

section four
reflection





PICTURE - SYMBOLS

reflection

A story once told is understood through reflection.
Morton, 2003, p. 24

Because issues and events raised by this project's development will continue to be applied and extended into new experiments and creative works, a definitive conclusion cannot be presented. However, it is possible to reflect on significant outcomes and processes. This closing chapter therefore considers three features of the project. First, the research's impact since *boy's* release in June 2004. Second, reflection on issues, experiments, experiences and methodology arising during the project, and finally a discussion of new creative and analytical research growing out of the thesis.

journeys on an open road

the research's impact

Boy's homodiegetic narrative opens with the image of an open road, browned by the summer heat and stretching out to a distant horizon.

When I designed the film, it was my intention that the research should travel on such a road. I did not want the study to be closed between the covers of a bound document, assessed by strangers and then relegated to the library shelves of academia. I am a practical man and my desire is to create work that contributes to human experience. In bringing the structures of a Ph.D. to this endeavour, I sought to rigorously challenge the undertaking and thereby enrich the quality of the outcome.

If research like this thesis is to have value, it needs to add not only to knowledge but also to human experience. In both its current form and in the rich potential for further research the project has generated, the thesis may be seen as having achieved these aims.

Boy had its international premiere in July 2004 as one of the six short works on film selected for the *New Zealand International Film Festival*. These films toured through fifteen regional festivals in the country between July and November 2004.

Prior to its release *boy* was selected in competition for the 2004 *Montreal Film Festival*¹. It was nominated for best short film and was described in reviews as “a brilliant story line developed within the short film” (Luc Perreault, 2004, p. 10) and “a beautifully crafted, visually rich, story that pushes the borders of convention in the genre” (Theroux, 2004, p. 21). Critical reviews and exposure at the festival resulted in interviews and excerpts of the film being featured on a number of Canadian and New York television shows². At this time it was also officially selected as one of nine short films for the 42nd New York International Film Festival³. Over the next two months *boy* was selected for ten other international festivals in America and Europe (fig. 4:1).

The New Zealand Film Commission awarded the project a grant of \$20, 460 to take the HD experiment back out on to 35mm stock. However, following the demand for the film in international festivals, the commission took the unusual step of having additional copies printed on 35mm film and Beta SP tape. “A List” international festivals are generally closely networked and selection panels tend to travel to earlier events to see new films. Because of this networking, *boy* was invited to feature in a range of festivals into which it had not been entered⁴.



Fig. 4:1
Official selections in international film festivals (2004)

¹ Because the film premiered in Montreal, it was automatically closed for consideration in Cannes. These festivals require international premieres so films that have screened at one, cannot appear in competition at the other. The decision to accept the selection for Montreal was pragmatic. This festival has a strong history of promoting innovative and experimental films compared to Cannes’ emphasis on more commercially focused works. Montreal also has strong links to European markets, especially in Northern and Western Europe, and these markets are often more open to less formulaic methods of storytelling on film.

² Significant among these were, *The Stephen Holt Show* (2004, October 1). Montreal Film Festival: Episode 2 ; *Channel 2 Arts News*, (2004, September 2). Competition Mondiale: Highlights; and *Arts Week*, (2004, September 4). New approaches to short film: Boy.

³ This festival considered 800 international short films for selection. *Boy* screened with Jonathan Caouette’s documentary *Tarnation* on September 28th and October 5th at the Lincoln Centre, New York.

⁴ Significant among these in 2004 were, *Uppsala*, (Sweden); *Rosefilmdagen*, (Amsterdam); *Hamburg* (Germany), *Sonar Florence*, *Newport* (USA), and *19ième* (Belgium).



Fig. 4:2
Official selections in international film festivals
(January- April 2005)

The film has also been selected for the *American Short Film Archive 100*. This archive managed by the University of Nevada, contains what are considered to be the 100 world’s most significant short films.

Boy has also sold to *Canal+* in France, Poland and Switzerland, and to *Universal* in Italy.

In January 2005, the film was selected for Clermont-Ferrand. This was its third A List festival in six months. The Film Commission travelled over to France with it, using it as a central feature of the marketing and promotion of other New Zealand productions. Prior to its selection for this festival, *Film Movement*, a New York distribution company dealing in festival films, bought the North American rights to the film and plans to release it on DVD in the middle of 2005.

Since January 2005 *boy* has been officially selected for a further fifteen international festivals in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Egypt, Germany, Britain, New Zealand, Norway, France, and the USA (fig. 4:2). These selections for widely different types of festival suggest that the film may be seen as a significant and valued contribution to both human experience and new ways of storytelling⁵.

⁵The following excerpts of reviews provide a cross section of reactions to the film.

[Germany]
“In the 15 minutes of short film there is more to discover than in most feature length films. Ings has found a way to tell an exceptional story in an exceptional form.” Hagen Gottschalck. *Kino* magazine. December 2 2004, p. 26

[New York]
“This is a deeply moving, mesmerizing film that just blew the audience away. At its conclusion in the Lincoln Centre the theatre erupted into applause. It is definitely the short film triumph of this year’s festival.” (Richard Beven. *New York Short Film Review*. October 6 2004, p. 35).

[New York]
“A haunting, visually inventive tale about coming of age and into sexuality.” *Film maker* magazine. <http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/blog/2004/09/new-york-film-festival-shorts.php>

[New Zealand]
“Before the screening of *boy* the director, Welby Ings, was given the opportunity to talk to the audience and warned that a lot of the audience probably wouldn’t like this short. He was correct, but not because of misplaced moral outrage, rather that visually the film appears to be a low-budget tribute to Peter Greenaway.... *Boy* has a lot to say about the intolerance and violence inherent in rural life and the ostracism and bashings that a young gay man is subjected to. Unfortunately the look of the movie overpowers its message.” Stephen O’Hoy. *New Zealand Xtra* entertainment website: <http://xtramsn.co.nz/entertainment/0,,7126-3545868,00.html>

[Netherlands]
“A visually stunning story.” Kees Werren. www.maleweblog.nl/weblog/index.php?itemid=397 - 5k

[Reviews continued on facing page.]

Although international reviews of the work have generally drawn attention to *boy's* compression and richness of imagery, the film, as a piece of creative production should not be considered simply as a discrete artifact. Instead it may be seen as a research site where data, knowledge and technology have been brought into creative discourse with each other. Through reflection on, and in action, these elements have been orchestrated into a woven narrative that utilises structural and aesthetic profiles from narrative music videos and television commercials. The thesis may, therefore, be seen as embracing both process and a resolve.

reflection on key issues, experiments and methodology

In reviewing the key issues, experiments, and methodology in this project it is helpful to remember that all of these developments are essentially interconnected. Each move tested against the whole is affected by, and affects, the emerging totality of the work. While significant investigations and outcomes are revisited in groups in this section of the exegesis, their demarcation is not a reflection of the way they worked in the design of the film. The features of this project are considered under the headings method and process, image and narrative, durability, continuity, space, professional method, story-telling, and shrines.

⁵ continued:

[Germany]

"Boy is an ambitious masterpiece. In fifteen minutes Ings assails the audience with a flow of breathtaking images. His use of flickering type and damaged dolls, piles layer upon layer of beautifully coloured images, over a difficult subject. Yet for all of the story's content, this is not heavy-handed sensationalism. The rapes and beatings, psychological pressure and rural claustrophobia are shot so seductively that you are left hypnotised and stunned at the end of the screening".

Samantha Pauson. *Filmspeak*. <http://www.filmspeak.com/2004/german-verzaubert-films.php>

[Finland]

"Finally a political short that is masterfully told. This religiously styled story of a young prostitute's coming of age has all of the detail correct (although some of the written language will go above many people's heads). This is not a light romp through a neon world. Small town prostitution is shown for what it is, run down toilets, petty theft and double standards. What stands out about this work is its treatment. This is a very ornamental film that you have to watch closely. From its opening poetry to the flickering credits, this short holds you in its grip. It talks to you in multiple of voices, all of them silent. You will go away wanting to see it again. This is certainly the most innovative, and groundbreaking short film in this year's festival." Marko Anderson. Vinokino reviews. http://www.tuset.fi/vinokino/2004/en/movies/mr_right/index.html

method and process

While there are a number of paradigms of thought surrounding the process of creative problem solving, in this project I sought to unpack the research method that had become so integral to my way of making art.

The project sought to forge a unique way of researching that maximised the chances of creative and effective outcomes. Scrivener's (2000a) understanding of the multiple and shifting goals and issues that might accompany such an undertaking, was addressed by opening the project up to methods of collecting and linking data in ways that enabled me to maintain the maximum variation of perspectives. This process, as Kleining and Witt (2001), suggest enables the researcher to locate and orchestrate similarities and patterns by frequently asking questions of the material. Similarities, analogies or homologies are arranged and rearranged until they begin to form cohesive and coherent patterns.

This becomes a transactional process of reflection and experiment, which employs a form of appreciative enquiry. This is essentially an affirmative process that Gibbs (2004) suggests creates opportunities for positive insights into effectiveness. Essentially it asks the questions, "What works well?" and "Why did it work well?" Appreciative enquiry *"takes attention away from problems and deficits and redirects attention to the best of what is"* (Lander, 2000, p. 136).

Because the research methodology designed for this project was subjectively positioned and transactional, it was sometimes harrowing. The connection of the self to the process and outcomes means that the successes and failures of experiments are keenly felt. Finding positive connections, whether it be in networks for uncovering or creating data, or in methods of connecting material so effective patterns emerge, required an appreciation not only of the material, but also of its potential. Experiments through exploratory and contemplative sketching, the making of artifacts and immersion in locations, were processed concurrently with forms of narration. In processes similar to those outlined by Schön (1983), verbal and non-verbal dimensions were connected and tested. Situations and ideas were talked forward and listened to as they spoke back. Out of this process, situations were reframed and tested against those that surrounded them in the emerging text.

the relationship between image and narrative

Boy is the result of a series of experiments undertaken to create solutions to emerging questions. These questions surfaced as part of an ongoing reflection on action. The experiments could not be seen as linear, as from the outset a sense of the whole meant that creating the film could be likened to a protean, multi-layered kind of jigsaw, where each new piece trialed in the picture altered shapes and patterns in things that surrounded it. These layers covered a multitude of areas including sound, rhythm, direction, colour, type, character, image, depth of field and narrative position.

New treatments of these areas were trialed against broader needs in the text, including impact, durability over repeated screenings, coherence, stylistic concord and accessibility of meaning.

The text was constructed as visually rich, with an approach taken from television advertising where, as Ellis (1992) explains, images tend to be simple and direct, jealous of their meaning, and cutting to details rather than holding a viewer's attention for longer periods of time. Experiments in this area concerned the development of graphic but powerful images like the dolls and atmospheric shots of the open road. The project also experimented with the duration of shots so a core message could be noted and then the viewer quickly moved on to new information. This resulted in the highly compressed nature of the narrative, with closely cropped scenes averaging just over three seconds in duration.

durability

Darley (2000) talked about images in new media genres often being so elaborate that they cannot be apprehended in a single screening. In a similar way, *boy* makes its core information obvious, but images and relationships between images are constructed so they unfold information over repeated exposures to the text. This is done by carefully orchestrating events, density of imagery, and secondary iconography that may contribute to meaning retrospectively. Because *boy* was concerned with a design that might maintain durability and interest over repeated screenings, many experiments focused on the fine-tuning of enigma and closure. These experiments were aimed at creating a text that would work effectively in the cinema, but would also engage in

a calculated way with the growing use of short film as a reviewable narrative, released on DVD. Experiments related to the durability of the film involved the designing of secondary iconography, the use of enigma, the rapid pacing of some typographical treatments, and the development of characters that reveal themselves more fully after repeated exposures to the text.

continuity

Colour, directional flow and rhythm were carefully orchestrated in the film, with the aim of smoothing out the fragmentation caused by the very short scenes and the rapid progress of the narrative. Concord between images included experiments involving the shifting of certain pigments from one scene to the next, the establishment of palettes that grouped sequences together, the subtle use of consistent directional flow, and the use of editing systems that either cut to the beat of the audio track, or around the action within a scene. These techniques were orchestrated to develop concord. Conversely, disruption of these approaches was used to build tension in the text.

To cope with the rapid pace of the story, characters were generally kept simple, being either archetypical or as Burton (2000) posits, opposed to each other in type. Thus in *boy* experiments in both scripting and direction established a dynamic where characters were developed from the actions and reactions within other parts of the narrative. This meant that despite the lack of dialogue, minimal time was demarcated for the singular development of any individual character⁶.

space

Another set of experiments emerging inside the project trialed the potential of both temporal and physical space, in terms of its ability to heighten the power of imagery and pace in the film. The use of

⁶ The contrasting exception to this approach was the character of Sam. He consumes more than five times as much exposure time in the film as any other character. This is so his character has room to develop, passing from a secretive, internalised isolate, to a boy who publicly exposes the guilty driver in the closing scene.

television dramas influenced by music video's narrative discourse, were developed in *boy* through reflection on spatial treatments in selected music videos from the studio broadcasts of the early 1960s. This low relief tiering of space influenced the theatricised look of certain sets in the film. The shallow treatment of space evident in Sam's personal world of the opening titles, the bogs, his flash frames and the shrines, were set against the deeper perspectives used in the rest of the movie. This approach was used to create a subtle demarcation between his private and public worlds.

sound

Experiments with sound became important because the film was non-spoken. Silence, homodiegetic sound, music, sampled mixes and atmos were all orchestrated so they added emphasis or contributed to rhythm or atmosphere within the text⁷. Significant experiments involved the mixing of sound to reinforce the ecclesiastical and contemporary elements of Sam's world, the alienation of the rape scene, and the synchronicity between film action and emphases in the audio track. The selection and demarcation of specific third level sounds was used to reinforce the sense of intimacy and dislocation in the film.

professional method

This movie was shot in a small hydro village in the south Waikato. In 1929 when Arapuni was built, it was one of the major government power stations in the country. Its village boasted a milkbar, tea kiosk, post office and a range of small shops. Among its public services, were doctors' rooms, a library, a primary school, a maternity hospital and a local union. Today, it has no store, no school, and no postal delivery. The hospital and the doctors' rooms are only a memory. While we were filming there, the village's only remaining service station closed down.

⁷To ensure the quality of sound in *boy*, audio was printed using both Dolby digital and analogue systems. This is because Dolby sound, being printed between the film's sprockets is susceptible to damage. As a back-up, an analogue track was also printed. This appears on the right-hand side of the negative. Two versions of the film's soundtrack were necessary to accommodate screenings in festivals where digital systems are not available.



Fig. 4:3
Interior of the half round shed at Arapuni showing the sets for the last supper and Sam's room. This building in the centre of the village, was loaned to us by John and Rosemary Hendrikson. During the weeks of set construction and filming of *boy*, many of the local families popped over here with their children and visitors to have a cup of tea and talk about what was going on. Because of the limited space available in the village, this studio became multifunctional. Beyond its use for the sets of three major scenes in the film, it also served as a costume and prop store, and bedroom for some members of the crew.

Driving south from the dam, as you wind into the village there is a paddock on your left. It is empty now, save for a few cows, grazing indolently in the afternoon heat. But once this field held Mr Darby's picture theatre. As a small boy, his building was the source of my wildest dreams. It was where I saw my first movies.

Every Friday night when they got back from shearing, my father and mother would put their six children in the back of the Chev and drive us over to the village to watch *Ben Hur*, *Sparticus*, *The Robe* and the other cinematic epics that marked the highlights of my childhood.

I came back to this place to make *boy*, because it was home once... a long time ago.

But it has changed.

By necessity, the 120 people living in the village now, have learned

to depend heavily on each other. They are a close and eclectic community whose generosity and support of this project has been phenomenal.

The older people remembered my family.

When I designed and shot the television film *The Coopers* in 1997, one of my main aims was to develop a method of making film inside a community. This meant establishing ways of compensating local people for their help and involving them in the actual process of constructing and checking the integrity of the film (fig. 4:4).

The desire to make film in a manner that profiles a genuine respect for the goodwill of people involved has been important to me since my days of making documentaries for television. Film projects often exploit local communities. Production crews generally show great interest in them while they can access props and locations, but after the shoot is wrapped, there is often no more contact. The relationship is not reciprocal because the film is often seen as more important than the people contributing to it. While I accept that the film is of importance, I believe that one must work with communities so they genuinely feel they have benefited from the experience. This helps to make the event fulfilling for everybody and also ensures that the local people are happy to support future projects.

In *boy* reciprocation was achieved in several ways. Many of the local people appeared as extras in the film and thus became part of the team. Everybody involved has a copy of the film and their names appear in the credits and press packs. Their families and friends were all invited to join us during the shoots⁸ and all crew took time out to explain what was happening and why we were using certain equipment in certain ways⁹.

Because all of the actors were amateurs and only one had worked

⁸ The only exception to this was the rape scene, which was a closed shoot because of the sensitivity of the subject matter. This scene was shot in two separate, sealed-off locations between 1.00 and 2.00 in the morning. Tammy Warwick who acted the part of the young woman, had support people with her during these scenes.

⁹ There was no traditional hierarchy in the crew. All crew were equally valued and received the same flat fee for their involvement in the project. Although we could not afford to pay actors, they all received the same level of support and acknowledgement.

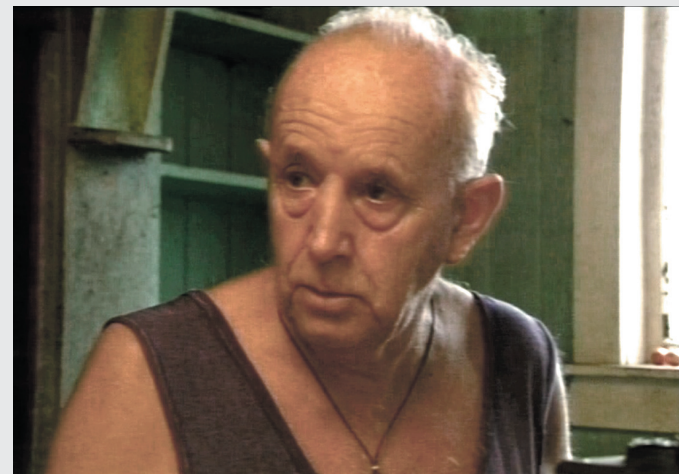


Fig. 4:4

Stills from the community based film *The Coopers* (1997).

All of the actors and crew used in this production were located from inside the district where the original events in the film occurred. Some of the actors were involved with, or relations of, people who lived the original events. These stories were woven together in the narrative. Local people were encouraged to be involved in all parts of the production and we showed them how to use cameras and editing equipment, and how to access funding, so they could go on to make their own stories long after we had gone. While we made the film, we lived in the community; we celebrated with them and gave our help where there were ongoing things we could offer. As a result, the film gathered a high level of analysis and support because the people involved knew details about set dressing and characterisation I would not have been able to access if I had simply employed actors and crew from outside productions. While the film had a unique style, I was anxious that the community saw it as reflecting who they were and the events that had happened in their lives. Today, all of the crew and cast have copies of the film and there are prints in the local *Te Awamutu Museum* and the *New Zealand Film Archive*. Money made from screenings of the film was folded back into the community's support services.

in film before, we were able to arrange agents for many of them after the production. *Boy* therefore, acted as a promotion for them and four of these actors have now gone on to professional work in film, television drama, or commercials. Furthermore, three of the students who had parts in *boy* are now enrolled in university courses in film or theatre. I have written references for them and they have used their performance in the project to support their applications.

For the crew, we rented accommodation in an old church in the village, and we lived and ate there for a week. Contracts for catering and accommodation all went to local people.

When the film was finished I organised a special cast and crew screening for the village, and local families received a small music video that showed them during the making of the film. (See appendix 5: *How Bizarre*). This was not a work of art; it was just a way of saying thank you in a manner that might serve as a record of the time we spent together on the production.

I continue to write newsletters for the community on the progress of the film, and have lobbied on their behalf with the district council for funding for a local picture theatre in the village.

Because many of the people involved in the production have asked what will be happening to specific artworks and props used in the film, I have arranged for these to be given to them at the end of the thesis.

I take this method of working with a community and carrying responsibility for the reputation of film as a profession, seriously and will continue to develop the approach in upcoming projects.

unique ways of storytelling

Considerable research into, and experiment with, narration is a feature of this present project. Some of the most complex decisions in the film were those concerned with the design and positioning of its narrative voices. The development of typefaces and typographical treatments that captured the ethos of Sam's divided world, drew on the ecclesiasticism and angry dislocation inherent in the language of the bogs. The disruption of Salen's (2001) national symbolic environment, with designs that caused disturbances to stable, ubiquitous

font families, was a reflection of bogspeak's disruption of meaning and emphasis in standard English.

Typographical voices operated as direct address in the heterodiegetic spaces of the opening and closing scenes of the film. Type also spoke in more ambiguous ways inside the homodiegetic space of the narrative. The creation of intermediary surfaces, that were neither letter-form nor pictorial elements, were used in the animation of words, so the written word operated not as a subtitle, but paralinguistically as part of the personality and developing drama of the narrative.

Experiments with the relationship between the size, form and pace of type were extensive. Although, in general, these may be seen as successful, I feel I have still not resolved the issue of what happens to readability when the type size and duration, set for large-screen cinema, is compressed and viewed on a video monitor¹⁰. While most of the type works well, I still have concerns with two pieces of text in the narrative. These are the sentences immediately following the girls calling Sam a pussyboy from the school steps, and the text accompanying Sam riding his bike through the open grass (fig. 4:5).

I set the reading pace at the opening of *boy* in a relatively rapid rhythm. The aim of this was to suggest that one needed to pay attention to what was being said with the type, because it might not operate in a manner one is used to encountering in cinema. This worked for most of the typographical interruptions, especially the single word flashes. This was because they could sustain momentary exposure due to the fact that what one was actually reading was a flickering shape. As the film progressed, many longer sentences, originally scripted for the film were edited out. The remaining sections of Sam riding his bike and walking past the girls on the school steps I now feel were unnecessary and could have been pared back using less text.

¹⁰ Colour and sound were both designed to operate effectively, irrespective of viewing format. This was because I took cues from the way broadcast television works around its inability to transmit the breadth of captured information. Drawing on the medium's treatment of these areas, I employed features like heightened foley sound, crushed blacks, and broadcastable colour palettes, to build scaffolds from which intensity could be structured into the film.



Fig. 4:5
Sentences appearing as type. Although the potential for repeated viewing partly addresses the issue of content being too much to take in on first viewing, these two sequences probably push the envelope a fraction too far. Because of the pace of the scenes, one has to focus on either the writing or the action. The competing demands of both are effective on a large screen where scale affords a breathing space. However, when compressed to the size of a video screen, the multiple information feels too panicked.



Fig. 4:6 Early shrine experiment using models to block in a Flash animation. The first shrines were trialed using tracking sequences, but these were later replaced by blue-screened film shots embedded into layered drawings.

Perhaps the most time consuming experiments in the film concerned the designing of the shrines. The problem of how to translate into visual structures, the notion of a chorus, that provides a passive space in an unfolding narrative (ballad), proved complex and challenging. Stylistically the shrines needed to be in concord with, but differentiated from, the iconography of the story. Examples and commentary on these experiments can be viewed in appendix 5: *Shrine experiments*.

In the end I used references to the shape of an arch employed in the set of Sam's bedroom panels (figure 4:7), and ornamented it with funerary sentinels. A selection of these images appears in the exhibition of work accompanying this thesis and as prints within the exegesis. I feel these designs are particularly effective because they are in subtle concord with the audio design that accompanies them in the film. This sound mix samples the two main musical themes of the film, the ecclesiastical *Behold the Bridegroom Cometh* and the darkly personal, and more contemporary *Anchor Me*. The shrines lift ecclesiastical references and weave them with themes of enigma, theatricality, and spatial compression. They are at once simple and complex images, embedded, on close inspection, with a range of secondary iconography, including references to the character inside them and subtle changes in the pose and nature of the statues that flank them. Inside the proscenium arch of the shrines we see the central characters of the narrative, the *dramatis personae*, dislocated from their normal space at the opening of a narrative and now placed out of dramatic context but within the stylistic flow of the unfolding narrative.



The experiments and outcomes involved in the shrines draw attention to an over-riding challenge that faced the film. How does one, in discussing a boy's world, divided between widely different cultures, interpret this as stylistic and narrative devices in a story? In other words how can one translate cultural dislocation into the look and structure of a narrative?

If *boy* has a strength, I believe, it is in how the film's design answers this question. The multiple dimensions orchestrated to bring into stylistic concord, the contrasting themes of dislocation and ecclesiasticism, have been a huge and creative challenge. Sound, image, rhythm, and type have all been used to translate these almost antithetical profiles of Sam's world.



Figure 4:7
Images showing the construction of Sam's shrine.
A glazed watercolour and tissue-paper painting of a detail from a Gothic revival stone portico (*above left*), was overpainted with a landscape of the open road. This image was imported into *photohop*, where it was veneered with a transparent layer of grass and ivy leaves (*top*). The final plate (*above right*), shows Sam as a child embedded into shrine with four layers of funerary flowers and statuary, and a camera lens at the apex of the image.

These areas of the film have been worked in relationship to each other to bring contrast into a strange and opulent concord. This concord appears in both the look and structure of the narrative. In pursuing this convergence, richness has become a feature of the text and the pursuit of this value will travel forward with me into future creative research.

new horizons

new creative and analytical research growing from the thesis

The story of this film began one afternoon in the autumn of 1997 as my partner and I sat on the porch of the Okororie Hotel. We were drinking tea and eating sandwiches. In the quiet light a boy rode past us on a bike. He will never know the impact that moment, frozen from a journey he has no doubt forgotten, had on this thesis. It was a movement that sketched a horizon that took years of research to reach.

Horizons are strange things. They are sometimes perceived more by chance than by design. A discussion of pathways forward from this thesis is something similar. While it might sound impressive to state that experiments with sound, iconography and the pace of type are the main reasons for further experimentation in the medium of film, that would not be the truth.

In the opening to this exegesis, I said that I was a storyteller. My father was a storyteller and I am moved and fascinated by the power of a story to present and affect the human condition. Okri (1997) suggests, “*A good story keeps on growing*” (p. 119). Perhaps this might also be said for a storyteller.

Storytelling is not just narrating information. The verb to weave, so often used to describe the process, is a perceptive one. Many threads are brought forward and then momentarily hidden from the narrative. Every mystery and every revelation is part of a pattern. It is the

desire to find and construct patterns that lie at the core of further research in this area.

While there will continue to be scholarly publications and keynote addresses coming out of this thesis¹¹, it is the challenge of making stories in more powerful ways that is the greatest motivation for my work.

My new feature film will extend the investigation into methods of storytelling, specifically the use of directional flow and blended colour palettes, and how these might be used to bring cohesion to a text heavily saturated with imagery.

Between September and December 2004, I was approached by several production houses in the United States and Europe requesting information about up-coming scripts for feature films. I am currently working with Richard Bever, Creative Executive of *Andrew Lauren Productions* (New York) and the *New Zealand Film Commission*, to develop a new feature film, scheduled for production in 2007.

The film is untitled at the present stage and still in a state of narration. However, a working thumbnail of its content is as follows:

¹¹ I am currently in the process of writing a book on the social and architectural history of the New Zealand public toilet. Five more oral histories have been set up for interview for the Alexander Turnbull library.

Research on contemplative and divergent thinking as a method for creative problem solving is an ongoing interest. Among the keynote addresses influenced by findings and readings in this present research are:

Ings, W. (2004). *Value by Performance*. Keynote address and paper presented at the Teacher Education Forum of Aotearoa New Zealand. Biennial Conference, 5-7 July, Auckland College of Education. http://www.tefanz.org.nz/tefanz_prog_mon.htm

Ings, W. (2004). *Trading Beyond Experience, Design Teaching as an Intimate Act*. Keynote address and paper presented at the INTAD Conference, 1-19 April, Brisbane. <http://www.intad.asn.au/conference/trading%20beyond%20experience.pdf>.

Ings, W. (1998). *Separation and Divorce: the State of Creativity in Technology and Design Education*. Keynote address and paper presented at the Technology New Zealand Education Conference April 14-16, Wellington. <http://www.tenz.org/proceedings/Keynote3WI.shtml>



thumbnail narrative

1941 The early part of the story concerns two conscientious objectors who eventually succumb to pressure from their community and families and go and fight in the Second World War. One is European and one is Maori. The men work as fencing contractors on the steep, mist-shrouded hills of the King country, and although one is married, they are deeply connected (one senses their friendship may be deeper than 'cobbers').

It is early morning and the fog hangs heavily in the valley. The world is silent except for the drone of a distant vehicle making its way across a landscape of mud and stunted trees. Eventually the car stops and a woman and two children get out. The eldest child, a boy, has a black eye and his face is swollen. He stands separate from his mother and sister and stares at his father with sullen anger. The boy has been beaten up at school by the local children because his father has refused to enlist like other men in the district. The child's mother is angry. There is an argument and the woman eventually leaves with the two children.

The incident is obviously significant because the next day the two men sign up at the local borough council offices. Shortly after they visit the Maori man's Nanny. She has warned her nephew not to join the army because she can foresee his death on foreign soil. She is a deeply religious woman. When the two men leave her homestead, she stands on the porch and wails the hymn *Abide with Me* in Maori. She is crying.

When the men arrive in Europe, both want to come home as they realise they have made a terrible mistake. However, the European becomes a hero as an army wrestler, because of his ability in the friendly sports rounds the British, Australian and New Zealanders have while in training camps. When he beats the British contender in a match in London, his success gets caught up in the propaganda machine of the time and he is made a hero of the newsreels coming back to New Zealand.

Both men try to persuade the army to send them home, and in doing so, raise the ire of their commanding officers who accuse them of being cowards and buggers. Despite continued attempts to have their involvement in the war reconsidered, they are eventually posted to Alamein in 1942 and the wrestler's mate is killed next to him in a bloody and graphic exchange of gunfire. Crying in disgust, the wrestler peels off his army uniform in the trench and naked, carries his cobbler's body out into the gunfire. Amongst the smoke and shouting he sings *Abide with Me*. The enemy who recognise the hymn do not shoot at the strange sight.... the wrestler is shot in the back by a commanding officer.

When the wrestler is sent back to New Zealand [wounded] he is given medals but his protest against the war is covered by the army's assertion that he was shell-shocked. He is put in a psychiatric hospital where years later, he dies alone.

Fig. 4:6.
Indicative still from the opening sequence in the film.
A group of small, masked, winged children, are running through the shorn off stubble of a maize field. There is a storm on the horizon... billowing cloud through a damaged sky. Below it the land is still. The children are playing around a homemade high jump. A man approaches the group and grabs one child, pulling her mask off. When he realises he has made a mistake, he goes on to another, who he identifies as his son. He drags the boy inside and the other children follow them down the hillside in a lonely procession. Inside the lounge, under the watchful eye of a large, framed newspaper photograph of his grandfather hanging above the fireplace, the boy is made to wrestle his older brother. We discover it is the boy's eighth birthday party... he loses the match and is humiliated.

1952 Although the wrestler's son knows the truth, he only wants to believe the image of his father as the war hero. As an adult now, every year he marches in the memorial parade wearing his father's medals. He tells people that this old man was killed in battle.

He hangs above the mantle piece in his house, a full-page newspaper print from the 1940s of his father holding the wrestling trophy in front of a crowd of cheering soldiers. He belittles his own sons for never being the men their grandfather was. He makes them train as wrestlers in the small town where they live. Yearly they represent their school in matches, and march behind their father in the ANZAC parades.

The core narrative of the film grows out of these events.

They background the film's main narrative that concerns the wrestler's youngest grandson. The story is essentially about the boy's fight against the domination of his father.

1964 The wrestler's grandson is a popular boy at school. He is admired by his peers and comfortable in his position as a prefect and talented sportsman.

When this section of the story opens, he is required to represent his secondary school in a wrestling match. Every year his older brothers have won the event for the school, and his predicted continuance of this success seems assured. The school has its hopes pinned on him.

About this time a fifth-form girl arrives from another school. There is some discussion about her background and eventually the boy's girlfriend finds out that the new girl is an unmarried mother, who is attempting to make a fresh start at a new school. The new girl and her baby, board with a woman in the town. The woman has fostered the young girl, but it is clear that she is trying to secure custody of the baby.

The unmarried mother is treated very badly by the people in the community, including the boy's ex-girlfriend and her peers. They label her as a slut.

One day, before a physical education class at school, these girls set the young mother up. They fail to pass on to her a note about bringing her swimming costume for the next day's class. The next morning, when the swimming instructor sees the girl without her gear, she reprimands her. The boy's girlfriend and her peers however, appear to come to the rescue and loan the new girl a spare swimming costume.

It is white.

The class begins its swimming lesson and boys in the class constantly harass the young mother. They have been fed rumours about her easy promiscuity and think that the attention is a kind of joke. They swarm around her in the pool like predators and make clumsy grabs for her legs. When the young mother, frightened, eventually tries to leave the pool, she discovers the wet swimming costume, being white, has become nearly transparent. She sinks back down in the pool ...trapped.

At the end of the class, when the teacher insists that the girl and final stragglers get out and change, the other students, who are in on the joke, stand around the changing sheds watching.

When she eventually pulls herself out of the water, the young woman does not call for a towel. She looks down at her feet then defiantly up into the eyes of the teacher. Then she walks down the length of the pool seemingly naked, and through the gaggle of girls outside the changing shed.

The incident causes the boy to criticise his girlfriend and her friends. The incident acts as a catalyst to the break-up of their relationship.

Over the following days, the boy and the young mother become closer. In the world of 1960s small town New Zealand, the girl's unflinching endurance of a pariah-like status, causes the boy to rethink his constant compliance with his father's dreams.

One afternoon, they visit the boy's aunt [who has never married but has an assortment of elderly (paying) gentlemen friends]. While he is visiting, the boy answers the door and finds his form teacher calling, with a bunch of flowers.

From his aunt the boy finds out that his grandfather was somebody very different to the myth his father has created. His aunt gives him a pile of letters his grandfather [the wrestler] wrote asking that the family come to visit him in the psychiatric unit.

They never did.

The letters try to explain why the man walked into the gunfire, and how in dying he thought that that he might be allowed to fly for a moment above the chaos. In so doing he could carry his dead cobbler into the light.

Shattered, the boy rides out to the derelict hospital. Here he finds only empty rooms and broken windows. His search through the building is shadowed by the image of a small, masked child with broken, strap-on wings. [The child from the opening of the film]. This child appears fleetingly in the empty corridors and neglected rooms.

There is a flickering anachronistic scene of the old man sitting alone with afternoon tea. He is surrounded by a Christmas tree and presents, and is waiting for a family to arrive. He hears a car. He stands hopefully and walks to the window. He sees the car pull up and a family get out. They walk towards the ward but then turn and enter another part of the hospital.

He closes the curtain and sits down again in his chair.

The scene fades.

When the boy returns home, he confronts his father.

He is hit violently around the head with a belt and is sent to bed. In the corridor leading to this room, the same small, winged child stands... watching. It turns and follows the boy down to his room.



Fig. 4:7
Stills from documentary footage of
soldiers in Alamein 1942.
[New Zealand Film Archive]

In the weeks that follow, the boy's new girlfriend encourages him to continue training for the high jump in secret. During this training their relationship grows. He talks about his grandfather and the feeling of flight when he jumps, about breaking away and being lifted up into the light.

On the day of the inter-school sports competition, the boy enrolls for the high jump, in defiance of his father and his form teacher's wishes. However, he is not allowed to compete and is brought back to the hall where the wrestling matches are in action. His ex-girl friend and his brothers help the boy change and he is ushered unwillingly into the ring.

The match starts but as it progresses, the shouting and abuse of his father and the crowd cause the boy to stop fighting and he is continually thrown to the floor. As the crowd screams, he stands up again and again, stares straight at his father. Finally, he peels off his wrestling uniform.

There is silence.

Wearing only his shorts he walks past them... out of the hall... and begins to run across the front of the school, towards the high jump event. The small winged child drifts enigmatically behind the onlookers.

His young mother, still out at the high jump, along with a few other marginalised students, sees him coming and although the event has finished, she takes the pole and places it at the highest notch on the frame... far above the winning jump. The supervising teacher tries to stop her, but the boy has begun a run up. Amidst the cheering of these few supporters he runs ...and jumps. The film ends with a frozen frame of his body clearing the pole... in the gritty, texture of the shot, we can see that he has grown wings. The frame is dissolved by light.

director's notes

The main body of the story is set in the late 1960s, although the graphic style is much more contemporary. The film moves in an almost hypnotically directional flow, like a cross between the grace of a good music video and the flickering staccato of old Movietone newsreel footage.

The opening sequence of the children playing uses a square frame, and imagery is desaturated and grainy. The movement is jilted.

The sequences from the 1940s may be black and white or graded so that colour is reminiscent of the footage returned from Europe on coloured showreels of that period. It is slightly bled, unstable and grainy like a fading watercolour. (Fig 4:7)

The sixties sequences may be graded like the hand-painted black and white photographs of the period and action will often be accompanied by antithetical pop and country music from opening years of the decade. Experiments setting silence against climax, the use of melodic sound tracks over abject content, and the use of directional flow, will be extended from research developed in *boy*.

in closing

This has been a project that has taken six years to complete.

The exegesis uses nominated areas and experiments to contextualise the film. It also explains the methodology used to facilitate the level of creative experiment involved in the work.

The document focuses on two features of the work, the structural and aesthetic influence from selected television narrative music videos and advertising, and the development of typographical treatments, from a consideration of an anti-language.

The film itself of course, contains far greater breadth of experimentation than what is presented here. However, if I was to cover all levels of experiment, this document would be many times its current size and could appear to eclipse the importance of the film as the primary site of research in this thesis.

This exegesis should therefore, be read in relationship to the accompanying exhibition of artifacts and images, and cross-referenced to screenings of the film.

So now the thesis closes. It was motivated by a desire to research and develop a new way of telling a story. All experimentation within it has served that primary concern. Storytelling has been both the project's method of development and its primary outcome.

Okri (1997) said,

A great challenge for our age, and future ages, is to do for storytelling what Joyce did for language- to take it to the highest levels of enchantment and magic; to impact into story infinite richness and convergences; to make story flow with serenity, with eternity (p. 111).

There is a truth in this,

...this convergence and richness and enchantment...

It is the power that drove this research and what will lead it on to new horizons...

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This is research that reaches outwards...

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there is no end.





appendices

- The bogs: an historical and legal overview*
- Bogspeak*
- Oral histories*
- Filmography and script*
- DVD*

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