

*This exegesis is submitted to Auckland University of  
Technology for the degree of Masters in Art and Design.*

**ABSTRACT REALITY:  
THE ALIENATING GAZE**

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

‘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 in the acknowledgements’.

### **Abstract**

This is a visual arts project consisting of 20% exegesis and 80% practical work. My work explores the visual possibilities of using the digital accumulation of data to convey socio-political concepts in relation to the surveillance of the individual in modern western society. The nature of surveillance is investigated with reference to Michel Foucault's metaphorical use of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon in describing the organization of society in the modern nation state. My critical interest lies in the intrusive aspect of surveillance in regard to the privacy of the individual and the concomitant sense of alienation and disempowerment. The concept of 'abstract reality' has been developed to describe the nature of the surveillance of the individual in the modern nation state.

## Introduction

This visual arts project is part of a progression in research practice and theory that reflects an interest in the ability of minimalist practice<sup>1</sup> to convey political or socio-political meaning. The exegesis discusses the development of the three bodies of work that culminate in the final presentation, and includes examples of past work. This chronological style reflects the heuristic approach taken as the research progressed from the background work to the thesis outcomes. I found heuristics, combined with Donald Schön's methods of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, best enabled me to critically evaluate both the practical work and the contextualisation as the research progressed.

Initially the exegesis explains how the first of these three bodies of work places the style of the practical work within the field of minimalist practice, and outlines the beginnings of an ongoing interest in socio-political concerns.

The nature of the second body of work and the following reflection is then explained in Chapter Two. This reflection resulted in a close reading of Peter Halley's writings that made me aware that the underlying concerns in my practice stemmed from the nature of some aspects of the Information Society. Extrapolating from Peter Halley's view of the organization of modern society, the concept of an abstract reality, that is, the all-pervasive surveillance of individuals, was developed.

Following on from this there is an analysis of the nature, purposes and effects of surveillance in the modern nation state. This analysis of surveillance is informed by Michel Foucault's metaphorical use of

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'minimalist practice' to describe a manner of making art that results in the work resembling minimalism when in fact it is not, as it is based on or contains a referent. Such works are known as 'homologies', homologous meaning 'having a related or similar position or structure'. (Collins Concise Dictionary and Thesaurus 2000)

Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. For the purposes of this project I have concentrated on the more sinister aspects of this abstract reality, with a view to the work questioning the issues raised in the exegesis.

The exegesis then examines the work of several artists whose making arises out of what Daniel Buren refers to as a 'political consciousness'. I see the work of these artists as validating my making and providing a contextual basis for my project.

The final chapter outlines some of the processes involved in the making of the final presentation including the use of colour which came to be an important research aspect of the making.

The project is comprised of 80% practical work and 20% written exegesis. A CD with the exegesis text, images and full visual documentation of the final presentation will be included for the final library copy of this project following final editing.

## Chapter One

An interest in minimalist practice and statistics arose while studying the ethnic makeup of the population of New Zealand.

I was interested in the multicultural nature of a population in what is recognised as a bi-cultural society. This necessitated research into the history of the New Zealand population in terms of ethnicity from pre-European times through to the present day and beyond. The final work was based on information to be had on population projections to 2050. The title of the show was *'Time Stills'*. Figures in relation to the percentages of ethnic groups making up the New Zealand population over time were obtained from the Statistics New Zealand website and the Auckland Research Library. The works, each 1.6 metres tall, were minimal and inert in appearance, their formal nature also borrowing from Colour Field painting and Hard Edge painting. They had that 'aloofness' of which Hans Haacke speaks in regard to minimalism.

In 1984 Haacke said in an interview with Yves-Alain Bois, Douglas Crimp and Rosalind Krauss:

As you see, one can recycle "minimalism" and put it to contemporary use. I admit I have always been sympathetic to so-called minimal art. That does not keep me from criticising its determined aloofness, which, of course, was also one of its greatest strengths. (Berger, 1997 p 51)

This aloofness of which Haacke speaks can be interpreted as the formal, detached or remote nature of minimalism, the same description being aptly applied to much of what is referred to as minimalist practice. Artists who follow minimalist practice produce works based on referents without representation. Without access to the referents the

viewer may see the works as minimalism<sup>2</sup> or modernist abstract art,<sup>3</sup> or the work may be open to a variety of interpretations. In this sense, the works can be described as aloof as in the interpretation above. This was the nature of the show '*Time Stills*', (Fig 1, Fig 2) only the title providing a means of access to an understanding of the socio-political nature of the work.

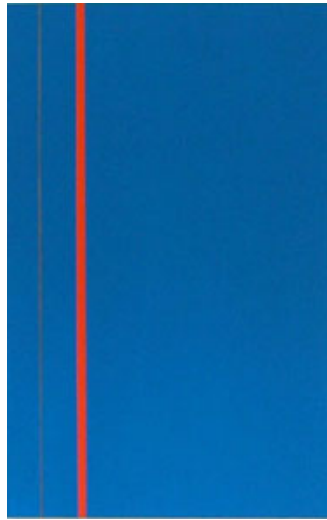


Fig. 1. Clare Matheson. *Timestill II*. (2003)  
Acrylic on linen. 1600mm x 800mm.

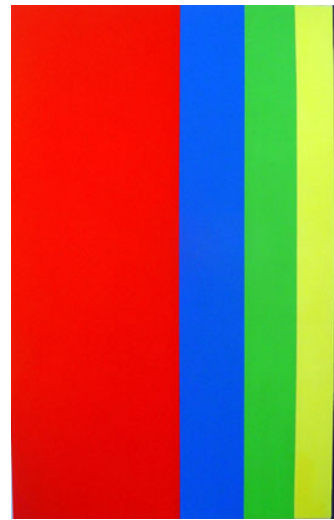


Fig. 2. Clare Matheson. *Timestill V*. (2003).  
Acrylic on linen. 1600mm x 800mm.

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<sup>2</sup> 'A twentieth century art movement or style stressing the idea of reducing a work of art to the minimum number of colour values, shapes, lines and textures. No attempt is made to symbolise any other object or experience...' (Artlex)

<sup>3</sup> 'In the fine arts abstraction refers to art which lacks representational qualities, which does not depict recognisable scenes or objects, which instead works expressively with forms, line, colour for their own sake. Expressed another way, it is art in which form may be understood as independent of content....However, this distancing from things in the world may be a matter of degree...' (Westmacott, 2005 p 1).



## Chapter Two

I referred to the writing of Peter Halley who does not believe that colour, forms and lines communicate with the spirit within us. For Halley, geometric forms in art should possess social meaning. His works have a figurative basis in that they represent, in many cases, the simulacra of modern day society. His colours and designs speak of computer circuitry, cells and prison cells, communication lines and conduits.

Wanting to place my work in a contemporary social context, in April 2005, I mounted a show that was entitled '*The Lay of the Land*'. (See Appendix I for complete documentation of this exhibition) This body of work was a commentary on New Zealand in wider socio-political terms than the earlier one. Statistics that covered a variety of concepts such as conservation, immigration, age distribution and land cover were used as a basis for the project. Three of the pieces followed the same formal process as earlier works. (Fig. 3.)



Fig 3. Clare Matheson. *Non-invariant I*. (2005).  
... Acrylic on board. 1000mm x 800mm.

Then, because some of the groups of statistics did not lend themselves to this process easily, I investigated other formal processes to

accommodate them. This resulted in minimalist/colour field paintings as triptychs. (Fig. 4., Fig. 5.)

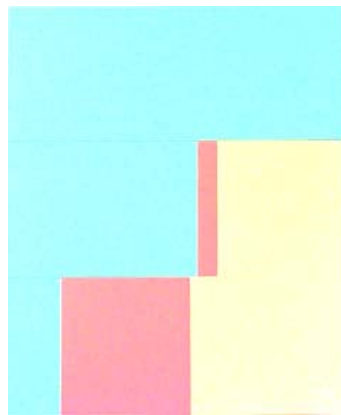


Fig. 4. Clare Matheson. *Diminution I*. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1200mm x 1000mm.

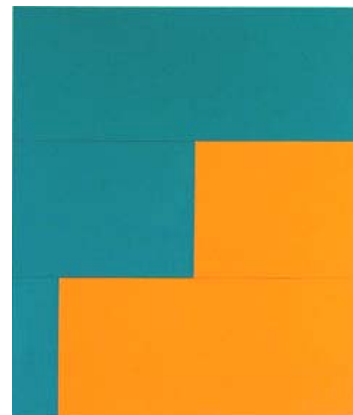


Fig. 5. Clare Matheson *Diminution II*. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1200mm x 1000mm.

As I reflected on these two works I saw that they could be perceived by the viewer as having a sense of calm which belied the nature of the statistics on which they were based. They were based on statistics that signified the steady diminution of New Zealand's endemic bird life and fish species in our coastal waters. I wanted the perception of the viewer to be more open to an interpretation of the works being based on precise statistics that reflected a matter of concern. In order to signify a sense of anxiety and to indicate more clearly the notion of percentages, I investigated dividing some of the boards into one hundred segments of equal size. This enabled me to distribute the colours indicating the percentages of the different variables around the board, intermingling as opposed to being laid on the board in isolated blocks. The confusion and dispersion of colours could possibly be seen to reflect anxiety. Colour fields became 'mini' colour fields and each segment was defined within a ridge that was a product of the making. The ridges came about as the result of using a sealer along the edges of the masking tapes before applying the paint. When the tapes were removed, slightly raised ridges of paint enclosed each one percent. Each percentage could be seen as a discrete piece of information or statistic. (Figs 6 & 7.)

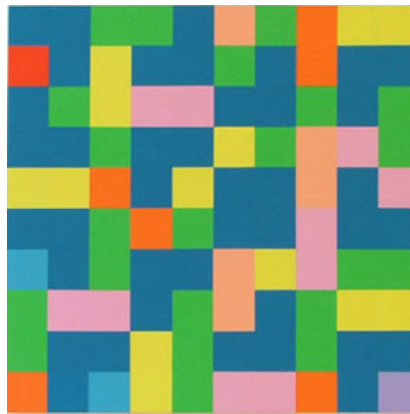


Fig. 6. Clare Matheson. *Universal Set* .(2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm

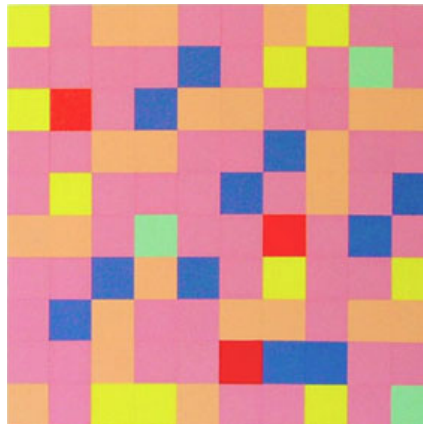


Fig. 7. Clare Matheson. *Subset I*. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm.



Fig. 8. Detail showing ridges.

As I reflected on this show I asked myself several questions. Why was I interested in basing my work on statistics? What did the ease of accessing such a wide variety of statistics, often based on personal

information, imply? What was the actual basis of my work to date? What were my concerns?

I found that the answer to these questions was that my practice was leading me into an investigation of the highly technological Information Society in which we live. My concern lay in the vast amount of personal information that could be accessed by the state, private corporations and others. I was concerned as to what ends this personal information could be used by persons unknown, possibly without the consent of the individual to whom the information belonged.

Changing my medium, I introduced other geometric shapes in order to investigate whether other formal processes might be more suited to my research which was based on a visual exploration of the presentation of data. I had been using highly saturated acrylic opaque paints, largely in contrasting tones, in order to clearly differentiate the different subsets of statistics within each work. I now experimented with translucent paints, incorporating shapes such as the circle and oval that could also be worked out in percentages. (Fig. 8., Fig. 9.)

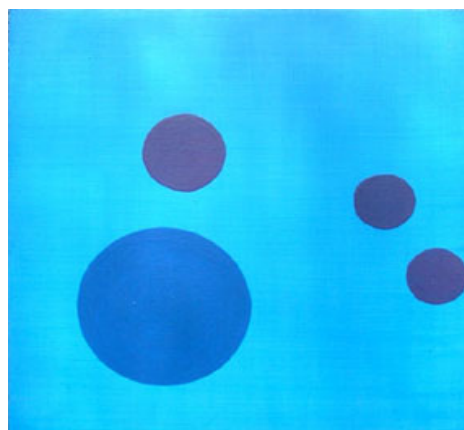


Fig. 8. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2005).

Acrylic on board. 100mm x 100mm.



Fig. 9. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2005)  
Acrylic on board. 100mm x 100mm.

When I analysed these pieces I did not see the method of using curved geometric shapes as effective as the polygons I had used previously. Polygons could be arranged in a manner that resulted in the whole surface of the board being covered, the total sum of the shapes adding up to one hundred percent. The curved shapes, unless I embarked on some extremely complicated mathematical manoeuvring, would appear to be floating within the confines of the board. I did not see such an ethereal approach suited to the presentation of precise data. I also found that the translucent paints did not result in a sharp delineation between the shapes, nor did they give the intensity of colour resulting from the use of paints that produced a matt finish. The contrast of, and density of colour was an important aspect of the work as it differentiated between the statistical variables I was using.

I returned to the process of dividing the board into one hundred segments but this time I used a rectangular board, 80cm x 40cm. Again I painted the board in various colours each representing a different variable in a set of statistics.

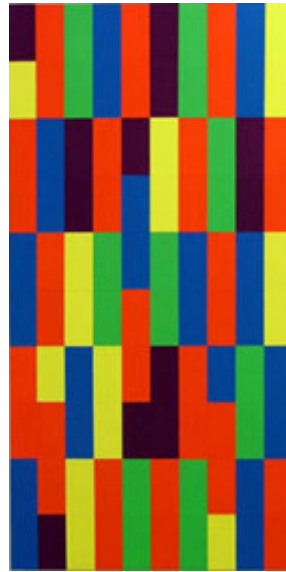


Fig 10. Clare Matheson. *Untitled*. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 800mm x 400mm

As I studied this work and reflected on its effect, I could see an allusion to digitalisation.<sup>4</sup> The nature of the work made me aware that I need not base the work on actual statistics. I could see that by alluding to digitalisation only, the work could have a more conceptual basis and that there could be greater scope for the contextualisation of my work.

I returned to the writings of Peter Halley whose belief that geometric signs in art should be making social commentary, had been the starting point of the last two bodies of work. This time I read him more closely.

Peter Halley uses geometric signs in his work to signify the geometric nature of the world we live in. He has said:

Where once geometry provided a sign of stability, order, and proportion, today it offers an array of shifting signifieds and images of confinement and deterrence...the crisis of geometry is a crisis of the signified. It no longer seems possible to accept geometric form as either transcendental order, detached

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<sup>4</sup>Here, digitalisation refers to the manner in which digital information can be illustrated graphically by series of coloured, equally sized rectangles such as those seen when a computer is defragging.

signifier, or as the basic gestalt of visual perception (as did Arnheim). We are launched instead into a structuralist search for the veiled signifieds that the geometric sign may yield. (Halley, 1998 p 75)

This confirmed in my mind that the formal use of rectangular geometric shapes could be used to signify the vast amount of personal data accumulated by way of surveillance, in the data banks of the modern information society.

## Chapter Three

### The Abstract Reality

Interested in Halley's view of the world, and reflecting on his words, I concentrated on his notion that as individuals we conform to geometries: "...human movement is made to conform to rigorous spatial and temporal geometries" (Halley, 1986, p128).

The question I asked myself was, 'Why do we conform to these geometries?' I came to the conclusion that we conform because, quite simply, we subconsciously or consciously know our behaviour is being monitored. My work with statistics to date had made me aware of the vast amount of personal information that is gathered by the state and private organizations. I saw an overall purpose to that gathering of information. It was to maintain an organised, disciplined and economically sound society.

Extrapolating from Halley's ideas I concluded that we have the temporal and spatial realities, (Halley's temporal and spatial geometries), but we have an abstract reality also. It is the abstract reality that makes us conform, as Halley says, within the spatial and temporal realities. Whereas people may have their own abstract view of the world based on philosophical, spiritual or hypothetical beliefs which may or may not be proven, the abstract reality of which I speak is that of the surveillance of the individual which can be empirically proven. It is non-perceivable but factual. It is all-pervasive, intruding into all aspects of our lives. There is little about our lives that someone, somewhere, does not know about.

It is the awareness that our lives and actions are continually monitored by the abstract reality of surveillance that makes us in the main, well-behaved, self-disciplined citizens of the state. Our manner of living has



been highly conditioned by the society in which we live. It was the nature of this abstract reality that I decided to investigate.

Whereas personal information was once always stored as hard copy, much information today and especially that in regard to surveillance, is now stored in cyberspace. Data related to individuals can be accessed (either legitimately or illegitimately) at any of the terminals through which the information passes. It may be used for a variety of purposes. It may be analysed by sociologists, matched with other sets of data, used for business purposes and possibly sold on to other businesses, used for the purposes of state organizations and services or local bodies, used for espionage or counter espionage, or used by those of criminal intent with a view for example, to fraud or identity theft.

It is in analysing the abstract reality of surveillance and the accumulation of data that we become aware of the ever-increasing amount of personal information that continues to accrue in data banks. The majority of our actions are governed by that abstract reality which is the driving force enabling the modern state to function in the manner it does. I examined the purposes for which information is garnered and handled in the modern nation state. The abstract reality of which I speak could be said to be the hallmark of that state.

## Chapter Four

### The Nation State

The nation state is a comparatively new phenomenon in world history, reaching back only two to three centuries, and "...the overwhelming majority of nation states have been created in conditions of war and all are sustained by possession of credible defence" (Webster, 1995 p 61). New Zealand is no exception to this, as the Land Wars in New Zealand in the nineteenth century would testify.

The nation state provides identity for the subjects residing within it. It organises a society which, in the modern western world, is more often cosmopolitan rather than homogeneous, and does so in regard to economic, social and cultural factors as well as the law. In order to do this the state must gather information pertaining to all aspects of life within its boundaries and this requires an enormous amount of surveillance of the individual. Webster refers to this process as "individuation" (Whitaker, 2000 p 55), a process necessary if the individual wishes to participate in the benefits provided by the state such as medical care or welfare support.

A large part of Frank Webster's writing however, including his commentary on Anthony Giddens' work in regard to the defence of the nation state, now has a slight sense of the passé in the light of events since the attack on the twin towers of New York in 2001. Surveillance may be necessary globally in order to keep the war machines at the ready and in the right places, but surveillance of the individual within the state has now increased and has an even more sinister connotation in regard to the 'enemy', because the enemy may now be domiciled and unnoticeable within the boundaries of the state until he or she takes action. When one considers this new aspect of surveillance today there is a sense of déjà vu. We were at this same place in the days of

the Cold War<sup>5</sup> between the Soviet Union and the West from the late forties to c1989. Fear of the unseen enemy has caused a ratchetting up of surveillance of the individual. As New Zealand passports expire for example, they are now renewed in a manner that meets biometric identification requirements. Security and surveillance at airports and other places where people congregate in large numbers have increased.

### **The Panoptical Society**

Frank Webster (Webster, 1995), Reg Whitaker (Whitaker, 2000) and Murray Laver, Laver, 1989), political scientists, all refer to Michel Foucault's metaphorical use of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon<sup>6</sup> (Foucault, 1978) when referring to the exercise of power and discipline in the nation state.

Foucault speaks of panoptical surveillance as a means to exercise power and discipline in the nation state in the interests of organization and efficiency, "...a kind of laboratory of power..." (Foucault, 1978 p 204) and he speaks of "...the vigilance of intersecting gazes..." (Foucault, 1978 p 217). Our actions are under surveillance, in the form of an invisible gaze, at all times. This results in a form of discipline exerted by the state that causes us to become self-monitoring. We internalise the discipline. As Foucault has said:

It [power] is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting-subjects by virtue of their acting or

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<sup>5</sup> It is relevant to mention the harassment suffered by muslims and the singling out of Iraqis since 9.11.01

<sup>6</sup> The principle of Bentham's Panopticon (1787) was that a prison could be built based on a circular design with cells for the prisoners around the circumference. The lighting was arranged in a manner which enabled the overseer situated in the centre of the building, to see the prisoners at any time without the prisoners seeing the overseer or each other. Prisoners would not know if or when they were being watched.

being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.  
(Foucault, 1989 p 427)

Foucault also makes the point that this power is exercised over free subjects, “and only insofar as they are free” (Foucault, 1989 p 428). This appears paradoxical until we consider the theory of social contract <sup>7</sup> which is generally recognised as the underpinning ideology of the Western modern nation state. In simple terms the theory of social contract can be defined as “...an agreement to cooperate for social benefits especially involving submission to restrictions on individual liberty”.<sup>8</sup> According to this theory the citizens forego elements of their freedom thereby allowing the government to organise the society in which they live for the betterment of their health and wellbeing. One person’s rights are dependent on the concomitant duties of others. If I am travelling north, I must drive in the northern bound lanes. To drive in the southern bound lanes would result most probably in my death and the deaths of others. Our roads and motorways are continually under surveillance. As we are under surveillance as we move around the city/country, so too, are we under surveillance in every aspect of our lives. We are subjected to a ‘multiple gaze’.

Oscar Gandy identifies eleven categories of personal information that are now routinely accumulated in public and private data banks: personal information concerning identification and qualification, finance, insurance, social services, utility services, real estate, entertainment/leisure, consumerism, employment, education, and legal information. (Gandy, 1993, as cited in Whitaker 2000 pp 126-127) When one considers all the various aspects of these categories that are stored in cyberspace and multiplies them by the population of any

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<sup>7</sup> There are a number of versions of the social contract, a term first used by Thomas Hobbes in 1651 in his book ‘*Leviathan*’. After Hobbes, other versions were mooted by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and in the 20<sup>th</sup> C by John Rawls, the first three being based on each author’s opinion of the nature of man in his natural state.

<sup>8</sup> The New Zealand Pocket Oxford Dictionary

given modern state, one has some notion of the vast amount of personal information that is available in data banks.

Then there is all the information that accrues through the use of the cards, accounts, computers, telephones and other technological devices that individuals use and by which the state and corporations can track the lifestyles and purchasing habits of the individual. Much of the information is passed to some organizations voluntarily in return for rewards to the consumer for their loyalty and their allowance of the organization to track their shopping habits. This co-operation on the part of the consumer results in what Reg Whitaker refers to as the “participatory panopticon”. (Whitaker 2000 p 179)

All of this information could be available to anyone who had a mind to, and the computer skills necessary, to seek it out. *The private information that is fed into a computer becomes public information.*

## **Privacy**

This transformation from private to public information gives rise to a popular concern about the privacy of the individual.<sup>9</sup> This is understandable when one considers that surveillance and the gathering of statistics have progressed to the point where few aspects of our lives are unknown to others. The lifestyle of the individual has always been exposed to the observation of others. That is not new. What is new in this abstract reality as Robert Castel says, is that, “... this surveillance dispenses with actual presence, contract, the reciprocal relationship of watcher and watched, guardian and ward, carer and cared” (Burchell, 1991, p 288). The subjects have no knowledge of, or relationship with those who are watching them.

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<sup>9</sup> In a survey conducted by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (2001), 93 percent declared that respect for and protection of personal information was important, 78 percent considering it very important. (Schroff, 2004)

In keeping with this, Assistant Professor Daniel J. Solove of the Seton Hall Law School at Yale University maintains that:

The problem with databases is not our being watched, controlled or inhibited. Nor is it our lack of ownership in our personal information. Rather, it is a problem that involves power and the effects of our relationship with public and private bureaucracy – our inability to participate meaningfully in the collection and use of our personal information. (Solove, 2001 p1461)

If there is truth in the maxim that ‘knowledge is power’ then this “inability to participate meaningfully in the collection and use of our personal information” implies alienation. If personal information becomes the property of someone unknown, and the individual is denied knowledge and participation in the decisions as to what uses their information may be put, this can result in a sense of alienation and disempowerment. Murray Laver summarised the situation explicitly in regard to privacy in the context of information technology: “Privacy is the right of persons to determine how far, for what purposes, and with whom they are willing to share information about themselves...” (Laver, 1989 p115). The survey conducted by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, New Zealand would indicate that this is correct. In the information society the sense of alienation grows as people become aware that their personal information becomes the property of someone else and that they have little control over how it is being used.

One must remember also, that the entering of information into a computer is always subject to human error. There is always the possibility that mistakes can be made in regard to the information supposedly relating to a particular person, which leads to misrepresentation (Craig, 2005).

In New Zealand the crux of the matter in regard to the availability of personal information to others who may be strangers, is whether the

subject under consideration is identifiable or not. The Privacy Act of 1993 applies to ‘personal information’, this being defined as “...information about an identifiable individual” (Fordham p 1).<sup>10</sup> Statistics New Zealand handles information about non-identifiable subjects but it must be remembered that the larger the database the easier it is to extract more useful information. Data banks are cumulative and expansionary: they continually feed on themselves. Statistics New Zealand has a service whereby one can have them pull information from their data banks according to the variables given. A fee is charged for this service. The service may be harmless in itself but it is an example of an organization making profit out of the information given by, or taken from, the individual.<sup>11</sup>

As the majority of personal information is largely stored in cyberspace there is always the danger of it being accessed by hackers or internet spies. There is a burgeoning industry in anti-spyware such as Spybot and Ad-aware, anti-virus programmes such as Norton Anti-virus, and Firewalls aimed at protecting privacy and preventing ‘foreign entry’ into computers.

People have become more concerned about privacy in this age of technological surveillance because the nature of surveillance has changed. It has become largely invisible and far more intrusive. Two major concerns can be identified: the intrusive power of the state and the increasing power of corporations and trans-national corporations.

### **The Power of the State**

Referring back to Webster’s notion of individuation, in New Zealand the state cannot access information about any given individual or group of individuals at any time, or legislate for the matching of data

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<sup>10</sup> Annabel Fordham is employed at the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

<sup>11</sup> Much personal information comes from census records for example, from state services or from returns by employers.

banks in order to learn more about individuals without consultation with the Privacy Commissioner's Office. According to Marie Schroff, the current Privacy Commissioner, seventy data banks controlled by State services have been approved for matching, thirty-three of which are active with more to be actioned. (Craig, 2005) Identifiable individuals may be placed under scrutiny. The process is referred to as 'mass dataveillance'. This process increases the knowledge of, and the power over, subjects. "Such a concern," writes Webster, "usefully reminds us that a 'surveillance society' is at the same time a 'disciplinary society'" (Webster, 1995 p 73).

The attempt in New Zealand to introduce ID cards nationally at the time of the updating of the Land Transport Act of 1998 when the new driver licences were introduced, reminds us that this is the case. The enforced carrying of these driver licences with their identifying photos when travelling no further than to the local dairy or to the beach, could be seen as a move in this direction. Bruce Slane, who was the Privacy Commissioner in 1998, was forceful in expressing his concerns prior to the passing of the Act (Office of the Privacy Commissioner pp 1-2). His concerns however were disregarded and the final draft was released unknown to him. By the time he found out about the release it was too late for him to make a submission. He was powerless to act.

The disturbing element of this story is that this incident took place prior to 9.11.01. The possibility of terrorism was not an element considered at the time. Where a government department has a mind to, it can, and apparently will, merely bypass the safety nets ostensibly there to provide for the protection of the individual's liberty and privacy. It could be said that as the power of the state has decreased in terms of providing utilities such as telecommunications and electricity, as the 'user pays' philosophy becomes more entrenched in regard to public goods such as health and education, and as modern information technology has made vast amounts of knowledge about citizens available, the attention of the state has focussed more on the



disciplinary opportunities provided by close surveillance of its population.<sup>12</sup> I see this resulting in the gradual erosion of the liberty of the individual. In 1928, an American judge, Justice Louis D. Brandeis made the observation that:

Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government's purposes are beneficent... The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding. (Laver, 1989 p 111)

The question comes to mind as to whether social contract, if the theory is actually correct, includes guardianship of the private, personal morals of the individual by the state. There are those however, who would like to see greater guardianship of the morals of corporations in regard to their affect on the wellbeing of the public.

### **The Growth of Corporations**

The question of guardianship becomes a major issue when the liberty of the corporation is compared with the liberty of the individual. Whereas the individual is subject to the law in regard to being mindful of the safety of others, there seems to be a discrepancy between the subjection of the individual and the subjection of the corporation. Richard Grossman, founder of Poclاد, a large chemical industry in the United States asks a highly relevant question: "Why is it - after so many years of so many groups fighting toxic chemicals and winning...that every day more toxic chemicals are produced than the day before?" (Achbar, 2004).<sup>13</sup> There is an anomaly here. The individual may be imprisoned for manufacturing chemicals for personal use but a CEO cannot be imprisoned for allowing their

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<sup>12</sup> In New Zealand citizens are liable to be fined for things as simple as not having their driving licences with them when they drive to the local dairy or the beach, or for taking a cool bottle of wine in their chilli bins when they go to picnic in an Auckland park.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Grossman has become a major activist in the struggle to subject corporations to the principles of democracy.

organisations to make toxic chemicals and sell them to the public at large.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this is simple. A corporation is a legal entity only, and not a person. There is no one to be held accountable. Once a chemical has been proven to have toxic effects on people the State halts its production, and in some cases, after possibly years of legal wrangling, compensation may be paid to the victims. This does not prevent the corporation making further toxic chemicals because the cost of compensation is outweighed by potential profit. As Milton Friedman has said: “Asking a corporation to be socially responsible makes no more sense than asking a building to be” (Achbar, 2004).

There is an increasing awareness on the part of the individual of the ever-increasing influence and power of the corporations, and documentaries such as *‘The Corporation’* (Achbar, 2004) accelerate this awareness.<sup>15</sup> The corporation grew out of the industrial revolution, and the main factors embedded in the ethos of the corporation are the drives for greater production and profit, not beneficence.<sup>16</sup>

Frank Webster, (Webster, 1995) while pointing out the benefits to the consumer of the corporations’ market research through surveillance, cautions that there is a ‘sinister side’ to this same surveillance. (Webster 1995 p 73). Reg Whitaker pursues this vein of thought by quoting from Thomas Hobbes’ *‘Leviathan’* (Hobbes, 1985):

Left to its own devices in the “state of nature” without government, the market is a war of all against all, where life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. (Whitaker, 2000 p 180)

And, Whitaker continues,

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<sup>14</sup> - although they may be imprisoned for fraudulent behaviour in regard to financial matters.

<sup>15</sup> This documentary, which includes people such as Milton Friedman, Noam Chomsky and others, is an exposé of the nature of the corporation.

<sup>16</sup> Hence corporations such as Nike have their products manufactured in countries like China where underprivileged people will work for a few cents an hour rather than starve. Fisher and Paykel (NZ) have recently announced that they are taking part of their manufacturing offshore in order to cut costs.

Today's global economy has freed capitalism from the constraints of the nation state, and transnational capitalism is making the most of its freedom. (Whitaker, 2000 p 180)

The state may focus on disciplinary matters but the primary threat to the individual appears to be more from the corporate world as the trans-national corporations pursue greater production and profit. The state may be well meaning and without understanding but the corporate world relentlessly pursues efficiency and power with the aim of reducing economic risk.<sup>17</sup> This reduction in economic risk is brought about to a large extent by gathering personal information of the individual, and at the expense of the individual.

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<sup>17</sup> Dr Robert Hare Ph D, consultant to the FBI on psychopaths, maintains that if we look at the corporation as a 'legal person', the person known as the corporation has all the attributes of a psychopath; callous unconcern for the feelings of others, incapacity to maintain enduring relationships, reckless disregard for the safety of others, deceitfulness/repeated lying and conning others for profit, incapacity to experience guilt, and failing to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviour. (Achbar, 2004)

## Chapter Five

As it is impossible to perceive society in its totality,<sup>18</sup> the artist can investigate one aspect at a time only. These single aspects can be described as epiphenomena, those elements of the superstructure of society that arise out of the basic phenomenon of the society in which the artist is involved.

The investigation of one aspect of modern society only, was now the focus of my project. As it is impossible to perceive the whole of society objectively, I would concentrate on investigating this one epiphenomenon only, the nature of surveillance.

### Political Consciousness

A number of artists make work that is inspired by a political consciousness. Enveloped by the totality of the society in which he or she lives, the artist is able to investigate only one aspect of that society at a time. These investigations result in the referents upon which some artists' works are based and which contribute to the writing of art history. As Douglas Crimp states:

We need hardly be reminded of the dangers inherent in divorcing art practices from the social and political climates in which they took place... (Foster, 2000 p152)

Crimp cites a passage (Foster, 2000 p 152) written by Daniel Buren in 1968, one month after the student riots in France. In this passage Buren explains the causes behind the “countless traditions, academicisms, countless new taboos and new schools” that have been

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<sup>18</sup> To view society as a whole would require an Archimedean point which is ‘...a hypothetical vantage point from which an observer can objectively perceive the subject of inquiry, with a view of totality. The ideal of “removing oneself” from the object of study so that one can see it in relation to all other things, but remain independent of them, is described by a view from an Archimedean point.’ (Wikipedia)

created in art over time, and explains why they are transient. The artist struggles against the epiphenomena of which he or she is a part and which "...are built on the base that conditions art and is art." These epiphenomena lie on the surface of the substructure and as long as the artist does not touch the base, nothing is "basically" changed. This Buren maintains is "...how art evolves, and that is how there can be art history."

Such an artist is Hans Haacke who constantly challenges the status quo. His work *Voici Alcan* 1983, depicts photographs of two opera productions sponsored by the Alcan Corporation. They are framed in Alcan aluminium. But Haacke included also, a photo of the murdered South African anti-apartheid leader Stephen Biko. The intention was to draw attention to the way in which large corporations present themselves as beneficent to the public, a process known as "perception management", (Achbar, 2004) while they may be making profit at the expense of the deprived or the oppressed. Alcan was supplying the South African government with products that helped sustain that government in its repressive activities. (Buchloh, 2000 p 207) Benjamin Buchloh has said of Hans Haacke:

His work is based on the idea that cultural production and reception have become increasingly subjected to relations and interests of power operating outside the producer's control. (Buchloh, 2000 p 207)

This subjection was illustrated when in 1971 the Guggenheim Museum in New York refused to show Haacke's work *Shapolsky et al Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-time Social System as of May 1, 1971*. The installation, comprised of photographs of rundown tenement housing and including the names of the landlords, some of whom were directors of the Guggenheim, was an exposé of the holdings of the major property companies in Manhattan where the Guggenheim is located. The officials of the museum declared the work to be "muckraking" and not art. "An alien substance," the Guggenheim

director said, “had entered the art museum organism” (Julius, 2002 p 174).<sup>19</sup>

It is the factual specificity of Haacke’s work that makes it so effective. Haacke “...makes every effort to reconstitute all of the contextual aspects of the objects he uses” (Buchloh, 2000 p 228). His works demand a response on the part of the viewer in relation to those contexts.

Whereas Haacke’s intentions are clear to the viewer, Richard Serra’s minimalist practice leaves his work open to a variety of interpretations. Douglas Crimp itemises three components of a materialist critique incorporated in Serra’s work which are,

...his attention to the processes and divisions of labour, to art’s tendency towards the conditions of consumption, and the false separation of private and public spheres in art’s production and reception. (Foster, 2000 p 153)

The making of Serra’s site-specific works is reliant on the work of others. Both the making of the material elements of the sculptures, and the labour required to make the sculptures in their sites, require input by the industrial labour force. They cannot be made in an artist’s studio. These sculptures stand where they are made with the help of industrial labourers, and are made of materials used only for the means of production.

These works, like his earlier pieces such as *Splashing* 1968, in which molten lead was splashed into the right angle of the floor and wall, are not commodities to be bought and placed in private living rooms or reside in gallery spaces.<sup>20</sup> The scale and nature of these site-specific

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<sup>19</sup> The officials of the museum were so affronted by the works that when the curator objected to Haacke not being allowed to show them, he was dismissed from his position.

<sup>20</sup> A notable exception is an installation of works at the Guggenheim Bilbao. Eight rolled steel sculptures are installed in a 430 feet long by 80 feet wide gallery space

works defeat the notion that art should be confined to private spaces, and reveal the constraints placed on art by institutional exhibition spaces, both for the maker and for the viewer.

*Tilted Arc* 1981, incorporated these three components and more. Installed in Federal Plaza, Lower Manhattan, New York, *Tilted Arc* was 120 feet long, 12 feet high, made of Cor-ten steel and tilted at an angle with a 12/1 slope.

Federal Plaza is surrounded by buildings housing such bastions of power as the United States Court of International Trade, and is adjacent to New York City's federal and state courthouses. The sculpture tilted slightly towards the office buildings and the trade courthouses. It divided the plaza into two distinct areas.



Fig 11. Richard Serra. *Tilted Arc*. (1981).  
In *Richard Serra*, Massachusetts: MIT.

That a wide variety of interpretations could be placed on the work, was in fact, spelled out by Judge Dominick DiCarlo, one of those who ultimately called for the removal of *Tilted Arc*:

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designed by the architect Frank Gehry, the installation being opened to the public this year, 2005. (*Man of Steel*, 2005) Serra has said that this is the only indoor space in the world in which he could have made such an installation.

“Could its maker be making a political statement? Perhaps it was a discarded and rusted piece of the Iron Curtain. Or perhaps its author was expressing his views on trade policy. This is the Court of International Trade. Was his iron barrier symbolic of a protectionist viewpoint?” (GSA Art-in-Architecture Program n.d. p 7)

This was the era of the Iron Curtain, the Cold War between Russia and the United States. One interpretation of *Tilted Arc* could be, that as the political Iron Curtain metaphorically divided two worlds, so Serra's work placed site specifically amid the United States bastions of power, literally and metaphorically created a barrier to a view from one side of the fence to another, so to speak.

Or could it be that *Tilted Arc* signified the Berlin Wall? Symptomatic of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall was built by the Soviets in 1961, the aim being to prevent people translocating from the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) that was under the control of the Soviets, to Western Germany. It was a demarcation line that literally separated east from west, but which also metaphorically highlighted the political and philosophical differences between the two. Such interpretations, possibly none of which Serra had in mind, bring us back to Hans Haacke's description of minimalism and minimalist practice as aloof. A variety of interpretations, outside the control of the maker, can be placed on works where the referent is not obvious. This was the nature of my own work.

That Serra was open to the work being interpreted in various ways is indicated by his own words. Dr Michael Delahoyde cites a statement by Serra from Amy Dempsey's *Art in the Modern Era: A Guide to Styles, Schools and Movements*, (2002 p 263):

I want to direct the consciousness of the viewer to the reality of the conditions: private, public, political, formal, ideological, economic, psychological, commercial, sociological, institutional.” (Delahoyde p 1)



But whether Serra had the Iron Curtain or the Berlin Wall in mind when *Tilted Arc* was made is arguable. Following a court judgement that ruled in favour of complaints made about the *Tilted Arc*, it was destroyed in 1989.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, this was the same year in which the Berlin Wall was dismantled as the Cold War drew to an end.

In keeping with Daniel Buren's belief that dangers are inherent in "...divorcing art practices from the social and political climates in which they took place..." we can also examine the motivation behind the work of the Abstract Expressionists. In contrast to critics who have studied the art of this period in terms of aesthetics of action such as Harold Rosenberg, or the formal qualities of the work such as Clement Greenberg, Serge Guilbaut examines "...the political and cultural implications of the period" (Guilbaut, 1983 p 2).

Following WWII a conflict of ideology arose between the USSR and the Western world. Many artists, and others who formerly had been inspired by the ideals of communism, now became disillusioned as the Cold War took hold. In the United States in particular, the extreme left fell into disrepute. The ideals of liberalism, freedom and individualism were trumpeted loudly throughout the United States. The world had witnessed the horrors of atomic warfare in Japan, and as the tensions of the Cold War mounted, so too did the fear of full scale nuclear war.

In their disillusionment, artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko began to make work that aimed at being apolitical and non-propagandist. Centred within the clash of cultures the artists could take no overall objective view. Grasping the concepts of individualism and freedom they made work that was essentially non-representative and highly individual. In so doing, they perhaps unconsciously, allied themselves with the cultural needs of their country:

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<sup>21</sup> As the work was site specific, to remove it was to destroy it.

Because of the avant-garde's self-proclaimed neutrality it [abstract expressionism] was soon enlisted by governmental agencies and private organizations in the fight against Soviet cultural expansion. (Guilbaut, 1983 p 11)

But the political consciousness came through and is perceivable in the works when reviewed today. Expressing their individualism and freedom and aiming at neutrality they may have been, but standing in front of a work by Pollock one can perceive a sense of anxiety and agitation in its making. (Fig. 15) In a similar manner a Rothko work can evoke a sense of disquiet, an ineffable sadness. (Fig. 14) Such perceptions are indicative of Guilbaut's view that their works were influenced by the disillusionment and fears generated by the threats embodied in the Cold War between the two nations whose military armaments included the weapons that could generate a nuclear war. These artists appear to have been greatly influenced by the political scene and social events in which they were submerged. Their works can be seen as products of that scene and those events in which they were involved, and of which they were a part. It may not have been intentional, but they captured the spirit of the abstract epiphenomena of their time: the tension, the insecurity and the fear. In the same manner, I see my work reflecting some of the apprehensions and anxieties that are aroused by some of the more sinister aspects of the abstract reality in the information society. The benefits and advantages of information technology have to be balanced against its ability to create monoliths of power which in turn can result in the alienation of the individual.



Fig 12. Mark Rothko. N° 14 (*White and Greens in Blue*). (1957).  
In *Éditions du Désastre*, Belgium.



Fig 13. Jackson Pollock. *Number 1, 1948*. (1948). In *How New York Stole  
The Idea of Modern Art*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

All of the artists I have mentioned above appear to have had, or have a political consciousness which reflects in their art practice. I have found investigating their work to be invaluable in the contextualisation of my practice, and the investigation has validated my own processes.

## Chapter Six

As my work was a critique of the vast amount of personal data gathered by surveillance in the modern nation state and the resulting intrusion into the privacy of the individual, I continued to investigate methods that could allude to digitalisation, the continual aggregation of data, and the unease that could be felt by the individual in relation to some of the issues raised in this exegesis. Imposed on the highly controlled formal structure of modernist abstract art there could be a critique of the information society in which we live, and from which there is no escape.

Peter Halley employs the geometric to signify the spatial and temporal geometries in which we live. In 1983 he wrote in his *Notes on Painting*:

Even though my work is geometric in appearance, its meaning is intended as antithetical to that of previous geometric art...Informed by Foucault, I see in the square a prison; behind the mythologies of contemporary society, a veiled network of cells and conduits. (Sim, 1998 p 269)

Unlike modernist abstract art or minimalism my geometric shapes would signify the abstract reality of surveillance. This approach to the practical work was affirmed in my mind when at this time I defragged my computer and watched the brightly coloured rectangles pictured on the screen simulating the defragging that was taking place.

In order to signify a vast amount of data, and to increase the possibility of the viewer perceiving the implications and connotations contained in the work, I needed a large number of the boards. I painted each board in a different combination of colours in order to signify the large number of databanks containing various types of personal information.

## The Use of Colour

The use of colour had become an important part of the research. I had found that I disagreed with the words ‘inharmonious’ and ‘dissonant’ to describe the colours I had been using, dissonant meaning ‘not in harmony, harsh-toned, incongruous.’<sup>22</sup> This word came up at critiques in regard to my investigation of different colour combinations and though correct in terms of traditional colour theory I found it difficult to accept. Fig 12 is an example of colour exploration made in 2004.



Fig 14. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2004).

Acrylic on canvas. 1000 x 800mm.

I had investigated the use of colour combinations over time with reference to colour charts and the use of colour in fashion, design, and interior decorating. (Figs 15 - 18) I felt that the use of words such as inharmonious were no longer appropriate in an age where vivid use of colour is such a large feature of our lives through all aspects of the media, and of fashion and decoration. I sought an alternative language to describe my use of colour.

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<sup>22</sup> The New Zealand Pocket Oxford Dictionary

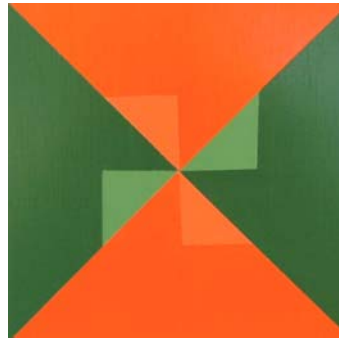


Fig. 15. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2004)  
Acrylic on board. 100mm x 100mm.



Fig. 16. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2004).  
Acrylic on board. 100mm x 100mm.



Fig. 17. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2004)  
Acrylic on board. 100mm x 100mm).

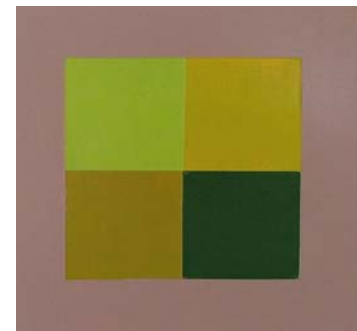


Fig. 18. Clare Matheson. Untitled. (2004).  
Acrylic on board. 100mm x 100mm.

I deliberated on Wassily Kandinsky's comment that "Today's dissonance is tomorrow's consonance" (Crow, 2002 p 1). Referring to books on colour theory I found a statement which precisely explained my attitude to the use of colour and which I regarded as in keeping with Kandinsky's statement.

Can we truly describe these unconventional art forms as disharmonious? I believe that by now we should be abandoning the aesthetic concept of harmony as restrictive. If strident combinations, unexpected chromatic proportions, and violence against traditional taste come together effectively to express dramatic effect, mental disturbance, or the ideological complexities that are part and parcel of the human condition, then it is clear that we must still speak in term of harmony, of all parts converging into an expressive whole. (Grandis, 1986 p 151)

I considered this statement highly relevant to the works I was making. The works were intended to create a sense of ‘mental disturbance’ signifying the alienation and disempowerment of the individual in the surveillance society. I saw my multi-coloured works ‘converging into an expressive whole’. Rather than describing the colours I use as dissonant, I see them as co-dependent, each colour being chosen in relation to its effectiveness in highlighting the effectiveness of the others. I pursued this notion in the making of my final presentation. Each colour is dependent on each of the others to provide an overall effect.<sup>23</sup>

This colour co-dependency is highlighted by the manner in which the colours are distributed around each piece of work. The distribution was worked out on graph paper with coloured pencils, concentrating in the main, on combinations that produce a high degree of contrast or which complemented each other. (Fig. 19) There was no key or set plan to the distribution.

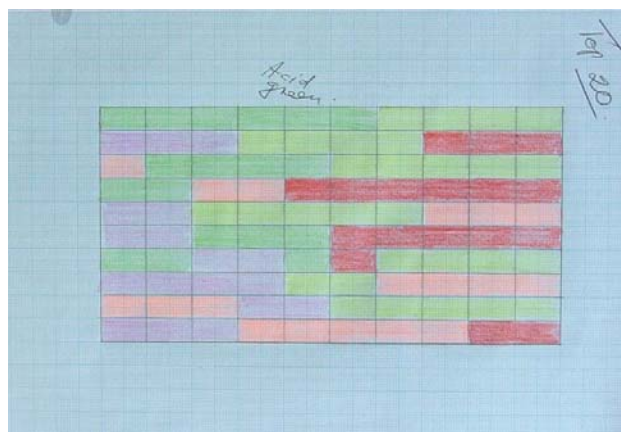


Fig. 19. Sketch on graph paper.

Reflecting on each colour as I worked I aimed at a distribution and combination of colours that would enhance the effectiveness of each. On some of the boards though, I experimented with colours that were

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<sup>23</sup> However, if viewers see the colours as dissonant then that is quite in keeping with what I consider to be the dissonant nature of near total surveillance of the individual which clashes with the concept of individual privacy. The complex montage of colours could be seen as indicative of confusion and anxiety.

more muted and harmonious in order to allow some sets of colours to advance and some recede with a view to producing an illusion of the databanks being non-static.

Having said that, it was not uncommon for me to reflect further on the colours being used as the work was in progress. The paints I used are highly saturated and produce a far more brilliant effect than coloured pencils. Once one colour had been applied to the board I might reflect on it and decide that an orange would be more effective against it by way of contrast than say, the pink I had originally planned. This ongoing process, from the graph to the board, fits with Donald Schön's description of reflection-in-action:

It [reflection-in-action] is closely tied to the experience of surprise. Sometimes, we think about what we are doing in the midst of performing an act. When performance leads to surprise - pleasant or unpleasant- the designer may respond by reflection-in-action: by thinking about what she is doing while doing it, in such a way as to influence further doing. (Bennet p 2)

This process also added an element of excitement to the work in that it was not until the final tape was removed from the last laying on of paint that the total effect could be seen. (Fig. 20) Rather like a potter opening his or her kiln.



Fig. 20. Unmasking the work.



When some of these elongated works were hung together I felt that they alluded to the concepts of which I have spoken, the digital accumulation of personal data in data banks as the result of surveillance.



Fig 21. Clare Matheson. Series of untitled works. (2005)  
Acrylic on board.

Not having to accommodate various percentages allowed me to investigate producing an allusion to the movement of data, the possible perception of the viewer being that the accumulation of data is an ongoing process. I grouped the colours more and extended some of them into longer verticals, signifying the data flowing and grouping together as more and more information was accumulated.

In order to signify change and entry and exit of data, I experimented by leaving the odd segment on a board blank. (Fig 22) On others, one segment of a maverick colour was included signifying human error. (Fig 23)



Fig 22. Clare Matheson. Untitled work.  
(2005). Acrylic on board.



Fig 23. Clare Matheson. Untitled work.  
(2005). Acrylic on board.

## Chapter Seven

### Presentation

In the final presentation I wanted the viewer's consciousness to be open to some of the concepts that have been outlined in the previous discussion and which were embodied in the work, obviously or by implication:

- the endless accumulation of personal data which involves the risk of human error in recording information
- the subjection of the individual to a multiple gaze
- the threat to privacy involved in the gathering and storage of information which can be vulnerable to those with criminal intent
- the diminishing power of the state
- the growth of multi-nationals
- the implication that knowledge is power
- the alienation of the individual
- the disempowerment of the individual
- the threat to the liberty of the individual

I had a large number of individual boards and I wanted to present them in a manner that best allowed the viewer to access some of the notions embodied in the work. Two plans were considered both of which were by way of an installation, rather than having the works attached to one wall.

One plan was to build a three-sided installation with the majority of the works arranged in double rows on each of the walls. (Fig. 24) Some works hanging from the ceiling and others piled on the floor could signify the burgeoning amount of personal data available in cyberspace in our contemporary society. The viewer, standing within the space would be encompassed by the mass of data.



Fig. 24. Clare Matheson. Model of Option I for presentation of works. 2005  
40cm x 40cm x 40cm.

On reflection I decided that something simpler would be more effective. The complexity of an arrangement as depicted above, although appearing interesting visually in itself, left room for the possibility of raising issues or interpretations that might have little relevance to the primary objectives of the project. With its fixed elements in juxtaposition with the floating elements, such an installation could distract the viewer from seeking out the concepts and implications contained in the presentation of vast amounts of personal data.

I next considered making the works into a freestanding sculptural piece which could be accessed from all sides. The boards, each 80cm x 40cm in size, would be arranged and joined together in two blocks. Each block would be three boards high and six boards wide, that is, 2.4m square. The blocks when joined together at one end would form a freestanding right angle. If the viewer stood on the imaginary line that would have formed a triangle, he or she would be encompassed by the work as his or her peripheral vision picked up the works on either side. The eye would travel to the apex of the triangle. The height of the piece would be well above the eye level of the average viewer. This,

combined with the peripheral vision, would make the viewer feel encompassed by the work. This enclosure could create an appreciation of the vast amount of data and a possible sense of entrapment, especially as the placement of the piece was such that the viewer would be confronted by it immediately on stepping out of the lift into the Level Three foyer. This foyer ceiling is much higher than others and would allow for the elevation of the work to be appreciated. The viewers could also move around the work allowing a variety of views of the work. This could better enable them to access some of the issues upon which the work was based. Having said that, because the nature of a foyer is in itself confining, the viewers could not distance themselves too far away from the work. They would be involved with it, and moving into or around the work would enable them to react to the work at a personal level. This would evoke a greater sense of the watcher and the watched – the alienating gaze.

Aesthetically, the colourful front of the piece made up of hundreds of separate segments would signify the notion of this alienating and multiple gaze, while the rugged reverse could signify the more sinister aspects of the infrastructure of the abstract reality. Viewed from the front the work would also appear as a screen, with all the connotations that that word implies.

Because of the vivid use of colour in the works an optical illusion of movement along the edges of the segments could be seen, alluding to the constant streaming of data in and out of data banks. There could possibly be a sense of disquiet accessed by the viewer as he or she was confronted by the mass of seemingly shifting symbols.

The exposed reverse side of the work could be seen as the infrastructure, not just of the work itself, but also of the infrastructure of the abstract reality in the information society. As an enclosed grid it could appear to be holding the personal data in place thereby signifying the nature of the panoptical society from which there is no

escape. This plan went as far as my arranging for a technician to help with the assembling of the piece, but all my former plans or ideas were put aside when the works were all completed assembled together for the first time.

When I laid out all the works in the studio with a view to numbering them all prior to their being joined together to form one sculptural piece, I could see that what I had planned was perhaps too literal, and not necessary. This was the first time I had viewed them altogether and the overall effectiveness of the works was greater than I had anticipated. As I considered the presentation of this visual arts project again, I felt that the works attached to the wall of the foyer en masse would speak for themselves. The concepts described or implied within the exegesis would be just as accessible through a simpler presentation as they would through that which I had previously proposed.

I briefly considered placing them in a different space where a double row of the works would extend 7.6m. This would reflect the never-ending accumulation of personal data, and although this aspect of the project was important, it was not the first principle upon which the project had been based, and the thought was dismissed. My initial interest had been in the vast amount of personal information that is already stored in cyberspace and the ramifications of that particular epiphenomenon. It was important that this particular aspect of the research was paramount. To this end I saw the presentation of the works en masse, thereby signifying a large block of personal digital information, as a return to this first principle. They would form a block of works covering an area 3.2 metres wide by 2.4 metres tall.

This revised method of presentation would highlight the vast accumulation of personal data in the nation state. Using the height of the space to its best advantage the works were arranged in three rows, each row being three works tall on the wall opposite the lift doors. The viewer was still confronted by the installation on stepping out of

the lift on Level Three. The nature of the making and the vivid mass of colours, each of which indicated a particular type of information, would allow the viewer the possibility of perceiving the various concepts which resulted from this accumulation as described in the exegesis, and which were implied by the work.



Fig. 25 *The Alienating Gaze*. Clare Matheson. (2005)

Acrylic on board. 520cm x 240cm.



Fig 26. *The Alienating Gaze*. Clare Matheson (2005)

Acrylic on board. 520cm x 240cm.



Fig. 27 *The Alienating Gaze*. Clare Matheson. (2005)  
Acrylic on board. 520cm x 240cm.



Fig. 28. *The Alienating Gaze*. Clare Matheson. (2005)  
Acrylic on board. 520cm x 240cm.





Fig. 28. The Alienating Gaze. Clare Matheson. (2005)  
Acrylic on board. 520cm x 240cm.

## Conclusion

This project has investigated some of the issues raised by the abstract reality of surveillance in the modern nation state and has concentrated on the more sinister aspects of that concept. It has presented visually a few of the socio-political concerns spoken about today in relation to the abstract reality. The ramifications of surveillance are broad in their reach and this project has examined only those negative aspects that relate to the individual who is subjected to the multiple and alienating gaze. Subjects know they are being watched but often have no knowledge, in keeping with a panoptical society, of when or by whom they are being watched.

There appears to be a need in the information society for some well-formulated ethical guidelines in respect to the gathering and storage of personal and other information. It must be said though, that because surveillance today is so comprehensive and so invisible, it seems unlikely that any ethical constraints could be effectively imposed on this particular epiphenomenon. The artist may highlight concerns as he or she sees them, but as Daniel Buren said, nothing is 'basically' changed.

Having said that, the project has made me aware of the vast nature of the topic I have only just begun to examine. I have not balanced the negative with the positive during the course of this project, and the work and research deals largely with the accumulation of data as it relates to the individual in a very personal and negative manner.

Other projects could stem from this one. A further project addressing the positive effects of globalisation say, against

the negative effects of globalisation could be interesting. Research would then have to address the utopian notion of the peoples of the world united as one 'world family' as opposed to the oppressive and monolithic powers of the trans-national corporations. Such a project could begin by examining the concept that 'knowledge is power'.

One of the greatest benefits arising out of this project for me as an artist, is that my basic interest in the Information Society and its affect on the individual, has aroused an ongoing interest as to how information technology may affect populations globally. Whether globalisation is perceived as a positive process or a negative one depends largely on the viewpoint of the individual. The challenge in practical art terms would be the exploration of the ways to create in my artwork the negatives of a sense of insecurity or conflict or tension, in juxtaposition with the symmetry of the positive aspects to be found in the systems of information technology. It seems that there is inherent in the modern information society, a distinct sense of the paradoxical.

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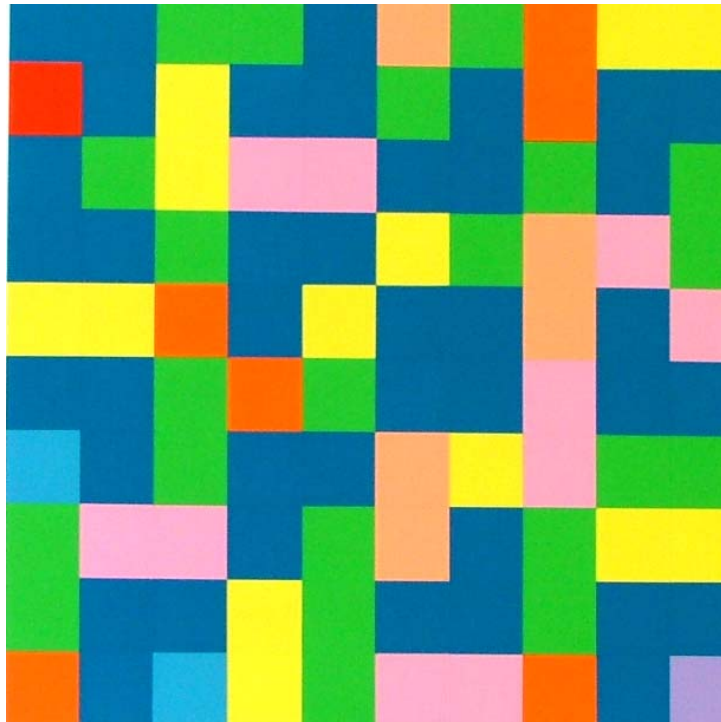
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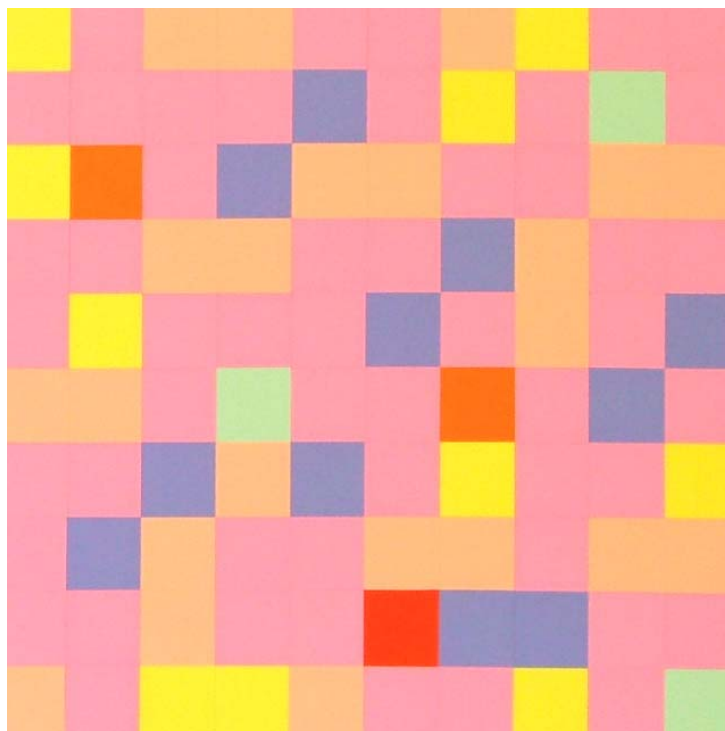
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Appendix I

Exhibition of works at  
PPG Gallery  
April 2005

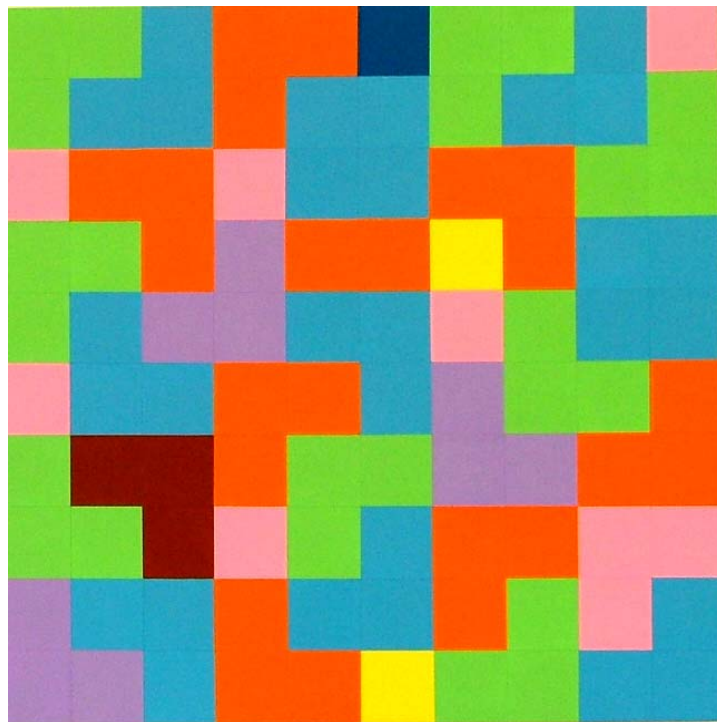


**Fig.1.** *Universal Set.* Clare Matheson (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm.

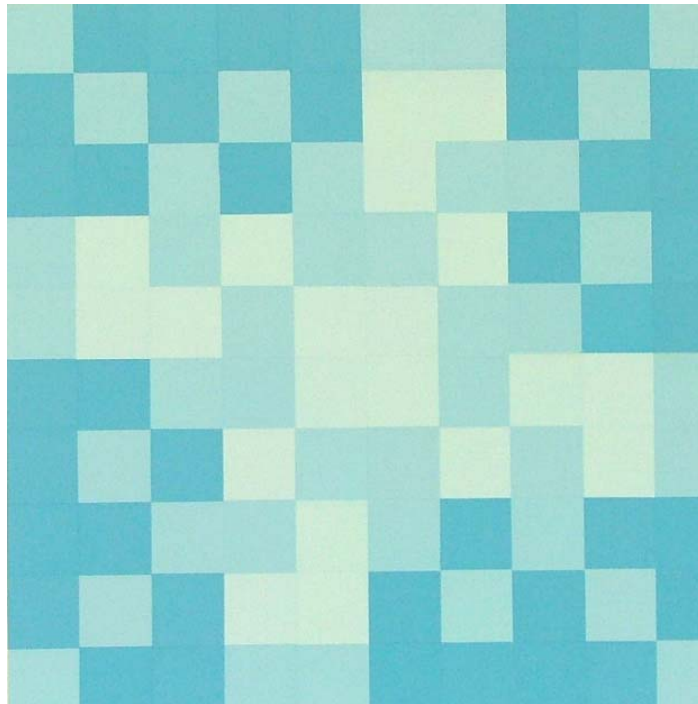


**Fig. 2.** *Subset I.* Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm.

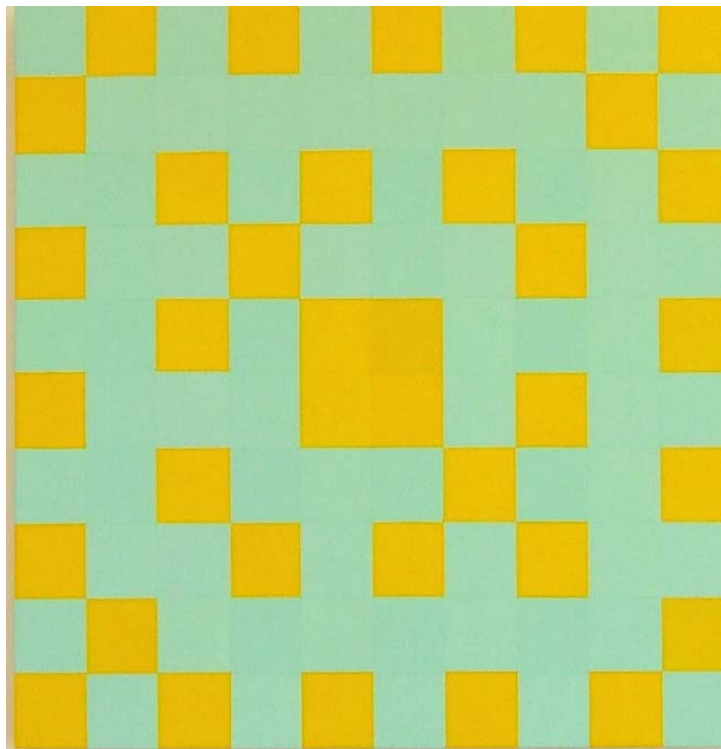




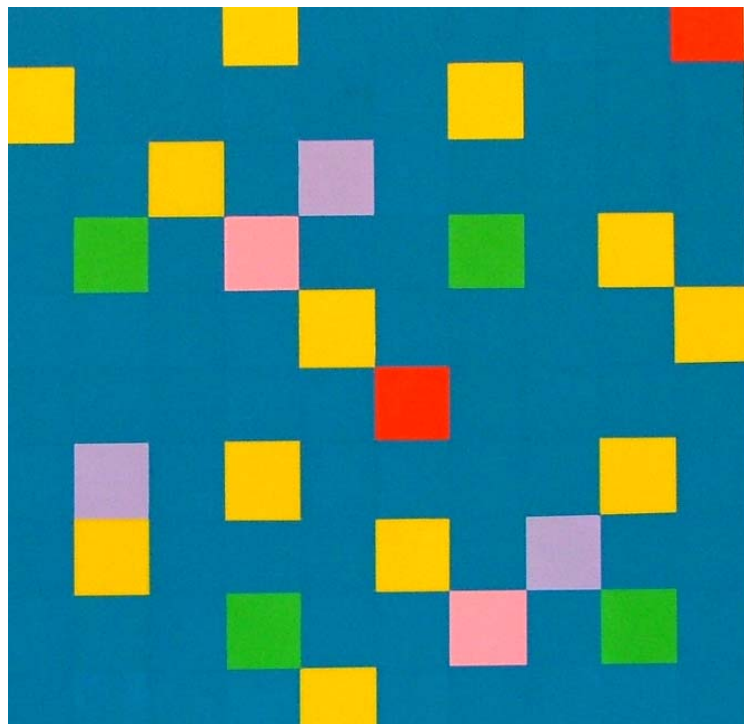
**Fig. 3.** *Subset II.* Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm.



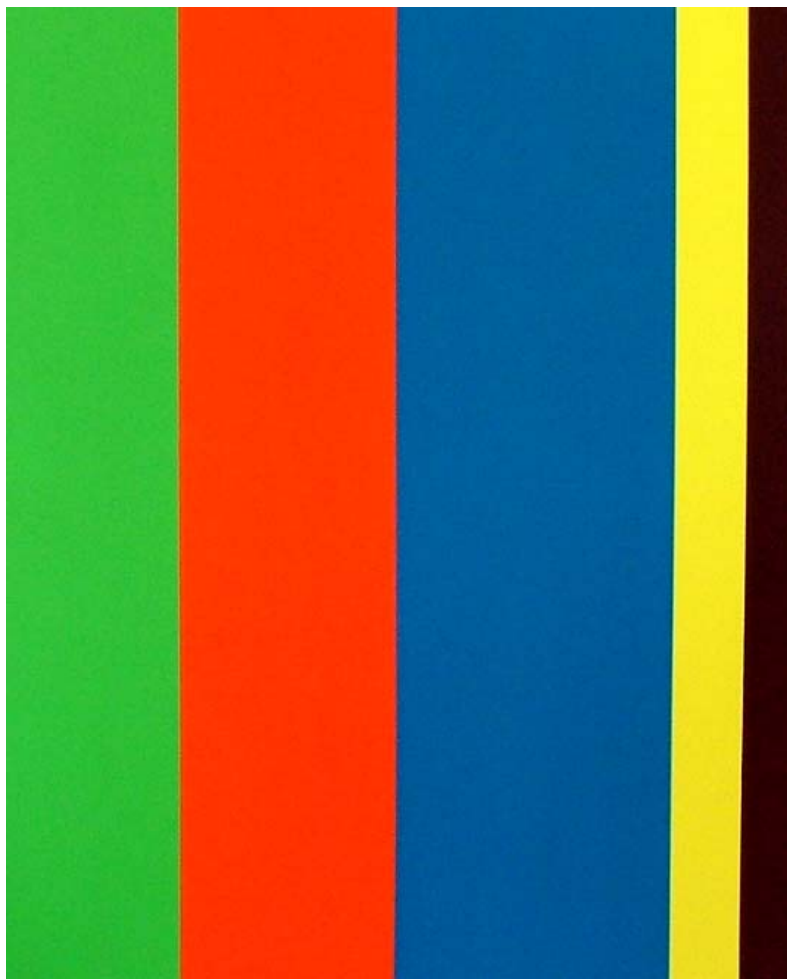
**Fig. 4.** *Sea Level*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm



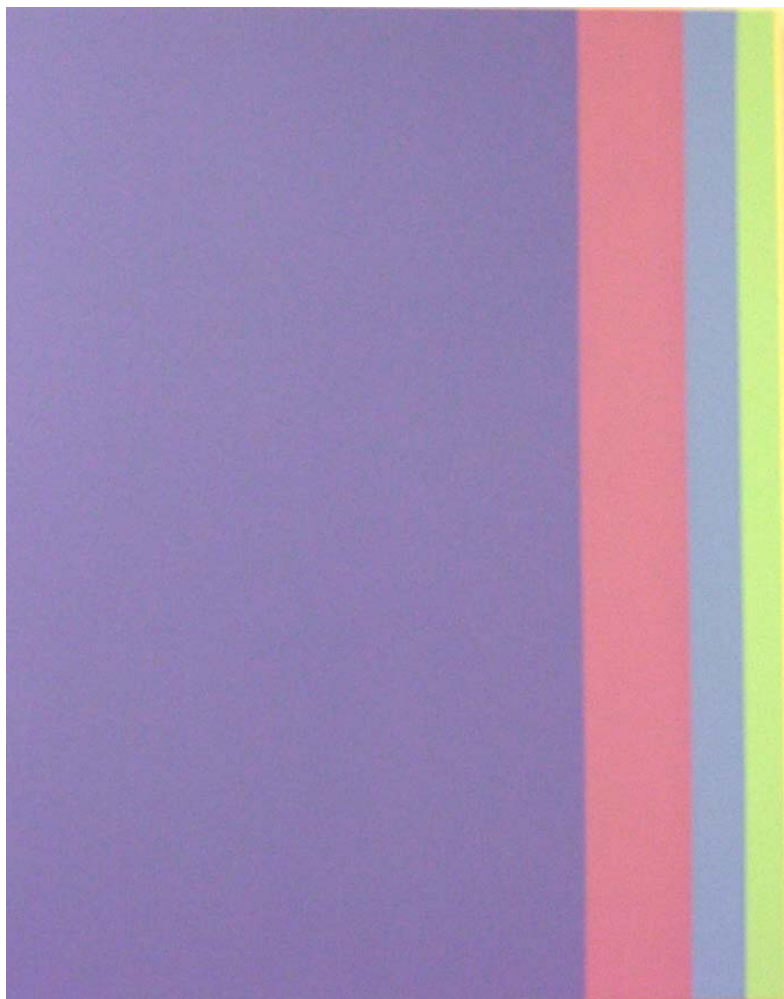
**Fig. 5.** *Translocation*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm.



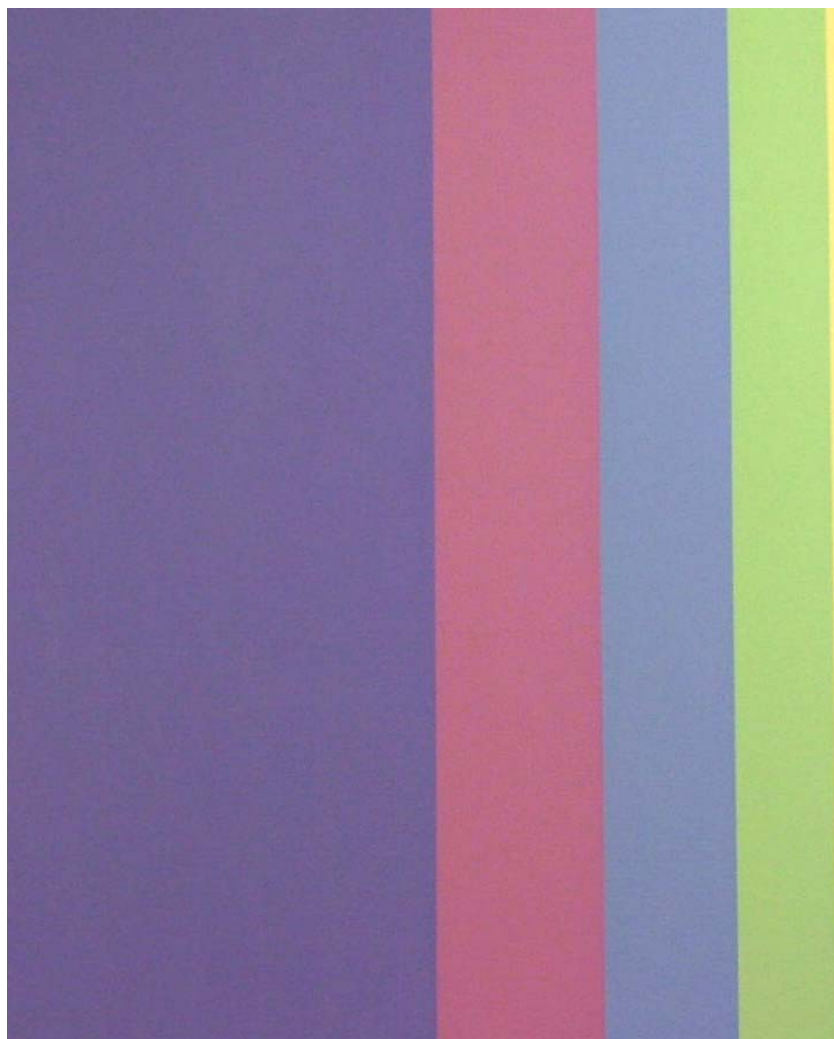
**Fig 6.** *State of Play*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 500mm x 500mm.



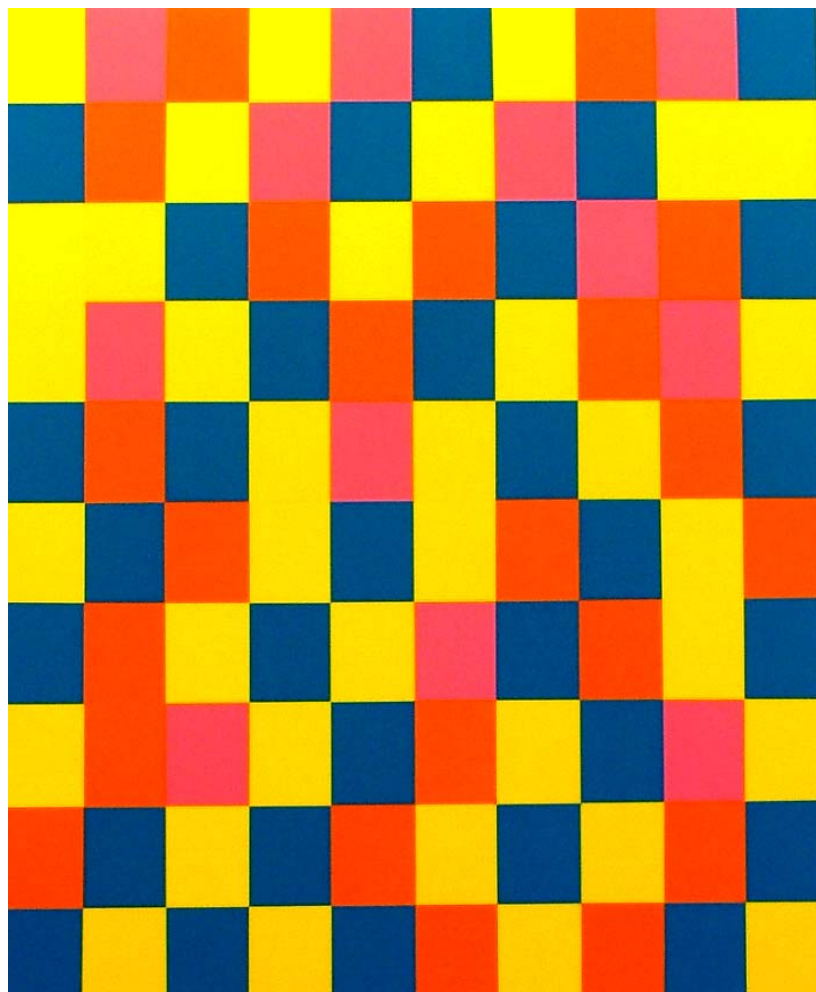
**Fig. 7.** *Interface*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1000mm x 800mm.



**Fig. 8.** *Invariant I.* Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1000mm x 800mm.

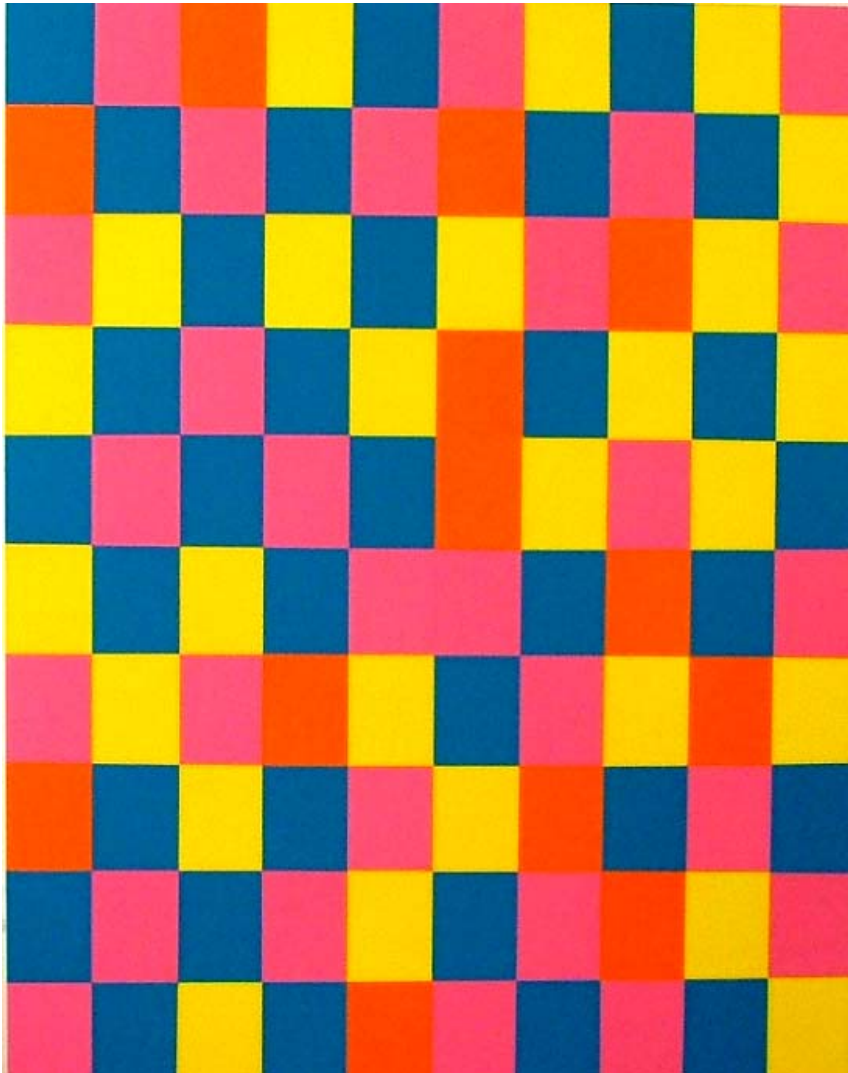


**Fig. 9.** *Non-invariant I*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1000mm x 800mm.

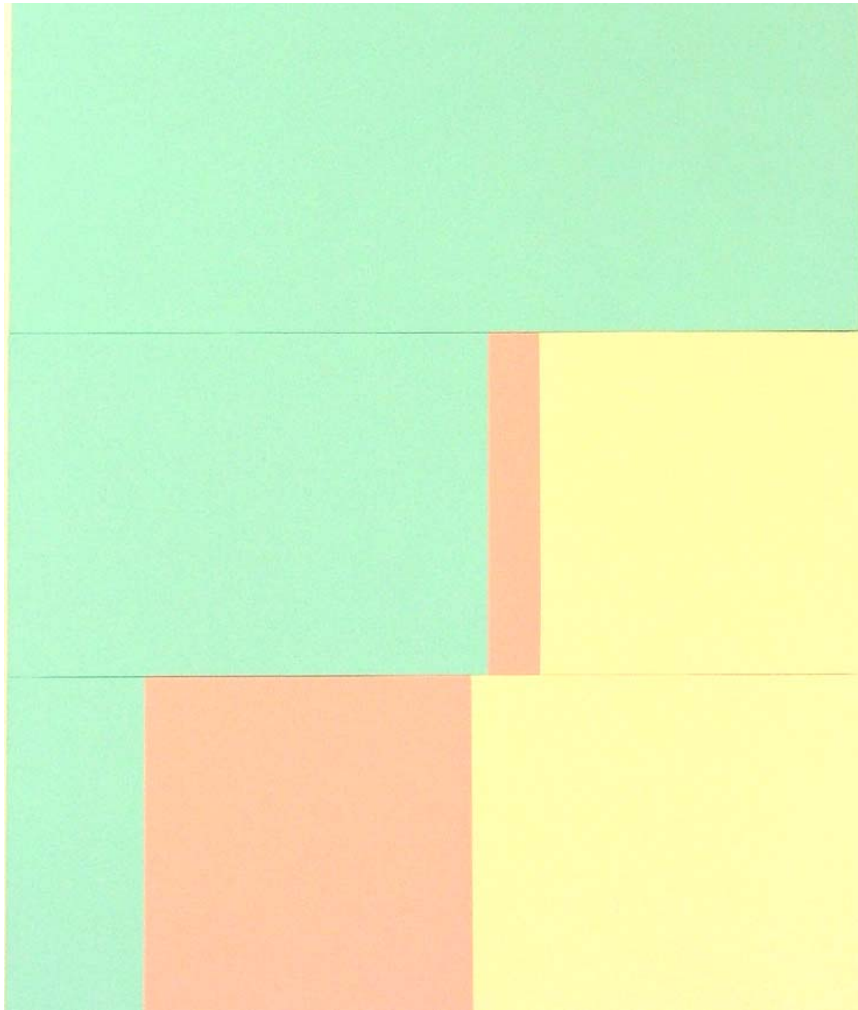


**Fig. 10** *Invariant II*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1000mm x 800mm.

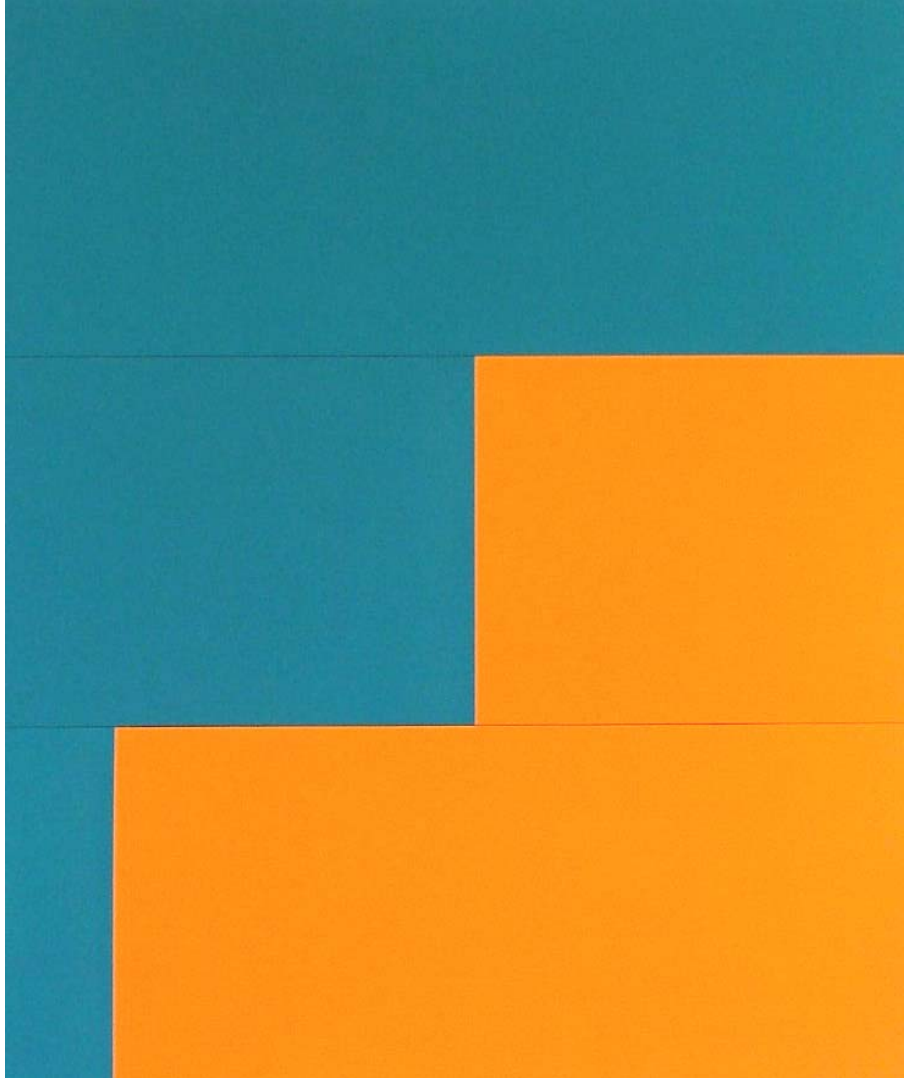




**Fig. 11.** *Non-invariant II.* Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1000mm x 800mm.



**Fig. 12.** *Diminution I.* Clare Matheson (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1200mm x 1000mm.



**Fig. 13.** *Diminution II*. Clare Matheson. (2005).  
Acrylic on board. 1200mm x 1000mm.

