

# THE UNCONSCIOUS RUIN

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DRAWING MINOR ARCHITECTURE



Auckland University of Technology, Master of Art & Design 2012



**Fig 1.** *Aletheia #1* (After Kay Sage's *Tomorrow is Never*, 1955). Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).



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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 nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Attestation of authorship:

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For Joy Sellar.

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## ABSTRACT

### The Unconscious Ruin

*To hate all languages of masters.*

– Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka*

The citizen subject, simultaneously estranged and yet embraced as an entity, insatiably commodified and marketed to, increasingly experiences urban place as a *terrain vague* – a place without coherent reference or broader orientation. Far from being an historical accident, the *terrain vague* testifies to the operation of spatial systems of decline, a decline mandated by the deterritorialising logic of Late Capitalism. This research speculates on what postures of observation remain available to gauge such a scenography.

Set against contemporary architecture's insistence on ameliorating conventions bound to Euclidean concepts of spatial distinction and legibility, but also its adventurism through experimentation and spatial disjunction (developed via post-modernism, neo-avant-gardism, speculative digital and the virtual), this project aims to enter into the politics of the architecturalised digital image. It claims entry into such politics via spaces of dereliction; the existential "*non-places*" of the post-industrial. Drawing on the industrial-maritime hinterland of Auckland's Mangere inlet, the project intersects the Situationists' joint strategies of *dérive* and *détournement* with Surrealism's overturning of realism in favour of oneiric and uncanny spatial abstractions. Merging illustration and installation practices, it undertakes what will be considered a *minor architecture* – one paralleling Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's consideration of *minor* literary voices, particularly in Franz Kafka.

The experimental architectural drawing – itself a minority within architectural practice – is considered here as a means for unfurling the complexity of place and its sighting, eschewing an architectural will-to-project, a will to bring sites into completion and resolution. The project turns to Jean François Lyotard's and Deleuze's conception of "the Figural" as "fissure" or break with reality to further explore place, sighting and situating. The strategy pursued in this research is that the spectacle of capitalism, and its production of "grey sites", harbours an emancipatory potential accessible through the architectural drawing and its installation.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Spatial Logic of Late Capital

The southern edge of the Mangere Inlet encompasses a seemingly incoherent array of manufacturing, light industries, state housing and colonial settlement architecture, stretching from the eastern tributaries around Otahuhu to the historic boroughs of Onehunga and Mangere. The tensions embodied by this broken temporality and the disjointed socio-historical narratives implicate to it, is part of a much wider contradiction defining the southern harbour. Together with its northern counterpart, Auckland is a doubly-centred city, historically given a front and back. Contrastive with the northern commercial port pocketed by a venerated Hauraki Gulf, the southern inlet can be thought to mirror what the Marxist theorist Ernest Mandel referred to as “third stage” or “late capitalism” (Jameson, 1991, p. 3). For Jameson, this late stage of capitalism, or “long wave” of capitalism's third stage, began at the end of World War II, and had the effect of “reorganizing international relations, decolonizing the colonies, and laying the groundwork for the emergence of a new economic world system” (1991, p. 9).

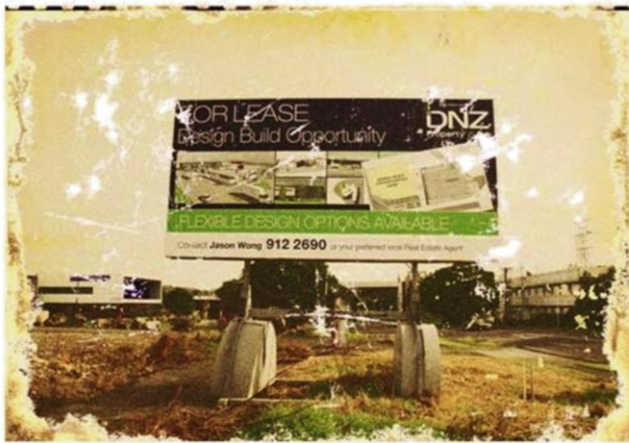


Fig. 2. *Terrain Vague #1*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

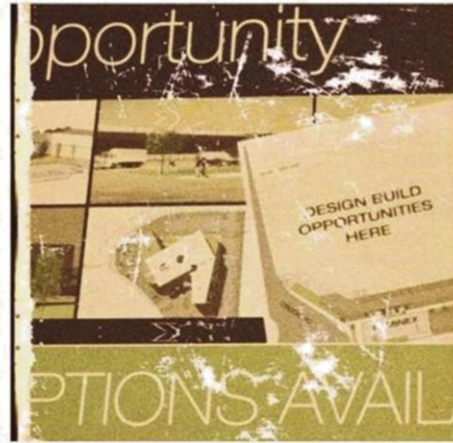


Fig. 3. *Sign#1*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

This project attends to the anxieties and indetermination evidenced by urban systems in decay. Globalisation has heralded new international divisions of labour, a new dynamic in international banking and stock exchanges (including the now enormous First World debt), along with new forms of media interrelationship and standardised transportation systems such as containerisation. Mechanised container transfers have dramatically changed the character of port cities worldwide, and these changes have been evidenced developmentally within the inlet. International market forces and fluctuations in trade (induced by the stock-market collapse and withdrawal of farming subsidies from earlier that decade) forced a remaking of the inlet's maritime infrastructure from the 1980s. The quest for transportation synergies that linked into new economic realities prompted the expansion and containerisation of the port facilities, while at the same time traditional producers in the region fell away. The result is a wasteland of sorts, where disused abattoirs, a phosphate fertiliser works and retired factories, having long discharged and leaked untreated waste into the Manukau Harbour, now persist as disused structures, testifying to a lapse of post-war optimism.

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## Space for Acting Out

Modifying Michel de Certeau's invitation to consider "space as practiced place", the Southern Inlet may also be construed as a *practiced space* – a theatrical locale for "acting out" in the manner of the Situationist International's (SI) playfully constructed situations. In uncovering the latent potentialities of the inlet this thesis takes from the SI the technique of the *dérive* to better read and record encounters with the urban-harbour fringe. Exploring the urban periphery by foot mandates an encounter with the phenomena of place; an attendance on appearing and appearance.

Eschewing prevailing site analysis, the observational walks that centre the project are directed towards a *digital dérive*. The practice of walking or *dérive* thus becomes a practice of rehearsal (as de Certeau suggests), anticipating the construction of a digitally doubled theatre; in other words, the remaking of the "seen" as a scenographic or virtual "picture" of the Southern Inlet. As such, the project imagines itself as "virtual" representations of selected sites in and around the inlet. These image repertoires then run counterwise to the acknowledged coding of the architectural drawing.

Further, this thesis draws on practices of estrangement taken from both Surrealism and the Situationists. Broadly, these approaches utilise what the SI termed *deceptive détournement*, a negative artistic strategy that aimed to subvert the routine contours of the given through parody, collage, creative vandalism and *sly quotation*. Furthermore, the antagonistic and satirical aspects of *détournement* are here abrogated in favour of visual strategies that extend the Surrealists' cut-ups and collage games of *exquisite corpse* to generate scenographic doublings, the aim of which is a misrecognition of the familiar, and to explore an uncanny strangeness from which forms of elucidation may arise – an informing that Walter Benjamin referred to as "profane illumination" (Ferris, 2004, p. 170). The pursuit of an illuminative unveiling recovered from the given, finds tradition in the Surrealist's ghost-ridden street gorged with dreams: Bauderaires *Les ept Viellard* (Swarming City), and T. S. Elliot's depiction of London as the "The Unreal City" of *The Wasteland*. This duplicity found in the metropolis – a place given to misery, pleasure, and elucidation – backgrounds this project's pursuit of uncanny dream images: depictions of decayed landscapes, phantasmic ruins, monumentalised industrial outbuildings and obsolete utilitarian structures.

No doubt the Situationist International appropriated many aspects of the Surrealist critique of the urban as a harbour of lived banalities, technocracy and commercial imperatives, utilising the earlier movement's strategy of a psychical overturning or revolt to better re-enchant the world. Marxist sociologist and philosopher Michael Löwry points to the Surrealists' radicalising and revolutionising of Romanticism by refusing its polemic of "social fragmentation and isolation of the individual under capitalism" (2009, p. 16). For Andre Breton as leader of the Surrealists, this struggle took the form of a libertarian Marxism aiming to "recreate the human community" through a "Romantic Anti-capitalism" that tapped into the "collective imagination as expressed through mythology and folklore" (Löwry, 2009, p. 16). This appropriation of myth and symbol, according to Lowry, offered an alternative, romantically augmented anticapitalism, presumed better able to dismantle the State rather than having to overturn or topple it. Behind the Situationists' technique of *détournement* can be seen a similar agenda. In this sense, Surrealism and Situationism share a commitment to the abolishment of capitalist unfreedoms via liberatory explorations of the city.

## Methodologies of Site

The use here of deceptively simple strategies of spatial knowing gained through walking, recording, collaging and ultimately digital assemblage, attempt to capture the complexity of place through narratives of unease. However, the innovation this project attempts is to rethink the question of the *dérive* and *détournement* beyond the appeal to free corporeal mobility. While the installation/images aimed at in this research arose in and out of walks, the works themselves are concerned with degrees of experiential immobility and shallow observational spaces that confound roaming freedoms. As such, the *terrain vague* and *digital dérive* explored in this thesis draw on Jean François Lyotard's and Gilles Deleuze's consideration of "the Figural", with particular focus being given to the painter Francis Bacon in his use of the triptych format.

The pursuit of the figural here, in the conceiving of spaces of "rupture", is an attempt to convey the past, present, and perhaps future, in a series of image frames or triptychs, which assume the movement and pacing of a *dérive*. This relies less on the moving observer than on a mobility within the image repertoire itself – a movement dynamic drawn out by, and into, a shallowly defined installation tableau. The *dérive* conceived this way critiques the "virtual" agency typified by the perceived mastery of the immobile participant presented onscreen. The digital, understood as an omnipotence of the digits and their command of an extensive "beyond" is here rethought as a space of questioning counter-mastery, a space of estranging illumination.



**Fig. 4. *Inlet*** Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

## Drawing on a *Minor* Concern

*A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.*

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka*

The installation practice and digital image-making component of this thesis takes influence from what might be considered “minority” readings or interactions with the sightedness of place: culture-jamming, “place hacking” and contemporary illustration. These examples could be extended toward non-academic “paraliteratures” most notable in genre fiction such as science fiction and fantasy, extending out into the maze of digital/visual representations evidenced in Japanese Manga, Anime and digital video game culture. In architectural terms a *minor* architecture might be represented by experimental practitioners such as Lebbeus Woods or Brian Cantley, who deal with explorations of systems in crisis, drawing or describing existing architectural orders being confronted by war, economic or natural disaster. As such, experimental architecture is often politically charged with provocative visions of possible realities, yet remaining inside the realms of the unbuilt or unbuildable.

This project imagines itself as a place *drawn* off from its locale and then replayed back to the viewer as an amalgam of site specificities and exhibited digital images. Viewed this way, a minor architecture could be understood as existing within the majority narrative of architectural form and discourse, but like the rag-picker or hacker of everyday objects attempting to create an assemblage of recombinative forms or uses. This has obvious intersections with the automatic writing, exquisite corpse, *dérive* and *détournement* of the Surrealists and Situationists.

The term *minor architecture* is here utilised in reference to Deleuze and Guattari's critical writing on Franz Kafka. Jill Stoner, writing in *Toward a Minor Architecture*, locates the minor within a pre-existing condition that exists “at the bottom of power structures, yet holds an extraordinary potential for power”. To Stoner, a minority literary or architectural voice could “emerge from within a major language” as a literature or language that is “intentionally impoverished, fractional, and stripped of decoration and even of grammar” (2012, p. 3). Within this thesis I draw on the minority image-makers of post-modernity, genre literature, and experimental architecture to create an alternative sighting of place through the architectural drawing.

## CHAPTER STRUCTURE & OVERVIEW

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The chapters in this exegesis unfold as a series of reconsiderations of, or digressions from, exhibition events or “happenings” that occurred within the Spatial Design calendar year (2012). Some of these events were co-sponsored with student practitioners, while others were intended as stand-alone installations. Each chapter seeks to explicate and unpack the unique methodological and technical/practice-led approaches that led to the conception and eventual evolution of a *Minor Architecture*.

Beginning with the Six States exhibition I will show how Guy Debord’s and Asger Jorn’s collaged or *détourned* map of Paris, *The Naked City*, was co-opted to create a map of the Southern Inlet through the imagined nomadic wanderings of architectural “machines”. These oversized “trams” were influenced by a conceptual digital science fiction and further co-option via Constant Nieuwenhuys’ proposition for an endless nomadic *New Babylon* project. The motivation for this was twofold: to create a “cognitive” *mind-map* of the inlet mirroring Guy Debord’s undermining of traditional readings of the map in his “*détourned*” map of Paris, and to relay my own movements through a fantasy of experimental architectural machines, overshadowed by global industrial machinations endemic to the maritime infrastructures and rail corridors of the inlet.

Chapter 2 recounts an installation undertaken for the SPACE/Talk symposium, a remaking of an encounter with site *through* assemblage and installation, and a first attempt at presenting a *virtual dérive*. The *dérive* was assembled in a basement lift-lobby and explored questions of spatial depth and image intensity. The aim was to replicate for the viewer the sensation of dread or unease that Sigmund Freud termed the “uncanny”. The installation stemmed from a memory fragment of a colonial settler’s house that was demolished and replaced (somewhat paradoxically) by a small railway workers’ shed from around the same era.

Chapter 3 reviews the *Hersey* postgraduate test-space installation, which remade Francis Bacon’s *Three Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion* (1944). The aim of this installation was to further explore image *détournement* of familiar objects encountered en route during a *dérive* while attempting to place the implied movement within the flattened pictorial frame situated amongst Deleuze’s theories around representations of the “figural”. Chapter 4 covers the AD12 exhibition, again addressing the triptych format, but this time presenting a trilogy of images depicting a *dérive* which intended to focus on the movement and pacing of the narrative journey while witnessing an “uncanny” landscape morphing into strange and uncanny objects/structures.



Both Heresy and AD12 were a remaking of infrastructures and built-objects evidenced around the maritime port district that introduced the possibility of distorting and reimagining architectural forms by way of a Kafkaesque metamorphosis. *The Metamorphosis* is a story written by Franz Kafka about a man, (Gregor Samsa) who wakes up as a gigantic *bug*. Gregor's abrupt and unexplained transformation, along with the story's juxtaposition of everyday and fantastic elements, gives the story a dream-like quality that is enigmatically compelling. This is in essence at the heart of the practice, a retelling of the city through the eyes of Kafka. This becomes pivotal through the sheer range of readings that attempt to apprehend Kafka's strange vision: from Marxist alienation, biographical historical, allegory to Freudian Oedipal drama. This project attempts to touch on *some* of these aspects in reading a Kafkaesque space pertaining to the inlet.

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## CHAPTER 1

# SIX STATES

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(TO ANOTHER WORLD)

04 May 2012

### Drawn From Space

This opening chapter critically explores how I made an “affective cartography” or “psychogeographic map” in response to a number of *dérives* or “drifting walks” around the Mangere arm or Southern Inlet of the Manukau Harbour. The practice vehicle for these explorations was part of a collaborative exhibition titled Six States (of being urban) undertaken by the *Proximate Urbanism* postgraduate research cluster. Held within Spatial Design’s *Porte Cochère* exhibition space, it gave viewers the chance to interact with the exhibitors’ work via pencils suspended from the ceiling at one metre intervals, thereby inviting inscription, drawing, scribbling, doodling, indeed *graffiti*. This participatory strategy aimed to mimic the ad hoc, grungy urbanism that was partly the subject of this research. The interactions sat well with my own graphic depictions of the *terrain vague* which were in themselves graffiti or *détournement* of existing survey maps variously montaged and collaged to capture a patchwork of tracks across the Southern Inlet. It also was an attempt to create an affective cartography, offering at once a critique and rereading of the map as a representation or directive for walked experience.

The *dérives* or “drifting walks” I undertook around the inlet inform each chapter of this thesis in different ways, and take direct influence from Guy Debord’s *The Theory of the Dérive*. Debord as leader of the Situationist International viewed the *dérive* as a technique of transient passage through, and varied observation of, the ambience of the city. The *dérive* for Debord entailed playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, which distinguished it from the classical notions of the impartial or distanced journeying or strolling of the *flâneur*. For the Situationists this was less a matter of chance encounters than the capturing, through variable points of view, extra-human *psychogeographical* or *psychologically* existent states.

The *dérive* also realised an overcoming of purposeful, linear intention, with the divining of psychogeographic factors being the main driver of motility. Hence, the *dérive* quite literally makes the walking body a kind of “divining rod”, tracing out hidden ambiances and concealed layers in urban space. Psychogeography uses a number of strategies and techniques to better read the subtleties and obfuscated meanings of place: local histories, old maps, displaced ecologies and purposeful misreadings of site are all psychogeographical tools for excavating hidden meanings from place. What can be thought of as *metadata*, or seemingly irrelevant, outdated information, was expanded in my case to include an *urban graphic* concentrating on images, maps and signs from other disciplines such as literature and film. In fact, the planar maps exhibited in Six States were not aimed at a representation of my prior journeys into space, but instead created a field designed to set the beholder’s eye itself onto a *dérive* exercised across imagined temporal expanses.

## Tracing Cognitive Maps

An affective cartography could be thought of as being an internalised map of the city, which gives one a sense of location or direction, and hence allows the ‘user’ of an urban environment to recall locations and directions. This process could be described as being “composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, stores, recalls and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of localised phenomena in everyday spatial environments” (Flatley, 2008, p. 76). In this sense, cognitive maps are about mental or mind maps that render cityscapes recallable or legible – something usually achieved in an instinctual and unquestioning way.

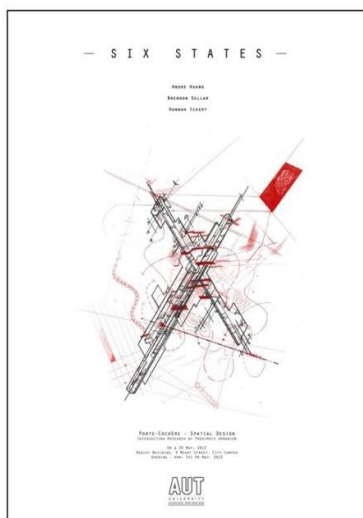


Fig. 5. *Six States poster*. Digital Media. B. Sellar et al. (2013).

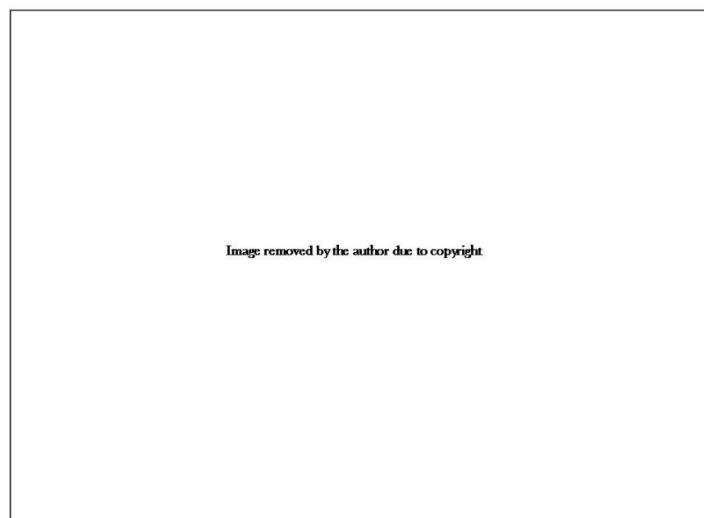


Fig. 6. *The Naked City*. Guy Debord. (1957)

Guy Debord's *Naked City* presents a radical departure from the Cartesian grid. In reaction to the rational city models embraced by Parisian post-war planners in the 1950s, he and his colleagues co-opted the map of Paris, reconfiguring the experience of the city. By manipulating the map itself, they intervened in the logic of the city, constructing an alternative geography that favoured the marginalised, and often threatened, spaces of the urban grid. Torn from their geographical context, these areas were woven together by arrows inspired by the itineraries of the drift or “dérive”. These “psychogeographic” maps proposed a fragmented, subjective and temporal experience of the city as opposed to the seemingly omnipotent perspective of the planimetric map. As mapping is used as a tactic to bring together personal narratives about urban space, the Situationist maps provide a useful example of visualizing a subjective view of the city.

Such a conception of mapping can be directed to the problems of recalling space within the overall form of the city, yet this notion becomes extraordinarily suggestive when projected outward to include national and global schematisations or understandings. Fredric Jameson affords us a broader analysis of space, offering “cognitive mapping” as a way to read spatial socio-political phenomena. His cognitive conceptions of space aim to encompass ideological or political concerns, providing a “situational representation of a vaster, unrepresentable totality of the subject engaging with more pervasive societal structures” (1991, p. 43). Put simply, Jameson seeks to bridge, at the level of the perceiver and their environment, the gap between local subjective experience and an overarching totalisation evidenced by the urban. The Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser further defines this formulation as “the representation of the subject’s imaginary relationship to the real conditions of existence” (Flatley, 2008, p. 76).

With these notions of cognitive mapping in mind, an attempt was made to create a map that captured, and at some level schematised, the highly complex infrastructural networks and attendant wastelands composing the industrial hinterland of the Southern Inlet. The gambit was that this particular materialisation could be read as a representational valence pointing to a larger spatio-political “reality” otherwise missed in a cursory apprehension of the local. In this case, a reaching beyond the cursory was sought through a series of *dérives* or drifting walks that both took in the ambience of these sites and remade the experience as an affective cartography. Yet these maps aimed to do more than transcribe just the route of the *dérive* – they ambitioned a broader perceptual reading of landscape akin to a kind of unveiling or truth-telling, something the Situationists had termed *psychogeography*.

As such this chapter further explores how a psychogeographic reading of the inlet might cut through the apparent “junkspace” typifying contemporary urban place (Benedikt, 2002, p. 21). Architect Rem Koolhaas has used this term to describe how cities have become predominantly disorientating and resistive of any clear-cut cognition (borrowing the term from *space-junk*). Manuel de Solà-Morales, similarly concerned with this lapse of recognisable place-pattern, coined the term “*terrain vague*” to describe the non-place of industrial wastelands. It was to a charting of the *terrain vague* of the inlet that my affective cartography was aimed.

## Practice Methodology

In undertaking this cognitive mapping, topographical land-survey plans were downloaded from Auckland Council's *GIS Survey Viewer* (an online database of planning maps) and then montaged and collaged, creating a disorientating and disparate patchwork of boundaries and coastal perimeters. What was aimed for, in part, was a "*détournement*" or undermining of the omnipotent perspective of the planimetric map and governmental classifications of geography. At another, (practice-based level), it sought to deploy something akin to the Surrealist exploitation of the accidental called the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse). Based on an old parlour game, the exquisite corpse was played by several people, each of whom would write a phrase on a sheet of paper, fold the paper to conceal part of it, and pass it on to the next player for his or her contribution. Not coincidentally, the poster for the Six States exhibition was also produced through this means, as a drawing together of unplanned and spontaneous collaborative collages.

The individuated or "tiled" part-plans extracted and remade from the survey maps were laid out in series to form a horizontal and vertical cruciform spanning the entire eastern wall of the *Porte Cochère* exhibition space. In fact, what these images roughly traced out, were sectional cuts running from the coastal edge of the inlet deep into the interior of Auckland's volcanic field. Imagined as planimetric excursions, each "tile" sought to capture the fields of scoria cones and lava vents in such a way as to overcome the manifest evidence of human habitation and activity. They were, then, meditations on geological forces and temporal over-writings of the isthmus in excess of human immediacy and common purview.

Into this human-vacated landscape daisy-chained machines were pictured, akin in certain ways to a cross between Constant Nieuwenhuy's utopian *New Babylon* and a Japanese sci-fi *Manga* strip. Through the use of CAD (computer-aided design) I was able to extricate individual parts of the map and reintroduce the spectator at a perspectival ground-level view-point. Hence the maps could be "broken-up" along the cruciform shape by more in-depth and personalised viewpoints of select scenes. The science-fiction aspect of the images showed perhaps a minoritarian approach to architectural image-making. However, at another level it was a projection into a future given over to a *hyper-capitalism*, traversed by oversized infrastructural "trams". These monolithic machines moving through brownfield sites also seemed to be engulfed or swallowed up by the volcanic landscape. This was in part the chance/accident of the exquisite corpse, but it also pointed to another reading of the inlet: as a battle for mastery over nature by forces of production. Ultimately though, these were images of fantasy and sensation, mapping not just my walks of enquiry during a series of *dérives*, but also the fantastical imaginings of construction, glimpsed through Nieuwenhuy's endless rambling cityscapes.

*This underscored one of the key conceptions I intended to continually explore within the project – how to excavate into or beneath normative representations of place: how to "unlock" new visual and emotive/cognitive experiences in systems of drawn architecture.*

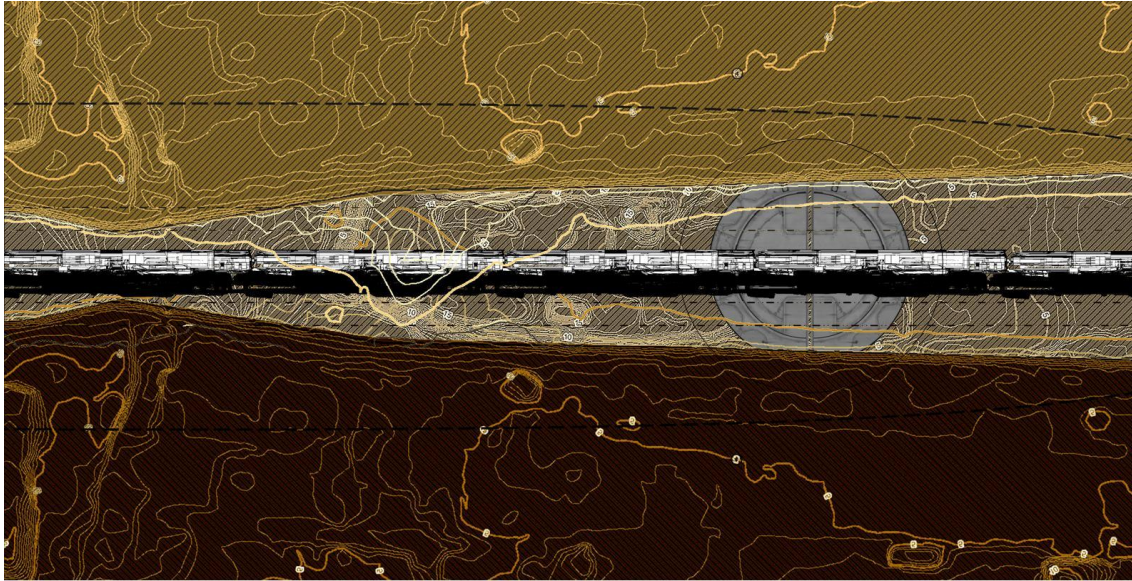


Fig. 7. *Inlet Star Map #5*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

These oversized “trams” were influenced by a conceptual digital science fiction aesthetic co-opted through Constant Nieuwenhuijs’s endless nomadic *New Babylon* project. The motivation for this was twofold: to create a “cognitive” *mind-map* of the inlet yet also project a whimsical “what if?” scenario of “*hyper-capitalism*” – running away through time unhindered and unobstructed.

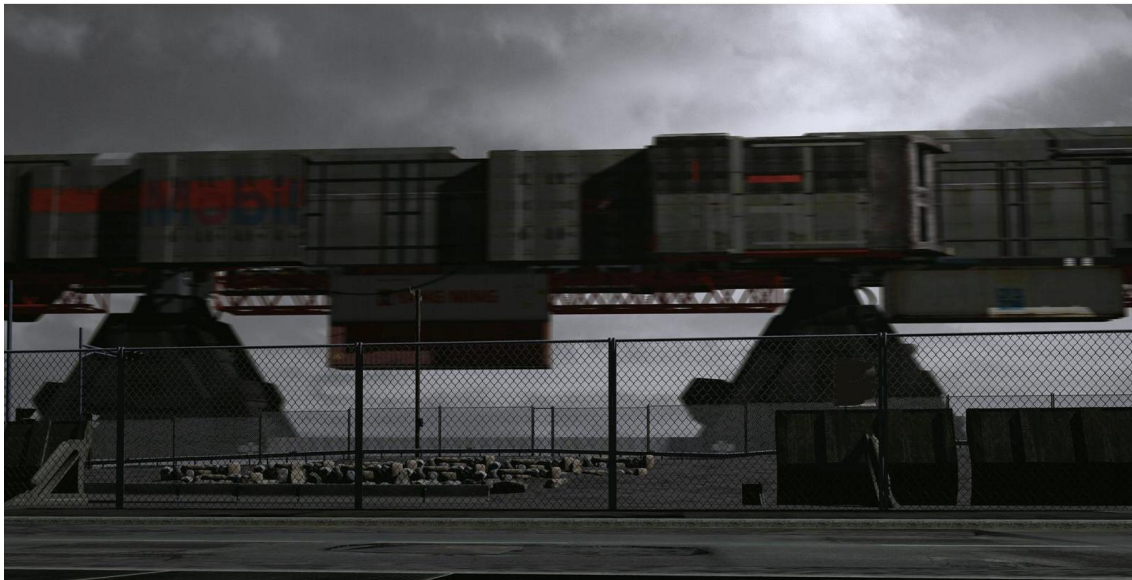


Fig. 8. *Inlet Map # detail*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).



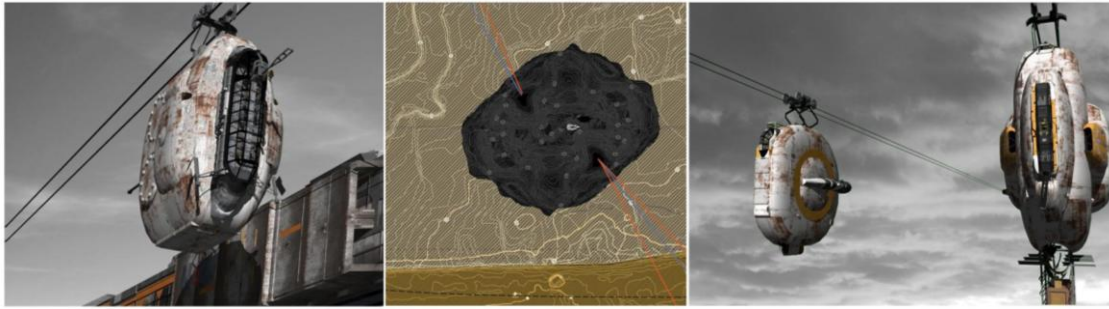


Fig. 9. *Inlet Map #assorted*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

Nieuwenhuy's *New Babylon* was intended as an enormous structure floating above the ground on columns; a vast interior space "artificially lit and air-conditioned". Moveable methods of pedestrian circulation were intended to construct "veritable labyrinths of the most heterogeneous forms in which desires continuously interact." New Babylon becomes the pure psychogeographical city, one that adapts to the "exploding [and] increasingly mobile population", transferring lost geometric space to "psychological space". Within these drawings New Babylon was utilised as some kind of pre-emptive dystopia, envisaging the coming 'mega-cities' of southeast Asia and Mexico city. It also became an opportunity to explore the drawing itself through fantasy and genre fiction. It is perhaps a strange irony that Nieuwenhuy's project ended in defeat and dissolution. After twenty years he became convinced that he'd made a terrible mistake. The failure of the '68 riots and the death of a friend's child jarred him into the realisation that New Babylon would not necessarily generate a utopian playground of love and solidarity.

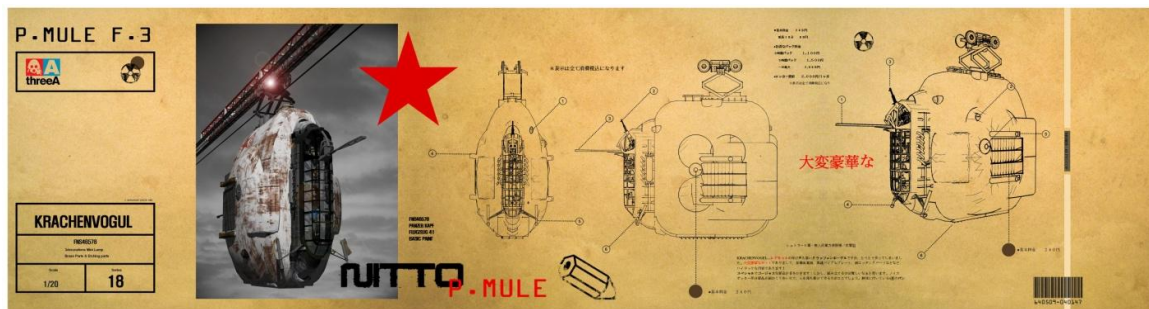


Fig. 10. *Inlet Map # Mule*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).



## Inlet Maps: Archaeologies of the Future

The inlet maps sought to undermine the survey map as an omnipotent device for reading space, while the collaging and cut-ups of exquisite corpse attempted to disorientate the perceived mastery of the map. The map was confronted through walked experience, to create new and diffuse atmospheres, as a contemplation of topographical projections in relation to the act of walking. Capturing the essence of place through a *dérive* has also involved a confrontation with the *terrain vague* as a disorientative space that has become customary within our everyday life. What kind of politics or what kind of looking is part of the everyday? Rem Koolhaas insists junkspace is an accumulation of habits (stuff, detritus of Late Capitalism) while Manuel de Solà-Morales claims the *terrain vague* to be a spatial condition we cannot see critically in our experience of the everyday. Going for a walk, and capturing an encounter with the industrial wasteland through the “junkspace” of post-modernity, opened up the inlet as a site of rupture, open to experiences we don’t habitually notice within the chaos of free-market forces. In Chapter 2 I will move from the overview of the map to a more intimate encounter with place and scale, through an exploration of the post-historical ruin.

## CHAPTER 2

# SPACE / TALK

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SPACEWRECKED: ZONE & DERELICTION

11-12 June 2012

### A Crying Lot

With the results of the explorations undertaken in the Inlet Maps and attendant questions about postmodern “junkspace” incorporated into “affective” or “cognitive” maps, the focus of enquiry now shifted to a more intimate scale of investigation that hoped to embody personalised and historical narratives of site. The results of this exploration were staged in the *SPACE/Talk* symposium held in June 2012. The symposium aimed to collectively present emergent postgraduate research design. This forum provided a unique opportunity for testing approaches to the *virtual dérive*. In a move away from pretences of mastery transported by planimetric vantage points, an exploration of frontal perspective was played against interiorised, psychological and remembered states. Less focused on peeling back layers of accumulated “junkspace”, the aim was to engage the viewer in more individuated spatial syntaxes to better uncover an *uncanny* historicity of place. This required a scale-shift from the overwrought overview of the map to a more singularly experienced scenography defined by pedestrian encounter. Drawing from the richer haptic qualities of touch and corporeal immediacy, the *dérive* delivered here sought a “stillness” evidenced as a series of digital drawings recreating place-encounter. Expanded into a digital-video work, the resulting installation focused on a specific site at Onehunga Mall Rd, near Mangere Bridge. There, an empty lot seemed to extend the *terrain vague*, spreading from the Harbour Rd out along the promenade toward Orpheus Drive. A chance encounter with this site during a *dérive* invoked an *uncanny* sense of place connected with my memory of a previous dwelling which once existed there.



Fig. 11. *SPACE/Talk* poster. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

## Abject Space

The work for *SPACE/Talk* was installed in the basement lobby of the Dadley Building adjacent to the lift shaft, and aimed to capture some sense of an “unconscious” space common to the building itself and the previous *dérive*’s uncovering of loss in Onehunga. Against a reinforced concrete wall in the basement, a “map” of the inlet comprised of individual collaged fragments printed and affixed to painted sections of MDF was literally nailed to the wall. The whole was then pieced together as a larger massing – as a kind of rudimentary jigsaw puzzle. Around the drab wall-space two digital images of the site had been placed. Rendered via CAD (computer-aided design) and photoshop, they were further diverted from straightforward representational ends by being printed on a plan-chest printer, giving the images a rough-hewn or smudged “photo-copied” appearance. In front of the map a black and white TV monitor played a static shot of the site on a 12-minute loop. As a series of intersecting relays and representations, the images set out to reduplicate, over and over, a doubling implicit in the documentation of place encounter. The almost artificial scenography that I encountered at the site was recreated as a “Trompe-l’œil” or forced perspective through the digital images (depth), while the passage of time (my looking) was projected through the video component.



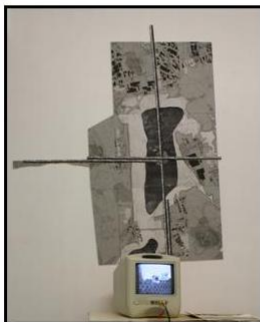
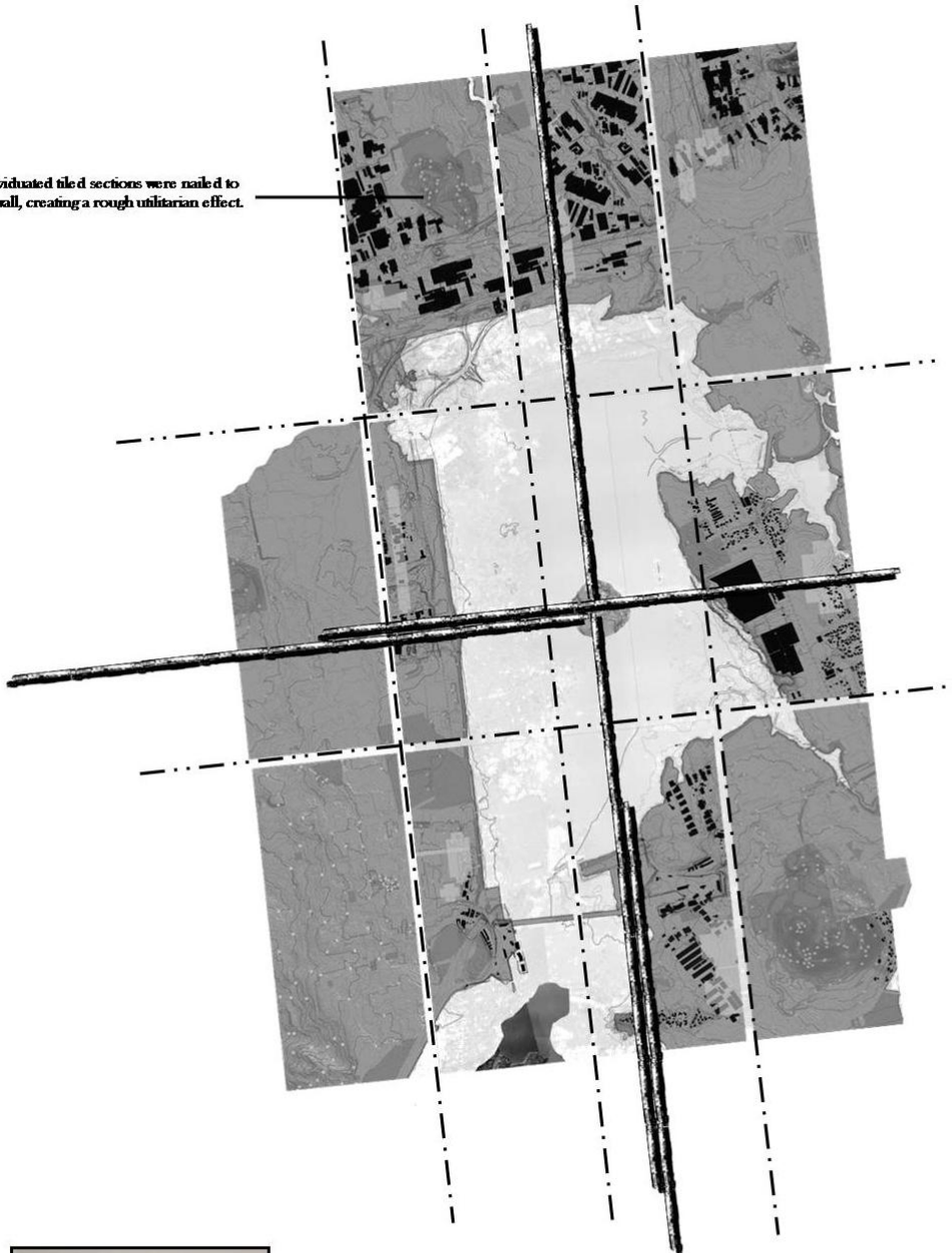
Fig. 12. *Montage from SPACE/Talk*. Digital Media/photographs. B. Sellar. (2013).

Formally, the concept behind this endeavour was centred on a memory fragment of an encounter-with-place experienced at the Onehunga Mall Rd site some years previous, maybe a decade, of a colonial settler house which was demolished. An enduring memory associated with this destruction was of a dishevelled man (wearing an outdated inter-war suit, possibly 1940s) surveying the razed cottage with a look approaching reverence. The poignancy of this image raised the obvious question of his relationship to the house. The figure was positioned with his back to me, facing the remnants of the structure, with an overcast and dull sunset softening his outline. How much of this memory is either over-embellishment or fictive is difficult to untangle. Nevertheless, I recall myself being swept up in a type of looking that mimicked that of this man and in turn finding myself split by a double sense of mourning. In between looks, a kind of clearing opened up, one invoked by the clearing on the vacant lot.



**Fig. 13.** *Onehunga Mall Rd Site from SPACE/Talk*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

Individuated tiled sections were nailed to the wall, creating a rough utilitarian effect.



The digital map was collaged and tested in a variety of shapes and recombinative poses before a final positional composition was decided upon. The cruciform 'trams' were reprised from the **Inlet Maps** studies slicing through the Onehunga Mall Rd site, creating an axial cut through across the Inlet itself. This was in actuality my own 'line of sight' expanded as a monstrous gesture, or reclamation of sight through a personalised vision or viewpoint. However this is negated in a sense by the diminution of the replayed screen: a spatio/temporal compression of sight. These two negative dialectics of luxuriant imagining of sight coupled with the virtual claustrophobia of the video image was an attempt to represent the 'scale-shift' that had occurred for the viewer from the previous omnipotent perspective of the **Inlet Maps** series. The confined basement siting of the installation for those in attendance creating a claustrophobic sensation, where people were constantly having to move to view the images.

Fig. 14. *Wall Map: SPACE/Talk*. Digital Media. B Sellar. (2013).



The current site encountered during my *dérive* is now sealed off from the street by a chain-link fence connected and bookended by two smaller unremarkable clap-board/breezeblock constructions. In the middle of the overgrown lot now stands an *Accom* or *Platelayers hut*. These small huts resemble guard boxes and were traditionally conceived as trackside shelters for rail workers laying track, sleepers, fishplates, bolts etc. In the heyday of Auckland's railway operation a platelayer might be assigned to a juncture of track, with a platelayers' hut providing shelter and a working base. The section of track would regularly be patrolled and other duties might include greasing points, and generally watching for wear and tear.

The almost considered placement of the hut at the centre of the allotment, and the jarring sensation of a *what-once-was* created a sense of the uncanny. For Anthony Vidler writing in *The Architectural Uncanny*, the uncanny is difficult to define, for as he describes, it is neither "absolute terror nor mild anxiety", but is easier to characterise through what it is not than what it may appear to be (1996, p. 22). Thus, it might readily be distinguished from horror and strong conceptions of fear, though not "uniquely identified with the parapsychological – the magical, the hallucinatory, mystical or supernatural" (Vidler, 1996, p. 22). For Freud, the uncanny is in reality nothing "new" or alien, but "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Vidler, 1996, p. 14).

Psychologist Ernst Jentsch paralleled Freud's insights, citing the uncanny sensation as being an insecurity brought about by a "lack of orientation"; a sense of something new, foreign and hostile invading the old and familiar customary world. In the case of my own uncanny experience, the old was paradoxically replaced by the old, and confirms (albeit circuitously) Freud's final determination of the uncanny as *Heimlich* (home) – exposing the disturbing affiliation and double negation between *homely* and *unhomely*. So a piece of history was torn out and replaced by another piece of history – a *counter historical* – which perhaps reinforced and expanded some of the visual conceits and free-associations explored within the Six States exhibition. Although removed from any postmodern *excess*, this innovation became more about multiple historical dialogues vying for place within the present.

Freud's uncanny appears to Vidler as an "anxiety of time" (1996, p. 10), expressed as intellectual attempts to "imagine impossible futures or a return to equally impossible utopian pasts". The almost artificial quality of memory and artificial arrangement of the scene I encountered seemed to confirm this. This moribund fascination with the consequence of time's errors is for Vidler a manifestation of "dystopian effects" or interference on the natural development of the urban project, and the combined psychological shock of the past and future in simultaneous dialogue with one another. The uncanny site or house represent for Vidler a place of counterfeit symbolism or 'familiar strangeness' conjoined with a repression which masquerades as intellectual uncertainty (1996, p. 10). But this counterfeit could just as easily be represented as an image of the deranged double or twin. So within the "contemporary ruin" one can witness the utopian Victorian project of the colonial settler cottage *and* the dystopian future/present/past of railway infrastructures (the hut) in simultaneity; the ruined utilitarian structure foresees the future of decline while still retaining the disused aspects of the past.

The installation at *SPACE/Talk* was then based on this conception of an uncanny historicity activated through a "doubling" of the found with an installation space. Attempted here was a spatial mimicking of objects as encountered at the site, which were themselves viewed as a kind of "ready-made" scene (in the *Duchampian* sense), a small backstreet theatre, or hidden play of counter history. Seen this way, the historical doubling of built objects could be codified as both a built-psychoanalytical and aesthetic response to the *detritorialising* logic of Late Capital, a cognitive shock that the future is in actuality a warping or endless replaying of the past. If we view the site as a *trompe l'oeil* of shallow space drawing us into an uncanny spatial condition or a series of alternate pasts, we are again presented with a fictional "present" relayed through a counterfeit "past"; something Jean Baudrillard terms the *simulacrum*.

So too with the digital doubling relayed through the video monitor as a screen or simulacra of the "real" – it is literally a displacement of the simulacrum itself. In a similar way the Surrealist painter Max Ernst posed new identities for his conjoined subjects/machines when he collaged them into strange and disjunctive recombinative poses. Thus we become utilised by the monitor to reread an image of place. This aspect of the installation placed viewers in a diagrammatic space – an optical surveillance of historical relativity within a system of virtual signs. The feedback loop suggested here between map, digital replaying of static space and static pictorial digital images reproduced both hut and house simultaneously.

In the next chapter I will continue to try and resolve these uncanny relays, as I try to translate these attempts at a digital/pictorial doubling into a *minor architecture*. I will attempt to do this through a remaking of Francis Bacon's *Three Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion*.





Fig. 15. *SPACE/Talk*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

## CHAPTER 3

# HERESY

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BEYOND SPECTACLE & REASON

3 October 2012

### Head on the Block

In September 2012 I participated in an exhibition titled *Heresy* held at St Paul Street Gallery Three. Here, I hoped to build on my previous explorations of mapping strategies from Six States and readings of multiple histories found through a psychogeographical confrontation with the vacant site of encounter in SPACE/Talk. Thus, Heresy was an attempt to incorporate and combine both an uneasy or *uncanny* conception of place conjoined with a sense of movement or journey. Another innovation introduced here was the use of the triptych (tri equaling “three”) taken from the painted, folded or hinged panels of religious paintings found in Christian art. This multiplication of viewpoint in the trilogy format drew inspiration from Francis Bacon’s painting *Three Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion* (1944).

Within Bacon’s crucifixion we witness a horrific scene, depicting vaguely anthropomorphic creatures writhing in anguish. Bacon’s disturbing subject matter included: disembodied, almost faceless portraits; mangled bodies resembling animal carcasses; images of screaming figures; and idiosyncratic versions of the Crucifixion. Bacon viewed the Crucifixion as a “magnificent armature” from which to suspend “all types of feeling and sensation” (Peppiat, 1996, p. 85). He disdained painting as illustration and concentrated, instead, on emotional and perceptual evocation. His persistent use of the triptych format (also traditionally associated with religious painting) furthered the narrative disjunction in the works through the physical separation of the elements that comprised them.

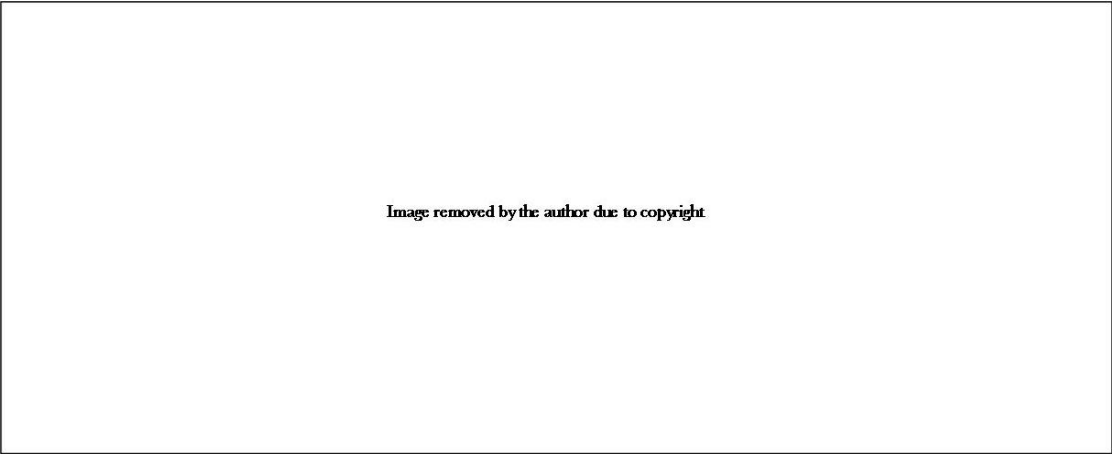
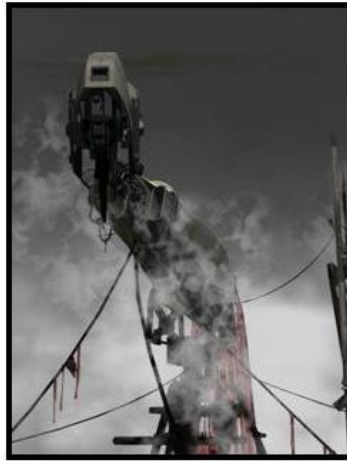
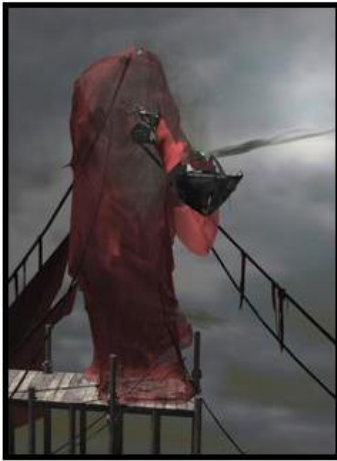


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Fig. 16. *Three Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion*. Francis Bacon. (1944).

The separately framed images implied a journey narrative or movement through a field of objects situated in the terrain vague, representing for me a type of *dérive*, or assemblage of architectural objects encountered en route. Within this chapter I will explicate my reasons for drawing on Bacon's imagery, and illustrate how his use of flattened or depthless backgrounds was utilised to *draw out* contemporary issues around cultural spectacle, through an uneasy relationship which I believe exists across digital illustration and the cultural and spatial logic of Late Capital.

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**Fig. 17.** *Second Version of Tiptych 1944*. Francis Bacon. (1988).

**Fig. 18** *Heresy*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

## Suspended Belief

Heresy evolved from a series of *dérives* around the disused Westfield Abattoir located at the Eastern fringe of the inlet. In the same way that Bacon sought to “hang” ideas from the armature of the crucifixion, arcane pieces of infrastructure provided me with “armatures for ideas”: cell phone towers, scaffolds, cranes, gas manifolds and outlines of disused buildings encountered en route. The *dérive* of Heresy was then read visually through Bacon’s *Three Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion*. The Heresy test-space installation also took influence from Deleuze’s reading of Baconian space in “The Logic of Sensation”. Here Deleuze writes on Bacon’s large fields of colour without depth as being a *shallow depth* divided by armatures or bands; as formal techniques to “frame” or “ensnare” figures so as to focus a viewer’s gaze more intently. Deleuze describes these armatures as being like “a ship’s rigging, suspended in the sky of a field of colour upon which the Figure executes taunting acrobatics” (2003, p. 73). This evocative description of Bacon’s swirling “acrobatic” figurations somehow tangled in a “ship’s rigging” provided a powerful evocation of a flattened background plane and a sense of captured movement, beyond a static image. The slaughterhouse, the walk, the aerial rigging and the space of decay all coalesced here as one.



Fig. 19. *Westfield Site*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

## A Heretical Stance

It is perhaps important to talk about the naming of the exhibition. *Heresy* has many implications, with the most accepted being a belief or theory that is strongly at variance with established belief systems or customs. For me the naming did not necessarily preclude a level of religious apostasy, being more attenuated toward the *heretical stance* or *antipathy* of the architectural drawing itself. My personal attitude here is one of both anxiety and ambivalence toward computer-aided design in its reified production of sublime yet slick images. How, then, could I get outside the digital or spectacle image of the majority architectural digital image, which is indexed purely to its own hyperreality?

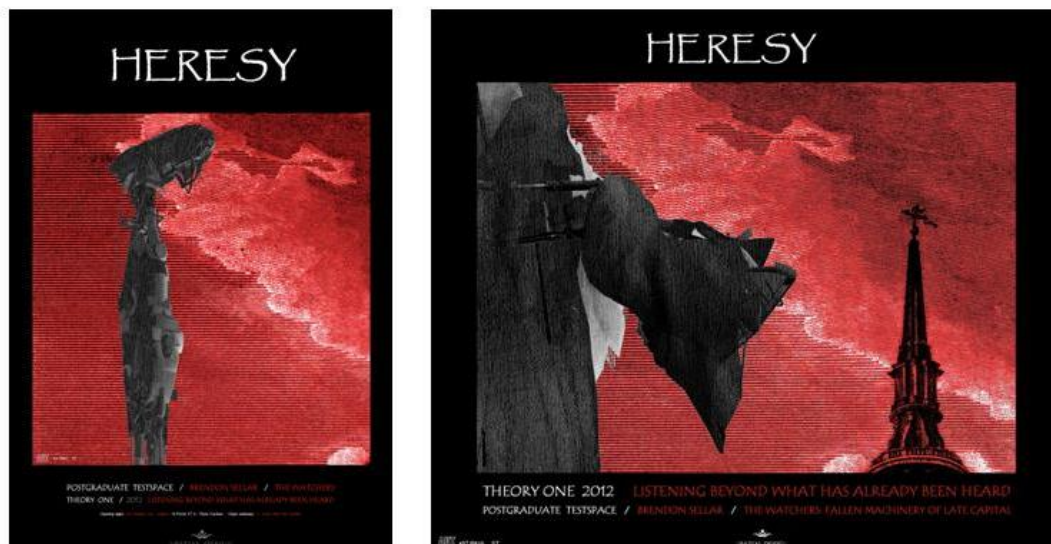


Fig. 20. *HeresyPosters /alternate*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

The decision to remake Bacon's seminal *Three Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion* (1944) was in itself an act of *heresy*. However I believed by remaking Bacon's work (a *détournement* of Matthias Grünewald's *The Mocking of Christ* (1503)) I could somehow implicate the viewer within my own *dérives*, involving them at a level of deep cognitive engagement similar to a virtual environment. Why, then, use Bacon in this sense?

Bacon never drew from life, instead always working from photographs. He had a copy of Eadweard Muybridge's pioneering book from the 1880s, *The Human Figure in Motion*, in which explored movement through a series of still sequential images of people walking, running, jumping and wrestling. Muybridge's photographs can be recognised as the source for many of the figures that appear in Bacon's paintings. Another book that the artist referred to was Clark's *Positioning in Radiography*. The sense of unfolding time-frames in Muybridge combined with the precision of radiographic positioning (anterior, posterior, lateral, medial) contained aspects of both the *dérive* (as a series of durational time-frames) and the architectural drawing (plan, section, elevation, section-cut, etc).

But there was a further potential in Bacon's Crucifixion in the violence that existed within the frame(s), occurring for the spectator as a drama without meta or pictorial narrative; an undefined and inhuman violence occurring in an unseen place beyond space and time. Bacon later related these figures to the Eumenides – the vengeful furies of Greek myth. The title relates these horrific beasts to the saints traditionally portrayed at the foot of the cross in religious paintings. Bacon even suggested he had intended to paint a larger crucifixion beneath which these would appear. This influenced my thinking in the creation of my own “architectural furies”, existing not below a crucifixion, but rather below the surface of reified and spectacular architectural imagery. As such my own machinic biomorphic distortions of everyday architectures sought to evoke the “atmosphere” of the terrain vague experienced under Late Capitalism.



## Staring into the Abyss: The Depthless Spectacle

I read Bacon's use of magmatic and flattened orange background as an attempt to spatially "blind" the viewer, disorientating any normative reading through depth of field. My own practice is invested in exploring this same condition of shallow or "depthless" space through the digital render. Luigi Ficacci sees Bacon's treatment of space as a perception that occurs at a "psychic rather than logical level" (2006, p. 17). If we consider painting historically as delineating organic (bodily) configurations within architectural or natural environments, then the human figure was at one point the central measure or point of reference within the image frame. This representation of space seemingly dominated by the body expressed the narrative and symbolic intelligibility of the image itself (Ficacci, 2006, p. 17). The wreckage of cities after World War Two left behind the impossible perfection of ideated or utopian space. Bacon depicts this psychological state of anxiety and ruination in his chromatic orange background, where nothing survives but an immediacy that plunges the viewer into the depths of some "unknown spatial abyss" (Ficacci, 2006, p. 17).

Anthony Vidler contemporises Bacon's spatial anxiety by promoting the "virtual" of "cyberspace" as a horrifying condition for the Cartesian subject, "referred to by Pascal as a vacuum or non-space" (2000, p. 235). For Vidler, the depthless space or "field" of the virtual is an anxious spatiality expressed as an endless string of 0s and 1s, which displays an image on a screen without depth (2000, p. 236). This is the *representation* of information that seems to have no inherent spatiality, whereby narrative and temporality have been collapsed into "no-time and non-space" (Vidler, 2000, p. 236). What Bacon pioneered was a disorientation of the centrality of the image, and virtual-space shares this rupture from authorities of narrative, beginnings, middle and ends, of pasts, presents and futures. In both Bacon and cyberspace the severance from nineteenth and twentieth century nostalgic scenography confronts us with the "post-spatial" void.



Fig. 21. *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).



## Finding a Way In

The installation test-space was set up as a field of objects that allowed the viewer to pass through, walk around or engage frontally. This was achieved by affixing the digital triptych to the wall and having a readymade object mounted on an easel, containing a further diptych. A tiny digital print was offset behind the diptych representing Maungakiekie (One Tree Hill). Moving around the installation space then contained a performative aspect for the spectator, mirroring a microcosm of movements within the *dérive* itself, whereby Maungakiekie was always only just perceptible for me within the detritus of the terrain vague.



Fig. 22. *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).



**Fig. 23.** *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

**Fig. 24.** *Self Portrait*. Painting. Tony Fomison. (1977).

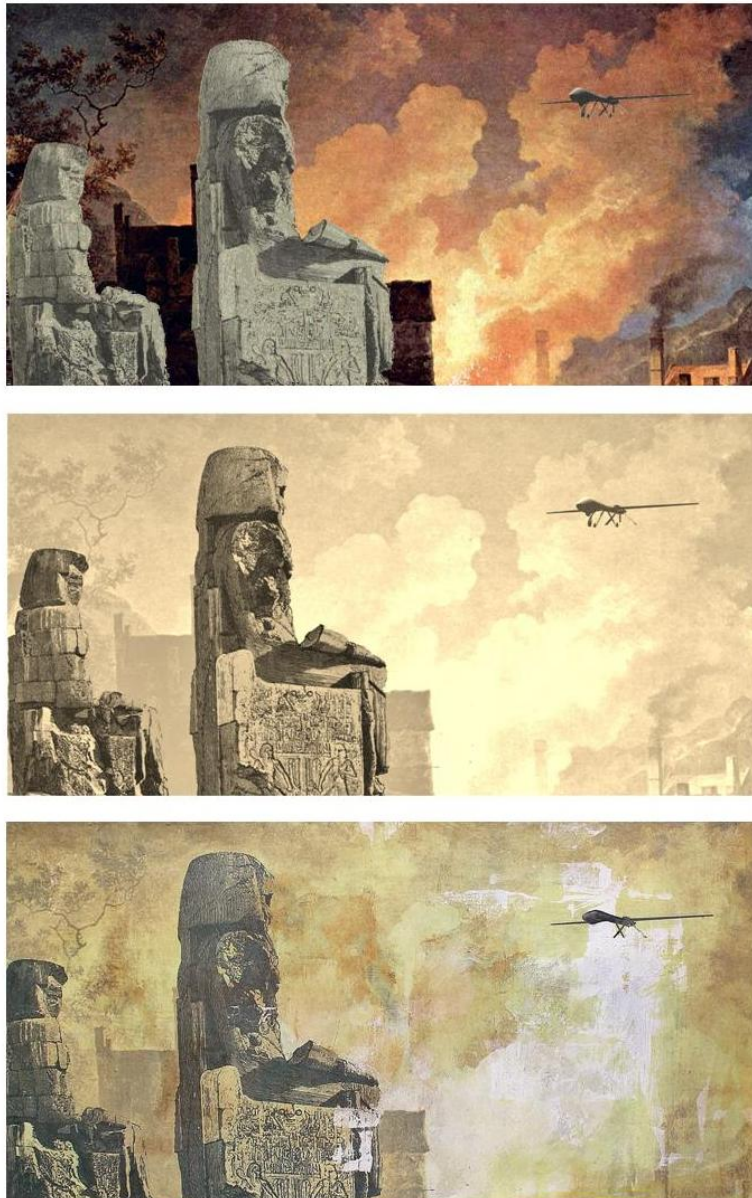


Fig. 25. *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

It also sought to manipulate our approach to place, bringing into consciousness (or descending into the level of anxiety) the *terrain vague*. If Bacon threw paint at the canvas, or aggressively worked the painted surface to imply movement, I similarly invoked movement, by forcing the viewer into a spatial engagement with a shallow field of objects. Bacon wanted to produce ghostly traces of human activity like a “snail leaves its slime” (Peppiatt, 1996, p. 26), but he also attacked the substantiveness of the figure, instead implying constant movement through space and time.

To attack the completed architectural image and provide a way into the depthless spectacle of virtual reality I drew on Kafka’s *Castle* to find a way into the image/object itself. The installation in this sense has multiple entrances, like Kafka’s castle. The image object field I created was a way into the impregnable castle as the habitual image field of the *terrain vague*. Deleuze and Guattari begin their work on Kafka by wondering how to find an entrance – *how to find a way in*. “It is a rhizome, a burrow,” they write. “The Castle has many entrances. The hotel in America has too many doors for us to count” (1986, p. 6). Among these entrances, none seems privileged; no sign over the entrance announces that this is the way in. The reader of Kafka’s work will choose an opening and create idiosyncratic maps, and this will change according to the entrance chosen. This is not just a relative choice – “the principle of multiple entries” is also, to Deleuze and Guattari, a political strategy (1986, p. 10).

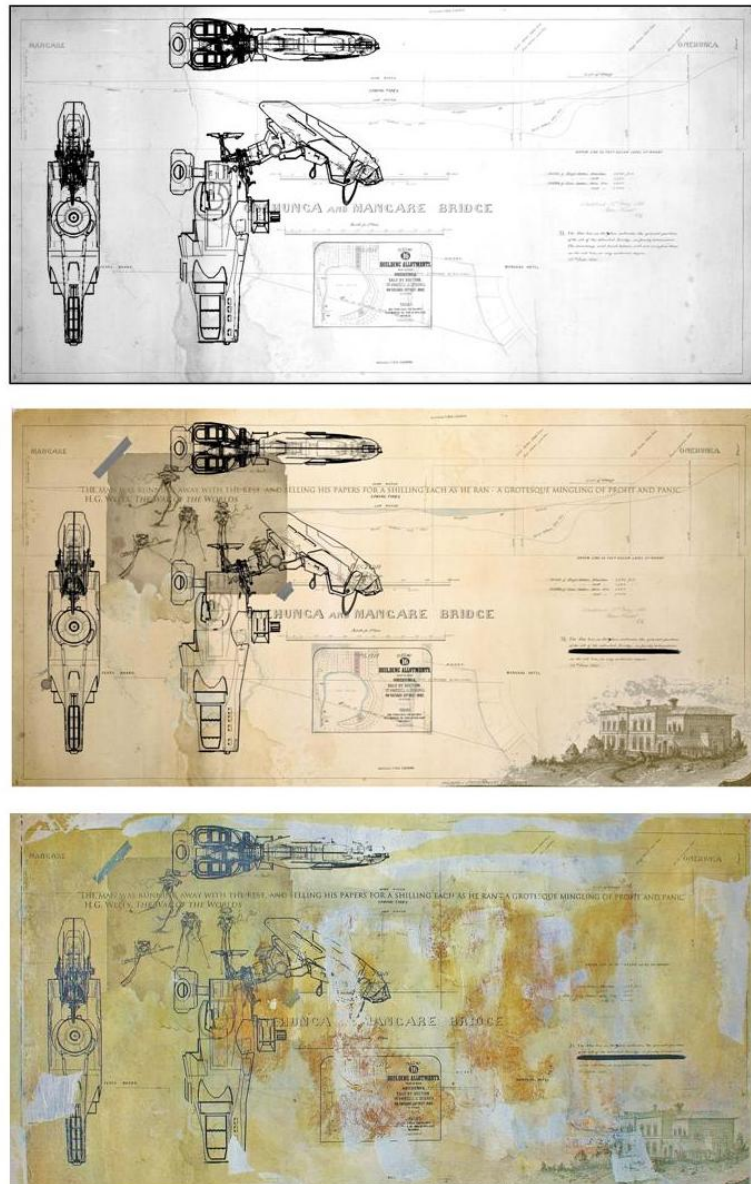
The Escher-like geometry of Kafka’s spatial systems was mirrored in the rise of new social and economic structures in the first half of the twentieth century. More precisely, Kafka possessed an uncanny ability to recognise the spaces of bureaucratic and authoritarian regimes before they had fully emerged – a precursor to the temporal predicament of the *terrain vague* and the postmodern over-codified “junkspace”. In his stories and novels, hierarchical spaces of industrial production and guardian bureaucracies are brought under the roof of a singular narrative edifice within which “there is no line of flight, no escape, not even any true arrival” (Stoner, p. 12, 2012).



Three stages of digital/analogue collaging. The top figure shows the first composite image created from three elements. The second stage is a sepia wash across five layers in photoshop. The third and final stage is the image being reverse colour photocopied and then affixed to a board (the rear panel of a piano) with a gel medium. The panel was pre-worked with acrylic paint creating an aged and distressed appearance. The image was (provisionally) titled **Confrontation at Thebes**. An obviated political reading may appear here (America's drone policy) although the image was also intended to convey a clash of contemporary technology and ancient irreducibility. The suggested reading (and composition) here, is that the ruin is both timeless and in some senses immovable - irrespective of progress and changing cultural value systems.

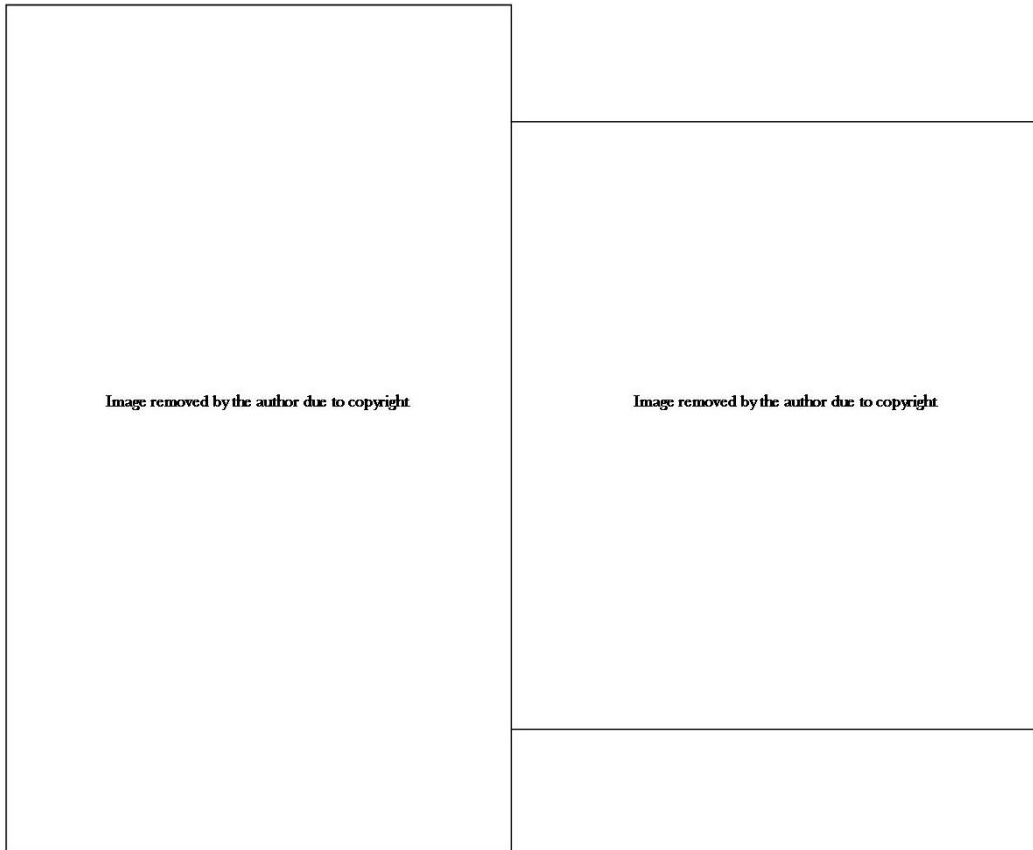
Fig. 26. *Heresy/Montage*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).





The opposite panel was another doubling or multiplying of projected views (plan, section and elevation) of a *Kafkaesque* machine. The *machinic* biomorphic object is indebted to H.G. Wells' descriptions of martian fighting machines in *"The War of the Worlds"*. Wells' monsters, according to Patrick Pallinder "are Victorian manifestations of the guilty conscience of imperialism - a memory of subjugation and murder" (2000, p. 140). Wells' monsters never sleep - an evolution towards indefatigable and post-human work practices. Here the maritime infrastructure under globalisation envisages Wells' war machines as metaphor of conflict with historical value systems of labour and local cultural values..

**Fig. 27. Heresy/Montage.** Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).



**Fig. 28.** *Untitled*. Welded steel, canvas, black fabric, rawhide, copper wire, and soot. Lee Bontecou. (1961).

Whether heroically scaled or intimate, Lee Bontecou's predominantly abstract work has consistently incorporated figurative, organic, and mechanistic references to states of transformation between the natural and the man-made. Her early sculptures of wall-mounted, three-dimensional objects in which geometric fragments of canvas and other materials are stretched over and fastened onto welded metal frameworks, encompassing spatial conditions with no barriers and no boundaries. Beginning in 1959, a large circular opening began to recur in Bontecou's sculpture, projecting from the surface of the work itself and framing a dark, receding inset. She intended these blackened voids to evoke mystery and a range of emotive responses to the unknown, the wondrous, and the sublime, prompted in part by her fascination with scientific and technological advances surrounding the exploration of outer space. At the same time, this aspect of her work also references the underbelly of human nature, encompassing fear, violence, brutality, and war. References to aircraft, the wings of birds, and other anthropomorphic and mechanomorphic elements have reverberated within her work.



**Fig. 29.** *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three.* Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

The “machinic” quality of Bacon (as posited by Deleuze) was investigated within Heresy as a “test-space” that attempted to utilise paper architecture as an unfolding process of machine-body relations (bio-morphic architecture and technomorphism) through machinic-assemblage (cinematic representation of subject). This fall into a ‘deregulated world’ or “post-spatial void” was a starting point to further explore Bacons own biocentric *détournements*, within a visual imaginary of fallen architectural machines.

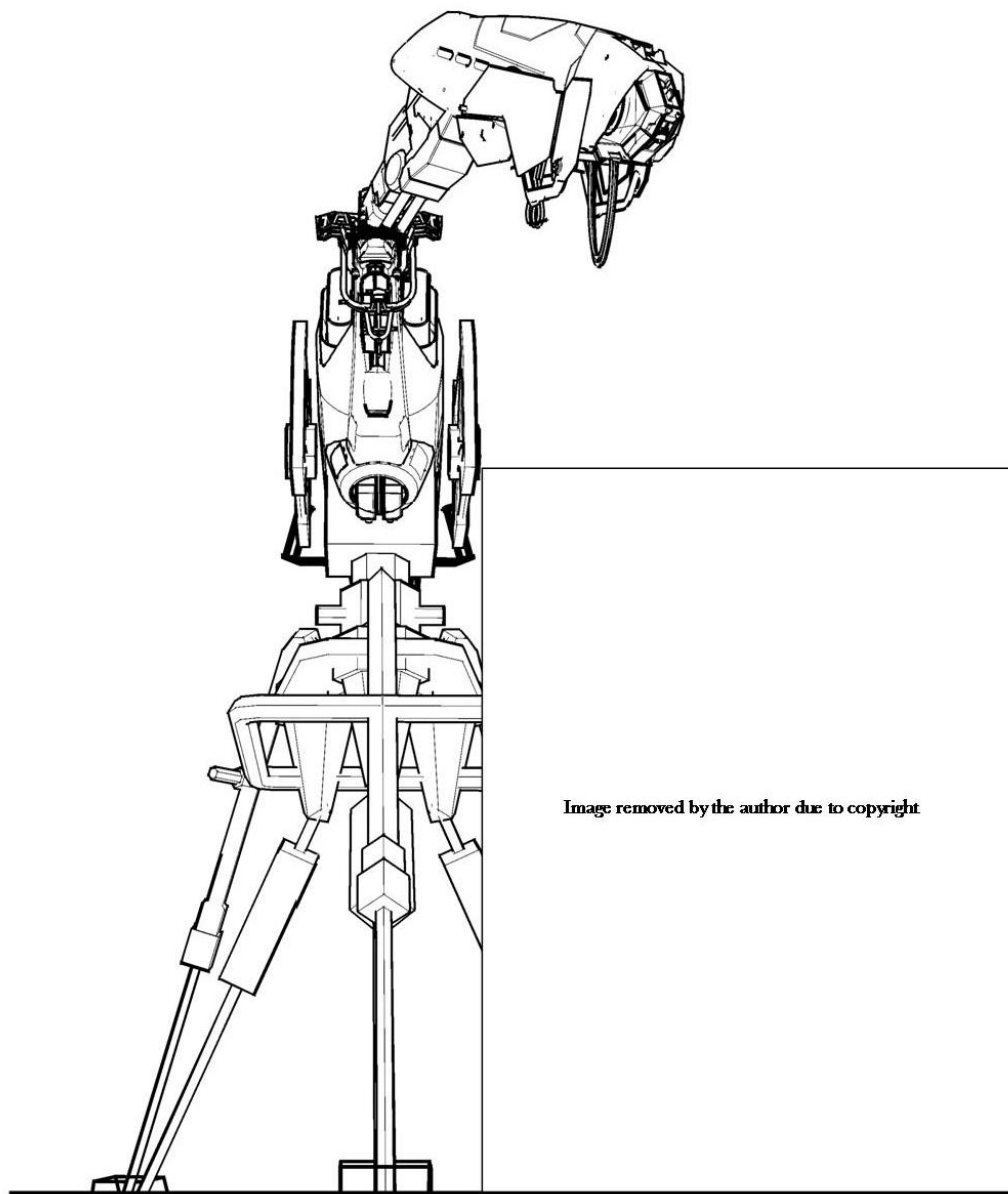


Fig. 30. *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

Fig. 31. *Rock Drill*. Modelled plaster, steel. Jacob Epstein. (1915).





Fig. 32. *Heresy Exhibition St Pauls St Three*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

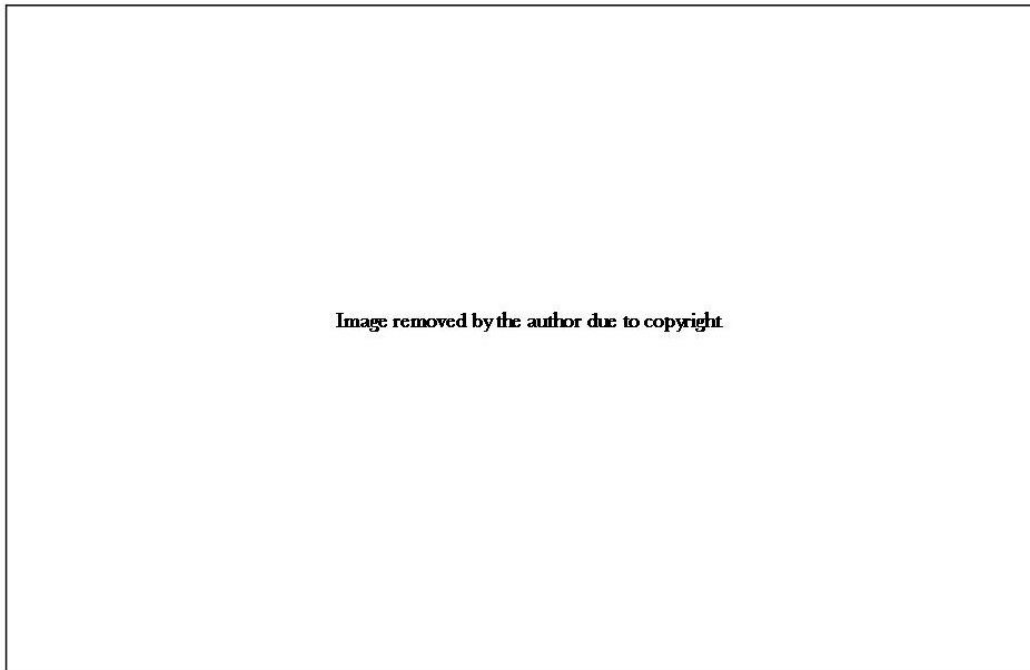


Fig. 33. *BLANKUDERMILQ 01*. Photoshop, Digital Media. N. Moulin. (2009).

Nicolas Moulin creates digitally altered images consisting of architectural elements on seemingly distorted scales within urban and exurban landscapes. The work is inspired by the wave of radical Italian utopic architects of the 1970s, notably the group Superstudio and the megalomaniac projects and meagstructures of the supermodernists initiated by BM Fuller and perpetuated by Claude Parent and Paul Virilio. These elaborate projects marked the end of modernism and also the beginning of postmodernism in architecture. The images within Moulin's work seek passage into a revolutionary future, which finds itself paradoxically within the critique of the present, like a machine that demystifies the future.

## Divining the *Non-place*

The narrative memory of my *dérives* retain what might be called formal and frontal memory: a memory of techniques, practices, actions – a literal embodiment of a series of physical reflexes and snap-shots of places and objects. These memories are then remade as digital scenes, a recalling of psychogeographic “drifts” through space and time. The memory of the contemporary architectural scene edits or “photoshops” out inconvenient realities, but the ideological rubble is always smoothed out. Within the Heresy test-space the viewer was forced to move around a remade experience of a *dérive* to confront the spatial-void of virtual reality, and also to perform a rescaled *dérive*.

What was evidenced in the final work was a sense of vacuity at the level of image-making and depthless space itself. Had I in fact (and perhaps unwittingly) confronted the dark and occluded face of Capital Spectacle, by making such audaciously over-ripe images that somehow produced a strange feed-back of sensation between the digital image, *détourned* architectural illustration and atmosphere of the Westfield site (through Bacon’s work)? These tightly-knit perceptions of place and encounter would be played out again during the AD12 final year exhibition.

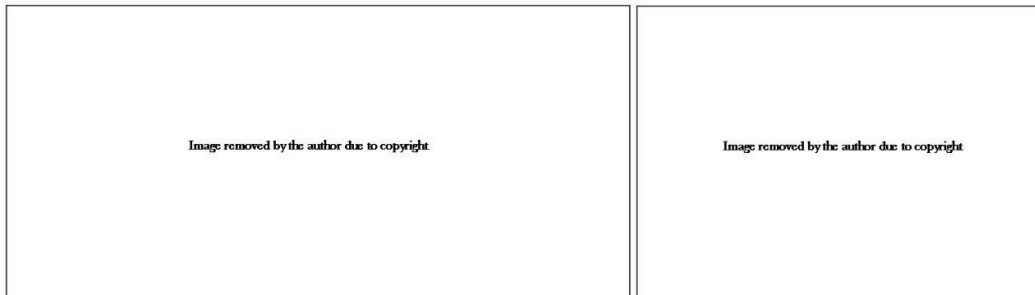


Fig. 34. *Berlin Free-Zone 3-2*. Colour pencil, photocopy, Lebbeus Woods. (1990).

Fig. 35. *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*. Francis Bacon. (1962).

## CHAPTER 4

### AD12

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ORPHEUS, ANGEL & STASIS

7-11 November 2012

## BEYOND REASON

### The Unconscious Ruin

AD12 was the end-of-year exhibition showcase across AUT's various schools of Art & Design. My final work for the year was circuitously exhibited at the *Porte Cochère* exhibition space, and entailed a further exploration of the triptych format adopted in the Heresy test-space installation. *The Unconscious Ruin* was an attempt to coalesce the various strands of methodological and theoretical frameworks engaged with throughout the year. The trilogy aimed to capture a *dérive* moving east to west along the promenade of Orpheus Drive. The distinguishing architectural feature (and focus) was the Onehunga Sea Scouts Hall, which appears to teeter precariously on the edge of the promenade. Originally the hall was the base for the Manukau Yacht and Motor Boat Club formed at Onehunga in 1891.

The hall is the last remaining structure (apart from the old pilings and landing stonework) in the old Hopua/Geddes Basin (a dormant crater in-filled as a park), where once there were shipyards and moorings for small craft sheltering from the changeable Manukau Harbour. Despite the dramatic vista towards the Northern heads of the Manukau, this area, reclaimed from the sea and sliced through by State Highway 20 and Mangere Bridge, is an area for passing through, not a site of arrival or contemplation. Improbably, given the infrastructural dominance here, the remaining dry-stone walls following the southern coast of the inlet can still be seen. The triptych frames these scoria walls as they march towards the western vista.

I would liken this final image-journey to an anamorphic projection, in other words an image that appears distorted unless it is viewed from a privileged angle or is viewed with a special instrument. It could also mean a denial of the usual conventions of "seeing" whereby an observer views an image frontally from a limited range of viewing angles. The central panel represented a "there", through a representational doubling of the first Bank of Auckland in a state of ruins. The depiction had its genesis in architect and artist Joseph Gandy's cut-away drawing of Soane's *Bank of England* as a ruin. The uncanny narrative of this triptych became about blurring the distinctions between the *here* and *there* or the *then* and the *now*. It was about the sudden eruption of a time/image in the wrong place as a double reading of the space of travel itself. The *dérive* in this instance had taken place near the site of the old bank (now gone), also taking in the Onehunga Mall Rd site before moving out toward Orpheus Drive. But it was also an image sequence of uneasy portents, an opening up of memory circuits allowing time to seep in.

## The Virtual Ruin

I approached this triptych by breaking each frame down into single and isolated spaces, with some generic compositional elements and objects. The scoria dry-stone wall served as the main unifying visual element across the three images, representing a durational timeline or journey narrative. The left-hand frame contained the old scout hall; the central frame represented the Bank, while the right-hand frame depicted the ghostly, spectral image of a headless statue. The central frame of the Bank differed from the other flanking images by focussing slightly deeper into the pictorial field.



Fig. 36. *AD12*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2012).

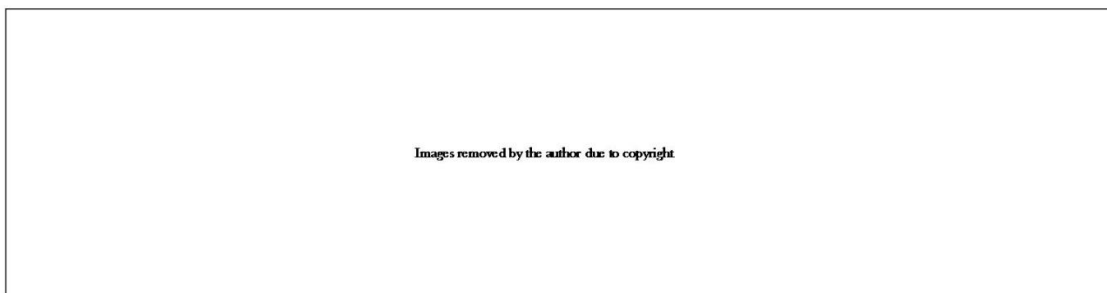


Fig. 37. Sea Scouts Hall, Orpheus Drive

Fig. 38. First Bank of Auckland, Onehunga

Fig. 39. *Tomorrow is Never*. Kay Sage. (1955).

Each frame thus contained similar artefacts, held loosely together by the horizon-line and dry-stone wall. However, each image also contained an individual reference or aspect from the series of half-glimpsed objects encountered during the *dérive*. The bottom left image is the hall viewed from Google Maps street-view, while the central panel is the Onehunga branch of the first Auckland Savings Bank erected in 1886. The bottom right panel is a painting by the Surrealist artist Kay Sage titled *Tomorrow is Never* (1955). These seemingly disparate visual cues were transposed into the digital canvas as various spatial configurations, providing “objects of encounter” for the spectator. In the bottom frames we witness a hall, a bank, and a monument. The scout hall still exists while the bank has been demolished. The painting by Sage represents a dream reverie existing in the realms of the unconscious imagination.

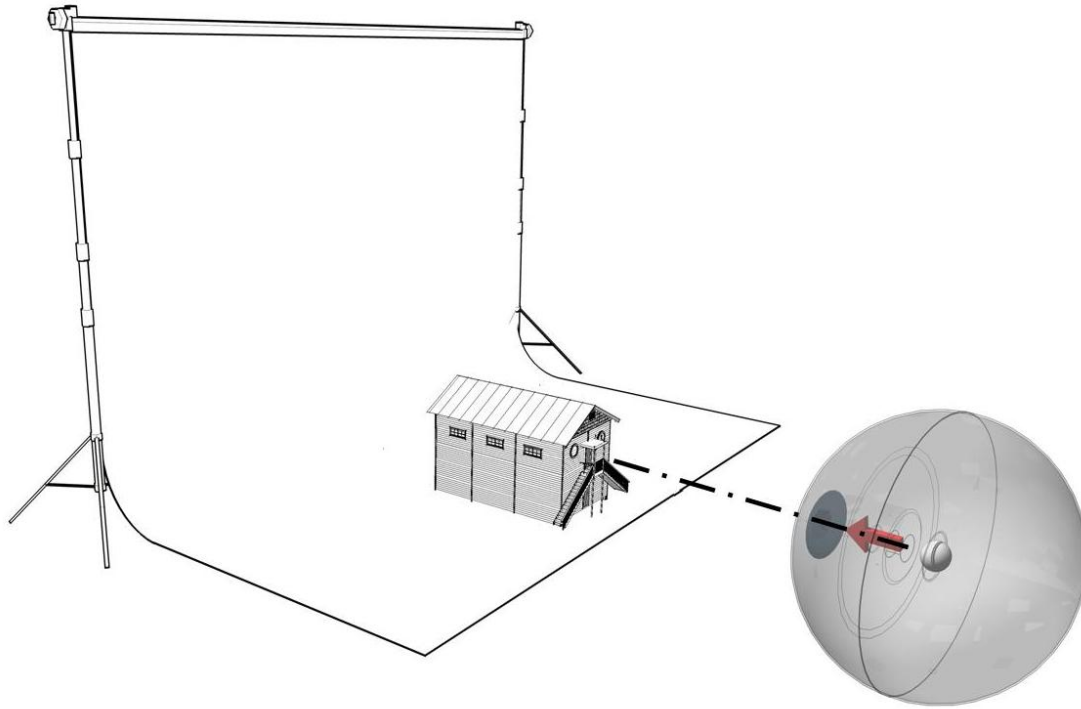


Fig. 40. *(Im)Mobility of the Eye*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

For Lyotard, passing through the figural plane, –if read through a digital practice, is a passing through infinite points – a way of moving around an object (or building) to experience it as multiple differences. In some ways the digital representation presents us with infinite choice, yet in another sense it is always in excess of the finite views that we can grasp or experience haptic-sight as a singular and totalised viewpoint. This ability to move around an object – to introduce other objects of an *uncanny* discursive or unsettling nature, is what is at stake here. Perhaps this is an area where the digitised constructed “situation” can eclipse the static painted or drawn surface. I believe this also has implications for reading space psychologically, and may also manifest at a level of deeper “political unconscious” through image manipulation. Although the virtual appears to give us mastery, our bodies remain inert – and immobile. This distributed point of view could be conceived as a viewpoint witnessed by the radical “exile” of the anti-capitalist *dérivé*. The topological differentiation or journey through space and time based on something that must be or is feared to be known (Late Capital), carries the uncanny into the regions of the quest, the pilgrimage, the journey narrative, the trial, and the chase – all aspects of game narratives – and all preeminent concerns within Kafka’s work.

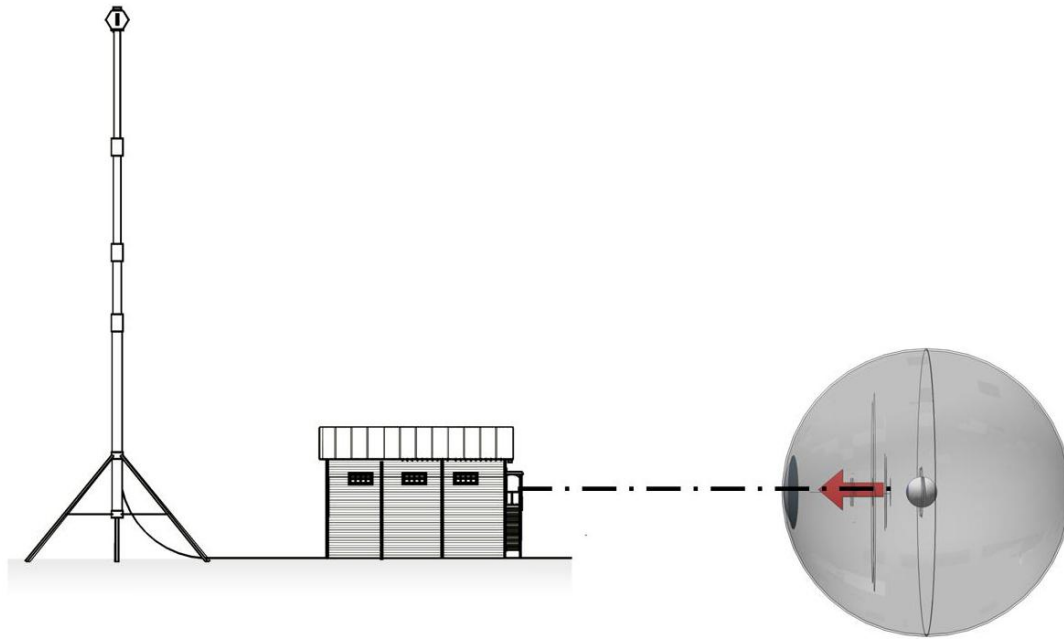


Fig. 41. *(Im)Mobility of the Eye*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

For Deleuze the definition of rupture and movement evolves from his discussion of Francis Bacon in “The Logic of Sensation” – where the static object can become more than an illustrative image, provoking an affective sensation that extends beyond itself, surging out toward the viewer. This “life force”, which envelopes the spectator, enacts for Deleuze an *event* or aesthetic encounter. Any eruptive intensities of figural displacement are fundamental ruptures of representation, which for Deleuze can be extended into both philosophical theory and contemporary art practice. I would argue here that Deleuze’s conception of disruption via the figural also takes antecedence within the multiple projections of architectural representation. This moves beyond surface – plane (plan, section, elevation) and into a pixelated *planar* digital environment capable of recalling the rhythms of ruptured surface and of shattered totalities – not to be confused with Cubism or deconstructing of image; rather as a “blurring” or multiplicity of movement. This bursting through the planometric has a sense or force of the *incommensurable*, – a chaotic and unpredictable condition. For Deleuze this chaos is immediate and real – an irrational discourse that bars the spectator from accessing the indecipherable, incomprehensive layers of reality. Here the infinite multiple perspectival viewpoint also describes the inalienable and degraded infrastructures, outbuildings and ruined factories of the Southern Inlet; to open up a rupture at the level of unconscious affect. This moment of uncanny cognition acting directly on the nervous system will perhaps allow the viewer a fleeting glimpse into the dark ambiances of the industrial wasteland – an uncanny spectacle of decline or by-product of Late Capital’s occluded impulse.



## The Irreducible Object

Why undertake these virtual doublings then, if I had already achieved a similar result within the SPACE/Talk installation? By setting-up a virtual montage or mock-up of the scene before making the digital composite, I was recalling Francis Bacon's own arrangements of cut-up images, torn fragments, reproductions and dog-eared photographs, arranged and collaged as preparatory "models" before the unconscious decisions that materialised were performed at the canvas.

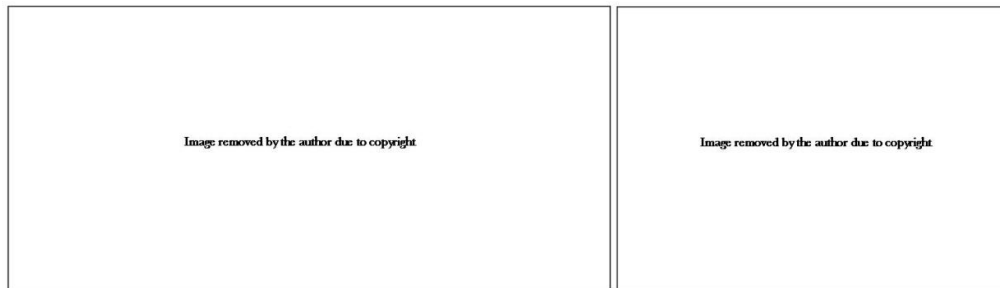
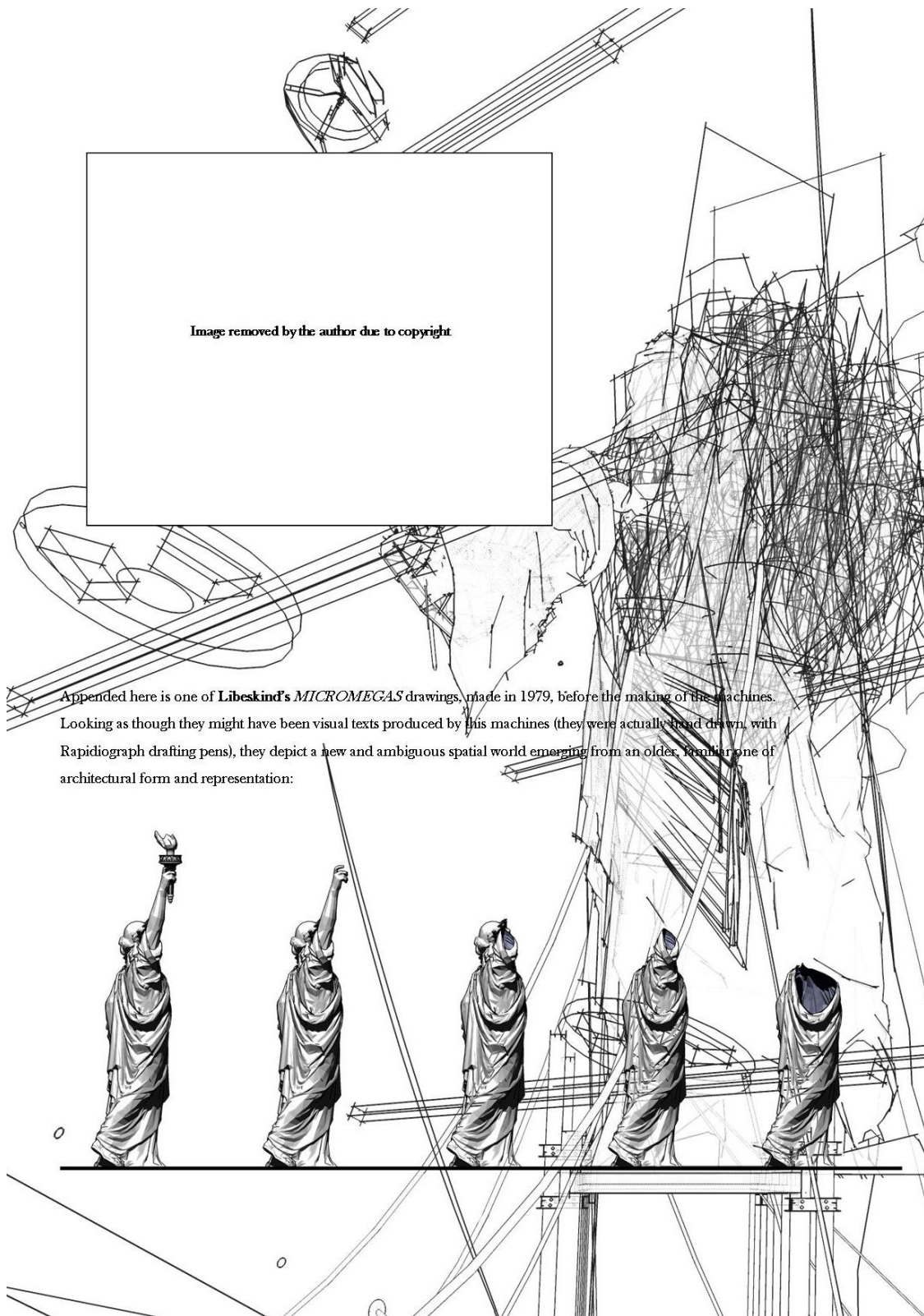


Fig. 42. Francis Bacon's Studio (recreated in Dublin), (2011).

When I begin working digitally, my process falls somewhere between preconception and chance. Is this possible within design suites such as Rhino, Sketch-up, 3dsMax, etc? I believe it is, although it begins with a design/methodological approach very similar to any digital or architectural work-space. All composite images or what I term "artefacts" are made separately. If the main model works well it may be finessed further by "bit-mapping" and "texturing", incorporating weathering effects or exterior surface treatments. Once a sizable number of objects have been conceived and assembled (sometimes just as ancillary geometric "blocks"), I compose the setting. Assembling a substantive library of objects in advance usually means a scene can be laid out roughly as a *trompe-l'œil* or "forced perspective". When I compose a tableau I tend to work quickly and rarely reference photographs or precursory sketches. In some respects this is like painting or "massing" blocks of objects, although it is quite different from "painting" digitally with a tablet. In another sense, despite its chaotic appearance, this process is in essence a "constructed drawing" in the classical Palladian sense.

I highlight one of the architect Daniel Libeskind's *MICROMEGAS* drawings (Fig. 44) from 1979 as an example of a "deeply ordered" chaos. This "fracturing of space" for me creates forms out of which a *ruin-scape* of assembled objects can emerge, where, like Libeskind (and to a certain extent Francis Bacon), there is an inherent underlying "order" despite the seemingly chaotic appearance.



**Fig. 43. *Procession / Progression Diagram*.** Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

**Fig. 44. *MICROMEGAS*.** Drawing. Daniel Libeskind. (1979).

## The Reproducible Object

*Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.*

**Walter Benjamin**, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1935).

I would like to conclude this chapter by discussing the process of image reproduction, counterfeiting and mirroring that takes place within my practice relative to Walter Benjamin's text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Benjamin writes of the artwork's lost aura as a loss of singular authority within the work of art itself. But what comes through in this new space left by the death of the aura? How does the mechanically reproduced work of art manage to make up for this void? The digital image, for example, intervenes in how we "see" or conceive of space in a way painting can never do. It directs the eye toward a specific place and a specific story; at the same time it is radical and revolutionary in its ability to produce a multiplicity of viewpoints. Yet digital space is also totalitarian in its efficiency, and here we can remain at a fixed or fixated distance (or ironic distance) from the reality of place.

Can we interact with the inauthentic and depoliticised architectural virtual? For Benjamin, the aura had to be moved into a mythological space; into the *cult of genius*. This cult of genius relates back to the cultish characteristic of the aura itself – in its absence there is a reaching-out, a *grappling* for a replacement. What does it mean to place an aura on "someplace" or "something"? By attempting to engage with the scenography of the inlet through a psychogeographical reading I have aimed to bypass the digital's modes of deception and distraction. And here I believe a confrontation occurs within the image projections of Late Capitalism itself. This then becomes a reworking of the mechanical (drawing, painting) to the virtual-space as an analogue/digital cross-over as a (re)remembrance of sight. This (re)remembering of place is also a disorientation of normality, making us critically aware of the habituation of an everyday experience with place. The image of the ruin returns us back to the image of place more violently, and this then becomes a consolidating field of images, moving restlessly between past, present and future. The potential for exploring the uneasy site of ruin inside the *terrain vague* has here been explored through the dark potentialities of the digitised architectural image. This has become (through Benjamin) a remaking or "splitting" of the image, to uncover a dark and occluded spatial condition or, for me, a heightened reality of place.

## Orpheus: The Backward Glance

The “dark netherworld” of the virtual and digital-space has thus become for me a meditation, strongly reminiscent of the dark Orphean underworld that philosopher Maurice Blanchot evoked in his portrayals of the space of literature in which the writer dwells. Blanchot reflected deeply on the nature and experience of writing, insistently returning to the theme of realising the illusionary nature of the real. To Blanchot, Orpheus sees the primal appearance and the image reflection. In the wondering (and wandering) gaze of the *dérive* one may hope to see existence in its stark appearance, to peer past the veneer of human constructs. How is this possible? Is such a realm accessible? I believe the writer or the drawer of space can find the answer to this question through the experience of crafting space itself, in the virtuality of the text/space where one may run up against the human wall of images of place, and be permitted a momentary gaze through its crevices. It is striking to me how Blanchot’s likening of the Orphean underworld to the space of the text is evocative of contemporary images of cyberspace. Cyberspace seems to elicit images of empty space, other realities, and dark regions beyond our sensory perception. Like Orpheus traversing the dark underworld in search for his beloved Eurydice and the search for an impossible “aura”, our nocturnal wanderings in the virtual/digital image may reveal insight that daylight is unwilling or unable to yield to us.



**Fig. 45.** *Orpheus*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

*To turn back is to lose sight of all that you held precious in your mind.*

Orpheus Drive takes its name from the Royal Navy's steam corvette HMS *Orpheus*, which hit the Manukau Harbour bar on 7 February 1863 killing 189 of 259 onboard. It remains New Zealand's worst maritime disaster. A series of minor errors and bad luck caused the disaster, including the use of outdated charts. After the ship hit the bar, its engines seized, pushing it onto its side. As the ship sank into the sand, the men climbed into the rigging. The masts collapsed, throwing officers and men into the sea.

## CONCLUSION

### Horizons of Late Capital

*Our all-too-beautiful strategies of history, knowledge, and power are erasing themselves. It is not because they have failed (they have, perhaps, succeeded too well) but because in their progression they reached a dead point where their energy was inverted and they devoured themselves, giving way to a pure and empty, or crazy and ecstatic, form.*

**Jean Baudrillard** (Plant, 2012, p. 167)

Philosopher Sadie Plant writes in relation to Baudrillard that our postmodern condition has left us with nowhere to go and nothing new to say: “Dada’s cut-ups reappear in the fragmented texts of postmodern discourse, and Surrealism’s collages resurface on advertisement hoardings” (1992, p. 167). A postmodern age ushers us into endless (and frivolous) reworkings of previous styles, vocabularies, ideas and experiences; a representation of earlier moments from which all critical force and political momentum are excluded. Part of this thesis has involved trying to invigorate (or even apprehend) the ruin of the *terrain vague* not just as the site of spectacle and architectural decline, but as a theatre for image representation, where many diversions and inconsistencies proper to Late Capitalism can collide within the habitual of the everyday.

The revolutionary impulses of the Situationists and Surrealists have been engaged here, not simply to *rework* or *incorporate* a patchwork of phrases and strategies for decoding and rereading the city under globalisation, but to search for deeper implications for the viewer as a subliminal politic. Perhaps this is asking too much of the viewer or the image itself, but in order to define a *political unconscious*, the question asked of the viewer here is what political agency defines our perception when reading an image of place? If we depict a space of obsolescence or redundancy that turns away from us (or is counter to our perception of frontality and hence progressive sighting), can we afford not to read history of place through ideological systems of urban control?

If our perception of focus is the built-environments of the *terrain vague*, then what I have proposed here is a sighting of place that runs as a counter-narration; not just to the rational Cartesian grid of modernism, but also to the spectacle of postmodern, multinational late-stage capitalism. The fading production infrastructures and historical narratives of the inlet evidenced at the Onehunga Mall site (as macro-structure or meta-narrative) and the ruin of the Westfield Abattoir (class structure, aesthetic revulsion) are reminders that informational Late Stage Capitalism produces ruins in spurious cycles of “growth” and “market forces”. The silent, abject and mute contemporary ruin is thus occluded or “backed away” from our sight. However, in recoding the sightedness of dissolute architecture through a political sensation of unease I have also attempted to gain insight into the wasteland through a psychoanalytic reading of place moving beyond the Jamesonian framework of Marxist alienation or what Jean Paul Sartre would call the *derealisation* (depersonalisation) of the individual.

Repression and denial are, in classical Freudianism, two important mechanisms by which the unconscious tries to manage something the conscious mind cannot confront directly. Here the embodied *uncanny* of the post-historical runs backward or counter to the rational Cartesian grid as it scores and scribes datum-lines of “progress” across stratified historical urban layers of spatial control. The uncanny spatial dread of the wasteland engenders it as a subversive object, resonating with collapsed monumentalities. Francis Bacon’s depthless voids have provided the anxious backdrop in the creation of a scenography of unease. The contemporary-ruin is presented within this depthless space of postmodernism and Late Capitalism, thus standing apposite to reason, and remaining at an occult imbalance from civic life precisely because it eschews a temporal break or rupture from more optimistic gestures of urban form-making. Dylan Trigg writing in *The Aesthetics of Decay* outlines any attack on political and philosophical regimes related to architecture and the city as being an attack on the notion of rational progress itself. To Trigg, the term reason is:

“... limited to the mode of rationality as a homogenising agent which defines and identifies the particular in accordance with a static principle already established in the past. So long as absolute reason lays claim to universality, then the presence of permanence is simultaneously implicated. Universality evades contingency and temporal mutability as it strives towards an absolute” (2009, p. 8).

The post-historical ruin therefore “unveils” the myth of static progress stretching back into the past. Here Deleuze’s *heterarchies*, Nieuwenhuijs’s *New Babylon* or J. G. Ballard’s *affirmative dystopias* may provide the template for inhabiting the leftover wastelands of the contemporary metropolis. These are the spaces of science fiction: utopias, heterotopias and the dystopic visions relentlessly promoted through video game architectures and paraliterature. This is the site of a *minor architecture* and as such it is a *détournement* of the Majorities system of representation. The minority image attempts to reframe the symbolic capital of authority, in the same way Kafka replayed systems of architectural and state authority within labyrinths of spatial dread.

A *minor architecture* is political because it is mobilised from below, from the substrata that may not even register at the (surface) sanctioned operations of the profession. Instrumental power structures operate at this level of spatial politics and produce “major architectures out of which minor architectures emerge” (Stoner 2012, p. 15). A *minor architecture* is political by virtue of this adjunctive or parasitic quality.

Here, the research has opened a temporal hiatus or rupture inside the practice of the architectural drawing, an opening up not just of the post-industrial ruin as a site of potential enquiry, but also as a means of representing its uneasy alliance with the market forces of Late Capital. Concerned with the way exchange value was supplanting the social and cultural values



of urban space, the Situationists sought an emancipatory body/relation with the city, particularly within non-prescribed open spaces. Left-over spaces, easements, obsolete infrastructures and abandoned sites were treated as outside the hegemonic control of capitalist discourse, and thus held a special attraction beyond the uniformity of State consumption and control. These are the sites that inspire a minoritarian engagement with space.

It also important to stress the *dérive* within this practice as a rupture from the habitual and everyday disorientation promoted by junkspace and the *terrain vague*. Reading the wasteland on foot affords a free temporality through the creation of an internalised dreamscape. Perhaps this is where the emancipatory potential of the Situationists and Surrealists exists within this practice; as a drift through a dark Orphean underworld, overlapping the occluded spaces hidden inside the virtual image/drawing itself. Replaying a *dérive* within a shallow space or field of objects has highlighted the immobility of both virtual movement and our own earth/body/political relations. However, it has also provided my practice, through uncanny conceptions and readings of space, with a counter-reading to the rationalised digital desktop space of computer-aided drawing. The digital doubling or unconscious twin haunts the image-making within this project, and the traversal between images of sight and digital remaking of place have been explored within this analogue/digital crossover. If, as Benjamin suggested, the gaze reveals aura as a false origin, then a more technically advanced image (with its attendant changes in technique and technological operation) does not necessarily wipe out aura. Rather, the digital double (of either photograph or even memory) may summon up and make visible a fading permanence; an original state that can only appear retrospectively. The digital faces us from within contemporary techniques that (paradoxically) have been made from earlier (even obsolete) technologies, fossilizing them into a kind of historical permanence.

The post-historical ruin is thus antithetical to our current space of *smooth* and *striated* time where we glide over the surface of over-designed urban environments which, in the main, are limited to spectacle, and we are easily seduced into forgetting history and its relation to place. The topographies of our cities are now so pervasively programmed that few sites are left for withdrawal and reflection from the *Spectacle*. Standing in contrast to aesthetically and socially regulated spaces, the neglected site can offer us a different perspective on the marginal and unseen. By evoking an aesthetic of disorder, surprise and sensuality we are offered ghostly glimpses into a past full of tactile encounter and forgotten marginalities. The depiction within this thesis of a wasteland runs apposite to architecture's "official" story, and through the voice of *minority* is here rethought as a *minor* drawing out of place.



## DARKSPACE / LIGHTSPACE

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FINAL INSTALLATION (APPENDIX TO THE UNCONSCIOUS RUIN)



Auckland University of Technology, Master of Art & Design 2012



Fig. 46. *SPACE/Rocks*. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

## LIGHTSPACE

### ST Pauls St / Frontbox Installation



Fig. 47. **LIGHT/Space**. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

### 4-7 April 2013

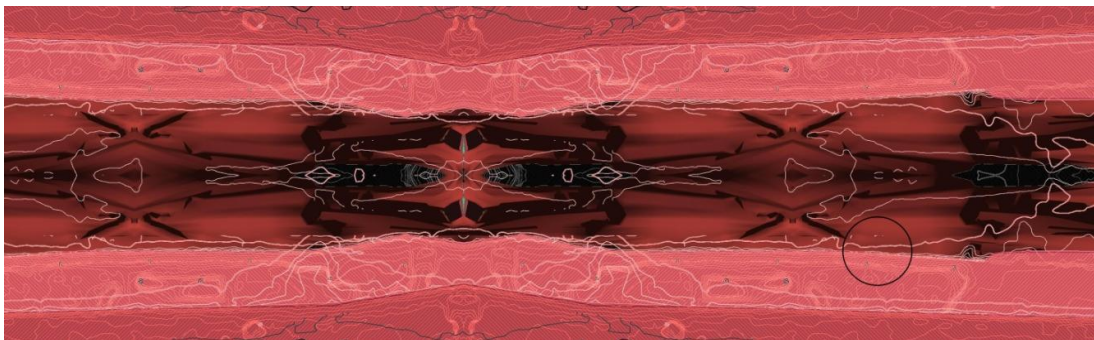
The final installation, *Light/Dark Space*, took place across two venues situated at AUT's St Paul St gallery complex. The "Frontbox" street-front project space provided a snapshot of work for public consideration while an internal test-space stationed inside level 3 of the WM Building housed the exhibition proper. The Frontbox or "Lightspace" installation initially contained three sparse elements: a digitally printed textile panel, digital print on paper and a framed digitally collaged map (behind reflective glass). The test/project space housed the primary exhibited work and was contrastively named "Darkspace". During the exhibition programme the test-space work was gradually relocated into the outwardly accessible Frontbox, furnishing the cubicle with various deinstalled props from the principal exhibition.

This unpacking and relocation of work exhibited within the WM building test-space enacted a mimetic ritual confirming the southern industrial inlet as part of a doubly centred city, whereby the terrain vague acts in opposition, or is inverse to, the manifestation of public and civic appearances.



**Fig. 48. LIGHT/Space (streetview).** Digital Media. B. Sellar. **Fig. 49. LIGHT/Space (initial installation).** Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).

Much of the artefact/image assemblages on view across both spaces contained formal compositional and constructed elements evident in earlier work, as a recycling or counterfeiting, which again sought the presence of or summoning of an inauthentic “aura”, echoing Benjamin. This evocation of a fake “aura” was manifest in both the tableau’s institutional setting and the display of found/readymade objects conjoined with more contemporary digital techniques. The incorporation of digital textile prints melded into and onto steel tripods, aluminium housing and drafting (drawing) chair/equipment blurred the distinction between traditional artisanship and simulation. It was hoped such a mirroring of past/present/object relations would present the viewer with a perverse disjunction between the installed work and its contextual setting. The question of an inauthentic landscape or junkspace in relation to a facsimile or digital uncanny was ultimately replayed in the performative reinstallation from dark to light as an illuminative unveiling of place.



**Fig. 50. LIGHT/Space, INLET/Scar (detail).** Digital Media. B. Sellar. [2013]



## DARKSPACE

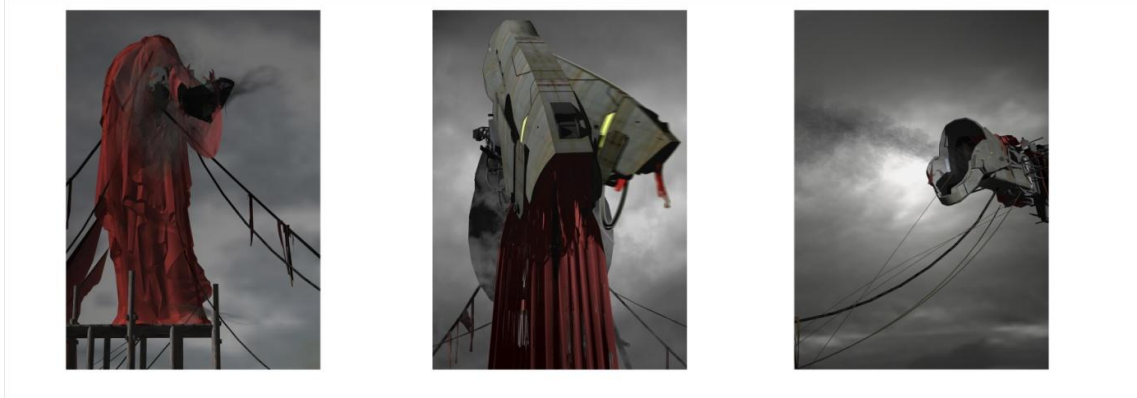
ST Pauls St / WM Building: test-space



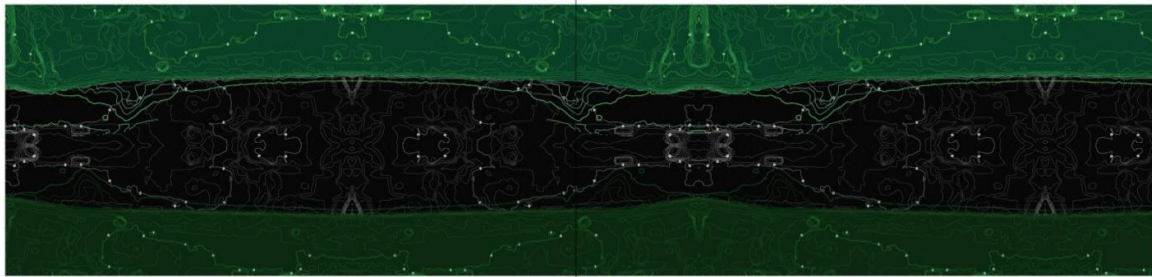
Fig. 51. **DARK/Space**. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).



Fig. 52. **INLET/Map**. Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).



**Fig. 53. Triptych (version).** Digital Media. B. Sellar. (2013).



**Fig. 54. GREEN/Map . Textile pattern repeat.** Digital textile print on cotton twill. B. Sellar. (2013).



**Fig. 55. VIEW (version).** Digital photograph. B. Sellar. (2013).





**Fig. 56. Polystyrene Rock.** Digital photograph/photoshop. B. Sellar. (2013).

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