

KO WAI KO AU KO AU KO WAI I AM WATER, WATER IS ME

TATIANA TAVARES

I have worked with *Cultural Spaces and Design* since 2012 when I was invited to present my Master's project *Carnival Land* (Figure 1) at the *Upstream. Prospects through Design* colloquium at the Institute HyperWerk in Basel. From this project, I conducted a workshop applying Lévi-Strauss' notion of »bricolage«, where the students fashioned collages to explore their own bricolage identity using Gaspard Weissheimer's diploma project – a »mobile screen print facility«. My involvement with the project continued with a number of other collaborations before I was invited to be an integral part of the research project, facilitating workshops in India and Australia with other research partners. The *Satellite* format was suggested as a form of collaboration between year 3 communication design students from AUT Auckland University of Technology (where I lecture) and the Institute HyperWerk. The workshop was conducted over a 12-week period in the spring semester of 2017.

THE CULTURAL SPACE AGENT

One might say that my role in the *Satellite* was that of a *Cultural Space agent*. The etymology of agent comes from the Latin word *agere* which means *to act*. It also refers to chemical compounds that act upon something to produce a particular effect. Donald Davidson (1980: 46) argues that the act of an agent is »intentional under some description«. The agent is »immediate«, has a clear sense of goal or action, and practi-



Figure 1. Images from my 2011 graphic novel »Carnival Land«. This project formed part of my MA thesis in graphic design and was based on my experiences as an immigrant to New Zealand. Employing photomontage and creative writing, it told a tale of transformation and a young woman's quest for a place to belong. The work used metaphors of Carnival (from my home country of Brazil) and highly »staged« illustrative treatments to communicate the sense of disconnection and ambivalence one may experience as an immigrant. © T. Tavares, 2011

cal reasoning, relates also to forms of connection, to in-betweens and to translation. The agent has the ability to question the nature of purpose, intention and guidance. In particular, I felt that as a *Cultural Space agent*, I was providing a clear sense of communication, direction and autonomy. I wasn't directly teaching in the communication design programme, so my main role was to create connections and dialogues between two institutional frameworks (AUT and HyperWerk), as well as to participate in initial discussions concerning the conception of the brief and some points of student development.

First, the collaboration between AUT and HyperWerk grew out of conversations with Catherine Walthard during the *Points of View* workshop (2016) at ANU

University in Canberra, one of three International workshops of *Cultural Spaces and Design* which took place in different countries. Returning home, Catherine (in Switzerland) and I (in New Zealand) initiated the *Water* project, setting out the intentions and opportunities for collaboration between our institutions. At the beginning, it was fundamental to recognise the opportunities offered by *Cultural Spaces* as a platform for discussions and networking, and to align the aims of the project to the context of water in its local specificity. It was important to keep in mind the educational purpose of the project and the relevance of the workshop for communication design students. For this, I worked closely with the AUT lecturers Natalie Robertson, Simon Clark and Maxi Quy. They were essential contributors to the project, involved in constructing and delivering the brief; interpreting discussions; teaching the content; and actively working with the students towards their final submissions. I was also the editor for the final publication showcasing the students' work, which gave me a richer sense of involvement in the project as a creative practitioner.

THE WAI (WATER) CONTEXT

The saying »*Ko Wai Ko Au Ko Au Ko Wai* – I am water, water is me« is a *Te Reo Māori* (Māori Language) expression frequently used to suggest the strong Māori relationship with *Kaupapa Moana* (Ocean), *Kaupapa Wai Māori* (Fresh Water) and *Kaupapa Awa* (Rivers). Natalie Robertson – one of the lecturers in this project who is Māori descendent – argues that this principle began with the Whanganui River Māori and was »widely used to affirm indigenous connections with their own particular waterways«. (Robertson 2017) As the project started, the concept of Wai (water) was not only highly relevant, it also encouraged discussions about other issues that were not immediately connected with water. In addition, it provided debates about familiar sites on our doorstep, including our own campus and nearby locations that are common ground for most Aucklanders and students. Robertson (ibid.) notes that: »*AUT University is built on land gifted to the City of Auckland¹, by the local tribe, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, in the 1840s. An underground stream gives our University marae (pan-tribal Māori meetinghouse) its name, Ngā Wai o Horotiu (the waters of Horotiu).*« The first case study was a field trip to Ōkahu Bay, a well-known and frequently visited location about 15 minutes from the busiest area of Auckland.

We began the coursework with a field trip to nearby Ōkahu Bay, the home of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, to explore the history of the city and its waterways from the perspective of those who gifted the land. This has been a fraught history, with Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei becoming almost landless through colonisation. From 1914, sewerage was pumped into the bay, that had once provided food for the people, and the village was refused connection to the city's fresh water supply. In the 1950s, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei were removed from their land at Ōkahu Bay. Since the 1980s, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei have steadfastly turned around their situation, through their powerful struggle for sovereignty. Ōkahu Bay Restoration scheme was the case study that all

students began with. Connecting the gift of land with the gift of water, how we treat gifts, and host/guest relationships, conceptually underpinned the project. (Robertson, ibid.)

The relevance of the water issue to New Zealand became more evident throughout the course of the project. During the 12 weeks we collected more than 70 water headlines, indicating water-related issues occurring in different parts of New Zealand. Parallel to the semester, we faced floods across Auckland while some other cities and regions were beset by cyclones and water shortages.

BRIEF OUTLINE

It is very common to speak nationally and internationally about Aotearoa–New Zealand as an environmentally clean country. This reputation has been slowly but steadily eroded over recent years due to a number of ecological factors. Over the years, swimming has been banned from a number of Auckland beaches due to human and animal waste. Rivers have become too polluted for swimming (with »*wadeable rivers*« as the new national standard). Town water supplies have been contaminated. Dams are being proposed to assist in intensifying dairy farming, to the detriment of native flora and fauna. Aquifer rights have been sold to multinational companies, while drought took hold across several regions. All around our country, rural and urban areas face different yet connected water-related problems. None of these concerns are going away. Indeed, many are becoming more pressing and urgent.

A very famous marketing campaign for the official tourism travel website in New Zealand has as its main tagline »*100% Pure New Zealand*«. This campaign is not only a false claim directed at promoting an appealing image of New Zealand to foreign visitors, it is also a dangerous form of communication – in one of the videos, a woman appears to be drinking water from a river until the video cuts just before the water reaches her mouth. This campaign highlights not just controversial ideas concerning the state of the New Zealand environment, but also the ethical responsibility of visual communicators to draw attention to legitimate information that brings awareness and promotes social change. With this in mind, we proposed the following design provocation to students: »*100% Pure? Has New Zealand (Aotearoa) trashed its ocean, sea, fresh water, lakes and rivers and ruined its reputation as »clean and green«?*« Students were required to interpret this provocation and develop an experimental and exploratory project to consider water in their local areas, through field trips, readings and group discussions. Field trips encouraged students to dig deeper below the surface, walking, contemplating, talking to local people and exploring historical perspectives in different locations. Addressing the political, geographic, socio-cultural, environmental, and ecological issues of water in these locations, students developed conceptual and visual approaches to their selected areas of interest. They were required to propose strategies, provocations, problems, and solutions that consider water in both literal and metaphorical ways.



Figure 2. Final publication »Ko Wai Ko Au Ko Au Ko Wai – I am Water, Water is me« with a collection of work from year 3 communication design students from AUT University. Photograph by T.Tavares, 2011

The *kaupapa* (purpose) of the project was to develop a practically-oriented research project that addressed the provocation through communication design artefacts and an accompanying written document explaining the contextual background to the work. Students could use a range of media, including photography, illustration, graphic design, video, and the crossovers between these disciplines. Communication strategies required the work to be suitable for an international audience (multilingual and multicultural) and to consider forms of display.

The project was developed over a course of 12 weeks and consisted of four 3-week project phases to discover, visualise, develop, and deliver:

Stage 1 (discover): The first 3-week block constituted an intensive research and visual development phase. It was intended to nurture skills in research, fieldwork, camera work, drawing, and map-making while on location.

Stage 2 (visualise): The second 3-week block was dedicated to visualising the material gathered; to considering metaphorical approaches; and to selecting a way forward in the development of a project. Students evaluated their research and started to determine a preferred personal direction.

Stage 3 (develop): In the third 3-week block, students continued to develop a specific project and visual strategy based on one selected idea/location/site/issue. At this stage, students were able to develop a more metaphorical approach to the information they had gathered. This phase was marked by an intensive making period.

Stage 4 (deliver): In the last 3 weeks, students were required to refine, synthesise and deliver the outcomes. They were required to work more thoughtfully towards a final goal of creating a communication strategy for an international audience.

At the end of the project, students Jessica Tweed and Cameron Roby-Mais were selected to participate in the colloquium *Globalisation is a Design Issue* and present their final projects at the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, Switzerland in 2017. Alongside their work, a selection of other students' finished artefacts was transported to and exhibited at the location. A publication with all the students' work was designed containing a collection of statements, thoughts, process work and imagery from each student. (Figure 2)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

In their final statements, students related their experiences and strategies during the project. The following are a selection of five students and their statements, that were written as the final submission for the publication *Ko Wai Ko Au Ko Au Ko Wai – I am Water, Water is me*:

CAMERON ROBY-MAIS: DAIRY FARMING

»Cows may not be the first thing that come to mind when talking about water. However, after researching the state of New Zealand waterways, the culprit wasn't hard to spot. New Zealand culture is heavily based around farming. There is a sense that our love for farming is somehow in conjunction with our clean, green image. As this project grew and the information started to reveal the truth behind the agriculture industry, it became clear what needs to happen to heal New Zealand.

I started this project researching water outlets, where freshwater rivers meet the sea. I couldn't understand why these secluded waterways, far from human contamination, were becoming more and more polluted. From ground level it's hard to see the entirety of the issue. However, after using Google Earth it became obvious that the huge amounts of livestock bordering the rivers were creating too much waste for the ecosystem to process. When it rains, this waste matter gets washed into the river, inevitably destroying all life that calls the river home.«

Cameron Roby-Mais is a recent graduate of AUT's communication design program. He has spent the last year working in New York as a creative director and has now returned to New Zealand upon opening a creative studio, *Lude Factory*.

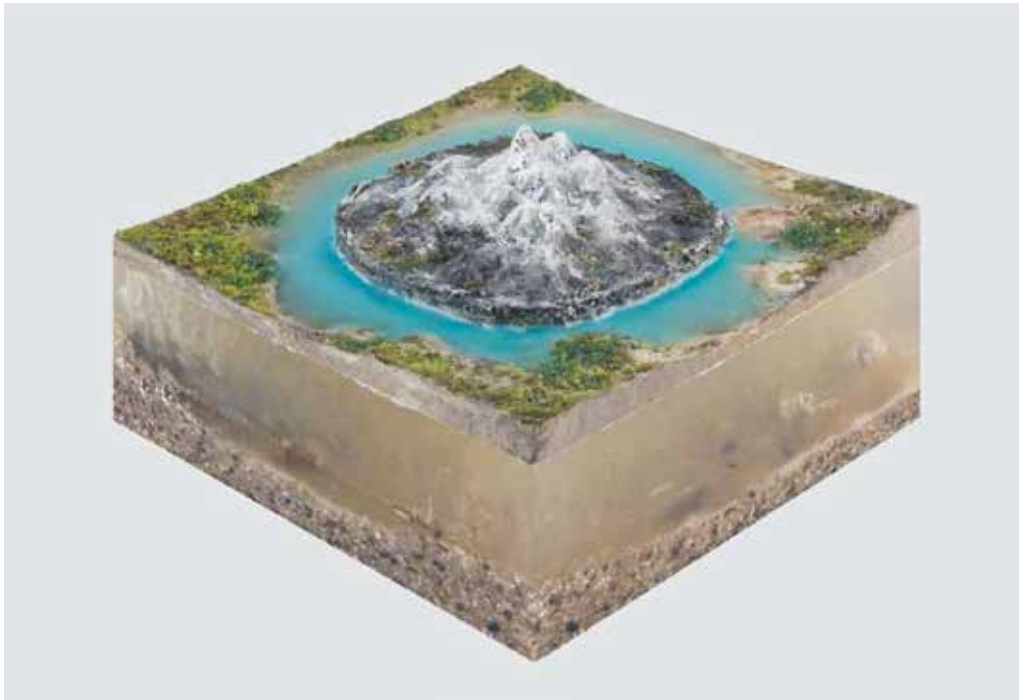


Cameron Roby-Mais. Series of outcomes containing a propaganda poster series, a short film, and an interactive website with additional facts to help enlighten viewers and spread the word of change. © C. Roby-Mais, 2017

TERRIE SHUM: WAIRAU CREEK (MILFORD) – GEOLOGICAL DEGRADATION

»In the investigation taken at one of the polluted Auckland rivers, Wairau Creek in Milford, I found myself particularly interested in studying the conventional texture around the river – the mud, soil, polluted water, and sediment around the site. Most of the works I made are based on making three-dimensional sculptures from studying the textural photographs I took on site, thus they are able to reflect how the river has been affected by urban development in the past. This provides the viewers a direct close-up of the current state of New Zealand river quality, as opposed to their expectation of clean, green New Zealand.«

Terrie Shum is a communication design graduate of Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. As a digital designer, she specialises in graphic design, illustration and concept design, and has an interest in exploring themes in relation to humans, nature, and futurism. More of her digital illustrative artworks can be seen at this website: www.artstation.com/artist/sckiu



Terrie Shum. This sculpture follows the concept of an »edible scenery cake«. The snow-capped mountain in the centre surrounded by crystal-clear water is an iconic representation of New Zealand scenery. However, the bottom is filled with muddy yellowish water and a lot of rubbish which immediately taints its natural beauty – this is the reality of »100% Pure New Zealand«. Different modelling techniques were used in the making of this sculpture – FDM printing, resin casting with found objects, and realistic scenery painting. © T.Shum, 2017



Hope McConnell. Series of illustrations using silk screen print over layered translucent perspex panels. The illustrations were part of the documentation of a number of polluted sites, including Meola Reef, McLaren Falls and Lake Rotoiti. © H. McConnell, 2017

HOPE MCCONNELL: UNENLIGHTENED YOUTH

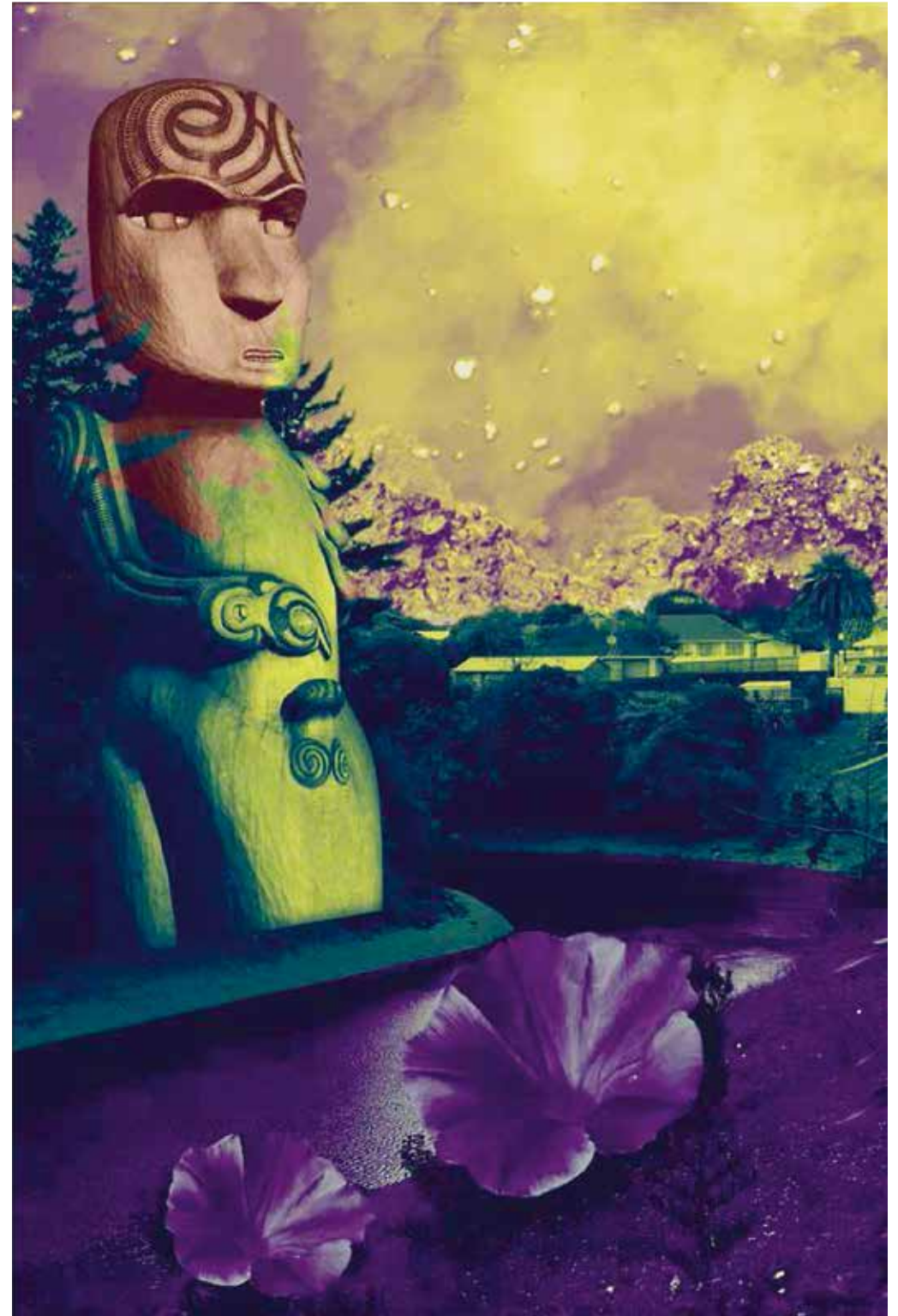
»I have decided to create a series of four illustrated works, depicting environments around New Zealand being used recreationally by youths. The areas I illustrate are sites where the water is contaminated, beginning with a site that is not severely polluted, and then consecutively depicting sites that are more polluted than the last. Activity and leisure are common at all of the sites I will illustrate, specifically among the 10-25 age bracket. I will use several layers of illustrations on perspex, to convey the depth of water pollution as an issue around New Zealand. As the environments I depict get progressively more polluted, I will use increasing layers of pollutant imagery in my illustrations. This will serve as a visual metaphor to show the scale of contaminated environments in New Zealand. The only area of the layers underneath that is not obscured will be the water where you can see straight through to the perspex illustrations of pollution.«

Hope McConnell is a communication designer and illustrator from Tauranga, New Zealand. In 2017, she graduated with a BFA in Communication Design from AUT. She is currently available for freelance projects or part-time work.

www.hopemcconnell.com/about



Kauri Finlay. A series of illustrations using childhood photographs as reference. Her illustrations are sentimental in that they evoke a sense of nostalgia, but they also provide contrast and alertness in their use of colour. © K. Finlay, 2017



Libby Carpenter. Collection of images taken at Oruarangi stream with pink residue, including one photo-montage illustration from the »carousel book«. © L. Carpenter, 2017

KAURI FINLAY: NOSTALGIC TOXIC YELLOW

»Through my project, I wanted to shine light on this lack of awareness and ignorance of people, and, in this case, of New Zealanders specifically. I figured that in order to create a change in the mindset of people, awareness must first be raised. The approach I have chosen to use comes in the form of an illustrative series of work. I have illustrated, using graphite, people interacting with water. However, the water is a toxic yellow colour created using modelling paste and acrylic paint. The toxic yellow represents the pollution in New Zealand waterways. The people appear completely oblivious to the toxic state of the water they are interacting with. I have also used old photographs of New Zealanders interacting with waterways that are now too polluted to swim in. This adds a nostalgic element to my work, which I hope will evoke an emotional response from the viewer. The series includes five A2-sized illustrations, which means five different polluted New Zealand locations.«

Kauri Finlay is studying at Auckland University of Technology and undertaking her Master of Design in communication design. Her work explores various illustration techniques, and she is currently in the process of creating a graphic novel. For a closer look at her work, check out her portfolio: www.kaurifinlay.wixsite.com/myportfolio

LIBBY CARPENTER – ORUARANGI STREAM

»My project began to be developed and refined when I involved the research I was doing alongside it. I learned of an event in West Auckland in 2013: a waterway called Oruarangi stream had its banks and waters coloured purple after thousands of litres of dye was spilt into it, killing creatures and staining its reputation. In the 1900s children grew up around this water and would fish there all the time.

In visiting this site, I initially observed that there was, in fact, little life left. After climbing along the muddy bank, however, I experienced a serendipitous moment of discovering purple morning glory. The only colour and life in the whole area just so happened to be the same colour as the dye spilt. Naturally, I then highlighted and celebrated this through my work.

From here, my research developed further still, as did my work. I became interested in learning more about New Zealand's Māori culture, reading the stories and myths. The overnight occurrence of a purple stream is such a spontaneous event that I was inspired to look at creating a story. In the end, my project is a short story, a morality tale, about this event and our water issues. It takes the form of a small book, created using a ›carousel book‹, layered technique.«

Elizabeth (Libby) Carpenter is a communication design graduate of the Auckland University of Technology. Her work has a focus on publication and collage and has been shown in group exhibitions in New Zealand and Switzerland. She is currently a graphic designer in Tauranga, New Zealand.

CONCLUSION

The range of projects created by the students branched out to include a number of different creative explorations with materials, visual languages, techniques, media forms, and research approaches. Their initial investigations were based on a broad and universal understanding of water and were not yet applied in a deeper and more localised way. The process of visiting different locations gradually brought students to a deeper perception of their surroundings, their neighbourhoods, and the hidden creeks behind their houses. Students also travelled around 32 locations in New Zealand, exploring specific polluted sites; concepts of water as a life-giving resource; intensive agricultural impacts; and restoration projects. The topic of cultural spaces and water provided opportunities for discussing the local problems that occur in different locations in New Zealand, while creating an interesting dialogue between the local and the global and their relationships. The issue of water is emergent, decisive, and deeply important in the cultural space of New Zealand. The final statements from students are deeply revealing and life-changing. This project has not only changed students' perception of the state of waterways in New Zealand – it has also profoundly transformed their understanding of their own ethical responsibility as visual communicators.

NOTE

1. Auckland is the largest urban concentration of Pacific Islanders from Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands and Fiji. There is a very strong culture of Māori people and the Pakeha (as Māori call non-Māori New Zealanders of European origin). More recently, the influence of Asian cultures is quite predominant.

REFERENCES

- Davidson D. (1980). *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Robertson N. (2017). *Ko Wai Ko Au Ko Au Ko Wai – I am water, water is me*. In: T. Tavares (ed.) *Ko Wai Ko Au Ko Au Ko Wai: I am water, water is me. Kaupapa moana, Kaupapa wai Māori, Kaupapa awa: Ocean, fresh water, and rivers*. Auckland, New Zealand: Blurb press.