "[O]nly a British immigrant knows the gap that these living, growing, mementos of home were meant to fill" (109). Morgan notes that this "embodied nostalgia in the form of introduced flora, fauna, landscapes, and practices [that] have become mundane; normalised as they have turned into part of ensuing generations' experience of childhood and of home" (100).

As I vacuumed, the carpet felt like carpet but I could not forget the paddock underneath it. The image of me dragging the carpet over the grass of the paddock, then standing on it to vacuum highlights the paddock as a material landscape and cultural surface. This sense of surface and how I feel immersed in it at the same time has a physical correlation to Morgan's *Points of Perspective* (2006), a five-hour performance bringing a sense of the British colonial pasture to *The Blue Oyster Gallery* in Ōtepoti, Dunedin. Grass turfs were unrolled and laid out with tea-urns and teacups that were constantly refilled until vapour "ran down the walls, dripped from the ceiling like indoor rain and sat wet in the hair of

spectators" becoming a "thick fog through which the performer and the audience struggled to locate themselves" (Morgan 51). Morgan's performance adds a layer to the directness of *Vacuum* as the struggle to locate oneself can also relate to how white people often cannot 'see' their whiteness.

Vacuum comes from the places most familiar to me: my white female body, my labouring background and its corresponding habits towards land and gendered roles. As I vacuumed, I felt my controlling attitude and slightly bossy mannerisms reveal my whiteness. I felt this perceived bossiness and its entitlement could be viewed as reflecting a broader pattern of the hierarchies of white privilege. The stratifications of the white hierarchical structure encompass the layered and unequal distribution of power, privilege, and resources among different racial and gender groups, with whiteness and traditional male dominance often occupying the highest and most privileged positions in this hierarchy. In other creative works, my 'whiteness' is highlighted by wearing the white jumpsuit, making me stand out, and in the process, making my whiteness visible to myself and increasing my awareness of it as I engage with the land. Examples of this whiteness standing out are how my jumpsuit glows in the low light of *Portal* and against the muddy water of the Kiwitea puna in *Stream,* and how it makes my movement in *NeverEnding paddock* easily seen and trackable in the paddock.

Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (2000) explores how white women's identities are shaped by race and privilege, placing Pākehā womanhood within global narratives of whiteness. Similarly, Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (2020) critiques white feminism for perpetuating colonial and racial hierarchies by centring white, middle-class experiences and neglecting the intersecting oppressions of Indigenous women and women of colour (Moreton-Robinson 32). Moreton-Robinson writes that "the domination of white women in feminist discourse echoes the structural relationship between white society and Indigenous society (246) and highlights how whiteness often goes unmarked within feminist discourses, maintaining it as the normative standard of womanhood (147). *Vacuum* makes my identity as a white settler woman visible as a subject position existing in "relationship to the dominant white male centre" (16) and how such a subject position, complies with and maintains the racial order (16). The ramifications of my role as a single white woman in the paddock, symbolizing the civilizing mission and its

maintenance cause me to reflect how my presence on this land recalls its alienation into individual title through white property practice and how this severely impacted and disadvantaged local Māori in Manawatū. This is explored in detail in T J Hearn's Waitangi Tribunal Report "The social and economic experience of Porirua ki Manawatū Māori" Wai 2200, #A219.

This paddock is the settler tidied version of land; the displacement and the control of what was there before has already been exerted not only through colonial land theft in this land block's history as one of the most contested and controversial land purchases conducted by the Crown during the 19th century (Hearn *One past, Many Histories* 10), as well as in the destruction of the ecologies of this place by draining and clearing it for the economy of settler agriculture. The history of this rohe (region) is notable for its importance to a number of iwi (tribes) as a shared and negotiated territory of iwi (tribal) movement. Māori in areas like Manawatū and Horowhenua lived in nohohanga (temporary dwellings) that changed with the seasons and food supply, emphasizing adherence to "kawa" (Māori protocol and etiquette) (Cleave 159). In *Vacuum,* the carpets' square shape and the fences symbolize control over my environment, which echo "the surveyors' boundary lines imposed by colonizers", as Joseph Selwyn Te Rito writes in the date article Whakapapa and Whenua: An Insider's View. Te Rito says surveyors "disregarded the Indigenous history tied to natural features such as rivers and hills", which were often fluid, shifting over generations. One group might expand their territory in one generation, only for another neighbouring group to assert dominance and push those boundaries back in the next" (Te Rito 2).

Tina Ngata's article *Wahine, White Women, and Waitangi* (2022) further examines how white women's roles and privileges are often unexamined in discussions about women's suffrage and broader feminist contexts, reinforcing the invisibility of whiteness in these narratives. Leonie Pihama's *Mana Wahine: Decolonising Gender in Aotearoa* (2013) advocates for a decolonized feminism that addresses intersecting oppressions and challenges colonial structures.

To situate my research within broader ecofeminist frameworks, I briefly examine my work *Vacuum* alongside Ann Laura Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender and Morality in the Making of Race* (2021), Ann McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender,*

and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (1995), and Kay Schaffer's *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Bush* (1988). These texts collectively explore the intersections of colonial and environmental discourses and Pākehā womanhood within ecofeminist contexts, revealing how environmental engagements are shaped by and contribute to settler colonial frameworks. In *Vacuum*, the act of tidying and controlling space reflects broader imperial practices of environmental and gendered control, which Stoler highlights by noting that "gendered bodies were central to the workings of imperial power" (Stoler 115). McClintock's analysis of race, gender, and colonialism further contextualizes this, demonstrating how "gender, race, and class intersect in the making of colonial space" (McClintock 46). This perspective clarifies how domestic tasks in the paddock represent colonial impositions on land and gender. By placing these tasks in the paddock, a symbol of colonial control, *Vacuum* engages with the contested history of the land, reflecting the broader contestations Schaffer describes in her exploration of the bush as a contested space, where environmental and cultural symbols become sites of negotiation under colonial rule (Schaffer 73).

Fig. 17. Still from *Busy Work (00:54).*

Busy Work picks up where *Vacuum* left off and keeps picking at settler subjectivities and everyday ways of being that normalise settler inhabitation of land. Wearing a dusty pink

jumpsuit, I draped and fixed a dark green tarpaulin over *The Chrysalis* as a makeshift solution for leaks. My body is in constant motion and there is an impression of restlessness, continual circling and incompleteness. The tarpaulin eventually moves into place. This is one of the longer works and its duration heightens this restless activity as it gets more and more tightly bound.

Vacuum and *Busy Work* tap into my mother's busyness in the house, which at the time of my youth seemed like a strange mix of devotion linked to Christianity and scarcity mentalities. She found it difficult to rest, as though she was not allowed to. Sometimes I wonder if this was the worry and resourcefulness of maintaining a family household on a low income, a learnt resourcefulness that became my survival in the paddock. My mother embodied the Protestant work ethic, the moral view that a person's duty and responsibility is to achieve success through hard work and thrift (Britannica). I wonder if the Protestant work ethic is ever satisfied. In the context of domestication and land, this looks like controlling something tightly, with the fear it might not be enough. This causes me to wonder about the territorial nature of this and wonder at this sense of lack. This causes me to link this restless activity to scarcity, the concept that resources are only available in limited supply. In the paddock, this activity reveals a settler relationship to land, of a hunger for land and holding onto as if it were an object capable of disappearing or depleting.

Performing in this way makes me aware that *normal* is something I feel in my body, but that when this *normal* is out of context it is unsettling. I felt at home in the action, so much so that this was unsettling because this was not a house piled into the ground. The quality of the movements stood out and the person I saw in the footage seemed to be relating to the land in *Vacuum*, and *The Chrysalis* and in *Busy Work* without quite realising it.

A Nomadic Stance as a Counter to Sedentary thinking?

I consider my creative work as an embodied form of nomadic thinking. In *Electric Fence*, I am literally climbing the fence, and in *NeverEnding Paddock,* despite all of its false starts, expresses a desire to go beyond the holding of territory questioned in *Vacuum* and *Busy*

Work. The mobility in my work has led me to Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic thinking as "a practice of non-linearity which entails putting the creative powers of the imagination to work and the strategy of de-familiarisation" (Thompson 341). Inspired by French writer and antirationalist philosopher Gilles Deleuze's philosophical nomadology, Braidotti's *Nomadic Theory* (2011) outlines a sustainable modern subjectivity as one that is in flux, never opposed to a dominant hierarchy yet intrinsically other, always in the process of becoming, and perpetually engaged in dynamic power relations both creative and restrictive (Braidotti 2). Braidotti describes this as "an affirmative activity" (2), which, in my work, involves "the recognition of the necessarily situated and hence partial and contingent nature of our utterances" (130). If described in spatial terms, nomadic thinking is categorised by movement on a horizontal plane, a form of opening and flow – rather than closing up and holding close that allows many stories to exist in the same space without dominating them.

This is a form of nonlinear movement that "can allow a return to and creative repetition of stories that constantly give birth to new hybridised forms, aiming to create a creative chaos which enables new forms of thinking" (Goransson 2021). In my work this is not just about moving across terrain as shown in the images (Figs. 18-20) which traced my path to and from the camera and *The Chrysalis*, a process during which I was very aware of my body moving. It was as if my movement was drawing an alternative map to a parallel world. From this perspective, the works became stepping stones and evidence of a path I had taken. While this looks like Braidotti's "productive zig-zagging" (Braidotti *Posthuman, All Too Human* 8), the process was more like a series of loops, returns, and repeats. The furthest point I reached speaks to the limit of a circle of awareness. These thin lines of contact signify a fullness of space that cannot be held, felt or comprehended all at once.

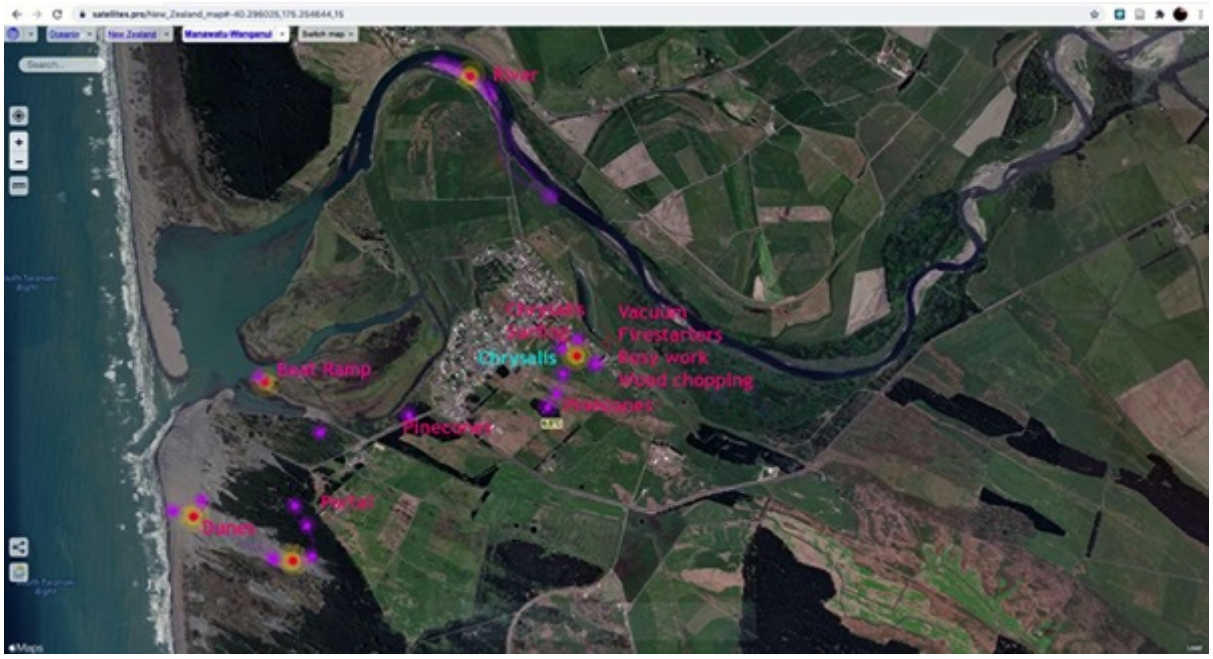

Fig 18. An aerial view depicting the spread of works and *The Chrysalis*. *The Chrysalis* is signified by the red and yellow dot.

Fig 19. The movement of making the work, *River*. The static yellow red dot signifies *the Chrysalis* and the red lines of my movement making the work in the space.

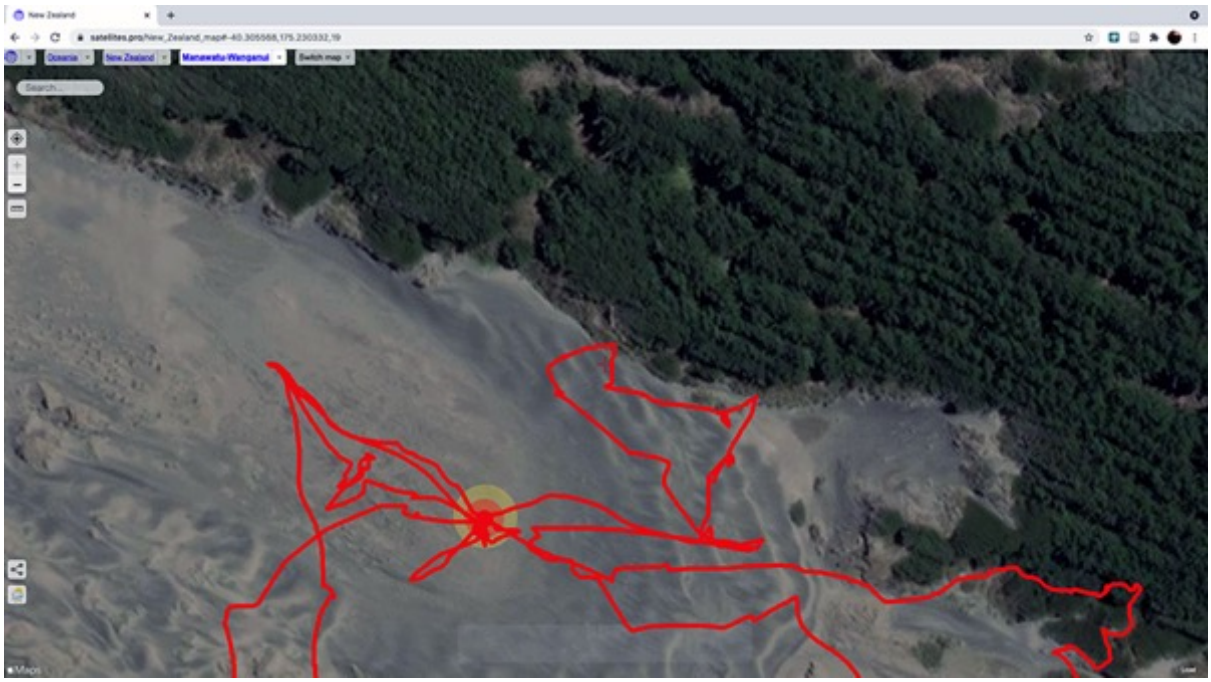

Fig 20. A section of movement from the making of *Dune-Forest*.

Electric Fence

Fig 21. Still from *Electric Fence* (00:43).

On a midsummer day in a paddock in Tangimoana, I climbed a fence slowly and carefully. The sky is blue, the grass is closely cropped, and the sunshine reflects my brilliant white jumpsuit and the dog waits. Climbing this fence is an easy looking proposition, so why am I making it look so hard?

All the fences had electric wires. I was wearing the white jumpsuit as an explorer trope, symbolic of heroic actions, leading with the attitude of colonial finding that prompts the images of a European explorer in deepest, darkest Africa with a pith helmet, or a white suited astronaut on the moon. This climb is only a short distance off the ground and the precarity that the video *Electric Fence* captures is astounding. The awkwardness of this work is the centre of its humour; it could be a poster child for the emotional discomfort that many descendants of European settlers feel when colonial violence and injustice and conflictual local histories are remembered. These are the discomforting emotions that education academic Elizabeth Russell refers to as a potential opening for social and political

transformation (Russell 39). *Electric Fence* is funny because it hurts a bit; it's embarrassing to watch for me as the artist and for the audience. The ticking sound of the electric fence was loud; like a bomb that the audience who are seeing the video will never hear. This experience conveys what feminist scholar and curator Amelia Jones writes about performance's ability to '"enact" rather than "suppress'" or "contain" the "messy, durational, relational, and disorienting qualities of being a person in the world" (Jones 24). Strangely, despite a cringe factor that triggers involuntary laughter, there is also a rise of empathy within me about the uncertainties of how to step and yet still make a move which points to the humanness that this situation entails.

I am awkward and uncomfortable but I know I carry my ancestors inside me and I have to remember to kindly bring them into a different future with me, one in which I do not have to forget anything to be here comfortably. My problem is that I don't really know my ancestors. I have to imagine their specific stories or see them as melded in with the ideologies of settler landscapes. Without the contextualisation of place, this could be a paddock anywhere. It could be in Kent, in the southeast of England where ancestry.com tells me I have 19 percent DNA heritage, which perhaps confirms my listed forebear Stephen Pilcher (Farm labourer, Kent, arrival 1840). Part of this awkwardness is that I am not sure exactly what I am decisively trying to get away from when I am climbing over this fence. It is like becoming a whole person connected to the injustices of the past as a "complicit and co-responsible witness" (Russell 48), and that a path forward is not made by rejecting my forebears and cutting off the parts of me that carry them. Realising they are co-present breaks down a barrier to acknowledging how these things influence me and make me who I am. This "attendance to the Pākehā world" is, as Russell points out, "a step towards engaging meaningfully with te ao Māori" (Russell 48). I attend to the situation by setting up a camera and, although I am in front of it performing without another person behind it, the framing of the shot is very clear. Despite its intimacy, the camera does not equal the viewer, but it allows me to speak to myself and anyone who watches this. There is potential for a viewer to feel this in their body, to be drawn in through the cringe factor and awkwardness of this decidedly unheroic manoeuvre, which could be what Jones describes as a point of reciprocality "in which the live and/or performative artwork opens us temporally to an exchange" (Jones 21).

As with all my videos I perform with a purposeful and serious demeanour. My white jumpsuit shines like a uniform with a bit of the silliness seen in *NeverEnding Paddock*. Anyone catching a glimpse of this process would find these eccentricities incomprehensible, perhaps frivolous and incompetent, and yet, herein lies this situation's strength.

NeverEnding Paddock

If *Electric Fence* was awkward and uncertain, in *NeverEnding Paddock* it is unclear where I am going. I seem lost in a paddock. I stride forward full of purpose only to suddenly stop and turn, and arbitrarily repeat this action over and over again. This video has been edited to enhance this jerky stop/start movement in the same manner in which I found myself stuck and constantly hitting imaginary and literal (fenced) walls in this Pākehā landscape of the paddock. As a video, *NeverEnding Paddock* draws heavily on the live act of Luna and I pacing in the paddock, moving to and from the camera. To appear disoriented in the enclosed space of the paddock is part of the absurdity and humour of the video. As a settler figure lost in a settler constructed landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand, such uncertainty can create productive spaces for reconfiguration. This is where my practice can aid me. In the making of this work, and in the editing and rewatching of the performance videos, I find an excess of sensation that could relate to the strangeness of Pākehā forgetting the memories, histories and narratives of colonialism’s violence that tend to override ancestral sensibilities and stories of place. I encounter this strangeness as a space of blankness, not empty, but a dense impenetrable fog, like the conversations and questions with my immediate family that often trail off mid-sentence into nothing. *NeverEnding Paddock* expresses the sense of these instances, which feel like incomplete pathways, despite partial

knowledge gleaned from death and birth notices or ship manifests or vague stories. This is expressed in how I seem to encounter invisible walls that cause me to turn.

Fig 22. Still from *NeverEnding Paddock* (01:01).

A Nomad Artist and Costume, Props, and Animals in my Work

Electric Fence, Hedge and Lawns have an affinity to Sámi artist Marja Helander's video works *Trambo* and *Dolastallat – To have a Campfire*. I came across Helander's work when undertaking the survey of the field of practice and found a parallel equivalence in our work. These works appear to have been made in the same manner and attitude; our works move in similar ways and involve a female protagonist in the landscape. The conscious use of romantic landscape is central to the Helander's imagery and, like me, Helander trained as a painter and was drawn to photographic framings and processes that employ this form of representation (AV-arkki). Helander's work also relies on the tripod to create a still frame that she can move within. We place our bodies in the frame and our sensibility of paring back the compositional elements and using colour and props as though the camera is a

painting composition. This visuality corresponds to how I tell my stories, and is evident in the depictions of her performing in the landscape wearing costumes and using props and animals to perform storied activities that are linked to her nomadic culture.

Helander's work revolves around her Sámi people, the Indigenous population of Scandinavia, whose means of livelihood have traditionally been reindeer breeding, hunting and fishing in the northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia. Helander writes that her work focuses on old stories from her Sámi relatives (Helander). This infers inner worldings that are tangible to the collective worlding of her Sámi identity, traditions and history. Like Helander, the visual stories I tell are part of my internal world and personal history; they pose cultural questions and situations that may be recognisable. Helander's work suggests to me the sense of a world running counter to the logic of the westernised landscape, with large swathes that are unseen and untranslatable to the western eye. My experience of land and my instinctive understanding of being part of its life networks clashes with my western landscape perspective. This gives me the sense that the worlds I perceive are within a westernised landscape, even as I try to look beyond it and challenge its logic.

Nomadic thought helps me unpick western modes of seeing related to how I move in my performance practice. These figurations of force, movement, difference and change are useful, and their limitations and potentials can be tested in the physical and conceptual realms of my art practice. Living out of *The Chrysalis* and filming is not the same as Helander's nomadism, which is a long-standing, communal way of life disrupted by colonialism. I share Australian scholars Bignal and Rigby's reservations, when they say that nomadic thought can be a productive form of resistance to Eurocentric power, but that it can also obscure Indigenous realities or rewrite Indigenous ontologies (Bignal and Rigby 160).

Humour in my Work

Humour helps me tell my stories. It's a way to discuss hard topics that both I, the artist, and audience can approach. I'm poking fun at myself and a general Pākehā uneasiness about these topics. Helander's humour, like mine, is visual, an absurdity based on context, which requires all visual elements, action, story, characters, demeanour, and context of outfits and place to work together. The absurdity in my work is tactical (Ball 4) because I do it with purpose to interrogate the contradictions of my situation “through wit and subversion” (Douglas 1). In *Dada and Surrealism* (1974), Dawn Adès points to how absurd art “positions the viewer/spectator as an interlocutor in a process of thinking and questioning the world” (1). As well as pointing outwards to a viewer, who gets involved because they are compelled to make sense of my actions, I am also consciously part of this audience in that the processes of my work involve me as a spectator through the video format. Helander's video works explore alienation and displacement through tragi-humour, similar to how I use deadpan humour to address the awkwardness of settler history. *Trambo* was inspired by the common sight of trampolines in Finnish yards, in which a Sámi woman drags a trampoline through a snowy mountain in Finland, "a burden she hopes will bring a bit of joy to the difficult years ahead" (*Trambo*).

I think the humour of my works relates to the audience knowing more than me and probably being better at climbing electric fences, or knowing how not to get lost in a paddock. Awkwardness plays into the humour in these works. Awkwardness is unsettling because it undoes any idea of being in control. This is a form of resistance because that is difficult to manage; it mucks things up. My artwork has a lot of playful mucking around. It pokes at things and it wonders and wanders about. This can create funny moments, generate laughter, and lighten up a space so that there is room to move, to invoke transformation. Great to play with, my work makes me laugh at myself. This humour is not joy; it helps me unpick myself (and things dear to Pākehā) in situ. In a decolonial sense, I revel in how much fun this is to do. The decolonial joy is in the agency these gestures build as they gather. More brings more and creates the space for more.

Fig. 23. Still from Helander, *Trambo*, 2014.

Outfits, Props and Animals in my Work

Outfits help me tell a story and to create links between discrete works to build a sense of a bigger story with moving pieces. It's useful to start this alongside Helander's use of Sami national costume. The ballet outfits and props such as stuffed bears and birds all have a specific significance and meaning in her work. I discuss this use of outfit and props in our work through *NeverEnding Paddock*, where a Pākehā woman finds herself disoriented on the cultural surface of a western landscape and at the same time on Indigenous land. This compares to Helander's *The Modern Nomads* (Fig. 22 and 23) where a contemporary person is totally lost in a traditional Sami environment, the mountains, as she walks in the footsteps of her reindeer-herdsmen ancestors (Biennial 2). Both these works express a ridiculous situation: I'm lost in a paddock that has fences to keep stock in, and Helander has somehow got detoured from the office.

Fig 24. Marja Helander. *The Modern Nomads: Buollánoaivi (Sami-language)/Palopää (Finnish)/Mount Palopää (English),*C-print on aluminum, 2001.

Helander's corporate pumps and thin modern suit are completely impractical, in sharp contrast to her warm traditional hat. They speak to the parts of her that are divorced from this environment. My white jumpsuit stands out as a detachment as it highlights my strangeness to this land and my estrangement from another. In this context it draws association with explorers wearing white pith helmets, just as the wearing of white in colonised wildernesses symbolises the purity of the colonising mission. This white jumpsuit, in a paddock that is already domesticated land, opens up discussions about the colonising claim to space. It is impractical and easily soiled, yet it reflects the idea of terra nullius, a land empty of people. For example, the white pith helmet, or the white suit has an absurdity to it akin to the element of preparing oneself for the event or the challenge of representing the empire and all the serious logic attuned to that.

My white jumpsuit, similar to the overalls used in Fielding's freezing works, a place where animals are slaughtered and carcasses frozen for export, underscores the utility of this land, reflected in the video's cropped grass and cow droppings. The 1882 shipment of frozen meat to England revolutionised Aotearoa New Zealand's economy, making small farms viable. This led to farming expansion and the sale of 2.3 million acres (930,000 hectares) of Māori land in the North Island (Stringleman and Peden 5). I'm wearing a jumpsuit in *The*

Chrysalis, which stands for the opposite of land exploitation, with no animal killing or economic extraction.

Fig 25. Marja Helander, *The Modern Nomads: Buollánoaivi (Sami-language)/Palopää (Finnish)/Mount Palopää (English)*, C-print on aluminum. 2001.

Helander's suit is as inappropriate as my formal dress and lipstick in *Vacuum*. When I worked in the corporate world, lipstick was referred to as armour, and makeup as war paint. These incongruities are humorous and illustrate the tensions in the story. In *Portal,* I embrace Luna like a charm, as if she can lead me. The dog symbolises loyalty and I'm in the paddock, the heart place of Pākehā ideas of land. Helander's charm is a taxidermy bird, but it is lifeless, suggesting a waning habitat. In other works, Helander uses the potency of her Sami dress in context with her surroundings to speak for her.

Fig. 26. Still from *Portal* (05:15).

Fig. 27. *Red Dress*.

While the white jumpsuit was not my only choice of attire, it seemed to hold richer associations and more freedom than the long, red velvet dress I tested in Fig. 27. The red dress next to *The Chrysalis* (Fig. 27) made settler habits look normal and familiar, like the images of pioneer wives I was raised with, and reinforced Victorian womanhood ideals that did not align with my independent nature in the works. Wearing the white jumpsuit helped to unsettle these settler womanhood and gendered stories, especially in works such as *Fire Starters-Solar Oven* and *April Mornings.*

The white jumpsuit has parallels to the projection screen in that it is a surface that can be projected on and played with, and the white stands out in the videos that tracks my movement. Associations include the white overalls of a house painter, meat or factory worker, laboratory coats, doctors coats, space suits, parachute jumpsuits and formal military uniforms. They are like my father's work overalls; his were khaki or green to hide the grease and dirt.

When I am not wearing overalls I'm wearing tight dresses like the siren of the orange body con dress in *Lawns* (an early work), reminiscent of going out on the town in the 80s and 90s. I often wear headphones, a gesture that can indicate focus, engagement, and isolation. While the reason for this inclination is unclear, I find it crucial. I don't expect comprehension, but curiosity from observers. Worn with the jumpsuit they tap into a sci-fi space traveller, or explorer images. Headphones symbolise social distance but offer a personal auditory experience that doesn't disturb the surroundings. The ensuing ambiguities such as its dual nature is an adaptability linked to the mobilities I investigate in my work.

Luna and *The Chrysalis* are more than just props or visual elements: one is my companion and the other is my home. Their presence is both aesthetic and symbolic. Luna brings a sense of levity and recognition of other senses to my work that sometimes takes my performative acts further. In *Butterfly Creek,* an early work, she is attached by the lead and we symbolically become the split consciousness of one body. I appear in various places and jump out of *The Chrysalis*. It stands out in the compositions because of its size and colour, which can change depending on the context and light into a spaceship, a tank, a house, or an old home built horse float.

In my performance videos, I share space with animals without dominating them. This is evident in the videos that feature the ducks in the paddock and Luna the dog. This approach shifts their presence in the work to not merely passive symbols but active participants with their own modes of being on and with the land. For instance, Luna is not just a symbol of loyalty; she is a being with her own experiences and interactions with the land. Pets, like dogs, are not only companions; they are witnesses to our experiences as we are to theirs. This also applies to the ducks in my work. Ducks have long been kept by many farm households (Wintle and Lepper). Most of the ducks that appear in my videos, the Mallard and Muscovy are domesticated, but many arrived to the paddock of their own accord.

On their arrival, both Māori and Europeans initially used animals for survival (Swarbrook). Māori brought animals such as the kurī (Polynesian Dog) and kiore (Polynesian rat) in about 1250 CE (Lowe) for food, tools, and assistance in hunting (1), while Europeans introduced cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, and cats for farming and transport (2). Māori kept some animals as pets, including kurī and kākā, and sometimes animals "described as pets were more like guardians, similar to the European concept of a familiar (attendant spirit). There are accounts of pet taniwha and pet whales" (5), while "Europeans gradually formed bonds with their working animals" (6) By the 1860s, pets became common among settlers. Animals were crucial for survival and companionship, with dogs playing vital roles for European explorers like Charlie Douglas and Andreas Reischek (8). These settler introduced species changed the environment; ducks, possums, pigs, and tahr severely impacted New Zealand's ecosystems, with possums damaging native flora and fauna, and pigs and tahr causing habitat destruction and competing with native species (Brockie).

Pākehā ideas of landscape often revolve around concepts of land as property and resource (Challenger 31). This perspective was strongly influenced by European notions of land ownership and utilization, where land is seen as a commodity to be managed, cultivated, and improved. Introduced animals, such as cattle, sheep, and game birds, were integrated into this framework as part of the effort to transform and exploit the land for economic gain and personal use. For example, the introduction of game birds like Mallards and Muscovies in the 1930s and 1940s (Oliver) was driven by the desire to establish hunting grounds, reflecting how Pākehā utilized animals to align the landscape with their recreational and economic interests. Similarly, the presence of ducks in farm settings, as depicted in my

videos underscores their role within the constructed landscape of agricultural productivity and leisure.

In the context of my research where I am unsettling settler modes of landscape that include the habit of dominating animals, I am living with them rather than over them and acknowledging their presence and perspectives, I am encouraged to see my place here as an interlocutor rather than a dominator, which means engaging with the land and its non-human inhabitants as partners in dialogue and mutuality, rather than imposing control and exploitation. I am aware of how these values and practices draw associations with contemporary theory and philosophy such as New Materialism and Posthumanism and other anthropocentric thought. However, those considerations and inquiry lies beyond the scope of this research.

Chapter Three: The Ship

The whole of Earth from the perspective of space is green, blue, white, light and dark with infinite stories being played out.
Landing closer and closer, gently I plant my feet on the ground knowing I am playing out and creating my stories.

Bikka Ora

Fig 28. Still from *Dune-Forest* (00:09).

Dune-Forest, Widdershins and Portal portray a lone woman arriving as an entity set apart from this environment. Barclay's Fourth Cinema theorises a means by which to play with these depictions of my Pākehā body, land and landscape.

In *Dune-Forest* I arrive like an alien on a spaceship. *The Chrysalis* is pink and sculptural, and the white jumpsuit heightens the impression that I am from outer space. As I stand on this expansive stretch of beach under an equally expansive sky, it is as though I am taking my first breath in a new place. My declaration of getting ready 'to arrive' haunts me. The light shifts and flattens in the next shot and *The Chrysalis* briefly reverts to being a horse float on the beach with the sea behind it moving backwards and forwards in the manner of a rolling

pause. This suggests an inversion or a different timescale, and in the next moment, *The Chrysalis* is a ship once more. I stand on its deck in my white jumpsuit, always and forever a settler descendent.

I set up the camera on its tripod on the shore of Tangimoana beach in the opening shots of *Dune-Forest*, but in Fourth Cinema terms, this is not a view from the shore— this is a camera of the ship and from the ship. I consider the landscape as a view from the ship, a colonial construction. This is influenced by filmmaker Barry Barclay's *(*Ngāti Apa, Ngāti Pākehā*)* metaphor of Indigenous cinema as a camera on the shore "that reverses the direction of the colonial gaze" (Gordon-Smith), and places settlers as ship people. The sense of being distinct from my environment is a factor in most of these works and now I consider the implications of this in conjunction with the dynamic of my camera to landscape and the arrival of myself as a Pākehā to the possibilities of a new sight to land.

In his book, *What is Landscape?* (2015), John Stilgoe writes that landscape materialised from a gaze that comes from the sea, that the word (landscap) meaning 'seen from sea' (2), and the seaman phrase 'making land', and its use in logbook terminology "connotes the conjuring of land from the sea" (2). I think of my use of the camera, with all my references to romantic painting styles and how it frames me in a scene, how it shows a landscape. I make work that questions my settler nature and draws upon landscape as form. In explaining my settler dynamic of camera, my relation of body to camera and the performative relation of my body to land, I cannot speak for Indigenous ways of being but can speak for my own way of being and my awareness of this. Framing my work as being of the ship gives me clarity about the colonial nature of the landscape. If to sight land from a ship's sea view is to *make* land (landscape), and this is paired with the settler activities of living on land as a settler construct, then I have to accept myself as a ship person. It can be no other thing, because my body is always made of settler stuff and I am habituated to see from a colonial gaze. Even my attempts to un-work this habit are of this gaze. Its particularities are something I am becoming more aware of as I make this work. Mark Williams refers to this view from the ship as "an arrogance of the eye" (Williams). I wonder about my camera as I turn it on myself and use it, as I seek to unpick and unmoor this colonial gaze I have. First Cinema and "the camera of the ship's deck," is Barclay's visualisation of the settler perspective, which is to situate this as an encounter of lines of sight from ship to shore,

centred within the politics of conquest (Hearne *One past, Many Histories* 3). Barclay defines this as,

> First Cinema camera, whose more or less exclusive intention has been, over one hundred years of cinema, to show actions and relationships within Western societies and Western ideological landscapes (8).

> The First Cinema Camera sits firmly on the deck of the ship. It sits there by definition. The Camera Ashore, the Fourth Cinema Camera, is the one held by the people for whom "ashore" is their ancestral home. "Ashore" for Indigenous people is not usually an island. Not literally. Rather, it is an island within a modern nation state (9).

The contrast between these views can be seen in the difference between Barclay's use and concept of the unmanned camera and how I keep my camera running and on a tripod. Coming from a feminist sensibility and being a woman operating the camera, some may wish to call my camera practice as unmanned, however I consider why I do this and my actions with the camera and tripod to be entwined in the process of seeing from the ship. I need the camera and tripod because I am the only person involved with my work. I mediate my performative acts through the camera by putting myself in front of it, and rather than hunting for my body with the camera, I hunt for the camera with my body. I do this so I can put myself in the landscape image already framed by the camera. When Barclay made his documentaries, he would often position his camera so that things would happen in front of it, rather than hunting and pointing. For him, the 'unmanned camera' relates "to the behaviour of people and elements of place that enter the lens without his bidding. In this instance, the magical "singular incident" of documentary film occurs when what is in front of the camera speaks for itself, rather than the apparatus of the filmmaker speaking for it" (Turner 173). This is not what I do. In a feminist sense, I like to think I am not just happening in front of the camera, I am pointing myself at the landscape, and once I have got there I am consciously messing with it.

Dune-Forest

Dune-Forest is a silent video work shot on the beach and the parabolic (wandering) dunes finishing at the edge of the pine forest plantation, which act as a barrier between the beach, dune and agricultural land. Sometimes referred to as 'running dunes,' these are described as the fastest moving dunes in the country (Goodwin) as they shift inland with the prevailing north-westerly coastal winds (Craig 30). The pine forest serves as a barrier that protects the surrounding agriculture from the dune's natural movement. Historically, this area was part of a recognised highway used by tribes moving up and down the coast, and as such, many different iwi and hapū, and early European travellers, would have been familiar with the site. Northbound travellers would have been held up often at Tawhirihoe whilst waiting to cross the Rangitīkei, and they would have foraged and temporarily camped in this spot (Department of Conservation 8). In the late 1800s, a large proportion of the area surrounding the Tawhirihoe Reserve was originally held as a pastoral lease (8). This area was a rich food basket for Māori (McKinnon 3). The work *Dune-Forest* was inspired by the idea of these movements.

Fig. 29. Still from *Dune-Forest* (00.16).

The transitory nature and location of *The Chrysalis* is heightened in this view. Like New Zealand film director Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), it is not intended to stay in the hostile environment of the beach. The tide will rise and engulf it or at least lap around its wheels. The dunes take on the quality of being another planet: not much happening. In the white jumpsuit, I look like a space traveller, then a scientist or explorer. This is not a dark, lonely scene of abandonment. I appear to be the sole human here, but this is not being alone so much as being solo and a discrete entity present with the space.

Fig. 30. Still from *Dune-Forest* (03.25).

I am drawn to arbitrarily pacing in these works. I stride around in straight lines like an “arrow”, with a linear mentality, but with no objective other than pacing to undo the idea of aiming for a target. For me, this is a description of a linear thought process. I use it as a compositional element and form of interaction with the space and the camera. The pacing and assumed focus is me expressing a linearity with my body that gets undone because these trajectories are arbitrary and often randomly interrupted. Here, these trajectories become curious rather than measuring and counting what’s in the space and this morphs into a more fluid relationship to the territory.

Curiosity becomes a way to move through space. This encounter has a different relation to time than colonial tropes of discovery and exploration. The playful encounter has a different relation to time; it meanders rather than staking claims. Deeper in the dunes, I alight out of *The Chrysalis*, purposefully striding backwards in a strange circular trajectory with the certainty and sure footedness that reverse footage brings. I am putting things back as the ground magically smooths over. Am I un-taking? Explorers are not known for giving back their discoveries, nor are scientists prone to ritual circling as part of their process. Is this a reverse return? It's been suggested this could be seen as a type of seeding because it looks like I'm planting something into the ground.

I often pause and crouch closer to the ground touching it, feeling it, rather than standing over it, and it is as though this is a type of contact that opens the space to me. Or is this me opening to it? It seems to unlock the surface. These are running dunes; my body is not the only thing moving here. Perhaps I am catching currents? The tī kōuka (cabbage trees) and the gaps between them become portals I move through. This sense of time and space hits something different when the video shifts to the footage shot directly from my body as I move through the rush land of oioi in the dune hollows. Is this what happens in between these changes of position? An immediacy, something different, a different relation? These jump cut edits (cutting a stream of footage and splicing it back together) that give the impression of jumping through time and space are compressed in this footage. How I move my body through the space in these circling trails to camera and back and to *The Chrysalis* makes me think of these edits as stitch points, the threads, the movement of my body that concertina and disrupt the fabric of this landscape.

Fig. 31. Still from *Dune-Forest* (06.00).

The presence of tyre tracks (Fig. 29) digging aggressively into the sand is loud even in the absence of sound. I use the soundtrack of a video to draw out elements of the work, and this work is silent because it expands the sense of space and this visual (Fig. 29) works as an anomaly to break this. I am no longer a lone human in space, and it suggests I am moving through it with a different mentality. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, as the filming of *Dune-Forest* took place, outdoor spaces were mostly empty due to restrictions. This area is popular with 4WD and off-road motorbikes, the loudest most continuous noise in the local soundscape on weekends. This highlights parallel stories present in this space. This sense continues in the forest with the disquieting presence of rubbish despite the wall of trees. Deeper in the forest, there is my white dog Luna, waiting for me in the knell of a pine tree, which is barely discernible and hidden like an Easter egg. *Dune-Forest's* strategy of no sound differs from my use of a recording made in dunes in the early hours of the morning for the pine forest scenes of *Portal*. In *Portal,* this is a subtle hint, a continuation of awareness that not all is perceivable at face value and this texture, even if unrecognisable, is of the parabolic dune-scape that this strip of pine plantation holds at bay from the agricultural land abutting it.

Portal

Fig. 32. Still from Portal (01:26).

Portal opens on a scene where the artist, wearing a white jumpsuit and headphones, moves slowly within a pine forest in small intermittent jumps through time and space using sunshine portals, and in this way traverses the space to a denser pine forest. The dog appears in a sun flare, as the artist wanders alone through the pines. Later, the dog is seen held by the artist emerging out of a lone patch of ferns to the road deeper into the forest.

In this work I follow glimmers of sunlight as they touch plants. In the darker tones of the forest, the whiteness of my jumpsuit and the dog glow like beacons. The other works discussed in this chapter, *Dune-Forest* and *Widdershins* have a seeking quality, but in *Portal* my seeking shifts to following. I wanted to touch land gently as though I could communicate with it and was guided by the notion of following, rather than conquest. I followed the simple rule of following light in the form of the sunlight dapples that the tree canopy let in. This section tracks this impulse of touching the ground and imagining going into it.

The trees were tall, and seemed never-ending. I was a little lost when I came across a thicket of native sedge grass in a clearing near the forest's edge. The grasses were a delicate texture of luminous green that seemed jewel-like and astonishing after being in the trees. They felt ephemeral and the dapples of sun led me into them, and I decided to let this light lead me while filming. Unfamiliar to being in forests, I found the layer of pine needles to be a surface that had something underneath it. As in all my works, my presence on the land in *Portal* is ephemeral and leaves no trace, in keeping with being a visitor. This is a mode of resistance to attitudes of dominating land. I see this as a gentle approach, and this is seen in how I move in *Dune-Forest,* which contrasted with tire tracks digging though the space, and now in these movements of following in *Portal*. In her book, *Power of Gentleness: Meditations on the Risk of Living* (2018), French philosopher and psychoanalyst Anne Dufourmantelle describes 'gentleness' as a passage, that as a symbolic force, and because it has a transformative ability over things and beings, it is a power (Dufourmantelle 3). She says,

> Gentleness liberates skin from being skin, it doesn't resonate, it merges, it winds itself around the lines of the landscape; it doesn't dampen anything, it gives space to things and removes the weight of shadows. Gentleness incites violence because it doesn't offer any possible foothold on authority (3).

In this sense, gentleness is a threshold phenomenon which correlates to my desire in this work to somehow get under the skin of landscape, to connect to land and to be in resistance to settler colonial paradigms. These modes of gentleness and their disarming nature have the potential to melt boundaries, to coincide with the thread of fugitivity running through the videos which gives the space to foster these connections. In following the sun to slip through landscape as I do in *Portal*, I symbolically breach the boundaries of landscape.

The Playful Aspect

I approached the work *Dune-Portal* with a curiosity that relates to the playful aspect of my practice and the humour of it. This is a lighter touch of a different order to the seriousness of settler logic, using the tools of the master, with a playful attitude in defiance of its logic. Play is a subject of much academic thought, and a term subject to many meanings, and a big topic beyond the boundaries of this research. In the following paragraphs, I take a moment to clarify playfulness as a mode in my work. As a modality of my practice, this is "the attitude of play without the activity… [it] is a way of engaging with particular contexts and objects that is similar to play but respects the purposes and goals of that object or context' (Sicart qtd. Sefton-Green). Within my practice, playfulness is "not a spur to creativity" (Sutton 7), it is the creativity. It is how I have the conversation and the marker of this conversation is what I refer to as a story, the video, the performance.

In these videos, I play as though I am seeing this land for the first time and approaching it with curiosity and with an absence of fear. Argentine feminist philosopher Maria Lugones (1987) writes that when she is playful in a world, she is at ease within that world, and the less at ease she is in a world, the less playful she is within it (Lugones 9). Lugones says this lack of ease has more to do with a lack of health and that she is not a healthy being in the "worlds" that construct her as unplayful (14). A playful approach allows me a space to challenge the things I experience as unhealthy. Inspired by Lugones, I frame this in feminist and decolonial terms and note that this playfulness is curious and not "play as contest winning, losing or battling" (15). This is a departure from what Lugones defines as an agonistic sense of playfulness, "one in which competence is supreme, where you better know the rules of the game. In agonistic play there is risk, there is uncertainty, but the uncertainty is about who is going to win and who is going to lose" (15). Brian Sutton (a prominent researcher on play) helps me consider my non agonistic approach against the moments of sharpness in my work as not winning or losing. Instead, I frame these as moments of resistance. Instances are vacuuming the paddock to taunt (*Vacuum*); pretending to be an explorer but being unheroic or lost (*Electric Fence*, *NeverEnding Paddock*); or exploring as curious engagement rather than conquest (*Dune-Forest*, *Portal*, *Widdershins*). This is tricky, so I draw upon Sutton again as I explain this playful attitude in

my work. Sutton notes that play is a paradox because it both is and is not what it appears to be. He says, “animals at play bite each other playfully, knowing that the playful nip may not be a bite, but it is indeed what a bite means” (Sutton 1). Sutton comments that to the outsider play may be incomprehensible at first that “we sense something is behind it but we do not know, or have forgotten how to see it” (2). It may require a shift to appreciate it. It disrupts. I find this useful as a shift from certainty about what it is we are seeing, to wonder about “how” we see these things. This puts me into a different relationship to this subject material. This is a discovery drawn out through improvisation and experimentation that emerges by allowing it to present itself. In *Dune-Forest*, this could be how I use curiosity as a way to move through the work. Unlike the forms of colonising discovery of amassing territory, rights to resources and knowledge, this type of play does not overwrite other stories. It is not seeking to devour, and is open to the delight of the encounter.

I link this playfulness to the movement of relation that Glissant describes in his poetics of relation. As I engage in creative acts, being playful is not weighty or bossy. This is not a whimsical act because it allows transformation, and it is not controlling or threatening. It *allows,* and it makes a space where it is safe to express the awkwardness I have as a settler descendant approaching these questions I have. It is precisely this awkwardness that is the gap where my humour gets in.

This playful mode unsettles. It creates a space for freedom of movement, safety to be awkward, to resist and be vulnerable and hilarious. This is how I partake in what Glissant terms “trembling thinking” (OBrist 1) that cannot be achieved “with thoughts of domination, thoughts of a systematic path toward a truth that we’ve posited in advance” (1).

This is what he describes as being in real contact with the world, “a thinking in which we can lose time, lose time searching, in which we can wander” (1). Glissant says, “if you are to find *tremblement*, you have to find it by yourself, because a system of interdependence is conceivable only if you are really independent in your own mind, if you do not prescribe to a system of thought” (12). This reminds me of the incomprehensibility of play to those who have forgotten its modes. The act of not prescribing to a system of thought can make you incomprehensible to its logic and able to imagine beyond it. For me this is as simple as following the sunlight as I do in *Portal,* a symbol to me of the simple touch of curiosity, where a touch to leaves and stalks allows me to travel through the ground. When I made

these works, I felt I could imagine these moments as feeling this land and imagining the land seeing me.

I see this as a deliberate reorientation that can calibrate a settler descendant to recognise other ways of knowing. Making these works gave me the experience of seeing this land for the first time despite the generations before me and that layering of time in a place. If I consider this in the time-space of my practice and in general, this is the first instance in which I am a settler descendant curious about being *with* land, rather than rather than on it or over it.

The Man Who Fell to Earth

This section discusses the aesthetic and tonal influences of the lone figure in Nicolas Roegs's film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), and my departure from the gothic imagery of Vincent Ward's aesthetics and tone in the film *Vigil* (1984).

Fig. 33. *Still from The Man Who Fell to Earth*,1976.

In the process of making my work, I find myself sensing landscape surfaces and trying to access these with simple actions. I walk around. Nothing much is happening in a narrative sense, but I am there, present in the landscape. Like early sci-fi movies, it's the look and the scene that evokes a leap of imagination such as in *Portal* and *Dune-Forest* where I jump through time and space. In this walking around, I find surfaces of meaning. Some are revealed through the camera and how I use its framings. For instance, there are questions about the relation of my body to this space. Am I a visitor? Who am I? Where am I? Am I a scientist? Am I an alien? Or am I just an AWOL house painter? How does *The Chrysalis* move? Is it a spaceship?

My white jumpsuit is an indirect visual reference to *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Nicolas Roeg's 1976 cult classic sci-fi movie starring David Bowie as the alien Thomas Jerome Newton. Newton crash lands on Earth in order to use his advanced technological knowledge in search of water to save his drought-stricken planet, ultimately becoming stuck on earth. This sense of a visitor arriving from another dimension feels familiar to the way that my body moves as a discrete element within these scenes. My decision to wear the white jumpsuit and headphones was influenced by the feel and aesthetic of the alien figure Newton. This silhouette (Figs. 32 and 33) and the solitary and disconnected character of Newton (despite those around him) visually murmur in the background of my work, present in its oscillations between detachment and intimacy.

Fig. 34. Still from *The Man Who Fell to Earth*,1976.

Fig. 35. Still from *NeverEnding Paddock* (00.15min).

Like Newton, I am wandering, not on earth seeking water, instead I wander through landscape. These resonations exist in my lone figure moving through the landscapes of my videos and it is as if I am falling though facets of the Pākehā psyche, along with the shapeshifting tones of *The Chrysalis* with its spaceship-like bulk, my white jumpsuit and headphones. I associate landscape with these particular notions of proximity in that the containment of landscape is an expression of separation and something I am both inside and outside of.

Light is an important element in my work and instead of the darker landscape tropes of the uncomfortable settler imagination I lean towards bringing light to this situation which can be just as uncomfortable. I want to see this in the light. I see light as a heightening element and a visual indicator of storytelling, one that can give access to imagining different timelines or versions of a place. The sunshine space of my work, rather than imagery focused on the mud and struggle of taming this land, is a reference to early settler arcadian dreams and a decision to move from the perceived oppression that settler gothic imagery taps. In the context of landscape mythologies, mined and spread by early colonial propaganda, this is to remember New Zealand as the land of plenty, where the sun always shines and if it rains, it's only at night.

Fig. 36. Still from *Virgil, (1984).*

Vincent Ward's movie *Vigil* (1984) is a good example of settler gothic imagery. *Vigil* is a depiction of Pākehā isolation in the landscape, a drama set in a primeval valley where four characters live and farm in an uneasy coexistence. Ward's characters are the same colour as the landscape: dour, gray-green, surviving and enclosed, in contrast to my work where the colours of *The Chrysalis*, white jumpsuit and dog glow in the light and I am attempting an openness. Painting as an influence on our work is common ground and Ward and I share a history of having studied as painters in art school. Ward works on a story like a painter: first blocking-in the big shapes, colours, light and shade with broad brushstrokes, then adding finer details (Dean 2017 3). In my works I am seeking the hazy light and romantic imagery of early colonial settler painting. For *Virgil*, Ward went to great lengths to avoid any romantic settler notion of the New Zealand landscape instead searching for "a muddy, depressing, rundown piece of land, finding it at Uruti, in north Taranaki" (Phillips). In a paddock, and in the context of farming activity, especially in such a space as *Vigil*, white is an impractical choice; dark greens and muddy browns are the colour of settler practicality. But I am not here to farm, and I am looking for more than survival.

Widdershins

Fig. 37. Still from *Widdershins* (0:52).

Widdershins is a work made in response to encountering a large log on the riverbank and because of its stature I thought of it as a tunnel. The log drew me because it looked surreal, dismembered, and solitary and it was uprooted far from an origin point. It had a thick torso and root cluster that I could stand chest to chest with. Previously in the ground, this root bundle seemed like a tangled nerve cluster. The trunk spoke of the movement from canopy to root system as a space between sky and ground; I just wanted to walk through it. It seemed like a stand-in object for *The Chrysalis* and so I played with it. I was considering my settler identity as a 'root identity' (Deleuze and Guattari) and also as one that has been uprooted and planted here. That this log was once a tree that grew somewhere else, obviously cut down, and transported by flows of water (river or sea) was foremost in my mind. The soundtrack is the steady circular hum of a singing bowl and I deliberately walk the circumference of the log three times to seemingly disappear, and reappear. The clunky editing is disruptive as it transitions from being as smooth as the simple circling of the singing bowl, which adds a certain amount of tension and discomfort. The use of

headphones in the video questions whether the sound is in the headphones or in the environment. The dog is caught up in this disappearing and reappearing. Something is altered, though this could be just a game, or an answer to a call of nature. ‘Widdershins’ is a Lowland Scots term meaning to go counter-clockwise, or to go lefthand wise, or to walk around an object by always keeping it on the left (Billinghurst 85). A northern hemisphere term, it means to take a course opposite the apparent motion of the sun. Some ancient cultures said that moving widdershins causes chaos and turmoil as it was going contrary to the movement of the sun (85). The term ‘widdershins’ is also used to mean any direction that isn’t the proper or usual way, to go against sense (85).

This log encounter corresponds to similar concerns that catalysed Aotearoa artist Holly Walker’s log encounter in her work, *Brought to the land by the sea, I wonder how we got here* (2021), a work made a year after *Widdershins*. There are tonal contrasts in demeanour in these works in that my approach is playful and Walker’s is poetic and grave; both are about dislocation and question what connection to land is. Walker is intimately engaged with the tree, literally entering into it, flesh on flesh. Her naked body becomes one with the tree whereas my clothed body is distant, separate. Walker says she wanted to “balance the energy and [her] autonomy and being there as a nude body, as a female body in the landscape, and also have this giant tree stump possessing its own kind of story which is like intrinsically tied to these questions and existentialism surrounding whakapapa and not belonging or belonging” (New Zealand Portrait Gallery 09:18 - 9.29).

Fig 38. Holly Walker. *Brought to the Land by the Sea, I Wonder How We Got Here. Photograph,* 2021.

Walker says her art practice is “centred around beginning here in this body and understanding what Pākehā identity looks like for her in this present” (03.59 - 04.20). In an interview about this work, Walker speaks of seeing the log on the beach as a passenger in a car and feeling an affinity towards it combined with an excitement and anxiety that it might not be there long:

> I looked at it and felt pieces of myself reflected. I wondered where it had been and how it had uprooted itself and how did it drift through an ocean in between in an unknown and arrive here on the whenua without that history. The tension of knowing that Tangaroa could take it back away. I loved it. I fell in love with it and honestly had quite a romantic kinship. I needed to go visit it and worried that it would go. (04.28 – 05.02)

Walker talks of a fluid process in her art making that echoes how I interact with what is present in a space. She says her chance encounter with the log is a type of collaborative process with her environment that she fosters as a process of her practice (05:33 - 06.28). Like myself, Walker says that she has seen Pākehā to be quite anxious about things such as acknowledging Te Ao Māori or holding Te Reo and acknowledging the land as Papatūānuku. This anxiety is not present for her because these cultural ideas are a reality for her (Walker 2021 29.59 - 30.24). I deal with these issues by focusing on the constructs of landscape while reconsidering myself as Pākehā. For me this is a way to signal sensitivity and respect because it acts as a boundary to appropriation in this work framed as a Pākehā effort towards self-understanding as the foundation to becoming a worthy treaty partner.

Chapter Four: The Camera and My Work Translations of Performative Acts

This chapter contextualises how my practice plays out relative to my use of the camera and the translations of performance to video. The framing of the scene is important to these works and so is the sense of my body travelling through them. The performative act comes first, then its translation to video, which is a continuation of the work. As I carry the camera with me, set it up and move to and from it, it becomes enmeshed in the work. I discuss these aspects of my work alongside avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren, her short film *At Land,* and artist Julieanna Preston and her collaborative extension of her durational performance *Waning (2016)* into the video *Shore Variations (2018)* with artist Claudia Kappenberg. These artists offer perspectives from which to unpack the dynamic of performance, camera and time within my work against how my relationship to landscape transforms over the scope of this research.

The Performative Action and the Camera in my Work

I want to do actions in a space; I want to see this from the outside; I want to move. This is part of the drive that causes me to meld video and performance in this work. In the context of unsettling, the performative gesture comes first in the doing of these things. This doing is about my presence in the space. Striding through paddocks in a white jumpsuit, lying on hedges or vacuuming a paddock, living out of a pink horse float like a doll's house in a rural setting are important gestures that interrupt the overriding logic that has made these spaces. This doing shifts my relationship to these spaces and to myself. If I am defying certain types of logic with my small acts of absurdity in these spaces, then editing the video in certain ways can defy physical logic, disrupt time and extend my understanding of what it means to unsettle.

The camera and tripod are integral to this and the videos reflect and reveal my process. There is an internal structure to each work that allows it to build on itself. I have to use

natural light, so I shoot outside and pay attention to the sun. Setting up the camera framings and getting in front of it causes me to move around the space. I find this to be a processual and reflexive way of making work that resonates with descriptions of nomadic thinking. Some videos lean towards unedited documentation and others are more clearly edited. There are no re-dos or reshoots. In the same way, I approach the footage in the editing programme and work from what I see in the footage. Sometimes the act is enough. Examples of this are *Hedge, Vacuum, Pole, Electric Fence.* At other times I continue by manipulating the footage such as in *Busy Work, NeverEnding Paddock* and *Portal.* Some videos have augmented soundtracks related to their content, others employ the original sound and manipulate it or delete it in favour of silence.

In this nonprofessional production, the acts of unsettling resist becoming a seamless language of cinema and prowess that would shield the points of access I am looking for. Part of this access is facilitated by the tripod and how it creates a static frame. This frame around the movement creates an outer boundary that draws attention to movement, especially that of me and my white jumpsuit, within it. For me, this frame creates a homogenous view, a surface that can be disrupted if a part of it gets loose. I seem to be within it, like a loose thread with the potential to unravel it.

In my video performance works, I engage critically with early settler and colonial landscape painting traditions by deconstructing their picturesque sensibility and integrating a dynamic, performative element. Early settler and colonial paintings, influenced by Eighteenth-century aesthetics, often depicted landscapes with harmonious colour schemes and atmospheric effects to present an idealized integration of European settlers into the New Zealand environment (Docking 13). Eighteenth-century landscape aesthetics generally fall into three categories: the Pastoral, celebrating human control over nature with inhabited rural scenes, the Sublime, portraying man‘s smallness in the vast face of nature”(Pound 21) and the Picturesque, emphasizing harmonious and irregular beauty, (Pound 25). Colonial New Zealand painting often embraced the picturesque style, blending idealized landscapes with elements of the sublime (Docking 13). This approach featured grand, awe-inspiring scenes such as the Canterbury plains and Milford Sound. The composition typically included expansive views, irregular shapes, and asymmetrical arrangements to enhance the sense of spaciousness and variety (Dunn 10). Scenes of settled land with towns, farms, and harbours

celebrated settler achievements but often minimized Māori contributions, presenting a favorable narrative of colonization (Docking 13).

These approaches not only reflect historical attitudes towards nature, they also resonate with my own intuitive engagement with the landscape, which has been shaped by my acculturation informed by the painting I grew up with in our house. I am influenced by early New Zealand landscape paintings with a distinctly romantic light and mood, which frame landscape as a vista, sometimes with small human figures against a backdrop, with the hazy light and dioramic aspect that marks many romantic paintings of this period. These qualities can be witnessed in the works of painters such as William Hodges (1744–1797), *Waterfall in Dusky Bay with Maori Canoe* (Hodges 1776), William Fox's (1812–1893) watercolours such as, *On the Grass Plain Below Lake Arthur* (Fox 1846), and John Gully's (1819–1888), *Western Coast of Tasman Bay*, 1885, notable for its pastoral vision in semi-cleared land, set off by a dramatic sky.

These artists employed structured perspectives as framing devices to create a romanticized view of nature that suggested a seamless blend between settler and landscape (Docking 13). My video works challenge this idealization by disrupting the static, controlled views characteristic of early colonial paintings. For example, I use a static camera frame reminiscent of one-point perspective to echo early colonial compositions. However, my performative movements, emphasising transitions and boundaries, transform this static view. My position in the frame varies, I do not blend in and my moving figure often occupies the foreground or middle ground as a central subject, rather than being a minor compositional accessory or a distant human figure overshadowed by nature's grandeur. This approach disrupts the blending of settlers and landscape depicted in colonial art, reflecting a more complex interaction between human presence and the landscape. The role of light and colour in my moving image works is particularly significant in this critique. Early settler and colonial paintings often utilized soft pastels, rich warm tones, and dramatic light and shadow to evoke tranquillity and depth (Pound 77). I reference these techniques by filming during the golden hour, a time associated with the "soft, diffused light and harmonious colour palette" typical of paintings from the early settler period (92). Examples of this are *April Morning* and *Surfing the Chrysalis*. However, I introduce deliberate contrasts to challenge these idealized portrayals. For instance, my use of a white costume against

natural backgrounds emphasises my presence and disrupts the seamless integration of figures within the landscape, a hallmark of the period (Docking 13). This disruption is emphasised in my white pacing figure in *NeverEnding* Paddock, which combined with my circling and jerky editing, unsettles my presence on the land. In terms of composition, I recontextualize traditional techniques such as the golden ratio and the rule of thirds through my performative practice. These rules can be recognised in *Butterfly Creek*, the golden ratio and use of compositional curves to draw the eye, which then is disrupted by Luna's movement and figure. *Section* is another work where these principles are clearly evident in its horizontal thirds, which direct the eye to the horizon line. This effect is heightened by my steady horizontal movement, which repeatedly cuts across the scene, visually representing the dissection and gridding of land into property. engage with the frame dynamically, moving within it rather than directing the camera. This approach introduces a dynamic element that foregrounds my physical interaction with the environment.

The concept of the view and my history of being a painter also play into my attention to composition and colour. This frame in conjunction with the performative act has become a way for me to understand landscape as "a mediating surface and a site of reaction and interaction" (McGuire 21). In landscape, this outer limit is linked to an ideology of enclosure with correlations to the picture frame, the edge of a painting, the fences of a paddock and the delineations of land into grids of property. As is a boundary, this static camera framing could be seen as a threshold or doorway. Through the mediation of the camera, my body can be seen to be in contact with this boundary, my body is on this surface, attempting to see it, attempting to interrupt it, my body is crossing it, and sometimes I just walk through it. This is a site of transition and transformation in my work.

Lone Woman Kind Movies

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, my videos are of the lone (but not alone) woman kind, where I have my camera and an outfit and make videos about things that trouble me as a Pākehā woman. This is a form of independence just as my action of making my house. My rebelliousness leads me away from the loudness of masculine mythologies so present in settler narratives and history and exerts itself in the mobilities of my independent one-

woman band (performing, filming editing), using the basic equipment of a camera and tripod, easily carried with me. In my mundane and simple acts, I side step heroic gestures and conquering actions with simple mundane and often awkward doings. The white jumpsuit echoes 'scientist-explorer' tropes, yet I am a woman and it looks like I am mucking around. A hero in control of the situation would not get lost in a paddock and they would likely jump a fence gracefully like a gladiator and certainly they would never ever vacuum carpets inside or outside. These aspects combined could afford me unfathomable (perhaps unrecognisable?) to these masculine mythologies as I make my work. For example, I suspect my activities in the paddock were unfathomable to the man who owned the farm across the road who had a view of me in the paddock where I was playing like a child with my camera.

Fig. 39. Still from *At Land*. (01:32) Maya Deren 1944.

I first encountered Maya Deren through her film *At Land (1944)*. The manner in which the central character played by Deren moves through the frames and scenarios caught my attention because of how I move my body across streams and a movement that gets repeated in numerous works, to create a sense of agency and, ultimately, a worlding. Deren was concerned with film as a form and with how filmic time-space can be experienced as its own expression of a reality created by the subjectivities of her protagonists moving within it. Deren (1917-1961) was a key figure in early American avant-garde cinema, characterised by her independence and known for her inventive editing and her imaginative manipulations of time and space to produce a filmic whole characterized by the quality of its mobile elements. Interestingly, despite the subjective impression of a woman becoming agential within her environment. Deren describes *At Land* as having little to do with the inner world of

the protagonist, saying it externalises the hidden dynamic of the external world. Deren says, “It is as if I had moved from a concern with the life of a fish, to a concern with the sea which accounts for the character of the fish and its life (Deren *A Letter to James Card* 229). Although I write and make work from an auto ethnographic perspective, its microcosms speak to the larger structures of settler colonialism and how it orders life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

There are moments in my work where video extends my reach or allows something to occur that is seemingly impossible in a physical world but always can happen in a playful world. These are the jump cuts, the transitions between scenes where I break a single shot with an abrupt cut, jumping between scenes that makes the subject appear to jump abruptly forward in time or change position (Bedard). This makes it seem as though I have slipped through the frames and time or as observed in *Dune-Forest* and *Portal.* The editing becomes completely visible and highlights the constructed nature of the film (Bedard). In my work this points to the stream of footage linked to the time space of the original live performative act and the unsettling of a seamless surface.

This causes me to take notice of Deren's letter in response to James Card’s request for her first film *Meshes in the Afternoon* to be archived in the George Eastman House collection. Deren describes a revelation from a sequence in this film that could mirror an internal dialogue I have with my work. Deren writes:

> It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through. I kept saying to myself: ‘The walls of this room are solid except right there. That leads to something. There's a door there leading to something. I’ve got to get it open because through there I can go through to someplace instead of leaving here by the same way that came in.’ And so I did, prying at it until my fingers were bleeding. And so came to the world where the identity of movement spans and transcends all time and space and that becomes the central theme of *At Land.* (226)

Deren writes “that the dynamic of movement in film is stronger than anything else,” that “movement or energy, is more important, or powerful, than space or matter, in fact it creates matter” (226). This to Deren was

> marvellous, like an illumination, that I wanted to just stop and celebrate that wonder, just by itself. Which I did in *A Study in Choreography for camera.* The movement of the dancer creates a geography, in the film, that never was. With a turn of the foot he makes neighbours of distant places. (229)

This is where Deren choreographs a dancer through different outdoor and interior scenes, creating its continuity through the movement of his body and stretching a leap through editing beyond anything possible in the physical realm.

I think of my videos as permeable containers in that I can appear that I move between them if they are watched in succession. As I edit I follow the movement of my body in the footage. This is different to Deren who carefully curates the movements of her protagonist before she films which she then choreographs through the language of film to make their movement, whereas in my work the movement comes from the live action. Deren describes the films she makes as being built like a chamber that becomes a corridor, like a chain reaction (229). This points to the processual nature of Deren's work, and rather than allowing the camera to be a kind of witness to movement or to catch it and then manipulate video version as I do, she builds it. Deren advocated for the mobility and scope of the held camera over the static constraints of a tripod (Deren *Amateur Versus Professional* 2), which is in contrast to my use of the tripod's static framing quality and for the freedom it allows me to operate and get in front of the camera.

The use of a tripod and its static frame is how I isolate my moving figure and as I move out of one work, I can appear in another. This is insinuated through the visual links of my outfits, demeanour and how I go in and out of frame. In *Portal* I slip in and out of land through the use of jump cut edits and the narrative element of sunlight portals, and in *Pole* I disappear into the scene. As more works accumulate, they map a constellation of space, and these links are strengthened by the impression of my body moving throughout the spread of works. This is how I notice the camera extending the time/space of where my body ranges. This is not linear but a spreading horizontal type of movement, that never gets above itself, as in a bird's eye view. It creeps across the ground and like the video frames transfers happen side by side, when the works are gathered together.

This horizontal movement I describe has resonances to Deren's cinematic strategy of verticality, because it spreads out and does not travel in a straight line. I like to stride off in a serious manner in straight lines but getting from point A to B often gets foiled in my work. *NeverEnding Paddock* is a good example where I stride off, only to inevitably and arbitrarily turn, because I have to get back to the camera at some point and so I wander in the space as the work continues. Deren's vertical structure builds up and out rather than progressing "horizontally" in a linear fashion as narrative structures do, and her vertical sequences explore the quality of moments, images, ideas, and movements outside of such imperatives (Brannigan 101). This strategy is repeated throughout *At Land* as Deren's body literally climbs up through the filmic space from scene of the beach to the driftwood, extended through a collage of shots that focus on her climbing body to the table, to land, to fall back through water to the beach again. This gives the impression of her body moving through a stratified environment and of her body being the lodestone, or perhaps the portal, in this equation as it seeks and finds fissures and openings within a layered spatial dimension. Deren's are carefully curated images that cause the body to perform in the cinematic space such that it is the filmic space rather than the physical where her attention lies. I consider my body in my work to be simultaneously grounded in the original physical action and place and to also inhabit a filmic space.

Like Deren, the movement of my body is the unifying factor across my work, and I think of each work as fragmentary stories (performatively they are simple actions) and as more are encountered it potentially brings a whole into focus. This dispersal of fragments to a whole is interesting as a means to destabilise the dominant narratives of settler culture. I wonder if part of this is due to the unknown *between* space inferred in this constellation of stories. In the last scenes of *At Land*, Deren appears to herself from all perspectives in one bound moment. In my configuration this happens across a series of works existing in relation to each other instead of a discrete filmic whole. I multiply myself and travel through works, times, spaces, and portals. Because I have situated myself in Manawatū, in the full light of my settler nature and the recognition of land and whenua, these are the spaces I also metaphorically travel in and out of. This form of movement challenges the surface projection of landscape by fragmenting it. To someone like me who is acculturated to it as the only and natural view, this rupturing of this surface makes it possible to imagine realities beyond it.

Translations of Performative Acts

This section discusses my work and process in context with Julieanna Preston's practice and her collaboration with artist Claudia Kappenberg, the film *Shore Variations*, a 2018 film by Kappenberg that reimagines *Waning*, a 2016 live art performance by Julieanna Preston.

Julieanna Preston is an artist based in Aotearoa New Zealand with a broad ranging transdisciplinary practice of a new materialist feminist sensibility, spanning performance art, construction, sonic practices and architecture. Preston's practice is centred on performative entangled embodiments at the intersections of language and lively materiality. This has resonances to how I work with landscape ideologies, land, my body, and my history as dynamic materials. Preston's work vibrates as it hums, whispers and types, pings against wire fence lines, touches interior surfaces, tucks itself into corners of wood, becomes muffled with wool, bangs hammers, listens closely to buildings as one does to a seashell and presses into the ground or dissolves itself with tidal rocks.

Like myself, Preston wrestles with the colonial histories of Aotearoa and her own relation to them. In the article *Musing with Petric Bodies, Hanging on to Dear Life*, Preston writes that she is a work in progress prompted by a commitment to Tangata Tiriti, that creative works are the way she learns to be in this place, its land, people, customs, and values. "It is learning by doing, and in that sense, every live performance is an experiment that wonders about things through an embodied process more so than asserting knowledge that has already been acquired" (Preston *Musing with Petric Bodies, Hanging on to Dear Life* 3). As in my practice, Preston is also aligned with Haraway's term *situated knowledge*, saying that this also applies to *situated material learning*, a mode of feminist practice that explores a multiplicity of on-going transformation of local conditions (2). This, Preston says "embraces site-responsiveness, in which the site, its historic, political, and cultural context, and its materiality, are equal collaborators to how the encounter happens and what new understanding is produced" (2).

Shore Variations is an exploration into "the body in the landscape'' and the camera "following" (Preston Artist website 2018). *Waning* (2016) is a durational live artwork by

Preston at Birling Gap, at the site of the Seven Sisters chalk hills on the southern Sussex coast of England. Preston recognises these chalk hills as live entities, vibrant material, in the process of negotiating new alliances with other worldly matter. "*Waning* is a lament to the rapid rate of erosion of the hills at the water's edge … this erosion is a yielding to the ocean's unrelenting force towards become something other … this performance shaped a conversation between the chalk cliffs and myself" (Preston *Waning*).

When I make videos, my awareness turns to landscape as a material and ideological projection and, like Preston, I am conscious of the simple activities I perform on land as an unpremeditated conversation for a space that the performance holds. Preston describes this space (in reference to *Waning)* as one that *shapes* this bodily material conversation. If this is the case, then the camera in *Shore Variations* takes on a form of agency that holds space for *"being in* the transformational zone of action" (Preston *Waning)* and extends it in generative ways. At times it seemed like Preston was swimming in the land, much like how I used to play in the river as a child. Her body changed in relation to multiple scales found by the camera in proximity to sand, rock, and then to the cliff and back to sea again. The camera framed what is in and out of view, what is near and far, and in doing so, operated dynamically rather than resorting to documentation, clarification and explanation. This observation allows me to consider how the video mediated nature of my performance practice extends my performative acts and how this process of using the camera affords a range of proximities in my performative landscape interactions.

Extending the reach of a live art process through the mediation of the camera, sound and editing is a different proposition to a live experience or straight documentation to mark that an event has occurred. As I have stated, the dynamic of the camera and my performative movements are linked with an intention *to unsettle*. This becomes very obvious in some of the works, especially in *NeverEnding Paddock* where I am constantly turning back to the camera, and where it shakes in the wind. Preston's body reveals a different intention, one of connecting, and what is being communicated is being *with and open* to the cliffs.

The frame in my work serves an enclosure my body moves within and this relates to the cultural projection of landscape on land. In *Shore Variations,* there are many static shots but as the relationships build, the impression is that Preston's body in contact with land is the frame and the boundary for the movement rather than that of the camera. Although the

shots are full of movement there is a sense of holding a door open, of her body being a conduit, somehow mirroring the land. I attempt to explain this next because this interacts fruitfully with how I approach framing, surface and boundary as revealed by the camera. Perhaps this *body as the frame* impression is due to the nature of Preston's approach where she lets the performance shape and hold space for a material conversation. A lot of this is extended by Kappenberg's camerawork and editing and the manner of imagery which is not about a body moving on a surface but about the body being in contact and immersed with land, and it is as if the camera is an entity thinking about this in a camera way. Preston's musing body causes me this strange personification of Kappenberg's camera and edits. The split screen format invites me to draw comparisons, and I see scales of size, (Fig. 38) proximity, time (Fig. 38) and a difference of materials but a sharing of space. This split alludes to cartesian divides, but the apparent divide is diminished or inactive because it is crossed over numerous times by Preston's body. In light of this, the different shots become a thing seeing from multiple views that amplifies over the duration of 38 minutes.

Fig 40. Still from *Shore Variations* (08.00).

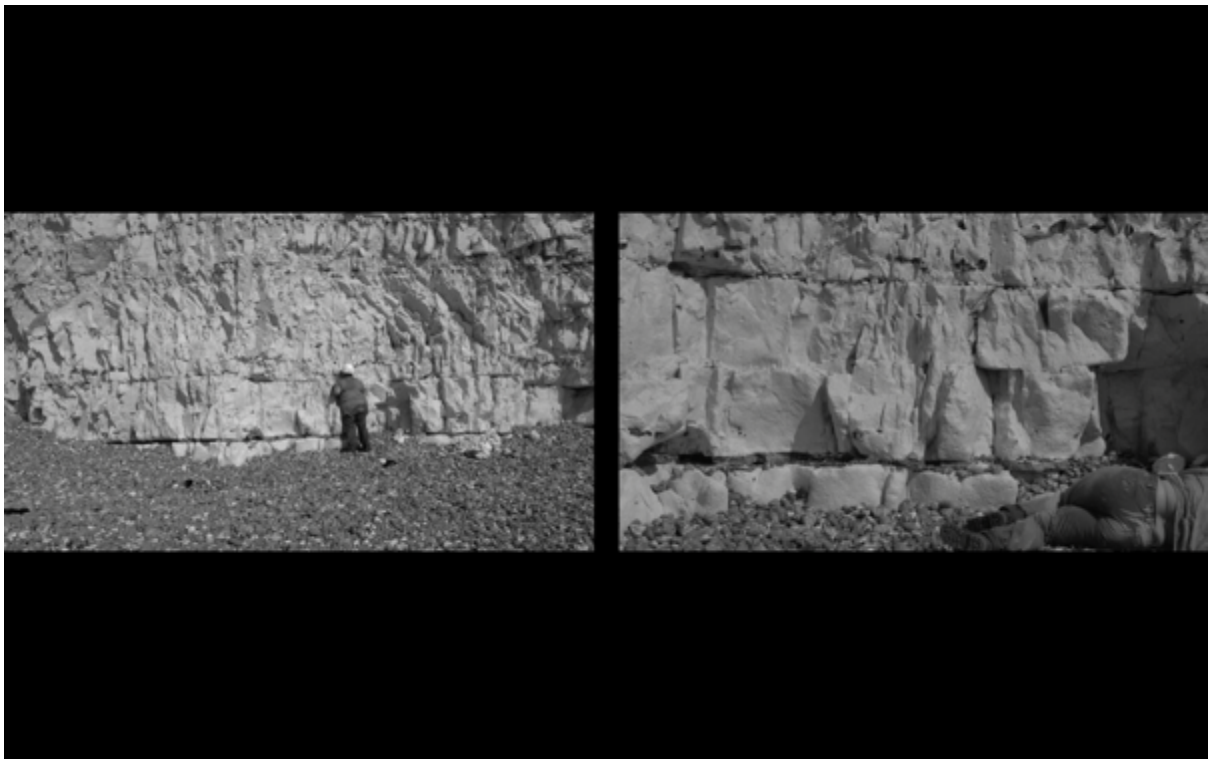

Fig. 41. Still from *Shore Variations* (36.09).

The shifts in black and white create time registers and the soundtrack of this sea environment is responsive to the ebbs and flows of proximity (Fig. 40). This causes me to think of respiration; this human body and land/rock body may be different proximities in terms of time and respire at different rates and depths, yet they respire together. Though split screen may allude to cartesian divides, this twoness averts that assumption as Preston's body moves horizontally from one side to the other (Fig. 4) and so this cliff, the sea and sand are all of the same space. Interestingly the people in the background (Fig. 41) seem separate and rather than detract from Preston's immersion, they heighten it. Preston's interaction is of a different realm, a different facet of perception.

Fig. 42. Still from *Shore Variations* (31.02).

Fig. 43. Still from *Shore Variations* (15.43).

Fig. 44. Still from *Shore Variations* (27.04).

Preston's integrations with the rocks, sand and pebbles, and her immersion in the sea, seemingly tumbled like sand, against the soundtrack heighten this sense of materials melding in durational tempo. This curious alchemy is playful and tactile; she lies cradled in stones as though she is experimenting with being a rock (Fig. 44). At one point she licks the surface of the cliff as though to test its taste and to truly feel it. The film ends in black and white (Fig. 38) and references the timescales of material. I wonder about the transitory moments of becoming this thing in time, and what marks time in this work so differently compared to a linear conception of it. Preston writes,

> Alternating between black and white and colour, and between single and multiple viewpoints, the video invites different modes of looking and perceiving. The viewer is both drawn in and pushed back, thereby mirroring the endeavour of the performer on site. (Preston *Shore Variations* 2018)

My conception of landscape as a projection and the camera and its tripod seem caught up with an unconscious urge to create distance. It's as though I am muffling myself against land, or more likely, revealing the implications of how I got to be here on this land that seem

to be covered up with the Pākehā ideas of what land should be. I'm not rolling and pressed in with the materiality of my environment in the same manner as Preston is in *Shore Variations*. Instead, I bob across a surface in my white jumpsuit which makes the jump cut edits more jarring and an interruption to the flow. Here lies a point of difference between my practice and Preston and Kappenberg. In my videos, I have set up the camera, with precision, left it unattended and turned on to record and then, I proceed to enter the field of the performance, letting the camera capture the scene. The camera allows me to frame the scene like a landscape painting and, later, to interweave rhythmic and tonal constellations between the sites I film. That I often augment the soundtracks to these works in post is a response to heighten the material and an extension of a process that gives an opportunity to become aware of the surfaces (histories, feelings, references to texts and jokes) that my work comes into contact with.

Chapter Five: Epilogue

This chapter discusses three works made in the final stages of this research where I shift with *The Chrysalis* to Titahi Bay, a suburb of Porirua in Te Upoko o te Ika, the greater Wellington region of Aotearoa New Zealand. This is a small plot of grass, 6m x 26m, a narrow strip in the small shopping centre close to the beach. It's a local shortcut, a transitory space. *Pole, Neighbours* and *Alighting Chrysalis*, depict my arrival to this new place. These are the last works of this series and through them I reflect on what unsettling has been, can be and its merits.

Fig. 45. Still from *Pole* (0:20)

At the edge of the shopping centre in my white jumpsuit, I look like a house painter coming to the popular bakery for a pie, but I am acting too strange for that. This strip of grass is the land on which I will live, which, for now, is a local pedestrian shortcut. I have migrated out of the painterly frames of the previous works into this urban space where the noises of people going about their day, dogs barking, and the sound of traffic are immediate and pressing. This video picks up the geometric qualities of the built environment with its planes, line,

sound, and colour. So, I do the obvious thing: I follow the current between these long, straight walls and disappear into this place without a trace. It is as if I am stepping back into life, as though I have been away. It is a literal stepping into the unknown.

Fig. 46. Still from *Neighbour* (0:33).

Neighbour is a meeting with a neighbour, the first involuntary human audience of these works. When I perform an act in a public space, I am interested in the people who might come across me. I think of these people as an involuntary audience. I make art hoping I will come across someone and usually there is some type of entangling interaction between them and the artwork I am involved in. This type of audience is different to those that see the finished videos. It is an interaction that many of them would not classify as art.

At the bollard, I wondered what to do. I decided to greet this place by lying down on it. It was damp and I felt silly. I like to consider animals, trees, birds and the environment I am amongst as something I am leaving a brief imprint on, just as they imprint on me. Despite the mud seeping into the white material of the jumpsuit, my body felt comfortable as though it was spreading out and losing shape on this solid surface. I did not see him coming. His dog was delighted to meet me. Greetings happened. I had to tell him that everything was

okay, that though this must seem a strange thing to do, I was just mucking around, new to the community, and filming for an art project. This seemed to explain everything.

I am the first audience of my work. I make it to experience it and see it and to think about patterns. This has been a type of alchemy for me. At times, I have thought that this work would be a conduit to stare in the grey zone that is my ancestral history, that somehow I would make out legible shapes within it. It is still very unknown. I have scrutinised these works even as I have been in the midst of the performative acts because at each stage there are things I notice and think about that I couldn't have done without this process. Some of these things I can barely access, and others I have attempted to communicate in this writing.

The struggles and questions posed in the videos are not mine alone. I want to share them out to the world beyond this academic context. To make these works accessible, I am sharing them via various platforms, including a website exhibition, possible solo and group exhibitions in galleries, and through The roving Chrysalis micro-theatre project. Through these works I hope to spark conversations with artists and curators. I have been inspired by recent group exhibitions that address themes of colonisation and identity from Indigenous perspectives. I want to show my works in group shows that foster open conversations and feature artworks from artists of different cultures and backgrounds. At this point I am exploring this with specific platforms that include Te Manawa, Manawatū Public Art Gallery, Pataka, Porirua Public Art Gallery and potentially in a collection of Tangata Pakeha hosted by the Pakeha Project (Sinclair et al.).

Fig. 47. *Alighting.* Still image, Titahi Bay, Porirua, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2021.

Alighting is a still image of *The Chrysalis* arriving at Titahi Bay. It has an uncanny resemblance to the video still in which I stand alone next to *The Chrysalis* at the beach, looking like I have just stepped out of a spaceship (Fig. 26). Here in this urban setting, *The Chrysalis* does not look like a spaceship; it is a horse float. If I wear my white jumpsuit in the paddocks, dunes, and stretches of beach in Tangimoana, I look like an explorer, and from that perspective I could interpret my movements through this inquiry as a hero's journey. This is the standard fiction template that comprises a hero who goes on an adventure, is victorious in a decisive crisis, and comes home changed. Here in this urban environment I do not look like an explorer; I am just someone in white overalls, who probably isn't a housepainter, guiding a horse float into a park. In this environment, near other wheeled vehicles, *The Chrysalis* seems more mobile than ever, and it seems I am more like a visitor alighting here for a time yet to cross the threshold.

Unsettling as a Threshold Space

All the works in this inquiry are about transition. They exist in the threshold space, when you are on the way to what happens after you have made a decision. They say that meeting someone for the first time is breaking the ice. Maybe this is about to happen with these works in Titahi Bay. Preston writes of the handshake as a threshold crossing exercise (Preston *Unknowingly, A Threshold-Crossing Movement* 9) and a "significant bodily gesture sets the tone for what might or could happen" (9). My work exists in the moments before that contact, that *unsettling space*, where you clear the space to approach.

I think of this inquiry as one big threshold. Titahi Bay is recognisable as an edge of it. This threshold space has been big enough to live in for a time as I have made these works, not only from this creative focus and lived art process, but in my personal life. Early on, I pointed to landscape as a threshold space "a condition that exists as a threshold or interface between fields" (Mcguire 21) and "a mediative substance" (21). After making these works, I am inclined to see landscape as a conduit that can get thin in places, or even broken though. In these works, frames, doorways, outside or inside, over or under, have been a theme that I have explored physically.

So I arrived at Titahi Bay, but I haven't quite arrived. I never washed my white jumpsuit in the making of this work. Surprisingly, it was still white, and only a little dirty after living in the paddock in Tangimoana. I point to this because this white jumpsuit is a constant in this work. This is not about not being a settler. I am what I am. This has been a type of accounting, letting go and opening to make space for the new to come in. A different form of relation. As with the theme of *The Chrysalis*, and caterpillars liquefying into butterflies or moths, it is not that the old material has been discarded, as much as it is being digested and reconfigured into a different shape. This shape has yet to come.

Conclusion

This art practice doctoral research is about unsettling and what it is to unsettle my relationship to landscape, land, and whenua as a Pākehā woman in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through my performance and video art practice, I discovered reorientation and a recognition that small acts are like small forces that can accumulate to be a simple but powerful means to enter a process of transformation. These works are like stepping stones, evidence of a path I have taken, and my practice considers how such literal movement in the landscape exerts nomadic thinking as a form of spatial, political, and cultural responsiveness.

This was something I explored through my body in my surroundings that proceeded with simple performative acts in front of the camera, which as more videos are viewed, unfolds into a story of a Pākehā woman unsettling her relationship to landscape and her settler habits. Framing landscape as a cultural projection on land was a major influence, which led me to consider it to be a complex surface that could be unsettled. It became something that I could interact with through my practice which involves movement across stage-like spaces, which gets translated onto screens. This influenced how I moved and used the camera, and how I edited the resulting footage.

Living off the grid in *The Chrysalis* made me attuned to the practicalities of physical positioning. I constantly turned to the sun and towards the beach and river and clusters of trees, not like a map. I repeated patterns, but each time was different because I oriented myself differently. This resulted in covering different ground. I experienced three examples of reorientation, living with land, including living on it by invitation only, and not owning or mining it for resources. Each of these speaks to a feminist expression of agency and a playful approach to questions about my settler relationship with land.

I saw that my work looked like a literal physical experiment of Mark Rifkin's (2017) call for a project of reorientation to the grid, the structuring of settler colonialism that treats itself as a neutral, natural, and self-evident frame for understanding reality (Rifkin *Beyond Settler Time* 25). I examined my relationship with landscape and realised that my perception of land as

separate from myself was a product of settler colonialism. I see landscape as an overriding story about land that normalises my presence here as a settler, a construction that is consolidated continuously in my everyday habits of living. I learned these habits at a young age; however, this is countered by my experience as a child, relating to the awa space and being part of its movement. I recognised this dynamic in Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Braidotti's nomadic thinking. These two contrasting points have been key for the development of this research. In a feminist and decolonial manoeuvre my art practice allowed me to reframe myself as an active female participant within the landscape, resisting patriarchal settler norms through small, playful acts. These videos tell many stories and are held together as a bundle of parts that exist as a collective. There are no heroes in these stories. They are snapshots of everyday life, using mundane acts to challenge dominant narratives that can be difficult to identify.

Through this work, I learnt that awkwardness is a superpower. It is the voice I speak in, and it is the centre of the humour in these works. In recognising this and being open to it, I received a gift. I wonder whether this awkwardness could be a Pākehā thing? It is awkward to be a settler descendent of settler descendants, and after taking so long, to acknowledge oneself as a guest to a place, not a stranger, but a visitor from somewhere else who has been here for some time, grabbing, and controlling everything. Being sensitive to this state of being is an unusual, unknown mode. I have not been taught it, I am not used to this, and I am unpractised, which is awkward. I have had to learn to open up to receive the gifts that these learning situations have given me, and that is awkward. Awkwardness is uncomfortable and humbling. Unsettling. This can create funny moments, generate laughter, and lighten up a space so that there is room to move. Of course, I love this awkwardness, because it undoes the idea of being in control. This is great to play with. It can be fun. I now see this awkwardness as a form of resistance because that is difficult to manage; it mucks things up. This is why I describe my artwork as a lot of playful mucking around; it pokes at things and wonders and wanders about.

It is evident that I have been caught up in a burgeoning Pākehā awareness. Now, as I hope to add my work to the space of this scholarship, I see that it is also in a state of unsettlement. This work has been a process of learning about what it is to think out of place, centred on my recognition of who I am, what I bring with me, and where I am in Aotearoa New Zealand. I can only make this work from me, and this is a partial and situated

(Haraway 1988 590) perspective I am offering. The pivot point for this was the work I was doing and continue to do of knowing myself as a Pākehā, which includes recognising ancestral resourcefulness, and acknowledging that what I carry in my body through DNA includes subconscious patterns. Although the details of my ancestry are mysterious to me, this work has brought some of that knowledge to the surface.

Bringing these questions to my art practice has allowed me to articulate them, embody them, experience them, and disrupt my previous relationship to landscape. The traces of this process, the videos, are my contribution to a burgeoning field of academic research globally and within Aotearoa New Zealand that seeks decolonial possibilities and, ultimately, the extension of this new understanding into lived experience. I think of these works as stories, existing in a diversity of others, I do not want to speak over others but to humbly present them as my stories of reorientation; they are small forces moving towards openness, with the hope of a cumulative effect. Therefore, I set my stories free. They have been externalised and can now be encountered. How they will be received, I cannot answer because this work sits at the moment of unsettling, and that is beyond its reach.

I have come to recognise this process of unsettling as a threshold. This assumes that there is a space beyond all of this. This is a decision to reach for the decolonial joy (Negrón-Muntaner 170) that I wrote of in the introduction and to imagine it here in Aotearoa New Zealand. I do not know what is ahead, and this uncertainty is good because it clears the ground for relational encounters. I am allowing the thought that perhaps this can organise itself auto-poetically on an encounter by encounter basis.

This whole process has been difficult to write about because the videos are the traces of a transition to an altered state of being that is entwined in my personal reality. Through them, I inhabit space differently from the written words on the page. The space I am in when I make art is lighter and more candid. This gives me a means to move that I do not access as easily in academic writing, and disconcertingly, my writing itself has revealed the things I wished to unsettle with the artworks. Such as the logic of being certain. I found I could talk in conversation about these things, yet often I would become blank in front of my computer beset by nameless anxieties, completely unmoored and unsettled. This is despite the beauty I have found in thinking through these things, and of the thinkers and artists who have led, guided, and inspired me through this process.

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