



THE PROCESS OF
BEYOND THE COGNITIVE AND THE PHYSICAL **IMMERSIVE**
PHOTOGRAPHY

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THE PROCESS OF
BEYOND THE COGNITIVE **IMMERSIVE**
AND THE PHYSICAL **PHOTOGRAPHY**



Lincoln Steagall and Ilza Mortensen Steagall (circa 1963).

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved father
Lincoln Steagall (19/06/25 – 09/07/88) who
believed that through study we might transcend
our limitations, and to my mother Ilza
Mortensen Steagall (19/01/1937), who believes
in the persistent beauty of nature.

Your faith in me endures...

This thesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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OCTOBER 23, 2018.

ABSTRACT

This thesis constitutes a practice-led, artistic research project that asks:

**What are the issues that must be addressed
when photographing land, such that one
might express an immersive, embodied,
spiritually-attuned relationship between
the self and what is recorded?**

In the study, I suggest that embodiment may reach beyond the cognitive and physical, to engage with a form of 'living essence' that embraces a realm of knowing that may be broadly understood as spiritual. When engaging with the land in this dimension the photographer is immersed in a process that involves a communion between the 'essence of the living self' and the 'essence of the living earth'.

In conducting the study, I utilise a heuristic inquiry to facilitate a dialectical approach to problem solving. Here practice advances to new understandings that have operative meaning for practical knowledge (Candy, 2006). In the inquiry I employ a form of reflective field journal where images, poetic writing, technical data and critical thinking enable me to reflect on both a state of immersion and outcomes emanating from the process.¹

The research contributes to current discussions surrounding the manner in which photographers engage with land because the study proposes and unpacks a process of 'Immersive Photography' as a conceptual and methodological approach.

¹ This journal is embedded within Chapter Four.

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I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my primary supervisor Professor Welby Ings, who gently guided me through the challenges with a balance of rigour and kindness. With patience and intelligence, he opened my horizons of understanding by introducing me to new research methods and epistemologies. As a scholar who I have come to deeply admire, he is a mentor to my teaching and thinking and a dear friend.

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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 (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

MARCOS MORTENSEN STEAGALL

October 23, 2018

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENTS

Given that this project has involved a critically reflective encounter between a photographer and the land, where no other human participants were involved, it was unnecessary to gain ethical approval for the research.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY
DECLARATION

I retain copyright and intellectual property of all images
taken by myself and presented as part of this thesis.

MARCOS MORTENSEN STEAGALL
October 23, 2018





INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A PHOTOGRAPH?

Although this thesis is concerned with the process of photographing, rather than with the photograph as an artifact, it is still useful at the outset to consider what I mean when I use the word photograph.

In this study, I define a photograph as an analog or digital record made by a camera, of a presence. When I make such a record, an image is produced that is a consequence of a subjective relationship between the photographer and the photographed (Sontag, 1977; Benjamin 1974). Within the image, time is recorded as duration (Bergson, 1994).

IMMERSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY AS A PROCESS

In this thesis I suggest that, if photography can be understood as a way of knowing the world through lenses, then it may also be considered as a powerful device operating on a tacit level to record the relationship between the photographer and the living essence of land.

In the study I posit a particular methodological and conceptual approach to depicting the land with a camera that I refer to as Immersive Photography. In this process the photographer engages with deep levels of immersion

inside what is photographed in an attempt to record a form of communication that exists beyond the explicit. This approach takes place in a fertile but unstable environment of the unknown, where the photographer indwells in a state of irresolution with the aim of bringing into being both the physical and nonphysical. In this engagement with the land, the photographer’s camera not only helps me to see what is physical, it also enables me to draw upon. By adopting a practice-led approach to the inquiry, I use the camera as a way to know and sense the world and myself.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

There is considerable debate surrounding the terms practice-led and practice-based research. Candy defines practice-led inquiry at doctoral level, as research that is “concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice”. She reasons that “the main focus of such research is to advance knowledge about practice or to advance knowledge within practice” (2006, p. 3). Gray (1996) supports this definition, arguing that such research is primarily ignited through practice and is “carried out through practice” (1996, p. 3). These authors propose that in doctoral study, if research is undertaken to advance practice and practice is used as a vehicle for reforming, critiquing and advancing the research question, then we might define such an undertaking as a practice-led inquiry.

Conversely practice-based research Candy suggests describes a study where, rather than a process, it is “a creative artifact [that] is the basis of the contribution to knowledge” (ibid., p.1). Claims of originality in this form of doctoral research, she argues, may be demonstrated through diverse media and the resulting artifacts or performances are normally accompanied by a contextualising written text. Thus, if this thesis was an exhibition of photographs about land and this corpus of work was accompanied by an exegetical text, then the study might be described as practice-based.

However, in Art and Design research there remains considerable confusion over the two terms. In contradicting Candy’s assertion, writers like Smith and Dean (2009) still argue that where the “creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs” (p. 5) then it constitutes practice-led research.

So, we are left with a problem that may perhaps best be resolved by considering the nature of the research question that forms the basis of this inquiry. In this thesis I ask:

What are the issues that must be addressed when photographing land, such that one might express an immersive, embodied, spiritually-attuned relationship between the self and what is recorded?

When engaging with such a question I am not seeking to produce a body of work as a collective artifact or as an expression of an idea. Instead, I am critically exploring the potentials of a photographic method. The inquiry is led by a camera and a photographer to consider and experiment with the nature and potentials of a process. The resulting research “leads primarily to new understandings about practice” (Candy, 2006, p. 3). Accordingly, the study may be framed as practice-led.

This said, the thesis is that of a photographer and visual communication designer, so the scholarly voice that is adopted, navigates a stylistic and intellectual reconciliation between “the disinterested perspective and academic objectivity of an observer/ethnographer/analyst/theorist [and] the invested perspective of the practitioner/producer” (Hamilton, 2011, para. 2). Accordingly, while the thesis is an analysis of a method it is also presented as an object of beauty and critical reflection. In such theses, Ings argues that reflective, scholarly discourse becomes “something that engages both the content and the spirit of the text” (2014, p. 5)².

KEY TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

Words shape meaning, and in this thesis I use certain words in specific ways. Given the context-specific nature of the study I am aware that all definitions are subject to challenge because meanings are not constant over time or disciplines. However, at the outset, definitions for four words used in the study may be helpful. These are: Immersion, Embodiment, the Spiritual, and Mauri.

IMMERSION

In this project, immersion is used to describe a state of being and thinking in the field. It may be related to Polanyi’s (1962) and Moustakas’ (1990) concept of indwelling as a “process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension

of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). Using immersion I enter into an inquiry in a manner where the question and environment are internalised (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002; Ings, 2011; Kenny, 2012). In this state “vague and formless wanderings are characteristic in the beginning, but a growing sense of meaning and direction emerges as the perceptions and understandings of the researcher grow and the parameters of the problem are recognised” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 47).

Immersion in this project spans both time spent with the land and the images that emanate from it. Thus, it includes both the geographical sites of the inquiry and the period in the studio where I reflect on and am drawn into a creative conversation with the data I have gathered.

My immersion in land allows me to explore questions in a manner that is not sharply defined; questions are posed and hunches draw upon the tacit. This process allows me to consider aspects of my experience as I search for the nonexplicit, following clues and identifying patterns, and dwelling inside this to stretch their possible associations, and perhaps reveal new meanings (Moustakas, 1990).

EMBODIMENT

This thesis conceptually frames embodiment as a state where the mind and body are not separated entities but a continuous condition that incorporates reason and emotion in time and space. This thinking draws upon Spinoza’s proposal that “the mind is united to the body because the body is the object of the mind” (1959, Ethics 2, prop. 21). However, I extend the idea of embodiment beyond the cognitive and sensory experience of an environment and suggest that in such a state one might also be in tune with a kind of agency (Bennett, 2010) that may be conceived of as spiritual or immanent, but not yet manifest. Within the thesis this extended concept of embodiment describes a manner in which I come to know the world by lived experience; in an operative mode that reaches sensorial and tacit dimensions (Husserl, 1989; Heidegger, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Polanyi, 1967)³.

THE SPIRITUAL

I understand the spiritual as a subjective and largely invisible dimension that transcends the tangibility of the material and the cognition of reason. I use the term to refer to something separate from religious principles and values that may be culturally framed. Throughout the study, I have increasingly come to draw on Maaori epistemological frameworks when considering spirituality (especially in the manner in which it may be associated with land and my relationship with it). In Maaori ways of knowing, “every act, natural phenomena and other influences are considered to have both physical and spiritual implications” (Pere, 1982, p. 12). Helpful in my understanding has been Valentine, Tassell-Mataamua and Flett’s (2017, p. 65) observation that “spirituality from an indigenous perspective acknowledges the interconnectedness between the human situation and an esoteric realm. It acknowledges a wider connection to the universe as a living entity”.

MAURI

The Maaori notion of mauri is complex, and in this thesis I use the word to refer to the life principle of a physical object, individual or ecosystem and its essence or force (Marsden & Royal, 2003). Although Kereopa (cited in Moon, 2008, p. 72) argues that “mauri can’t be explained”, other writers define it as a force that holds and connects everything in the world (Kereopa, in Moon, 2008; Marsden & Royal, 2003; Mead, 2016).

Mauri acknowledges an essential quality and vitality of a being or entity and is understood to be present in everything, including humans, communities, fauna, flora, and land (Marsden & Royal, 2003; Barlow, 1991; Henare, 2001). Barlow (1991) suggests that mauri emanates from the Io, which Pohatu defines as “a source from which everything draws” (2011, p. 1).

2 Ings’ assertion may be related to Nelson’s (2004) and Hamilton and Jaaniste’s (2010) discussions of the poetics of the exegesis. In such theses, Ings (2014) argues that the writer balances traditional scholarship and a reaching “beyond the dispassionately prosaic [so what is presented] touches something of the humanity of the designer. It is reflective and personally insightful. It makes lyrical links between the researcher and the researched” (p. 5). Nelson claims that such doctoral writing, “explores scope for emotional content within the academic” (Nelson, 2004, para. 22).

3 This idea is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

In this thesis I use the word mauri to describe the spiritual energy I encounter when immersed in a deeply communicative state with land. In considering the concept as a device for describing what I encounter, I acknowledge that I am not Maaori;⁴ my epistemological frameworks have been constructed largely by my Brazilian culture and developed through a western academic paradigm that heightens the rational and tangible. The concept of mauri is therefore used tentatively and respectfully in the thesis. However, I have considered the idea seriously because it comes very close to explaining the nature of what I encounter.

THE NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

According to AUT’s Postgraduate Studies Handbook, a traditional PhD thesis is normally profiled by the following features.

It is ... wholly written. It includes chapters related to the introduction, literature review, methodology/ methods, data analysis, discussion and conclusions. It fits within the word requirement of ... 60,000 and 80,000 words, with an upper limit of 100,000 words. (AUT Postgraduate Handbook 2018, p.102)

This thesis as a practice-led inquiry is largely written but it contains integrated photographic practice as evidence of thinking. This visual content contributes not only to the thesis’ arguments but it also governs the ethos of its design (Hamilton, 2011; Ings, 2015). Although the document’s 79,460 words function inside the prescribed proportions for such a thesis, much of the subtle evidence of the research exists in over 138 photographic recordings. In designing the study and its presentation, I am cognisant of writing now dating back more than 20 years, Noble, 1994 and Goodchild & Miller, 1997, who observed that theses can be written in new and distinctive ways. The formatting of these documents, Swales and Najjar (1987) and Paltridge (2002) have more recently noted, often deviates significantly from prescriptions offered by published guides and university handbooks. However, although Paltridge, Starfield, Ravelli and Tuckwell (2012, p. 342) have observed that doctoral

4 As such I appreciate that there are limitations to my nonindigenous understanding.

writing does “not necessarily have to fit a pre-conceived template, or indeed straight-jacket”, given the guidelines of the handbook I have designed this thesis so it ‘speaks to’ requirements, albeit in a slightly negotiated manner.

The thesis consists of five chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction is followed by an opening chapter that provides a personal account of my background and the life experiences that brought me to the thesis. This is useful, because the research draws significantly on subjective states and tacit knowing to navigate a trajectory through practice. This chapter also serves to elucidate the origin of the question that has driven the inquiry.

The second chapter maps on to the traditional requirement of a Literature Review. It is called a Review of Contextual Knowledge because, as with an increasing number of doctoral theses in Art and Design (Ventling, 2017; Toluta’u, 2015; Chen, 2018), I acknowledge that not all knowledge exists in literature. Accordingly, the chapter, in addition to considerations of theoretical writing, also contains a review of contextualizing practice in the field, specifically instances where photographers are concerned with recording the ‘unseen’ living essence of land.

In harmony with conventional requirements, the third chapter discusses the Research Design underpinning the inquiry. It consists of three sections: a consideration of the research paradigm, methodology and a discussion of methods and phases of the research.

Chapter Four is concerned with data gathering, analysis and questioning. It is constituted as a reflective field journal. This provides an account of immersions and thinking that constituted my practice. The entries were written at the time or shortly after the fieldwork, so the chapter offers an iterative account of thinking and questioning produced from, and catalysing subsequent engagements with the land.

Chapter Five offers a critical consideration of what has been experienced and reflected upon. In doing so, it considers discoveries and hypotheses relating both to practice and my altered conceptualisations of embodiment, the role of the sensory and the nature of spiritual presence. It also discusses issues emanating from the process of photographic compression.

The thesis then concludes with a summary of the project, a consideration of contributions the research has made to knowledge and proposals for further research emanating from the study.

COMPOSITE VOICES

In this thesis, there are two stylistic features that relate to writing. They are the protean use of registers and the employment of certain geographical conventions.

PROTEAN REGISTERS

My writing moves across registers in a relatively fluid manner. This is not an uncommon phenomenon in practice-led research. Indeed, Jillian Hamilton and Luke Jaaniste’s content analysis of 59 Masters and PhD theses in artistic practice-led inquiry noted that often writing, “assumes a dual orientation, looking outwards ... and inwards” (2010, para. 31)⁵. Robert Nelson maintains that such diversity in “voice” is a natural function of the artistic practitioner who “explores scope for emotional content within the academic” (Nelson, 2004, para. 22).

Within the writing, but especially in Chapter Four (the Field Journal) the reader will encounter a distinctive sensory/ poetic voice. This register is normally employed as a form of shorthand for recording emotional or sensory impressions that do not translate into analytical prose. Conversely other writing is distinctly self-analytical, drawing past and current observations and reflections into critical consideration. It is from this thinking that questions arise that are used to question more advanced practice.

In writing this thesis I am also guided by the need for practice-oriented study to speak concurrently to both the academy and professional photographers. As a consequence, I have attempted to craft an articulate, readable ‘voice’, that is accessible to researchers in either context.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE

The thesis employs a number of features borrowed from outside of the disciplines of Art and Design. Indicative of this is the employment of certain conventions normally associated with the study of Geography.

I have been trained as a commercial photographer. My formative thinking has not been shaped by the culture of Fine Arts education. Instead my practice has operated within, and been largely

5 They observed that around 85% of the theses in their sample contained a combination of differently oriented approaches.

shaped by, professional concerns with documentation, representation and meaning. As part of this, a significant amount of my history has involved international travel to make photographic recordings of land. In this process I have encountered land geographically⁶ as much as artistically. Accordingly, I have become respectful of the necessities of certain geographical conventions including an appreciation of maps and numerical co-ordinates for locating and documenting sites. When I journey into remote environments I share these co-ordinates via a mobile phone app with local rangers and colleagues. This information means that I can be easily located in an emergency. The co-ordinates also enable me to return to a specific environment because they offer very exact documentation of its geographical position.⁷

THE FIELD JOURNAL

From Geography I also borrow the convention of the field journal⁸, although I adapt its format in specific ways to engage with the dual subjectivity and analytical nature of my research. As I employ it, the field journal builds over what Kaplan (1964) defines as “the reconstructed logic of science” (p. 21) so it approaches what Schatzman and Strauss, describe as a “vehicle for ordered creativity” (1973, p.105).

DATA

Finally, and perhaps unusually, I use the term data in the thesis to describe photographic recordings that I make while I am in the field. In the context of a Fine Arts inquiry such material would not normally be defined as data, but in my photographic practice I conceive data as both objective and subjective recordings of an investigation (Tantus, 2018).

Although the plural of the word datum (or given thing) is normally associated with quantitative research, or research that can be measured, collected, reported and analysed (Fowler & Fowler, 1969), in this thesis my intention is to comprehend, absorb and apply, rather than measure and analyse. In such research, data describes consciously documented recordings of land that are acknowledged as subjective but are compiled and reflected upon in an effort to understand specific phenomena. In harmony with this definition, the Concordat on Open Research Data⁹, has recently redefined data as:

... evidence that underpins the answer to the research question, [that] can be used to validate findings regardless of its form (e.g. print, digital, or physical). These might be quantitative information or qualitative statements collected by researchers in the course of their work by experimentation, observation, modelling, interview or other methods, or information derived from existing evidence.

Given such a definition, I conceive my photographic records to be qualitative statements that serve as evidence that underpins the answer to a research question.

THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH PRACTICE

Over a period of 34 months, I immersed myself in 13 locations in the North and South Islands of Aotearoa/New Zealand and on the offshore island of Te Puia o Whakaari. In addition, I revisited the Tietê River in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

These locations included sometimes hostile environments inside which I endeavoured to understand and develop a relational approach to photographing land where I could engage with and record a communication between the ‘essence of my living self’ and an ‘essence’ of something in the land that is immanent, but not yet manifest. To do this, I developed a process of immersion that involved waiting for hours in a single place while photographing multiple recordings of a landscape inside an identical framing, with the only variable being the passing of time (Figure 0.1).

The aim of the research was to refine my practice and contribute to current discussions surrounding the manner in which photographers engage with land.

In this thesis images that were significant in developing and refining my thinking are included in Chapters Four and Five. In Chapter Four, each of the 15 separate immersions is opened with a front plate that serves as an orientation to the nature of the recording. This image is supported by additional photographs that supplement, contextualise or explain my thinking at the time.

THE USE OF A DIGITAL CAMERA

In my practice I used a Nikon D810 digital camera instead of analogue equipment. This device is very portable so I was able to travel long distances or journey into difficult environments without significant hindrance. Because of the camera’s substantial memory capacity, I was able to record more than 45,000 large digital files, using high-resolution sensor and an extended dynamic range that would not have been available to me with analogue cameras. This was especially important because I was recording large amounts of material over extended periods of time. By using a digital camera, I was also able to circumvent issues related to the storage¹⁰ and transportation of material¹¹.

6 I understand geography as, “the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments [where the researcher] seeks to understand where things are found, why they are there, and how they develop and change over time” (National Geographic Encyclopaedic entry – What is Geography? 2018, para. 1).

7 The co-ordinates are entered in my field journal so future researchers are able to locate the exact land forms with relative ease.

8 I also conceive of my time recording material in the land as ‘field work’. Although the concept of field work is normally applied to research in the social and natural sciences, again, it is relatively rare in artistic inquiry. I define field work as “the process of observing and collecting data about people, cultures, and natural environments [where such research] is conducted in the wild of our everyday surroundings rather than in semi-controlled environments” (National Geographic Encyclopaedic entry – Field work, 2018, para. 1).

9 The Concordat on Open Research Data defines standards for data protocols for Open Platforms in the United Kingdom. <http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/2016/08/01/concordat-on-open-research-data-launched/>

10 Manufacturers suggest that for the best results, film should be processed as soon as possible after being exposed. This is because once the light touches the surface of film, it will naturally start to develop itself, independent of formal chemical reactions. With digital data it makes no significant difference how long one takes to engage with work after recording it.

11 Photographic film is susceptible to air humidity and temperature and these factors can impact on the way it responds to light. Film is also very sensitive to dust and because I was often in adverse environments for days at a time, it was a less practical option. The digital environment also enabled me to store, organise and recover images quickly.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE RESEARCH

RATIONALE

The rationale for this thesis has surfaced from emerging discourse surrounding the role and nature of the artistic researcher and the land they research. Partly stimulated by Sierra and Wise’s (2016) consideration of transformative approaches to the environment in relation to creative agency in artistic practice, the thesis recognises ways that artists may know and work with land as something more than the geographically physical (Nepia, 2012; Wenders & Salgado, 2014; Burton, 2015; Mäkelä, 2015; Pouwhare, 2016; Beatty, 2017).

Thus, the thesis aligns with certain understandings of land as having agency. As the academy becomes increasingly challenged by alternative epistemologies (Peters & Schwarzpaul 2013), it is timely that we might enrich such debates with examples of deeply reflective practice that exercises and exposes such understandings and the methodologies that activate them.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the thesis lies in two distinct contributions to knowledge.

First, the thesis contributes to current discussions surrounding the way that artists engage with land as field research (Mäkelä, 2015; Ings, 2016; Sierra & Wise, 2016). In this regard it unpacks through a commentary on practice, how this engagement impacts upon artistic ontogeny and agency. This contribution expands considerations of how artists may approach and interpret the landscape, through walking (Tilley, 1994; Ingold, 2004; Baraklianou, 2013; Beatty, 2017), flow (Donop, Davies, Hill, & Riedelsheimer, 2003; Csikszentmihályi, 2008), immersion (Mäkelä, 2015; Ings, 2016) and embodiment (Husserl, 1989; Heidegger, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Thus, the thesis proposes that a relationship between the photographer and the landscape may be a communication process where the researcher is concurrently an emissary and receptor. In considering this idea, the thesis gives voice to a mechanism of interaction between the photographer and the land. Inside this discussion, existing Western framings of embodiment are challenged by indigenous epistemologies relating to the spiritual nature and agency of land.

Second, the thesis contributes and exercises the concept of Immersive Photography as a process. Immersive Photography is the term I have conceived for this thesis in order to describe a relationship between the photographer’s subjective self and the land as a researched phenomenon. Conceptually, the process of Immersive Photography exercises the physical (sensory), cognitive and spiritual dimensions of the photographer and the communicative potential of land.

Having now described the thesis’ format, outlined fundamental considerations underpinning its concerns and discussed its significance as a study, it is useful to consider my position within it.



FIGURE 0.1.
Himatangi, New Zealand. (January 19, 2016). Data recorded across 14 exposures of the same image, taken in a sequence, to register the light from the sunset and the moon that shared the same sky. Time in the final image is not a physical representation of a specific moment but a compressed record of 1.5 hours.





1

POSITIONING
THE RESEARCHER

POSITIONING
THE RESEARCHER



FIGURE 1.1.
Aerial view of the city of São Paulo (n.d.) in Brazil showing its expansive, built environment.

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FIGURE 1.2.
Aerial view of the city of São Paulo and the Tietê River in Brazil. (September, 2014).

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HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY-NC/2.0/DEED.PT_BR

This chapter positions the researcher in relation to the inquiry. Given the subjective nature of the thesis, it explains contexts from which the research question emerged including its origins and influences.

A CHILD AND A DEAD RIVER

I was born and grew up in São Paulo, Brazil, a largely concrete city with 12 million people who live in an area covering 1,521 km² (Figure 1.1).

Growing up it was very rare for me to encounter natural landscapes.¹² I existed in an industrialised world. Near where I lived the river Tietê flowed through the city. Its banks were concreted and as a result of decades of industrial pollution, little life survived in it. Technically, it died many years ago, but still it moved, on a toxic journey to the sea (Figure 1.2).

¹² By this I mean environments that were not built by man. The city constituted my horizons, irrespective of the direction I looked.

As a child, I had a difficult time at school because of my inability to read and write. However, once I grasped the skill I began to consume a wide variety of literature.

When I left high school, I found a job as a backstage apprentice at music concerts. I learned about lights and how they could be employed to produce magical atmospheres. I became aware of the role of colour in visual space. Later these observations would become fundamental agents in how I began to visualise and construct photographic imagery. It was during this time that my father died and I inherited from him an old Nikon F camera. Such objects contain futures and I enrolled in a photography course in the Focus School in São Paulo. Here I learned to use the camera and later I discovered the potentials of the darkroom. I remember the lab as magical. I was captivated by the way the paper in the developer became an image; by the way the ghost of a new reality surfaced from beneath the fluid. I encountered a new way of thinking and speaking, a new wonder that connected the complexity of how I saw the world with devices that could bring such vision into tangible form.

SEMIOTICS AND QUESTIONING

I pursued my ambition to be a photographer. At this time there was not a degree in the discipline in Brazil, so I left for the UK and studied for a semester in a part-time degree at Westminster University, but for financial reasons, I was not able to complete it. When I returned to Brazil, I enrolled in a Social Communication Bachelor's degree, with a specialisation in Propaganda and Advertising. Concurrently I secured a position as a technical photography technician at Anhembi Morumbi University. After graduation, I was offered a lecturer's position and between 2000 and 2006 I completed my Masters and PhD degrees in Communication and Semiotics.

My professional photographic work during this period was largely concerned with creating catalogues of residential and commercial buildings for engineering and architecture companies (Figures 1.3 and 1.4), and for many years I worked in this arena, documenting desirable spaces to live. I was able to 'capture' the built environment with relatively assured results. Everything was known: subject, target audience and media, and to these things I applied a relatively stable methodology concerned with the systematic application of technical conventions.



FIGURE 1.3.

Casa Panamericana, an Art Deco building in São Paulo. (June 1999). The panorama was originally shot on 35mm film for a catalogue assignment.



FIGURE 1.4.

Estação das Docas, Belém do Pará, Brazil. (January 2004). This image was produced for a brochure for the Architectonic Project. The urban reconstruction in the picture had involved a complete transformation of the docks area in Belém do Pará, in the Amazon region of Brazil. The area had, before the development, been relatively violent and the project had pursued a social recovery by installing shops, restaurants, pubs and other public services. Belem do Para is a city known for its high rainfall and people normally schedule afternoon appointments around 4.00 or 5.00pm. This period of time is called *depois da chuva* (after the rain). It was this distinctive feature of the location that I was responding to in the work.

During this period I also expanded my professional design practice inside the advertising and fashion markets. Here I was able to abstract and transfer my knowledge of semiotics so I could adjust images for differing systems of significance. I framed and processed the world in a relatively pragmatic manner.

As a semiotician I understood photography as an artifact. I adopted the position of a ‘reader’ of a text and unpacked the manner in which an image worked.¹³ However, increasingly I felt that something was missing.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THOUGHT AND FOREIGN LANDS

So, a journey began. Although semiotic analysis and synthesis had proved to be fruitful methods of understanding photography, I became increasingly concerned with something that lay beyond the presented print. I was attracted to photographers like Sebastião Salgado who talked about the “process” of photographing as a form of discourse with the land. I began questioning beyond the ‘What’ of photography and wondering about ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’. I was especially drawn to the way that photography can touch the indefinable. It seemed that the more I thought about nonbuilt environments, the more I came to understand land as something living, something possessed of an essence that transcended both the cognitive and the physical. On reflection I wonder if this sense of extended embodiment had its roots in my upbringing.

Like many Brazilian children I grew up in a very religious family. Both of my parents were adherents of Espiritismo, a spiritualistic philosophy codified in the 1950s by Allan Kardec. Espiritismo influenced many social movements, healing centres, charity institutions and hospitals in São Paulo. My mother and father took an active part in such social programmes and up until the age of 14 my epistemological framework was heavily influenced by their belief system. I understood that what was apparently innate could have agency. As I began to travel, I began to think of myself as part of the land I traversed.

¹³ The course introduced me to Peirce’s pragmatic view and how one might study objects and how we make sense of them semiotically. I used the logic of signs and sign processes as a way to try to understand the world. I used this to approach photography in an operational sense where I could create ideal images for a given purpose.

So in July 2009, I began a journey. I travelled through 27 countries: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Turkey, Greece, Curaçao, USA, Canada, Iceland, Netherlands, England, Scotland, Wales, the Czech Republic, Austria, Israel, Jordan, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, South Africa, Germany, Paraguay, Peru, Costa Rica, Panama and New Zealand. In these worlds I began to question myself as a photographer and my relationship with land.

Initially I began by photographing urban environments. In cities like Amsterdam, London and Prague, rivers bisect man-made environments. Their waters held the luminosity of reflection (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). These cities (like São Paulo) flanked great, flowing pools of darkness, but their built environments mirrored themselves in rivers that were profoundly polluted. I knew that if I swam in these waters I would become ill. So, when I look at these images years later, I can see an undercurrent, a question that I could not articulate at the time. I was trying to understand how land lived ... how water and its relationship with land functioned and what it meant to be ‘unliving’ in a world of artifice that purported to be pulsing with life. There was something in the allure of these images that was a paradox. They glow but there is a certain toxicity, an overly anxious brightness, an effort to convince us of life, when I knew that I was photographing man-made, man-damaged environments.



FIGURE 1.5.
A canal in central Amsterdam, The Netherlands. (January, 2009).



FIGURE 1.6.
Overlooking the Thames River, London, UK. (December 2013).



FIGURE 1.7.

The outskirts of Reykjavik, Iceland. (January, 2013). The photograph depicts the phenomenon of the northern lights. The image is not photoshopped; the highly saturated green sky is what I actually encountered.

PRESENCE AND EXPANSE

However, as I journeyed beyond cities, I was pulled to the expansive nature of land and a desire to understand how what was not built spoke of presence. I experienced for the first time in my life, horizons that contained no evidence of human habitation. In these worlds I could sense a 'livingness' beyond the manufactured lights and reflections of the man-made. In truth this was not a romantic encounter. I was not struck by a sublime sense of expansiveness but rather I sensed that the land was 'talking' in a distinct way ... not in a discord of artificial light and reflection but in the composed manner of an almost indiscernible (innate) communion (Figures 1.7 and 1.8). The foreign light and colours of these worlds startled me; this was not colour as a hue but rather an intensity of dialect; an extraordinary pigment of accent with which the land spoke.



FIGURE 1.8.
Atacama Desert, Chile. (January 2014). Sunrise overlooking the salt desert at Vale de la Luna (The Moon's Vale), San Pedro de Atacama.

ANOTHER PATH

So I journeyed through thought and practice without a road map but with an increasing level of reflection upon my photography ... and eventually I sought out a relatively new pathway that brought me back into the academy. Although I already held a PhD, increasingly I became interested in practice-led research through which a professional photographer might seek deeper understandings of his methods and accompanying state of being. I was looking for something that might help me to comprehend through the process of critically reflective making, how I might approach land in a deeper manner.¹⁴ Given that such doctoral theses are not available in many countries (including Brazil), I moved to New Zealand to study.

When I arrived, it was with questions. I had begun to sense a form of immersion that engaged with an unseen agency for which I did not yet have a framework or explanation. I wanted to know 'how' a photographer might bring to light an invisible (sometimes delicate) essence of the land that was communicated through distinctive forms of receptivity. Given the failure of a semiotic framework to explain what I encountered, I embarked on the arguably riskier heuristic form of inquiry that underpins this thesis. I began to write to myself about my practice and its context (see Chapter 4: Reflective Field Journal). I experimented with the manner in which I immersed myself in land, and I spent extended periods of time reflecting on my practice (both in the land and in my studio). In a way I was trying to become more 'self-conscious' and 'land conscious'. I knew it would be necessary to engage with an ontological and epistemological shift in my research and this might lead to instability and disruption.

The immersive photographs I began to create were not frozen moments, but testimonies to a shared communication between the photographer and the land he experiences. They carried shifts in time. They became increasingly impregnated with the undercurrent and they were mysterious because they were suspended in states of irresolution. They contained understandings beyond words; the drawing in of essences and the manifestation of what was seen and felt.

The journey of this thesis began ...

14 I became especially interested at this time in the writing of Stephen Scrivener who suggested that the ideal candidate for practice-led PhD research is the practitioner "who wants to engage in research that will contribute directly to their on-going practice. Furthermore, they wish to conduct the research through art or design-making, or, put another way, they do not wish to suspend their creative work or allow it to become separate from, or sub-ordinate to, the research activity" (2000, para. 8).





2

REVIEW OF RELATED KNOWLEDGE

REVIEW OF RELATED KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

The review of related knowledge contextualising or impacting on this inquiry focuses on four concepts: immersion, embodiment, affect and affection, and the spiritual nature of land. In addition, at the conclusion of the chapter I position my research in the context of other practitioners whose work deals with methodological or conceptual concerns related to my practice.

IMMERSION

Immersion may be seen as a state of indwelling or entering into an inquiry in a manner where the question and environment are internalised (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002; Ings, 2011; Kenny, 2012). As far back as 1979, Gurwitsch noted that conscious engagement with an immersion can lead to a deep and productive integration of the situation and the inquirer. In actioning such a state he claimed:

... we do more and greater justice to it the more we let ourselves be guided by it, i.e., the less reserved we are in immersing ourselves in it and subordinating ourselves to it. We find ourselves in a situation and are interwoven with it, encompassed by it, indeed just “absorbed” into it. (1979, p. 67)

Gurwitsch’s thinking about immersion may have been influenced by Polanyi who in 1962 discussed an integrative immersive state (that he called indwelling), as a mode of gaining access to new knowledge. He argued that in the process of a self-search, the researcher might gain an increase of internal perspectives and this should be activated by questioning. Polanyi (1962) suggested that such a state enabled a researcher to reach tacit dimensions of knowing.¹⁵

After 1985 the concept of immersion began to surface in Psychology, specifically in the writing of Bruce Douglass and Clarke Moustakas. In reference to heuristic inquiry, these writers suggested that immersion in a question, topic or environment allows intensive and comprehensive understanding of a particular moment of experience. In this sense, they defined immersion as a particular state of mind where one becomes integrated with the research problem in an autocentric mode, and within this, all aspects of the researcher’s life are centred on the theme investigated.

¹⁵ He discussed the concept in an epistemological treatise that argued that knowledge is personal.

They argued that for immersion to work productively, the researcher "... must stay in touch with the innumerable perceptions and awareness that are purely [his] own, without the interference of restrictions or judgments, with total disregard for conformity or congruence" (1985, p. 47).

In 1990 Moustakas advanced this thinking in his book *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications*. He described immersion as a process that brings one into a conscious state of investigation of the self-as-researcher. In this state, he suggested that researchers can operate in the unknown and intangible, but through this they can become "on intimate terms with the question, to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). Moustakas suggests that this interior state is purposeful rather than something that takes place incidentally. He suggests that an immersive state "is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved" (ibid., p. 24).

Although twelve years later Sandy Sela-Smith (2002) was to critique aspects of Moustakas’ method, she still agreed that in a heuristic inquiry the "researcher is able to become intimately involved in the question during the immersion process; to live the question and grow in knowledge and understanding" (p.65). In 2001 Dave Hiles, in his consideration of immersive research processes, argued that for the self to become connected with tacit comprehension the researcher must:

- engage with the text/practice, participating as deeply as possible in the experience, exploring the demands it places on you as the researcher
- indwell over an extended period of participation by exploration and discernment, following "leads" to material outside that chosen, but always returning to the main focus of the study. (Hiles, 2001, para. 23-24).

More recently, Kenny (2012) has argued that immersion "allows an inquiry to work on us and influence the quality of our thinking and exploration, which in turn guides the experience and the understanding we achieve" (p. 7). Ings (2011) notes that in such instances, "sometimes the line between the researcher and the researched becomes permeable. Complex problems become as much a concern of the research as they are a concern of the self" (p. 238).

The discussion of immersion in Psychology, (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002); Art and Design, (Ings, 2011, 2014; Ventling , 2017) and Nursing (Kenny, 2012), all place as central to the inquiry, the relationship between the self and what is studied. At the base of this lies the idea that one does not stand outside of a question but instead the question is pulled inside to a place where the researcher and what is studied concurrently dwell. Here researchers function largely in tacit dimensions of knowing and they are "immersed in the clues of perception to gain a knowledge of the whole" (Brownhill, 1968, p. 118).

All of these writers describe immersion as a state where one might engage with thinking and knowing in a nonexplicit manner. They suggest that such a realm is intimate (Sela-Smith, 2002) and purposefully constructed (Moustakas 1990). Within it one operates with the tacit (Ings, 2011; Moustakas 1990; Polanyi, 1962; Ventling 2017) to exercise a richness and vitality of thought (Brownhill, 1968) or to solve problems through an "internal search to know" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39).

EMBODIMENT

This thesis explores a research process where knowledge and understanding are produced through interactions between the photographer and the land. At the base of the inquiry lies a reconceptualising of the concept of embodiment as a research practice.

Csordas (1994) suggests that embodiment focuses our attention on the bodily understanding of a "perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world" (1994, p. 12). Despite this, Lala and Kinsella (2011) and Johnson (1999) argue that the concept of embodiment has until recently been relatively forgotten in Western thinking. This said, embodiment has received increased attention in philosophy (Campbell, Meynell, & Sherwin, 2009), science (Gallagher, 2005; Lala & Kinsella, 2011), social science (Johnson, 1999), architecture (Pallasmaa, 2009, 2017), and Art and Design (Ings, 2014; Mäkelä, 2015; Koskinen, Zimmerman, Binder, Redström, & Wensveen, 2011).¹⁶

EMBODIMENT AS AN EVOLVING CONCEPT

Diprose and Reynolds (2014) suggest that in most metaphysical thought the body was denigrated and discrete. Thus, unsurprisingly, as late as 1637 Descartes (1984) argued, "there is a great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible ... the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body" (pp. 86-87).¹⁷

Descarte’s proposition of a bifurcated immaterial mind and physical body was challenged 40 years later in 1677, when Spinoza published his philosophical treatise Ethics. Spinoza proposed "that the body is the object of the mind and so by the same reasoning, the idea of the mind must be united to its object that is, to the mind itself in the same way as the mind is united to the body" (Spinoza, 1967, pp. 43-44). Opposing Descarte’s ‘Dualism’, Spinoza argued that the body and mind are extensions of a single reality. In Spinoza’s thinking only God could be called a substance because only God was an independently existing life. Human beings he maintained were finite modes with two aspects; thought and extension. Thus, he asserted, the "mind and body — are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought and now under the attribute of Extension" (ibid., p. 44).

In 1896 Dewey proposed a distinctively organic approach to the mind and body problem when he argued that sensation, thought and action were part of indivisible being. His writings in Physiological Psychology argued a biological and environmental organic notion where the "idea of environment is a necessity to the idea of organism, and with the conception of environment comes the impossibility of considering psychical life as an individual, isolated thing developing in a vacuum" (Dewey, 1896, p. 28). Dewey proposed that logical structure is subordinated to psychological or biological components. He argued that "sensory stimulus, central connections and motor responses [should] be viewed, not as separate and complete entities in themselves, but as divisions of labor, functioning factors, within the single concrete whole" (ibid., p. 35).

In 1901, when Husserl released his Logical Investigations (*Logische Untersuchungen*) he offered a specific terminology of intentionality that led to the detachment of phenomenology as a single discipline within the Philosophical tradition.¹⁸

- 16 Lala and Kinsella (2011) note that embodiment as an issue has also attracted increasing advocacy in qualitative research practice in general, with writers like Sandelowski, (2002) and Sharma, Reimer-Kirkham and Cochrane, (2009) arguing for a re-embodiment of qualitative inquiry as a whole.
- 17 Gallagher notes that to “ignore embodiment and situation was the overwhelming tendency of the philosophical tradition. Up to and including the twentieth-century many philosophers simply ignored the importance of body and situation in favor of the isolated mind” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 2).
- 18 Up until this stage philosophy’s core subjects were generally considered to be epistemology, ontology, ethics and logic.
- 19 Husserl’s concept of *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) may be understood as a:
... world-horizon of potential future experiences that are to be (more or less) expected for a given group member at a given time, under various conditions, where the resulting sequences of anticipated experiences can be looked upon as corresponding to different possible worlds and environments (Husserl, 1989, p. 49).
- 20 Wilson and Foglia (2011) suggest that “features of cognition are embodied, in that they are deeply dependent upon characteristics of the physical body of an agent, such that the agent’s beyond-the-brain body plays a significant causal role, or a physically constitutive role, in that agent’s cognitive processing” (para.1).
- 21 Broadly phenomenology examines phenomena from people’s first hand accounts (Van Manen, 1997), and it considers phenomena as lived and directly experienced.
- 22 He also suggests that the “knowledge and skills of traditional societies reside directly in the senses and muscles, in the knowing and intelligent hands, and directly embedded and encoded in the settings and situations of life” (2017, p. 101).

Husserl developed the concept of *Lebenswelt* or “lifeworld” referring to what we experience in a precognitive form, without interpretation.¹⁹ Lived experience he suggested, was the immediate precognitive conscience of life (Dilthey,1985). Behnke (2018), in discussing the concept of embodiment as proposed by Husserlian phenomenology, argues that the body is “a locus of distinctive sorts of sensations that can only be felt first hand by the embodied experiencer concerned” (Behnke, 2018, para. 1). Husserl (1989) suggested that the body, including its motor and perceptual systems and its interactions with the physical environment (situatedness) can directly impact on one’s knowing.²⁰

Husserl and his pupil Heidegger made significant contributions to the field of phenomenology.²¹ In Heidegger’s thinking, the conception of human existence (*Dasein*) can only be fully comprehended through a contextual relationship because our being-in-the-world is guided by our ability to handle things, including tools, ideas, affections and emotions. Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* proposes a “living being” through the activity of “being there” and being in the world (Heidegger, 1996). In a related way the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre has said: “Understanding is not a quality coming to human reality from the outside; it is its characteristic way of existing” (1993, p. 9).

In 2012 Barbara Bolt applied Heidegger’s ideas of *Dasein* to her discussion of praxical knowledge in artistic inquiry. She said:

... we don’t come to understand the world by contemplating it theoretically, nor do we know it objectively. Rather it is in being-in-the-middle-of-things, putting things to use and handling things that we come to understand our world. ... Our “involvement” or relationship with the world underpins the primarily praxical nature of being in the world. It is through dealing with or handling entities in the world that the nature of the world is revealed to beings. (Bolt, 2012, pp. 87–88)

Recently, the architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa (2009, 2012, 2017) has proposed a structure of atmospheric and aesthetic intelligence inside which he argues that the “human body is a knowing entity. He suggests that “our entire being in the world is a sensuous and embodied mode of being, and this very sense of being is the ground of existential knowledge” (2017, p. 100). In this sense Pallasmaa considers that all knowledge is existential.²²

Pallasmaa also suggests that knowledge is an essentially existential entity and not shaped by ideas and words. He argues that 80% of human communication takes place outside of language. He suggests that a considerable part of our communication to the world happens in chemical modes, and simply being in a place with our bodies will create a range of readings of the environment that feed back into the body. Like Bolt (2012), Pallasmaa (2017) draws on Heidegger’s thinking to discuss embodiment that occurs through the human hand, a concept he describes as the ‘thinking hand’. In this regard he refers to Heidegger’s assertion that:

The hand’s essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself in that element. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 357)

Heidegger’s ideas of handling are of particular significance to this study because I understand my camera as a way of ‘handling’ the world around me, and it functions less as an optic instrument that captures the reality, and more as an orthosis that extends my body to virtually ‘touch’ the invisible surface and apprehend the lived experience of this relationship.

In developing this idea, Merleau-Ponty has argued that the body is not only a physical phenomenon, but also a permanent condition of experience. He has suggested that our bodies are an absolute source of knowing, and that it is wrong to think that we possess our bodies; rather we should consider that we are our bodies. Through this point of view he suggests that we “are not spectators but are rather involved, interwoven and living in the world as embodied beings” (Lala & Kinsella, 2011, p. 78).

Merleau-Ponty also introduced the idea of temporality into considerations of embodiment. He argued that:

At each successive instant of a movement, the preceding instant is not lost sight of. It is, as it were, dovetailed into the present ... [Movement draws] together, on the basis of one’s present position, the succession of previous positions, which envelop each other. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 140)

Thus, Merleau-Ponty posited a form of flow within embodiment or a consciousness of connection that is useful in understanding how time becomes connective in my work.

An immersion as an embodied state he would understand not as a series of discrete encounters but as a cumulative experience of dovetailed time. Within this, he suggests, the body organises action through a successive change of positions that fold into the others. Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of embodiment eventually detached him from phenomenology and led him towards what he described as “indirect ontology” or “the ontology of the flesh of the world (*la chair du monde*) ” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 34). This idea was discussed in Eye and Mind (1968), the last of his works to be published, and in his incomplete work, The Visible and Invisible.

AFFECT AND AFFECTION

In this thesis, the immersive process creates resonances of being in the land, experienced through *comunhão*²³ between the land and the photographer. While theories of embodiment have helped to establish a substrate from which I have come to consider this relationship, my thinking has also been resourced by writing relating to the concepts of affect and affection.

DEFINING AFFECT

The concept of affect (derived from the Latin noun *affectus*) places emphasis on bodily experience. Broadly affect relates to the process of energy variations that a body will experience while in contact with other bodies. By bodies we might consider any body, including human or animal, vegetable or mineral, living or nonliving matter.

23 I use the Portuguese word *comunhão* here deliberately, because of its inclusiveness. *Comunhão* does not translate as 'communication' but may be loosely aligned with the English word "communion". The New Zealand Oxford Dictionary defines communication as the process of "transmitting or passing on by speaking or writing" (2008, p. 221) and as an intransitive verb it may extend to "conveying information [or] evoking understanding" (ibid.). However, the parameters of the word communication are normally understood as operating within the linguistic or physically performative. Conversely, *comunhão* draws into its definition a specifically spiritual dimension that is closer to the 'communion' that the Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary suggests may involve a more intimate transference including "mutual intercourse, fellowship, common possession, [or an] interchange of transactions" (2000, p.188).

Affect as a philosophical concept was posited by Aristotle, but developed largely in the work of Baruch Spinoza, then built upon by Henri Bergson, Guilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. More recent contributions to the idea have been offered by Simon O’Sullivan (2001), Brian Massumi (1995), Daniel Shouse (2005) and Ruth Leys (2011).

ARISTOTLE

An early consideration of the idea of 'affect' dates back to Aristotle who discussed a form of embodied energy capable of altering the mind. In Rhetoric 6, he described this as something “which leads one’s condition to become so transformed that one’s judgment is affected” (Fountoulakis, 2014, p. 27). He suggested that such a condition “is accompanied by pleasure and pain” (ibid.).

More recently, theories relating to affect have considered subjectively experienced emotions and feelings and theorists have attempted to organise them into categories including physic, social and internalised manifestations.

SPINOZA

According to Spinoza, affect relates to states of the body and mind associated with, but not identical to, feelings and emotions. These ideas were discussed in Part Two and Three of his work Ethics (1677). Spinoza believed that certain affections of the body may cause the body’s “power of acting [to be] increased or diminished, aided or restrained” (Spinoza, 1967, p. 70). He identified three broad kinds of emotion: pleasure (*laetitia*), pain (*tristitia*) and desire (*cupiditas*). Deleuze and Guattari (and their translator Brian Massumi) developed Spinoza’s thinking about affect by differentiating more precisely between affect and emotion. This was perhaps not unexpected because even Spinoza admitted that “an affect or passion of the mind [*animi pathema*] is a confused idea” which is only perceived by the increase or decrease it causes in the body’s vital force (Spinoza, 1967, p. 158).

BERGSON

Henri Bergson was a critic of psychological determinism and believed that the nature of research should reach beyond what is purely material. In opposition to the positivist perspective of science that assumes reality can be captured, measured and generalised to produce logical, mathematical truths,

Bergson developed a concept of duration (*durée*). Azambuja, Guareschi and Baum suggest that Bergson’s *durée* presented “psychological reality as a sequence of fuzzy qualitative multiplicity of states of consciousness that intertwine in constant and continuous change” (2014, p.187). To some degree, they suggest, in such a framework “science mixes time with space, treating psychic reality as space, as external and extensive” (ibid.).

Bergson argued that affect is actually a sensitive nerve response to a motor tendency that fills the space between an action and its direct reaction, absorbing an external stimulus through an internal reaction. He stated:

... we have to take into account the fact that our body is not a mathematical point in space, that its virtual actions are complicated by, and impregnated with, real actions, or, in other words, that there is no perception without affection. Affection is, then, that part or aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies. (Bergson, 2002, p. 135)

Bergson also emphasised the role of the body in cognition. He said:

Here I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are open to them, unperceived when they are closed. ... Yet there is one of them which is distinct from all the others, in that I do not know it only from without by perceptions, but from within by affections: it is my body. (ibid., p. 12)

Bergson (2002) argued that affection is created through vibrant connections between movement and the body. He stated, “I find that they [affections] always interpose themselves between the excitations from without and the movements which I am about to execute” (p.11).

However, Moore (1996) suggests that Bergson’s thinking places too much emphasis on perception as purely external. He criticises Bergson for “ultra-externalism” (p. 32). In challenging Bergson’s position, Moore discusses the phenomenon of a needle touching a finger with increasing pressure. Perception he argues will progress to pain (or affection), but pain is an inner experience. In his argument, Moore (1996) says:

For our bodies, with which and through which we perceive, are different from other images in that we are aware of them not only through perception, but also through our affections. And affections are in general the activities or tendencies to action, of the body itself. Such activities may be activities of the body as a whole, or localized activities within it. Though associated with pure perception they are quite different from it. (Moore, 1996, p. 33)

DELEUZE AND GUATTARI

The words affect and affection featured prominently in Deleuze and Guattari’s seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). In Massumi’s translation he differentiates between the two terms observing that:

Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L’affection* (Spinoza’s *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include “mental” or ideal bodies). (Massumi in Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. xvi)

Deleuze, defined affect as the continuous change on the body’s ability to act and also to be acted on (or affected). He suggests that affect “is a mixture of two bodies, one body which is said to act on another, and the other receives the trace of the first” (Deleuze, 1978, p. 46).

Deleuze proposed an alternative understanding of affect and affection by differentiating them from emotions and sentiments. Drawing on Spinoza’s attributes of substance and Bergson’s notion of duration, Deleuze argues that:

The affections (*affectio*) are the modes themselves. The modes are the affections of substance or its attributes. These affections are necessarily alive ... affections designate that which happens to the mode, the modifications of the mode ... their ideas involve both the nature of the affected body and that affecting external body. The affections of the

human body whose ideas present external bodies as present in us, we shall call images of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say it imagines. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 48)

In 1998, Deleuze defined affects as “passages, becomings, rises and falls, continuous variations of power (*puissance*) that pass from one state to another” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 139). He said, “We will call them affects, strictly speaking, and no longer affections. They are signs of increase and decrease, signs that are vectorial (of the joy–sadness type) and no longer scalar like the affections, sensations or perceptions (ibid.). For Deleuze’s these “image-affections” influence the body’s modes, “pushing it along gradients of intensity, strengthening or decomposing its capacities to affect and be affected”(Saldanha & Adams, 2012, p. 273).

O’SULLIVAN

In 2001 O’Sullivan linked affects to bodily experience. He argued that affect is “extradiscursive and extra-textual. Affects he argued “are moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter. We might even say that affects are immanent to matter. They are certainly immanent to experience” (p. 124). O’Sullivan argues that affects are not in the domain of language and therefore they exist in the realm of the body and can only be experienced through corporeal sensations.

MASSUMI

Brian Massumi (1995) argues that affect describes changes in the level of capacity in our bodies while we engage in life activities. For Massumi, our bodies carry the potential to increase or decrease its power to act in reaction to what happens in the future. He argues that there is a constant movement in the energy of the body, produced by our ability, as a body, to affect and be affected by other objects and bodies.

He proposes two different views emanating from the same reality. He says:

When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from

the point of view of the change in capacity... every transition is accompanied by a feeling of the change in capacity. (Massumi in Zournazi, 2002, p. 212)

SHOUSE

More recently, the concept of affect has been developed by social theorists and political scientists (Reddy & Reddy, 2001; Rosenwein, 2001). Daniel Shouse (2005) suggests that the “importance of affect rests upon the fact that in many cases the message consciously received may be of less import to the receiver of that message than his or her non-conscious affective resonances with the source of the message” (Shouse, 2005, para. 12). Thus, Shouse suggests a dimension of reception that operates beyond the conscious level. Reception, he suggests, exists within the ‘self’ of the receiver and it draws upon a functioning resonance between the receiver and the source.

Shouse (2005) also suggests that affection may be understood as, “personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings” (2005, para. 3). Moreover, he proposes “that an affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential” (ibid., para. 5).

SEIGWORTH AND GREGG

More recently, Seigworth and Gregg (2010) have discussed affect as a phenomenon that can move between the animate and inanimate. They suggest that affect can exist beyond emotion or consciousness, proposing that:

... affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability. (p. 1)

LEYS

Finally, Leys in 2011 critiqued the distinction between feelings and affect, arguing that there has been a noticeable “turn to the emotions” in recent literature that is evident in a variety of disciplines, “including history, political theory, human geography, urban and environmental studies, architecture, literary studies, art history and criticism, media theory, and cultural studies” (p. 434).

Leys (2011) notes that philosophers and thinkers have broadly misunderstood the importance of our bodily and affective tendencies in thinking and reasoning. She defines affect as something that:

... must be viewed as independent of, and in an important sense prior to, ideology – that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs – because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning. (p. 437)

THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF LAND

The concept of spirituality in relation to land

Given embodiment as a relational concept where the mind and body coexist, or the body is understood as an absolute source of knowing, in this thesis I propose an extension that considers a form of knowing that reaches beyond the physical and cognitive. I argue that embodiment might also embrace a spiritual realm of being in the world. This dimension I suggest resides both in the land and the photographer who records it and he is connected through an immersive process of *comunhão*.

The idea that there might be a perceptible spiritual dimension to land has been underpinned by a diverse evolution of thinking. Of significance to this study are the formative influences of Abrahamic thought, Descartes’ separation between the mind and the body, Spinoza’s ecologic alternative, Deleuze’s concept of the spiritual landscape, Dewsbury and Cloke’s immaterial push of the spirit alongside the materiality of land, Bennett’s vital materialism, and a growing body of indigenous writing concerned with the spiritual essence of land and its interconnectedness with humankind.

THE ABRAHAMIC FRAMEWORK²⁴

In early Abrahamic thought, the earth (Heb. Adamah, אֲדָמָה, meaning ground, earth, or land) was understood as separate from man. It was created before him. On Day Two, it was without form and on Day Three, God rendered it solid and covered it with vegetation (Genesis 1:9–13). However, it wasn’t until Day Six that God was understood to have created humans and other creatures that lived on dry land (Genesis 1:24–31).

This said, theological scholars have noted a distinctive etymological relationship between adamah (the earth) and the name of the first man ‘Adam’ (Abbott, 1910; Diamond, 2002; Gruenwald 2003). Gruenwald (2003) suggests that this relationship reinforces the teleological link between man and the land, emphasising both the way in which man was understood as a cultivator of the land and how he originated from the “dust of the ground” (p. 61). So, in Judeo-Christian thought, Adam was understood as a creature that was formed of the earth and God breathed life into his nostrils. As a result of this process, mankind came to possess a living soul (Genesis 2:7).

In addition to this, man was charged with having “dominion over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26). This theological framework for understanding the relationship between man and the land contained within it both a conceptual connection (being of the earth) and a disconnection (having been created separately from, and having dominion over the earth). This paradoxical state had a profound influence on much early Western thinking.

THE PROBLEM WITH DESCARTES

In 1637 Descartes, in his book *Discourse on the Method*, formulated a significant philosophical argument. He stated, “I think therefore I exist” (*cogito, ergo sum*). His assertion underscored a perceived separation between the mind and the body. In order to resolve ontological problems inherent in debates of the period emanating from religion and the sciences, Descartes established alternative domains, where religion ruled over the mind and soul while sciences prevailed over matter and nature. In his hypothesis, he positioned God inside the sciences and knowledge was conceived as understanding of (and from) God.

Descartes (1637) proposed a rational model of man who exercised dominance over nature. He said:

Knowing the nature and behavior of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens and all the other bodies which surround us, as well as we now understand the different skills of our workers, we can employ these entities for all the purposes for which they are suited and so make ourselves masters and possessors of nature. (Descartes, 1956, p. 40)

Žižek has argued that “Cartesian dualism open[ed] up the way to ruthless exploitation of nature... placing the idealized world of rational thought on a higher plane than nature” (2016, p. 3), and Taylor (2008, p. 472) has argued that the reduction of Nature to matter meant that Science was:

... exiled to the “merely” physical world, became a discipline without spiritual or ethical consequences. Theology, confined to mental substance, was cloaked in a spiritual insulation that kept it from being relevant to the world of time and space. The human soul was unable to interact with the body it inhabits and, analogously, the Western world’s God was left equally unable to interact with the physical universe.

Michael also argues that Descartes’ “mechanistic philosophy had dangerous implications for human society” (1992, p. 419). Animals and plants, he said, were reduced to “soulless machines” and were conceptually able to be misused. By extension forests, mountains and trees were able to be “indiscriminately exploited” (ibid.).

²⁴ The Abrahamic religions comprise a group of Semitic-originated belief systems. The three most widely distributed are Christianity, Islam and Judaism but also included are faiths descended from Yazdanism, Samaritanism, Bahai Faith and Rastafari.

SPINOZA’S ECOLOGIC ALTERNATIVE

However, in 1670 Spinoza challenged Descartes’ dualism by suggesting that “there is no transcendent and personal God, no immortal soul, no free will, and that the universe exists without any ultimate purpose or goal” (para.1). He claimed that substance is something that is conceived by itself and the properties of a substance are modes or attributes. The only substance he argued, was God and both humans and nature were modes of God. Both modes he suggested were interconnected and collectively dependent.

Carlisle offers a useful illustration to explain this thinking. He says:

The ocean stands for God, the sole substance, and individual beings are like waves – which are modes of the sea. Each wave has its own shape that it holds for a certain time, but the wave is not separate from the sea and cannot be conceived to exist independently of it. (2011, para. 6)

The image is effective because if we consider the idea of connectedness, we are aware that each wave’s movement will affect other things. Kober argues that:

Spinoza presents a rigorous naturalistic view of man and nature. Man is a part of nature, a subject of the same domain – not a domain separate from it, nor a domain within that of nature. Man cannot act against nature or in an unnatural way; in comparison with any other part or creature of nature, man is not special, more important, or qualitatively different. All general laws of nature apply equally to animals, inanimate objects, humans, God, the mind, and the affects. (2013, p. 43)

DELEUZE

Deleuze (1988) argued that a spiritual landscape could not be physical but the idea might refer to a space where something invisible or untouchable existed as an idea of “powerful, non-organic life which grips the world” (p. 81). (Deleuze may refer here to my material and bodily disposition to experience the spiritual and virtual in a world that exists in both senses). Rose and Wylie (2006), in discussing the land in relation to Deleuze’s notion of vitalist biophilosophy suggest:

In epistemological terms landscape is neither seen nor seeing, neither an object seen by a gaze nor a particular way of seeing. The term landscape is rather better defined as the materialities and sensibilities with which we see. Here, landscape names a perception-with, the creative tension of self and world. (p.68)

Deleuze’s thinking helped to move us towards a conception of the land as something beyond the physical, however more recent writers have drawn connections between the nonphysical experience of land and conceptions of the spiritual.

DEWSBURY AND CLOKE

In 2009 Dewsbury and Cloke published an article called Spiritual Landscapes: existence, performance and immanence on ideas of spirituality and land. In it they theorised an “immaterial push of spirit alongside the materiality of landscape” (2009, p. 695). They suggested that we might associatively map “relations between bodily existence, felt practice and faith in something immanent but not manifest as such” (ibid.). Three years prior to their essay Warner (2006) had suggested that relationships between landscape and spirituality were concerned with the apprehension of the corporeal and the ethereal, the solid and the elusive, and the material and mysterious.²⁵

Dewsbury and Cloke argued that in any discussion of spirituality and land, care must be taken to distinguish the meaning of spirituality and religion. They noted that “spirituality is clearly not always religious ... spirituality has been sought and experienced in a number of non- and a-religious contexts” (2009, p. 696). These they noted, included nature (Kalnin, 2008) and meditation on the inner self (Parrish-Harra, 1999).²⁶

In using the word ‘spiritual’ Dewsbury and Cloke referred to a state in “which faith forms a significant part of the move beyond rationality and of the possibility of other worldly dispositions” (2009, p. 695). They also suggested that a spiritual engagement with land may occur through practices that people undertake because they believe in their communicative potential.²⁷ They argued if a spiritual disposition is adopted “certain affects are produced that make people experience very real and specific feelings” (ibid., 697).

Dewsbury and Cloke’s concept of spiritually and its connection to contemplative walking had already been discussed in 1998 as a form of creative engagement with the land as a process of walking “to and through places found to be affective of some sense of spiritual evocation, to pondering on the aesthetic and affective connections achieved in say artwork” (p. 696). This engagement, they suggested, might be driven from a search to know how to achieve the full potential of human existence beyond immediate material gratification. This, they suggested, might include “ways of seeing beyond sight to both a sense of being that includes all senses and an openness to being affected” (ibid.).

BENNETT

Although not concerned with spirituality as an explicit phenomenon, the American philosopher and political theorist Jane Bennett proposed in 2010 that all matter might be considered alive (or vibrant). Her work suggested an interconnection between everything in the world, and she proposed because of this, significant implications for social, political and ecological dimensions of living. Her thinking drew largely on ideas from the vitalist tradition that had been resourced by Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze and Massumi.

Bennett’s provocative repositioning of the relationship between the nonhuman (things) and the human she described as vital materialism, or the ability of matter to influence other bodies (including human beings). By “vitality” she referred to the “capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (2010, p. viii).

²⁵ In the same year Rose and Wylie defined such a relationship as a “tension of presence/absence, and of performing, creating and perceiving presence” (2006, p. 475).

²⁶ Six years after the publication of Dewsbury and Cloke’s essay, Perriam suggested that:

... what we might call spiritual experiences of place are often perceived as traversing body and land. Spiritual dimensions of human experience range across faith-based systems of belief, ethical and moral beliefs in standards of human behaviour and heightened sense of purpose. (2015, p. 21)

²⁷ These practices, they suggested, might include “contemplative walks to and through places found to be affective in some sense of spiritual evocation” (2009, p. 695).

Through this assertion, Bennett proposed that land has agency and it interacts with us.

Although Bennett’s vital materialism served to challenge thinking that proposes a binary opposition between living and nonliving matter, her concerns were primarily focused on the question, “How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?” (ibid.)

Conversely a significant number of indigenous researchers have discussed the spiritual nature of relationships between people and the land. Of these, two bodies of writing have proven useful to this thesis. The first is an essay by Hukarere Valentine, Natasha Tassell-Mataamua and Ross Flett (2017). In their work they argue that “spirituality ... acknowledges the interconnectedness between the human situation and the natural environment, as well as the human situation and an esoteric real” (2017, p. 65). They suggest that by adopting a spiritual framework, “we acknowledge a wider connection to the universe as a living entity” (ibid.). They have also noted that spirituality inside indigenous traditions “can be different from religion and is based on a sense of connectedness” (2017, p. 65). According to Christakis and Harris (2004), this interconnection bonds together “earth, ancestors and peaceful existence” (p. 251).²⁸

To a certain extent Valentine, Tassell-Mataamua and Flett’s work interfaces with Maaori scholarship that discusses the manner in which the “spiritual realm is always present, integrated into everything, the source of both pain and suffering and healing and wellbeing” (Ruwhiu, 2001, p. 63). Significant within this arena is a distinctive body of writing relating to the concept of mauri.

THE CONCEPT OF MAURI

According to The Maaori Online Dictionary, Mauri refers to a “life principle, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions – the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity.” The word can also describe “a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group in which this essence is located.”²⁹ Moorfield also argues that mauri may also refer to a “source of emotions” (2011, p.106).

In 1954, in his discussion of spiritual and mental concepts of the Maaori, Elsdon Best suggested mauri may be likened to the Greek term thymos inasmuch as it is an inward activity.

However, he also argued that it is more than this “because, under the concept of mauri ora, mauri is also “held to be a protective quality, the sacred life principle” (p. 47).

In 1998 Mason Durie discussed mauri as a phenomenon that has a movement that moves from interiority outwards, creating a complex ecology of relationships. As a clarification of this, Barlow (1991) argues that mauri emanates from the Io; the supreme being, or the source of supreme intelligence.

Marsden and Royal (2003) suggest that mauri, “is meditated to objects both animated and inanimate” (p. 44) and as a phenomenon “it stimulates all things, creates order out of disorder” and shows “a sureness of touch that stems from inner clarity” (ibid., p. 88). Marsden and Royal (2003) and Kereopa (in Moon, 2008) suggest that mauri embraces the living essence or life force of everything. It is a phenomenon that bonds everything together, including land and people. However, the concept they both suggest is very complex.

In her 2011 essay Mauri – Rethinking wellbeing, Pohatu applied mauri to a rethinking of human wellbeing. In her seminal essay she noted, “Maaori reasoning accepts that there is a common center from which all mauri emanates and from which everything draws” (2011, p. 3). It is her writing, underpinned by preceding theorists, that I have found the most helpful in this study because it extends principles and definitions into contemporary practice.

Having now discussed a range of written discourse impacting on my project, it is useful to consider photographic practice related to the inquiry.

PRACTITIONERS

Although there are literally hundreds of photographers whose work is concerned with photographing land, of specific interest to this project are a small number of practitioners whose work is relevant either because of their approach (Thomas Joshua Cooper), their engagement with embodiment as physical (Wendy Beatty, Rene Burton) or their concept of land as a phenomenon that contains dimensions that transcend the physical and cognitive (Sebastião Salgado, Joyce Campbell, Araquém Alcantara and Robert Pouwhare).

28 Valentine, Tassell-Mataamua and Flett’s work contributes to an increasing corpus of scholarly writing that is increasingly impacting on Western ideas and underscoring the “importance of locating spirituality within culture, place and history” (Phillips, 2016, p. 66).

29 <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/word/3960>

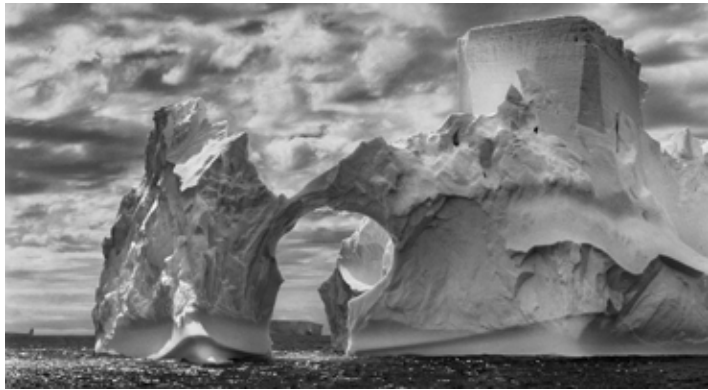


FIGURE 2.1.
Salgado, S. (2005). Iceberg, "The Castle," between Paulet Islands and the Shetland Islands, Antarctica. From the book *Genesis*.³⁰

FIGURE 2.2.
Frame grabs from the documentary *The Salt of the Earth* (2014). [01:12:35; 01:14:06; 01:14:08; 01:14:14]



SEBASTIÃO SALGADO

Sebastião Salgado is a Brazilian photographer who in 2014 produced *Genesis*, the fourth of a series of photographs about global issues.³¹ *Genesis* was concerned with issues of environmental and climate change. His exhibition contained photographs of landscapes, seascapes, wildlife and indigenous peoples. In an accompanying documentary, called *The Salt of the Earth* (2014) (made jointly by his son Juliano Salgado and Wim Wenders), Salgado discussed his distinctively immersive photographic practice (Figure 2.1).

In this work he describes his photographic process as deeply embodied in a physical and spiritual conceptualisation of a place. Salgado discusses a distinctive form of communication that occurs between him and the land in which he is immersed. He says, "In *Genesis*, my camera allowed nature to speak to me. And it was my privilege to listen" (Salgado, 2014, para.1). Arguably what he described here was a discursive process, a finetuning of awareness that enabled him to listen to the nonaudible.

The deeply immersive nature of his photographic process, he suggests, can produce a certain vulnerability that can result in markedly difficult outcomes when a photographer is working in 'damaged' environments (like his time spent documenting the civil wars in Rwanda).³² The result of work in this environment produced what he describes as a "sickness of the soul" (Figure 2.2).

After Salgado had spent years recording images of violence (prior to the *Genesis* project), he found that he was compelled to return to Brazil and begin an initiative to recover the native forest from his parents' farm. In the documentary he described the recovery of the forest as a form of healing and in this process, he says, lay the seeds of the photographic project *Genesis*. According to Smith (2016), Salgado approached this new work "not as landscape photography, but to tell a story of the ongoing coexistence of the human and nonhuman world" (p. 93).

- ³⁰ Sebastião Salgado's *Genesis* project was a record of natural environments presented in book form. His images surfaced out of an inquiry that took eight years to realise. His photographs were distributed in geographic chapters: Sanctuaries, Africa, Pantanal, Amazonia, Planet South and Northern Spaces.
- ³¹ His previous series were *Workers* (1993), *Migrations* (2000) and *Exodus* (2016).
- ³² The Civil War in Rwanda was a conflict between the government and the rebel forces. The conflict that happened between 1990 and 1993, resulted in more than 800,000 deaths.



FIGURE 2.3.

Beatty, W. (2016). Untitled# 12a and Untitled# 12.1 from her Landscape Series, gelatin silver prints, (99 x 157 cm and 99 x 151 cm respectively).

WENDY BEATTY

The Australian photographer and researcher Wendy Beatty also describes a methodological approach of embodiment when she records land. In her (2017) practice-led PhD research she described an approach that embraced walking and recording that significantly altered her previous aesthetic assumptions regarding landscape photography. (This is not dissimilar to the method that I have found useful).

Beatty comprehends land as something that includes but extends beyond the physical (Figure 2.3). In her thesis she describes a distinctive embodied approach where a:

... body-centred and physical process aims to arrive at, and then express, an implicit relationship with the landscape. Rather than seeing the land as a commodity, simply to be consumed and reproduced, my method is to view and engage visually with the landscapes to include an empathic, ecological position that I understand as an “affective gaze”. This is a tactile and body-centred response that extends the experience of looking at the landscape itself. (Beatty, 2017, p. iii/iv)

Beatty (2017) describes how the affections of the land influence the moment that she records an image and she suggests that the land she documents is in communication with her. She says, “the word dialogue is important here. A dialogue with the landscape” (p. 84). She understands her process as one that embraces a “mediation between physical presence and ephemeral senses” (p. 96).

Significant in her research practice is the use of field notes that function in a similar way to my reflective journal. Like my work, her journal moves between registers as it seeks to provide an authentic account of what has been experienced. Indicative of this is a situated poetic voice appearing in field note number 3 (p. 94) where she describes her bodily experience:

My body becomes the filter – the landscape is making imprints on my body. It might be a formation of rock, it might be a ridge in the horizon, or a cluster of grass – but it’s also the sound, the atmosphere that I am in-tuned to that affects the “moment”. (p.94)

Beatty claims that such an immersive approach not only changes processes but also perceptions and values.

Her embodiment not only impacts on how she engages with land but it is also incorporated in her final prints, because she allows it to intercept the light that reaches the photographic paper. Her body is used to darken or brighten areas on the final print, in a manner similar to dodging and burning in traditional analogue studio processes. This is a method Beatty describes as “dancing”. In affecting it she suggests that she draws strongly on processes of tacit knowing.

JOYCE CAMPBELL

The New Zealand photographer Joyce Campbell’s work is of significance because she draws relationships in her work between Maaori “mythology, history and ecology” (Campbell, 2018, para.1). This is a distinctive feature of her (2010) project Te Taniwha which involved a photographic study of Waikaremoana (Figure 2.4). To produce these photographs she worked “onsite” in a field-based darkroom. In this location she used ambrotypes and daguerreotypes to produce photographs of caves, gullies, and pools, anticipating “that in the silver we might catch a glimpse of the Taniwha” (ibid., para. 2). The taniwha she refers to is a mythical being that dwells in the sea, in deep pools in rivers or in caves. Such entities are associated with the treacherous movement of water as in dangerous currents or deceptive waves. Taniwha may be considered as protective guardians of a location (kaitiaki) or in some instances as dangerous nonphysical beings.

In the Te Taniwha project Campbell was concerned with trying to capture something in the land that reached beyond the physical. In doing so she appeared to accept that the land in Aotearoa/New Zealand might carry traces of something more than the tangible.

Her 2013 exhibition The Thread (Figure 2.5) followed on from the Te Taniwha project. She describes this inquiry as borrowing ideas from “the mythology, history and ecology of Te Reinga.” The project was concerned with damage to the land (Whakapunake maunga, the sacred mountain that rises above Te Reinga). In an attitude similar to my own, in this project she saw “errors” that occurred when photographing as part of a communication between herself and the land. She accepted damage and accidents as integral to the nature of the event. The catalogue accompanying her exhibition notes:

Eighty years ago the mountain burnt in a hunting accident from which the vegetation has never



FIGURE 2.4.
Campbell, J. (2010). Te Taniwha
project. Te Reinga, New Zealand.

FIGURE 2.5.
Campbell, J. (n.d). The Thread project.
Te Reinga, New Zealand.



regenerated. During the first photo shoot the mountain was enveloped by dense cloud and Campbell struggled to orient herself in a field of skeletal trunks that are the remnants of the virgin forest destroyed in that disaster. When those images were developed Campbell discovered that her film had been damaged – by age, heat or radiation – so that the images already obscured by fog were further clouded by the disintegration of the material surface of the film. (2013, Two rooms exhibition online catalogue, para. 3)

THOMAS JOSHUA COOPER

Thomas Joshua Cooper is an American born, Scottish-based landscape photographer and poet. Like me, he is noted for a very interiorised approach to recording land in often hostile environments. Each place he records is the subject of only one negative taken with an 1898 Agfa wooden field camera (Figure 2.6). This image is normally the result of an extremely long exposure. If Cooper fails to record something of significance, he does not revisit a location, because he believes a photograph of the essence of a place is something made available to him only once. He says, “If it’s gone, it’s gone. I never go back” (cited in Kennedy, 2001, para. 5). I experienced reasons for why such a phenomenon may occur and this is discussed in Chapter Four.³³

Kennedy (2001, para. 6) suggests that Cooper’s resonant photographs are partly influenced by his Cherokee father’s passing on of “a sense of the spiritual power of landscape.” Whether or not the spiritual nature of his work is influenced by genealogy, of particular interest to my research project is the manner in which Cooper approaches photographing the land through a process of interiorisation. In discussing this approach he says:

I think I realised that for what I wanted to do photographically, the first thing that had to happen was to be able to interiorise the outside to make sense out of it, to remove it from being an “out there”, a place away, to at least pictorially suggest an “in there” or an “around there” type of place. (as cited in Parkin, 2017, para. 41)

Although Cooper works almost entirely in black and white and produces very large scale images, his process of photographing in often hostile environments into which he immerses himself is similar to my own. Here physical demarcations between the external land and the interior self are experienced as permeable.



FIGURE 2.6.
Cooper, J. T. (1973). A Quality of
Dancing – Ceremonial Dwelling (small
animal nesting ground). San Jose
Canyon, New Mexico, pub: “Between
Dark and Dark.”

³³ This is explained in journal entries 5 and 6.

ARAQUÉM ALCANTARA

Araquém Alcantara is a Brazilian photographer who has worked widely with the land, mostly in environments in the Amazon and Pantanal. Like Salgado, his work often appears in book form, and his imagery emanates from a profoundly immersive process that involves high levels of empathy.

In a 2014 interview, Alcantara relates a story of his attempt to photograph a giant tree in Chapuri, in the Equatorial Amazon Forest. The tree was destined to be cut down so the community could use the timber to build corrals and houses. Given the majestic nature of the specimen, he asked if perhaps the organisers might select another, smaller tree, but they refused. While recording the event he describes falling to the ground at the same time as the tree, listening to its screams and that of other trees around it. He states that because trees of such age are part of a complex whole, as he lay on the soil, he was able to hear what he describes as “the screaming of the earth”. He said:

É impressionante o eco que a floresta produz lá embaixo. Quando uma árvore desse porte cai, mata mais umas vinte árvores ou trinta. E parece que toda a floresta para e lamenta. ... E o som da Terra é talvez o som mais triste do mundo, o mais triste que eu já ouvi.

(It is impressive the echo a forest produces down there in the Earth. When a tree with this age and size falls, it kills 30 or 40 other trees. And the sound that the Earth produces might be the saddest in the world that I ever heard.)

[Translation by Marcos Stegall]

Araquém comprehends land as a living entity and posits an ability to ‘hear’ and emotionally experience its agency in a manner that operates with and beyond the physical (Figure 2.7). His photography is concerned with the manner in which this agency becomes manifest in recorded imagery. Interestingly, in his 2014 interview, he uses the word *comunhão*, to describe his encounters with land. It is Araquém’s concept of *comunhão* that most adequately describes the communicative nature of certain encounters that I experience with land.



FIGURE 2.7.
Alcantara, A. (2014). Veredas.
Brazilian Cerrado.

RENE BURTON

The idea of a photographer's immersion in the land transcending physical and cognitive embodiment is also discussed by Rene Burton (2015) in his immersive study of climate adaptation resulting from the 1967 Tasmanian bush fires.³⁴ Burton challenges the physical parameters of photography by printing his photographs on to absorbent paper that he embeds with gunpowder and then lights. The record of the fire on the print is filmed and this becomes the exhibited work (Figure 2.8). Burton's methods for encountering land often transcended conventional physical/mental understandings of embodiment. He says, "I have a deep spiritual attachment to the landscape; I feel it in my bones. This connection is part of a single being; both landscape and person are connected, inherently. One cannot exist without influencing the other" (Burton, 2015, p. 29). He suggests:

My spiritual attachment to the land has allowed me to become more observant and in tune with my surroundings ... Thinking artistically about these experiences is a way to comprehend the world around me. It also provides a way to process and find new perspectives for considering problems and responses. (ibid.)

Burton describes the records of his burning photographic prints as "paradoxically hostile, yet caring and nurturing. They breathe, they are alive, they are not inert, and not static" (ibid.).

When photographically recording land, Burton (like Cooper) will spend an inordinate amount of time in a given location working inside what he calls "a greater, more immense, slow being" (ibid.). He says,

I have always been aware that the landscape exists without me, but I cannot exist without it ... our perception of time as it exists in the landscape, does not normally allow us to see it for its true self. Spending time in remote landscapes offers me an experience that is grounding and freeing - a form of reality intertwined with a sense of escape ... I am able to experience a sense of possibilities and history, a rawness, a richness and a perception or time beyond my own life. (ibid.)



FIGURE 2.8.

Burton, R. (2015). Fire over the burned land. Still from a temporal photograph of flames burning into a gunpowder infused screen print of Tasmanian bush.

Burton's immersions result in what he describes as "a thinking space (denkraum) where tacit knowing flows into explicit knowing" (ibid., pp. 49-50). His thinking resonates with my own research because I have increasingly come to reconceptualise the role and nature of time when recording land and to think about the protean and the unstable line between tacit and explicit thinking. In addition, I find Cooper's and Burton's considerations of time helpful, primarily because both photographers recognise that when in the land, a perception of time may become experiential rather than measured, and one can encounter and record alternative forms of temporality.

³⁴ Historically, these were the most fatal bush fires Tasmania had experienced. Within five hours, they burned through some 2640 square kilometres of land and left 62 people killed, 900 injured and 7000 homeless.

ROBERT POUWHARE

Burton’s embodied relationship with land that moves beyond the physical and cognitive is fundamental to the work of many Maaori artists. The filmmaker and activist Robert Pouwhare discusses this dimension in *He iti te manu he nui te korero* (Figure 2.9).

Citing Rangihau (1992) Pouwhare describes Maaori cultural identity as the connection between whakapapa (genealogy) and whenua (land). Within this, he notes,

Kinship is something that embraces the entire universe in Maaori thought. Ranginui and Papatūānuku are the sky and the earth, and all the creatures that inhabit the earth are tied together in whakapapa (kinship or genealogy). These relationships are the essence of Maaori culture and knowledge. (2016, p.32)

His artistic conceptions of land he says embody:

... both the physical and the metaphysical. They exemplify a multifaceted, different reality; a world that is conceived as an integrated genealogical whole through the mythology” ... (in his work) whenua (land) is treated as deeply dramatic ... We understand whenua as inherent power, rather than a landscape in which things occur (ibid.).

Pouwhare believes that because land and the photographer both possess mauri they are able to connect in a manner that transcends the physical. His writing and his subsequent discussions with me about this aspect of Maaori knowing have had considerable influence on the manner in which I have come to conceive both land and my practice within it.³⁵



FIGURE 2.9.
Pouwhare, R. (2016). Depiction of *Papatūānuku* the Earth Mother at the dawn of time.
From the moving image sequence, *He iti te manu he nui te korero*.

³⁵ The influence of these discussions is documented in journal entries 4, 8, 10, 13 and 15 and discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

CONCLUSION

A review of knowledge impacting on a practice-led inquiry is often accrued in the process of coming to know and understand what surfaces from the field. In this regard a review of knowledge is rarely a prequel to interrogating a question or questions. Accordingly, this chapter was written as a brief draft early in the thesis then revisited, edited or expanded as the project developed.

In terms of immersion, the study has been heavily influenced by Polanyi’s (1962) concept of an integrative immersive state (indwelling), and expanded through Douglass and Moustakas (1985), Moustakas (1990) and Sela-Smith’s (2002) writing on the relationship between immersion and heuristic inquiry. Specifically their discussions concerning how a researcher might operate productively in the unknown and intangible by becoming on intimate terms with a question have helped frame both my methodological approach and correlations between affection and practice-led inquiry. Integral to this have been Moustakas’ (1990) and Ings’ (2011) suggestions that through a process of immersion the connection that intertwines the subjective researcher with what is researched may become permeable.

With regards to embodiment, my thinking has been shaped by Spinoza’s early proposal that the body and mind are extensions of a single reality. I have also embraced Dewey’s idea that sensation, thought and action are indivisible. My understandings of embodiment have also been influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s proposal that the body is a permanent condition of experience. In addition, I have found Heidegger’s concepts of handability and Dasein useful in understanding how my body functions as thought. Finally, Pallasmaa’s assertion that knowledge is essentially an existential entity that may exist beyond ideas and words has influenced the way I think about land and the process of *comunhão*.

In terms of affect, I draw influences from Spinoza and his thinking relating to modes of the substance, from Bergson and his concept of duration, from Deleuze’s theories surrounding image-affections, from Bennett’s concept of vital materialism, and from Massumi’s distinction between affection and feelings.

In considering literature relating to the spirituality of land I have been heavily influenced by the anti-cartesian philosophy of Spinoza, particularly his understanding that both man and nature are equally modes of god, and therefore interconnected. Deleuze’s concept of the spiritual landscape and Dewsbury and Cloke’s idea that land might be a relationship “between bodily existence, felt practice and faith in things that are immanent, but not yet manifest” (p. 696), have also been influential, as has Valentine, Tassel-Mataamua and Flett’s concept of a spiritual and physical interconnectedness between what is human and what is nonhuman.

My thinking later in the thesis has also been challenged by Pohatu’s discussion of *mauri* as a life essence that is present and connects both land and people. Her work and that of writers like Best, Durie, Marsden, Kereopa and Pouwhare, have caused me to rethink embodiment as something that may extend beyond a consideration of the mind and body.

Finally, a review of the work of a small number of contemporary practitioners has served to contextualise approaches to method or understandings of the communicative nature of the land that are similar to my own. Significant here is Alcantara’s concept of *comunhão*, and his use of heightened levels of sensitivity that enable him to ‘hear’ land. In addition, both Alcantara’s and Cooper’s employment of extended time relate closely to my own findings. Also, of significance are Salgado’s, Beatty’s and Burton’s understanding of land as a phenomenon that contains dimensions that transcend the physical and cognitive, Campbell’s appreciation of productive “errors” that occur when photographing and Powhare’s belief that the photographer and land both possess *mauri* through which they are able to connect in a manner that transcends the physical.

Having now considered knowledge impacting on the inquiry it is useful to discuss the methodological approach taken to the study.





3

RESEARCH DESIGN

RESEARCH DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The research design for this thesis involves a heuristic methodology that is activated through diverse methods of inquiry. This chapter will discuss the paradigm from which it emanates and the specific methods applied in the project.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a comprehensive model for understanding what provides a researcher with his or her particular values and viewpoint and it influences how the problem is approached. Guba and Lincoln (1994) and McGregor and Murnane (2010) suggest that such a paradigm is a conjunct of beliefs, values or assumptions that govern a worldview, a general perspective, and by extension, how a problem is studied. Significantly, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006, para. 6) note that:

It is the choice of the paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research. Without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design.

This thesis project rejects the positivist concept of an objective reality and adopts an artistic research paradigm. Klein (2010, para. 9) argues that in artistic research the subjective perspective is constitutive, because experience can only be negotiated intersubjectively. He argues that if art can be understood as a mode of perception, then reflection on artistic practice takes place “at the level of artistic experience itself” (ibid, para. 13).³⁶

In this sense, such research is oriented towards discovery *through* artistic practice. Although the thesis is not concerned with the generation of an exhibition of photographic artifacts, its process of inquiry is conducted through practice and reflection on that practice. This process leads to insights into how I think about and respond to land as a researcher.

³⁶ There is debate around whether artistic knowledge should be verbalised and therefore if it is comparable to explicit knowing. Writers like Jones (1980) and the Arts and Humanities Research Board (2004) argue that such research must, while theorists like Langer (1957) and Lesage (2009) argue that knowledge is embodied in artifacts. However, Klein (2010) suggests that either way, artistic knowledge ultimately “has to be acquired through sensory and emotional perception, precisely through artistic experience, from which it cannot be separated” (para. 17).

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically³⁷ the research project constitutes a practice-led inquiry. Given the nature of its paradigm and the role of the photographer in discovering, understanding and constructing meaning, the thesis adopts a heuristic inquiry. Etymologically, the term heuristics derives from the Greek verb heuriskein (to discover). Moustakas³⁸ defines heuristic inquiry as:

A process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. (1990, p. 9)

According to Douglass and Moustakas (1985, p. 39), “In its purest form, heuristics is a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self”. Within this methodology the research question is understood as preliminary and is likely to change during the research process (Kleining & Witt, 2000). Heuristic inquiry is in essence, a form of self-discovery actioned through a trial and error process, where the results of experiments raise new problems and shift understandings. This form of inquiry positions the researcher’s self³⁹ at the centre of the study, and employs a dynamic based on insightful questioning and guesswork (based on accrued knowledge) to navigate an inquiry for which no known formula exists (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985).

Heuristic inquiry opens up embodyable spaces to researcher-practitioners that may operate outside of their normal sense of awareness. I suggest that such spaces may be understood as dimensions of “an unknown self”. They consist of both physical and cognitive dimensions, and in the instance of this thesis, a posited third dimension that may be broadly understood as ‘spiritual’.

Thus, the thesis is concerned with my perception of land and how it is ‘felt’. Because its inquiry is dialectical, a heuristic methodology enables me to work discursively with relationships in very flexible ways that “affirm imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid ways in the search for knowledge and understanding” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p. 40).

Kleining and Witt (2000) argue that it is through these qualities that the inherent flexibility of a heuristic inquiry can significantly increase the chances of discovery.⁴⁰

Therefore, in this study, a heuristic inquiry is a logical emanation from an artistic paradigm. This is because I am negotiating territory through photographic practice, without a formula. I am seeking high levels of discovery through questioning and reflection and these processes enable me to sense my way forward, based on both accrued, explicit knowledge and what is tacitly known or currently unknown.

THE ROLE OF THE TACIT

Inherent in a heuristic inquiry is an appreciation of tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1967; Moustakas, 1990; Schön, 1987). According to Polanyi (1967), tacit knowledge describes those things that we know but cannot explain. Polanyi suggests that tacit knowing is precognitive and cannot be adequately articulated by verbal means. He contrasts tacit knowing with explicit knowing which he suggests is knowledge that can be articulated. Sela-Smith (2002) states that, “tacit knowledge is a continually growing, multi-leveled, deep-structural organization that exists for the most part outside of ordinary awareness and is the foundation upon which all other knowledge stands” (para.15).

Thus, in my research, when I engage with land I do so operating with both formal, codified or explicit knowledge (technical expertise and knowledge about light, time and readable conditions) and tacit knowing (accrued nonverbalisable knowledge).⁴¹ This tacit knowing is based on “emotions, experiences, insights, intuition, observations [and] internalised information [that are] integral to the entirety of the consciousness” (Young, 2012, para. 6).

³⁷ Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that methodology asks, “How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?” (p.108).

³⁸ The study of heuristics gained momentum in Social Research after the pioneering work of the American psychologist Clark Moustakas (1974, 1985, 1990). He introduced a structured, intuitive process to investigate human experience, focusing on the inward emotional feedback of researchers while they make sense of an outward reality.

³⁹ Sela-Smith (2002) argues that “the heuristic process opens to knowledge that which is embedded and integrated within the self through understanding of the self in relation to, and in the context of, the dynamic whole” (p. 55).

⁴⁰ A number of writers in the area of artistic research have discussed the nature and potentials of heuristic inquiry (Dineen & Collins, 2005; Ings, 2011, 2017; Ventling, 2017). Significantly both Ings (2011) and Kleining and Witt (2000) note the usefulness of this form of questioning when identifying emerging patterns and homologies surfacing within one’s work.

⁴¹ My accrued experience in the field of photography resources me with explicit (technical) and tacit knowing. It is the heuristic nature of the inquiry that enables me to access and process what I encounter, and to function within the immersion as a distinctive self, a self that goes beyond the cognitive, who draws from feelings and a ‘sensed’ knowingness. This allows me to intuitively connect fragments of meaning in order to “give birth to the hunches and vague, formless insights that characterise heuristic discovery” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 49).

IMMERSION

Fundamental to heuristic inquiry is the process of immersion (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002; Ings, 2013). Moustakas (1990) defines it as a “turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience” (p. 13), or a “deep structure that contains the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and judgments housed in the internal frame of reference of a person” (ibid. p. 32). This state he suggests, “governs behavior and determines how we interpret experience” (ibid.).

METHODS EMPLOYED IN PHASES OF THE RESEARCH

Within this heuristic inquiry I use specific methods to bring the self and the land together in an immersive environment of sensation and artistic recording. Broadly the research project may be understood as having four phases (Figure 3.1).

- The first involves the gradual process of immersion in the physical landscape.
- The second phase emanates from the first and is concerned with the process of data gathering.
- The third, reflective phase occurs in both my studio and field journal. Here I process recorded material and experiences.
- The final phase relates to critical reflection and questioning by peers. This process is activated through a range of initiatives, including exhibitions of photographs, public presentations (at conferences or in peer reviewed journals), feedback on drafts of exegetical writing and the use of focused critical discussion.

PHASE 1: THE PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

LOCATING THE SITE

My relationship with land is very intimate and I approach it not as a voyeur but through a process of immersion. Here my physical boundaries and those of the land become fused. This may be likened to Hallowell’s (1955) argument that, “any inner-outer dichotomy, with the human skin as boundary, is psychologically irrelevant” (p. 88). When I approach a location the line between the self and the landscape becomes permeable.

In locating a site I sometimes rely on the recommendation of friends or colleagues⁴², although often I come across places as I journey through the country.⁴³ I have learned not to consciously research the history or nature of these places in advance of my arrival so I am able to encounter them in a relatively naïve way.⁴⁴

WALKING

My immersion in a location normally begins with a period of attentive walking (sometimes for hours at a time). During this process my body is in motion while my eyes move across or through the field. The elements that I see change as my vantage point changes. Ingold (2004) argues that walking might be understood as a form of “circumambulatory knowing” (p. 331). Building on his connection between traversing the land and ways of knowing, I use walking as an inquisitive method where the body is in motion and the land can be considered from multiple vantage points.

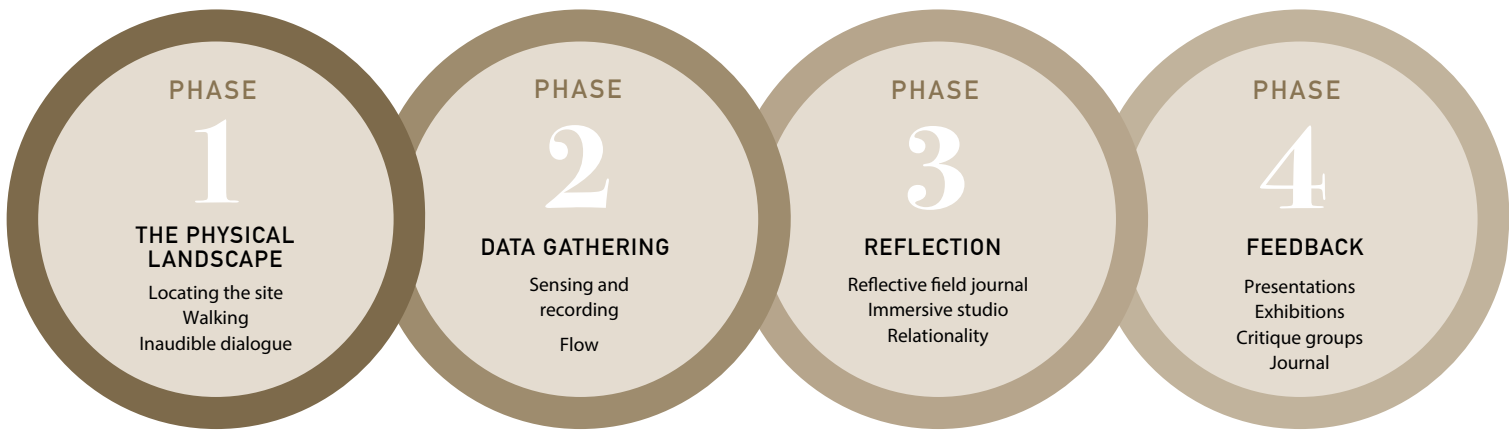


FIGURE 3.1.
Diagram of phases of the inquiry and related methods.

⁴² Muriwai and Te Henga (journal entries number 7 and 12) were approached on the recommendation of New Zealand friends who had spent significant amounts of time there.

⁴³ For example, the tributary of the Haast river was ‘discovered’ while driving around the South Island.

⁴⁴ I often just find the co-ordinates on a map and ascertain the best method of physically approaching the location.



FIGURE 3.2.

Tolaga Bay, New Zealand. (August 31, 2016). Walking enables me to initially settle myself into the physicality of land. I tend to seek out places with little or no human habitation. This is because encounters with other people tend to be a distraction. Normally my journeys are taken alone (or occasionally with my partner who leaves me for long periods of time so I can encounter the world around me in stillness).



FIGURE 3.3.

Gisborne, New Zealand, August 31, 2016. I tend to seek out places with little or no human habitation. This is because encounters with other people tend to be a distraction. Normally my journeys are taken alone, (or occasionally with my partner who leaves me for long periods of time so I can encounter the world around me in stillness).

When I walk into the worlds that I photograph, I am not pursuing a destination but instead I am entering an “embodied experience of pedestrian movement that functions in opposition to detached and speculative contemplation” (de Certeau, Giard, Mayol & Tomasik, 1998, p. 121). In this process, I gradually comprehend the worlds I traverse through interchanges between sensorial and physical modes (Ings, 2015), and walking becomes a rhythmic process wherein I become increasingly connected to the land.⁴⁵ (Figure 3.2).

INAUDIBLE COMUNHÃO

When walking, I enter into an inaudible dialogue with what I encounter. I listen to the land emotionally and intuitively. In this process my sensitivity to sound contributes to a kind of decentring where the land gathers greater agency and my emotional responsiveness initiates a form of communion.

This inaudible communion gradually becomes more finely tuned and when this happens I pause and wait. I remain open. This openness is not only to the physical qualities of the land, but also its living essence; so not just to the surface of what I see, but also to the essence that surrounds me.

PHASE 2: DATA GATHERING

During Phase 2 the recording of data takes place. This can only occur on the land and the process involves both technical and immersive methods.

SENSING AND RECORDING

When recording an immersive experience, I normally photograph from a fixed perspective using a tripod.⁴⁶ While this stabilises the parameters of the recording, the camera may vary in terms of focus distance and light exposure. Normally records are taken in landscape frame rather than in portrait mode because this allows me to record a wider angle of the location.

Although I document iterations of the land’s changes intuitively, I use the camera to record all of the available light, extending its range through multiple capture. Thus, on the camera I record a full dynamic range with a 3 to 12 bracket variation, in both directions, (bright and dark). This means that I record many images a lot darker and a lot brighter than one might normally. This is because I am seeking to record a maximum variation of light readings (Figure 3.3).

Sometimes I also record variations of my lens focus, a process known as photo stacking. This is a technique largely used in microphotography. The process increases the depth of field of an image, bringing sharpness from the foreground to the background. As a consequence, I rarely leave a location with fewer than 500 images. This large amount of data enables me later to identify patterns that make explicit, diverse dimensions of the encounter (Figure 3.4)

The early photographs in this research were generally taken at eye level. This meant that the image originated from my physical body’s position in the environment. Accordingly, the angles framed the relational state of my physical self as the ‘point of view’, and the composition was restricted to what my body could perceive through the perspective of my natural height. This procedure changed as the inquiry advanced.

⁴⁵ The relationship of walking to immersion is discussed contextually in Chapter Four: Data collection and analysis.

⁴⁶ Although carrying a tripod can be difficult in challenging terrain, I use the device because it enables me to utilise the sharpest point of my lens, giving me considerable stability and control over the depth of field. I normally use a high-resolution full frame Nikon D800E camera which has a high-resolution, full frame sensor. When recording material over extended periods of time, this sensor can heat up and this produces considerable ‘noise’. By using a tripod, it is easier to balance the dynamics of the camera, combining speed, sensibility (ISO) and the lens aperture in a way that would be difficult if I approached the research using a hand operated approach.

FLOW

Although the second phase of the inquiry uses specific technical methods, it is also the time when I am in deepest *comunhão* with the land. Although I discuss this phenomenon in more detail in Chapter Four, it is useful to outline here the nature of the communion as a method for sensing the environment.

When I find a location that suggests a recording, I wait for some time, letting myself become attuned to what is around me. Then I set up my camera and begin to photograph. Inside an increasingly immersive state, I am on occasions, able to identify a current, vibration or rhythm. Where an immersion is deeply experienced I find myself functioning in a kind of flow. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) suggests that ‘flow’ is often marked by a feeling of knowing what to do, and this energy keeps the researcher exploring, sensing, discovering and formulating, without a precise notion of physicality or time. He describes a flow experience as:

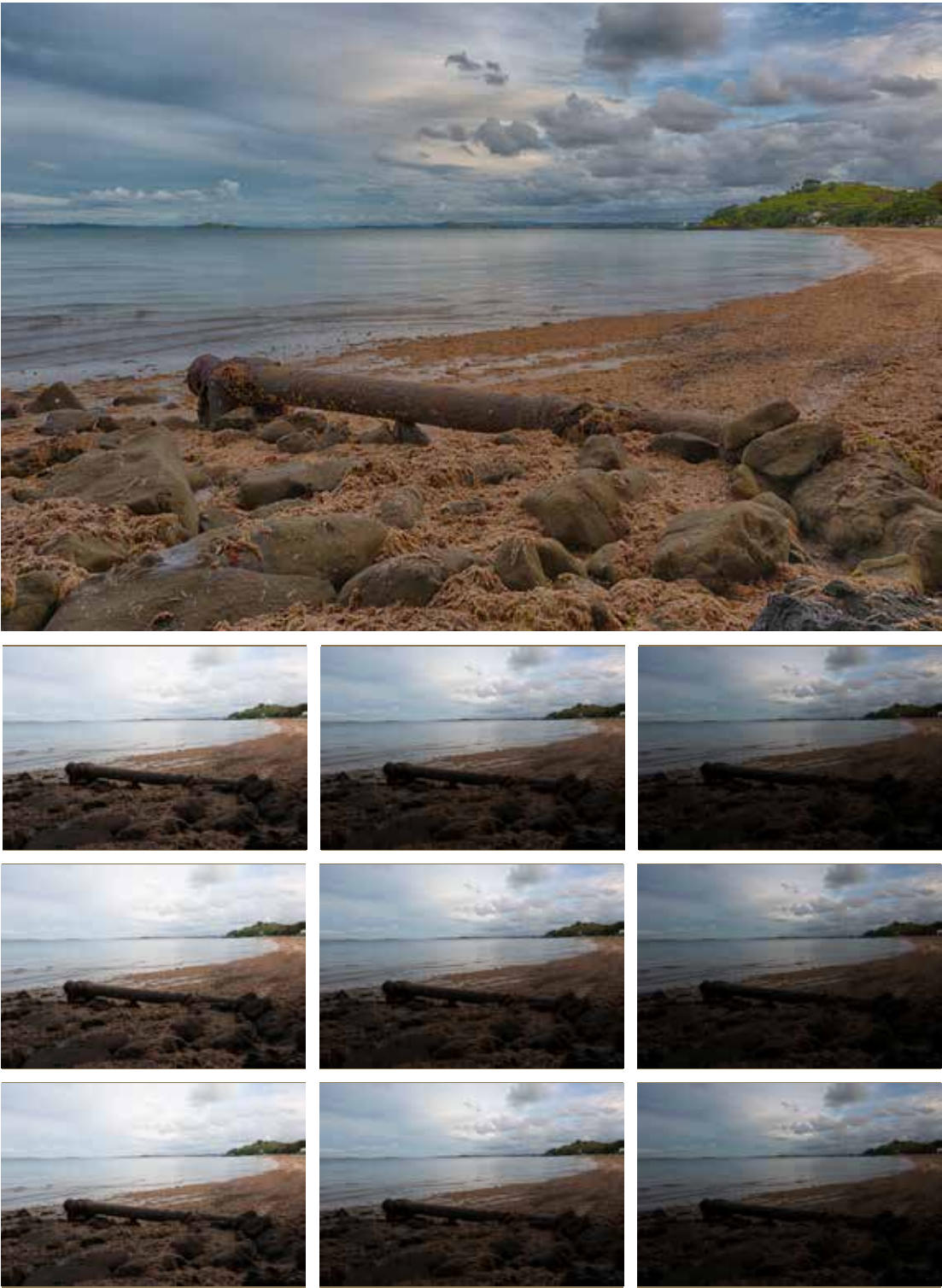
A sense that one’s skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand... Concentration is so intense Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous. (2008, p. 71)

In this immersive flow, I am able to connect to tacit dimensions of knowing. In such a state, technical concerns with equipment become peripheral and I transcend a state of exteriority and ‘feel’ my way into and through a condition of intuitive recording. My compass here is a sense of practice-oriented ‘rightness’ that Handelman (2005) describes as a “feeling of rightness-in-doing” (p. 19) wherein, “the aesthetics of practice integrate us with that which we do, in ways that self-produce and self-organize” (ibid.).

In this immersive state I operate in an embodied manner that is always physical, generally cognitive and sometimes connected to a living agency (Bennett, 2010) or a spiritual dimension.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ These ideas are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

FIGURE 3.4. Cheltenham, New Zealand, November 25, 2015. This technical experiment shows an image produced with three stages of focus and a variation of exposure in 3 EVs. The diversity of light recordings enables me to document shifts in tone and shadow. The increase in the depth of field is produced by focusing on different parts of the land. The first recording has its focus on the pipe, the second in the mid ground, and the third on the horizon.



PHASE 3: REFLECTION

The reflective phase of my research utilises both a reflective field journal and an immersion with data in my studio.

THE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Field notes and journals are largely associated with social and natural sciences, and profile as significant methods in ethnographic anthropology (Patton, 1990; Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2005; Creswell, 2013). However, reflective journals have become increasingly adopted as a research component in Nursing (Mulhall, 2003; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) Teaching, and Geography (Jones & Sauer, 1915; Bunge, 1969; Leopold, 2008; Hovorka & Wolf, 2009).

Although Newbury (2001) suggests that field journals are less common in Art and Design research, he argues that they may be considered as “a melting pot for all of the different ingredients of a research project – prior experience, observations, readings, ideas – and as a means of capturing the resulting interplay of elements” (p. 3).

In this project my field journal is an ongoing, chronological diary that has accompanied me on my incursions. As a data gathering and synthesising tool it is written as a narrative of experience, and in it I have recorded immersion locations, discoveries, reflections and examples of work that, at the time, were formative in my thinking. However, because the research is practice-led and therefore iterative, ideas that emerged in my early entries were sometimes challenged and supplanted by later thinking and questioning.

THE STUDIO AS A REFLECTIVE SPACE

The second form of reflection occurs once recordings from the field have been gathered and I return to my studio. Sometimes I use my journal to think through what I have experienced before approaching the images and sometimes I write up my reflections after working with the data. The decision largely depends upon what I have encountered.⁴⁸

The studio where I work is silent because the quiet helps me to concentrate and draw myself into and through the world I have experienced (Figure 3.5). I lay out on my computer⁴⁹ all of the recorded images and I sit with them, listening in an interior manner to what they are telling me. Sometimes the connection is immediate because what I experienced is so explicitly written into the photographs,⁵⁰ but at other times I must wait with the images for weeks before they uncover subtle nuances that my consciousness was unable to discern at the time.⁵¹

Normally I begin by developing full frame raw files, then I select elements from other recordings. These files are 36 Megapixels in size, natively recording with 12 bits of depth per colour channel. This represents 281.5 trillion colors (more than twice the information a screen will allow me to see). In this sense I am working with a range of information that is twice what the human eye can perceive. I go over and over this rich colouration to draw forward the ethereal nature of the encounter. The large palette of hues allows me to travel deeply into a richness that appears to dwell in the emotional undercurrent of what I experienced.



FIGURE 3.5.
Working with full frame raw files in my studio.

48 Normally if the immersion has been very intense and I can feel distinctive resonances in the work I will write in my journal soon after leaving the field. When there is little that is discernible in the recordings or I am worried about something, I will engage with studio processes first, in an effort to understand what has occurred.

49 When processing images I normally work with a group of applications that include Adobe Lightroom, Photoshop, Dxo OpticsPro, Aurora HDR Pro, MacPhun Creative Suite, Nik Software Suite, Landscape Pro, Affinity and Topaz Labs Suite.

50 Examples of this occurred with immersions at Haast and Te Araroa, (See Chapter Four: Entries 3 and 4). In these instances the experience was so clearly defined that the spirit of the *comunhão* permeated almost all of the imagery.

51 For instance, my experience of Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island on September 18, 2016 (See Reflective journal entry 4).

RELATIONALITY

When I reconnect with sensations I experienced in the land, I (re)create the stimuli of my communication. I immerse myself in a series of rhetorical operations that help me to discern and elevate relationships between elements. These elements draw upon data with variations in time, light, texture and colour. The generation of a single image may take many hours and use syntheses of multiple individual records of the location. In identifying patterns and useful relationships within the data I ask myself dialectically, ‘What have I been shown here?’ and ‘How might relationships within these records express what I have encountered?’ In this phase of a heuristic inquiry Kleining and Witt (2000) observe:

Research procedures are not linear but dialectical. We “ask” our material “questions” in a similar way one may ask a person, receiving “answers” and questioning again. We preferably use “open” questions. Reading a protocol will suggest which questions to ask. The text should be interrogated from as many different perspectives as possible and the answers analysed The dialogic procedure is a means to adjust the epistemic structure of the researcher to the structure of the phenomenon and brings it in line with itself. (para. 11)

As patterns and homologies surface, a record of my encounter gradually takes form. Much of the refinement of the image is reliant on the depth of my experience of the land’s essence and it is this that resources my sensibilities and decision-making.

Eventually, I feel a sense of ‘rightness’, and at this point I know there is nothing more to be done, a balance between experience and visual representation has been reached. I can feel something with a living presence is presented and a relationship is exposed. This presence speaks beyond the didactic nature of the discrete digital record of a landscape and gives visual voice to an intense or subtly undercurrented relationship.

PHASE 4: FEEDBACK AND REVIEW

The fourth phase in the research runs parallel to journal writing and creating photographic records of what I experience. This phase involves external processes of feedback and review. Although the concept of peer review is deeply established in research, in a heuristic inquiry it can pose problems. In Sela-Smith’s (2002) critique of Moustakas’ method, she argued that the deeply internalised modus operandi of the heuristic inquiry requires the researcher to protect the integrity of the tacit, and she questioned the validity of importing external feedback into the process. She suggested that when drawing on the realm of tacit knowing, external verbal analyses (including critique) might have a damaging impact on the quality of the thinking process. I believe that this is arguable. Heuristic inquiry does not consist entirely of internal processes. Indeed, even Moustakas’ (1990) method involved stages of explication and creative synthesis. The immersive phases of my approach are often preconscious, but I also try to understand what is happening by drawing what is sensed into the explicit by writing in my reflective field journal and strategically presenting work to peers whose reflection I can reimport into my thinking process. In this dynamic I am not seeking critique and evaluation of photographic artifacts; I am engaging in a process of prompting and questioning that I can use to drive my thinking forward. This feedback takes three distinct forms:

- Conference presentations of my thinking,
- Public exhibitions,
- Critique groups.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Throughout the thesis study I have opened my thinking up in national and international conference presentations. These have included my Confirmation of Candidature review presentation (December 12, 2016), a presented peer reviewed paper at the 11th AUT Postgraduate Symposium (August 17, 2017) and a public address at the Design School of the Anhembi Morumbi University in São Paulo (June 28, 2017).

In these presentations I discussed and reflected on methods I was experimenting with as I sought to understand and document the physical and nonphysical nature of land. Many of these presentations were to other doctoral researchers. What was distinctive in the feedback was how easily the idea of a spiritual essence was for Brazilian and Maaori delegates to accommodate. There was often an implicit understanding that one’s experience of land might operate beyond the physical and cognitive.⁵²

Conference presentations were useful on three levels. First, they enabled me to draw together my thinking at the time and to present it as a coherent hypothesis. This process caused me to overview my research and to externalise relationships within it. Second, the presentations were structured so they afforded time for questions from the floor. This questioning often suggested areas that required further clarification or approaches to the inquiry that might help to enrich my practice-led questioning. Finally, the presentations normally resulted in networking with fellow researchers and after the addresses, I was normally involved in ‘follow up’ discussions (in person or by e-mail) with people working in related fields. Often these researchers generously provided me with contextual reading or exposure to other photographers’ practice.

52 For some Brazilian thinkers this might be explained as a consequence of the country’s distinctive religious syncretism, where diverse elements of theological structures are synthesised into belief systems that place significant emphasis on the spiritual.

PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS

In the early stages of the research I attempted to elicit feedback through public exhibitions, although as the project progressed these became less and less useful. In the first two years of the research I exhibited bodies of work both in New Zealand and internationally (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). On the positive side, exhibiting photographs enabled me to draw together a degree of visual overview of research in progress. In addition, because the exhibitions required written copy for catalogues or wall displays, I was able to articulate my thinking in concise written form. However, public exhibition of my photographs became increasingly problematic. This is because displays led to an elevation of the image as an artifact rather than something emanating from an iterative process of inquiry into method. This may have been exacerbated because few people read the detailed print matter that accompanied the work.

It was the experience of these exhibitions that moved me increasingly away from separate displays of photographs and incrementally towards considerations of a thesis as a printed book that told the story of the research as a reflexive discussion between writing and photography.

CRITIQUE GROUPS

The third method of accessing feedback was more intimate in its construction. This involved the construction of critique groups involving experienced practitioners and thinkers. These people were selected because I felt that their professional, cultural or scholarly insight might pose useful questions. Normally participants were theorists, photographers or cultural experts. The critique sessions normally lasted up to an hour. With participant’s permission I used an audio device to record their reflections and questions so I could dwell on their thinking later, in the quiet of my studio (Figure 3.8).



FIGURE 3.6. Exhibition of work in progress at St Paul Street Gallery 3, Auckland, New Zealand, December 12, 2016. This exhibition was part of a presentation for my Confirmation of Candidature review. Selected photographs from five immersions were mounted on 1000 mm x 680 mm foam board. These were printed in 11 colours on an inkjet printer using Ilford Ultra White Paper stock. The exhibition was accompanied by a detailed print catalogue that included excerpts from my reflective field journal. Problematically, with the exception of reviewers who had read the 10,000 word print document accompanying the work, feedback focused almost entirely on the prints themselves. As a result, I was fielding questions about the sublime landscape, methods of presenting the images as immersive viewer experiences, and how photographic exhibitions might function as cultural experiences.



FIGURE 3.7. Exhibition of photographs at the Design School of the Anhembi Morumbi University in São Paulo, Brazil, July 16, 2017. The exhibition contained 10, 1100 mm x 780 mm, inkjet prints of images emerging from the inquiry. Feedback on the prints and the concept driving the research was very positive. To a certain extent a synthesis and summary of my thinking in a wall poster accompanying the exhibition (in evidence on the right of this image) helped to orient some feedback on to the research process. However again, much of the discussion related to how immersive experiences (as images) might be exhibited, the potentials of large-scale projections (rather than print), and how the use of recorded sound might function to enhance or distract from work when designing installations for such imagery.



FIGURE 3.8. Critique group in the Design School of the Anhembi Morumbi University, in São Paulo, Brazil, June 28, 2017. The session resulted from an invited exhibition that formed part of an exchange of international scholars working in practice-led approaches to research. The critique group comprised of PhD Design students and professors including Dr Rachel Zuanon, Dr Sergio Nesteriuk, Angela Santos, Eduardo Domingues, Kate Scarpi, Dr Bruno Silveira and Dr Felipe Conde. Critique groups like this were effective because rather than being question and answer oriented, they normally progressed into relatively deep levels of critical discussion. Because of the expertise of the participants, a level of rigour generally followed trajectories of thinking that incorporated theoretical and methodological considerations.

CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A highly sensory approach to artistic research that uses practice to lead thinking through both physical and nonphysical dimensions of land, is a challenging proposition to positivist paradigms of research. However, in Aotearoa/New Zealand given the impact of indigenous Maaori epistemologies on scholarly thought, such an idea is not unfamiliar. This said, using heuristic approaches to practice-led inquiry can present both advantages and challenges to the researcher.

ADVANTAGES

Heuristic inquiry can be very effective in surfacing what is not consciously known. It is flexible and invites very deep engagements based on the subjective yet critically reflective nature of the researcher. Through this engagement, Moustakas (1990) suggests that both the researcher and research are transformed so that a “growing self-awareness and self-knowledge ... incorporate(s) creative self-processes and self-discovery” (p. 3).

CHALLENGES

However, there are significant challenges in heuristic approaches to research. First, because of the methodology’s highly subjective nature, it can carry significant emotional costs (Ings, 2011). For this reason, it is crucial to bear in mind that any critique of what the researcher creates has to be consciously separated from a sense of critique of the self. At times in the supervision of the thesis my thinking has been ruthlessly interrogated. Inconsistencies have been pulled under the spotlight and I have been asked to justify contradictions in my thinking. However, I have been able to manage the emotional investment necessary because to a certain extent I have felt resourced by the vitality of thinking and the work emanating from the inquiry. In other words, discovery has not simply been a technical outcome of the research; it has sometimes been a sustaining ‘wonder’ to me. The ‘livingness’ of my engagement with the land has somehow balanced the high levels of emotional and sensory commitment, the self-exposure and the times when the physical challenges of inquiry left me exhausted, injured or conceptually disoriented.

Secondly, the flexible nature of heuristic inquiry means that changes in direction are very common and this can make the approach feel unstable. Accordingly, I have had to remain open to disruption but concurrently able to identify patterns and opportunities when they arise (Kleining & Witt, 2000).

The thesis trajectory itself has also been very protean. It necessitated changing supervisors, learning the nuances of a new language, challenging my western epistemological frameworks and eventually changing how I conceive of myself as a photographer. I was in this sense coming to understand the world heuristically.

Finally, the approach to immersively dwelling in land has raised the unanticipated issue of safety. In the past this has never been a problem for me but in truth many times while immersed in Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’ issues like time and physical danger become relinquished to the concentrated nature of the experience. While this flow can bring forward deep experiences of the nuanced and ‘essential’, it means that consciously I am less aware of the safety triggers that might normally operate. When I read back over my journal entries I realise just how common this experience was. As a way of addressing it, I increasingly began to take another person with me when I left the safety of a known environment. This was invariably a person who was prepared to wait and watch at a distance and in certain instances raise commonsense safety issues with me before I embarked on journeys into adverse conditions.

Having now discussed the overall methodological approach to the inquiry and positioned the research as practice-led, it is useful to consider the core of the study which is the field journal. In this chapter approaches to data gathering, analysis and synthesis in the project are made explicit and woven through a personal narrative of inquiry and discovery.





4

DATA COLLETION & ANALYSIS

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter may be broadly framed as an iterative, critical commentary on field work undertaken during the thesis. As the data gathering and synthesis phases of a practice-led inquiry, it is written as a chronological narrative of experience,⁵³ and in it I have recorded location immersions, discoveries, reflections and examples of work that, at the time, were formative in my thinking. Being a journal, the document has provided for an “ongoing developmental dialogue” (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p. 94) that integrates elements of “the real ‘inner drama’ of research, with its intuitive base, its halting time-line, and its extensive recycling of concepts and perspectives” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 15). Because of this, ideas that emerge in early entries are sometimes supplanted by later thinking and questioning.

The journal may be described as “a self-reflexive and media literate chronicle of the researcher’s entry into, engagement with and departure from the field” (Newbury, 2001, p. 7).

The entries in this chapter are chronological and they cover thinking that occurred in my studio after I left the land. This time I still consider as immersive because I “re-enter” the experience, albeit recollectively. Insights at this time are sometimes contradictory, revelatory, or raise questions that did not arise in the field.

The journal was used as a form of “close encounter” reflection and was normally written within hours of each immersion. This is because during this time I was able to record and consider what was experienced before insights from later immersions impacted on my thinking. The entries crystallised my thinking (through the process of articulating) and served in retrospect to illuminate transitions, discoveries and patterns of experience during the research process. As such the entries moved beyond just a reflection on immediate practice, they also operated as a kind of research narrative wherein I was able to read retrospectively, the emergence and nature of questioning, sensing and discovery.

⁵³ The journal does not contain reflections on a number of small incursions I undertook upon arriving in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is because these were largely cityscapes where I was familiarising myself with light and form and largely applying the same method of photographing places developed in my pre-existing work. The journal therefore begins with the first disruption to my thinking and it documents evolutions that followed.⁶⁰ It was only after I had produced the photographs that I was told about the infamous, unpredictable currents (rips) that can shift with little apparent warning.



PIHA

(36.5731° S, 174.2800° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

November 14, 2015
Reflective field journal entry 1

LOCATION

Piha is a beach 40 kilometres west of Auckland. It is positioned on the coast of the Tasman Sea to the north of the Manukau Harbour and on the western edge of the Waitakere Ranges. The beach has black sand due to a concentration of iron. At the time of this visit I knew nothing about the history or nature of the location.⁵⁴

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

Piha is close to where I have settled in Auckland, so it felt like a convenient incursion into the thesis inquiry. I drove my car out to the coast at 3.00 in the morning because I thought that I might photograph the sunrise over the water.

EXPERIENCE

However, my intensions were sorely disrupted. I slept in my car for a few hours before dawn then, as the light surfaced I was struck by a dramatic anomaly. As a Brazilian, beaches to me are populated places of gold or white sand, but what I encountered here felt like an inverse (or photographic negative) of my expectation. This was black sand.

The place was completely unpopulated.

I experienced Piha initially as sound. In the darkness, half-awake with expectation, I heard the land as a kind of selvagem. (I use the Portuguese word selva because the English translation “savage” is slightly different in meaning). The selvagem was contained in the thunderous, dark impact of the waves hitting the shore. There was an untamed, indomitable and uncompromising weight in the sound. I felt that it didn’t know me and I waited like a frail and insignificant observer in the front seat of my vehicle, wondering what meaning light might bring to the place.

I began to walk with my equipment under the first glow of light. I was still surrounded by the thunderously bass sound, constantly reminding me of the danger that seemed to permeate the place.⁵⁵

The experience produced within me a remarkable sense of respect and reverence. I was embodied in an experience where the land was not only moving but also ‘singing’.⁵⁶ The air I breathed was impregnated with water and salt (Figure 4.1.2).

A DAY LATER

Back in my studio when I reflected on what I photographed, I could see in what I recorded, something living. This was not a panoramic shoot of dawn over a beach but something that moved with both physical and nonphysical force. I began to wonder about magnetism, about sound in an image and about movement and stillness (such that what was still might contain the magnetism or residue of movement).

The photographic reflections I produced were all suspended in the strange half-light of my encounter with the dawn, with the unexpected disconcertion of opposites (the black sand and silver water), and the magnetic weight of sound (Figures 4.1.1 and 4.1.3).

FIGURE 4.1.1.
Piha, New Zealand. (November 14, 2015).

⁵⁴ It was only after I had produced the photographs that I was told about the infamous, unpredictable currents (rips) that can shift with little apparent warning.

⁵⁵ I discovered later that Piha has a history of death by drowning. Its unpredictable undercurrents have caused it regularly to be listed as one of New Zealand’s five most dangerous beaches, based on the number of rescues carried out by lifeguards (Water Safety New Zealand, Annual Statistics, 2016, <http://www.drownbase.org.nz/annual-statistics/>)

⁵⁶ This is difficult to explain. By singing I mean something very deep and resonant, like the darkness of sound created by the integration of water, hollow wind and the rhythmical movement of vegetation ... gathering as a kind of synchronizing mystery. This singing feels like a deep, black-grey voice of the land.



FIGURE 4.1.2.

Coastal rocks at Piha, New Zealand. (November 14, 2015). There was a kind of dark magnetism in the land. I was pulled by its force ... by its half-lit darkness and power. I could see that this was a place where the sea and the land churned against each other, but there was also a different kind of current that pulled at currents within me.

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY

I have been giving some thought to the methodological approach I will take to the project. I realise that my previous methods have not served to deepen the nature of my encounters with land. I have just completed a series of practice-led methodology workshops (30th September - 11th November) where I have been working with other creative practitioners. This has served to extend the parameters of how I consider approaches to research because much of what I have encountered is new (because of my background as a semiotician my research methodologies have placed an emphasis on fixed, evident data that can be analysed).

I feel that I have just started a methodological journey and things may change and evolve as I test approaches in the field. My sense at the moment is, because this is a practice-led inquiry, that I may adopt an autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography combines elements of ethnography and autobiography to compose stories that, according to Ellis, are “complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that taught morals and ethics, introduced unique ways of thinking and feeling, and helped people make sense of themselves and others” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, para. 2). Such an approach would place me and my relationship at the centre of the inquiry.



FIGURE 4.1.3.

Tide at Piha, New Zealand. (November 14, 2015). I felt when recording this place, the weight of skies and water pulling against something deep, that transcended the physical.



HAAST COASTLINE

(34.4633° S, 169.0758° E)

DATE OF THE IMMERSION

January 16, 2016
Reflective field journal entry 2

LOCATION

The Haast coastline spans over 2,500 square kilometres on the west coast of the South Island. It has numerous rivers formed by the defrosting of glaciers and the high level of water precipitation flowing from the top of the Southern Alps into the Tasman Sea. It is situated in the heart of the Te Wāhipounamu World Heritage Area; one of the most sparsely populated areas of the country. The road from Haast to Jackson Bay runs parallel to the sea coast. In the summer the beach is scattered with driftwood, due to the increased rainfall.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

It was summer and I was descending from Arthur’s Pass. It was raining in what appears to be a uniquely New Zealand kind of January where the skies are humid and hung heavily with cloud. The wind had begun to increase when I encountered this strange long beach. From the adjacent road the sand was obscured by the abundance of driftwood that had been thrown up by the surf. The scene was dramatic. There were trunks and branches strewn along the shore. It put me in mind of pictures of bodies taken by the allied troops when they disembarked on D-Day in the Second World War. I pulled in at the first possible access, gathered my equipment and picked my way down to the shoreline. Everything was subdued and ghosted by the rain that had been pouring incessantly for two days.

As I picked my way through the driftwood I was assailed by tiny insects⁵⁷ and I reacted without immunity to their bites. However, in addition to the onslaught there was something amongst the turbulence of wood and water that was calling to me. I began to feel a strong sense of disorientation (Figure 4.2.1).

FIGURE 4.2.1.
Haast coastline. New Zealand.
(January 16, 2016).

57 I found out later that these are a native sandfly (*namu* in Maaori) or West Coast blackfly (*Austrosimulium unguatum*) in English.



FIGURE 4.2.2.

Driftwood on the Haast coastline,
New Zealand. (January 16, 2016).

The timber, torn, buffeted then dumped by the sea was strewn like an aftermath ... physically exhausted. For two hours I picked my way through the debris ... stopping sometimes to record the residue (Figure 4.2.2). However, beneath the physicality, it was very difficult to become attuned to the land itself. I think this may be because the driftwood was temporary. It was not an enduring condition of the land, although the arrival of driftwood has apparently become a more regular feature of the coastline because of inland milling. I understood the timber as something discarded like the muscularised bodies of a Michelangelo painting, fallen from the ceiling of the Sistine and now devoid of colour ... broken and discarded.

When I staggered out of the place I was emotionally exhausted (Figure 4.2.3). This may have been because as I became so attuned to what I was experiencing that I lost control over emotional caution. What surfaced in the photographs was not the energy of the land but an emotional response to a discordance of form. This is difficult to explain. Can form have emotion?

Perhaps the photographs can be thought of as an amalgamic portrait of my relationship with discordance?

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY

I have come across a few PhDs in photography that have used autoethnographic inquiry. In 2006, Anniina Suominen produced a thesis *Writing with Photographs, Re-constructing Self: An Arts-based Autoethnographic Inquiry*. Here she used a process she described as an “active, intensive recreation of the self, an attempt to understand how changes in self-perception lead to new representations of self in the form of academic texts, presentations, photographic/textual/audio/ spatial installations and the articulation of a personal teaching philosophy” (2006, p.139). I wonder if her thinking may be partly explained by Crang’s (2003) argument that “Photographs become active agents within the research process as greater emphasis lies on subjective meaning and the practices and processes behind the creation of the image; not what is represented, but what is done and why” (cited in Scarles, 2013, p. 5).

In terms of my own work though, I am worried that autoethnography can sometimes fall into the trap of unintended narcissism. Atkinson (1997), Bruner (1993), Charmaz and Mitchell (1996), Coffey (1999), Holt (2003), Krizek (2003), Sparkes (2000), all suggest that without careful monitoring, such an approach can become non-productive, introspective, and solipsistic. If I do not remain critical, the research could dislocate from the consequences and expectations of scholarship and the project could end up being about me and not about a relationship I am trying to forge and understand. So, an autoethnographic study appears to place emphasis on the researcher and his encounter, not on the land and how it communicates. I am not certain about this at the moment, but when I stood on the Haast coastline (and before that on the sands of Piha), I was not experiencing only the “self”. There is something else. I will begin looking into autoethnographic inquiries and how they are used to embrace relationships between environments and the self without simply holding the lens of consideration up to the inquirer.



FIGURE 4.2.3.

Partially submerged tree. Haast coastline, New Zealand. (January 16, 2016).

I experienced the driftwood as a kind of painful desolation; a sense of the body torn ... a weight of neglect and discard ... like walking into a forgotten theatre of war. But perhaps my distress emanated from physical similarity? I think that this might just be heightened physical senses distressing me that I am confusing with an imagined communication with an essence of the land.



TE ARAROA

(37.3749° S, 178.2241° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

September 1, 2016

Reflective field journal entry 3

LOCATION

Te Araroa is a sand/shingle beach located at the mouth of the Te Araroa River. The coastal settlement lies between Tokata and Awatere, at the base of Whetumatarau at the eastern end of Kawakawa Bay. It is 175 km north of Gisborne city on the east coast of the North Island. The beach I photographed is under the kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of Ngāti Porou.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

This immersion took place after I spent a couple of days photographing in the Gisborne area. I had headed north without any preliminary knowledge of the land I was about to encounter. Once again this experience became something unexpected and again, it forced me to deal with a situation and events for which I was unprepared.

I stopped at the site attracted by the shape and dark colour of the rocks, and I began walking along the sand. I had been reading about how Tilley (1994) understood a traversed landscape as something woven into the walker’s life, and vice versa. In a way, walking feels to me like a kind of “attunement”, an aligning of the senses and essence that eventually transitions into a communication. Today my walking was accompanied by the sound of wind and waves folding against the land. I thought that Te Araroa was the kind of place that appears on people’s Facebook pages; the idyllic setting with trees crawling over rocks and sparsely populated hills in the background. I am sure that many holidaymakers have “snapped” it. Indeed, I had photographed many such places in the past, yet today I was very unsettled. I can’t explain this easily, except to liken the feeling to a paradoxical sense of beauty and foreboding. There was something wrong ... something troubled. I spent the whole morning photographing the passing of time in specific locations and trying to understand what was happening. There was a sense of wrongness, but I wondered if perhaps I was imbuing the location with more than was there (Figure 4.3.1).

Uncertain, in the afternoon I attempted to journey along a different part of the beach, but could not walk on the surface of the land because a quagmire of sand and small rounded pebbles caused me to sink up to my knees. I tried to photograph the phenomenon but it could not be captured in an image of the land’s surface. I was being both absorbed and repelled at the same time. There was sound, yet at the same time a brooding absence of sound. Looking back, I understand this as a foreshadowing of what was about to

happen, but I couldn’t comprehend what was occurring at the time. I left the place with the impression that it had not been a successful encounter. There was definitely something there but the serenity was discordant (just under its surface) (Figure 4.3.2).

Then three significant things happened in close succession. Firstly, I did something anomalous. I took something from the place. (I have a principle of not doing this because I try to leave things exactly as I found them). I do not know what I was trying to understand, but I placed small piece of tortured wood from the beach in my pocket.⁵⁸ Secondly, I drove to the hotel where my wife and I were booked in, feeling disappointed and frustrated with what I perceived to be my lack of capacity to control the field work.⁵⁹ Then in the middle of the night, we awoke to a world that was suddenly in chaos. The land on which we slept was hit by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that had its epicenter just 125 km away from the shoreline. For the first time in my life, I experienced land in physical disruption; heaving and rolling from its core. In disoriented wakefulness we experienced a mix of terror and unknowing. We had no learned response for such events and we waited through the quake feeling vulnerable inside what we couldn’t see. This was unsettling, but in the morning something else happened for which I have neither rational accounting nor prior experience. I am a fairly easygoing person and my wife is gentle and socially graced. In a most unusual circumstance, we came close to being assaulted when a very angry custodian of the complex, for no apparent reason, demanded that we leave the premises. He became incredibly violent and aggressive. He started screaming at us as we scrambled for our belongings. We had not done anything wrong but we could not reason with him and we had to literally run to the car and leave straightaway to avoid a physical confrontation.

FIGURE 4.3.1.

Te Araroa, New Zealand.
(September 1, 2016).

⁵⁸ At my Confirmation of Candidature review a number of Maaori colleagues stated that this is an unwise thing to do. When something is wrong with a place you should not remove anything from it. You should not disturb what is physical for fear of disturbing what is not evident. I will look more deeply into this phenomenon.

⁵⁹ It is very rare for me not to leave a place with an effective image. Reading this sentence though, I suspect perhaps that when things weren’t working I might have begun to default to my professional approach and values ... and I began “trying to capture” something rather than just dwelling with it and “listening to/feeling” [?] what was being communicated



As we drove away disoriented and confused, I knew there was something fundamentally wrong with this time and place. What occurred was unusual because I am not immune to either disruption or confrontation. Professionally I encounter such things all the time. I remember in 2000, I was contracted to photograph workers (for a commercial catalogue) at the site of the underground train excavations in São Paulo. During a shoot I saw a worker stab a screwdriver into the body of another man in front of me. It was a simple disagreement. The next day I returned to the same place almost as if nothing had happened. Such things in environments like São Paulo are not unknown. I have not grown up in a sheltered world and assaults (sometimes deadly) are commonplace. However, what happened at Te Araroa I still cannot fully accommodate. It frightened me because what I experienced was not on the surface, but something that happened as a consequence of what I could not see. Cumulatively I was being shown something by the land, but I had no framework for understanding it (Figure 4.3.3).

FIGURE 4.3.2.
Te Araroa, New Zealand. (September 1, 2016). This image shows the paradox I experienced. The detail of light, the beauty of the location and the grace of colour are all evident, yet the photograph shows a certain tension I experienced standing on the pebbled sand, “listening” to something I couldn’t hear, sensing that something was troubled.



FIGURE 4.3.3.
Te Araroa, New Zealand. (September 1, 2016). Images like this suggest something emotionally resonant, troubled and pulled by undercurrent. The photograph simply records the passing of time as it is contained in a single, stable frame. However, I ask myself to what extent my process of compilation in the studio (after the emotional experience of the earthquake) might impact on emphases in such an image (the intensity of the sunset sky with its Payne’s grey clouds positioned above a cyan sea). How I select time and integrate it is something emanating from my subjective experience of an immersion. The photograph is not an objective, dispassionate orchestration of data. I elevate some portions of recorded time over others. It is in this “discursive” space between what has been recorded physically and what is drawn forward in a document of the recording, that I struggle to make sense of the role of the self in interpreting an event.



TE PUIA O WHAKAARI / WHITE ISLAND

(37.5226° S, 177.1797° E)

DATE OF THE IMMERSION

September 18, 2016
Reflective field journal entry 4

FIGURE 4.4.1.
Te Puia o Whakaari / White Island, New Zealand.
(September 18, 2016).

LOCATION

Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island is the only active marine volcano in New Zealand. It is positioned in the Bay of Plenty, 48 kilometres from Whakatane. It rises to a height of 321metres above sea level and is approximately two kilometres in diameter. The island is punctuated with boiling mud pools, hot volcanic streams, a lake of steaming acid and fumaroles that release gases that mix with water beneath the crater floor. This is what produces the island’s distinctively corrosive white steam. Many surfaces on Te Puia o Whakaari are coated with sulphur. The waters around the island are pristine and contain an abundance of marine life. However, native vegetation is almost extinct due to the high levels of volcanic activity.⁶⁰

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

When I boarded the boat to the island, the sea was turbulent and the journey caused many people to become sick. Despite my usual weakness on boats I felt unaffected and motivated. When we disembarked 90 minutes later I began to follow the group in the guided tour party but I strategically slipped behind about 50 metres into the journey so I could record the land without interruption.⁶¹ However, after just a few minutes walking, I began to feel very sick and I was increasingly aware that the toxic gases produced by the combination of chemical elements heated by the volcano had impregnated the air.⁶² I kept walking, recording an unearthly landscape of ultrasaturated colours that ranged from neon green to pink-red. The body of the island was damaged. Across it were strange grooves that looked like wounds interspersed with boiling water holes made of melted (liquid) stone. It was difficult to walk and I had been warned of the potential danger of falling into these vents.

What I experienced was something I have never encountered before. It was like a manifestation of “deadness”. The open scars on the ground and the fearsome yellow greens seeping from the wounds in the rocks were the visible signs of this death but, (how do I describe this?) it was not death as a terminal state but death as eventual terminality. So, not death in the sense of a living thing dying, nor the death of the dead, but death itself ... suspended, slowly drawing itself into existence. I found myself walking across a place that did not communicate. Signs of movement suggested life but there was no spirit [?]. So physically I could feel texture, weight, sound, and the astonishment of colour ... all changing, but there was nothing alive or rhythmic here. Nothing in me came forward other than a profound kind of unwellness and nothing came forth from the land.

60 I am trying try to protect myself from gathering information about a place I am visiting. This is so I can avoid the permeation of existing knowledge that might “infect” my initial encounter. So, when I arrived on the island I knew little about it. However, after completing this journal entry I sought out material about its history. In the mid-1880s, then again between 1898–1901 and 1913–1914, attempts were made to populate and mine the island for sulphur but it ended in disaster when in September 1914 part of the western crater rim collapsed, creating a scalding mudflow. All of the workers were buried without trace and only a camp cat survived. A second, failed attempt at mining was initiated in 1923 and a crushing and bagging factory was built on the island. Unfortunately, the sulphur exhumed was of poor mineral quality so the business collapsed in the 1930s.

61 I had discussed this intension earlier with the guide and it had been approved.

62 I found out later that the island emits the noxious gases hydrogen sulphide (H2S) and sulphur dioxide (SO2), so visitors normally wear gas masks. The highly corrosive atmosphere can ruin clothing, damage camera equipment and burn skin even after a short time.



FIGURE 4.4.2.

A series of four unsuccessful photographs taken on Te Puia o Whakaari. (September 18, 2016). The images are partly compromised because I was an adjunct to a tour party. It was very difficult to sink deeply into this world because somewhere at the side of my consciousness I knew that there were people in my periphery and time was constrained. It appears that both factors impacted on my ability to truly immerse myself in an environment. Given the condensed time frame (the boat was tightly scheduled and I only had a window of one and a half hours to record material), there were very few instances where I could create multiple exposures of the same piece of land over extended periods of time.

I was immersed in this “deathness” for two hours. I felt blank and alienated, yet I was in front of something bright and physical that was moving in very dramatic ways. The sense of deadness permeated all of my time on the island and I confess I was glad to eventually be away. I thought that the journey had been wasted because I could feel no communion. I thought I had photographed the surface of a world and my uneasiness, rather than finding the essence of the landscape (Figure 4.4.2).

Surprisingly, when I was back on the boat I quickly recovered. The discomfort left and I could feel the life of the air and the regular movement of the ocean. I looked back at the island. It felt like a lifeless enigma.

STUDIO ENTRY

I find that I am deeply disappointed with the photographs. I look at them and there is absolutely nothing there; no essence. They all look like shots for a geology book. Perhaps it was my physical reaction when I was walking on the island? I will put them aside. I can’t work out what has gone wrong.

TWO MONTHS LATER

I have been trying to understand the nature of what I encountered and what is missing when I photographed the island. I have been reading Jane Bennett’s (2010) *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* and also some recent work dealing with embodiment, including Maarit Mäkelä’s (2015) thinking about how she operates as an embodied artist in the land. In a few months I need to pull my Confirmation of Candidature presentation together and my search for explanations and an authentic critical framework is producing more problems than answers. I have tried to understand what I am experiencing through theories of the sublime (Pseudo-Longinus, Burke, Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Otto, Costa), but these tend to place primary emphasis on the artifact and viewer rather than the method of engagement on the part of the maker. Somehow much of this writing misses

the undercurrent of communication back and forth between me (as a photographer) and the places I traverse. I have also been rereading and viewing some work by the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado. He describes his role as a photographer as deeply embodied in both the physical and spiritual essence of a place. In “damaged” environments (like his time documenting the civil wars in Rwanda), he describes a “sickness of his soul”⁶³ emanating from an immersion that is deeper than the physical (sensory), emotional or cognitive.

When I have discussed this idea and my experiences at Piha, Haast and Te Puia o Whakaari with a number of Maaori colleagues they have universally referred to an indigenous concept called mauri. Mauri appears to be a kind of life force or vital essence that can be both a material symbol of a life principle or a source of emotions. As an extension of Bennett’s thinking it appears to describe the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity, but it can be located in a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group.⁶⁴ Thus, it accepts that land may have a living, communicative essence and this may extend into a relationship with an individual or group. However, the idea is very complex. What is significant is that Robert Marunui Iki Pouwhare (a filmmaker, Mori language revitaliser and colleague) talked with me in some detail about the related concept of mauri mate, which appears to be a form of deeply damaged or dead essential essence that a place may manifest. It was interesting to note that the word mate in Maaori (meaning sickness or death) is the same as the Portuguese verb to kill.⁶⁵

With this understanding I may be able to tentatively explain what happened when, two months after putting them aside, I ventured into the folder of the island’s photographs again. Because I had understood them as void, I thought that what I was not seeing was of little consequence. In other words, I had not considered that a lack of living essence might in fact be something of significance. Accordingly, I am surprised to see that many images surfacing from my time on the island may suggest traces of the weakness of an essential living essence (or mauri ?). (Figure 4.4.3) I realise that perhaps undercurrents of my relationship with land might not be identifiable straight away ... (they may not be immediately evident), at least not through the eyes of my conventional value system.

FIGURE 4.4.3.

Te Puia o Whakaari / White Island, New Zealand. (September 18, 2016).

⁶³ From the documentary *The Salt of the Earth* (2014), [01:14:06 – 01:14:14].

⁶⁴ Moorfield, J. (2018). Te Aka Online Maaori Dictionary. <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?&keywords=mauri>.

⁶⁵ *Presente subjuntivo* (subjunctive present): *Eu mate, Ele/ela mate*.





As I reconsidered my photographs, accepting that it may have been mauri mate that was being communicated, I could see absence of life surfacing. I had been walking through a world that was dying. There was sickness looking back at me through clouds of gas, the wheezing of old lungs and crusted wounds that wouldn't heal. This had been a world fatigued and feeling its own death. It was exhausted. The unwellness I felt between its bright chrome yellow earth and azure skies (Figure 4.4.4 and 4.4.5) was not just my impression of the physical; there was something else here. I had experienced a vacancy where a living essence might normally have been.

FIGURE 4.4.4.

Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island, New Zealand. (September 18, 2016). Photographs like this were not deep in their undercurrent. They spoke instead of a toxicity of colour and the physicality of the island.



FIGURE 4.4.5.
Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island, New Zealand. (September 18, 2016). The visual surroundings in the island look like an alien planet.



EGMONT NATIONAL PARK

(39.1758° S, 174.0358° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

December 18 – 21, 2016.
Reflective field journal entry 5

LOCATION

Egmont National Park is located south of New Plymouth, close to the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand. It covers 335 km². The dormant volcano Mount Taranaki dominates the area. The land is distinguished by its annually high level of orographic rainfall that occurs as a consequence of moist westerlies moving inland from the Tasman to Mount Taranaki and the adjacent Pouakai and Kaitake ranges. The land’s mild coastal climate results in lush rainforest, especially in the foothills.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

INTENSIONS

This immersion has followed closely on from feedback from my exhibition and Confirmation of Candidature process. Reflecting on experiments to date I have begun considering a number of issues, including the manner in which I intuitively frame land (normally as extensive spaces with distant horizons), the emphasis on connections between water and soil within my images and the manner in which I am entering the field with a camera as an exploratory device. Accordingly, I have decided to experiment with opening up variables within the inquiry (Kleining & Witt, 2000) by entering a region with no coastal elements, and heavily forested areas that might cause me to encounter a different kind of land in closer overall proximity (so land without a huge potential depth of field).

I have also decided to experiment with immersing myself initially in the field without my camera. This was something I had never done before but I wondered what might happen if I experienced the land’s vitality in the first instance without a facility for physical recording. The issue had been raised by a number of reviewers as a potential challenge to my process. I have also chosen to immerse myself in the land for a much longer period.⁶⁶ So, I am interested in the nature of an immersion where potentially “different readings” might occur over successive days.

EXPERIENCE

The initial experience in the forest was physically distinctive. Significantly, its wet, heavily wooded nature made physical progress very slow since every step meant that I had to wade through layers of leaf mould and foliage.

Time was slowed. However, this was a much more significant issue in this instance. Light that might normally indicate the passing of the day was very different because the denseness of the forest meant that I could not see the sky. Here, light seeped through thick branches almost wetly, to be swallowed and dimmed by the mossy ambience. The world was deeply scented with humus so when breathing, I inhaled the presence of time (layers of foliage accumulated across years that formed the substance on which I walked). Because the ground beneath my feet was soft and often slippery, the rhythm of walking that I generally experience in open environments was very different.

My experience was one of being intensely inside the physical presence of trees that had a living almost human physiognomy. I could feel the wet, weighted evidence of something very old; something dense that did not invite uncompromised access. I was reminded constantly that this was a world where things lived and died and were absorbed. I could touch what I could see, the dampness of moss, the texture of bark and the demarcations of light. Paradoxically, although the land felt more intimate, it was not accommodating in its presence.

I felt:
Proximity,
Fear,
Discomfort,
Respect.

FIGURE 4.5.1.
Trees in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 20, 2016).

66 Normally I spend one or two days in a given location, walking and photographing, but I chose to spend four days living inside this environment.





FIGURE 4.5.2.
Photograph of distortions in the trunk of a tree in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 19, 2016).

FIGURE 4.5.3.
Trees in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 19, 2016). While this photograph depicts something of the textured character of the environment, the image is essentially a mundane photograph of the physical.

PROCESS

As I spent time in the bush, I quickly realised that I had made a mistake by not bringing my camera. What I was experiencing was the impact of a distinct kind of physicality. I perceived it sensually but without my camera, I was unable to record it. In thinking about the nature of this encounter, the closest word I can find to describe my sensation is “astonishment”.⁶⁷ I do not mean being astonished as a dramatic occurrence but a deep immediacy of communication or “overpowering emotion excited when something unaccountable, wonderful, or dreadful is presented to the mind” (Websters Revised, Unabridged Dictionary, 1913, para. 63).

In the bush, the living physicality of the land rose up and I found myself unable to document the the encounter. I realised that the forest was communicating something very primal.⁶⁸

When I revisited the locations on the second day I brought my camera, but was I was left with a flawed attempt to recapture something that had passed. The power of the bush’s physicality existed now only as a remembered encounter. As a consequence, the photographs I took were just documents of the obvious (Figures 4.5.2 and 4.5.3). I was able to orchestrate technical quality but there was no communicating essence either in the land, the work, or in me. I found myself behaving like a documentary photographer, recording the physical with technical precision ... with a kind of grief at my foolishness. I think I had become too ‘informed’ through an initial non-photographed encounter and this prior knowing ‘framed’ the way I returned to the land when I photographed it. The astonishment, discomfort, humidity and unfolding anxiety were lost.

The situation was partly resolved by my decision to remain longer in the forest than I normally would. By the third and fourth days I had learnt not to move forward without my camera. I recomposed myself into a more naïve presence as I journeyed deeper into more difficult terrain.

⁶⁷ My use of the word differs from its etymological source meaning a form of shocked paralysis (probably alteration of earlier aston, from Middle English astonen, astonien, from assumed vulgar Latin extonare to leave thunderstruck (Allen, 2000, p. 81).

⁶⁸ By this I mean in a manner not repeatable. So, original, initial, or early (from Latin primus, first).

The resulting work was very different (Figures 4.5.1, 4.5.4 and 4.5.5). Form and texture reached forward, and colour and space receded. More importantly I could increasingly feel the forest as a single presence. This was not a world of individual trees but an accumulated and deeply integrated force of life, single and deep in both form and resonance. What was new and what was old were essentially part of the same thing. Time wasn't suspended but it moved forward almost imperceptibly.

THE DIGITAL STUDIO AND THE LATENT IMAGE

After my field practice I normally download the digital files from the camera card into my computer and I also back them up to an external storage device. I carefully consider each image on my screen and reflect on the exposure, composition, light and tone, but beneath this I am looking for traces of what I experienced beyond the physical. Normally, in this process, certain images will reach out to me. However, when initially considering the photographs from this immersion, there was little response. I felt that they looked overpopulated with information, and there was a discernible “flattening” of depth that I normally encounter when recording.⁶⁹ I returned to these images day after day, checking them sometimes at night to sense if there was any life in them. Eventually some of them began to unfurl a presence. These were the photographs from the third and fourth days in the forest that revealed a distinctive vibrating energy.

After several days, I began to work with these images, trying to draw out the latency of the encounter present within the files. As I massaged their qualities trying to bring to the surface the vibration of the land, I re-encountered emotions as flashbacks that were almost physical.

My explanation for not initially finding the images communicative may be related to a learned tendency (which I constantly try to address) to view photographs as aesthetically pleasing documents. This, I think, is the result of my years working as a professional photographer where I have preoccupied with the finished artifact. But, this research is concerned with documenting the contact between my essential essence and that of the land. Therefore, when I embark on the digital development of the work I am searching for traces of this encounter. My guide here is not aesthetic appeal but an authentic reconnection with the visceral, emotive and essential



FIGURE 4.5.5.
Trees and epiphytes in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 20, 2016).

⁶⁹ This may arguably have resulted from working in such a “close” environment, where issues like perspective and depth were no longer the same as in much of my other work. Although the unfamiliarity was initially disturbing, upon deeper reflection I realised that the changes were a positive sign of engaging with the unique nature of the forest.

FIGURE 4.5.4.
The movement of aerial energy in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 20, 2016). This image and the ones that follow were taken on the 3rd and 4th days of my encounter.





FIGURE 4.5.6. ABOVE

The subtle vibration of energy through fern foliage in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 20, 2016).

FIGURE 4.5.8. BELOW

The downward, sinking weight of essence in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 20, 2016).

... and how these experiences might be brought back to the realm of the visual.

The delay in recognising ‘essence’ appears to occur when I am working with land that has produced high levels of astonishment and physical unfamiliarity. In such instances, often I need time to adjust to what is being revealed. I encountered a similar delay in recognition after my encounter with Te Puia o Whakaari where it took over a month before I was able to understand what was surfacing.

CONCLUSION

This immersion suggested the importance of a ‘naïve’ approach that fortifies the immediacy of contact. I realise that I need to respect the living essence of land as unfolding in the present, not as a revisited phenomenon. Immersive photography is clearly not ‘pre-checked out’ data that is later recorded and manipulated. To function authentically, I need to be indwelling in an unfolding revelation, holding the camera as an extension of an anticipating body in the moment of first communication (Figures 4.5.6, 4.5.7 and 4.5.8).

This may partly be because I am a relatively emotional, sensual and intense photographer. I wear my heart on my sleeve. When I photograph, intensity results in an amplification of experience. What might normally pass unnoticed, in my heightened state of feeling becomes elevated. I am assaulted or seduced, deflated or astonished by what I encounter and this intensity flows into and through my work. Any disconnection from the intensity of an immediate encounter clearly impacts on the potential richness of a photograph.

I have learned that I cannot simply “recapture” initial experiences as pictures. In addition, I realise that when I am encountering disruption to patterns of recognition, or very high levels of astonishment, often I need time to dwell with the images that I have recorded (especially when vibrations are very subtle). Such photographs often speak with an unfamiliarity that forces me to extend the parameters of my appreciation. I think this is because they challenge my accumulated preconceptions, such that my previous values are contested and disrupted.

I have also been giving some thought to my relationship with land and how methodologically I might approach the thesis. I had assumed at the outset that I was the centre of the inquiry and it would emanate from my singularity. In other words the study might be about me and my relationship with land. I am beginning to rethink this because I am wondering if it is not me at the centre but a relationship (so the land itself has agency in the inquiry).

I think I am trying to understand a relationship and how it functions. I think this thesis may also be seeking to explain a form of deeply interior communication between a considered self and an environment. I am not sure yet but I have been reading a lot about heuristic inquiry which feels much closer to what I experience and actualise in my research. Essentially heuristic inquiry is a discovery-based approach that while self-situated, acknowledges the tacit and intuitive. I have found Moustakas’ (1990) work on researching loneliness, and the earlier writing by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) very helpful. Kleinig and Witt’s (2000) essay on optimising chances of discovery in heuristic inquiry has also been useful because their features of such research correlate with what I am discovering when I work. (In particular the ideas that instability may be evidence of discovery and that the research question must be open to renegotiation as data “troubles” what may have been preconceived).

FIGURE 4.5.7.

Vibration along and through branches and vines in Egmont National Park, New Zealand. (December 20, 2016).





PUKEARUHE & THE WHITE CLIFFS

(38.5128° S, 174.3323° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

December 22 – 23, 2016
Reflective field journal entry 6

FIGURE 4.6.1.
Tidal flow around the base of the cliffs at
Pukearuhe, New Zealand. (December 23, 2016).

LOCATION

Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs are located on the south-eastern coast of North Taranaki, an isolated offshore reef in the shadow of Pariokariwa, inside the Parininihi Marine Reserve. The area has a spectacular geological formation of huge walls of colourful rock that face the Tasman Sea.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

INTENSION

I visited these cliffs just after my time in the forests of Egmont National Park. As a consequence, this time I entered the environment with my camera. The immediacy lost on the first encounter in the forests taught me the importance of being able to record my first contact. However, because I have begun spending longer with the land I decided to photograph the same place on two sequential days, (in order to investigate if land might communicate differently or in a cumulative manner). In other words, I was interested to understand if the information gathered on my first day of immersion would affect my understandings and responses on the second day and, if so, how these differences might be manifest.

The choice of location was made without any previous knowledge of the site apart from its geographic coordinates. I was aware through initial observation that the tide of the powerful Tasman Sea might offer only a small window of time when it would be possible to walk along the beach.

EXPERIENCE

Balancing the weight of my equipment, I walked carefully down steep rock stairs that provided access to the beach. The air was rich with the smell of salt spray and I could feel it when breathing. Arriving on the beach, I was suspended between the furious roar of the waves just a few metres away and the echoes produced by their sound as they rebounded off the cliffs. It was a place of contorted energy, powerful in its collision. Beneath my feet the sand moved ... pulling and tugging. I was overwhelmed by the weight and volume of the rocks sculpted by the pressure of the sea as it pushed relentlessly against them. I was aware that my adrenaline was rising. Beneath the roar I could hear the noise of small stones rolling as the sea dragged them back into itself. Here, there was danger and fear and insecurity. But it was also a place of deep excitement.



FIGURE 4.6.2. RIGHT
Colour in the cliff face at Pukearuhe. (December 22, 2016). This image was produced from recordings over two minutes taken on the first day.



FIGURE 4.6.4. BELLOW RIGHT
Rock formations in the cliffs at Pukearuhe (December 22, 2016).



FIGURE 4.6.3. LEFT
Tidal energy at the base of the white cliffs at Pukearuhe. (December 22, 2016). While walking I felt integrated with the land and water; the sea flowed through me. Yet despite the danger, I felt safe because I felt like I had merged with everything around me. Because of the thin and rapidly decreasing area of stable land between the ocean and the cliff, my photographs were made in a very confined space so I used a 14mm lens.

There was a discernible rhythm that was played out in astonishing patterns on the rocks. These sang with the colours and energy; discordant and formidable (Figure 4.6.2).

I walked along the four kilometres of the temporarily exposed beach, aware of the imminent danger. The energy of the land was fluid, fast, strong and moveable. My presence was fleeting, my time on the sand was a negotiation caught between the power of the ocean and the dominance of the cliffs (Figure 4.6.3). These cliffs were rich with mineral and organic life. It seeped out of them, exposed by the persistent carving of time and water.

I began recording what I could feel and see. However, I moved away from what should have been my emphasis. I became too easily seduced by my astonishment at the fissures and crevices carved on the walls. These spoke of strength and the weakness of certain areas. I could identify where the pressure of the water found a vulnerable spot and tore it back into the ocean (Figure 4.6.4).

I was fascinated by the energy and force capable of creating such patterns, and I became aware, by extension, of the fragile constitution of my own body. I touched the cliff in places and felt the roughness, gelatinous, and polished surfaces. I lay my body against the rocks so I could feel the depth of the strength and resonance.

I felt:

Astonishment,
Excitement,
A sense of being overwhelmed
Flow
The pulling of breath and emotion.

Yet for all of this, I recorded only a few instances of the turgid and anxiety-laden energy present and how it spoke with me (Figures 4.4.1 and 4.6.3).

I think the danger I can face when encountering the physically distinctive (like dramatic colours or rock profiles) is that I default too uncritically to my older, professional photographic practices. I flip too easily to documenting the physical ... the astonishment of the tangible rather than the astonishment of the unseen. It is something I need to be aware of, especially because the short immersion in this land was actually very rich with internal experience.



FIGURE 4.6.5.

Tidal area at the base of the White Cliffs. (December 23, 2016). This image produced on the second day was essentially a technical experiment, filled with information but lacking any spiritual emergence. While this was composed of five recordings taken at different times in the same place, in compositing the material it became evident that I was trying to force something to the surface that wasn't there.

Towards the end of my immersion (around the time I recorded information for Figure 4.6.3), I remember feeling shock as I felt the water touch my feet and the legs of my tripod. The tide was coming in. The vibrations of excitement increased and a kind of panic overtook me. I kept working until the last moments before the water flooded back and submerged the small strip of beach on which I was walking. As the tide rose to my calves I felt that I was caught inside a connective energy flow between the sea and the cliffs. But the sensation was suddenly interrupted by something physical. A wave splashed on to my lens, forcing me back to the reality that I needed to leave the beach immediately because I was the only person there. I remember at the same time suddenly feeling the coldness of the wind against my body.

I was jolted into the material world, urged by matters of safety to move back towards the only possible exit before the tides smashed everything into the rocks.

THE SECOND DAY

When I returned the second day, I took care to consult a tide timetable in order that I might have the largest possible window of time to walk along the beach. I was aware from the previous day's experience, of how physically dangerous the place was and how, when absorbed in a deep immersion, I could lose my sense of the precarious nature of the location.

When I reached the shore I walked steadily, oriented by my previous incursion. My body remembered the loose stones and uneven surfaces. I unconsciously started seeking compositions, trying to register things I saw the day before but was unable to photograph because of the rapidly encroaching tide. Immediately, my practice became oriented by logistical considerations. I was no longer an integration between land and water but merely a photographer attempting to shoot what time and physical limitations had prevented the day before. I no longer connected with the essence of the land; I became like a hunter trying to capture a recollection. It was like I was outside of something ... or on top of it, not 'inside' it. I was not an integrated part of anything, only an observer who was trying now, to take something that had been available the day before. There was no internal time, no absorption, no intoxication, no astonishment. I was only experiencing the land as a physical phenomenon.

I headed back to the beach access, worried because the waves were reaching my waist line. The excitement I felt the day before was replaced with a sense of danger. I was worried about my equipment. The images taken on this day depicted the physical without any depth. They were technical experiments that contained iconic elements and described something picturesque. But there was no internal energy in them, no rhythm to the distinctive flow that I encounter when the land’s energy calls to my own ... there was no melding of essences (Figure 4.6.5).

THE DIGITAL STUDIO

In my studio, I found that I was able to develop the images and feel again the physical proximity with the land, but only with two images surfacing from the first day (Figures 4.6.1 and 4.6.3). These two recordings were my deepest immersions. They were from the periods where I lost a sense of time and physicality and just moved into the flow of what surrounded me. The second one put me in serious danger of drowning because I was so deeply inside what I was doing that I didn’t read the physical warning signs of the encroaching tide against my body.

CONCLUSION

These experiments again confirmed the importance of trust in a certain naïve willingness to be open to what cannot be anticipated. I am learning to respect primacy, immediacy and ‘being inside’ ... with a diminished sense of logistics. There appears to be something about ‘first contact’ that is very important. It appears that it is in here that the essential essence of the place and evidence of this resonance are absorbed into the photographs.

This is difficult to describe, but this resonance establishes a harmony between everything: my emotions, the place and me. Inside this space, there is a pace that becomes a flow. My practice is carried with a certain level of trust and openness. This can be contrasted with the danger of reverting to older photographic approaches where the physical spectacle distracts me from the essence of what I am experiencing. When this happens the photographs I take are emotionally “flat”. They become at best, interesting documentations of the physical.

By extension, on the second day, with the inclusion of a logical scheme I have to accept that something went wrong. I worked assiduously. I wanted to believe that something would happen, but it didn’t. The event was a ‘shoot’. I recorded the physical, experienced the physical ... and was manipulated by the physical.

I am coming to believe that the living essence in the land has its own dynamic and, when immersed, I feel an energy that connects me, transforming my individual presence into something collective, akin to ‘being in the land’. In these immersions I am not an individual, but the accrual of what I do not know consciously, my cultural and ancestral values, my innate connections and my internal primal ‘readings’ of what is experienced. In these moments, while I am interconnected, my camera seeks to absorb any manifestation of this energy, any trace of the encounter. This connection moves me away from a preoccupation with my individuality.

Finally, this immersion has caused me to think about why it is that water has been such a dominant feature of my work. Reviewers and interviewers have asked me this question, but I have rarely considered it. I just know that I am drawn to water. When standing in the place between the incoming tide and the rocks I wonder if it has something to do with energy, since water is in constant movement and every move is engineered by a complex system. Another thought is that water is directly connected to two-thirds of the world as a single mass. Convoluted marine currents circulate the globe, yet the whole ocean is one unique vivid thing. My photographs depict the movement of this gigantic liquid body and its diverse manifestations. Within this I sense very strong presences that are physical, sensory and comprising of some essence that is neither.



MURIWAI

(36.4943° S, 174.2532° E)

DATE OF THE IMMERSION

April 16, 2017
Reflective field journal entry 7

LOCATION

Muriwai is situated about 50 kilometres west of Auckland. Its beach contains a high concentration of iron and this renders the sand black. The place is well known by surfers because its geographic features produce spectacular waves and dangerous water currents.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

To date I have been communicating with land in daylight. The reflection of light on surfaces provides information; colour, textures and perspectives, and how I “see” affects my understanding of the land; for instance, I can see where rocks are slippery or where soil is unstable. But I have begun to ask myself, ‘What would be my relationship with land if I could not see?’ My camera has an ability to ‘see’ light in a different way to my eye. It is able to register luminosity in a world that I cannot visually perceive. It is able to do this because it can record information through long periods of exposure.

So, this experiment at Muriwai was intended to understand the nature of ‘unseeing’. By this I mean I was interested to encounter and record communication with land when I had to operate without the ability to visually perceive what I was photographing. I knew this would pose some challenges because I would have limited movement and a reduced ability to both focus and compose images with my camera. However, what I really wanted to know was, how the land might communicate with me if my immersion within it was differently constructed ... if I was bodily, mentally and spiritually there ... but unable to see.

EXPERIENCE

To date I have been communicating with land in daylight. The reflection of light on surfaces provides information; colour, textures and perspectives, and how I “see” affects my understanding of the land; for instance, I can see where rocks are slippery or where soil is unstable. But I have begun to ask myself, ‘What would be my relationship with land if I could not see?’ My camera has an ability to ‘see’ light in a different way to my eye. It is able to register luminosity in a world that I cannot visually perceive. It is able to do this because it can record information through long periods of exposure.

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In the blackness, the first thing that came to me was that darkness increased my sensitivity to the sound of the waves and wind. I could hear the ocean almost within me. It was visceral and bodily. This is difficult to explain but perspectives of sight provide a sense of separation. In daylight, the edge of the ocean is there ... it is separated by sand and grass and an incline in the land. But without sight everything is more immediate and impacted. Distance dissolves. The wind blows uninterrupted and you can identify its changes in direction by the sound it produces. I pointed my camera towards the vibrations of sound with the sea running invisibly just metres way. At this stage, the water seemed to be much closer than it was and it sounded like the tide was rising.

FIGURE 4.7.1.
Muriwai Beach, New Zealand. (April 16, 2017). This image is the result of a combination of five recordings with each exposure up to 12 minutes in duration. They were taken in complete darkness when nothing could be perceived with the naked eye.



FIGURE 4.7.2.

These images demonstrate the light conditions on the beach during the immersion. When I arrived, there was a small glimmer of moonlight bleeding from the cloudy sky. These suggested an expanse of beach but its borders were indiscernible (Muriwai, April 16, 2017).

My lens was set to infinite. There was no focus operation. I was recording what I could hear and feel. I created long exposures with the camera, with the aim of bringing what was invisible forward into recorded form. I stayed in my position on the sand for two and a half hours. I sank into this black beach with its deep, vibrant voices. At this stage any image of the land was evident only in my mind. The land was essentially defined by an immense physical and nonphysical system of sound. The intensity of this might be likened to a kind of “intoxication” if one considers the word’s definition as “to excite or stupefy (somebody) ... to the point where physical and mental control is markedly diminished” (Allen, 2000, p. 735). This intoxication was abstract yet seemingly visceral. I could perceive things that would not normally be evident. In the darkness I was diminutive. I placed some tape on the LCD screen of my camera so I could not see the results of what I was recording.

After an hour I realised that the rhythmic patterns to which I was listening created a kind of voice, whispering in murmurs. I seemed to be hearing something that was vibrating a very deep history in an insistent way. But I was not included in it. I was an outsider, a stranger. As I waited in the dark, it felt like the land was not bothered by my presence. My visitor-self recorded in the blackness, trying to sense what felt like the spiritual⁷⁰ traces of something moving (Figure 4.7.2).

I could not understand rationally what I was experiencing but I could feel in my stomach a kind of excitement.⁷¹ I was there with my body, mind and spirit, but not with my vision. (I was relying on my camera to discretely record the visual, much like Man Ray’s rayographs). I was not looking at the land, but positioning the camera so it could record what I could not see. Actually, this isn’t correct. It seemed to be the other way around, the land was looking at me through my camera, the device was inverted, I could not see the land, but it could see me.

I felt:

- Darkness
- Increased sensitivity
- Diminutive
- Stillness
- Rhythm

A stranger in a foreign land

Excitement.

I immersed myself in this world for a very long time. The result was far fewer images than I would normally have gathered in such a period.⁷² Later, I discovered that many of these images were out of focus (Figure 4.7.3). Unlike other experiments, I had little idea about what I had in my memory cards, and the digital studio became like a darkroom I needed to “process” the files before I was able to identify any content. The experiment brought to mind earlier days in my photographic practice when I recorded land with analogue film.

THE STUDIO

When I downloaded and looked at the material I had gathered I had the feeling of meeting somebody during daylight who I had previously only encountered in the dark; somebody with whom I had shared a deep lived, yet enigmatic experience. As I considered the images I saw that these photographs revealed a very vibrant materiality (Bennett, 2010). Robert Marunui Iki Pouwhare has talked about this energy being mauri; a living essence that can connect land, people and things. At Muriwai this was not static. It didn’t hover or stand. It was constantly moving. It was a vibration of energy, where the land, its history and indefinable things were in constant motion (Figure 4.7.1).

70 I wrestle with this idea of spiritual. I try not to use the word because it is so easily connected to the theological ... but I can’t find another term to describe this dimension I was sensing. It was something deeply interior that was conversing; something beyond the physical and emotional. I call it “spiritual” here for want of a better word.

71 Interestingly, Best (1982) suggests “the Maaori located the seat of emotions, etc., in the stomach, because he noted the effect of pronounced anger, grief, etc., upon that organ, and he would naturally connect the mind with the seat of such feelings” (p. 29).

72 Probably in material terms only 10% of the records I might normally produce.



FIGURE 4.7.3.
In total I took only 158 separate recordings at Muriwai. This is a selection of those that were out of focus because in the darkness I could not discern visually what was in front of me.



FIGURE 4.7.4.

Muriwai. (April 16, 2017). The angle of sequential lights in this image is possibly an aeroplane, although when taking the recording it was not something I had noticed.

I learned from this experience that the absence of light can increase my sensitivity. Looking at the photographs I think they may propose a visual form for what is spiritual or immanent but invisible. What I saw on my viewfinder was 98% of black; therefore, I cannot say that the images were 'composed' in the sense of a conscious visual arrangement. The camera was attracted to the point where I could feel vibrations coming from the dark. This is what I recorded. What was in focus was extraordinary in its intensity and revelation (Figures 4.7.4 and 4.7.5).

I have been reading Bennett's (2010) *Vibrant Materiality* again. She proposed the term to define a life essence present in so called inanimate things like land and buildings. Bennett describes this vibrancy as "the capacity of things not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (p. VIII). The independent force of land makes sense to me, especially when I dwell in the dark, recording what cannot be seen. From another perspective Best (1982) in his discussions describes *mauri* as a kind of "introspective thought, to evolve abstractions, to conceive qualities and potential both spiritual and intellectual" (p. 2). I am not Maaori, nor do I have descendants from this land. But I grew up in a world where the spiritual was an ever-present part of understanding. My parents were religious people and they dedicated themselves to a philosophy popular in Brazil called Spiritism.⁷³

⁷³ This is based on a spiritualistic framework developed during the 1850s by Allan Kardec (Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail).

Broadly, Spiritism is concerned with the study of a spiritual dimension; its nature, origin, and destiny and how such a dimension relates to the physical world.⁷⁴ However, despite the epistemological framework that surrounded my childhood and adolescence, I would not call myself a religious person and I do not adhere to the tenets of the doctrine. That said, I have learned to understand the spiritual world as something natural (rather than supernatural). Accordingly, epistemologically it is not foreign to me that a spiritual (extra-physical/extra-cognitive) dimension exists to land and how it might communicate.

74 Spiritism has influenced a number of social movements, charity institutions and hospitals. While broadly distributed internationally, its greatest number of adherents are in Brazil. The influence of Spiritism is so pervasive that it permeates everything from afternoon soapbox operas like *Escrito nas Estrelas* (Written in the Stars) (ongoing as of July 2010) and *Além do Tempo* (Beyond Time) (ongoing as of October 2015), to popular films like *Chico Xavier* (2010) dir. Daniel Filho and *Nosso Lar* (Our home, 2010) dir. Wagner de Assis. This said, the Catechism of the Catholic Church in Brazil (paragraph 2117) explicitly warns against Spiritism and priests like Carlos Kloppenburg and Oscar Gonzalez Quevedo have written extensively against it. The debates have an extensive, and popular following.



FIGURE 4.7.5. Muriwai. (April 16, 2017). This image was one of many that I inadvertently took out of focus and I would normally discard such recordings. However, the powerful movement of the sky, mixed with the reddish hue, gave voice to the weight and power that I felt in the night. There was a dark vibrancy in the land, nothing here was static.



THE DEAD RIVERS

The Tietê and the Pinheiros São Paulo

(23.5505° S, 46.6333° W)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

July 17 to 18, 2017
Reflective field journal entry 8

LOCATION

For this immersion I returned home to São Paulo, the city where I grew up and lived for almost 47 years. São Paulo is the financial centre of Brazil and one of the most populous cities in the world.⁷⁵ I immersed myself in two locations, the Tietê River and one of its tributaries, the Pinheiros. These waterways are connected throughout the city and were created in order to control floods during the monsoon season.⁷⁶

THE DYING ESSENCE OF RIVERS

My return to São Paulo came after two years in New Zealand and it was motivated by a desire to revisit these bodies of water. The rivers that were central to my youth and early adulthood were reference points for an exploration of the idea of mauri mate.⁷⁷ After coming across the concept that land might die, or have its vital living essence deeply damaged, I wanted to know if such a phenomenon was something one might sense and draw into a photographic record. I had been spending some time with Robert Marunui Iki Pouwhare and Professor Hinematau McNeil as they discussed this phenomenon. Both mauri and mauri mate seemed to offer ways of understanding what I have been encountering. I arrived with many questions.

THE TIETÊ RIVER

São Paulo and the Tietê river are home to me. They constitute my place on the earth and the origin of how I see the world. I grew up and spent the largest part of my life in this city, and on this occasion, I planned to photograph a familiar river that I knew as profoundly polluted.

In his essay for the New York Times, Simon Romero (2012) described the Tietê river as “ashen grey, flowing and oozing” (para.1). He noted that the Tietê and Pinheiros, “persist in Brazil’s popular culture as dystopian objects of derision” (ibid. para. 9). I grew up being told the stories of thickly suited divers hired to unclog drainage gates,⁷⁸ exhuming a catalogue of bizarre things including handguns, knives, stoves, refrigerators, automobile tires and a suitcase containing the decomposing torso of a dismembered woman. Somehow these events had become part of what I understood as the “life” of the river.

My plan was to explore possible access points to the bridges where I could spend time with the Tietê. I chose to consider the river at night because my time would be less crowded. I

needed to find bridges that afforded pedestrian access because many of them are designed only for traffic. I was aware that these places are dangerous and people are often robbed there. Devoid of foot traffic, the bridges are traversed by thieves who cross with their bikes in search for easy victims. However, moving in the dark, I knew from experience that I would be less discernible.

For protection, I was accompanied by a friend who dropped me off by car. We agreed that he would drive back to check on me at 30-minute intervals. It took some time to locate a bridge with pedestrian access, but I eventually found one and I climbed out at a traffic island. I walked stealthily with my camera inside my jacket and the tripod legs closed. I traversed the shadows until the pedestrian track that crossed the bridge became accessible. Then I walked to the middle point where I could position myself above the river. The pathway was narrow with one side structured as a short wall against vehicles and the other presenting a rusted metallic barrier between myself and the river flowing beneath. Gaps in the railings enabled me to discern the water’s nature. It moved like a liquid shadow, its parameters defined by reflections of light on its surface.

I felt:

Fear in this suspended darkness,
A past remembered
... and an immediate present
The breath of danger
And a loss of belonging.

⁷⁵ There are more than 11 million people spread over São Paulo’s 1,500 km².

⁷⁶ The express highways that run next to them form the main road system and the densest traffic flow in South America, with more than 2 million vehicles travelling both ways daily.

⁷⁷ When mauri is damaged or unwell this life force is sometimes described as mauri mate. Such a state may permeate “a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group in which this essence is located” Moorfield (2018, para. 4).

⁷⁸ Romero noted that the rivers are as complex conceptually as São Paulo itself. In this city he observed, “hedge funds inhabit hulking postmodern skyscrapers, well-heeled consumers stream into luxury shopping malls and immigrants are as likely to speak Castilian Spanish as Quechua. At the same time, four million people — about 20 percent of São Paulo’s metropolitan population, still lack basic sanitation ... One area in metropolitan São Paulo, Guarulhos, with a population of about 1.3 million and home to the city’s international airport, treated almost none of its sewage before 2011” (2012, para. 15).

FIGURE 4.8.1.
The Pinheiros River, São Paulo, Brazil. (July 17, 2017).

At this stage the darkness and a subtle nausea descended. I could feel the river's liquid mass. I could barely see the track on which I was walking. I placed my tripod very close to the oxidised metallic sides of the bridge; agitated and tense.

Looking downwards increased my sense of vertigo. I tried to touch solid surfaces, to identify the substance of the ground upon which I stood. There was neither communication nor connection ... no life force flowing inwards ... just the substance of anxiety ... of the dark ... and of height. The air was impregnated with a putrefied smell of raw sewage. This is the scent of 50 years of industrial effluent poured into wastewater. It is carried by a river that is the colour of wet ash, due to the high levels of cadmium and lead. What I breathed in, with the darkness, was a thick, foreign aroma that reminded me of rotten vegetables and decaying fish. Beyond this I could discern the scent of injury, of fatigue and weight (Figures 4.8.1, 4.8.2 and 4.8.3).

Eventually I moved to the other side of the river and began recording. At this stage I was increasingly aware that things were unfamiliar, even though physically I knew this world. There was no compassionate force here, no sound of a river falling over stones nor the distant call of sea birds. Sound and movement were entirely generated from what was man made.

I felt:

The brutality of night.

I was trying to find an essential essence inside a cacophony of distraction, in the darkness, in a world devoid of tenderness ... and through this, the water flowed, pulling its way to the ocean. There was nothing here ... a lifeless river.

I continued photographing, adopting various angles when I suddenly became aware that somebody with a bicycle was turning in to the bottom of the track and riding towards me. Because I was in the middle of the bridge there was nothing I could do. I felt a chill of fear, because I knew that I could not run faster than a person pedaling. I released my camera and held it against my chest (inside my jacket) and I quickly closed the legs of my tripod, so I could use it to protect myself if necessary.

As the stranger on the bike approached, I identified someone in his mid 20s wearing a hood; the archetypical profile of what I should avoid. I felt like a tourist who had inadvertently ventured into a treacherous place and was trapped because he didn't know the stories of danger.



FIGURE 4.8.2.

Tietê River, São Paulo. (July 17, 2017). The long exposure shows how the river runs through a concrete streambed. There is no residue of the organic nature of an original waterway. The intense air traffic above the river is evidenced in the sky where the movement of aeroplanes and helicopters is recorded. This is a world that is never still, never settled ... never relaxed into itself.



FIGURE 4.8.3.

Motorway along the side of the Pinheiros River, São Paulo. (July 17, 2017). An image taken when I shifted my camera sideways to compare the frantic flow of traffic adjacent to the river. The vibrations of this traffic constantly impacted on the concrete upon which I was standing; like an incessant earthquake that never settled into stillness. Apparently, the bridges have a rubber system in their structure that affords them flexibility.



FIGURE 4.8.4.
Me working on the bridge over the
Pinheiros river. São Paulo, Brazil.
(July 17, 2017).

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As he passed me, the rider’s eyes swept across mine, possibly studying me to check what kind of resistance I might offer and assessing if I might be worthy of his approach.

... Or perhaps he was just passing.
Would that be strange at this hour?
I felt myself on the edge of panic in my own world.

I quickly moved to the other side of the bridge towards the point where my friend had agreed to pick me up. I checked my watch. I had been on the bridge for almost two hours. Luckily, my friend arrived on time and relieved, I bundled myself into his car. As he drove away I noticed the same cyclist pedaling back to the place where I had been only minutes before.

I realised that my decision to move to New Zealand had changed much more than my home address. Social safety was something I had begun to take for granted. On this night in São Paulo, I had become a vulnerable stranger.

THE PINHEIROS RIVER

The bridge across the Pinheiros River was about 40 minutes away and when I began to cross it, the smell was still there. I tried to not adapt to the odour so I might have something that might help me to notice things in an unfamiliar way. I wanted to see through what Caetano Veloso called “olhar de estrangeiro”, (the foreigner’s eyes: an ability to perceive beyond what the quotidian allows us to see) (Figure 4.8.4).

The encounter produced in me a deep sense of absence. This is not easy to describe in words, but it felt like something I have experienced at a funeral, a mixture of the silence and weighted thought. Beneath this I felt a sense of hollowness. Since I was a child I had known that the river was dead, but now I realised that this was not just physical ... there was a death of an essence too. There was no living force here, only a sluggish physical momentum that carried the weight of the water relentlessly towards the sea. This was the first time I had really understood the loss of the living essence of something. I gazed into silence ... and weight (Figure 4.8.5).

I worked for the rest of the night around these bridges, but slowly my sensitivity faded. My photography took on a more romanticised view. I was fighting against my vacationer’s eye and concurrently losing my initial depth of sensory perception.

I calibrated the white balance of my camera when I began the evening’s research and I did not change this throughout the immersions. When the lights changed from scene to scene, the white balance turned to warmer colors such as yellows, reds and oranges. The estrangement and sensitivity I felt at the beginning of the work diminished in relation to my decreased sense of belonging and what resulted were technically interesting but emotionally less resonant recordings (Figure 4.8.6).

REFLECTION

The comunhão was vaguely similar to what I experienced on Te Puia o Whakaari (White Island) in New Zealand. When I recorded the Tietê River, and my initial engagements with the Pinheiros, I was connecting with something in the rivers that may be likened to Plato’s thumos (the emotional, disturbed element) as differentiated from Democritus’ euthymia (i.e. “good thumos”).⁷⁹ The damaged mauri (mauri mate) pulled sluggishly and without rhythm, away from where I stood, but with no life. It didn’t even feel like water. The mauri of the place was so weak that it was hardly discernible.

So, I am finding it difficult to describe something I am wrestling with. I do not know how the spirit of land becomes inert, but it is a clearly perceptible state and it can be profoundly contrasted to the exuberant or richly undercurrented nature of much of the land I have dwelt with in New Zealand. This, in general, has a palpable resonance.

⁷⁹ Euthymia describes a state in which the soul lives calmly and steadily, being undisturbed. Best (1982), likens Democritus’ euthymia to mauri ora. This is the spiritual or essential health of an entity, including land.

FIGURE 4.8.5.

Pinheiros River. (July 17, 2017).
In this image I am aware of the
deep unease between the dank
weight of the river and its missing
essence. The water flows numb and
relentless, flanked by the assembled
lights of the city.

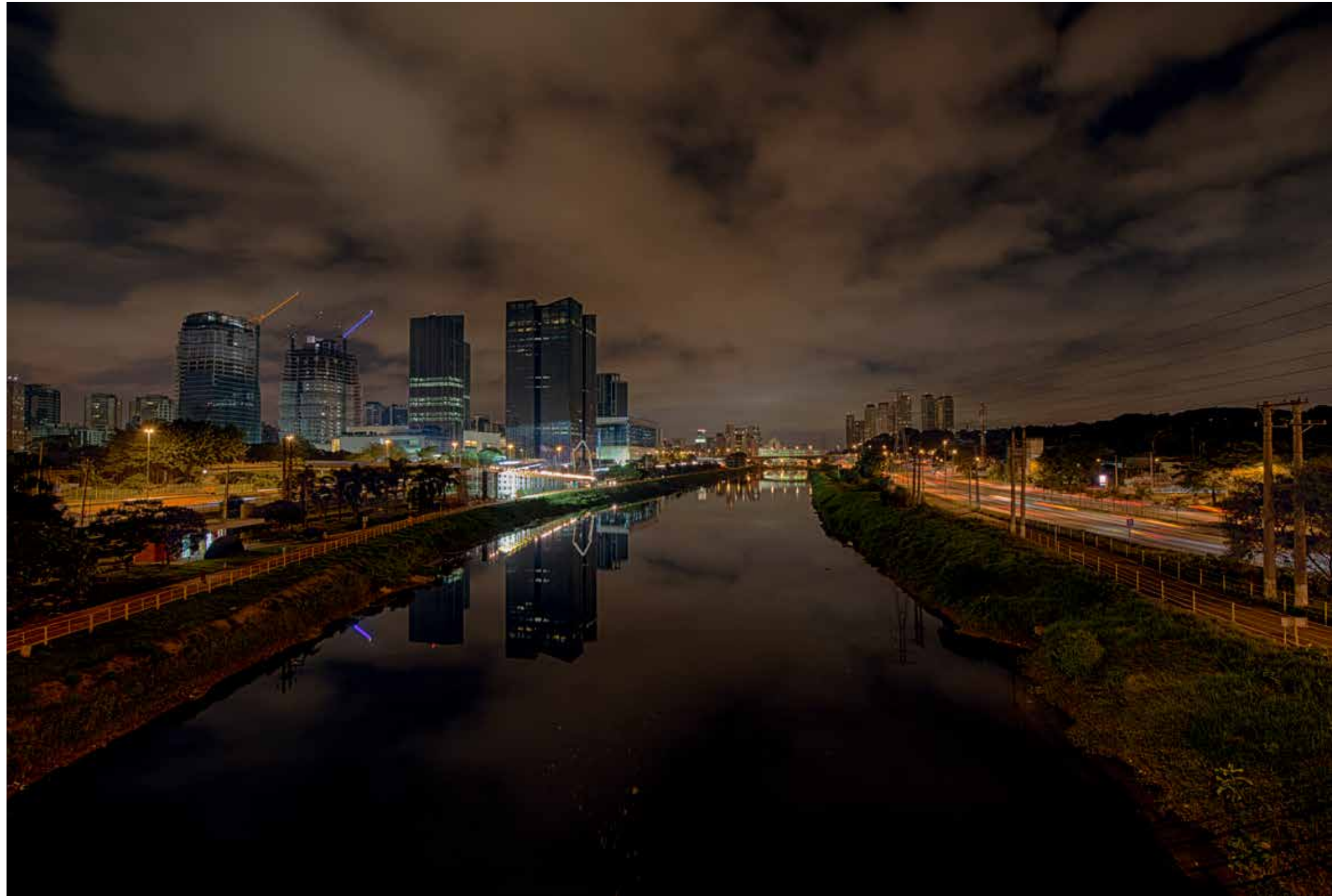




FIGURE 4.8.6.

Pinheiros River. (July 17, 2017). Here the image contains a technical warmth that perhaps came as a consequence of my increasing sense of familiarity and safety. However, it does not communicate the essential essence of the river.



FIGURE 4.8.7.
Me at the 2nd Batalhão de Guardas, an army elite unit situated in São Paulo, Brazil (circa. 1986 to 1987). (The photographer is unknown but the image was taken on my father's camera). At this time in Brazil there was a transition in power from the military generals who seized control in 1964, to the civilian democracy in 1986. This was followed by the first direct election for presidency, after the Army Forces coup d'état. The military leaders who had ruled the country for the preceding two decades had been accused of torture and killing revolutionaries' movements during their period in control. It was a tumultuous time to be conscripted.

THOUGHTS LOOKING AT OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

After my time with the rivers, while I was reviewing some old photographs at my parent's house, two interesting things occurred. Firstly, I realised why the smell of the river incrementally felt familiar. In Brazil we have mandatory military service when we reach the age of 18. However, only 10% of the population is forced to enlist. For some reason I was selected to be part of the conscription between 1986 and 1987. I was designated to serve on the 2nd Battalion of Guards in São Paulo (Figure 4.8.7).

This battalion had its quarters at a place called Parque Dom Pedro, in the city centre, where the river flows through a giant concrete pipe (as a contingency against flooding). On hot days the smell of the river infected the air, but after a while you became accustomed to it. However, it was present all of the time. We would spend hours marching over this area until we were exhausted. During my last visit to São Paulo I took a train that stopped at the station located close to this place. When I breathed in the smell I remembered everything.

A second interesting thing occurred while I was sorting through these old images. I stumbled across a number of black and white photographs I had taken just after I was given a camera. I also found the negatives from this session, and although I cannot be sure of the precise date they were taken, they were likely to have been produced between 1988 and 1989, due to the type of film and processing used (Figure 4.8.8) compares a photograph I took almost 30 years ago with a recording made on this trip.

GOING FORWARD ...

As I prepare to leave São Paulo, I am left with more questions than I arrived with. I need to know how the essential essence of land speaks when it is damaged. Deeply damaged mauri does not appear to be silent or a void. There is something there, but it is weak and heavy with loss, almost lifeless. I got a sense of this on Te Puia o Whakaari (White Island) last year, but it took a long time for me to work out what I had encountered.

I also want to understand how the essential health of land speaks. Much of my research to date surfaces a certain undercurrent. I wonder if the spiritual health of land looks different to a romanticised picture postcard and if so, how does it differ?

I am anxious to return to New Zealand, to continue to engage with these questions.



FIGURE 4.8.8.
Comparing the side of the Pinheiros River (2015 and circa 1987/1988). The damage made to the land by the transportation needs of the city, including the railway and the highways, is arguably irreversible, and it is evident that both the physical and spiritual health of the river had not during my childhood, been a significant consideration in the development of the city.



KARANGAHAKE

(37.4225° S, 175.7209° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

August 29 - 30, 2017
Reflective field journal entry 9

LOCATION

The Karangahape Gorge is situated between Paeroa and Waihi, near the base of the Coromandel and Kaimai ranges. It is 130 kilometres (two hours) away from Auckland and can be accessed via State Highway Two. Through the gorge the Ohinemuri River waters have carved a spectacular canyon that runs parallel to remnants of an old railway. Today what would have been lush Kauri forest has disappeared because of fire, logging and mining that dominated the area over 100 years ago. The location now contains old tunnels and a walkway around the industrial remains of important mining sites like The Talisman, Crown, Woodstock and Victoria stamping batteries.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

The immersion in Karangahake was a disruption to the expected. I knew that this gorge had once been a gold mining field and it had been rendered toxic by chemical pollutants associated with gold extraction (including mercury and cyanide). I had seen the damage this industry had done in Serra Pelada in Amazonia during photographic expeditions I made there between 2006 and 2011.

So, in this instance, I knew that I was going to a place where the land had been incrementally contaminated. This conscious seeking out of an environment that might parallel a past experience was a break from my normal approach of “discovering” locations. However, it was partly driven by my experiences when photographing the Rio Tietê in São Paulo and my attempt to understand what might happen when the essential living essence of land is damaged.

WALKING IN THE FIELD

I arrived at Karangahake around 10.00 am. The place was very quiet. The “silence” here was an internal state I felt, since I could still aurally identify atmospheric sounds like the water, insects and the wind. I had no idea of the geography of the Karangahake Gorge and Ohinemuri River, although I knew that historical mines had been located here.

I walked for many hours along the side of the river, through a world where knee high grass and foliage had grown with the winter rain. This meant that both physically and spiritually I was descending, lowering into something below the surface. In retrospect I realise that back in Brazil such a way of walking in the land would have been extremely dangerous. There you

cannot walk through ground cover where you can’t see what is under the surface. Such land is riddled not only with snakes and spiders but also with diseases like typhus and malaria, transmitted by insects.

However, the softness of the ground was welcoming. I was integrated into a tranquil forward movement. The perception of time blurred but my senses were heightened.

OLFATO

Olfato is the Portuguese word that describes the sense responsible for smell. During my time in this immersion I became very conscious of the scent of the land. As I moved through it, its smells touched me and passed, each with a distinctive character. I had not really been that aware of this olfactory heightening in previous immersions, even though I am a person who often notices scent and I often associate it with emotional memory. (I once had an extensive collection of perfumes and I could identify each by its particular notes and accents). The smells I absorbed were varied. I could identify the scent of insects and of vegetation but also combinations that I could not associate with anything I know. I can only explain this as sensing the land with a kind of “smell tuning” of place. I began to “read” the environment through its scent, much like I would a person who I know well (like the scent of one’s parents or the smell that remains in a piece of cloth).

THE ESSENCE OF THE LAND

In Karangahake I could feel the essence of the land running fluidly. There was a kind of vigour that contradicted what I had expected. (I am reminded again of the dangers of bringing prior expectations into these immersions with me). The wounds of past damage that I assumed would be here, as they were in Rio Tietê, were absent. As with certain land on the West Coast, I could feel strength here, not just physically in sound, and scent and vegetation, and the moisture of the air, but also in the essence that rode beneath and through these things.

I realise that in such immersions I am in a process of sensing, where my photography finds its highest potential in terrains of the unknown. In this respect, I am recording images of experience where photographing extends to a recording feeling (Figure 4.9.1).

FIGURE 4.9.1.
The Ohinemuri River during light morning rain.
Karangahake Gorge. (August 30, 2017).



FIGURE 4.9.2.
Soft ground alongside the Ohinemuri
River in winter (August 29, 2017).

NIGHT

Unlike the mauri mate that I felt above the Tietê River, the wildness of the mountain ranges and the force of the water running through the gorge was more reminiscent of Piha and Muriwai. Wondering if I was confusing the physical with the essence of the land, I tried an experiment based on an approach I used at Muriwai Beach. I decided to immerse myself in the night, where I could no longer see anything.

Darkness descended around 6.00 pm because the sky was thick with cloud. The roar of the river seemed louder (Figures 4.9.2). I set the focus of my camera to infinity. The ability to consciously compose the recording was largely eliminated from my approach (Figure 4.9.3).



FIGURE 4.9.3.

Initial night reading taken using a setting that recorded what my eye could perceive of the Ohinemuri River in the Karangahake Gorge. (August 29, 2017). The only light discernible was an inky blue sky.



FIGURE 4.9.4.

Reading at night of the Ohinemuri River, taken using a setting slightly brighter than my eyes could see. (August 29, 2017). This is the same composition as Figure 4.9.3 but with an exposure of 30 seconds. The sky is brighter and the white traces of the river movement are more apparent.

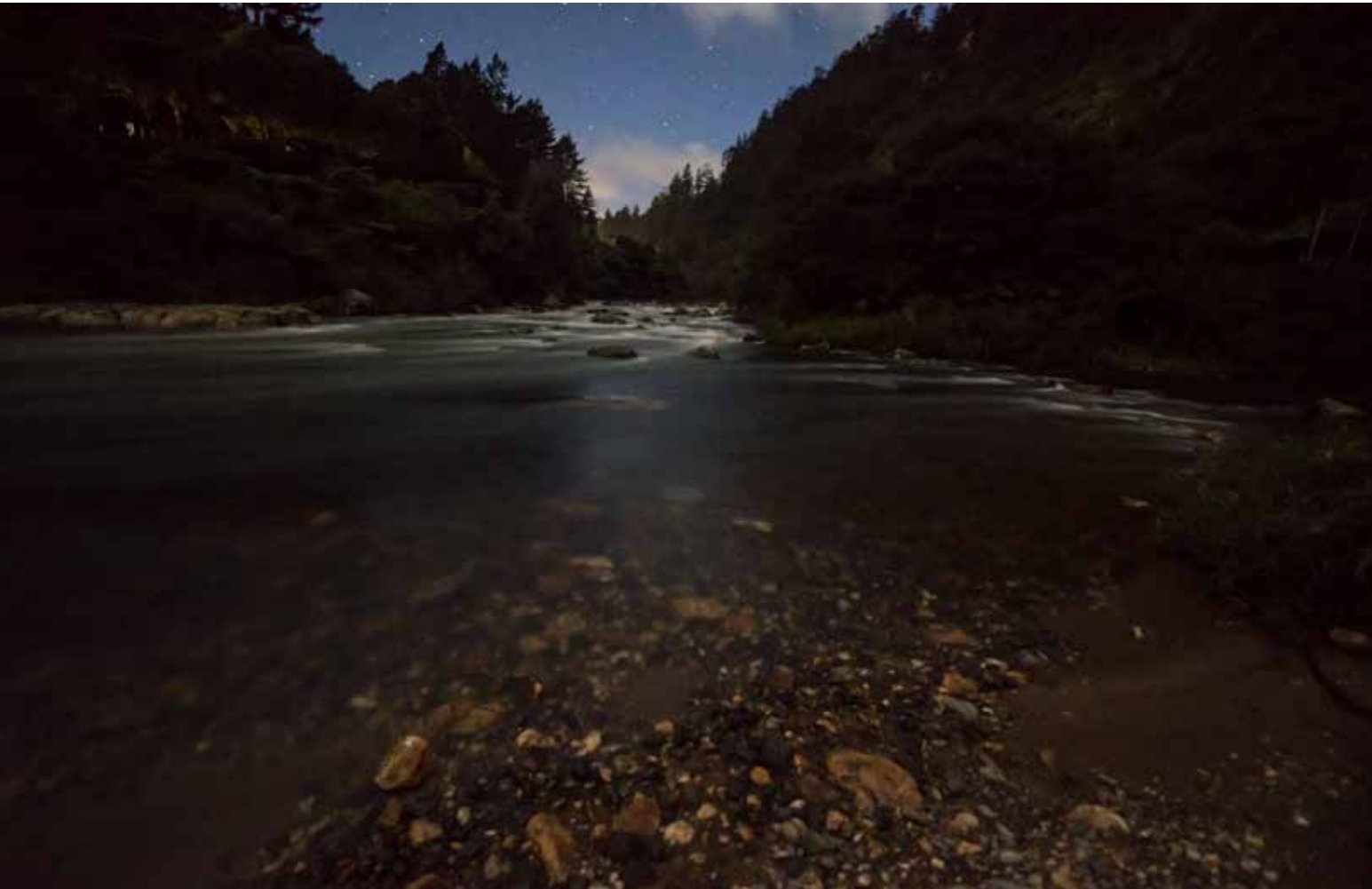


FIGURE 4.9.6.

Longer exposure of the Ohinemuri River. (August, 29, 2017). This image was recorded from the same angle as Figures 4.9.3, 4.9.4 and 4.9.5, but with a five minute exposure. With the exception of the stars evident in the sky, the image suggests daylight but with something indeterminably.



FIGURE 4.9.5.

Night photograph made of the Ohinemuri River. (August 29, 2017). With shorter exposures, I was able to document what I could not see with my eye, but the camera recorded the image in blues.



FIGURES 4.9.7. AND 4.9.8.

Night photographs of the Ohinemuri River. (August 29, 2017). The cloud had begun to clear during the period when I gathered this material. The lights of trucks and cars journeying through the night are evident on the left and in Figure 4.9.8. we see the movement of a descending aeroplane recorded.



Again, my camera was forced to accumulate light across minutes in a single frame, recording what was beyond my view (Figures 4.9.5, 4.9.6, 4.9.7 and 4.9.8). I positioned myself in a place that I knew was stable from my walking through the land earlier in the day. The night was an intoxication. I could feel its endurance; its weight and the depth and force of movement. Within this I was entirely integrated ... a flowing part of a greater flow.

THE NEXT DAY

On the second day the morning dawned with rain and mist. Because I had gathered a few hours of sleep in a local hotel I decided to return to the gorge to see if the adverse conditions altered the way the land communicated. My initial sense was that the place might be experienced with more intensity. Certainly, physically, the rain and mist transformed the wilderness but the smells I experienced the day before had gone. I only experienced the scent of dampness and wet earth normal for such a place.

The ground was slippery, so it was difficult to walk. The rain and the increasingly strong water current were causing me to worry about my equipment. I felt that it was not safe to stay for very long so I began one recording (Figure 4.9.1), but then I decided to leave. This was partially because while I was waiting I met a local couple who told me stories about growing up in the place, and how the gold mining had once damaged the river. I have found that meeting and talking with people, although sometimes unavoidable, normally destroys any chance of entering an immersive state. People seem compelled to layer information over what I am experiencing. Perhaps this is just the kindness of connecting socially in a strange environment, but it essentially curtails the research. It is very rare that I can recover any depth of communication after such interventions.

REFLECTION ON THIS IMMERSION

When heading back home, I realised that I needed to write in this journal quickly because I was afraid that nuances of my thinking might dissipate. With the ideas from the encounter fresh in my mind, I made voice notes on my mobile phone while I was driving. I transformed these into bullet points before writing this reflection. For some reason I need to write about the experience while I am working with the images. I am not sure why this is.

A PARADOX OF THE SENSES

I want to make a note here about the sensory. I realise that there appears to be a close correlation between a heightened level of sensual awareness and a corresponding emotional reaction when I progress into an immersion. When I read back through my entries this is very obvious, but I hadn't become conscious of the connection until now. I realise that somehow this heightening of my senses to a state that would be damaging if one operated at this level in the social world, seems to be an aspect of the state of immersion. I think this may be why I could smell what was nonphysical at Karangahake. However, if this is the case, then I am confused as to why when I am immersed, I cannot feel things like the passing of time or the encroachment of water currents around my legs. These are also physical sensations. It doesn't make sense.

CHANGE IN METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

I can feel my understanding of method and methodology maturing, especially when it is questioned by experience. I am clear now that the thesis is not an autoethnographic inquiry. I realise that when I began the study I still positioned myself (as a being) at the centre of the inquiry and as such I was in fact not truly conducting an inquiry into process, but instead it was an inquiry into the self. This has proven an incorrect framing of the project. For this thesis study, autoethnography is too self-focusing because the research is actually about a *comunhão* with land and how this impacts on the process of photographing.

Accordingly, I am gravitating more and more towards heuristic inquiry and in this regard I have been reading Moustakas (1990), Douglass and Moustakas (1985), Kleining and Witt (2000) and Sela-Smith (2002). However, it is Hiles' thinking that is proving influential, especially the link to the self that he provides in his observation that "although heuristic inquiry is not by necessity transpersonal, it has a central role to play in the research into transpersonal and spiritual issues" (2001, para. 17).



PIHA

(36.5731° S, 174.2800° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

November 25, 2017
Reflective field journal entry 10

FIGURE 4.10.1.
The right side of Lion Rock at Piha,
New Zealand, (November 25, 2017).

LOCATION

See location description for Journal Entry 1. I revisited this place for a second time in early summer.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

There was something in Piha that was still not resolved for me. It was here that I went when I was first trying to understand this strange connection with land as a living essence. My first visit was in early summer 24 months ago, so I decided to return to see if there might be a difference in the way I encountered and understood the essential essence of the location.

At the time of my first visit I was considering the theories of Burke (1998) and Kant (1960) as they related to the sublime, and I was only touching the surface of a perceived relationship between a photographer and the landscape. Since my first experience of Piha, a number of other thinkers have had a profound effect on me including Jane Bennett’s (2010) discussion of vibrant matter, Tim Ingold’s (1993) articulation of indwelling, and Pohatu (2011) and Best’s (1982) deliberations on the concept of mauri.

THE EXPERIENCE: FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM THE FIELD

I am writing this first part of the entry a day after the immersion, following a reflection on the images I created, but before entering my digital studio. I want to note some immediate thoughts and then compare these to ideas recorded after spending time working with the files.

LISTENING TO THE LAND

Soon after I arrived I caught myself evaluating my framing, trying to consider what would work, in order to produce a good composition. This remains a problem. It appears like a well-trained default behaviour and it results in a kind of ‘talking over’ what the land is communicating. Within the first few minutes I realised that I was judging the composition aesthetically and asking the wrong questions. I am learning over time that I need to wait ... to be still ... to settle and absorb the land around me.

Instead of walking around (which I normally do), I spent several minutes in a small area. I sat down as if preparing for a deep *comunhão* and while I waited with the land I began increasingly to lower my body on to the rocks.⁸⁰

80 This is not my normal approach. I tend to hold the camera close to eye level so I am in communication at walking height, with what I encounter.



I found myself using my tripod at a very low angle. For the first time in my research I began to photograph closer to the land, being 'within' it (Figure 4.10.2). In close proximity, I was trying to sense if there were textures, colours, flows and shapes that were channels from where what was not physical resonated (Figure 4.10.3).

FIGURE 4.10.2.

Immersion "within" the rocks at Piha. (November 25, 2017). One of several recordings where I lay prostrate on the earth. The land lay beneath me and I sensed both solidity and momentum ... so, I could also sense energy that covered and moved around and over me.



FIGURE 4.10.3.

Side view of coastal rocks at Piha. (November 25, 2017). I understand my body as a sensor with which the land communicates. I am trying to interpret energy in a flow, and a sense of incompleteness ... something that never closes. So, I believe that I am not pursuing the "physical" as an artifact, but instead I am trying to understand an enstasis that I experience. In this relationship precision dissolves into imprecision and I am able to sense a vibration passing through, around and over the land I traverse.



FIGURE 4.10.4.

Low angle view of rocks at Piha. (November 25, 2017). This photograph documented my first “mistake” and its physically is very similar to Figure 4.10.2. However, the way that light blows detail out of the image renders more explicit the flow of energy I could feel, dragging forward through the rough hardness towards the expansiveness of the ocean.

In the immersive process something familiar began to happen again. I felt my hands sliding with the controls of the camera in a kind of flow. This process was almost like an alternative consciousness that functions on an operative level, and it leaves my spirit to connect with the essence of the land without the cognitive processes involved in physically taking photographs intruding. Lying close to the earth, I felt an increased sense of force and bodily disposition, connected to an energy that is both the land and within the land and over the land. This essence resonates with me, creating a state that is both sensory and deeply connective. Pohatu (2011) discusses this idea when she says:

Through conscious application, relationships then acquire their own special and deep intrinsic worth, their own unique wai and mauri ora. In this way, the view that everything has a unique, yet unifying mauri is fashioned. However, it requires the constant expenditure of energy sculptured and explained by kaupapa, purpose, time, place and the sets of relationships involved. This energy fashions its inimitable mauri which, when analysed, can articulate how it inculcates comprehension of the nature and complexity within relationships. (Pohatu, 2011, p. 4)

In this state I felt as if I could go back and forward in time and the physicality of rock and sand would still be there. During the fractional moment before my hand recorded with the camera, I tried to discern an inaudible voice of the land. This voice did not sing as a voice normally would (this is very difficult to explain), but it was demonstrative and strong and it had a distinctive sense of ongoing vibration.

In the state of *comunhão* what is ‘natural’ emerges through a feeling of things making sense. This sense of equitableness is based on a relationship not the framing and construction of an image. This said, at times I am pulled back into a technical awareness because the camera is not accommodating the physical expansiveness of what I am experiencing. Here at Piha, the energy and flow of the land expanded beyond my widest angle lens. It felt like I was ‘listening visually’ from a compromised perspective that was unable to reach out to the parameters of what I was being shown.

THOUGHTS FROM THE DIGITAL STUDIO

AN ANOMALY

An interesting thing happened while I was recording my experience at Piha and looking at some of the resulting images, I am left wondering about the nature of the unpredictable. Perhaps what happened was a mistake but I am coming to suspect that there are no mistakes because there is no 'rightness or wrongness' when I am trying to interpret a relationship with land. While I was recording the energies, I made an incorrect white balance on my camera and the resulting images were a distortion of what the eye might normally see. Instead of correcting this, I just continued recording with the anomaly. So, figures 4.10.4 and 4.10.5 are not photoshopped images. They are the way my camera recorded Piha on the day. At the time I simply accepted the intangible details and blue cast as part of the flow of what I was experiencing.



FIGURE 4.10.5.

The face of Lion rock at Piha. (November 25, 2017). This image felt like a trace: unstable, uncertain, partly present and partly absent. Its washed aspect causes me to think about the intangibility of the essence of land: the not presented, the evident vs. the transcendent, being vs. nonbeing, the black (something) vs. the white (not something). These paradoxes convey the tension of the landscape, the negative and positive, as proportional oppositions.



WAIPU CAVES

(35.9344° S, 174.3494° E)

DATE OF THE IMMERSION

December 3, 2017

Reflective field journal entry II

FIGURE 4.II.I.

Interior of Waipu Caves, New Zealand,
(December 3, 2017).

LOCATION

ituated south of Whangarei, the Waipu Caves constitute the most extensive cave passage in Northland. The network is a karst⁸¹ formation composed primarily of limestone and marine shells. These compositions have dissolved in water and eroded with time, creating an underground landscape characterised by subterranean streams, ravines and sinkholes. After rain the caves quickly fill with water.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

The idea of conducting a photographic immersion underground was not something I had considered until, during a supervision session I was asked if the nature of land’s energy was the same above ground as it was below. I began to wonder about this. In truth, I do not feel very comfortable with the idea of being in caves. I remember as a child reading Mark Twain’s (1840) novel The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. In one of the stories, the teenage protagonist finds himself lost inside a cave for days before villagers miraculously discover him. The episode was told in graphic detail and it engendered in me a level of anxiety about claustrophobia and estrangement in a world devoid of light. Perhaps as a consequence, these caves were the first I had ever entered.

Given an expectation that I would be underground in slippery terrain and in complete darkness, I brought a head-torch and a small handheld lighting device to help me navigate the space.

ENTRY

When I entered the cave⁸² I descended for almost two and a half hours into complete darkness. In this space there was nothing visible to the naked eye. The entrance to the cave’s first chamber was so slippery that I was forced to maintain my balance by feeling along the floor with my hands. I was very aware that I could easily risk falling and damaging my equipment. As I entered the darkness I felt the quiet energy of the earth surround me. I progressed forward incrementally, recording the darkness with my camera, intuitively using various angles; turns, tilts, pans and zooms. In the blackness, seeing nothing and just relying on the spaces and solidness that I could ‘sense’, I made long exposures with my camera and projected light with synchronous movements of my body “drawing” the flows of my body into the darkness. Thus, these images were not the result of a sudden intrusion of a

camera flash on underground spaces but a careful inquiry of my body, painting questioning light into a darkness that the long exposure of my camera could record in a way that my eyes couldn’t see. In other words, I was experimenting to see if I might use my torch to ‘sketch with light’ the visible surface of the cave in the manner that a sculptor might use a chisel to draw detail from a rock.

Something in these images contains an energy that is moving, deeply vibrant and restrained in its presence (Figures 4.II.1 and 4.II.2). The essence felt similar to what I experienced above ground but “slower”. However, this may have been a perceptual “reading” caused by my very slow descent in darkness. What was interesting was that despite my anxiety about being so far underground, the essence of the land was calm [?] ... no ... maybe I am being anthropomorphic ... it was slow. There was still a rhythm in the caves, but as a drift that hung close to the rocks and water. You could feel it moving at corners and along planes even when you couldn’t see it. It was a consistent vibration.

81 Karst is a formation that occurs after the dissolution of certain rocks, such as limestone and dolomite, while in contact with water.

82 Given my unfamiliarity with caves I visited the space with a friend, Rodrigo Molinari, who has substantial experience of trekking, potholing and mountain excursions. However, I needed to be in the spaces by myself so we agreed that we would explore the caves individually but arrange to meet two hours later outside the caves. As a precaution, we agreed that if I did not surface before the agreed time he would come to look for me.



INTO THE INTERIOR

As I moved further into the cave complex, I was engulfed by the darkness and the only thing I could see was the artificial light produced by my torch. I felt darkness as a paradoxically solid but ethereal state (Figure 4.II.3), or as the scent of weight and time.

FIGURE 4.II.2.

Immersion in the Waipu Caves. (December 3, 2017). This image was recorded close to the cave entry. The limestone formations were more than rock; there was slow, enduring vibrancy that could be sensed here. This image and the one that introduced this entry were produced with the limited natural light coming from the cave's entrance behind me, and "light painting". Light painting is a technique that I invented (by necessity?) that involved using my torch to reveal what is hidden inside the darkness. Even though my flashlight had a bluish cast, because of its LED bulb, the colours evidenced in the image are actually natural hues in the rocks.



FIGURE 4.II.3.

Blackness inside the Waipu Caves. (December 3, 2017). In the caves I quickly understood the blackness as a deep connection inside which my senses were intensified. Perhaps this was because other visual senses were limited and the blackness also slowed the pace of my physical movement through the land. I am uncertain.



FIGURE 4.II.4. LEFT AND ABOVE

Records produced using torches inside the Waipu Caves, (December 3, 2017). These images were lit using movements of my body, revealing substance, and perhaps energy in the darkness. Out of this there appeared beautiful, enigmatic and temporal forms that became present for a moment then were engulfed again in blackness.

In this space I recorded long exposures (up to three minutes each) and used my torches to light the walls and rocks. Each stroke of light was only a moment of revelation that quickly dissolved back into blackness. I moved my light in response to something ... not seeking revelation like an explorer, but "talking to" a kind of vitality that touched my nonphysical body and senses. I was responding in my movements with light to something that was flowing around me. The results were unpredictable yet somehow in the abjuration of control I could sense that I was drawing forward something not normally known (Figure 4.II.4).

As with my other work, these images each contain a passing of time. (They are amalgams of more than one photograph taken of the same thing from the same angle using a camera locked into the same position). Although the terrain across which I waded was uneven and visually indiscernible, each photograph was taken from a tripod (because the camera had to be absolutely stable while the shutter was held open ... often for up to three minutes). Later in my studio, while I was inside these images, I discovered their extraordinary pigmentation (Figure 4.II.5). This colour appeared to vary depending on the composition of the rocks and the contact that they had with the river that flows through the caves after rain.

FIGURE 4.II.5.

Composite image created by the fusion of the five photographs inside the Waipu Caves. (December 3, 2017). The picture shows the distinctively coloured rock formations between the second and third chambers of the cave. This part of the network forms a corridor with the river that narrows into a small hole in the wall, then connects to the next chamber. When the blue temperature caused by the LED bulb from my torch was corrected in my studio, the rock revealed existing bright blues and yellows.





FIGURE 4.II.6.
Glow worms (*Arachnocampa Luminosa*) in the deeper chambers of the Waipu Caves. (December 3, 2017).

FIGURE 4.II.7.
The flooded final chamber of Waipu Caves. (December 3, 2017). The white light tracking on the right is a recording of somebody walking inside the cave with a flashlight.

The most advanced chamber of the cave network was a space I could only access by wading waist deep in water with my head almost touching the ceiling (Figures 4.II.6 and 4.II.7). Although the land here provided the glow worm studded interiors that are so often documented by photographers, I was fatiguing and although I was communicating with the land with a high level of intimacy, I realised that the myriad of lights was not the essential essence of these caves and the glow worms became distracting.

REFLECTION

My immersion in the Waipu caves was not the uncomfortable or claustrophobic experience I had anticipated. In fact, I felt very secure and still in a world of liquid darkness and ephemeral solidity. Here physical light⁸³ was a scarce phenomenon and I discovered that I needed to treat it with restraint, painting it, rather than using it to expose in a mechanical flash, what was (for my human eyes) unseeable. My connection with the land’s essence was rapid and I experienced a strong sense of intimacy. I do not think that this was due to the close, enclosing nature of the land (because I entered the environment anxious about being engulfed).⁸⁴

I think perhaps, that by being physically and almost silently “within” the land, I encountered a world where there was not the distraction of the landscape vista. Thus, the immersion gave me the opportunity to encounter again how darkness can function as an enabler of communion with the land. I wonder if this is because in instances when I cannot see, I am not distracted by a desire to compose images aesthetically so I am less manipulated by what is visually evident. Accordingly, I think that perhaps I “listen” more deeply to what is being communicated. When I was underground in complete darkness, the elements I was guided by were the stability of my body, the textures I touched and could not see, and the sound of drops of water falling from stalactites into dark pools through which I slowly moved. Beyond this, there was a pervasive depth of silence.

When I view the images that have surfaced from this immersion I am struck by the physicality of time; how the slow layering of earth and water results in shapes that allude to how wood and bone petrify (Figure 4.II.8). However, it was not astonishment at these strange shapes and the ceilings festooned with glow worms that were the essence of this immersion.

⁸³ Beyond the delicacy of the glow worms.

⁸⁴ This anxiety was intensified by worries about damaging my equipment and being in the dark in unknown and unseeable territory.

I confess that I feel a desire to return to these caves because looking back at the images and reflecting on what happened, I am increasingly curious about how the essence of land communicates when a photographer cannot see with his eyes (see Muriwai, journal entry 7). However, I am aware and worried that in the past, when I have returned to a place with consciously formed questions, as in Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs (journal entry 6), my focused questioning somehow obstructs the flow of communication and my “conscious self” interferes with my ability to communicate on subtle and responsive levels. I am not certain how I might deal with this.



FIGURE 4.II.8.

Rock formations inside Waipu Caves.
(December 3, 2017).



TE HENGA

(36.8922° S, 174.4488° E)

DATE OF THE IMMERSION

December 30, 2017

Reflective field journal entry 12

FIGURE 4.12.1.

The river that flows into the sea and divides the beach area from the rocks and caves at Te Henga, New Zealand. (December 30, 2017).

LOCATION

Te Henga (Bethells Beach) is situated 37 kilometres west of Auckland and is reached via the Waitakere Ranges. The black sand coastline faces the Tasman Sea. The beach is a contained area that lies between Kaipara and Manukau Harbours. It is positioned between two beaches visited for this project; Piha and Muriwai.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

I made the decision to visit Te Henga after speaking with a colleague⁸⁵ from work who informed me that the coastline contained a number of caves. After my visit to the caves at Waipu and my experience of the closeness of a subterranean environment, I was anxious to see if there were similarities between the locations. I was interested in how light (its disappearance) and physical immersion inside land might impact on what was recorded.

After the experiments I made lying on the earth without my tripod at Piha, I have begun to wonder if the artificial nature of this mechanical structure might physically alienate me, leaving only my feet positioned on the soil, and I am asking, “Could this have some effect?” Logic tells me no, because the essence of the land appears to be something above and around, as much as ‘through’ the earth, but it is something I do not understand and it is worth being alert to. I am also wondering how being on the land (standing), and my proportional relationship with recording, might be prescribing what is recorded.

ACCESS AND SETTING UP

I arrived at the beach late in the day. Because it was summer I knew the natural light would probably last until 8.00 pm. I also hoped there might be fewer people at this time, especially because I was there one day before New Year’s Eve.

The access to the beach revealed vegetation similar to what I encountered at the other west coast beaches, Muriwai and Piha. Significantly, the black dunes were being held in place largely by pingao⁸⁶ (Figure 4.12.2). Out of respect for the precarious, environmental vulnerability of these reclaimed and stabilized dunes, I avoided venturing up onto them to make records.

My first impression when I reached the shore was the expansiveness of what I encountered. As a Brazilian native, the west coast of New Zealand still inspires a sense of estrangement due to its black sand. I have no equivalent experience of coastal land either in my home country or in the countries across the world that I have photographed.



FIGURE 4.12.2.

Pingao protecting the black sand dunes from erosion at Te Henga. (December 30, 2017).

⁸⁵ Ken Leonard.

⁸⁶ Pingao (a form of indigenous sedge grass), grows on the seaward face of many sand dunes in this area. Wassilieff (2018) notes, “The legend of Tāne’s eyebrows (Ngā tukemata o Tāne) tells of the origins of pīngao: There was hostility between Tāne, god of the forest, and his brother Tangaroa, god of the sea. In a gesture of friendship, Tāne plucked off his eyebrows and offered them to Tangaroa. Tangaroa rejected this gift and threw them to the shore. There they sprouted and grow today as pīngao, symbolising the boundary between the realms of Tāne and Tangaroa” (Wassilieff, 2018, para. 3).

The waves were breaking with ferocity and there was nobody in the water (including surfers). The violence of the ocean was complemented by a strong wind that was blowing up the coast. This produced a thick mist that obscured distance detail in a white haze, transforming the land into inexactness (Figure 4.12.3).

I felt the salt in the air
 Rocks as silhouetted ghosts
 and sand
 ... an eternity of movement
 ... pulling relentlessly at my essence
 ... outward and into expansiveness⁸⁷

I set my camera to a high speed mode because I planned to record three different expositions without using the tripod, by simply by holding down the shutter release. Initially, I was worried about the salty moisture surrounding me because it can quickly damage equipment. I wanted to record the sense of indefinability that I was experiencing.

I stood in the middle of the river with my legs open, trying to hold my ground. I closed my arms, forcing my elbows against my core, and my body became my tripod. I felt connected with the energy that was moving around me. This was not a new experience but each time it happens I am astounded by the occurrence.

As I waited, I became increasingly aware that I was inside land where distinctions between air, water and sand were blurred. Elements were concurrently discrete but also part of the same state. The customary divisions of colour and form were drawn together so they functioned as part of an overall pull forward, across and into and out of earth and water and sky. I could sense distinctly being inside a transition between these things (Figure 4.12.1). In the opening image to this entry, I was experiencing a state of transition that was neither day nor night, earth nor sky, land nor water ... but a pulling outward that was more than the water flowing beneath me as it drew its way out towards the ocean.

FIGURE 4.12.3.
 Wind and water blurring details of distant landforms at Te Henga. (December 30, 2017).

⁸⁷ I realise increasingly, that I am resorting to the poetic as a way of grasping at meaning and description. Clifford and Marcus (1986) have argued writing has limits that are political, poetic, cultural and aesthetic. So, I am aware that my research writing in this journal is technically an approach with registers that emerge out of, and respond to subjectively experienced situations. Therefore, the writing is not neutral. I resort to the poetic because English is not my first language and I fumble for expression to describe what I have experienced and what is more articulately communicated in my photographs.



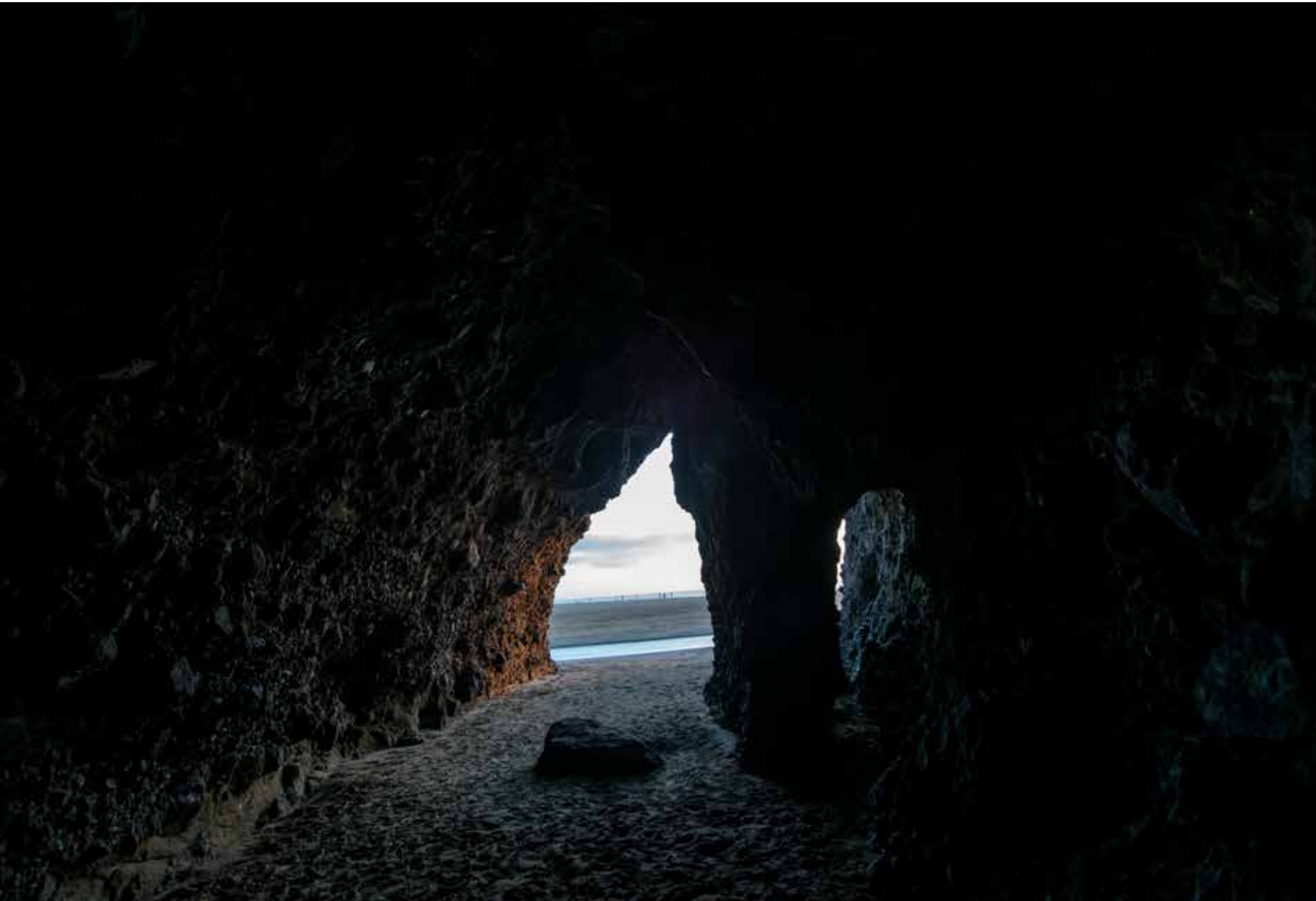


FIGURE 4.12.4.

Looking out from the interior of the littoral cave in Te Henga. (December 30, 2017). Although some light reaches the entrance of the cave, it is darker inside. Somehow its structure seemed acoustically to intensify the sound of waves crashing outside. Water regularly floods these caves during high tide.

THE CAVES

After some time I crossed the stream and sought out caves I was told were at the mainland end of a promontory. These caves were not like the karst cavities at Waipu and their entrances were distinctively exogene.⁸⁸ Considering their structure I think they were probably littoral (sea caves), formed by wave erosion in areas of weakness in the sea cliff. I entered the first cave through diminishing light. The environment was no more than 100 metres in depth (Figure 4.12.4).

There was a second, smaller cave a little further out on the promontory so I decided to investigate this before the skies became too dark to navigate my way back to safety. This second cave was much narrower (Figure 4.12.5) and I entered it with considerable care, feeling my way along the rounded rocks of its walls. I used its narrow walls to brace my elbows, creating a natural tripod. Despite the darkness, by doing this, I was able to record long exposures⁸⁹, and although I did not expect significant results from this technique, the images were actually interesting (Figure 4.12.6) because my bodily triangulation minimised shaking.

Inside this cave I could feel constraint ... a closeness, a weight and volume I had not experienced at Waipu. Moreover, there was a tension permeating my body, but I think this was due to the fact that I was using the walls of the cave as a stabilising system to steady the camera. On one level my body was more in contact with the land than normal but I was not relaxed. This tension clearly interfered with whatever I was trying to reach out to. Clearly, the physical bracing of my body intruded upon the process of sensing. I can see from this phenomenon how the physical can become problematic to an immersion because I encounter physical fatigue compounded with anxiety about my safety and that of my equipment.

⁸⁸ They are deeper than their opening is wide.

⁸⁹ These expositions were made around 1/15 second.



FIGURE 4.12.5.
The narrow entry to the second cave at
Te Henga. (December 30, 2017).



FIGURE 4.12.6.
Body-braced recordings.
(December 30, 2017).



FIGURE 4.12.8. ABOVE
Shoreline with time compressed. Te Henga. (December 30, 2017).

FIGURE 4.12.7. LEFT
Shoreline at Te Henga. (December 30, 2017). These three photographs were taken without a tripod, and although slightly offset from each other, the disjunction is not immediately evident. Due to the small angle variations I was able to align the images in postproduction to draw into being Figure 4.12.8.

Although I was anxious, I continued to photograph. However, increasingly my anxiety gained greater prominence. In the aches across my shoulders and arms I began to “hear” pain. Well, in my heightened, sensitised state, I thought this was what I was experiencing. Above and around me I was encountering a shrillness and I sensed a distinct agitation of the air over my head. Then the imagined became manifest. My presence (or also perhaps because night was approaching) was being reacted to by a colony of small native bats (pekapeka).⁹⁰

I was terrified. As noted in earlier entries, I do not feel comfortable in caves and in the pitch dark when what I thought was internal suddenly became physically manifest, it was a frightening experience. I left, I suspect, ashen white.

Thinking back, the terror I encountered in the cave may have been because when I am operating immersively with a heightened level of sensitivity, there is no longer a clear line between the physical and the nonphysical (both are real and present). I am so finely tuned that there are very few protections remaining to deal with sudden physical assaults on space or my susceptible positioning within it.

POST IMMERSION REFLECTIONS

I did not look at the photographs for a few days after the visit. In this time I thought about the field session and made mental notes that I have reflected on below. These are responses emerging from questions with which I am currently wrestling.

What are the implications of using a tripod and if it interferes in any way with an openness to communication, how do I address this?

I do not think the tripod in itself forms any structural blockage to effective communication. It is essentially a technical device used for stabilising the camera over long periods of time.⁹¹ However, I realise that to a certain extent, my unquestioning use of it has unconsciously promoted a certain way of ‘seeing’ that limits the angles and levels at which I engage with the land. Recent recordings where I have lain on the ground or huddled into rocks, positioning the camera at other than standing eye level, have increased the diversity of ways I dwell bodily in the land ... and, by extension, my perspectives are also altered. This is a shift from how I began the project where I believed that the tripod preserved something important about eye level. But of course, I realise now that eye-level (Figure 4.12.7 and 4.12.8) is entirely dependent upon how one is physically in the land; sitting, lying down, positioned at the top of a cliff or bracing oneself against the walls of a cave.

⁹⁰ Pekapeka are apparently quite rare. They have bodies measuring between five to six centimetres from nose to tail, although their wingspan can reach up to 30 centimetres. I think what I experienced may have been the long-tailed species because, although I couldn’t see them, they are more common than lesser, forest floor feeding, short-tailed bats. Long-tailed pekapeka are known to frequent certain coastal caves. They are also active at dusk and into the night (Meduna, 2017).

⁹¹ The tripod is, however, a useful device in environments of total or almost total darkness, where very long, stable exposures are required.

Does one need to record extended periods of time to embrace and communicate the living essence of land?

This is a very tough one. My sense is yes, normally, because it is the immersion and the conflation (or renegotiation) of transitory elements like light, time and form that seems to allow something significant to occur. This may partly be because I spend so much longer recording and being immersed than an ordinary photographer would. This “extended time” issue arguably lies close to the core of the thesis. Thus, immersion is not going to a place and being sensitive with my camera; it is actually a process of “fine-tuning” myself for long periods of time in a fixed place and letting the land communicate with me. This said ... (and now I come to a paradox) ... occasionally when I am deeply immersed, I record a photograph that is resonant (by this I mean something beyond just being atmospheric). This can perhaps be illustrated by Figure 4.12.9. So I ask myself, are such images a communication of a vital essence or are they just emotionally charged ‘shots’? And ... I am not sure. I suspect it may be the latter.

How does the scale of an image function in terms of its ability to communicate an essential essence?

Again, this question is one I keep wrestling with. I am wondering about the angle of view I am able to record with my lens, and I am curious to see if a broader view might allow me to be less concerned with the compositional aspect of my photographs. Although I have recently been using a wide-angle lens (14mm), I often feel the need for something even more comprehensive that allows me to immerse myself more effectively in a perceived ‘entirety’. Interestingly, when I began this research I generally used a standard lens (24–70mm), but over time I moved increasingly to a 14–24mm. Now I sense that I may need even more scope. I realise that this will challenge the conventions of “non-distorted” landscape photography embedded in my professional practice ... but I remind myself I am not photographing the physicality of land but its essence.

This said, I am also aware that sometimes very intimate (less panoramic) immersions like no. 5 in Egmont National Park and no. 11 in the Waipu caves, have been very effective in drawing forward in an image, the essence of something beyond the physical. Certainly, I have found numerous instances where the tension and undercurrent have not been dependent on sweeping inclusiveness. Perhaps the issue is one of approaching each immersion with more flexible options?

How does anxiety around physical danger affect an immersion?

Usually during an immersion I approach land with minimal information about its inherent hazards. By doing this I have learned to ‘protect my naivety’ so I become more ‘sensitive’ to what is being communicated. Sometimes my mind can detect ordinary danger, such as unstable earth or a tidal pull against my body. However, when immersed, my body, intellect and spirit are embedded in a world where physical danger is external (perhaps only sensed by a remaining veneer of the physical). As the immersion intensifies, the physical dimension of my body lessens and its communication with my cognitive facilities becomes less operative.

When I become too conscious of what is outside of this flow, because of anxiety or an insistent physicality, often a sense of external anxiety occurs. This state can precede, and even prevent an immersion. However, it also occurs as an agent that can pull me out of an immersion; for instance, when I suddenly feel the tide rising around my thighs. I think what is happening here is that the proportion of physical sense increases to the point that it intrudes upon and reaches (into?) the immersion. In these instances, I normally realise that there is a reason for the intrusion and my immersive state disintegrates.

So, given the instability of my physical awareness, I balance the precautions necessary to keep myself safe by asking somebody, when I am going into potentially dangerous situations, to either keep an eye on me from a distance or to leave me alone for three to four hours and then come and look for me if I haven’t returned. I need this ‘observer’ outside of the immersion as a precaution because I know that I am vulnerable. Although nothing has happened during my fieldwork in New Zealand, I was very shaken by the experience in the cave in Te Henga, because the wrench out of an immersion caused by the bats left me disoriented and panicking. Had I been only physical and cognitively immersed (as I might have been as a man exploring the cave as a structure), I would have been aware incrementally of the disturbances and I could logically have accommodated them as physical.

My rational mind would have been operating to the fore of my consciousness, but it wasn’t. The disturbance was experienced as ‘essential’ (or spiritual), because I couldn’t separate it from the immersive state. The result was profoundly disturbing and it is not something I would ever wish to encounter again.



FIGURE 4.12.9. LEFT AND RIGHT

Comparative photographs of a rock semi-submerged in a flow of water at Te Henga, (December 30, 2017). The image on the right is the result of three separate photographs, taken at 1/60th of a second over four minutes, that have been merged. The image on the left is a single photograph taken in the field (so one that is a self-contained recording of a fragment of time). I feel that the image on the right somehow more effectively communicates tension,⁹² ... the idea of conflicting integrations between the dark and light, and between the solidity of the sand and the fluidity of water. This is not something that just happens when you “sandwich” three images together. It is a peculiar “essence” that I find sometimes within the images that I am able to draw out.



⁹² According to Dewsbury and Cloke (2009), the “tension” of the landscape occurs because of an opposition between “what is solid, present, corporeal and material and that which inheres in the material as something mysterious, elusive, and ethereal” (p. 698).



TE UREWERA

(38.2259° S, 176.8403° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

January 08 to 11, 2018

Reflective field journal entry 13

LOCATION

Te Urewera is the land of the Tuhoe iwi. It is nestled between the southern Bay of Plenty and northern Hawke’s Bay. Geographically it is composed of forests, mountains, lakes and valleys. Although the region became a National Park in 1954, it was disestablished by the Te Urewera Act when the Tuhoe people instituted a governance board in 2014.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

I was invited into Te Urewera reserve by a colleague, Robert Marunui Iki Powhare. Robert is a Tuhoe leader and thinker, and he grew up near the Waiohau valley where he owns property. As a fellow researcher, I knew Robert as a language revivalist and political activist, as well as a respected educator and repository of tribal knowledge. He had talked with me in the past about the nature of mauri so having the opportunity to journey with him into land that he understood as concurrently physical, ancestral and spiritual was a valuable opportunity.

I knew that in this instance, I would not be able to enter the field with the same naïve positioning that I have tried to preserve in other locations. There were two reasons for this. First, Robert insisted that I was accompanied into the forest. This was partly a physical safety measure, but I also came to understand it was part of something more profound; about being attended by people of the land, when I entered the land. Robert also felt it essential to talk with me about the land and its nature, so I understood and appreciated the significance of what I was doing.

On the night I arrived he told me the story of how the clouds and the mountains fell in love and how this became the genesis of the Tuhoe people, and the reason they were called the children of the mist. These stories were told to me first in Maaori and then in English, and during the evening they were often embellished or completed by relatives who had joined us. We ate together and the stories flowed into the night. Although I do not speak te reo Maaori, the accounts were resonant ... How do I describe this? ... Something happened in the rhythm and emphasis, a collective understanding such that I could feel meaning beyond language? (I understand that this sounds a little esoteric, but there was meaning present in the room). I realise now that I was probably the only person there who did not speak Maaori fluently but, even before things were translated, I was able to ascertain a certain sense of what was being said.

My time in the valley⁹³ acquainted me with the very seamless way Maaori have of understanding land where the spiritual and physical are indivisible and an ordinary part of everyday life.

INTO THE FOREST

On the first morning when we left for the forest I had two guides, Shenna Butler and Te Kuru Pouwhare. These women were both from the local community and also members of Robert’s whanau (family).

The track we took wound up from the river and into the forest. The water was running high because of a storm that had swept through the region the previous week. During our crossing, the guides stopped in the middle of the river to ask the land permission for my entry. A ritual followed where we washed our heads and hands.⁹⁴ The land was being asked to allow me in.

The evening before I had asked Robert and the guides if I would be able to walk behind them at some distance and they were happy to accommodate this. As it happened we walked for a long time and in this process, I again began to encounter the sensory flow I experienced in Karangahake Gorge, Piha and Waipu caves (see journal entries: 9, 10 and 11).

FIGURE 4.13.1.

The behaviour of water and light in the Galatea River, Te Urewera. (January 09, 2017).

⁹³ I stayed in the Waiohau valley for four days.

⁹⁴ Later I asked Robert why we washed in the waters of the river before entering the forest, and he explained: “Wai or water is a traditional cultural practice to signify cleansing oneself before entering the forest as you did on that day – in a way you were asking permission of the God of the forest, Tanemahuta, for permission to enter the domain of Tane. Water is also used to lift the tapu – sacredness or restrictions in other circumstances.” (R. Powhare, personal communication, March 27, 2018).



FIGURE 4.13.2.

The Galatea river in Te Urewera. (January 09, 2017). An example of distortion forcing the recording away from what was experienced. Given the issue I decided to revert to my 8-15mm lens locked at 14mm. This was identical to my other 14mm lens but did not produce the problematic level of deformation.

I remembered stories about the land that I had been told the night before. As we progressed, blackberries closed in hard against the track, hooking into my clothing and I could hear the sounds of water between the rocks. I did not photograph during these first hours. I simply walked, trying not to disturb what I was sensing. We negotiated our way through muddy terrain until we reached a clearing and my guides washed in the water, looking to the mountain and conversing with it in Maaori. I stopped too and eventually waded into the river until I sensed where I should position myself to begin recording. I was submerged up to my waist. I situated the camera just centimetres above the water flow, angling it so I could include the horizon. Because I was immersed “inside” the water I could sense my mass through its resistance.

I had brought with me an 8-15mm lens⁹⁵ instead of my normal 14-24mm and 24-70mm attachments. Unlike my previous recordings, the 12-15mm produces a barrel distortion when pushed to its 12mm limit. Figure 4.13.2 shows the curved barrel, I also recorded Figure 4.13.1. This was an unusual image because of the behaviour of water and light in the river. I wonder if the strange distortion may have been caused by a refraction of the light on the water. I do not know. What was clear, was a distinctive immaterial flow occurring while I was recording the waterfall. I was aware of light and air and water ... and something else, as part of an intoxication. The essential essence of this place was never still. Reflections on the surface of the water were in constant movement and the light seemed almost alive. The images I recorded were not altered in any way.

⁹⁵ This is a more comprehensive fish-eye zoom lens that enables a 180° diagonal angle for recording images at the 8mm end.

While I was in this part of the river I recorded several photographs from a limited range of angles. The light was difficult to work with because it was very intense. However, I continued recording because I was less concerned with how the images looked and more with documenting what I was sensing. I repositioned myself on a rock around which small pools of water formed. In front of me I could see the forest but I was trying to *comunhão* with something beyond this.

Images taken in this location documented a flow of energy that was both visible and beyond the visible. There was a kind of sensuous tension moving through and around the physicality of rocks and light and water (Figure 4.13.3).



FIGURE 4.13.3.

The movement of energy in the Galatea river. (January 09, 2017). This image was taken with the 14mm lens because it minimised distortion. In photographs like this, there is a sense of another “wholeness” beyond the physical ... I see it in the vibrancy of the rocks and the manner in which light is both settled and unsettled ... physical and ephemeral.

After a period in this position my guides indicated that we should progress further into the forest. We walked for some time until we reached a place where the river curved, depositing on its margins, trunks that had been washed down from the top of the mountain. The debris reminded me of the driftwood I had encountered on the Haast coastline. However, the surface of these trees had been scoured by fresh water and the wood was bleached to a pale greyness (Figure 4.13.4). There had been a turbulence here. Not the constant, rhythmic, rolling of salt water and pebbles but the force of flood. Things had been torn and pummelled ... and discarded by a river that could change from tranquility to a rage of strength. It was capable of tearing trees to shreds and hurling them across the land. Yet strangely, there was also a sense of hollowness here. I could discern the insistence of insects ... and beneath the touch of my hands, I could feel stillness and silence.

At this point my guides indicated that we should leave the forest. I felt exhausted, not because of the physical effort but because of the intensity of the immersion.

I felt:

- Wholeness
- Intoxication
- A compression of the body
- Time as an integration
- Not a chronology...
- But seamlessness.

REFLECTING

The next day we decided to journey to the top of the mountains on horseback using a track used by local hunters. I followed the guides up a narrow path through blackberry and scrub, often clearing with machetes parts of the track that had become overgrown. However, during the journey the horse in front of me lost control and I was kicked and thrown on to the ground. As a result of the accident, my foot began to swell and, given that I could not walk, we were forced to turn back.

At the homestead I sat with my foot inside a bucket of ice and in this state, I have begun to reflect upon my experiences and write up this entry.

First, I am rethinking my concerns with the physical breadth of a recorded image. I had thought that by taking a wider lens with me I might somehow draw into the photograph a sense of the expansiveness I often feel when immersed, but this has not worked. Instead I ended up with distortions. I am wondering therefore, if the expansiveness that I assumed was physical, and therefore required a wider lens, is in fact not; it is spiritual. It is the nature of the essence. The wholeness and breadth are conditions of mauri that I have been mistaking for the physical dimensions of land. This is an interesting point. What I appear to be photographing is quite sensitive to anything being manipulated, wittingly or unwittingly. It appears that the more I am still, unpreoccupied with composition and technique, and more prepared to remain open to what appears in front of me, waiting patiently and without affectation, the more effectively I am able to touch the essence of the land's energy.

Second, I have also been thinking about the nature of the tripod and its impact on the immersive state. Again, here in Te Urewera I have found that bodily contact as a stabilising force neither enhances nor impedes a communicative process. So long as I am still and open to what is being recorded, the tripod is simply a device that affords the securing/stabilising of space that is being photographed. (In fact I realise that I am often grateful for it because in unstable situations like standing in a river current it offers me security that enables me to allay anxieties about physical safety, and as a result I become more settled and open to the immersion).

Third, although I can feel the land in a more physical manner when I am immersed in water, pressed against the walls of a cave (journal entry 11) or lying against the earth (journal entry 10), this is really only sensory (in a physical way). The effectiveness of the communicative process I have discovered is more associated with sensing what is above and through and across the physicality of land (and time). It also has something to do with a flow that is allowed to permeate me as a photographer and then surface and become recognisable in the recordings that I make.

THE DIGITAL STUDIO

I returned to the studio seven days after this immersion. My studio allows me an environment where I can 'develop' (or draw forward) what I might call spiritual light⁹⁶. Some images I create do not recall anything spiritual of the experience, and this I might compare to developing a film that has not been exposed to sufficient light. Conversely, certain images will re-establish a connection I felt on the land, and the affections I experienced will reach forward to me and they are drawn to the surface of the photograph.

96 By spiritual light I allude to an impression made upon the self, not a theological concept of divine radiance or refulgence associated with an esoteric nature of God.

FIGURE 4.13.4.

Trees deposited by the waters of the Galatea river. (January 09, 2017). I felt the enduring rhythm of discarding, something that has occurred here for centuries. The debris was part of a completeness, a wholeness where what was torn away and deposited became part of a natural and consistent order. Here was a paradox of strength and silence.





THE RANGIPO DESERT

(39.1742° S 175.4355° E)

DATES OF THE IMMERSION

February 14, 2018
Reflective field journal entry 14

LOCATION

The Rangipo Desert is adjacent to Tongariro National Park and occupies over 100 square kilometres between the Desert Road and Ruapehu. The area I photographed was accessed via Tukino Ski Road, 31 kilometres south of Turangi, opposite the eastern part of Kaimanawa. The volcanic region presents a harsh but exquisite beauty covered by reddish-brown tussock. It is strewn with power lines that stretch across the plateau. Despite high levels of precipitation that reach up to 2000 mm per year, the coarse mixture of sand and pumice quickly drains moisture from the soil. In addition, incessant winds cause high levels of evaporation that result in arid conditions over summer. Although a small part of the desert can be crossed by one of the most popular walks in New Zealand (the Tongariro crossing), few people venture into its greater expanse.

PREPARATION

I decided to visit the Rangipo Desert because I assumed that its anticipated aridity might function as a counterpoint to the mostly coastal and river-based nature of my inquiries to date. Cyclone Gitta⁹⁷ was expected to hit New Zealand about the time I left, so I felt it necessary to implement a number of safety measures.⁹⁸

When I entered Rangipo, the rain was unrelenting and there were erected signs warning of rapid and unexpected climate changes. I do not own a four-wheel drive vehicle so I realised that it would be risky to leave the car parked in such an area. As a consequence, I asked my partner to drop me off on the Desert Road at the access to the sky station and to return in approximately three hours. It had been agreed that if I was not at a prearranged checkpoint, she would return at 30-minute intervals and after six hours, she would alert authorities if I had not returned.

As a standard measure, I also brought with me my mobile phone with a full battery.⁹⁹ I use a mobile app that allows me to share my real time location with selected people and they are advised when I return. This allows them to monitor my geographic position displayed on Google Maps. I also carry with me a Garmin GP device that records my journey while concurrently functioning as an electronic compass.

FIGURE 4.14.1.
The movement of energy in the Rangipo Desert, New Zealand. (February 14, 2018).

97 Cyclone Gitta was a Category 4 Hurricane (SSHWS) that turned into a Category 5 Severe Tropical Cyclone (BOM) when it arrived from the east on to New Zealand. The weather event brought wind gusts up to 140 km/h in the Rimutaka Range, exposed places in the Wairarapa, and Buller. In the 24 hours up until 5am on February 21, the heaviest falls varied from 80mm to over 100mm. The country's MetService issued heavy rain and strong wind warnings across large parts of the country. Trampers in many South Island areas were told to evacuate and many communication systems across the country were cut off by the storm.

98 When I journey into unfamiliar environments I normally tell people where I am going and the time I intend to return. However, this particular location was extremely exposed. As a consequence, I extended the necessary precautions.

99 In addition, I also carry a charger that has its own battery source. This allows me to refresh all of my electronic devices while in a location.

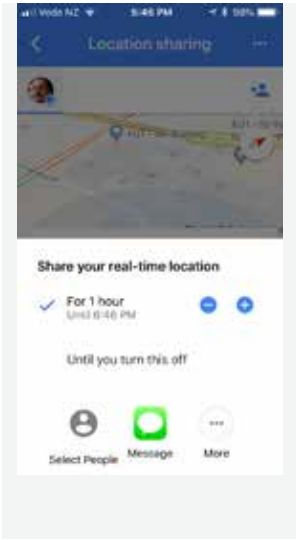


FIGURE 4.14.2.
Screen of the mobile app Google Maps.



FIGURE 4.14.3.
The Garmin Montana 550t, handheld GPS operates as a walking guide and return wayfinding device. The picture also shows the old Victorinox Swiss Army knife that I always keep in my bag.

On each journey I ensure that I have at least one friend who is not at the location and they have information about my proposed schedule. If they do not receive a terminating notice after 24 hours, they have agreed to inform authorities. In addition, my partner follows my location in real time through her mobile device (Figure 4.14.2).

Given the unstable weather conditions, I also took in a small pack an additional warm jumper, a thermal space blanket, a whistle, a Swiss army knife (Figure 4.14.3), some cereal bars and a bottle of water. In my kit I also carry a rain/wind breaker that provides protection in unpredictable conditions (Figure 4.14.4).

As a final measure, I also advised employees at the hotel where we were staying of my trip, informing them of our intension to be back by nightfall. If we did not return, they agreed to call a Department of Conservation rescue team. As we left, I checked the weather conditions for the area, and although rain was forecast for the whole day, there were no other meteorological threats predicted. My greatest concern was the approaching cyclone. However, it was not expected to reach New Zealand until a day after my journey.



FIGURE 4.14.4.
My partner recorded this image after she dropped me in the location. (February 14, 2018).
© (PROPERTY OF JANETE RODRIGUES, USED WITH PERMISSION).

My seam-sealed Marmot Precip raincoat offered protection against the elements while providing space for sheltering my camera in its front pockets. I also wear water resistant pants that dry quickly.

- 100 Here is an interesting thing ... I was acutely aware of being alone in this desert world, but the sensation was very different to being alone as a state of disconnection or alienation. When I think about it, there have been many instances when I have felt alone in land including the vast expanses of Iceland or Canada. Here my sense of aloneness was due to being 'alien' and unaccommodated. In these instances, I have felt outside of the world I was entering. At Rangipo my aloneness was related to being part of a flow of energy, but distinctly human within this. So, I sensed both my integrating flow but also my differentiation. As I attuned myself, I also felt vulnerable. I think it is because when I connect to the energy of land, I enter alone, but I am then pulled into a *comunhão*, a flow, that I can sense and record but not contribute to.
- 101 Rereading my journal entries I can see that I have understood walking as an integrated part of my immersive process from very early in the inquiry, and I understood this long before I became aware of Ingold's (1993) writing. Curiously, I remember that Nietzsche noted, "Only ideas won by walking have any value" (2007, p. 71).
- 102 By this I mean the time to stop, to photograph, to wait, or to change direction.
- 103 The Rangipo Desert had a distinct scent, different to other places I have been in New Zealand. The soil has a deep perfume of sand with clear rain notes, while the vegetation has an overriding fragrance of lemon and lighter floral accents set against darkly vegetative tones.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

Entering the desert

This was the first time I had decided to photograph in the rain. (This is something that I usually avoid because of the potential risk to my equipment). I sensed that perhaps a desert environment during inclement weather might be a distinctive encounter. However, soon after being dropped off by my partner I began to rethink the decision. I stepped out into the openness and ...

I felt:

Alone¹⁰⁰
Dwarfed by immenseness
Fragile beneath the force
of wind
and rain.

However, I decided to progress into the weighted immensity of the place.

IMMERSION AND THE SENSORY

I have come to appreciate that my immersions are a process that includes the journey into a location. So, an immersion is not a fixed state that is entered into once a position in the landscape has been identified.¹⁰¹ I rely heavily on what I feel while I am walking. I encounter the land with my senses and this informs my direction, pace and behaviour.¹⁰²

At Rangipo as with many other immersions I initially encountered the land as visual then I moved into a period of heightened sensory awareness while I walked. Normally, this awareness heightens my senses of sound and temperature, but sometimes my olfactory senses are also elevated.¹⁰³

Concurrently I become emotionally heightened. I often experience an intensifying of pleasure, wonder, anxiety or pain as I move more deeply into an immersive state. Then as the state of immersion gradually increases, paradoxically, this sensory awareness of the physical begins to dissolve and my individuality integrates into what surrounds me. I begin operating in a flow, using a kind of intoxicated 'non-aural listening' that exists as an intersection between the physical and the spiritual.

SOUND

This initial intensifying of my senses was very pronounced at Rangipo. When my partner left in the car, I pulled my raincoat around my body and wrapped my gear securely within it. As I walked into the desert I became acutely aware of the weight and intensity of rain pattering against my coat. This made an audible pattern. It was so distinctive that I recorded a few moments of the sensation on my mobile phone so that I could revisit the impression later.¹⁰⁴

However, as I attuned myself to the world I was walking through this sound integrated and was no longer an isolatable impression. As I became more immersed my senses (while they were finely tuned) began to integrate so they were no longer demarcatable from the energy of the land. Temperature also became less physically felt.

TIMING

At Rangipo I used the shutter manually in response to what I sensed were subtle changes in light, weight, pressure, and intensity. When changes in these factors occurred, then I triggered a recording. The process was intuitive. I might have described this sense of appropriate timing as the land 'instructing' me, but this isn't correct.¹⁰⁵

Although I sometimes awkwardly phrase my experiences as the land directing or telling me something, it does not address me in such a direct manner. This is because it is a vital essence I am encountering, not a communicating deity. I am not in *comunhão* with a 'voice', where there is a sender and a receiver sharing a message. I am instead, influenced by affections¹⁰⁶ emanating from my connection with an essential energy.

COMPRESSION AND AUTHENTICITY

When I entered the desert, I began recording its expanse, its vegetation and the pressure of the wind, rain and less physical energies of the place. In instances where I sensed that I could feel something discernible, I recorded a number of recordings over time that I was able to later layer into each other as compressions.¹⁰⁷ It is within this compression that I believe something of the essential essence or energy of the land becomes evident.

However, the compression is also one of intensity because when multiple images are layered over one another, very high levels of digital information are combined. This leads sometimes

104 Later when I listened to this recording it did not sound like what I experienced. It was simply non-differentiable noise. My sense of a delicate, audible pattern may have been an internal experience.

105 My incorrect use might be partly attributed to the fact that English is not my first language, and I have used the word “tell” in a nonliteral fashion. Reading back over my journal entries, I realise that when I say things like “the land tells me”, I can be misinterpreted. Because I do not want to interfere with the “sense making” at the time an immersion was recorded (because the iterative nature of my research means these ideas and insights shift as they develop and refine and I want the authenticity of my thinking at any given time recorded) ... I have decided not to change any earlier word use. However, from here forward I will use more appropriate words like “feel” or “sense”, because I am referring to the affections of the immersion.

106 By affections I refer to Spinoza's (1957) notion to something that can increase or decrease our power. In his translation of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi wrote a distinction between affection and feeling. He described Affect and Affection this way:

Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). L'affect (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. L'affection (Spinoza's affection) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body ... (Massumi, in the introduction to Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. XVI)

In this sense I am the affected and the living essence of the land is affecting me.

107 The time recorded I believe is not only the moment when the shutter clicks but also the time between intervening recordings. The compression of these recorded physical moments surfaces the essential energy that flows between and through them.



FIGURES 4.14.5 AND 4.14.6.
Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). A comparison of two recordings of a temporary lake formed by the rain. Figure 4.14.5 shows the original compiled image created by merging three records taken at two minute intervals. In this image, the yellows have become oversaturated because of the fusion. However, because there was constant rain falling while I was taking the individual recordings, the actual colours and contrasts were more muted than the compilation indicates. Figure 4.14.6 shows the same composite image, “colour corrected”. Here, the levels were adjusted based on the source recordings taken before the image fusion. This resulted in a more authentic expression of the essence I experienced.



FIGURE 4.14.7.
Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). The three source recordings used for colour correcting Figure 4.14.5. These photographs more faithfully recorded the original hues and softened textures.

to heightened colour saturation and increased texture in the composite image. This phenomenon presents me with challenging territory. I ask myself, “Could I be deceiving myself and assuming that the concentration of data resulting from the compression of images is only that ... intensity ... and not a recording of something of the energy of the land?”

However, I do not believe it is, because some images when they are compressed contain nothing but increased intensity of physical data. These photographs are almost entirely from periods when there was no authentic immersion (often this occurs when I am anxiously trying to ‘find’ something), or they were from times when I can feel no significant energy.

Thus, the issue of intensity, resulting from compression, sometimes distorts what I actually experienced and this occurred here at Rangipo. The intensifying can incorrectly suggest accents of colour and texture instead of communicating the experienced, subtle vibrations of the place (Figure 4.14.5, 4.14.6 and 4.14.7).

I labour over the issue of how much I ‘correct’ when I argue that I do not alter the content of what I record.¹⁰⁸ I know that photography has never really held an arguable bond to reality (Mullen, 1998; Sonesson, 2002; Shuster, 2017) and realism and perception comprise a complex theoretical web. The digital environment has brought with it a diverse array of tools and associated suspicions about the ability of an image to represent truth. In my past, professional concerns with achieving a great landscape shot meant that manipulation, including erasing undesirable elements and distorting or enhancing a scene, were common practice. But this approach did not produce records that had any real sense of what I actually experienced.

¹⁰⁸ In my workflow nothing physical is removed so sometimes items can appear as odd. For instance, in a photograph I recorded in Te Urewera (4.13.3), one of my guides appears in the photograph. I was not aware of this during the immersion or while I was compiling the image. Only after a discussion with my supervisor some weeks later did he point out her presence.

ENERGY AND INTERFERENCE

At Rangipo I twice experienced what I consider as a disruption or obstruction to the flow of the communicative essence of the land; once when I approached power pylons and once when I attempted to photograph a quarry in a section of the desert.

The volcanic plateau is punctuated with pylons that stand like sentinels sometimes dominant (Figure 4.14.8) and sometimes as small distant structures etched up against the horizon (Figure 4.14.11).

I noticed that when I recorded material under these structures I experienced a discernibly different force/interference.

In recordings of the desert before I approached the pylons I experienced:

- Delicacy
- Softness
- Distance
- The physical absorbance of soil
- A flow reaching outward
- Rhythmic ripples caused by wind and rain
- Balance.

When walking across the land I had felt a low vibrational flow, but things shifted discernibly when I was trying to photograph under these structures.

I felt:

- Brittle
- Tense
- Vibrations that were incessant but had no rhythm.
- Adrenalin
- An inaudible sound of electricity.

I noticed large pools of water forming puddles on the base of the structures but it was difficult to 'feel' them.

Later, I wondered if I was projecting feelings on to the land below the pylons because the structures looked so foreign. So, I asked myself, "Am I allowing my mind to interpret a visual (manmade) incongruity as a disruption to the land's essence?" I was also worried if, because I knew that there was electrical energy running through the wires above me, I might have been defaulting to a perceived disruption that was actually cognitively influenced. I am not sure.



FIGURE 4.14.8.

Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018).
This image was recorded directly under the power lines.

Later in the immersion I encountered a similar sense of disruption when towards the end of my time in the desert I came across a sand wall that had been textured by the weather. When I moved around it I stumbled upon a quarry (Figure 4.14.9). The scarring was dramatic and I think that I again felt a discernable change to the energy flow of the place.

The life force here seemed:
Diminished,
muted
a lower frequency ...
subdued ...

Again, I asked if I was projecting my understanding of the disruptive nature of quarrying on to the vibration of the land?¹⁰⁹ I wondered:

- Does the strength of the land’s essence bear some relationship to damage done to its surface?
- If this is the case, what about natural damage like earthquakes or the ongoing volcanic eruptions on Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island?
- If a human disaster happens on land (e.g. an influenza epidemic or a crime) but the event has no physical impact on the place, can this affect its essential energy?

So ... I do not have absolute answers to these questions. However, in relation to the first question, I recall my experience photographing the Pinheiros River. Here the essential essence seemed almost inert but also troubled. In a way what I experienced was similar to the Rangipo quarry because there was a significant difference in the energy that I might describe as a loss of “aliveness” that could be felt as inertness (Figures 4.8.1 and 4.14.9). So, I suspect that perhaps in some instances when there is physical damage to land, there might be a weakening of energy.

It may take many years to make a considered decision about the second question. On a surface level I think if all land is in a process of change, be it sudden or spread over millions of years, logic suggests the answer should be ‘No, natural damage to land should not impact on its energy’ ... but my exposure is so limited that I cannot propose a well-informed answer.

My initial response to the third question is that human damage would probably not have an impact on the essential energy of land because human experience is other than the land. However, Salgado (2014) suggests otherwise. He discusses

becoming ill after photographs taken in Africa where human exploitation and suffering on a particular site was extreme. Although his doctor could find no physical reason for his condition, the photographer understood that his soul had become ill. This illness he believed could only be relieved if he healed the land where he was living at the current time (his father’s farm). Accordingly, he planted a forest and as it grew he believed that his soul incrementally became healthier.

Similarly, I am reminded of the notion of tapu as it relates to certain land in New Zealand and how it is believed that the residue of human atrocity can have lingering effects on a site. An example of this in 2000 was the proposed 30 hectare prison site at Ngawha, seven kilometres north-east of Kaikohe, where there was significant concern raised by Maaori who argued that the land could be tapu because blood was spilled on it during historical battles. It was argued that it would be wrong to incarcerate Ngapuhi on land where their ancestors’ blood was spilled. The Ngapuhi kaumatua, Mr Ron Wihongi, argued that placing a prison on land that had been damaged by death in battle would affect prisoners and worker’s “spiritual and mental health in various ways” with resulting “mental disorders ... and terrible repercussions”.¹¹⁰

VEGETATION AND LIFE

A distinctive feature of the Rangipo desert is the vegetation that populates the plateau. In winter, snow blankets the flora and functions as a protection against severe temperatures. Most of the plants have a limited life span, compressed between the first signs of the spring and the arrival of the freezing winter temperatures. The eruption of Lake Taupo (circa. 186 A.D) created a deposit of ash that provides optimum growth conditions for tussocks and scrub but the high porosity and composition of the soil has prevented the growth of forest cover. Much of the flora is distinguished by a sophisticated system of roots that create a network of growth across a capillary system of temporary water flows.

As I walked through the desert, small flowers sparked pinks over green, red and brown vegetation. The soft moss was an unexpected encounter because my previous experience of deserts has been walking across expansive areas of rock and sand. In Rangipo I was captivated by the variety of plant species and I felt a rich sense of life (Figure 4.14.10).

INTEGRATION AND WEIGHT

Figures 4.14.11, 4.14.12 and 4.14.1 (front plate) were taken while I was inside the deepest part of my immersion. These images communicate the distinctive feeling of weight and being contained within a moving energy. When these recordings were made there was clearly a flow moving across and through the desert that was not in the same direction as the wind. The energy felt absorbent. By this I mean I felt concurrently on and within the land. Here skies were the same weight as the land. The essential essence was like a pull, sometimes subtle and sometimes very strong. I was weighted into this. The resulting photographs communicate something of this heaviness and its energy.¹¹¹

It was after recording the ground cover of the desert that I stumbled upon the quarry and the disruption to the vibration of energy that had occurred up until that point (with only the temporary disturbance of the pylons). It was as if the distinctive weakening of energy in the quarry initiated a withdrawal because I suddenly began to feel cold and tired. I am not sure what exactly draws me out of an immersion but the effect is always visceral. I become increasingly aware of my physicality and the physicality around me. What I hadn’t been aware of during this immersion was the extended duration of time I had been in the desert. When my partner picked me up from the checkpoint, she told me that I had been four hours in the desert and this was the third time she had driven out to see if I had returned. She mentioned that although we had an established plan, she had begun to worry because the wind and rain had increased significantly.

¹⁰⁹ The quarry was visually arresting for me because I have a historical interest in ruins and their meaning. However, instead of finding something graphically fascinating, what I encountered was mildly disturbing. I remained for only a short while because the energy level was so low.

¹¹⁰ See http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=14083

¹¹¹ I encountered a similar experience in Te Araroa where the physical conditions of the soil created an increased sense of being swallowed by the land. However, in that instance there was a sense of something being wrong, whereas with Rangipo, I was feeling absorbed but not rejected.

OTHER RECORDINGS OF THE RANGIPO DESERT

Up until now my journal entries have not contained all of the photographs I have taken. Normally I only include those that have caused me to question an experience or challenge a feature of my practice. However, I realise that this decision can suggest a distorted impression of the intensity of the research. I normally take hundreds of images in the process of trying to understand the communicative nature of an encounter, so on the following pages I have included 300 of these from a total of 568 recordings taken over four hours at Rangipo. They may provide a context for what has been discussed in this entry.

The images are presented in the order that they were recorded, and the resulting composites are placed beside their sources.¹¹² I always keep such material in my studio because in total the recordings provide me with a visual overview of the immersion, and chronologically they help me to visually map where the immersive process became intensified and where it lessened.



FIGURE 4.14.9.

Quarry in the Rangipo Desert.
(February 14, 2018).

¹¹² The composites were produced two to four days after the immersion, in my digital studio.



FIGURE 4.14.11.
Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018).
Tussock grass across the plateau with pylons
appearing subtly along the horizon.



FIGURE 4.14.10. ABOVE
Plant life in the Rangipo Desert. (February 14,
2018). Ground vegetation and the three source
photographs used to create it.

FIGURE 4.14.12.
Temporary furrows formed by water,
destined to last only hours before being
absorbed by the earth in Rangipo Desert.
(February 14, 2018).



RECORDINGS OF THE
RANGIPO DESERT

- 1

FIGURE 4. 14.13.

The first phase of recordings of the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). My process of immersion occurred very soon after I began walking and these early images already show instances of energy. However, at this stage I was still very aware of the rain and the sound and temperature around me.
- 2

FIGURE 4.14.14.

The second phase of recordings of the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). The light cleared as I progressed.
- 3

FIGURE 4.14.15.

Third phase of recordings in the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). In the later part of this journey I began photographing land that contained the pylons. At a distance there was little disruption to my absorption, but when I moved very close to the structures I was unable to feel anything under the new vibration.
- 4

FIGURE 4.14.16.

The fourth phase of recordings of the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). Here I have moved away from the pylons and begun considering the groundcover.
- 5

FIGURE 4.14.17.

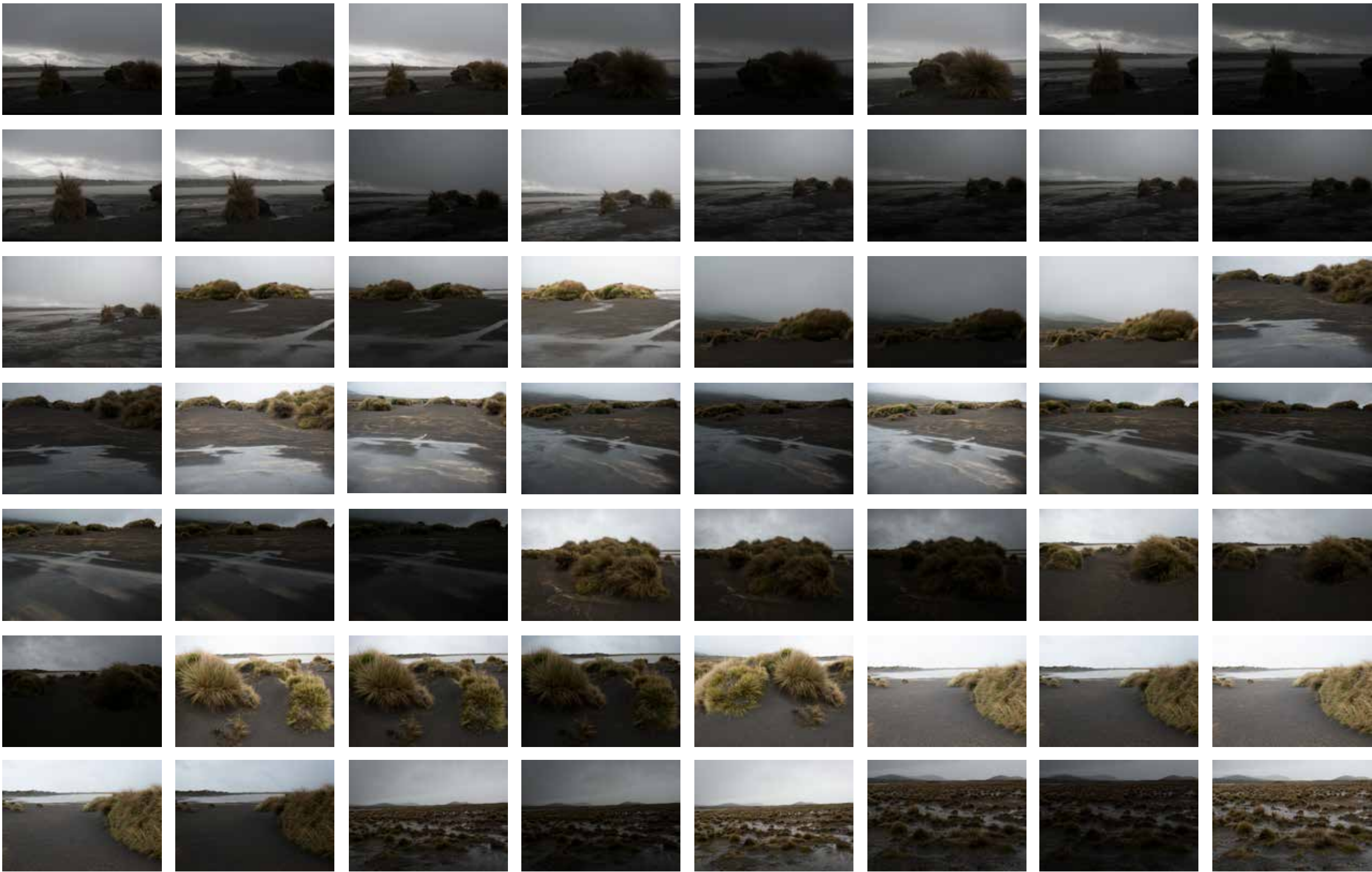
The fifth phase of recordings of the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). These images were taken while I was in the deepest phase of the immersion. Here the weight and distinctive movement of the desert’s energy are much more evident.
- 6

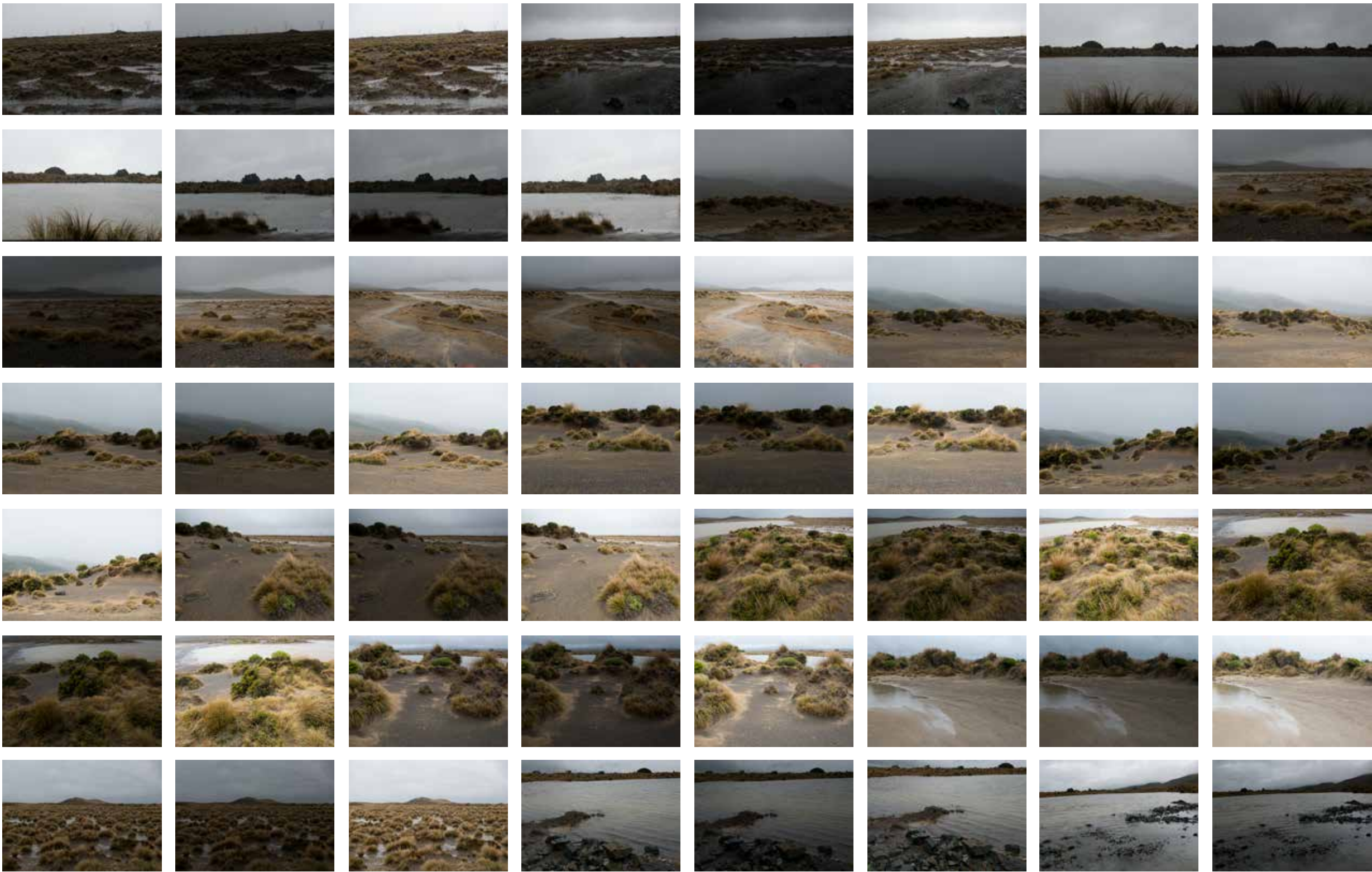
FIGURE 4.14.18.

The sixth phase of recordings of the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). These were made as I began surfacing out of the immersion prior to discovering the quarry.
- 7

FIGURE 4.14.19.

The seventh phase of recordings of the Rangipo Desert. (February 14, 2018). These images were recorded in the quarry I found at the end of my immersion. There is little depth here. The records are largely documentary in nature.



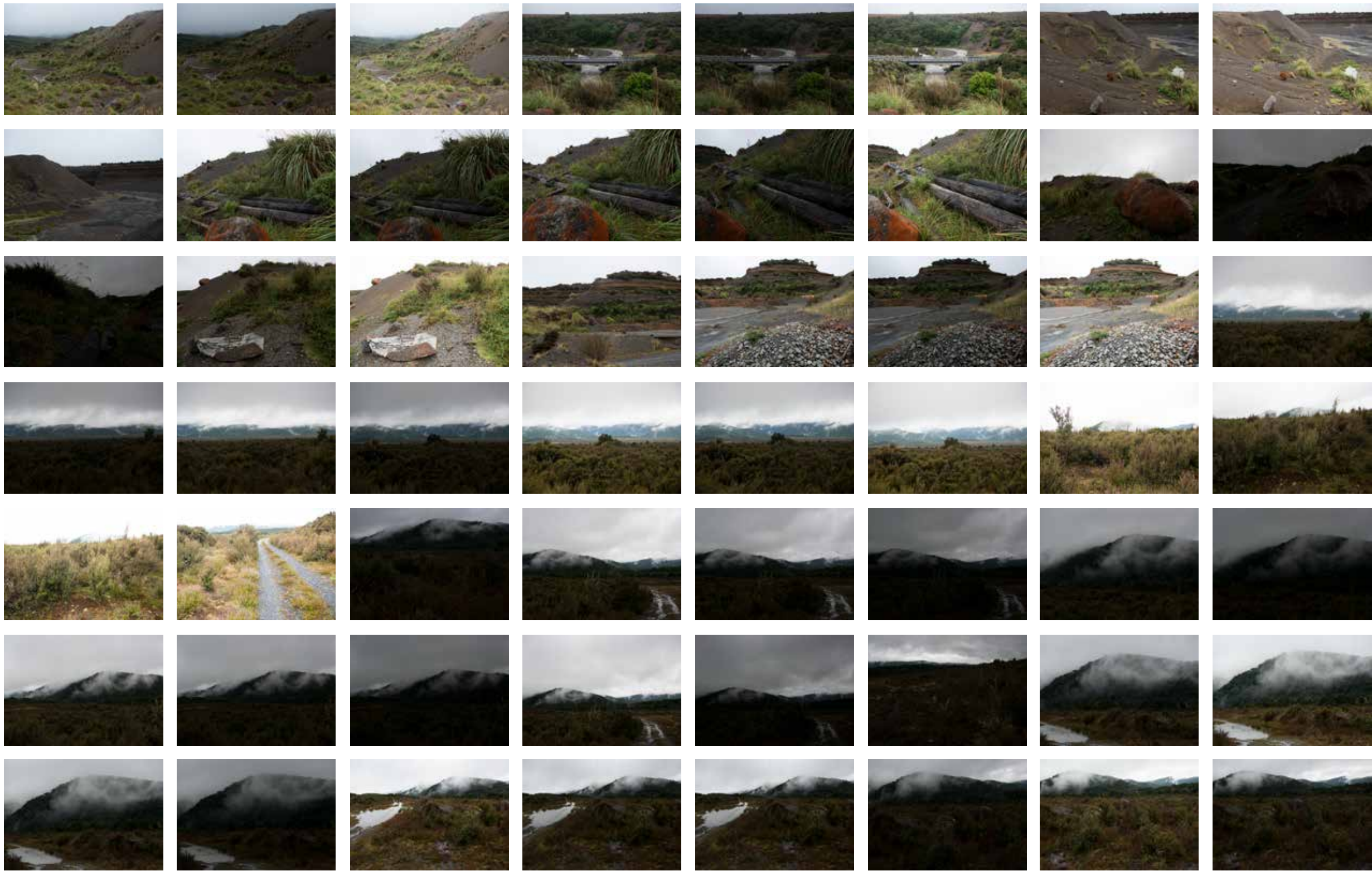














TE UREWERA (THE RETURN)

(38.2259° S, 176.8403° E)

DATE OF THE IMMERSION

March 15, 2018
Reflective field journal entry 15

BACKGROUND

This entry documents the experiences of an unanticipated event on the 15th of March, 2018. I had not intended it to be part of my inquiry but unexpectedly it drew many things together and gave me insights that my progression of reflective and reflexive thinking in land immersions hadn't been able to make manifest. As the final entry in this journal it provided through its tangential lens, a disruption and an illumination.

After my trip down to Te Urewera two months earlier (journal entry 13), my friend Robert Marunui Iki Pouwhare asked if I would return to photograph for his people, the official opening of their new wharekai (refectory) at Waiohau marae.¹¹³ The wharekai was the result of years of intensive work by the Ngati Haka Patuheuheu Hapu to raise a million dollars needed for materials and specialised labour. The opening of a new wharekai, according to Maaori tradition, is preceded by rituals and celebration. The ceremonies were attended by the local community, representatives of other Maaori tribes from the North Island and honourable ministers and politicians.

REFLECTION ON THE ENCOUNTER

The trip south east took over five hours of night driving and I arrived in the valley at 2.00 am. The world was shrouded in mist and darkness.

I had been asked to record a series of rituals that formed the opening celebration and the first of these was due to begin before daylight at 4.00am. This ritual enabled people of the community to enter the house, including women who had been previously forbidden. The rite involved a young girl (a virgin) crossing the threshold into the wharekai, followed by her grandmother, senior ministers and general members of the community. Visitors and local people entered the room in the dark, singing ancient prayers, inviting their gods and ancestors to join them and to bless the house. In the predawn darkness they filed into the space, forming a circle, while chanting.

This was when I experienced my first struggle. The interior of the wharekai was completely dark, save for the fragile glow of the emergency exit signs. Robert guided me by holding my arm and with small steps, I walked parallel to the human circle. The people were chanting and moving around the room. Despite Robert's guidance, I felt utterly lost in this foreign world. As a photographer my role was to record the event and for such a task I was fitted only with my western conditioning. Although I had recorded numerous ceremonies in Brazil in the past, I was completely out of my depth. Due to my innocence, I hadn't realised the implications of stepping into such a profoundly different culture. I was entering both a ritual and a space where the spiritual was fundamental. Everybody was immersed in an intimate connection with gods and ancestors ... and I didn't know how to be or act in this world. What was I supposed to record in the darkness? Suddenly, the thought of using of the flash mounted on the top of my camera was inconceivable.

FIGURE 4.15.1.
Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera,
New Zealand. (March 15, 2018).

113 The Waiohau marae is situated in the Waiohau valley and to access it, you leave the Galatea Road that cuts through land between Whakatane and Gisborne.



FIGURE 4.15.3. Blurred image made during the first ceremony of the wharekai opening at the Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera. (March 15, 2018). This is indicative of many of the photographs taken during the ceremony. Images were indistinct or so dark that people present were indiscernible.

My despair increased when I checked the first photograph I took. Because of the darkness, I could find no way to operate the focus. The auto-focus system of my camera is efficient, but it emits a little light beam to detect (by reflection) the distance between lens and subject. I felt that this light was screaming my presence as an intruder, disturbing the ritual, and I decided to turn it off. I realised that I would have to rely on the manual focus, but nothing was visible. I checked the first photograph and the result was a black frame with little registered except for the light of the exit signs (Figure 4.15.2). I was worried. I had been asked to record something profound. The voices around me were conversing with the spiritual and the physical but the people were largely invisible.

Every second of my discomfort felt like minutes. I was at a loss. Then I remembered what I discovered when I photographed presence in the darkness at Muriwai. Not knowing what else to do, I applied the same approach. I stilled myself and just sank into an immersion in the space, trusting what was around me to register in its own way. In this renewed state, I intuitively increased the sensibility of my sensor and, for the first time in my life, I set the ISO¹¹⁴ scale to the maximum limit of my camera, (12800).¹¹⁵ I knew that I was dealing with something sensible but invisible, so I sensed that perhaps my anxieties about grain and noise would not make any significant difference to the recording.

I began to flow with the movement of energy emanating from the chants, and although I could not understand the meaning of the words, in the darkness there were flickers of recognition ... mauri ora, wairua, Tuhoe and the repetition of the word Teumitarua (which Robert told me later was the name given to the wharekai).

I felt:

Lost
The enveloping movement of blackness
Immeasurable time
A dissolving of the physical and spiritual.

The resonance of the praying and the energy around and through the sound was palpable. I felt my beating heart aligning to the rhythm of the voices. I felt immensely emotional and my eyes began to well with tears. I photographed groups of people who I could not identify in the dark, focusing only on the faintest contours of their silhouettes ... just trusting in the process. There was of course a possibility that this would not work and the sacred event would be lost without record ...

but I was feeling tranquil. This world had no concern with the technical, so I released myself to trust.

Much of what I recorded was out of focus (Figure 4.15.3) but some of the images recorded nuances of the spiritual presence in the encounter (Figure 4.15.4).

Moments later I was drawn into the circle by people, not as an intruder anymore but as a welcome guest. The transition was very moving and my initial sense of guilt lessened. While recording what was present it was impossible to perceive any individual because everything was connected. Every person was integrated into a spiritual and physical whole. The darkness increased the resonance of their voices, and I was no longer embarrassed by the “click” of my camera shutter. I was freer to quietly move around.

I was now engaged with the ritual in a different way. I felt the operation of my camera equipment flowing with the dark.¹¹⁶

In retrospect, I ask myself “Does an immersion allow me to “see” things in the dark that are not visible?” I think so, but this is something inexplicable. I wonder if this ability to see the unseen is perhaps just a heightened sensitivity and adjustment to the low light. However, this argument doesn’t explain the inconsistency in the imagery, because if this was just heightened awareness in the darkness, then the resulting photographs would have all, gradually become clearer, but they didn’t. A “growing accustomed to the dark” argument, when I clearly wasn’t, also doesn’t explain how I constantly felt pulled quite strongly towards photographing certain things, for extended durations of time, that I clearly couldn’t see.

Although I couldn’t see it at the time, I could feel that people were crying. Their emotions permeated me. I recorded what called to me, increasing exposure to six seconds and trusting my body to stay still enough while the shutter was open to record something visually discernible.¹¹⁷ I understand in retrospect that although at this time I was only recording one photograph, I was still compressing time inside the frame, in a manner similar to merging a series of photographs. In this instance it felt like I was recording ‘breathing movements’ of time and energy.

I felt:

The physicality of sound
Prayer
Darkness as sight.

114 The ISO (International Standards Organization) is a standardised industry scale for measuring sensitivity to light. Using a sensor setting, the photographer is able to brighten or darken an image. The acronym harks back to analogue film where standards were set in relation to the sensitivity of materials. The higher the ISO number, the higher the sensitivity of the sensor. Thus, by adjusting the ISO setting the camera can ‘see’ beyond normal human vision. However, higher ISO settings will produce digital artifacts on the image (noise) and this decreases the perceived resolution and quality of the photograph.

115 To produce a high-quality image, given that long exposures are normally stabilised with a tripod, I use the ISO set at a range between 64 and 100.

116 See journal entries Piha 10 and Waipu 11.

117 Usually an adequate speed to photograph without a tripod is 1/60th of a second (or faster for a normal lens). Longer exposures will register both the shake of the photographer’s hands and any movement of the subject.

FIGURE 4.15.2

The first ceremony of the opening of the new wharekai in the Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera. (March 15, 2018). This image shows the dim light from the emergency signs barely outlining the moving current of humanity in the main room of the wharekai. LED lights, although they appear bright to the naked eye, are technically low emission and designed to illuminate small, specific points. Using only this light and lengthy exposures with a hand-held camera, logic told me that I would be unable to record what was happening and the distinct presence in the room.





FIGURE 4.15.4.

A group of kuia from the community in the wharekai at the Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera. (March 15, 2018). In this image I used the light from the emergency exit to register what I sensed was a group of unidentifiable women in the ceremony. The extremely long (six second) exposure produced a softened focus caused by the natural movement of my body and the subtle shifts in the women's positions. This photograph was made with an ISO of 12800 and an f 2.8. aperture. The image shows something of the deep vibrancy present during the ceremony.

The resulting images showed physical bodies merged with a moving spirit. The increased grain and noise from the high ISO seemed entirely conversant with sense of immateriality ... recording in a strange way what I experienced ... physical and nonphysical dimensions no longer demarcated from each other (Figures 4.15.5 and 4.15.6).

During this phase of the immersion I was no longer tired but connected through an intense sense of togetherness with people, most of whom I had never met. My hearing perception was heightened, similar to what I experienced during the night at Muriwai and slightly similar to the immersion in the Karangahape Gorge.

After the ministers spoke, the light was turned on and I was finally able to distinguish individuals in the circle, men and women of different ages, young children in school uniforms, adolescents and many elderly people.¹¹⁸ These people were profoundly connected.



FIGURE 4.15.5.

The vibration of essence at Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera, (March 15, 2018). This image records a group of people in the dark, united in prayer. Here the visible blurs with the invisible and the whole is connected by a permeating spirituality.

¹¹⁸ It was interesting to see that in this world the spiritual involved all generations of a community. I thought about the extent to which nowadays, digital and mobile technologies arguably increase the gap between the young and the elderly, yet here, there was a solid wholeness where age was not a demarcation.

FIGURE 4.15.6

Recording of the unseen, Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera. (March 15, 2018). Prolonged exposures such as this one registered the movement of people and movement differed from person to person. Such photographs when I look at them, move me away from considering human physiognomy and cause me to recall the more ethereal and indistinguishable nature of the ritual. I sense inside photographs like this, an essential essence/energy that was present but did not have a material form.





FIGURE 4.15.7.
Dawn at the Waiohau Marae, Te Urewera.
(March 15, 2018). The three source
photographs, taken from the same
position over a period of eight minutes
are laid out below the image.



After this part of the ceremony, I walked outside to my car where I fitted myself with equipment that I would use for the rest of the day. The mist that had draped the valley when I arrived was still present and the first signs of light were surfacing behind the mountains ... in hues of blue and magenta. I recorded the arrival of light over a period of three minutes (Figure 4.15.7 and Figure 4.15.1).

As this time, I was still very much in the flow of what had just happened and I walked quietly around the marae. I saw trees veiled in the smoky residue of mist and I began to photograph them. I recalled Eldon Best's first book *Tuhoe: The Children of the Mist* (1925) and how he spoke about these people, their relationship with land ... and the veils of mist that envelop it.

Between ceremonies I also recorded the sky and the dissipation of light above the mountain range. Here, strange, almost smoke-like clouds rose silently, like a water colour whose definitions were dissolving in the rain. There was a huge, settled power here, something paradoxically delicate and immense ... (Figure 4.15.8).

I felt:

Whole
And part of something whole
An inaudible echo of prayers
And the beating of my heart.
..... Quiet
Complete.

I continued to photograph, albeit in a documentary manner that I believe was expected, until late morning. Then an extraordinary thing happened. It occurred in a part of the ceremony where the ministers were giving speeches. These were responded to by speakers from the guest tribes¹¹⁹ who had been invited to the opening. At this time, the sun was high in the sky but the smoky softening of the light remained.

¹¹⁹ Many honorable members of the Maaori community and iwis attended the opening ceremony of the wharekai, including, but not limited to: Tamakaimoana from the sacred mountain of Maungapohato, Ruapani from Lake Waikaremoana, Te Kohinga mainly from Ruatoki, Ngati Hamua from Waikirikiri, Ruatoki, Ngati Rongo, Te Upokorehe from Kutarere, Ngati Manawa, Ngati Whare, Ngati Pikiiao and Ngati Makino.

FIGURE 4.15.8.

View from behind the Waiohau Marae facing the Te Urewera range. (March 15, 2018). This image records the partly visible and the invisible. I am reminded that there is energy beyond what I can know or control. It is untouchable ... and vivid ... and it draws my essence.



I glanced up and to my surprise, I witnessed a perfect circle that had formed around the sun (Figure 4.15.9). I took a sequence of photographs because I was not sure if what I was seeing was real or a consequence of my fatigue and the emotional impacts I had experienced during the ritual in the wharekai.

I showed Robert the photograph of the circle in the sky through the LCD of my camera. I thought it could be something particular to the area that I was not aware of. He seemed surprised too and looked at the sky, showing others around him what had appeared. Increasingly people began looking at the phenomenon. Later one of the kuia asked if I had seen the “sign of the spirits” in the sky and photographed it.

I asked myself initially if this phenomenon might be the result of a refraction on my lens or a consequence of heat from the sun forcing its way through the clouds. I was cautious about interpreting what I saw as anything nonphysical, although clearly people at the marae understood it this way. They saw the phenomenon as a sign of the spiritual presence on the land made visible.¹²⁰

Two days later I received a call from Robert to thank me for recording the ceremonies and he told me something interesting. On the opening day there was another academic who also attended the ceremony. Associate Professor Hinematau McNeill had also taken photographs on her mobile phone (Figure 4.15.10). Robert interpreted the halo as his people’s ancestors trying to express their love and gratitude for the achievement of building the new wharekai.

Although from a scientific paradigm the meteorological explanation is of course plausible, I am interested that an alternative understanding exists in an indigenous context, given the unique timing of a lighting effect at the highest point in the ceremony and the fact that no similar effect had been hitherto experienced in people’s living memory.¹²¹



FIGURE 4.15.9.

A series of single images of the solar halo that formed temporarily above the Waiohau Marae around noon over a period of 10 minutes. (March 15, 2018).

120 I discovered later that solar halos are actually experienced subjectively. Depending where one is standing, one sees a unique version of the effect, made by different ice crystals oriented semi-randomly, at differing angles. These ice crystals are normally suspended in high cirrus or cirrostratus clouds drifting up to 20,000 feet in the upper troposphere. The light phenomenon is often called a 22-degree halo because the ring has a radius of approximately 22 degrees around the sun.

121 I am reminded here of Aristotle’s supposed assertion that “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it” (This was attributed to Aristotle in Bennion, 1959, p. 52, but the origin is contested). Irrespective of the origin of the assertion, I find that I am increasingly able to accept two perceived and arguably conflicting thoughts with less and less anxiety. In one world a scientific explanation is valid and in another an ancestral and esoteric explanation feels complete and justified.



FIGURE 4.15.10.
Three photographs taken by Associate Professor Hinematau McNeill with her mobile phone of the solar halo. (March 15, 2018).

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QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Given the nature of these experiences I am left with some questions and tentative conclusions.

THE LIMITING NATURE OF MY WESTERN CULTURAL BACKGROUND

I am increasingly aware of the limitations to my thinking that rise from my largely Western cultural context and how this impacts upon my understanding of things that reside outside of a Cartesian need to rationalise and create logical explanations for what I experience. If I do not understand something that cannot be explained rationally, my approach is to treat the occurrence with caution and to act suspiciously. For instance, at the marae I spent hours trying to explain the hole in the sky scientifically, while every Maaori I asked instantly understood it as an esoteric phenomenon. It was consistently and ubiquitously comprehended (known) as an ancestral/spiritual communication.

During the predawn rituals I felt deeply ignorant when it came to spiritual matters that were palpably so deeply understood by everybody else. While I have been studying concepts like mauri the last two years, Maaori at this ceremony grew up with an understanding of it as a natural part of their everyday life. But I am constantly constrained by either an innate positivist default or a religious monotheist framework emanating from my upbringing. The people at Waiohau had no need to understand, or know the parameters of, or define mauri. It is clearly an integrated part of their ontology. It is not a way of knowing, but a fundamental phenomenon.

Such insights haunt my academic conception of the world.

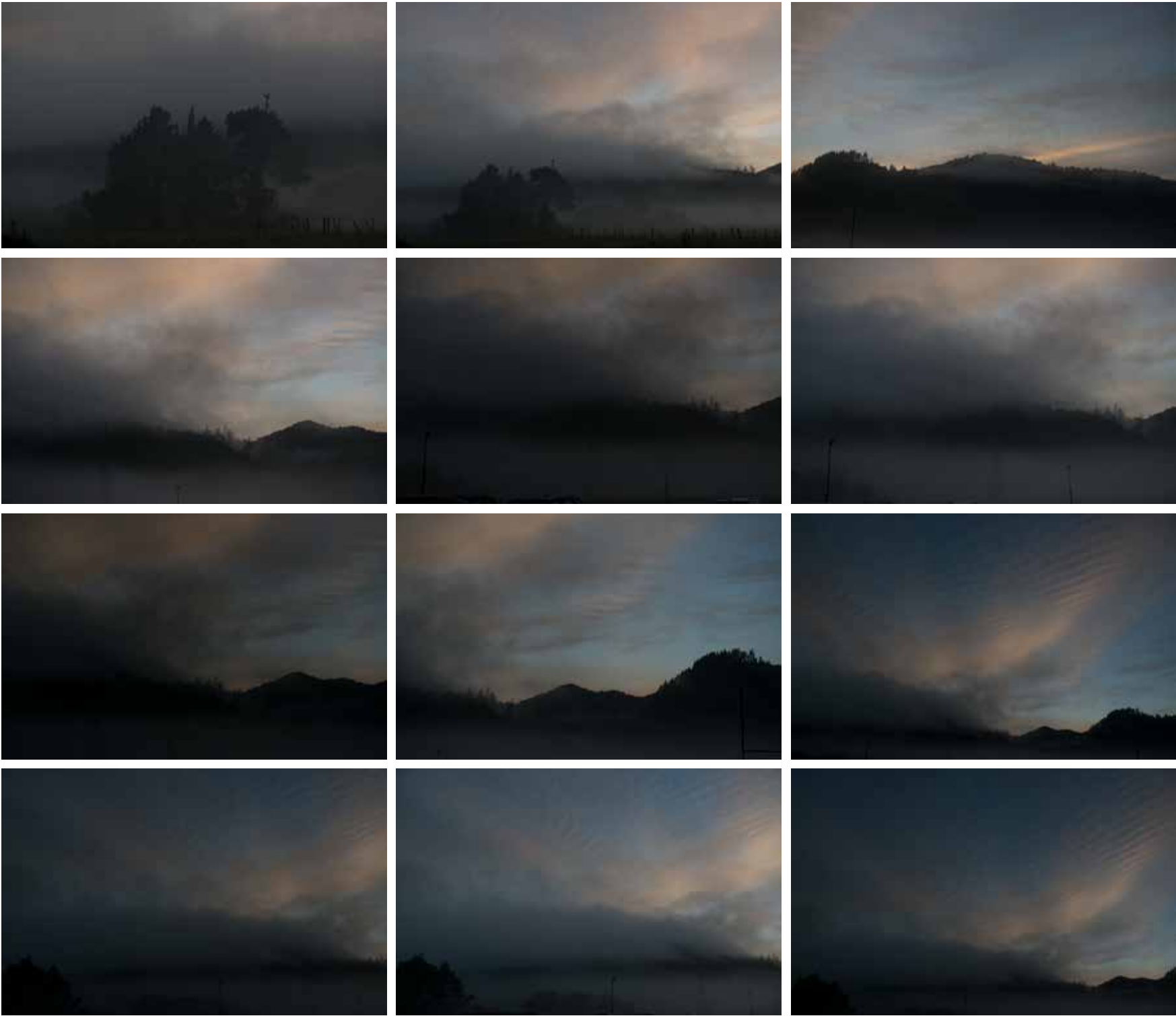


FIGURE 4.15.II.
Other photographs recorded during my second immersion in Te Urewera. Here an expression of the whole that cradles me inside sky and earth comes closer to recording the living energy of what I experience. (March 15, 2018).

THE CHARACTER OF MAURI

I am not certain if what I am discovering is transferable, although I can find similar recognitions of the land’s essence in accounts by photographers like Salgado and in Andy Goldsworthy’s discussion of his relationship with land where he state:

I need the land, I need it. I want to understand that state, the energy that I have in me that I also feel in the plants and in the landscape. The energy in life that is flowing through the landscape. It’s that intangible thing that is here, then gone – growth, time, change, and the idea of flow in nature (Goldworthy in Donop, Davies, Hill and Riedelsheimer, 2003).

What I was shown at Waiohau is that mauri is more than the essential living essence of land (and most of the literature confirms this). It is also a condition of a person and people as a collective. There are certain things that appear to occur both with collectives of people and the living essence of land.

- There is an identifiable sense of wholeness and rhythm that holds things together.
- The single, be it an individual or an element in the landscape is not discrete but part of a whole.
- To align with the essential essence that rises when I photograph, I have to be open, suspending anxiety and conscious preoccupation, be it technical or conceptual.

I also have to accept that not being Maaori is something that cannot be bridged with study and reading. It is a very deep thing. I am not Maaori. All I can do is stand respectfully outside of a complexity and listen and think and accept challenges to the way I try to understand the world. Within this process, I recognise certain ways of knowing that increasingly make sense to my western shaped mind. The concept of mauri is one of these.

THE DISEMBODIED OPERATIONAL FLOW

The experience at Waiohau confirmed again that when I am inside an immersive state, I can operate a camera in a state of flow. In recent immersions at Piha, Waipu and Te Henga I stopped consciously thinking about controlling the device, leaving it to operate more as an extension of myself. This is not to say that I am not taking into consideration what is known explicitly, but this becomes secondary, like a kind of reflexive automode that functions in a synchronised flow with my body and spirit. This differs substantially from my past approach as a landscape photographer who mediated what was seen and how it was ‘captured’ by resorting to reason and the logical application of technological expertise.

Immersive practice allows me to act in the darkness of my knowledge, relying on the tacit to guide and discover. If I try to logically figure out meaning and experience inside the process of recording, I lose touch with what is trying to reach me.

THE STRONG PRESENCE OF MAURI IN TE UREWERA

Another issue that I have been thinking about is the strong presence that I felt in the land of Te Urewera. I am not sure if this might be the result of a significant portion of land that is still relatively untouched (preserving its state so the mauri is less compromised), or if it is because the mauri is heightened between people and land by being richly nurtured by living stories, waiata, rituals and explanations passed down through generations. So, I am uncertain of the extent to which my experiences with people at Waiohau have influenced how I respond to their land. I ask myself “Am I influenced by having access to information generally not available?” Or alternatively, “Am I exercising permission given to me to be open because I see others naturally operating in such a familiar relationship with the land and its physical, genealogical and spiritual dimensions?”¹²²

These considerations aside, the land here is clearly magnificent.¹²³ The mist is both physical and metaphysical.... touchable and untouchable ... visible and invisible ... and always in a constant state of change.

It has shown me something.

THE SEARCH FOR THE WHOLENESS AND EXPANSIVENESS OF THE LAND

At this stage I am clearer that the essence of land is somehow related to a sense of wholeness and expansiveness, rather than to details and singularities. In his poem Auguries of Innocence (1803), William Blake wrote:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour. (Blake, 2008, p.145)

The first two lines of the poem no longer make sense to me. I do not sense that the essential energy of land is compressible into a detail. It reaches outwards rather than crystallising inward. At times during this research I have tried photographing details, searching for “the world in a grain of sand”, but there is something forced about it. It is hard to “breathe” the fullness of a detail in an expansive way. Perhaps it is because details are a forced demarcation from a contextualising wholeness of the land that contains them? Such recordings cannot encompass the skies and their connection to land, nor can they document relationships and flows between diverse elements (Figure 4.15.11).

Although I cannot sense the essential essence of land easily in Blake’s “grain of sand”, his third and fourth lines do make sense to me. With my camera I can hold expansiveness (an infinity of spirit) in the palm of my hand. When I record with wide perspectives I am swallowed inside the land. In reference to his fourth line, I understand that it is time (not space) that can be compressed. Thus, I can record time and layer it into itself ... holding, if you like, an “eternity in an hour”.

¹²² I don’t know. Perhaps a little of both. This is difficult. I want to find absolute answers, but they are elusive. I find the need to know myself and how I behave as a photographer much more complex and demanding than I ever imagined.

¹²³ I use the word in relation to its etymology from the Latin “magnificus” meaning great, elevated, noble or distinguished.





5

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

And so we step away from experience and questions, to reflect on what has been found (and how it has impacted on my practice).

The Association for Qualitative Research defines research findings as “the principal outcomes of a research project; what the project suggested, revealed or indicated” (2013, para. 1). Being a practice-led inquiry, the findings in this project are not absolutes, nor do I claim they are automatically transferable. However, in this chapter I will discuss insights and indications that have been transformative to my practice. These have surfaced as a consequence of my addressing the thesis’ primary question, “What are issues that must be addressed when photographing land, such that one might express an immersive, embodied, spiritually-attuned relationship between the self and what is recorded?”

This chapter is structured to consider five broad areas. These are: embodiment, the role of the sensory, attitudinal features, the nature of spiritual presence and tensions between manipulations and integrity.

EMBODIMENT

In 1989, Husserl suggested that the body could be considered as the collective organism of all perception and as such, the medium of all human understanding of the world. In this thesis project I have come to know the world through a form of embodied experience, in an operative mode that reaches sensorial and tacit dimensions (Husserl, 1989; Heidegger, 1996; Polanyi, 1967), but also a dimension that may be considered spiritual (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009; Valentine, Tassell-Mataamua & Flett, 2017; Pohatu, 2011).

On a physical level I engage with the land I photograph by exploring it through my body. I frame possible arrangements with my hands; I physically touch and understand patterns, proportions, relationships and distances. This bodily framing of the landscape is an intimate act, but also one that reinforces intimacy; it is a way to embody myself in the land. When I look through my hands, the frame is not fixed but breathing, it moves in relation to my body and I understand what I see as an extension of myself. While immersing myself in the land, my camera becomes a device to record my experience. I use the camera as a tool that allows my hand, my eye and my essence to ‘touch’ this world. In this sense my camera is an extension of my arm and a greater physical and nonphysical self.

The idea of a handled thinking device has been discussed by Heidegger (1996) in his concept of *zuhandenheit* when he analysed a particular form of knowledge that arises from our bodily use of materials and processes. According to Wu, Heidegger’s concept of *Zuhandenheit*:

... throws into question the traditional metaphysical separation of *theoria* from *praxis*. As a philosophical alternative *Zuhandenheit* offers the new insight that *theoria* and *praxis* are interwoven through the *metra* (measure) of the understanding of being: distinction and difference are but the cleavage (*Zerklüftung*) in the sameness in being. Through *Zuhandenheit* we can get an appreciation of how ontology operates in the everyday world of doing and making by bringing thought and action together in the unity of being that the ontic–ontological distinction always refers back to under the aegis of ontological difference in fundamental ontology. (2016, para. 3)

In considering what has been discovered in this inquiry as it relates to embodiment I will consider five ideas. Although these are dealt with separately, they are integrated features.

The ideas are:

- Immersion as a process
- Aloneness
- Walking
- Magnetism and pull
- Time.

IMMERSION AS A PROCESS

Lima and Prado (2018) note that:

There are many approaches to immersion from a variety of academic domains, including areas related to information technology, linguistics, psychology and the arts. It is a developing knowledge field, so its terminology and definition are still in debate. (2018, p. 72)

The authors suggest that when researchers enter an immersive state they are conscious of its occurrence, “although they may find difficulties in expressing this experience through words” (ibid. p. 73). Brown and Cairns (2004) suggest that an immersion is typified by three phenomena. The first is a state of consciousness in which there is a lack of attention to the passage of time, the second is a level of inattention to the surrounding environment, and the third is an involvement and feeling of being in the immersive environment. Lima and Prado suggest that “all of these effects are mutually implicated, interfering in the apprehension of time and space” (2018, p. 73).

When considering entries in my field journal it is evident that an immersion contains distinctive phases that involve ‘going in’, ‘being in’ and ‘coming out’. These states occur always through a process of walking and waiting. In instances like Muriwai where I photographed land in the dark, I would remain standing in the same position for hours at a time. In other instances, like in Rangipo Desert for much of the time I spent walking, moving in and out of immersive phases.

GOING IN

Normally I can sense an immersion beginning because there is an amplifying of certain senses (often sound and scent) and I enter into a state of heightened awareness that increases and shifts in emphasis. By this I mean my body shifts in accent from feeling physical presence (or even adversity) or to a state of focused attunement. In this state Douglass and Moustakas note:

Immersion carries the sense of total involvement ... in such a way that the whole world is centered in it for a while ... a feeling of lostness and letting go pervades, a kind of being wide open in surrender to the thing itself, a recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life. (1985 p. 47)

BEING IN

Douglass and Moustakas’ ‘relinquishing of control’ appears to be pivotal to the immersive process I experience. When I am immersed I am “wide open in surrender to the thing itself” (ibid.). This state relies on me disabling my preoccupation with externality (what is physically around me). If I do not, I become either too intent on recording something ‘tangibly specific’ or my anxieties about the conditions of the environment override the state of still acceptance that appears to be necessary for the immersive process to function (see Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs).

Being inside an immersion I feel as if my whole attention is being drawn into what the land is communicating but this occurs without a forced attentiveness to concentration. I become ‘de-centred’ and pulled into something. Cognition functions differently, as if it is working in the background (Journal entry 10: Piha). My mind, body and spirit become synchronised in a kind of flow where my senses alter and I begin to feel and see in a manner that is both physical and nonphysical.

COMING OUT

An immersive state is not always stable and it can become disturbed by anxiety (Journal entries 5: Egmont National Park and 6: Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs) or by a depletion of the energy in what I am recording (Journal entries 4: Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island, 8: Rio Pinheiros and 14: the Rangipo Desert). An interruption to, or depletion of energy normally results in a diminishing of attunement that I experience as a “sense of absence” or “something I have experienced at a funeral ... a mixture of the silence of mourning or loss, and weighted thought” (Journal entry 8).

ABSENCE OR WEAKNESS

Absence may be likened to “loss within a weighted thought” (Journal entry 8). In such instances, the process of immersion is weakened and I experience discernable or occasionally, quite dramatic changes to the energy flow of the land. In the case of the Rangipo Desert immersion this absence felt flat, that I described at the time as a “diminished (life force), muted ... a lower frequency ... subdued ...” (Journal entry 14).

When I experience a diminishing of, or disruption to the immersive process, my practice often defaults to logistical and technical considerations. Not being in communion with the land, I return to becoming a procedural photographer, trying to capture something in a realm of physical consideration. My embodiment is reduced to the physical surface of what I see. I am 'on top of' the land instead of 'inside it'. In this purely physical state my decisions are strategically constructed and driven by a schedule, logistical concerns or the pursuit of spectacle. I become a visitor trying to record something that is evident and available. In this purely corporeal state of embodiment there is no intoxication, only astonishment and seduction by the wonder of the physical.

SUDDEN WITHDRAWAL

On rare occasions an immersive state is interrupted because my body acts instinctively to pull my attention to the surface in an effort to protect me from danger. Instances of this occurred at Te Henga when I encountered bats in the caves and at Muriwai and Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs, where sudden changes in the tide became dangerous.

ALONENESS

When I visited the Rangipo Desert I wrote about a state of 'aleness' that was different from being alone as a condition of disconnection or alienation. This form of aleness appears to be a significant attribute and condition of an embodied immersion. In referring to it, I am not talking about solidao (solitude), but something that excludes what is outside of an intimate relationship, such that I am 'alone' in the company of the land (Figure 5.1).

As a photographer, I am very familiar with loneliness. For many years I have photographed the vast expanses of the world. I know what it is to be on the land, sometimes for weeks without human contact. In such places my aleness is a diminishment of the self in the landscape. I encounter land as an immensity and I am an element moving through it, disconnected but recording.



FIGURE 5.1.

Tolaga Bay (August 31, 2016). The sense of composite aleness I have discovered tends to draw my focus away from distraction. I feel myself, even in a populated area like this coastal settlement, drawn with subtle force into a singular communicative emphasis with the land. Normally I only discover people in such photographs after I look at them in detail in my studio. In this regard I think perhaps the state of aleness has a distinct agency such that it operates as a form of cognitive editing, a focusing away from distraction and into an intimate relationality with essence.

However, when I experience an immersed embodiment I am neither singular nor disconnected. My aloneness is composite. I might describe this as “We are alone ... the land and I”. Although I can experience an initial sense of being unaccommodated, even alien, as I enter an immersive state I increasingly feel both my integration and my differentiation. I enter alone (by myself) and I connect into a composite aloneness; a flow of energy that I can sense and record but not contribute to. In this very fine attunement with the land, I can sometimes feel very vulnerable. The aloneness I experience appears to be a condition where I can become very open and receptive on a level that would be sensorially and emotionally dangerous in a socialised environment.

I have learned that I need to respect and protect this state of aloneness because if it is damaged an immersion will fall apart. (For instance, when I encountered local people in the Karangahape Gorge). In instances where human accompaniment is unavoidable (for safety reasons or because I require tangata whenua as guides), then I endeavour to create a certain discreetness; a separation so my conjoint aloneness with the land can function with minimal impediment.

WALKING

Walking as a process transcends the physical function of crossing land and enables me to attune myself to the spiritual essence of a place. Dewsbury and Cloke (2009, p. 696) refer to this form of spiritual and creative engagement as “contemplative walks, to and through places found to be affective of some sense of spiritual evocation, to pondering on the aesthetic and affective connections achieved in say artwork.” This process is driven from a search to engage with “ways of seeing beyond sight, to both a sense of being that includes all senses and an openness to being affected” (ibid.).

My walking through the land is a silent dialectical process where in the “timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others” (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008, p. 1). It is an operative process of embodied inquiry, a circumambulatory form of knowing (Ingold, 1993; Olwig, 2008; Mäkelä, 2015), where I come to know the land through a process of bodily movement and constantly changing perspectives inside which my sensitivity to the land is heightened and I attune myself to what I encounter. On a physical level, when I walk on the land I feel it under my feet; it informs me about its constitution and state.

Ingold and Vergunst suggest that “walking ... is itself a way of thinking and of feeling” (2008, p. 2). Informing their thinking is the concept of habitus developed by Bourdieu’s Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action, where Bourdieu presented the concept of a bodily hexis that he defined as a “political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 69–70).

Ingold and Vergunst suggest that “walking is as much a movement of pensive observation – of thinking as you watch and watching as you think – as it is a way of getting around” (2008, p. 5). When I walk across land, I comprehend the worlds I traverse in a continuum of changing physical and sensory positions. I feel the materiality of the land, its physical qualities, and increasingly, something beyond this. Time aligns with the rhythm of my walking and my body becomes attuned to this. Walking becomes a quasi-dialectical process with the land that involves complex dynamics of movement, temporality, intensity and the “projectional character of movement itself” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p. 267). The direction I take and when I pause is informed by Ingold and Vergunst’s sense of embodied thinking and feeling.

This said I am very respectful of the land I traverse. Where I have any prior knowledge of land (such as that I recorded in Te Urewera), I take time to acquaint myself with Ritenga (customs, rules, regulations, and protocols of access or use). I will never knowingly traverse land where a rāhui¹²⁴ or tapu¹²⁵ applies. This is because I understand that Maaori maintain Mana whenua (authority in the land) and I approach it with respect. I have also learned to never take anything beyond the images I record and to be very careful not to physically disturb the earth.

MAGNETISM AND PULL

When I walk I become increasingly aware of a certain pull of energy. This is something I often sense subtly but it becomes very evident when I review the recordings I have made.

In my first journal entry at Piha I described this phenomenon as a certain “dark magnetism in the land [where] I was pulled by its force ... by its half-lit darkness and power” (Journal entry 1). At the same beach 24 months later, I described the same phenomenon as “a vibration passing through, around and over the land I traverse” (Journal entry 10). In the caves at Waipu I experienced the same sensation noting, “The camera was

attracted to a point where I could feel vibrations coming from the dark” (Journal entry 11); then again in the Rangipo desert I described the same magnetic pull as “Incessant but having no rhythm” (Journal entry 9). This distinctive feature of pulling energy flow is more articulately expressed when I was reflecting on my time in the darkness at Muriwai. Here, I described pointing “my camera towards the vibrations of sound with the sea running invisibly just metres away” (Journal entry 7).

This pull towards vibrations in the land only occurs when I am inside an immersive state. It is something very interior that seems to call into and from a depth within me. I feel myself drawn outward and into the land. The pull is never present immediately upon my arrival at a location, nor when anxiety diverts my attention.

However, I have questioned this phenomenon in my work because sometimes I can see it materialising in distinct similarities of composition (Figure 5.2). In these instances, it becomes manifest as a kind of outward flow, often moving along lines between water and the land. It is common in these photographs that I find the horizon has been similarly positioned and it is the curvature of this pulling that I have recorded. I can’t account for this, because it is certainly not conscious and such compositional constructs were not an evident feature of my work prior to the thesis. My sense is that sometimes ‘pull’ is very strong along edges of land and water. This is not simply tidal or river currents perceived as something essential, because I have recorded the same phenomenon on the shores of large still lakes and in puddles of rain in deserts.

124 Rāhui means “...banned, out of bounds, forbidden, prohibited, under sanctuary, reserved or preserved” (Maxwell & Penetito, 2007, p.1). Marsden and Royal (2003, p. 70) states rāhui can also mean to “prohibit the use of one or more resources in a given area.”

125 According to Williams (1971, p. 385), tapu means “under religious or superstitious restriction, ceremonial restriction, quality or condition of being subject to such restriction”. Sachdev (2009, p. 962) suggests that diverse understandings of the term have derived from definitions of:

... different people, objects or situations being tapu. The common factor in all these states of tapu was the link with the atua (god), of whom a tapu always indicated a direct influence. The atua were the unseen animators of the Maaori world, and they were the power behind the state of tapu that could make it both efficacious and dangerous.

TIME

An immersion is also distinguished by a distinctive experience of time. Time it appears is controlled by the immersion itself and functions not as temporality but as experiential. In my photographs, time is compressed between each recording and it becomes an expression of a period of walking and waiting. The duration of these recordings can differ significantly from Figure 4.7.1 that spanned over 1 hour, to Figure 4.9.2, an image that took only a matter of minutes to record. This recording of durations is very different to the way in which a normal photograph documents 1/60 of a second that is frozen and subtracted from the whole.

In Egmont National Park I asked myself the question, “Why does time slow?” and I think it may be because I am immersed in an expansion of experience. By this I mean that although the images I record (in their final form) are composites that synthesise and compress time on to a single surface, my lived experience is of a unique duration of experience (Bergson, 1994), and this reaches beyond the physical.¹²⁶ In the physical landscape time is often identifiable. The lengthening and direction of shadows, the colour or intensity of light, or the density of darkness, are generally able to be perceived by simply looking. My body can account for the passing of time through physical indicators. Indeed, even the meter on my camera can identify variations in such things. However time, as it relates to the flow of energy in land, is not so discernible and it appears to vary according to location. Inside the Egmont National Park Forest, time passed in a manner very different to how it was experienced in front of a rock face at Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs.

If we consider the American Heritage Dictionary’s definition of time, it is conceived as a “non-spatial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future” (2011, para. 1). However, I think time may also be understood as a “duration wherein one’s perceptions are considered to be in the present” (Andersen & Grush, 2009, p. 277). This experienced present is unlike the “objective present because it is a perceived interval” (ibid.). I perceive this experienced interval as irregular and dependent upon the subjective state of my mind. Interestingly, Csikszentmihalyi alludes to this subjectivity in his discussion of variations in the perception of time when one is immersed in a state of flow. He maintains, when one is “completely involved in an activity for its own sake ... the ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one” (1988, p. 78).

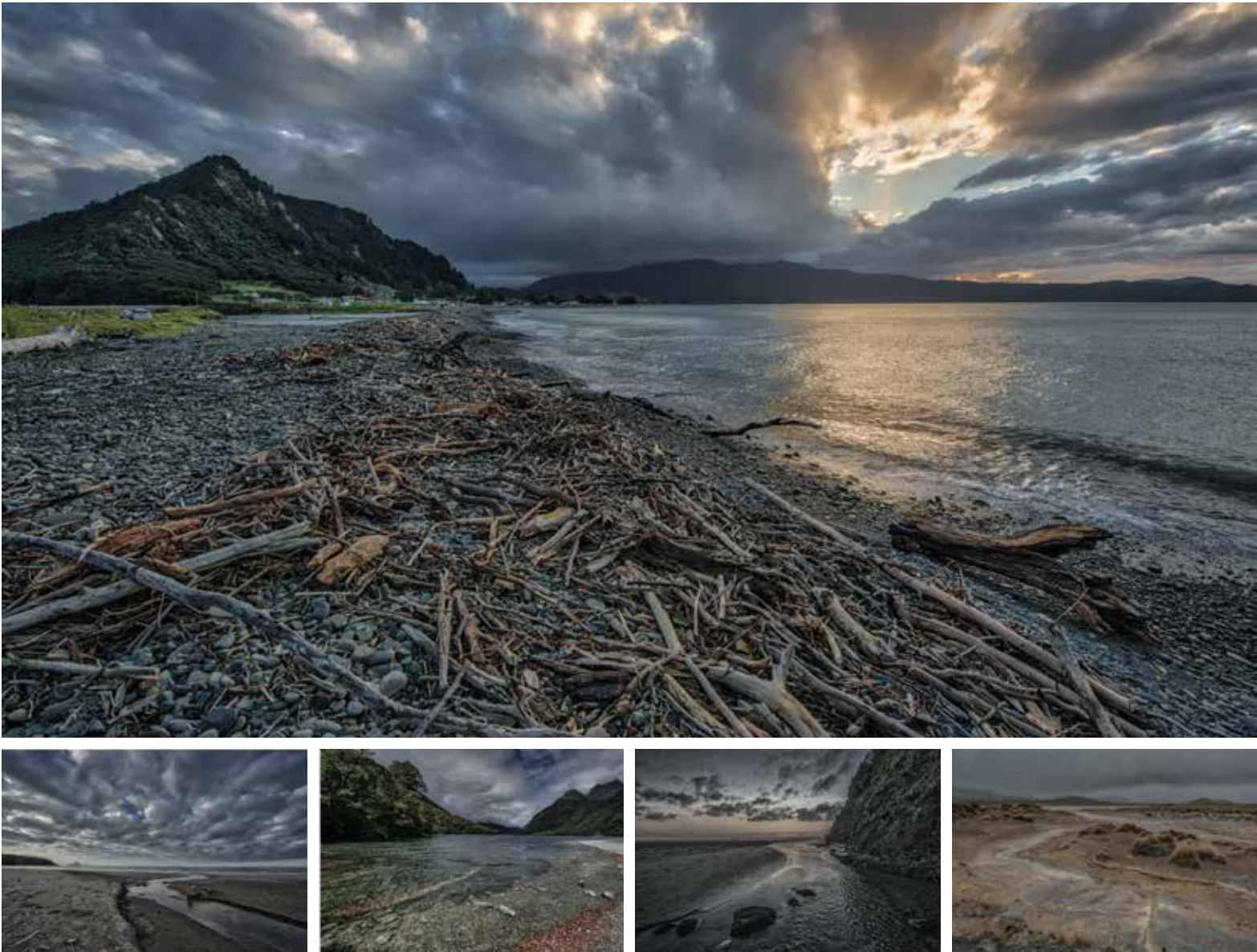


FIGURE 5.2.
Comparison of recordings at Te Araroa (September 2, 2016), the Rangipo Desert (February 14, 2018), Lake Te Anau (January 8, 2016), Te Henga (December 30, 2017) and Gisborne (August 30, 2016) showing the pull of energy outwards, along intersecting lines at the meeting of land and water.

¹²⁶ This idea is discussed more fully under the subheading ‘The implications of compressing time’.

So time, I suggest, may be different depending on the nature of an immersion.¹²⁷ In the Egmont National Park I wrote about walking in a densely forested environment where my physical progress was slowed because with every step meant I had to wade through layers of leaf mould and foliage. There was a distinct sense that time had slowed here, not only because of physical impediments to walking and the visual absence of the sky, but also because inside the immersion I encountered both a compression and expansion of time, and these apparent opposites were not demarcatable. The present was non-objective and irregular. Here, the temporal (meaning both temporary and worldly) no longer functioned in conventional ways. I dwelt inside a flexible permanence.

Although I experienced this nondemarcatable expansion and compression of time in lightless environments like the caves at Waipu, a night at Muriwai beach and in the darkness of the Karangahake Gorge, the same sense of nonobjective ‘timelessness’ also occurred in highly ‘lit’ immersions like the Rangipo Desert, Piha and Sao Paulo. In all of these locations I recorded an inability to maintain a significant sense of objective time.

THE ROLE OF THE SENSORY

When reviewing my journal entries I am struck by the prevalence of a heightened sensory state when entering and experiencing an immersion. In the Karangahape Gorge I observed that, “there appears to be a close correlation between a heightened level of sensual awareness and a corresponding emotional reaction, when I progress into an immersion.” (Journal entry 9). It appears that at the outset an immersion engages with the sensory by intensifying certain qualities and relinquishing others. In considering findings within this inquiry as they relate to the sensory there are three distinct features that warrant consideration:

- Astonishment and intoxication,
- Olfato,
- Sound.

¹²⁷ I am reminded here that Bergson (1994) identifies two approaches to the concept of time. One is linear time as a spatialised notion where units can be used to measure time as a chronology (as in scientific or social time). But he also conceives time as nonlinear, intense and experienced by our consciousness. He describes this second concept of time as ‘duration’. Duration he characterises as intensity, becoming, or a continuous mutation that characterises a happening.

ASTONISHMENT AND INTOXICATION

The words astonishment and intoxication are used throughout my field journal to describe two slightly different impressions of the senses.

ASTONISHMENT

I use the word astonishment to mean a state where one is “impress[ed] with sudden surprise or wonder” (Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 57). Astonishment normally applies to the physically evident nature of land. It describes an intense immediacy of communication that occurs when I am stopped ‘in my tracks’ by what is physically perceptible. For instance, in the Mt Egmont National Park I used the word to describe my being physically absorbed into “the sinking nature of the earth” (Journal entry 6), but also to describe wonderment at bright colours in the soil at Te Puia o Whakaari and Pukearuhe.

This sense of astonishment can prove problematic because it is very arresting and my senses are attracted to it. At Pukearuhe I was astonished by a colossal rock wall, the searing heat, the taste of salt and my physical diminutiveness in relation to the land and ocean. But such physical preoccupations resulted in me “documenting the physical ... the astonishment of the tangible” (ibid.), rather than what was unseen and moving around me.

INTOXICATION

An experience of intoxication describes something different. Intoxication is a sensory experience where “physical and mental control are markedly diminished” (Allen, 2000, p. 735) and one transitions to a state of sensory “elatedment” (Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 506).

This experience was particularly marked at Muriwai where I was immersed for more than two hours in darkness. Here I described a sense of sinking (nonphysically) “into” the beach and encountering its “deep vibrant voices”. I wrote:

The land was essentially defined by an immense physical and nonphysical system of sound. The intensity of this might be likened to a kind of intoxication. (Journal entry 7)

This intoxication of nonphysical senses is also recorded when I experienced my first journey into the Te Urewera

forest. It occurred when I was photographing the inexplicable phenomenon of movement at the base of a waterfall. I wrote,

I wondered if the strange distortion may have been caused by a refraction of the light on the water. I do not know. What was clear was a distinctive immaterial flow occurring while I was recording the waterfall. I was aware of light and air and water as part of an intoxication.

In this instance again my senses were transcending the physical. The light and air and water were not experienced as material, but as part of a deeper immaterial dynamic.

However, perhaps the most graphic instance of this immateriality of the senses surfaced while I was recording in the Rangipo Desert as I began to move into an early phase of an immersion. At the time it was raining and I tried to record the experience on an audio device. Although I experienced the rain’s rhythm as an extraordinary pattern of weight and intensity, what was digitally recorded was simply an incessant, flat sound. It was only my intoxicated senses that perceived the experience as nuanced. I observed at the time:

... as the state of immersion gradually increases, paradoxically, this sensory awareness of the physical begins to dissolve and my individuality integrates into a flow. I begin operating using a kind of intoxicated ‘non-aural listening’ that exists as an intersection between the physical and the spiritual. (Journal entry 14)

OLFATO

Olfato is the Portuguese word for the sense responsible for smell. I use it in this thesis to describe both physically discernible scent and the smell of something nonphysical. Both of these dimensions appear in my notes written soon after photographing the Tietê River. Here I discuss both the physically “putrefied smell of raw sewage” and also my ability to experience the scent of the “the breath of danger” (Journal entry 8).

This oscillation between physical and nonphysical smell is also evident in my recording of the Ohinemuri River in the Karangahake Gorge. Here my sense of physical smell was initially heightened; “I could feel strength, [the] scent and vegetation, and the moisture of the air, but also in the essence that rode beneath and through these things” (Journal entry 9). While I

accept that the scents may be more discernible after rain, and I record them as such in both the Karangahake Gorge and the Rangipo Desert, this does not account for the instances where sometimes I move from astonishment at a scent, to a more abstract level of intoxication with it.

Astonishment as a heightened attention to the physicality of a perfume may be illustrated in footnote 67 when I described the Rangipo Desert's "deeply perfumed soil, smelling concurrently of sand with clear rain notes, while the vegetation has an overriding fragrance of lemon and lighter floral accents set against darkly vegetative tones" (Figure 5.3). On other occasions I have smelt salt in the air at Piha, Pukearuhe and Te Henga, and layers of humus in Egmont National Park, with the same finely tuned attention. This process normally occurs either outside of an immersion or is an indicator of my moving into such a state.

Intoxication, however, is something I only smell when deeply inside an immersive state. It is the discernible scent of things more abstract like the "scent of injury, of fatigue or weight" (the Pinheiros River), or "the scent of weight and time" (the Waipu Caves).

SOUND

Just as the sense of smell moves between astonishment and intoxication, so too does the sensation of sound. This shifting between the physical and a greater level of sensory abstraction is evidenced in my first entry at Piha in November 14, 2015. At the time I wrote:

I experienced Piha initially as sound. In the darkness, half-awake with expectation, I heard the land as a kind of selvagem ... [this] was contained in the thunderous, dark impact of the waves hitting the shore. There was an untamed, indomitable and uncompromising weight in the sound. (Journal entry 1)

Here, I was experiencing sound as something essentially physical. Its intensity was registered as a deep savagery. However, later in the same entry, the sense of sound had moved to something I described as a "magnetic weight." By this I was referring to the 'pull' of sound, its abstract darkness and almost mesmeric nature.



FIGURE 5.3.

Temporary lake caused by pre-cyclone rain in the Rangipo Desert (February 14, 2018). Smallwood (2014, para. 1), explains that the physical, earthy scent of rain (petrichor) is often at its strongest when rain falls on dry soil. He notes that before, during and after a heavy thunderstorm, humans can detect a distinctly "clean smell" that is caused by ozone. This scent can be "pungent and has a very sharp smell that is often described as similar to that of chlorine" (ibid.). However, although the scent of ozone was discernible in the Rangipo Desert, it was primarily the oils secreted by various plants that Smallwood notes, "collect in the environment and when it rains, are released into the atmosphere (usually along with geosmin)" (ibid. para. 8), that produced the strong physical perfume discernible during the immersion.

As with olfato, when I enter an environment, sound is almost always physical, although it can draw associations between the self and what is heard. At Muriwai, I noted, “In the depth, the first thing that came to me was that darkness increased my sensitivity to the sound of the waves and wind. I could hear the ocean almost within me. It was visceral and bodily” (Journal entry 7). This immersion occurred entirely in the dark and it appears that the absence of light may reinforce the hierarchical position of sound when I encounter an environment.¹²⁸ Thus, in the Waipu caves I wrote:

... the immersion gave me the opportunity to encounter again how darkness can function as an enabler of communion with the land ... I think that perhaps I “listen more deeply to what is being communicated. (Journal entry 11)

However, when I am deeply immersed in an environment, sound can manifest as a more abstract sensory reading. Examples of this include the “inaudible sound of electricity” I experienced in the Rangipo Desert (Journal entry 14), and the “sound yet at the same time a brooding absence of sound” I experienced before the earthquake at Te Araroa (Journal entry 3).

Thus, certain senses (especially sound and scent) appear to operate in an immersion on two levels. On a purely physical plane, when I enter a location there is often a heightening of awareness that draws my attention to nuances or details of the environment. I can be positioned or led by my senses and they generally register as a form of astonishment. However, as I transition into deeper levels of experience, what is heard and smelled is generally more abstract. My sense of sound and scent move beyond conventional parameters to discern weight and movement and inaudibility as an actual presence.

ATTITUDINAL FEATURES

Although a heightened state of sensory awareness prefigures and permeates an immersion, the inquiry has also led to four insights that may be broadly defined as attitudinal. These positions impact on the nature and effectiveness of my approach in the field and have been transformative to my practice.

They are:

- Naivety
- Cultural responsiveness
- Flow
- Right or wrong.

NAIVETY

PROTECTING THE STATE

A state of naivety is a phenomenon that prefigures entry into the field. I use the word ‘naivety’ not in reference to a lack of experience, wisdom, or judgement, but to describe a state of openness or “natural, unaffected simplicity in thought” (Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 641) where one’s “unreservedness” orients the self to a certain unencumbered preparedness to receive without prejudice (ibid.).

In Egmont National Park I noted that, “to function authentically, it appears that I need to be present in the moment, indwelling almost naively in the unfolding revelation, holding the camera as an extension of an anticipating body and essence” (Journal entry 5).

To attain a naïve state, I protect myself with the minimum information possible,¹²⁹ allowing wherever possible for discovery to occur through an openness to whatever presents itself. An illustration of this occurred during my first visit to Piha. The area of the west coast is well known for its irrational tidal rips and high annual death toll. At this stage I had only been in the country for a short time and I knew few local people.

My initial impression was one of astonishment. The land was black, thunderous and ruggedly wild. Because I had no significant preconception, I encountered the beach in a naïve state of mind. I encountered something very unexpected and because of my unpreparedness. I was quickly open to both physical and nonphysical impressions. I noted a dark magnetism that pulled me with its force. I experienced a rapid transition from astonishment to a state of intoxication during which I felt a “half lit darkness and power” (Journal entry 1). Looking back, I realise that I was encountering Abram’s (1997) flesh of the flesh: “the flesh of the land and my own flesh somehow dragged by an indefinable magnetic force” (Abram, 1997, p. 51).

I explored parts of the beach where the strong force of the sea had carved holes in the rocks. I walked around this area for hours, and although I could logically sense the imminent danger of the place, it felt (to a certain extent), as if I was able to ‘read’ risk. (Although I would not wish to elevate my communion with land to claims of anthropomorphic benevolence, I believe that being guided by my bodily disposition can sometimes function as a way of ‘reading’ potentials and physical stability).

128 After the initial discomfort of the sound of these waves, my hearing became so finely tuned that I could also discern air currents moving around me. Although I could also feel these with my body, my primary sense was one of the subtle shifts in what was audible.

129 I acknowledge exceptions here like safety precautions, being cognisant of land protection and trespass signs, and background contexts required by Tangata whenua.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

The naïve approach I wrote about at Piha became one of the critical understandings of my research. I tested its validity with two comparatively planned journeys, both of which were relatively unsuccessful.

During discussions at my Confirmation of Candidature review in December 2016, it was suggested that I should visit a single location and spend several days, to observe if any change occurred in my communion as I became increasingly familiar with the environment. Accordingly, I drove down to Taranaki, with the intention of exploring the forest for a week. I resolved to spend my first day in the field without my camera. However, the experiment proved singularly unsuccessful. In my journal I wrote:

What I experienced very early, was a visceral communion with the physicality and sensual nature of the land, that contained a clear communication ... Here, the living essence of the land and my living essence rose up and I found myself in communication without an ability to document the subtle nuances of the encounter. (Journal entry 5)

I had spent an intervening evening planning and strategising, thinking about what I had encountered and how I might record it. But, when I re-entered the field the next day, in a high state of cognitive preparedness ... I experienced almost nothing. Just the physical. I had disabled the naivety of the encounter.

The same problem occurred a few days later when (still shaped by public feedback from my review) I sought a second time to 'recapture' an experience. At the Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs I experienced an initial encounter with a thin, temporary coastal conduit of land that resulted in initial impressions of astonishment. Because my time recording had been suddenly curtailed due to the sudden surge of the incoming tide, I decided to return the next day to record experiences of energy flow that I had not been able to document. Prior to the next day's visit, I had planned possibilities and approaches, scheduled time and strategically selected equipment. But the photographer who re-entered the field was a manifestation of my former self. I was on an expedition to capture ... and all I could do was reach out to the physical. I encountered nothing of my previous day's experience.

I understand now that if I am to be open to dimensions beyond the physical I must compose "myself into an attentive, anxious and naïve presence" (Journal entry 4). The importance of this naïve approach is that it "fortifies the immediacy of contact ... [attuning me] to a "living essence of land as an unfolding in the present, not as a revisited phenomenon (ibid.). An immersion it appears, is predicated on being present in the moment, immersed in an unfolding revelation, "where I hold my camera as an extension of an anticipating body and essence" (ibid.). Naivety I now understand is an orientation for circumventing cognitive dimensions and established attitudes to practice. If I am not naïve, my mind quickly imposes logical preconceptions and these disable access to more subtle, unexpected occurrences.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

As an extension of the naïve state, my experiments in the field have also shown that I must remain culturally responsive. By responsiveness, I refer to the ability to change the modus operandi of a previously conceived professional practice or conceptual belief and to accommodate this reorientation across a research trajectory. In this thesis, such responsiveness concerned the manner in which I engaged with cultural ways of knowing that were different from those that had been formative to my development as a photographer.

I align my understanding of cultural responsiveness with Inoue (2007) who describes the state as "an appropriate application of respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, the willingness to suspend judgment, tolerance for ambiguity" (Inoue, 2007, para. 33). Such a condition implies a receptiveness that enhances my understanding of a cultural context unlike my own, and the manner in which communicative phenomena are received and understood. In photographing the essence of land in Aotearoa/New Zealand I encountered this issue with respect to Maaori ways of knowing both land and people's relationship within it.

FORMATIVE CONTEXT

Although I am Brazilian, I have grown up with an appreciation of diverse ways of conceiving land. The world of my childhood was a constantly moving navigation of contrasting cultural constructs. My country has, through iterations of postcolonialism, continued to engage with contested

ideological positions with regards to land, its use, meaning and ownership. Historically, the Inconfidencia Mineira (1789), the Independence movements (1821–1824), Ragamuffin War (1835–1845), Cabanagem (1835–1840), the establishment of the Julinia Republic (1839), the Sabinada (1837–1838), the establishment of the Piratini Republic (1836) and the Canudos War (1896–1897).

Predating these wars were conflicts between Brazil's indigenous cultures,¹³⁰ (the first inhabitants and natural owners of land)¹³¹ and European colonisers. Many of these people¹³² were forced to leave their traditional lands to the western regions of South America.

¹³⁰ The indigenous people in Brazil were called Indio (Indian), because when the Portuguese arrived they thought they were in India.

¹³¹ The Tupi (also known as the Tupi Guarani) was the largest indigenous group in South America, and the Tupinambas, a sub-tribe that lived close to the coast, were the first to come into contact with Europeans. Kim (2008) notes,

Tupi tribes were semi-nomadic, living largely along the coast and along the banks of major rivers. They moved their entire village once about every five years. The Tupi shamans, who also served as something like the village's councilmen, were also the tribe's medicine men. They controlled the rituals and sacrifices, and were believed to be able to talk to demons and ghosts in trance. Tupi people subsisted on various ways, including fishing, hunting, migrant agriculture, and gathering. (para. III.1)

¹³² When the European arrived in Brazil they found four major indigenous populations: Tupi Guarani, Gé, Carib, and Arawak. Their collective population was estimated around 3 million. Many of the 2,000 nations and tribes which existed in the 16th century suffered extinction as a consequence of European settlement. According to Linsday, DiPasquale and Whiteman,

Outbreaks of measles, smallpox, tuberculosis, gonorrhoea, and influenza spread quickly, sweeping though the land killing hundreds of thousands of the indigenous people. Whole groups were decimated without ever coming in direct contact with the settlers. Following the outbreak of disease was a period of famine, locals desperate for food chose to sell themselves as slaves, to evade death from starvation. (2016, para. 8)

Kim, (2008) notes that although indigenous tribes had diverse cultural traditions, they generally lived in social communities (around 30 families in each house) and their relationship with land was either nomadic¹³³ or semi-nomadic.

Indigenous rights to land only started to be recognised in a significant way in the 1960s, mostly as a result of the work of the activist brothers Orlando and Claudio Villas-Boas. They were the first Europeans to reach tribes in the region of Xingu, and their work helped to establish a conservation area larger than Belgium and a prototype that was used for the demarcation of most of the indigenous territories provisioned by the Brazilian Consitution in 1988. However, even with such efforts, there are still many conflicts between indigenous tribes and colonisers who invade their land to explore for minerals or to graze cattle and develop agriculture. As a result, land ownership remains a contentious issue in Brazil.

REORIENTATION

When I began this research I rapidly became aware of distinctive epistemological frameworks for understanding land in Aotearoa/New Zealand that were different to my own. Maaori understand cultural identity in terms of a connection between whakapapa (genealogy) and whenua (land) (Rangihau, 1992). Inside this construct, Papatūānuku (the Earth Mother) and Ranginui (the Sky Father) and a range of atua (gods) connect all animate and inanimate things together through mauri (the life principle). Pouwhare notes that “While each tribe has their own version of the cosmogony narrative, all concur that the land, Papatūānuku, is adorned with the offspring (flora, fauna) of Tāne, (her eldest son) with ancient ancestresses” (Pouwhare, 2016, p. 37).

In reflecting upon what emerges from my practice, it is not my intention to correlate a Maaori worldview with Eurocentric philosophical ideas. Indeed, I am aware that in some regards as a visitor to Aotearoa/New Zealand I may be accused of being “a white traveler telling stories about people in far-off exotic lands” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 8), based on my own foreign male experience. Contextually, such a tendency may be exacerbated because in a postmodern world, it is relatively easy to superficially select beliefs, frameworks and ideas that appear to correlate with my own ontological ideas and feelings, without understanding the complex relationality and contexts from which they emanate. Indeed, as a Brazilian man whose own

nation still navigates the impacts of colonisation,¹³⁴ I am very cognisant how creative expression can overlook the ethics of appropriating the property of first-nation people.

This said, I try to be ideologically humble. I try not to go into the land as a white hunter shooting and capturing what I see and imposing myself upon its meaning. Culturally, I walk inside instability because the boundaries of what I know continually change. This is why I approach complex Maaori concepts like mauri and whenua with respectful caution. These phenomena have resonated with what I have experienced, but in reflecting upon them I am constantly aware that I do not ‘know’ and cannot ‘know’ their complexities. Whether I stand in the land or in a darkened wharekai I dwell inside what I sense and feel. I try to not assume the transferability of culturally determined ideas. Therefore, my consideration of other cultural ways of knowing is not one of accumulation and use but rather one of remaining as respectfully open to what exists outside of my own epistemological framework.

FLOW

The third attitudinal feature impacting on this research is both a state of orientation and a method. By approaching land with a purposeful naivety and understanding the necessity for cultural responsiveness and respect, I have also come to recognise the advantages of engaging with the process of flow.¹³⁵ In this state my technical considerations move from an explicit process to functions that operate almost unconsciously.

Csikszentmihalyi also refers to the concept of transcendence in his discussion of flow as integrative state between practice and the practitioner. He says:

Often we feel a sense of transcendence, as if the boundaries of the self have been expanded. The sailor feels at one with the wind, the boat, and the sea; the singer feels a mysterious sense of universal harmony. In those moments the awareness of time disappears, endless hours seem to flash by without our noticing. (1988, p. 72)

Csikszentmihalyi coined the term flow and developed an associated framework to describe the optimum experience that a practitioner may experience. In this state he suggests one encounters:

... a sense that one’s skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. (ibid., p. 71)

Inside an immersion, such flow operates almost automatically. It serves a process of recording where the mechanical handling of the camera functions in the background while my senses operate in the foreground. Decision-making processes concerning framing, lens aperture, shutter speed and camera position feel largely intuitive.

When I begin to operate inside (or dissolve into) a flow, the concept of an image for consumption by an audience diminishes; I do not pursue exhibitable artifacts but, instead I am immersed in a process of recording intrinsic parts of my relationship with the land. This state seems to occur during the deepest parts of an immersion and may be associated with the state of intoxication.

This flow relies upon tacit operations and memories of similar bodily experiences. Knowledge of the camera is something that has been accrued across many years of experience and I am uncertain that such a flow could be experienced by a photographer whose camera has not become a deeply understood extension of his body. This is because in a state of flow, the camera is transformed from an optical device to an extention of the body. Flow enables me a *comunhão* with the world because the thinking hand (Pallasmaa, 2009) is not to the fore of my consideration. It serves rather than dictates the state of flow.¹³⁶



FIGURE 5.4.

Comparison of recordings of Lion Rock at Piha (recorded respectively on November 14, 2015 and November 15, 2017).

RIGHT OR WRONG

The fourth attitudinal feature relates to what constitutes a ‘correct’ response to photographing the land. As the study progressed and I elevated notions of naivety and openness, I increasingly began to abandon certain judgments that were formative in my professional training. As a consequence, my preoccupations with binaries between right and wrong as they relate to process or composition were challenged. This occurred partly because my concerns with recording aesthetically pleasing images shifted to a preoccupation with how I might expand depth and resonance of my photographic practice.

This shift in emphasis is evident in reflections on my process when I photographed Piha for the second time. In this later visit it was much easier for me to accommodate disruption, and to absorb what was technically anomalous into a natural experience of flow. This is because I was operating under a much greater attitudinal openness to experience where ideas of ‘error’ or ‘wrongness’ were replaced with concerns about ‘making sense of’ or ‘discovering’ (Figure 5.4).

Traditionally the idea of ‘wrongness’ is associated with failure or error that disrupts the successful attainment of a goal. Kirkpatrick (1985) defines wrongness as “not according to

rule ... not that thing that is required, intended, advisable or suitable” (p. 1157). However, when one moves beyond a pre-imagined outcome, then an inquiry may be concerned less with what is ‘according to rule’ and more with discovery. Consequently, my questioning increasingly shifted from concerns with ‘How might I strategically select a part from the whole?’ to asking ‘What might be the nature of the whole?’ and ‘How might I heighten the chances of discovery when encountering such a thing?’ When I am ‘part of a whole and seeking to understand its hitherto unknown nature, concerns with wrongness are relinquished and ‘mistakes’ can be considered as potential findings.

Under this new attitude a photographer may sacrifice certain established values in the pursuit of discovery. This may manifest in subtle shifts in approach, but also in conscious disruptions undertaken to expand opportunities to reorient thinking.¹³⁷ Instances of this behaviour included blocking my viewfinder so I could not see what I was framing at Muriwai, and painting what I could not see with torch light in the caves at Waipu. In all of these instances I consciously moved my emphasis away from concerns with ‘rightness’ in the pursuit of revelation and in so doing, I shifted the parameters of what might be accommodated and understood.

- 133** There were two main reasons for this nomadic state. The first was the dominant agricultural technique of *queimada* (burning), which involved setting fire to land after the collection of crops. This technique quickly exhausted the fertility of the soil necessitating continual relocation. However, the second reason indicates a sense of land as contested, or ‘owned’. Some nomadic practice resulted by ongoing wars with other Tupi and non-Tupi tribes. These indigenous conflicts eventually lead to strategic alliances with the Portuguese in order that tribes could acquire guns and tactical techniques to assert dominance over land. (Kim, 2008)
- 134** In the 1990s, as much as 45% of the available farmland in the country was controlled by 1% of the non-indigenous population. Even today certain advocates of land reform continue to criticise the amount of land reserved for indigenous peoples (The Economist, 2007).
- 135** In this discussion I differentiate between flow as a state of handling and flow as an experience of energy. The latter has already been discussed under the sub-section Magnetism and Pull.
- 136** Journal entries 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15.
- 137** This approach is fundamental to Kleining and Witt’s (2000) work on heuristic inquiry and the manner in which one might heighten the chances of discovery in research.

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

It is now useful to consider what I have discovered in relation to a spiritual dimension to how land might be encountered by a photographer. In writing this section I am aware that I journey into contestable territory. Although a number of writers have considered notions of embodiment and immersion, to extend this thinking beyond concerns with the cognitive and physical is not an easy thing to do and I admit that even now, I am working towards an understanding of something I did not initially think would surface inside the parameters of my inquiry.¹³⁸

In discussing the nature of the spiritual and the land I would like to consider two ideas that have been significant in extending the nature of my practice. They are:

The Spiritual Landscape
and Mauri

THE SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE

In this thesis the spiritual is considered outside of a religious system. I consider it as a largely invisible dimension that transcends the tangibility of the material and the cognition of reason. Added to this idea there is an appreciation of the thinking of Abraham Maslow (1971), who suggested that the spiritual dimension is an integral part of human nature. Chandler, Holden and Kolander argue that in such a dimension we operate through “a holistic perspective of the world, a natural tendency towards synergy (cooperative action), (being) intrapsychic, interpersonal, intercultural and international, (being) more consciously and deliberately metamotivated” (1992, p.168).

This holistic perspective may be likened to Van Ness’ (1992) proposal of spirituality as a wholeness that connects both the inner and the outer. He suggests:

The spiritual aspect of human existence is here hypothesized to have an outer and inner complexion. Facing outward, human existence is spiritual insofar as it intentionally engages reality as a maximally inclusive whole and makes the cosmos an intentional object of thought and feeling. Facing inward, life has a spiritual dimension to the extent that it is experienced as the project of one’s most vital and enduring self, and it is structured

by experiences of sudden transformation and subsequent slow development. An integration of these inner and outer characteristics is achieved by equating the spiritual dimension with the existential task of discovering one’s truest self in the context of reality and cosmic totality. (Van Ness, 1992, pp. 13-14)

However, there is debate surrounding what constitutes the spiritual. Such a consideration may subsume into itself everything from the ‘super-sensible’ or what is not gathered by means of the five physical senses (Boland, 2018), to the Maaori concept of matakite (or ‘seeing-behind-things’) (Ngata, 2014).

In their consideration of ‘spiritual landscapes’ Dewsbury and Cloke discuss a co-constituting set of relations “between bodily existence, felt practice and faith in things that are immanent, but not yet manifest” (2009, p. 696). They see spiritual landscapes as “spaces that can be inhabited, or dwelt, in different spiritual registers.” (ibid.).¹³⁹ Drawing upon the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and its relationship with studies of the landscape in geographical contexts, they include within the spiritual, certain affects that “are produced that make people experience very real and specific feelings ... [that are] constitutive of everyday life; cutting at that space between absence and presence, and manifesting at the immediate, and therefore non-metaphysical, level of the body” (ibid., p. 697). Thus, they argue the spiritual may have a direct relation (or register with) the bodily. A link is made here to a comprehension of the spiritual where the researcher might be “extending beyond sight to a sense of being that includes all senses and an openness to being affected” (ibid., p. 696).

Although Dewsbury and Cloke consider ‘spiritual’ as forming “a significant part of the move beyond rationality and of the possibility of otherworldly dispositions” (ibid.); they are cautious about locking down a definition. They state:

Appropriately, we are yet to say what the spiritual is. And we are not going to, for that would also be to say what the spiritual means. The spiritual is not something that is straightforwardly accessed. (ibid., p. 698)

My approach in this thesis is similar; I try to remain as open as I can to the parameters of what might be considered spiritual. I use the word in a relatively inclusive manner that shows

humility and respect for what I cannot fully understand. In taking this position, I am somewhat comforted by Vattimo who considers emerging spiritual sensibilities in scholarly literature as “imprecise and not definable with any rigour”, although he claims that this state, “corresponds well to the topic (to believe in belief)’ (1999, p. 21). This said, like Dewsbury and Cloke, I believe that the “spiritual matters precisely because it presents the unknown to us; that excess that is of us ... the outside of knowing as opposed to direct perception” (2009, p. 698). Accordingly, I conceive the spiritual as a dimension through which the photographer might come to know dimensions of land that exist beyond the material yet may impact on both the body and an artistic way of expressing experience.

TENSION

Warner (2006) notes that when we consider relationships between the land and the spiritual, there is an inherent tension between what is present, solid and material and “what inheres in the material as something mysterious, elusive, and ethereal” (p. 72).¹⁴⁰ This tension may be preserved if one considers the physical and nonphysical as binaries. However, Grosz maintains that:

... the body is not an object. It is the condition and context through which I am able to have a relation to objects. It is both immanent and transcendent. Insofar as I live the body, it is a phenomenon experienced by me and thus, it provides the very horizon and perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible. (Grosz, 1994, p. 86)

Within this framing of the body as an immanent and transcendent relational condition, I suggest that the photographer may through a highly attuned bodyliness encounter and express spiritual essences within the land where the “body differentiates sensuous experience, patterns of organization and narratives of meaning” (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009, p. 701).

My experiences in the field suggest that there are three encountered features of this phenomenon.

The first is that such energy moves. Throughout my journal I describe this in different ways. Sometimes I experience it as fluid. This sensation tends to occur where land is influenced

by water.¹⁴¹ However, in caves, deserts, forests and at the Waiohau Marae, sometimes I experienced this energy as a distinctive vibration.¹⁴² This said, it is not helpful to present these experiences as binaries because in certain instances I experience both sensations as a composite. Thus, when I photographed Muriwai in the darkness, I described the unseen energy as:

... not static. It didn't hover or stand. It was constantly moving. It was a vibration of energy, where the land, its history and indefinable things were in constant motion ... The camera was attracted to the point where I could feel vibrations of energy coming from the dark. (Journal entry 7)

The movement of this energy can also be experienced as distinctive rhythms. For instance, when recording material deep in the Waipu caves, I noted a discernible slowness in its pace that I experienced as:

... an energy that is moving, deeply vibrant and very restrained in its presence ... The essence felt similar to what I experienced above ground but 'slower' ... There was a rhythm in the caves, but as a drift that hung close to the rocks and water. You could feel it moving at corners and along planes even when you couldn't see it. It was a consistent vibration (Journal entry 11).

This rhythm has also been experienced as "enduring"¹⁴³ or "concurrently solid and moving."¹⁴⁴

CONNECTIVITY

When I enter a deep state of immersion I also experience the movement of energy as connective. By this I mean there is a bridging of something within me, through my body (and my camera as an extension of this) into the land. This can be best described through an observation I recorded at Pukearuhe and the White Cliffs:

... when immersed, I feel an energy that connects me, transforming my individual presence into something collective, akin to "being in the land". In these immersions I become the land along with its legacy and energy. I am not an individual, but the accrual of what I do not know consciously, my cultural and ancestral values, my innate connections and my internal primal 'readings' of what is experienced. In these moments, while I am interconnected, my camera seeks to absorb any manifestation of this energy, any trace of this encounter. (Journal entry: 6)

In such a state I am not separate from the land as a discrete photographer capturing some physically unseen movement. I am inside the movement (Figure 5.5). Thus, I do not feel the movement on me (as through the sense of touch on the skin or as a connection into any of the other five physical senses). Instead it permeates me and I experience it moving within and through the trunk of my body. Often when describing this, I find myself making circular motions with my hands around my heart and gut but it is not the physical organs of my body that I am referring to. Rather it is a broader, less defined sense of physical centrality.

138 I thought initially that I might simply be dealing with the nature of an increased level of awareness during immersions where my senses operated in a heightened mode.

139 The authors define landscape as "embodied practices of being in the world, including ways of seeing but extending beyond sight to both a sense of being that includes all senses and an openness to being affected" (2009, p. 696).

140 Interestingly, Rose and Wylie also contend "that landscape is tension, a tension of presence/absence, and of performing, creating, and perceiving presence" (2006, p. 475).

141 Journal entries 6, 12 and 13.

142 Journal entries 5, 7, 8, 11, 14, and 15.

143 Te Urewera: Journal entry 13.

144 Piha: Journal entry 10.

PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

Finally, what is perceived as a spiritual energy can vary in strength. In some instances, it can be very strong.¹⁴⁵ By contrast, sometimes I encounter land where what is perceived spiritually is very weak or almost absent.¹⁴⁶ In these instances, land is normally damaged or physically disturbed.

MAURI

In this thesis, I have found the concept of mauri particularly helpful as a way of understanding the spiritual landscape and how a photographer might function within it.

The Maaori academic Taina Whakaatere Pohatu argues that “Every part of the whole, including the spiritual element, is crucial to the effective functioning of relationships, no matter what the issue or context” (2011, p. 1). She maintains that mauri “imbues Maaori thinking, knowledge, culture and language with a unique cultural heartbeat and rhythm” (ibid.).

Henare (2001) suggests that “everything has its own mauri, its own nature: people, tribe, land, mountains, stones, fish, animals, birds, trees, rivers, lakes, oceans, thoughts, words, houses, factories” (pp. 208 – 209). However, Best asserts that it is problematic to equate mauri with the soul, because “the mauri ceases to exist with the death or disappearance of its physical basis”¹⁴⁷ (Best, 1982, p. 47). In this regard he likens mauri to the Greek concept of thymos, that similarly ceases to exist after the extinction of life in the physical body.

Marsden and Royal (2003, p. 70) suggests that while we live, mauri is with us to some degree. He argues that:

When the mauri is strong, fauna and flora flourish. When it is depleted and weak to those forms of life, they become sickly and weak.

In concord with his assertion, Harmsworth and Awatere (2013) argue that the mauri “denotes a health and spirit, which permeates all living and non-living things ... Damage or contamination to the environment is therefore damage to or loss of mauri” (p. 276). Here, they indicate a relationship between the mauri of land and its health. They also discuss several conditions of mauri including, “destroyed mauri (mauri mate) [and] diminishing mauri (mauri noho)” (ibid., p. 277). Henare (2001) also notes that:



FIGURE 5.5. Haast coastline (January 16, 2016). Often when I record the ‘pull’ of energy in the land, I experience a condition where the physical body no longer presents a barrier to what is within and what exists beyond the self.

¹⁴⁵ Journal entries 3, 12 and 13.
¹⁴⁶ Journal entries 4, 8, and 14.
¹⁴⁷ This is why the Maaori expression “Kua ukiuki te mauri” is similar to saying that somebody is dead.

... mauri may be violated, abused, or diminished through neglect or attack. Thus, trees and plants, rivers, lakes, and oceans may not produce in limitless abundance. Fruits would be scarce, there would be fewer birds, animals, or fish. (p. 209)¹⁴⁸

I use the concept of mauri in recognition of a distinctive spiritual presence that I encounter in the land around me.¹⁴⁹ This permeates me in subtle vibrations that are under my feet, above my head and passing around and through my body. Inside this life force I am absorbed, such that I am part of something that is simultaneously part of me. Mason Durie (1998) suggests that “mauri moves from the centre outwards, in search of connections within relationships in their contexts, in the pursuit of the discovery of similarities” (p.88). In this movement I sometimes experience a pulling. When conscious of it, I become integrated with a greater whole. I experience mauri as a kind of completeness that is active.

I also understand mauri as perceptible. I comprehend it as more than a living essential essence or energy. It is a vital life principle that is dynamic and I believe that I can, in certain instances, record its presence. I comprehend it as fluid or vibrational. My recognition of it is in a *comunhão* between what is interior to the self and what is outside. This dynamic affects my body. It surfaces abstract perceptions that are reached through, but transcend physical sensory experience.

In a way mauri appears to hold things together. Henare argues that “mauri, having been imbued in the embryo at conception, interacts with Mother Earth’s forces, the immediate source of life. The land is the nurturing source of human physical existence, just as the placenta is for the newborn child” (2001, p. 207). Within this, the concept of the individual diminishes, making space for a comprehension of a connected, greater whole. I can feel this connection most clearly when I am open, without anxiety or conscious preoccupation.

Whether it is because I am not genealogically connected to the origins of the concept or I perceive its relationship to a culturally located network of other ideas¹⁵⁰ that I do not fully understand, I am aware that mauri is not something that I can fully grasp, so I use it with caution. I stand respectfully outside of its cultural context and accept its potential challenges and insights into the way I try to understand the world I record.

In adopting this tentativeness, I am reminded of Gary Zukav who notes that when we journey through human experience we do not do so as experts. We try to comprehend and connect knowledge in a process of coming to know, and as a consequence of our thinking we may contribute value. He says:

There is no such thing as an expert on the human experience. The human experience is an experience in movement and thought and form, and in some cases, an experiment in movement in thought and form. The most that we can do is comment on the movement, thought and form, but those comments are of great value if they can help people to learn to move gracefully, to think clearly, to form like artists – the matter of their lives. (Zukav,1990, p. 14)

MANIPULATION AND INTEGRITY

In closing this chapter, it is useful to consider an issue that emanates from my studio. It concerns tensions that I navigate between manipulation and integrity.

Although it is easy to argue logistical reasons for employing digital recording devices, I remain constantly aware of concerns over the camera’s ability to significantly alter what is recorded. Digital cameras offer a wide range of easy manipulations that a photographer can default to in times of doubt. Beyond issues of focus and framing, these include additional facilities like colour control, saturation, lightness, hues and contrast. These functions can redefine what is recorded at the turn of a dial.¹⁵¹

Susan Sontag (1977) has argued that “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting one’s self into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge, and therefore like power” (p. 178). When I take a photograph, I choose to nominate and exclude certain elements and to frame an image using a specific angle. These decisions are shaped by my socio-historical-professional contexts and thus my work cannot claim to be an objective form of representation. This said, I attempt within a subjective response to what I encounter, to heighten a certain level of integrity by adopting two principles when working with material gathered in the field.

First, I do not add any material to a photograph that was not recorded during the time that the camera was locked into position. So, skies, water, land forms, textures and light, are all records of what existed in the period that I stood on the land with my camera documenting what was in front of me.

Second, I do not subtract any conceivably ‘problematic’ physical elements from a photograph. So, there is no erasing of records of people, lights, water spots on lenses, or details that I might, as a commercial photographer, have removed. None of the images in this book are retouched.

148 I experienced this correlation between damage and weakness on Te Puia o Whakaari/White Island and when I was photographing the polluted Pinheiros River. Thus, I have experienced mauri as diverse in its intensity. This is indicated by locations that I photograph revealing distinctively different vibrations or flows.

149 Marsden and Royal (2003) argue that “mauri creates benevolent conditions within the environment, both to harmonise the processes within the earth’s ecosystem” (p. 70).

150 Beyond the complexities of genealogy and land, these include Te Tūhonohotanga (interconnectedness), Te Wairau (the soul and its depths, which incorporate the thinking and applications of earlier generations), Te Whatumanawa (the inner eye, as the site that enables the connecting of the visions of earlier generations to those of now and the future), Te Manawa (the ‘strength’ of ‘the pulse’ that monitors integrity and sets of relationships), Te Puku (the stomach with its levels and depths, as the seat that acknowledges the place and value of emotions in fashioning responses and actions), Te Ngākau (the heart’s levels and depths, as the site to hold, understand and shape the use of the legacies of earlier and present generations to inform, guide and monitor our acquired thinking and actions), and Te Hinengaro (the mind with its levels and depths for acquiring knowledge and wisdoms, as the site for holding and applying critical reflection and analysis in the development of positions and fashioning responses to issues) (Pohatu 2011, p. 9).

151 These anxieties were resourced by a long history of manipulating images. As a commercial photographer I have made extensive use of colour filters for black and white photography that allow me to change the representation of a colour in its respective grey tone. For instance, I have used yellow filters to darken blue skies, or red filters to darken the greens in vegetation. I have also made extensive use of neutral density filters to increase or decrease exposure time, and polariser filters to increase contrast and diminish reflection.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF COMPRESSING TIME

In the field I take many photographs of the same piece of land. These are recorded over time, varying light exposures and an occasional shift in focus. I trigger each record manually and the composite of these photographs produces an image that is a compression of time. These photographs contain both recorded moments of chronological time and time as a duration that has been experienced between the instances when a shutter has been clicked (Figure 5.6).

When discussing duration, Bergson (1994) suggests that time (as a non-scientific/mathematical construct) is kinetic and incomplete. When an individual subjectively experiences time, it may speed up or slow down. He argues that our inner life is also a form of duration that is neither a unity nor a "continuous quantitative multiplicity" (p. 105). He suggests that duration can only be represented indirectly through images and that these can never reveal a complete picture. This is an interesting point. Even though my photographs compress time in a manner that a traditional photograph does not, I still understand them as 'incomplete'. They are documents of what remains indefinable, inconclusive and partly grasped through intuition and the imagination. They do not represent indivisible concrete spaces that are frozen in time. As Bergson notes:

There is no need to assume a limit to the divisibility of concrete space; we can admit that it is infinitely divisible, provided that we make a distinction between the simultaneous positions of the two moving bodies, which are in fact in space, and their movements, which cannot occupy space, being duration rather than extent, quality and not quantity (ibid. p. 114).

In this project my thinking about time has shifted. I now understand compressed photographs surfacing from immersive processes (in the field and studio) as incomplete negotiations of what is multiply divisible. Within these images, time is not experienced or expressed as a 'captured moment' or an aesthetically constructed compression of 'captured moments'. Rather, the photograph is an expression of time as duration.



FIGURE 5.6.

Te Araroa (September 1, 2016). An image like this is comprised of five records spanning two minutes. These images may be aligned with Bergson's (1994) concept of time as 'duration'. The vibrations and tensions that move within this photograph are not frozen moments captured by the 1/60th of a second action of the camera shutter. They are expressions of subjective experience.

THE CHALLENGE OF COLOUR AND TEXTURE

Often colour in my work feels concentrated. But, in this project I have never applied colours that were not recorded, nor have I replaced, saturated or intensified hues. However, when multiple records of the same place are compressed, colour sometimes intensifies. Often the resulting photograph speaks directly to the intensity I experienced and I leave what has accumulated untouched. However, on rare occasions, (such as in the Rangipo Desert) compression leads to distortions in both colour and texture that are not conversant with what I encountered. In such instances I face a problem. To address this, I consult the original recordings and use them as a guide for revisiting the chromatic frequency that I experienced. This is not a difficult thing to achieve because at the time I am immersed in both the photographs and the memory of their recording.

However, either the compression of intensity or the renegotiation of an image back to the chromatic frequency I experienced, may be seen as manipulations. This is something I accept because I am not objectively documenting the physicality of a scene but trying to bring multiple records as a compressed expression of what I experienced.

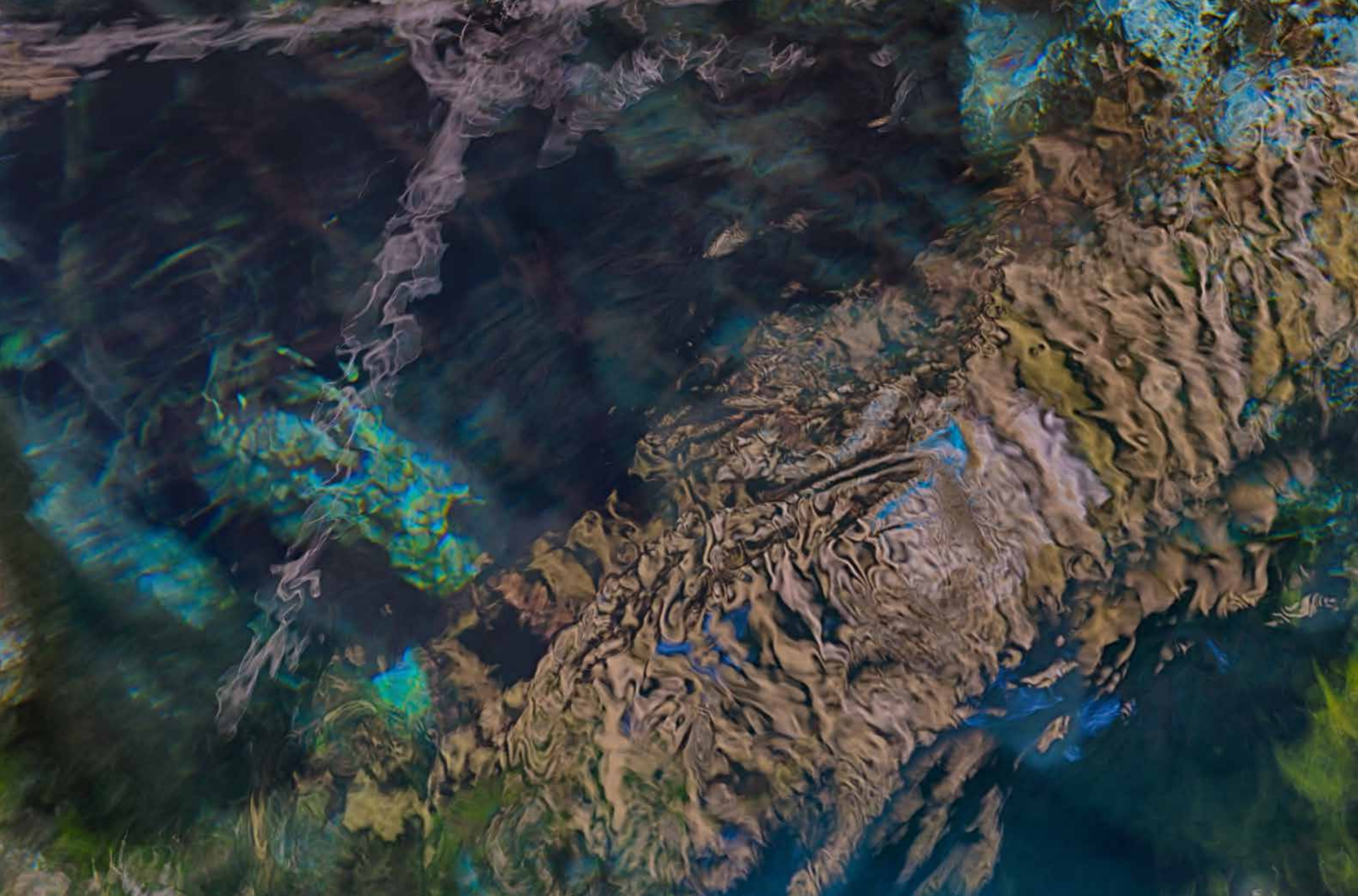
AN OVERRIDING QUESTION

So, there is a question that faces me. Could somebody employing the same techniques, who has no belief in, or sensitivity to, a spiritual dimension of land, produce the same type of photograph?

In answering this I turn back to the work of Sebastião Salgado. I have traversed and experienced some of the land that he has recorded. I also know many of the photographic techniques that he uses. But this does not make me Salgado. I do not know the land as he does and I cannot express it in the same way. I cannot give voice to the scars on the soul he experienced when photographing in Africa. I cannot reproduce the viscosity in the middle of a crater in Serra Pelada. I cannot express the same resonance of experience in photographs that record thousands of workers, coated in mud, as they ascend treacherous wooden ladders. Such things are unique and unrepeatable by another photographer. The intensity and worth of these photographs transcend technique and relate more closely to disposition. These are photographs of what he 'felt' in the land.

This is the reason why people look the way they do in a wharekai in the remote Te Urewera forest, why the Rangipo desert radiates tension and expectation before a cyclone, why an earthquake speaks through the instability of form and light and why a photograph of a beach pulls us outward in a vibrational flow. These things are present because these photographs are a *comunhão* between the land and a photographer who experiences them.

They are an expression of a unique relationship.





6

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This thesis posed the question:

What are the issues that must be addressed when photographing land, such that one might express an immersive, embodied, spiritually-attuned relationship between the self and what is recorded?

In concluding I will briefly discuss:

A summary of the main ideas,
The thesis' contribution to knowledge,
Potentials for further research,
and some parting thoughts.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN IDEAS

As a practice-led inquiry concerned with advancing practice through reflection and experimentation, the thesis proposes an approach to photographing the land through a process of immersion. In doing this, I posit an extension to the concept of embodiment such that what is encounterable as physical or cognitive may be expanded to include a spiritual dimension or the presence of "things that are immanent, but not yet

manifest" (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009, p. 696).

Immersion is understood as a "total involvement (where the photographer becomes) wide open in surrender to the thing itself" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 47). In the land this state is normally prefigured through a process of walking that is a sensitising, circumambulatory form of knowing (Ingold, 1993).

While in an immersion I encounter a transition from sensory 'astonishment' (a heightened receptivity of the senses to the immediately physical) to an experience of 'intoxication' where presence is more abstract. Nonphysical essence within this state is experienced as a sensation of magnetic pulling (Abram, 1997) or a vibration, that can be expressed photographically through a process of multiple recording that compresses time.

An immersion is, however, vulnerable. It is predicated on conditions of aloneness, naivety, cultural responsiveness (Inoue, 2007) and the abnegation of technical concerns with rightness or wrongness.

When inside an immersion I enter a process of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1988), where time is not measurable but experienced as duration (Bergson, 1994) or a 'specious present' (Andersen & Grush, 2009).

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Normally at the conclusion of a thesis the practitioner discusses what new knowledge has emerged from the inquiry. I understand knowledge as content or insight that operates in both tacit and explicit ways. Such knowledge may have useful applications for practice. Given this definition, I suggest that the thesis offers three broad contributions.

EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF EMBODIMENT

First, the study proposes and demonstrates through practice, an extension of the concept of embodiment. In so doing, it suggests that what is physical and cognitive might be expanded to include a spiritual dimension to how land is comprehended and recorded.

IMMERSION

Second, the thesis considers a process of ‘Immersive Photography’ both methodologically and conceptually, demonstrating and unpacking its nature and the manner in which it occurs in a photographer’s practice. Thus, the study articulates and demonstrates the functioning of a process that enables a deeply internal yet communicative interaction between the photographer and the land.

THE FIELD JOURNAL AS A METHOD OF PHOTOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

The thesis also demonstrates a unique form of image-led field journal that photographers might use as a subjective, descriptive, analytical system for documenting and reflecting on experience when studying the land. Newbury, who argues that field journals are a relatively new method in artistic inquiry,¹⁵² suggests that the field journal is essentially a subjective, reflective device that “provides a form through which the interaction of subjective and objective aspects of doing research can be openly acknowledged and brought into a productive relationship” (2001, p. 3). In this thesis I demonstrate how such a journal might integrate photographic recording, descriptive narrative, poetic accounting and interrogative, subjective questioning as methods for thinking about and responding to practice.

FURTHER RESEARCH

In a practice-led inquiry, it is not always possible to draw a definitive line around where research terminates. This is because one’s practice and discoveries resourcing it, extend beyond a thesis. Although my concerns with immersive photography cannot resolve themselves into a list of absolute conclusions, the study is living research, so there is potential for further investigation. Accordingly, I would like to discuss three distinct (but related) trajectories. The first concerns the potential exhibition or publication of photographs surfacing from the study, the second relates to publication of written thinking, the third considers dissemination through conferences and public addresses.

EXHIBITIONS AND BOOKS

Exhibition as a mode of progressing thinking in this thesis did not serve as a useful method. This is because the photograph as an artifact, disconnected from the process underpinning its realisation, was often read as a discrete text.

This said, as the ‘residue of thinking’ some of the photographs may serve to raise the issue of landscape photography’s potential to record a nonmaterial essence as it exists within the physical. Although I am still ambivalent about the idea, a potential exhibition might be constituted of very large projections so a viewer might encounter recordings of land in a manner close to the way that I experienced it. Because I would want to reinforce the relationship between the image and the research process, I would design a print catalogue that contains an essay drawn from writing within the exegesis. The other option would be to create a catalogue from a reconstituted, prefaced Chapter Four, so people could read and take away with them the researcher’s unfolding inquiry as it was documented across the duration of the project.

However, my preference is to publish a book that contains 50 to 60 photographs. These would be accompanied by an essay. I am inspired in this regard by the art book *States of Grace* by Anne Noble (2001).¹⁵³ The book’s cropped A3 landscape format provides a quiet, intimate, singular relationship between the ‘reader’ and Noble’s photography and critical writing. The relatively private relationship that can be established between a book, a photographer and a reader has been employed by a number of photographers including Araquem Alcantara¹⁵⁴ and Sebastião Salgado.¹⁵⁵ Beyond the distinctive intimacy that a book offers, an additional advantage is that the experience of the photographic work can endure long after the spatial facilities of an exhibition have ceased to be available.

As an alternative approach, the potentials of e-book publishing offer an additional option if the cost of publishing a physical book proves to be prohibitive. The advantage of this approach is that the electronic format can enable access to the work at an affordable price. E-book publications also enable me to embed audio recordings of certain locations, interviews and useful links for readers and other photographers.

152 Field journals have an established history in Geography and the Social Sciences, but in Art and Design it is normal practice to employ an artist’s diary or a designer’s workbook.

153 Noble, A. (2001). *States of Grace*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.

154 Among Araquem’s most well-known books are: *Parques Nacionais Brasil* (2004), *Imagens do Brasil* (2005), *Fauna e Flora Brasileira* (2008) and *Veredas* (2014).

155 Significant among his books are: *Other Americas* (1986), *Sahel, L’Homme en détresse* (1986), *Terra* (1997), *The Children* (2000), *Africa* (2007) and *Genesis* (2017).

156 In the article I discuss my research as an example of practice-led inquiry. I then unpack the methodological approach underpinning the study with emphasis on immersive and reflective methods and the manner in which they may be developed to increase the depth of communication between a photographer and the land he records.

157 MAI (*The New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship*) is an open access and peer-reviewed journal focused on multidisciplinary articles addressing indigenous and Pacific epistemologies in the context of New Zealand. <http://www.journal.mai.ac.nz/>

158 *The Journal of Artistic Research* (<http://www.jar-online.net/>) is an international, online, open access publication.

159 *The International Journal of the Image* [<https://ontheimage.com/journal>] is a useful consideration because it is peer reviewed and publication is open access. This means that there is a higher chance of my thinking and photography being disseminated in both academic and professional contexts.

160 The 10th International Conference on the Image, will be held at the Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University, in the United Kingdom between the 5th and 6th of September 2019.



FIGURE 6.1.
Cover of the DAT Journal [November 2018, 3 (2)], showing accumulated driftwood on the shore at Gisborne. (August 30, 2016). The issue focuses on new and emerging thinking in practice as research emanating from two Southern Hemisphere Universities.

JOURNAL PUBLICATION

I am also interested in reconstituting the research in this thesis into journal publications. My most recent article, “Practice-led doctoral research and the nature of immersive methods” has been accepted for publication in the blind peer reviewed *Journal of Design, Art & Technology* (ISSN: 2526-1789). The journal edition will be published in November 2018.¹⁵⁶ (Figure 6.1).

I am also currently writing, with my colleague Robert Powhare, an article for MAI¹⁵⁷ (*The New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship*). This is a photographic essay with an annotated introduction. Titled Reo Rua (Two Voices), the work features photographs I recorded at the opening of the wharekai in Waiohau. It combines a discussion of my immersive approach to photographic documentary alongside Robert’s unpacking of the esoteric and physical nature of the ceremony.

Given that relatively little has been written about how immersion might work as a process for photographing what lies beyond the physical in landscape photography, I am also interested in revisiting parts of the thesis to develop work for two peer reviewed journals. The first is the *Journal of Artistic Research* [JAR].¹⁵⁸ This open access, multidisciplinary journal focuses on the dissemination of international artistic research and offers artistic researchers a forum for discussing methodologies and processes related to artistic practice. The journal enables me to include a large number of photographs that can speak directly to a description of process.

An alternative option is the *International Journal of the Image*.¹⁵⁹ This journal draws together researchers, theoreticians, practitioners and educators from diverse disciplines who are concerned with the functions and processes of image-making. Usefully, the publication has an associated annual conference¹⁶⁰ that offers an opportunity to present a paper. This means that my formative thinking is able to go through a process of peer feedback and advice before I reconstitute material as a submitted article.

PRESENTATIONS

I see presentations as a useful way of not only seeking peer feedback, but also for positioning photographic research in relation to the photographer who is physically present (and able to take part in discussion).

On November 15 2018, I will be delivering an illustrated presentation about my research at the launch of the Special Issue of the *Journal of Design, Art & Technology* in Sao Paulo. I speak both Portuguese and English, so I am comfortable navigating nuances of meaning and explanation between languages (given that the audience will largely be Brazilian). The launch has been designed in partnership with the New Zealand Higher Education Commission and the New Zealand Embassy.

... SO IN CONCLUDING ...

In adopting a practice-led inquiry I chose to embark on a reflective and critical journey. In this instance, questions arose that I had not entertained in my professional practice. This was because my prior concerns had been largely with what was evident or technical and aesthetic considerations impacting on the construction of photographs.

The inquiry led me into subterranean caves without light and a shutter speed exceeding three minutes in duration. I stood for hours under blackened skies on remote, windswept shorelines, I wandered into deserts as cyclones approached and entered buildings where cultural understandings operated beyond the realm of the physical. I submerged myself in rivers, lay on the soil of outgoing tides, and photographed in toxic environments where the acidity of the air burned my skin. Through such forms of engagement, practice was a pursuit and pursuit became the essence of discovery.

I came to understand both poetic and analytical registers as voices in research. I sought knowledge through image making and translated what I could into written reflection. As part of this I sought high levels of authenticity by embracing sensory and emotive responses to what I encountered.

So, I stand now at the end of an inquiry that has been transformative, both to my practice and to myself. I face unconsidered horizons (both physical and conceptual) with my camera, an extension of my body. This is a body that now reaches beyond the cognitive and physical. It has a greater openness to things that are immanent, but not yet manifest.

In a realm of not entirely knowing

... I remain humble.





7

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ABSTRACT

This thesis constitutes a practice-led, artistic research project that asks:

What are the issues that must be addressed when photographing land, such that one might express an immersive, embodied, spiritually-attuned relationship between the self and what is recorded?

In the study, I suggest that embodiment may reach beyond the cognitive and physical, to engage with a form of 'living essence' that embraces a realm of knowing that may be broadly understood as spiritual. When engaging with the land in this dimension the photographer is immersed in a process that involves a communion between the 'essence of the living self' and the 'essence of the living earth'.

In conducting the study, I utilise a heuristic inquiry to facilitate a dialectical approach to problem solving. Here practice advances to new understandings that have operative meaning for practical knowledge (Candy, 2006). In the inquiry I employ a form of reflective field journal where images, poetic writing, technical data and critical thinking enable me to reflect on both a state of immersion and outcomes emanating from the process.

The research contributes to current discussions surrounding the manner in which photographers engage with land because the study proposes and unpacks a process of 'Immersive Photography' as a conceptual and methodological approach.

