

Clouded vision: Reframing multi-marginal landscapes through a lens-based practice.

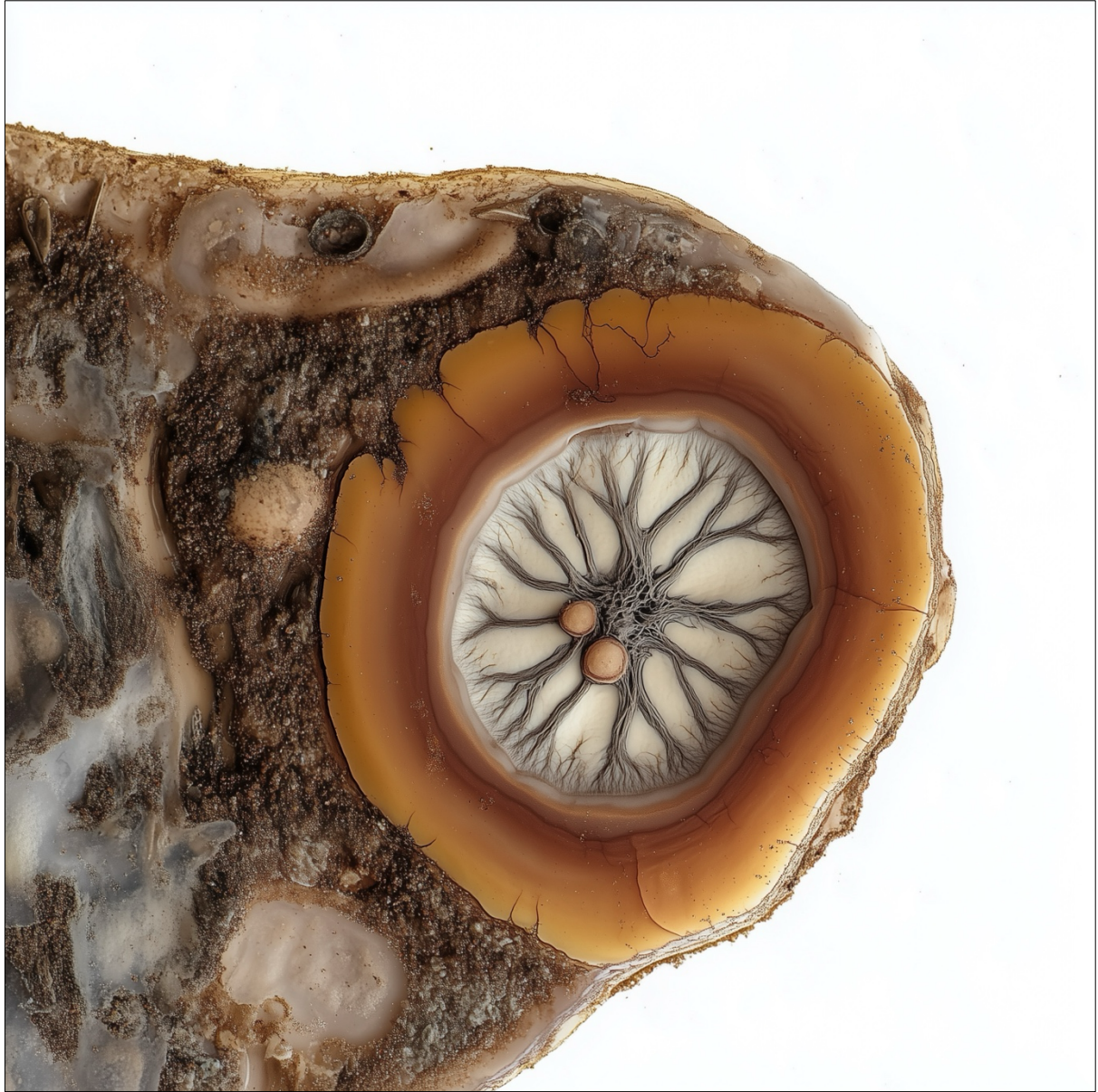


Figure 1 Hallucination of Topsoil #2. (B.Nunes 2025)

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Attestation of Authorship.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Staffordshire for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, based upon Published Work. I hereby state that this submission is my own work, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material which to a substantial extent has been or is being submitted in respect of another research degree at this or any other University.

During the preparation of this manuscript, I used Grammarly for editing assistance to check spelling, and to improve grammar and readability. I used Midjourney Generative A.I to co-create the 'hallucinated' works in *1000 Years Per Inch* as stated in the body of the text. Here A.I is used critically as a creative method. I reviewed and revised all outputs from these tools and take full responsibility for the final content of the work.

Rebecca Clare Nunes

June 22nd 2026

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Abstract.

This practice-based doctoral submission presents a decade of lens-based inquiry into the visual representation of multi-marginal landscapes, examined through the interrelated conceptual frameworks of “‘hin places’, partial opacity, and more-than-human relationality. The portfolio of published works spans five bodies of practice — *Maunga* (2014–2017), *Tongariro Power* (2015–2017), *An Age of Iron* (2017–2020), *Clouded Vision* (2024-5), and *1000 Years Per Inch* (2024–2025) — and moves between the colonised and contested landscapes of Aotearoa New Zealand and the post-industrial multi-marginal landscapes of the English Midlands and Northwest.

The research is driven by two interrelated questions: how can a lens-based practitioner represent colonised, and exhausted landscapes without reinscribing extractive practices upon them; and how can lens-based practice reposition marginal landscapes as protagonists rather than backdrops or resources.

The thesis argues that prevailing documentary conventions of landscape photography — characterised by the fixed viewpoint, optical clarity, and the dispassionate aesthetic of large-format practice — reproduce the anthropocentric and colonising logics they may nominally oppose, rendering landscapes as image-resources available for contemplation and consumption. In response, the research develops an alternative methodology grounded in three interconnected propositions.

The first is the theorisation and practice of partial opacity as a constitutive ethics of lens-based image-making. Drawing on Édouard Glissant’s concept of the right to opacity — understood, following Drabinski, as an anticolonial resistance to modes of knowing that seek to absorb, possess, or render the Other fully legible — the research advances opacity not as an aesthetic preference but as a structural condition of ethical relations. This proposition is extended beyond the human subject to encompass more-than-human protagonists and is enacted through a set of disruptive production and post-production methods: speculative fieldworking; and the strategies of selection, occlusion, appropriation, and re-assemblage that together produce what the research terms ‘the enigmatic image’.

The second proposition concerns the theorisation of fieldwork as a relational-ethical practice rather than a neutral method of visual data gathering. Drawing on situated feminist epistemology, the kaupapa Māori protocols developed through sustained engagement with Ngāti Rangi, and Polly Stanton’s conception of fieldworking as a process of *making-with*, the research positions the practitioner’s embodied, porous,

and situated arrival at a site as a pre-productive ethical orientation. The practitioner is understood as a participant in a more-than-human encounter rather than a surveyor of it.

The third proposition advances the productive interval — drawn from Trinh T. Minh-Ha's critique of naturalism in documentary practice and Lyotard's theorisation of the fissure between *discours* and *figure* — as the site at which relational ethics and aesthetic innovation converge. Post-production strategies are reoriented away from their conventional function of resolving and polishing the image, and toward the generation of disruptive, affective, and partially opaque image-forms that act upon the viewer at the level of the unconscious, resisting assimilation into the extractive visual regimes of contemporary landscape photography.

A significant strand of the research reflects critically on the particular obligations and risks of working as a tau iwi, or non-Māori, practitioner within the post-colonial context of Aotearoa. The thesis demonstrates how an ethic of care developed through engagement with Indigenous cosmologies, kaupapa Māori research protocols, and the counsel of Ngāti Rangi knowledge-holders can be carried forward, with appropriate reflexivity, into subsequent practice in the landscapes of England. The most recent work, which introduces chromatography — a pseudo-scientific process of soil portraiture — and a critically interrogated collaboration with generative artificial intelligence, extends the research's ethical and methodological concerns into the ecological and technological conditions of the present moment.

Taken together, the portfolio and accompanying critical writing propose a photographic practice that operates as a form of planetary alliance. Through the integration of speculative fieldworking, surrealist-inflected post-production, and an ethics of partial opacity, this research advances new methodological and conceptual pathways for engaging with thin places in lens-based practice. The clouded vision articulated across the submission does not seek clarity or resolution; it affirms affect, uncertainty, and more-than-human relationality as the conditions through which responsible and responsive visual knowledge can emerge.

Keywords

Thin place, multi-marginal landscape, lens-based practice, partial opacity, relational ethics, more-than-human, post-documentary, speculative fieldworking, enigmatic image, speculative fabulation, posthuman feminism, new materialism, postcolonial practice, tau iwi, decolonising methodologies, Aotearoa New Zealand, Capitalocene, chromatography, planetary alliance, appropriation.

Introduction.

0.1 Scope of this thesis.

“Everything dreams. The play of form, of being, is the dreaming of substance. Rocks have their dreams, and the world changes...”

Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Lathe of Heaven*

0.1.1 Time travel in relation to this thesis: a sort of disclaimer.

The works comprising the portfolio in this submission are selected from a decade of creative practice. The selected works chart a development of research, methods and creative outputs from the contexts of both Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter referred to as Aotearoa) and the United Kingdom (U.K.). I was born in the Midlands of the U.K. and work as an artist and educator, weaving together the strands of my own lens-based practice with teaching, curriculum development and pedagogy in Aotearoa and, after the significant geographical and cultural shift back to the United Kingdom, now find myself once more in the Midlands.

The writing that underpins my portfolio submission traverses both contexts, though most of the work shown, and the time spent researching and producing it, took place in Aotearoa. Both in practice and in the critical reflection undertaken to contextualise it, a tidal act of flowing between hemispheres, between worldviews and through thin places, has been occasioned. This seems appropriate, as so much of what I have worked with circulates around the connecting flow of two (or more) positions. I see this reciprocal flow as closely aligned with Neimanis’ porous posthuman feminist body¹.

I acknowledge the difficulties presented by writing, “in the now,” a defence of work made in the past. I have attempted to remain authentic to the processes and thinking that occurred, in some cases up to and exceeding 10 years ago. However, it has also been very important to bring a contemporary critical reflection to bear on some stages of that process. At times, things seem neater and more coherent now than when I was embroiled in their making. I have also arrived at realisations and discovered important thinkers, writers, and artists long after a specific work to which they are highly relevant was created. Also, it is relevant, I think, to note that while much of the critical thinking

¹ Neimanis argues for the specifics of a situated, located and porous body, *an embodied materiality, inflected with an affective and political subjectivity*. (Neimanis, 2017) This posthuman feminist body, particular to my own ongoing process of relations, is the body that has carried me through the making of the work in this submission.

that underpins my practice, particularly in relation to new materialism and other-than Western cosmologies, is now much more “mainstream”, in 2014 it was not so.

There is an MFA-shaped hole in this piece of writing; undertaking my MFA study in Tamaki in 2013-14 was a critical time for the development of my research and practice. I have tried to carefully sidestep this to avoid including that work, as per the regulations for this submission. Therefore, it has seemed doubly important to draw on earlier aspects of my developing practice as a critical context for this narrative.

Finally, the regulations for this submission require a relative brevity in the written portion. I have expanded on important theories and ideas where possible, using footnotes. The way I have used them owes a lot to Max Liboroin’s book *Pollution is Colonialism*. Liboroin describes the use of extensive footnotes in their text as “enacting an ethic of gratitude, acknowledgement, and reciprocity for their work” (Liboroin, 2021). The interruptions of the footnotes are a reminder of these world-building relations and it is in this sense that I use them, acknowledging those on whose shoulders I stand.

The totality of a decade of iterative learning and practice does not fit neatly into 10,000 words, and so I have aimed to focus on the key aspects relevant to each work included in the submission. Similarly, the full-stop at the end of the document does not indicate such a neat cessation in real life. My learning and practice continue. (Appendix 9).

0.2 Thin places and an ethic of relations.

This portfolio and accompanying writing detail an ongoing investigation into the visual representation of multi-marginal² landscapes (Cocker, E. in Deriu, Kamvasinou, Shinkle. 2014). The sites that I aim to recentre and listen to in my research could all be said, in these terms, to be multi-marginalised, through the impacts of colonization, industrialization, agriculture, and human activities, as well as through their geographical and cultural positioning on the margins of daily life. In addition, each of the sites that are portrayed in these works are also what I would describe as “thin places”³. Thin places are physical manifestations of coexisting polyvocal narratives, belief systems, and epistemologies held in tension.⁴ Thin places have also been posited as “A curatorial proposition where artworks operated as gateways or portals between bodies of knowledge.” (Healy-Musson & Feola 2019). I suggest that the works discussed in this thesis operate similarly, as concentric or overlapping openings into contested physical

² Emma Cocker describes the “multi-marginal” terrain of Barrow -in-Furness as a site held in multiple tensions; its industrial past shaping its current exhausted state, an in-between space held between sea and the more mountainous lands of the more picturesque Lake District, between the urban and the truly rural. (Cocker, E. in Deriu, Kamvasinou, Shinkle. 2014)

³ From Celtic folklore, these are spaces where the veil is thinnest between worlds.

⁴ Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose address this “mobility and equivocality” in their book *Deterritorialisations. Revisioning landscapes and politics*.

and conceptual territories. In this sense, thin places are both the protagonists⁵ of my work and the central access points for disseminating their communications. My primary response to these sites has been as portals, liminal spaces & places of deep time. These sites are accessed through processes of fieldworking⁶, which utilise situated feminist walking practices and consultation with indigenous knowledge-holders, as well as interventions into archival materials.

In this thesis, I detail the developing ethical, aesthetic and conceptual positions that emerge through the portfolio of selected works. I detail these positions in relation to the contexts of the landscapes I aim to be *in-relation-with*.⁷ The portfolio and narrative together propose, through iterative generation, development, and reflection, the repositioning of marginal landscapes as central protagonists in lens-based representation. Each artwork iteration included in the portfolio argues for a revision (re-vision) of established hierarchies of subjecthood in relation to the lens. Drawing on an ethical entanglement of epistemologies, the portfolio of artworks resituates more-than-human⁸ earthly elements as planetary relations and, through the impact of the visual outputs, exhorts us to act in alliance with them.

Fieldwork in contested and traumatised landscapes is problematic terrain for a Pākehā⁹ practitioner; indigenous and post-colonial scholars have articulated that any work made

⁵I have characterised my practice as being “lens-based”. This offers an expanded context for the constellation of still images, moving image, audio, text that come together in varying proportions throughout this portfolio. As a support for this expanded field of practice, I have used key terms that might be more often used in relation to the critical theory surrounding film or literature. Miriam Webster states that the protagonist is understood to be the central character in literature, film or television, but crucially can also be understood as an active participant in an event, (Webster, 2025) and it is this understanding that I take forward into this thesis.

⁶I utilise the term as a verb in reference to Polly Stanton’s use of the term; she uses it to state that fieldworking is always a active process of “making with”. (Stanton. 2022)

⁷This is a phrase I have often heard used by Dr. Tyson Yunkaporta in his podcasts and videos. Yunkaporta names himself as an Indigenous skolar (Apalech clan (Wik) Lostmob Nungar) working with Indigenous Systems Knowledge and collective Indigenous inquiry methods inflected with complexity science to resolve global existential threats and issues in regenerative design responses to crises. Although I cannot find a singular definition for this term, I here am using it to mean a responsible awareness and interconnection with other human and more-than-human citizens. I feel there is a strong connection in underlying meaning with Glissant’s use of the term Relation, which is an important foundational concept for my practice.

⁸Although there are several post-humanist terms which refer to a decentering of the anthropocentric or human-centred vision of our world, throughout this text I use the term more-than-human (Whatmore 2006) to indicate our planetary relationships, both internal and external, to reference Haraway’s troubled entanglements and Astraeda Neimanis’ descriptions of unbounded and permeable bodies, and to indicate respect for the ineffable mystery of the cosmos.

⁹Pākehā: (noun) New Zealander of European descent - probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. According to Mohi Tūrei, an acknowledged expert in Ngāti Porou tribal lore, the term is a shortened form of pakepakehā, which was a Māori rendition of a word or words remembered from a chant used in a very early visit by foreign sailors for raising their anchor (TP 1/1911:5). Others claim that pakepakehā was another name for tūrehu or patupairehe. Despite the claims of some non-Māori speakers, the term does not normally have negative connotations.

in these places must acknowledge that traumatic history of colonisation or risk, inadvertently or otherwise, reinscribing it, through telling stories that are not theirs to tell. (Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988; T. Minh-ha, 1989; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012.) The works made in Aotearoa chart my ongoing critical reflection on my positionality as a non-indigenous artist. Returning to the U.K. required a further re-visioning of ethics in relation to earthly materials as subject, and the work made in England has been informed by the ethic of care developed in the context of Aotearoa. My research questions emerged through grappling with these issues in relation to the sites I wanted to engage with:

- How can a practitioner utilise lens-based practice to represent contested, colonised and exhausted landscapes, without reinscribing extractive practices upon them?
- How can a lens-based practice reposition marginal landscapes as protagonists?

0.3. Overview of methods

The framework of research methods and processes I have drawn together enabled me to visually reframe a series of multi-marginal landscapes - thin places - as the main character in their own narratives. The works do not deny human presence; rather, they often emphasise the impact of extraction and commodification on these sites. However, the intention has been to displace the human as the central character in these images, and to create the conditions for more-than-human narratives to be centralised. I argue that this re-centring could not emerge through dominant conventions of contemporary landscape photography. Instead, it required specific processes of production and post-production that worked in many ways directly against the cool, dispassionate aesthetics of these conceptual documentary lens-based practices. I list these processes below and return to them in greater depth in the body of the thesis, where specific works from the portfolio are drawn on as reference for each iteration.

0.3.1. Production

The production method central to my practice and utilised at the outset of each of the portfolio works, is speculative fieldwork. I use this term in the sense employed by Bridget Crone as she describes her immersive fieldwork with a camera. Crone describes speculative fieldworking as relational, where an artist both enters into and is entered by their research, the terrain of their inquiry. (Crone, 2022.) I expand on fieldworking and walking as key research tools in Chapter 3.

0.3.2. Post-production.

A key innovation in my research is the disruptive use of post-production methods as destabilising tools in the encounter with the work. Where post-production methods would primarily be considered as tools for the resolution of artworks¹⁰, I utilise disruptive and non-naturalistic post-production methods of selection, occlusion, appropriation, and re-assemblage to create what I term enigmatic¹¹ images.

These tools (Figure 2) are used in varying combinations in each of the works referenced in the thesis. In this sense, the methods described are ingredients in a recipe, where each is used in varying amounts to achieve a range of outcomes. I expand on them in detail in Chapter 2.

Fieldworking	A situated, embodied practice of walking with a camera.
Selection	Not an extractive process, but an enigmatic one.
Occlusion	Working against the violence of total visibility ¹²
Appropriation	As an act of resistance or subversion
Re-assemblage	Layering, combining, re-framing

Figure 2 Table of processes

The expanded definitions in the table above are my own. Throughout the thesis where I discuss the individual portfolio works, I shall insert this table, and place emphasis on the innovation I am discussing in relation to that work.

0.4 Notes on the structure of the thesis.

It is not possible to adequately contextualise this portfolio of works without taking something of a detour back in the timeline of my practice. This has necessitated the weaving in of some autobiographical details alongside the development of philosophical positions and research methods that are key to the projects. In doing so, I draw on a

¹⁰ Here I am drawing on my lived experience of commercial photography and design work, where digital post-production tools are utilised to hide the means of production, to add a visual sheen to a person or object, and to neatly “package” a consumable narrative into an image through careful selection of semiotic markers. Édouard Glissant has described these cultural messages as “flash agents”, concealing the violence of globalisation and colonialism beneath the spectacle. (Glissant, in Davis, 2019)

¹¹ David Bate describes three categories of Surrealist image; the mimetic, photographic and the enigmatic. As Bate describes it, the enigmatic image utilises optical conventions to “disrupt the conventional photographic signifier” and it is this ability to disrupt, to “interrupt within the relational discourse of precisely what can be signified” that I claim to be operating within these works. (Bate, 2004)

¹² Throughout the thesis and central to it is woven Glissant’s notion of opacity, and his Poetics of relation. H. Adlai Murdoch describes opacity as “an epistemologically-grounded world vision that allows each subject the right to his or her own unknowability.” (Murdoch, in David. 2019) And I extend this definition to the other-than-human subject.

situated feminist standpoint,¹³ in which my relational and located lived experience forms the bedrock of positionality and authenticity from which I feel able to operate.

0.5 The chapters.

Chapter 1 grounds the work in this embodied context and highlights three important seams that run throughout the thesis.

- I. The overarching geopolitical context of Aotearoa in relation to communities and art production from the 1990's to 2000's.
- II. The dominant discourses of photographic representation of the land in Aotearoa during that time, and some resistant voices.
- III. My position as tau iwi,¹⁴ and my developing understanding of this position in relation to obligations to decolonise my thoughts and practice. I detail the shifting nature of this position in relation to the body of work **Tongariro Power**, as demonstrated in my reflections on the complicated relationship of photography to visual politics and social justice. (Appendix 1)

Chapter 2 asks the question: Why a lens-based approach? Throughout my practice, I have engaged with the entangled questions of faith, visual evidence and belief through a lens-based practice, where the tools of making are historically, scientifically and artistically

¹³Feminist standpoint theory as an epistemological proposition emerged in the 70s and 80s and was deeply informed by Marxist and psychoanalytic thinking. Three main subsequent critiques of this theory emerged: One was aimed at its inherent essentialism – the effects of patriarchal oppression only as experienced by white middle class females. The second was a tendency to exclude; an inability to recognise feminist men, those who embody differing forms of masculinity and those for whom gender is a more fluid state. Finally, feminist standpoint theory opened itself to marginalisation through the articulation of a skewed sense of political correctness based on “women’s’ ways of knowing”. These failings, and other “fragmentations” of feminist thinking have only served to underline Donna Haraway’s assertion that “there is nothing about being “female” that naturally binds women.” (Haraway 16) However, subsequently a more nuanced and layered understanding of feminist standpoint theory has emerged that stems from a critical interrogation of the standpoint from which we act. Wylie states that a standpoint is a “critical consciousness about the nature of our social location and the difference it makes epistemically” (Wylie, 2003, in Intemann, 2010) This critical consciousness enables an awareness of socio-political injustice and prejudice. The empirical or embodied knowledge of these imbalances, when utilised in an art context, calls for a kind of activism, an “understanding and revising (of) our epistemic practices so as to identify, understand and ultimately abolish the ways in which systems of oppression limit knowledge production” (Intemann, 2010)

¹⁴ Tau-iwi:

1. (personal noun) foreigner, European, non-Māori, settler.
2. (noun) person coming from afar.
3. (noun) Gentile, heathen - Māori Bible translations for someone who was not a Jew.
4. (noun) outsider.
5. (noun) alien, stranger, foreigner, non-Māori.

In recent years the phrase Tangata Tiriti has become relatively widespread. This phrase encompasses non-Māori who are expressly taking up positions as allies with Māori and who consider Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the binding constitutional document of Aotearoa. This is arguably a more affirmative phrase, and one that allows for more than a settler-indigene binary. However, the phrase “tau-iwi” seems more appropriate here, as I am not ‘settled’ in Aotearoa and therefore cannot take up a relationship with Te Tiriti as my own foundational document.

imbricated. I propose that these overlaps also occur in the psychogeography of the sites I represent visually; that the layered nature of these “thin places” both overlap and occlude each other in the works.

This chapter highlights the following innovations in my work: I understand occlusion and opacity in relation to Glissant’s notion of protective gestures towards the visual subject, (Glissant, E. 1996) and these processes are a central aspect of ethical care in my practice. Eruptive disjunctures in the naturalism of observational photographic practice, informed by Trinh. T. Minh-Ha’s notion of the *interval*, (Minh-Ha, Trinh T. 1990) operate as critical breaks in the flow of documentary sense-making. This is further developed as the visual method that creates direct connections with the collective subconscious, building on Lyotard’s fissure between *discours* and *figure*. In this chapter, I specifically discuss these ideas in relation to the series of works that coalesced as *Maunga*.

Chapter 3. This chapter considers the land itself as the central figure in each body of work and as the nexus of my research and visual outputs. I am an artist who works with earthly materials and marginal landscapes in colonised and commodified sites. The resonances and tensions where vibrant materialism, posthuman feminist thinking and indigenous knowledge rub up against each other are fundamental to the development of my work. In this chapter, I discuss Jane Bennett’s enchanted phenomenology¹⁵ in relation to the affect of my work. Braidotti’s posthuman feminism (Braidotti, 2016) is central. I have discussed these aspects here in relation to the still and moving image works that constitute *An Age of Iron*. (Figure 3)



Figure 3 Screenshot from *An Age of Iron*. (B. Nunes 2020)

¹⁵ Bennett describes the affect of enchantment as twofold; “(1) a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and (2) a more unheimlich or uncanny feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one’s default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition.” This affect, named by Bennett in 2001, aligns for me with Bate’s analysis of surrealist affect, and describes with after-the-fact accuracy the intention for the impact of my work.

Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I delineate the significance of speculative fabulation¹⁶ to the work. The open-ended, non-linear and speculative potential of science fiction (SF), as underlined by Haraway, offers centralising narrative possibilities for multi-marginal landscapes. To think about these flows of time, energy, and reciprocity, and their expression through works of speculative fabulation, I include published writing that reflects on my own and other artists' work in service of more-than-human citizenry in the essay **Clouded Vision** and finally turn to the works that comprise **1000 Years Per Inch**.

The fragmented narrative of past/present/future for Grizedale Forest was produced through the innovative production methods referenced in Fig. 2; and I focus in this chapter on:

- The production of enigmatic images through the production of chromatographs and an uneasy collaboration with A.I.
- The assemblage of non-linear and disjunctive images into speculative fiction form of the photobook

0.6. A note on translations.

Throughout this document, I have used te reo Māori, or the Māori language, to name places, things and concepts. Aotearoa is officially bilingual, and the learning and use of te reo is a central aspect of decolonising thought and action. For this reason, Māori words and phrases are not italicised. The richness and depth of layered meanings can only be partially conveyed through translation, but throughout, I have relied on the Māori online dictionary for this process. The translations are articulated via the footnotes.

0.7. Accessing the portfolio of works.

The works for examination have been presented on a [website](#) built to house them. The appendices can also be accessed via the website. In case there are any issues with viewing the website, or for closer viewing of any of the materials, all the material is also available in a GoogleDrive folder [here](#).

¹⁶ Donna Haraway here, as in many other aspects of my practice, has offered critical overarching thinking around “the poesis -the making- of speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism, soin de ficelle – so far.” (Haraway, 2019)

1. Positionality and representation: a tidal flow. (*Tongariro Power*)

1.1 Cultural hybridity: Tāmaki Makau Rau¹⁷ in the 1990's-2000's

In 2005 I was working as a commercial and editorial photographer, one of the first women in Aotearoa to successfully sustain a career in commercial photography, based in my studio in Tāmaki Makau Rau. An Anglo-American, with Jewish and Cornish ancestry, I had been living on the unceded tribal lands of Aotearoa for over 15 years. Much of central Tāmaki Makau Rau was, when I first arrived, a marginal urban space. Cheap rents, plentiful large and dilapidated warehouse spaces, and free higher education were the perfect conditions for a highly creative, hybrid mix of arts and entrepreneurship to flourish. Young Māori artists were named “Young Guns”,¹⁸ making global connections to the then-current crop of YBA artists in the U.K. The Young Guns epitomised “a willingness to probe contentious issues of biculturalism, prevalent in the 1990s, by way of humour, disjunction and provocation, and a detribalised position with a refusal to adhere to qualities associated with customary Māori art” (Hanfling, 2024). Cultural innovations flourished, and new events, art spaces and publications emerged to showcase them. *Planet* magazine was one such publication. (Figure 4). Designed from a loft on Tāmaki Makaurau’s Karangahape Road, all the content—from features to advertising—was created and printed locally, with a focus on homegrown culture: amplifying the voices of Māori and Pasifika, and combining elements of indigenous cultures with fashion, music, and design.



Figure 4 *Hero Parade/Emma Paki/Sony Advertisement for Planet Magazine* (B. Nunes 1990s)

In 2012, with two other women photographers, I founded Tangent Photography Collective. Emerging from our belief in the power of collective and resistant action,

¹⁷ (location) Auckland Isthmus, Auckland - sometimes written as Tāmaki-makau-rau or Tāmaki Makau Rau.

¹⁸ I first encountered this term recently, in Edward Hanfling’s very helpful text, and have quoted his reference for this term here. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, in Paul Bushnell, “Arts Week: Young Māori Artists,” Radio New Zealand Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, 30 September 1995.

grounded in research, practice and action, we determined to cut across some of what we perceived as patriarchal and establishment gatekeepers of our medium. It is important to note that some of the works in this submission emerged from this fertile environment, characterised by collective sharing and discussions. We offered emerging artists and each other constructive critique through review sessions, published volumes of photography, made documentaries, and curated group shows of work (Appendix 2.) that we considered more dynamic and polyvocal than much of what was offered through festivals and local art market offerings. (Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7)



Figure 5 Social media post: Manifesto. Tangent archive.

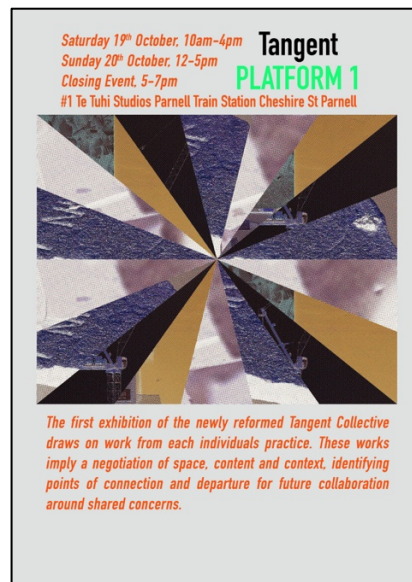


Figure 6 Social media post: Tangent archive



Figure 7 *GRTSTHRD* publication as part of Tangent *GRTSTHRD* group exhibition, Artstation Te Toi, Auckland, 2014. Photo B. Nunes

1.2. The context of landscape photography in Aotearoa during this era.

In the contemporary art discourse of Aotearoa in this period, photography was still something of a poor relation. Where photographs of landscapes were represented in the gallery or art market, the works could only be, in the main, ‘serious’ documentary projects. This meant practitioners (usually male) using large-format cameras, mounted on tripods, utilising infinite depth of field, clarity, and wide vistas. The detail of 10x8 negatives enabled large-scale prints to retain their optical detail, holding commanding space on a gallery wall. This emphasis on the fixed viewpoint, optical clarity, and an apparently neutral emotional register in relation to the photographic subject was continued in the work of Peter Evans, Tim Veling, Chris Corson-Scott, and others, all of whom embraced medium- and large-format processes, often working with analogue film. Often, the backstory of the lone male artist in the landscape with his camera harked back to figures such as Ansel Adams and the pioneering history of photography, further solidifying this somewhat patriarchal and modernist set of tropes.

I do not suggest that these images offered no challenge to the dominant settler histories and power structures. For example, in his significant long-form project, Mark Adams documents post-contact sites of significance across Aotearoa, critically referencing historical paintings that depicted the first impressions on Cook and his crew as they “discovered” this land. Chris Corson-Scott and Peter Evans record sites of post-industrial decay in the landscape, again through strategies of fixed-distance, large-format photography. Ian Walker terms this an “oblique form of social documentary” (Walker, I. 2019). These bodies of work are contextualised as asking questions about extraction, consumption and land use. I suggest that, though the intentions here are for settler-indigene-ecological alliances, these images have formed a digestible, marketable part of an ongoing flow of anthropocentric storytelling about place, where documentary tropes, or ‘traditions’ (Minh-Ha, 1990), simply serve to shore up a seeming continuum of the

story of a colonised land, and to position the landscapes depicted as backdrops in this flow of history. The gap this research identifies is not one of intent but of method: the formal conventions these practices share — optical resolution, the fixed viewpoint, the commanding gallery print — structurally reproduce an anthropocentric hierarchy of subject and backdrop, regardless of the critical ambitions of individual practitioners. My practice proposes a different set of methods precisely because a different ethics of looking requires a different visual language.

As an example of are the visual gaps, or blind spots, that my research identifies and interrogates, I refer to a recent exhibition of landscape photographs in Aotearoa. In 2022 an exhibition titled *Tēnei Ao Tūroa – This Enduring World* was staged at Te Pataka Toi Adam Art gallery, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University, Wellington; brought together by Christina Barton. In this exhibition a collection of significant previously exhibited bodies of work by three artists, Mark Adams, Chris Corson Scott and Natalie Robertson, (Kawerau, Ngāti Porou Clann Dhōnnchaidh) were drawn together into dialogue with each other and with historical photographic works and artefacts.

All three artists, as is explicitly stated in the exhibition catalogue, (Barton, C. 2022) work laboriously and meticulously with large-format cameras, inscribing a high level of detail and infinite focus into their photographs; themselves reproduced at large scale, often running across framed triptychs or jointed pairs on the gallery walls.

Hinemihī: Te Hokinga – The Return. (Adams, M. 2000) consist of a suite of meticulously made and printed photographs that depict a whare whakairo (carved meeting house), installed incongruously in the grounds of Clandon Park, Surrey by Lord Onslow at the end of the nineteenth century. These photographs clearly ask us to consider colonial plunder, property, wealth and globalization, and the work aligns itself with the call to return Himemihī to Aotearoa.

Corson-Scott's work, made around 13 years later, follows in this tradition. Large-scale prints are arranged in a linear sequence on the walls, richly saturated in Antipodean light, with markers and structures of industrial processes visible in each. The sites selected depict past and present extractive and colonising endeavours such as goldmining, timber milling, and quarrying. Corson-Scott sometimes utilises a human figure, rather self-consciously placed in the landscape. This could be his partner in a field of wildflowers on a housing development, a frequent collaborator named in the works title as "the poet", or his mentor Mark Adams himself. Corson-Scott references the picturesque traditions of landscape painting which informed early photography, (Barton, T. 2022) and it can be assumed that his insertions of the overtly romantic figures, as well as the framing, compositions and other formal decisions are intended as devices that indicate a critical, or at least thoughtful authorial gaze.

As a viewer traverses these works, inside the hushed, architecturally designed interior of the gallery space, the photographs operate exactly as a “landscape” should. They frame a human view onto the physical world; inviting that human to survey, contemplate and ruminate on our place in this world in a detached manner; affect is limited to an appreciation of the technical prowess of the author, and their herculean efforts to make the work, as stressed in the exhibition texts. This is the condition my research terms the extractive aesthetic: a visual regime in which the landscape is made available for contemplative consumption, its complex more-than-human life rendered legible and possessable by the sovereign gaze of the author.

Natalie Robertson is the only female photographer included in this collection. Her work has been an important touchstone in my practice as I have thought about my own positionality in relation to colonised land. Robertson states in an interview for Te Papa that she sees herself as simply the most recent gatherer of stories, a conduit in a much longer-term strategy for the survival and propagation of Māori culture and history. (Robertson, 2023). Robertson’s practice is located in Te Tai Rāwhiti, on the Eastern coast of Te Ika A Māui. Over an extended period, Robertson has been recording, in still and moving images, the extensive impacts of extraction on the ancestral Waipua River as part of settler frontier economies. In this work, she is guided and instructed by kaumatua and kuia of the iwi¹⁹, who determine how her skills as an artist can meet the community’s needs.

In her practice, the individual determinism commonly supposed to be at the wellspring of creative endeavour is in fact in a state of constant reciprocity and symbiosis, as the methodologies and aesthetics of the artist act and are acted upon by the kaupapa of the communities, individuals, and environments they serve. Robertson’s work is deeply embedded in her whakapapa²⁰ and necessarily originates from a very different positionality to my own. In her decisions about practice, she relies on collective knowledge from her tupuna and is a listener at the feet of her elders²¹.

Where Robertson does deploy a more conventional documentary approach to the display of the images, she does so in order to create a counter-archive, a set of evidential documents for her descendants. In the exhibition catalogue, where the works of Adams and Corson-Scott are interpreted by art historians, Robertson speaks for herself. In an introductory essay Robertson speaks of her community-focused methods; working as a

¹⁹ The elders of her tribe, both male and female.

²⁰ Whakapapa: (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.

²¹ Robertson and other contemporary indigenous film-makers in Aotearoa reference Māori film-maker Barry Barclay as a hugely important figure. Barclay situated the terrain of the indigenous documentary on a metaphorical marae, or customary meeting-place, which dictated that the camera and other technical aspects of the craft should behave of as if at a hui, or gathering. This meant a ‘listening camera’ that behaved with dignity.

Ngāti Porou person and making photographs that will contribute to the re-emergence of tribal knowledge for future generations. (Robertson, N. 2022). In the exhibition texts themselves Robertson includes conversational retellings of her embodied experience as she searches for traces of pre-settler life for her ancestors in the landscape. Most powerfully she includes a first-person text written from the more-than-human viewpoint of Rākairoa, a carved figure adorning the whare on her tribal land. This text weaves together human and more-than-human connections, through water, tree roots, sap, blood and clouds. It is a powerful activation for viewing Robertson's images. In this part of the exhibition the work begins to break free of the restrained framed picturesque. Robertson's monochromatic kahikatea tress cannot be confined to a frame, or even displayed across a triptych. They hang suspended in the space, overlapping and jostling each other, they extend beyond the boundaries of the supports that display them.

Robertson's practice represents the most significant departure from the dominant conventions surveyed here, particularly in its community-embedded methodology and its foregrounding of more-than-human voice. However, as a Ngāti Porou practitioner working from within whakapapa and guided by kumātua, her positionality is necessarily distinct from my own. The question her practice sharpens for me is not what can be seen but what ethical conditions must be met before the camera is raised at all — and what visual strategies can protect the more-than-human subject from the acquisitive logic of the photographic apparatus, regardless of the practitioner's intent. It is this question that drives the development of the post-production methods, the relational fieldworking protocols, and the ethics of partial opacity that constitute the methodological contribution of this research.

1.3 Influential practitioners in my journey. (Two, selected from many.)

1.3.1. Ann Shelton

A fellow inhabitant of the demimonde of Tāmaki Makau Rau in the 1990s, Ann Shelton began working as one of Aotearoa's first female press photographers at the Dominion in Wellington. On leaving that post, Shelton attended Elam School of Fine Arts in the 1990s. Her seminal project *Redeye*, a series of hyper-saturated snapshot-style portraits of friends and lovers, captured the zeitgeist of that time and catapulted her to public notoriety. It was that notoriety, what Shelton perceived as an unintentional reinscribing of stereotypes by the work's audience, that reset her conceptual approach. Her work became depopulated, and human presence was inferred. The influence of significant conceptual documentary figures such as Jeff Wall, an alumni and professor at the University of British Columbia where Shelton achieved her MFA, became evident post-*Redeye*. Shelton was mentored in Aotearoa by Mark Adams, and in earlier bodies of work

similarly used the fixed position and high resolution of the analogue view camera to image the site as trace, as aftermath, as stand-in. However, the research underpinning Shelton's work was informed by feminist thinking, and the formal aspects of her work developed beyond oblique social documentary, taking new forms. Shelton developed a process in the post-production of her images that she described as a visual 'stammer'; mirroring and doubling her landscapes to create an uncanny "third space" where the two came together. This third space is described in an essay about the artist's work by Anna Sanderson in 2005, where, as Sanderson states, the air itself becomes an agentic property (Sanderson, A. 2005). This was the phrase I chose for the title of the long-form documentary film I made with and about Shelton between 2015 and 2106. (Appendix 3.) The third space, the disjunction that prevents an easy assimilation of the image, was powerful in opening a space for individual encounter with the work. For the last decade, Shelton has worked extensively with plant knowledge sourced from alternative and repressed histories of female reproduction, contraception, and healing. Shelton's more recent work has excavated the figure of the witch through extensive investigation into herbal wisdom and the symbiotic relationship between women and plants. In the series of images that make up *i am an old phenomenon*, she layers visual references to traditional botanical properties, with varying degrees of abstraction from the figurative. Where these works are strongest, they suggest an ambivalent viewpoint. In the image *She Could Lie on Her Back and Sink* (ginger imbir Asian ginger zingiber), 2022 (Figure 8) The watery depths of the image contain partially submerged leaves and tubers of ginger pushing up from the green and cloudy negative space in the centre of the image. Are we above or below the surface? Drowning or swimming? The title connects the image with the traumatic history of "swimming the witch," where both trial and punishment were combined in the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ginger, the plant shown either drowning or rising in the image, has many medicinal properties, not least the reduction of morning sickness in pregnant women.



Figure 8 *She could lie on her back and sink (ginger, imbir, Asian ginger, zingiber)*, (A. Shelton 2022). Courtesy of the artist and Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Shelton grows, tends, and harvests these plant protagonists from her own biodynamic garden. While these works displace the human figure, her carefully grown and staged botanical props are just that; stand-ins for the human narratives she is foregrounding through her extensively researched photographs and text works. Therefore, there remains a hierarchical relational position implied in these works that remains in tension with its emancipatory aims.

1.3.2. Kate van der Drift.

When considering degrees of legibility in relation to the meaning carried by the pictorial surface of a photographic image, I now turn to the work of Kate van der Drift (b. 1985). Van der Drift is a settler practitioner living and working in Aotearoa. Through her ongoing practice, she engages with her own positionality in relation to settler histories and the colonisation of the landscapes of Te-Ika-a-Māui (the North Island). In the series *Sweet & Sour and Directional Listening: Fluvial Field Notes* van der Drift mobilises abstraction as a means of co-creation with the Piako River. Rather than producing descriptive representations, the works emerge through a latent photographic process in which colour negative emulsion is immersed in the river over the course of a lunar cycle. The Piako River was once a pristine waterway flowing through extensive kahikatea forest and wetland on the Hauraki Plains (Taupaki 2021), however today it bears the material traces of environmental degradation. By submerging the film for a month in the silty depths of the river, van der Drift relinquishes authorial control, allowing the river itself to inscribe the image. The resulting camera-less photographs occupy a space between index and abstraction, where traces of sediment, chemical interaction, and environmental

conditions coalesce into non-representational forms. These abstract surfaces resist straightforward interpretation, instead operating as material records of encounter. As van der Drift describes, they emerge through a “direct interaction between a photosensitive surface and the world” (Wilkinson 2024), foregrounding process, relation, and material agency over depiction. Van der Drift’s titles suggest a scientific approach to field recordings akin to a documentary methodology, however the poetic painterly outcomes extend beyond “landscape’ into visionary expressions of human and more-than-human entanglements (Harraway, 2016).

Van der Drift’s more recent works (*Dance, dance*. Auckland Festival of Photography 2025) utilise invasive plants and herbicides as both subject and process. Her large-scale prints, made from 4x5 and 10x8 negatives, have a visual impact that holds the gallery walls. The exhibition text acknowledges the tactic of aesthetic beauty as the lure for the viewer. (Were, V. 2025) Their titles loosely tether them to thoughts of European taxonomies and migrating plant life, however these works also circulate successfully in the currents of the contemporary art market. Once separated from academic exhibition texts and relocated into domestic or corporate interiors, how resistant to colonising forces are these works? My practice interrogates these difficult issues through experimentation with art objects that are more resistant to these forces. I utilise the ephemeral projection, the single print edition, the singular handmade book, work displayed on billboards in public spaces. These forms of dissemination stand to one side of a commodified art market. In these ways my work resists the extractive impulse. These choices of form are not incidental to the research but constitutive of it: by producing works that resist the art market’s extractive logic at the level of their material existence, the practice enacts rather than merely represents the ethics of partial opacity it theorises.

1.4. Speaking for others? My developing understanding of post-colonial contexts in Aotearoa.

While still working on editorial and commercial commissions, several significant projects challenged my worldview as tau-iwi in Aotearoa. These projects took me into communities and landscapes beyond the city, and here I began to be attuned to a second, deeper way of being that lay beneath the thin surface layer of settler life. (Figure 9, Figure 10)



Figure 9 *Makere and Whare Biddle (Ngai Tūhoe)*. (B. Nunes 2002).



Figure 10 *Ruatāhuna, looking out to Te Urewera*. (B. Nunes 2002).

1.4.1. Mau Moko.

Between 2005-7, I was invited to participate in a project that I now consider a central pivot on which my future praxis would hinge. Penguin NZ's Editor-in-Chief, Geoff Walker, invited me to collaborate with the University of Waikato on a book that charted the history and contemporary status of Māori Moko or cultural tattoo practice. Dr Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Dr Linda Waimarie Nikora headed the project. My role was to produce over 60 photographic portraits of wearers and practitioners of the art form. ***Mau Moko*** is a major publication in the history of recording and preserving Māori taonga. (Appendix 4.) The book, along with my images within it, provided evidence of the resurgence of Ta Moko in recent years. The work required ethical care and an ongoing process of self-reflection regarding my own positionality. In employing these research protocols, I felt that my role was to bridge conceptual and spiritual gaps that may have existed between the production of an authentic, culturally appropriate record of Ta Moko and the pursuit of a publisher's commercial imperatives. Throughout this process, I was very aware of the historical significance of earlier important bodies of work in this field made by Ans Westra and Marti Friedlander²². I perceived some similarities in our positions: "outsiders"

²² Westra and Friedlander, both migrants from Europe in the mid-20th century, made bodies of work over their lifetimes that have the complex politics of visual representation at their core. Friedlander particularly, a Jewish migrant from London, worked with writer Michael King on a series of portraits

to Aotearoa, women photographers, tasked with recording an aspect of Māori culture at a key point in time. (Figure 11)



Figure 11 Awe, *Te Rangitu* & George Nuku. (B. Nunes 2006)

Looking back on this work, I employ Mark Healy’s notion of “racial time” (Sealy, 2019) as my reflective lens. Sealy describes how viewing an image within its racial time calls up the historical conditions of its creation, including their social and political complexities; this layered, active, and reflexive analysis can be seen as decolonising the camera, thereby challenging or destabilising the original intentions behind its capture. The work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Dr Ngahua Te Awekotuku has also informed this understanding. In her seminal publication, *Decolonising Methodologies*, Tuhiwai Smith exhorts all researchers working with communities to ask themselves, “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012.)

Reflecting on my work for *Mau Moko* in racial time, it is clear that any need for the “bridging” role that I felt I occupied in 2005 no longer exists; there are now several new generations of indigenous people who have all the technical skills and access to means of production, as well as the deep cultural understanding and embodied knowledge to be the visual storytellers of their own peoples.

recording those who were thought to be the last wearers of moko kauae, or traditional facial tattooing for women.

1.4.1 Te Kahui Tupua

In 2006, I took on a second important commission that would shape my future practice: producing a significant series of photographs for a major regional tourism initiative. I was asked to find and generate a series of images that would convey an invitation to the traveler without relying on a direct narrative of humans in the landscape.

The project required me to undertake extensive historical and geographical research to ensure the images reflected the region's complexity and spiritual significance. This work exhorted me to begin listening to and thinking about the land as an active participant in the process of locating meaning in an image. (Figure 12). I believe that I produced images that, at their most successful, tested the limits of a picturesque landscape. More importantly, my commitment to imaging landscapes as my ongoing kaupapa²³ began here.



Figure 12 *Untitled*. (B. Nunes 2007).

1.5. Connections to indigenous ways of knowing through my work with Ngāti Rangī

My relationship with Matua Keith William Paetaha Wood (Ngāti Rangī) and his wife, Mercia Wood (Ngāti Rangī), began when I sought permission to visit an important site on Ngāti Rangī tribal land. The Woods became mentors, colleagues, and friends as we worked together to offer an immersive learning experience for groups of students at the college where I taught. Each year, the Woods opened their marae to us all, sharing, with great generosity, insights into Te Āo Māori. A key aspect of this sharing was the hīkoi²⁴;

²³ (noun) topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative.

²⁴ (**verb**) (-tia) to step, stride, march, walk. Hīkoi is a verb expressing movement, but also since the 1970's has been associated with collective Māori resistance. In 1975 Dame Whina Cooper began a march to protest the ongoing theft of Māori land. In total the distance covered was more than 1000 kilometers, and

“walking as a form of collective action and self-determination” (Hester, B. in Crone, Nightingale, Stanton, 2022, p. 325) (Figure 13)



Figure 13 *We hīkoi to the maunga.* (B. Nunes. 2016)

Spending meaningful time with the Wood whānau and other members of their extended community deepened my awareness of the Māori philosophy of vitalism, which views a spiral, rather than a hierarchy, of reciprocal ethics. Manuka Henare (Ngāti Hauā, Te Aupouri, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Kahu) writes that “Māori vitalism can be suggested as the belief in an original singular source of life in which that life continues as a force that imbues and animates all forms and things of the cosmos.” (Henare. M. in Grim 2001 p.204) These ways of knowing had a much deeper relevance and resonance in my practices within Aotearoa's landscapes than my previous undertaking during my MFA to “be alive to” an animus working within nature, a concept I had explored in reference to synchronicity, and the deep empathic observation called for by philosopher Richard Tarnas, in earlier work. (Appendix 5.)

Artist and researcher Rachel Shearer (Te Aitanga ā Māhaki, Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Kahungunu) notes the issues around translating rich and complex Māori concepts into English. (Shearer, 2018). In this thesis, I refer to some of these complex concepts, citing Māori scholars in relation to them, and I acknowledge the risks of appropriating their approximate meanings. In this, as in past actions, I draw on the counsel of Matua Keith, who advised that good intention lies at the heart of action and explained that the final arbiter will reside in the outcome of those actions. This is also affirmed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith as a tenet of indigenous research methodologies, where she asks of non-

became known as Te Hikoi o te Harikoa, or the march of tears. Through this collective action the work hikoi became the term used for any protest or justice walk.

indigenous researchers the following: “Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us?” (Tuhiwai Smith. 2014)

Hikoī, walking, as a method, was already a key aspect of my personal practice, and had been informed by feminist author Rebecca Solnit, who writes about the meditative and connective powers of walking, and views walking, especially by women, as a political act. (Solnit, R. 2001). The setting of intention through a range of ritualised practices, and the continued awareness of my own positionality in relation to indigenous and more-than-human perspectives, were aspects that I now understood to be critical in entering these spaces with a clear spirit and a good heart. Here I am responding to Clare Land’s call for tau iwi to be “able to articulate their interests and their personal sense of a framework for their activism. (Land, 2022. p211)

I could now bring together my walking practice with an intention informed by decolonising methods and operating in alliance with Te Āo Māori. This framework guided my fieldwork in thin places as tau iwi. I will now detail the development of the body of work *Tongariro Power* in relation to these concepts of alliance and reciprocity.

1.6. Fieldwork in Thin Places.

Fieldworking	A situated, embodied practice of walking with a camera.
Selection	Not an extractive process, but an enigmatic one.
Occlusion	Working against the violence of total visibility
Appropriation	As an act of resistance or subversion
Re-assemblage	Layering, combining, re-framing

The fieldwork I undertook in *Tongariro Power* involved repeated visits to Ngāti Rangi tribal lands. In the development of this work, I looked to Kaupapa Māori Practices drawn from Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*, although it should be noted that the original attribution is to Ngahuia Te Awakotuku. The tenets prioritise respect, humbleness, a willingness to listen before speaking, generosity, care and the willingness to present yourself in person. (Smith, L. 1999) These protocols continue to have huge resonance for me both in interactions with humans and when undertaking relational fieldworking.

The series of works that make up *Tongariro Power* focus on the impact of the Tongariro Hydro Power Scheme, situated in the volcanic plateau of central Te Ika a Māui. The scheme supplies a substantial portion of energy to the National Grid and requires the damming of many waterways; 22 rivers have been diverted from the Whangaehu headwaters alone. These headwaters originate from the crater lake of the volcano Ruapehu, the first ancestor and a very sacred entity to Ngāti Rangi. More recently, the legal and ethical discussion of the “personhood” of the natural world has gained

mainstream attention²⁵. While this might seem radical in the West, for Māori, rivers, mountains, trees, and all aspects of Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) have always been seen as tupuna awa or ancestors. Below the dam structures on these waterways, the streambeds are dry. (Figure 14) Tiny quantities of water escape as hard-won concessions from the Genesis Energy corporation.



Figure 14 *Dead Rivers*. (B. Nunes 2016)

My earlier still and moving image work explored the degrees to which autoethnographic and documentary impulses could cohabit in photo-filmic work. I had been attempting to weave together references to intensely personal experiences with elements of less abstract visual storytelling, drawing on established conventions of landscape and still-life photography. Initially, while working on the tribal lands of Ngāti Rangī, I continued in this manner, producing a series of still images and several short moving-image works. As I reflected in a published essay for the online journal *Screenworks*, (Appendix 6), *In single file* (Figure 15) was an early attempt to combine these aspects of my practice. However, the methods used resulted in an uncomfortable utilisation of the landscape. Through this process of overlaying written English, a visual hierarchy was established, assigning meaning to the land solely within the frame through the context of my tau iwi lived experience.

²⁵ In October 2025 a bill was introduced into the House of Lords in the U.K to enshrine rights in nature. This follows decades of pioneering legal work globally resulting in many more than human entities being legally protected. However as is frequently pointed out, this is the West playing catch-up as for centuries the status of more than human entities has been seen as equal to that of the human. As just one often-quoted example, for the people of the Whanganui region, Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au — I am the river and the river is me. (National Library of New Zealand.)



Figure 15 Screenshot from *In Single File*. (B. Nunes. 2016)

My approach to representation of the landscape, through static picturesque camera viewpoints, accidentally repeated the colonising gaze, a “flexible mode of representation that served a range of strategic purposes including naturalizing the position of the colonial settler” (Mitchell, 1994). Landscape was still playing a bit-part in the work; serving as the “setting” for my autobiographical drama to play out upon.

1.7. Appropriation as method.

After reflection, I reworked my approach to this project in two ways. I stopped making direct naturalistic photographic responses to this thin place. Instead, I drew upon existing archival footage of the mine's construction as a pre-existing, mediated representation of the landscape. *Tongariro Power* is a short film made by the National Film Unit in 1970 that foregrounds the triumphalism of engineering through a dramatic score and a Received Pronunciation (or Queen’s English) voiceover. As one of multiple expressions of colonial hierarchies of value, in the original film the protection of rainbow trout stocks for anglers is detailed, whereas there is no discussion of Māori land rights beyond a reference to an archaeological dig for “relics” of former community life.

Campbell and Durden (2019) write that “Photography’s aesthetic captures very well the reflective sheen of the surfaces of capital’s culture; indeed it helps to create it.” In appropriating imagery from propagandist government-sponsored filmmaking, I aimed to “intervene at the surface of this allure”, using large-scale projections of fragments of footage, the unsettling abstraction of sound and film speed and the recontextualization of single frames into new narrative structures within a zine-format artist book. The appropriation of archival materials and the subversion of that material through its reconstitution draw on psychoanalytic film theory (Mulvey, 1975) to expose the repressed layers of communication within the original film texts.

The artist book, together with the large-scale projections, sequence a series of small but revealing moments from Fraser's film, proposing a feminist and psychoanalytic reading of the filmmaker's gaze²⁶, bringing together the cinematic tropes of the idealised male figure and the orifice/underworld in a critical reading of the original film's desire to penetrate and extract the body of the landscape. (Figure 16 Figure 17)

The two looped experimental films select specific moments in the film that present the human figure and the body of the earth as objectified and available for extraction and/or consumption. I have utilised extremely slow frame rates to select and magnify these moments beyond their original meanings; this renders the original footage enigmatic, in Bate's use of the term.²⁷ An enigmatic image, Bate tells us, has become "an explicit intervention and signifying contradiction (oxymoron) introduced into the signifier itself. Exactly what is being communicated, "signified", is not clear. It has become opaque..” The stretching and distortion of the original sound both underlines and parodies its dramatic effect, building tension that remains unresolved through the looped repetition of the sequence. The drag on the cigarette, a wink at the camera, these feel like a studied casualness in response to the very real dangers of travelling deep inside the earth. An assumed machismo, an underground cowboy, the sexual tension of male-only domains, the acts of burrowing and penetration. These extracted, heightened and repurposed fragments aim to foreground the complex layers of cultural and social tensions held within the Tongariro Hydro project.



Figure 16 Appropriated footage reassembled as stills in *Tongariro Power* artist book. (B. Nunes. 2015)

²⁶ Agnieszka Piotrowska discusses the insights that a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading can offer to documentary film theory. Especially relevant to my reading of the original Tongariro power is the following, where the documentary filmmaker sublimates their unconscious desire, directing their/the camera's gaze at their subject "who, in some way, offers an unconscious response to the filmmaker's desire – overtly to find out about the world and create something new out of that enterprise." (Piotrowska, 2023)

²⁷ Bate tells us that "Any range of techniques can be used to produce disruptions of a conventional photographic signifier.."



Figure 17 Appropriated footage reworked and projected as part of *Tongariro Power* installation. (B. Nunes 2015) Carr, Cowlard, Nunes. Group exhibition, Pearce Gallery, Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design, Auckland. Oct 2017. Photo B. Nunes.

2. Why photography? (*Maunga*).

2.1. The enigmatic image and the battleground of the “real”.

An early work holds, on reflection, many of the threads of investigation that have sustained my practice from then until the present day. The diptych *We are nowhere and it's now* (Figure 18) pairs an image of a 20th-century hangi pit or earth oven, recreated in the grounds of a hotel in the tourist region of Rotorua, and utilising thermally produced steam on tap to cook the traditional hākari or feast, with the waiting area for the laundromat. The preparation and sharing of a hangi within Te Ao Māori is an expression of manaakitanga or hospitality and plays an important role in the flow of tapu and noa on the marae.²⁸ Rotorua plays a significant role in the dissemination of cultural tourism in Aotearoa (McIntosh, 2004). The structure pictured is used to provide a commercial-scale hangi to hotel guests. The diptych questions to what degree human and other-than-human relations can be mutually respectful in a colonised and heavily commodified landscape and asks what traces of spiritual resonance might still accompany such a commercialised ritual. Can a photograph be a conduit for such a trace?



Figure 18 *We are nowhere and it's now*. (B. Nunes 2013)

²⁸ As elder Manuka Henare writes, “There are problems associated with translating Māori terms into English, especially where Māori terms have multiple meanings. Typically, it is the context in which Māori terms are used that clarifies the metaphysical and spiritual intentions of the term.” (Henare, in Grim 2001) This sentence contains many complex concepts for which there are no direct translations into English. Customary protocols of hospitality involve rituals of exchange & formal oration at the marae or meeting house, and the sharing of food indicates the shift from a tapu or spiritually charged state to one of noa, or an earthly state.

2.2 The problematic ethic of lens-based practice

The apparatus of photography and filmmaking have a complex and problematic history. Lenses have been and are tools used for ethnographic “othering”, the creation of stigmatising typologies, surveillance and the conveyance of the hierarchical, patriarchal, colonising gaze.²⁹ Macarena Gómez-Barris points out that this is not simply a historical problem, stating that “colonial visual regimes normalised an extractive planetary view that continues to facilitate capitalist expansion, especially upon resource-rich Indigenous territories.” (Gómez-Barris, 2017). I assert that photographic images of landscapes, beneficiaries of the “documentary turn” in fine art, and disseminated in the context of the art market, can be seen as a proliferation of this extractive planetary view; even when the individual authors of the work have intended them to raise a note of dissent.

Photographic practices forge a complex relationship between ideas of truth, evidence, witnessing, and visibility. In an interview I conducted with photographic artist and researcher Fiona Amundsen in 2018, she described her motivation to pursue “a practice of ethical recognition that extends far beyond the image” (Amundsen, 2018, in conversation with the author). Amundsen’s photo-filmic work links concepts of documentary witnessing, ethics, and the military-industrial complex. “The partial presentation of aural histories, archival and propagandist visual elements and smaller memorialising photographs all seek to disrupt any easy building of a collective historical narrative or recollection; as Amundsen states, looking does not necessarily lead to knowing.” (Nunes, 2018, Appendix 1). (Figure 19.)



Figure 19 *A Body that Lives*, One-channel HD video, 13mins 49sec, (F. Amundsen. 2017). St. Paul’s Gallery, AUT. Auckland.

As I argue in this thesis, the inherently problematic nature of the photograph and photographic processes paradoxically makes it suitable for this aim of ethical recognition. As an artist using a camera, I must remain aware of and attentive to these

²⁹ Theorists I have been especially indebted to here are bell hooks, Mark Sealy, & Ariella Azoulay.

complexities. The works should also encourage viewers to grapple with some of the layers of complexity during the viewing experience.

The complicated relationship between the indexical, the artist and the audience, mediated by the apparatus of the camera and the lens, makes concrete for me Haraway's invitation to "stay with the trouble." (Haraway, 2016). Ian Walker, in his essay "Things As They Are" gathers together some terms to describe this complex territory; art documentary, neo-documentary, "near documentary". (Walker, 2019) I, however, claim post-documentary as the term that best fits; a term that denotes an expanded and critical terrain. Jacob Raupach describes what this terrain offers: "No longer is the documentary photograph bound to inert realism and singular histories; rather, documentary practice has now been opened up to the mining of archival material, multiple narratives and alternate means of viewer interactivity." (Raupach, 2014.)

2.3. Beyond facticity.

Film theorist and critic Erika Balsom, in her essay 'The Reality-Based Community,' discusses the conflation of post-structuralist layers of critique as establishing an almost impenetrable enclosure of restrictive orthodoxies, within which we "breathe the stale recirculated air of doubt." (Balsom, 2017)

In advocating for a return to "an encounter with facticity," Balsom proposes a "reality-based community," one that recognises that "**all** objectivity is situated; **all** vision is partial." A situated position and the idea of a partial vision are fundamental frameworks that inform my practice. However, Balsom also emphasises "the facticity of phenomenal reality and demand(s) belief in it" as essential elements in the works she cites by members of her reality-based community, and here I diverge from her claim. I have created a series of works that demand belief in **both** the phenomenological and what lies *beyond* facticity. The need to move beyond the phenomenological is expressed by Lyotard, who states that "Phenomenology . . . remains a reflection on knowledge, and the purpose of such a reflection is to absorb the event, to recuperate the Other into the Same" (Lyotard, 2011, 17)

"Beyond facticity" for me means beyond the easily categorised, beyond the scope of the tools and narrow empirical knowledge systems of colonial visual regimes (Gómez-Barris, 2017) to quantify. Beyond facticity means to reach, in my practice, a plane where more is "happening" than the purely phenomenal, and to offer that revelation to the viewer. (Figure 20) My contribution to new knowledge is expressed through the production methods developed, which enable aspects of the more-than-human to remain as inexpressible Other within the works, and therefore unavailable for commodification or an easy assimilation into pre-existing tropes of landscape photography.

2.4 Addressing ethical representation through partial opacity or an occluded vision

I have written about Balsom's proposition for a partial vision as a strategy for ethical representation of the real and connected this term to Edward Glissant's notion of opacity as a protection against the colonising and capitalist gaze. (For more detail, see Chapter 4, *A Clouded Vision*.) Edouard Glissant, Martinican poet and philosopher, introduced in his *Philosophie de la Relation* (Glissant, 2009) the concept of a world *in relation*, (emphasis my own), "a relation between different people and places, animate and inanimate objects, visible and invisible forces, the air, the water, the fire, the vegetation, animals and humans" (Diawara, 2017). Being *in good relation* with humans and more-than-humans who differ from each other requires Glissant's "right to opacity" as protection against the acquisitive and commodifying gaze of the project of the West. In re-reading Glissant, John Drabinski determines that the power of this opacity "lies in its anticolonial force, and therefore its resistance to certain senses of knowing and understanding that would seek to absorb, reactivate, and possess." (Drabinski 2019) For Glissant, opacity means a willingness to co-exist without demanding the right to totalizing information about the Other. This opacity can be understood as an antidote to Lyotard's phenomenological absorption of the event.

Lyotard expresses the tension between the *discours* (that which can be read in an image) and the *figure* (that which arises from the unconscious, and/or affects the viewer on the level of the unconscious) This tension, I propose, is what can block the totalizing recuperation of the Other through a singularly semiotic "reading" of the image-as-text. (Lyotard, 2011).

I have subsequently applied Lyotard's proposition of *discours* and *figure* in critical reflection on my creative processes. How can the concept of opacity be deployed in a visual art practice? I connect these ideas with the denial of a Cartesian knowledge of a place through my photographs. Opacity, as an anti-colonial force, must therefore work against the "grand-scale view from above", the total visual exploitation of site described by Gomez-Barris. (2017). The opaque or occluded image, as a form of resistance to hierarchies of power and knowledge, can also subvert dominant readings of materials from the archive through recontextualization.



Figure 20 *Pilgrim's Progress*. (B Nunes 2014).

2.5. The interval, or productive break.

“There is no such thing as *documentary*” (T. Minh-Ha, 1990). In stating this, Minh-Ha posits what we now think of as the obvious: that a film, like a photograph, is never *the thing itself*, but always a mediated representation of a thing. In *Documentary Is/Is Not a Name* Minh-Ha writes against the adherence to the rules of “naturalism” in cinema, which require adopting the filmic techniques that best conceal their deployment. Rather, she argues for a self-aware break in the flow of the material, in order to make overt the sense-making of the work, and its partiality. (Minh-Ha, T. 1990.)

This interval, introduced in my works through the key post-production methods stated, enables meaning to remain unfixed, fluid and relational. I contend that Minh-Ha’s *interval* is iterated in my practice, through the four methods stated; of selection, occlusion, appropriation and re-assemblage. The process of application brings into tension the “desires and fantasies that circulate around commodity” (Campbell and Durden, 2019) through a fragmented speculative narrative; one that disrupts the extractive potential of the gaze, instead short-circuiting into the subconscious. This can be seen in the construction of the portfolio works *Pyrite* and *Taharoa* (Figure 21). Photographic documentation was made during fieldworking at Taharoa, including images made of workers’ cabins and the monument to the agreement made between the Crown and Ngāti Mahuta ki te Tai Hauāuru. In post-production, these elements are isolated and floated on digitally generated planes of colour. The colour fields reference the time-period of the land agreement; the metallic lustre of the prints reinforces the references to gold and value. The re-assemblage of these elements avoids a harmonious focal point;

instead the gaze must bounce between elements; there is no comfortable resting place from which to “enjoy the view”.

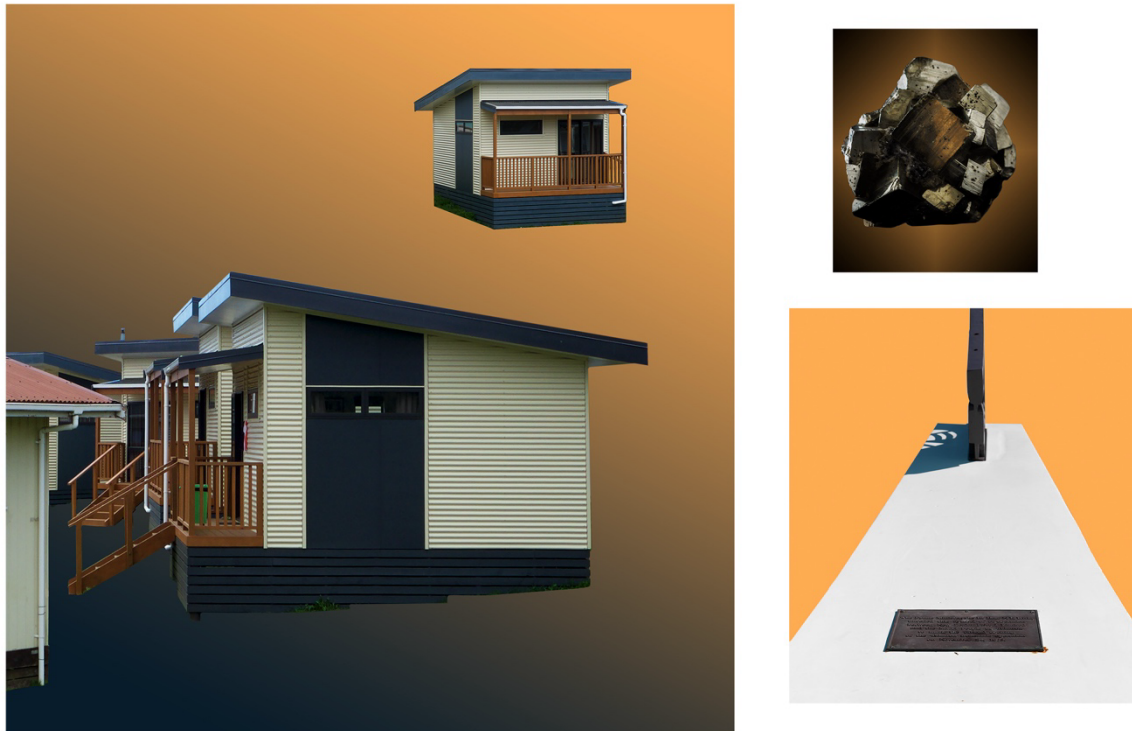


Figure 21 Mock-up for *Taharoa* series. (B. Nunes 2018)

2.6. Imaging the thin places of Tāmaki Makau Rau.

Fieldworking	A situated, embodied practice of walking with a camera.
Selection	Not an extractive process, but an enigmatic one.
Occlusion	Working against the violence of total visibility
Appropriation	As an act of resistance or subversion
Re-assemblage	Layering, combining, re-framing

I now turn to the body of work, *Maunga*, where I specifically focus on fieldworking, selection and re-assemblage as innovative creative tools resulting in a contribution to new knowledge of photographic practices.

This body of work emerged from research into the volcanic field of Tāmaki Makaurau, comprising more than 50 puia³⁰ once considered living ancestors by Māori and, post-contact, all modified or, in some instances, quarried into oblivion. These are places of profound spiritual importance to the tangata whenua³¹. They are also potent thin places. My focus within this field was on those sites that I saw daily, and that I could connect to

³⁰ (noun) volcano, geyser, hot spring, eruption.

³¹ (noun) local people, hosts, indigenous people - people born of the whenua, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried.

on foot. Here, I conducted embodied and open-plan fieldwork “formed and informed by the conditions of the field itself, which is also forever undergoing processes of change and transformation, ‘such that it cannot be presumed in advance’”. (Spivak, in Crone et al 2024).

Macarena Gomez-Barris, in her book *The Extractive Zone*, described the indigenous filmmaker’s viewpoint as a “submerged perspective.” This term invokes a vision beyond the surface; perhaps beyond the visible. This is not my viewpoint; as tau iwi in Aotearoa and indeed as re-immigrant in the U.K; my open-plan fieldwork is instead diffractive; drawing on Haraway, my practice-led research in thin places is relational and entangled.

My situated experience informs each aspect of the fieldwork. What I can carry on foot, what the weather brings, what reading and thinking into the history of the site I have undertaken, what acts of preparedness I have undertaken before my departure and on arrival. These, along with many other layers of social construction, are what arrive with me and what I bring to the site. What then occurs, and can be recorded, observed or simply felt, are aspects of the site that are brought to me. Polly Stanton describes this aspect of fieldworking as a mutual remaking; where site acts on artist and artist on site in a mutual act of making-with. (Stanton, P. 2022).

I worked in this way at Ōhinerau, Tikikopuke, and Maungarei. These ancient landforms have all been almost subsumed by intensified suburban housing, highways and industrial quarrying. The endless automotive flow along the Great South Road divides Ōhinerau and Tikikopuke and was first constructed to facilitate the conveyance of Crown arms to the front lines of the invasion of Waikato in 1863. It is now a congested multi-lane motorway that travels from the most affluent suburbs to the least, and on into the greenbelt and farmlands of Waikato. I imagined the voices of each puia calling across to each other across this road. (Figure 22).



Figure 22 Tikikopuke, (Mt. St. John), seen from Ōhinerau, (Mt. Hobson), across the divide of the Great South Road. (B Nunes 2016).

In this work I utilised a forced focal plane within a large format camera system and Polaroid Tyep 55 film; this film creates a positive and negative within the same exposure and is sadly discontinued. I utilised the optical device of forced focus to visibly connect the very near slope of Ohinerau on which I stood with the distant cone of Tikikopuke. My intention was to “see” the separated other, across a physical barrier that is the highway & the suburbs, as well as to signify a compression of time. Reflecting on this outcome, shown in conjunction with the words of a traditional waiata, or lament, I recognised that the image was itself caught between worlds. Visual referents (large-format, black-and-white negative film, darkrooms) held the image within its colonial past. The formal poetics of the image created a vague sense of nostalgia; the marooned islands of volcanic cones in a sea of suburban colonial structures felt (and perhaps are in a sense) fixed by a mid-century settler gaze. This was a kind of affect, but from this point I actively pushed the development of my practice towards something much more disruptive.

The next site of fieldworking was Maungarei (Mt. Wellington)³². A more significant silhouette in the landscape of my then-neighbourhood, Maungarei, emerges from the most heavily industrialized suburb of Tāmaki Makau Rau. Housing developments, retail parks and motorway off-ramps lap at its fringes. At the summit, sightlines extend across the Tamaki River to the Waitemata Harbour beyond.

In the large-scale reproductions of the triptych **36S_174E** (Figure 23), the topographical contours of Maungarei are discernible, though selected away from any comfortable reading through tight cropping and monochromatic treatment. The hard edge of the concrete reservoir juts through the earth's skin. This image is the centre of the three. The left-hand image isolates the trig or mapping point against the same digital background that is present in the right-hand image. This background references the Kodak 18% grey card³³. The right-hand image shows a piece of volcanic rock. Scale is hard to discern. The rock could be a planet.

³² Maungarei / Mt Wellington is Auckland's second-youngest volcano, having erupted around 10,000 years ago. It is also one of the tallest, at 100 meters from its base to the tihi (summit). Two large craters were formed in the eruption. One still exists, while the other was filled with a concrete water reservoir in 1960. Maungarei means 'watchful mountain' and is a reference to this Maunga as a highly strategic vantage point, and the ability of the inhabitants to resist attack. Maungarei is one of the best preserved maunga pā (village settlement) in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland and occupation by Māori dates to around 1400AD. (<https://maunga.nz/maunga/maungarei> retrieved 2026)

³³ An 18% grey card was used by photographers to ensure correct exposure, although since the advent of digital technologies this is much less widely used. As in much of photographic history, the origins of this are contested and murky; claims exist for Ansel Adams to have determined that 18% sits in the median of his Zone system. Also, there are claims that a light reading from the back of a Caucasian hand will read 18% grey. So here we are again, dealing with a patriarchal figure that looms large in the dominant canon of photography, as well as racial biases conflated with corporate interests.



Figure 23 36S_174E. (B. Nunes 2014)

These methods produce combinations and elisions of disjunctive images into what I consider to be sigils³⁴. These assemblages are not intended to operate as a series of signs to be decoded or read in a semiotic sense. Instead, they are intended to operate as esoteric symbols that, when combined, convey a psychic force.³⁵ As Stuart Hall has stated, an image works not only discursively or linguistically but at the level of the subconscious, in our fantasies, dreams and imagination. (Hall, 1977) Partial opacity, through selection, occlusion, appropriation, or elision in the picture plane, becomes my tool for imbuing the image/s with an impact that operates at the level of the subconscious. In the production of these images, I both leveraged and subverted the devices of the commercial photography studio, utilising digital production techniques of selection, extreme macro focus, hyper-sharpness, manipulation of tonality and colour. These strategies “trouble Barthe’s referent”³⁶, re-configuring the representation of earthly materials into a new visual form; one that will not relinquish itself completely to the gaze but instead remains, to a degree, Other.

³⁴ In this context I use the term “sigil” in the continuum of Chaos Magic and the work of the Situationists. Chaos magic holds that sigils are powerful expressions of intent coalesced from the unconscious. The situationists used automatic drawing, the cut-up and the derive to break open the construct of the spectacle that they saw as controlling society. It has been posited that corporate logos are a form of hyper-sigil. Glissant assigns these images as flash agents; again, indicating their ability to function on the psyche. I wished, with the use of these enigmatic sigils, to enter the collective unconscious with my own ‘charged’ and anti-capitalist, anti-colonial messaging.

³⁵ Here I use this term to connote the impact of artist work made with a specific esoteric intent. Brion Gysin, William Burroughs and other outlier members of the Pataphysicists and Situationist movements in the 20th Century utilised automatic drawing, the cut-up and other strategies to access aspects of the subconscious mind through the operation of combinations of materials, texts and forms. An example I drew on in the body of work developed as part of my MFA study was Gysin’s “dreammachine”, an ocular device designed to produce trance-states in the viewer. I explicitly echoed this strategy in my experimental video work *Dreammachine-After Gysin*. (Nunes. 2014)

³⁶ Here I draw on David Bate’s discussion of surrealist signifiers as “troubling what Barthes called the ‘stubbornness of the referent’ in photography with what the surrealists hailed as the marvellous, a conflation of material and psychical reality” (Bate, D. 2004)

It is interesting to return to a review of the triptych **36S_174E** in EyeContact. Written by John Hurrell in response to this work appearing in billboard form across the road from the commissioning gallery, (Figure 24) he was attentive to the fluid and multiple possibilities for accessing the image, including through a non-dominant way of knowing more connected to te āo Māori³⁷ (Appendix 7)



Figure 24 Installation of *36S_174E* (B. Nunes 2014) for Te Tuhi billboard commission. March-June 2014. Te Tuhi, 21 Williams Rd, Pakuranga, Auckland. Photo by B. Nunes

³⁷ Māori world, realm, worldview.

3. From the ground up. (*An Age of Iron*)

3.1. The landscape as protagonist in my work.

The notion of a *landscape* itself is a simulacrum. An adaptation from the Dutch, the word "landscape" can be used as a noun, verb, or adjective (Merriam-Webster, 2025). In all its permutations, its meaning appears tied to vision and representation. A landscape infers a particular view of a landform, often one that has already been mediated through a creative practice. Landscaping requires the modification of a landform, often with the outcome being an inferred improvement on the original. Landscape, as an adjective, refers to the format of an image; most often utilised when that image is a photograph.

In contemporary discourse, landscape is “a porous category, which lends itself to a variety of discursive framings. At the same time, it can be thought of as a process - a cultural practice that performs an instrumental or constitutive function rather than an exclusively symbolic or signifying one. (Deriu, Kamvasinou, Shinkle, 2014) Although this is, on the surface, a useful and fluid way for me to think about landscapes, it also seems to reinforce an ephemeral or immaterial connotation: landscapes as existing only when framed in relation to human thought or social construction. So instead, I wish to acknowledge the solidity, minerality, and deep-time geology of landscapes, and to re-vision them through my work as enduring, though not unharmed, beyond the span of our own event horizons.

3.2. Landscapes in the context of the Capitalocene³⁸.

The history of photography has a complex and intertwined relationship with dominant notions of landscapes. Philosopher Richard Tarnas discusses the “dark shadow of the Enlightenment”. (Tarnas, 2006) Here, he refers to the ways that humankind's remarkable inventions and technological breakthroughs have unintentionally caused planetary trauma; that these advancements have led to the disconnection of our human bonds and relationships, both with more-than-human entities and among ourselves. Photographic technologies emerged in concert with the project of Empire and have been complicit in it through the production of early land survey photographs, aerial reconnaissance and surveillance images, ruin-porn, and the online circulation of travel & landscape imagery.

³⁸ I use this term – “an ugly word for an ugly system” as Jason W. Moore states in his introduction to his anthology- as a preferred alternative to the Anthropocene; which itself contains some of the human-essentialist connotations that the term attempts to critique.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes the colonial project as the collection of a set of “Travellers’ stories.. generally, the experiences and observations of white men whose interactions with indigenous “societies” or “peoples” were constructed around their own cultural views of gender and sexuality.” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012 p81). Haraway’s (1988) thinking aligns here: Her description of the dominant gaze as “a travelling lens” prompts reflection on the role of the camera in shaping the settler-colony. As discussed in greater detail in the writing I have collected in Appendix 1, and briefly in Chapter 2 of this thesis, this includes its role in cartographic surveying and in reinforcing typological classification systems through anthropological photography. The camera and resulting photographic records served as the main means of transporting these travellers’ stories back and sharing them with a captivated Victorian audience in Europe. Mapping expeditions to the “New World” used photography as a primary tool for establishing the terrain to be exploited, and the development of digital technologies has enabled this extractive mapping to increase exponentially.

Contemporary photographic practices engage conceptually and formally with these themes; often, the image production itself brokers uneasy pacts with mechanical tools of surveillance and control. The works of Edward Burtynsky operate on an epic scale, utilising the “God-trick” (Haraway 2016, 53–72) afforded by drones (themselves the product of the military-industrial complex) and forensic detail rendering devastation as spectacle; an apocalyptic techno-Sublime. Richard Mosse utilises expired aerial reconnaissance film to render the blood-soaked hills of the Congo in lurid pinks. Dan Holdsworth’s ethereal mapping of glaciers in multi-channel moving image seemingly ask us to consider their shrinkage in real time. While these works engage on a conceptual level with the problematics of the military-industrial complex and anthropocentric climate emergency, these visual tactics leverage photography’s tendencies towards spectacle; a surface transformation of natural forms that can too easily be rendered a visual commodity. (Mitchell, 1994)

3.3 The impact of feminist and new materialist thinking on my practice.

This extractivist framing of planetary elements as ‘resources’ is enabled by an Anthropocentric vision of the universe; the act of centring human existence automatically disenfranchises all more-than-human existences. ³⁾ Macarena Gómez-Barris clearly articulates the role in this project of “the extractive view” of photo-filmic apparatus and its potential as a tool to reorganize all life into what she terms as “extractible data”. The framing of my practice as active resistance to the creation of more “extractable data” insists on a relational ethic of entanglement. (Haraway, 2012). Rosie Braidotti identifies the two “defining features of posthuman thought ... the feminist critique of humanism on the one hand, and a post-anthropocentric approach to ecology and animal rights on the other.” (Braidotti, 2016). Many mycelial strands of

alternative thinking-with have emerged with which to propose a rich flow of new understandings about the multiple ways in which humans and more-than-humans are entangled. From the bacteria in our biomes, the underground connectedness of fungi (Tsing, 2015, Sheldrake, 2023) to all growing things, to the ways in which trees support and communicate with each other (Wohlleben, 2017), this entanglement with our planetary relations connects us across space and time; “as true for electrons as it is for brittle stars as it is for the differentially constituted human’ (Barad 2007, p.392). Of course, none of this is ‘new knowledge’. Dominant philosophies have had to rely on scientific discoveries to prove what has been the collective lived wisdom of millennia amongst indigenous communities; that existence is fundamentally relational: humans are always constituted through their entanglements with other humans, non-human animals, technologies, environments, and material systems. (Haraway, D. 2016)

My responses at each site when my human body walked on the earth, held a piece of basalt or poured silky black volcanic sand through my fingers were the result of an amplified receptiveness to “our minerality in its less vital and more enduring form” (Yusoff, 2013) Jane Bennett argues for the vital importance of this awareness of enchantment, where “the world comes alive as a collection of singularities” (Bennett, 2001, p. 5). I assert that this relational symposium, or intra-active collectives of permeable entities as expressed by Haraway, exists beneath human conscious thought, and can be accessed through encounters with art.

(Figure 25)

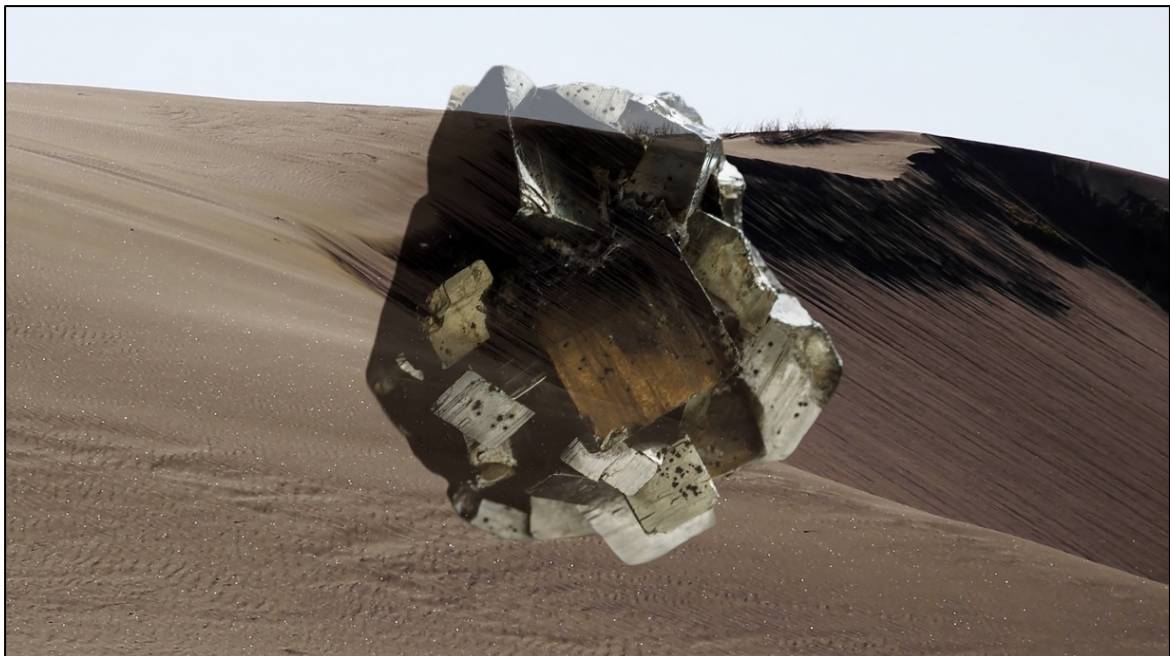


Figure 25 Screenshot from *An Age of Iron*. (B.Nunes 2019.)

The innovative production methods proposed can be observed in relation to the series of works that make up An Age of Iron.

Fieldworking	A situated, embodied practice of walking with a camera.
Selection	Not an extractive process, but an enigmatic one.
Occlusion	Working against the violence of total visibility
Appropriation	As an act of resistance or subversion
Re-assemblage	Layering, combining, re-framing

Tahāroa is a small settlement to the southwest of the Kawhia harbour on the West Coast of Te Ika a Maui. At the end of a long winding road, the township itself sits in a tight huddle of new and older houses and workers’ cottages. NZ Steel first brokered an agreement with Ngāti Mahuta ki te Hauāuru in the 1970’s to extract the titanomagnetite from the sands and ship it offshore for use in the construction of steel. The dredging operation of this iron ore extraction from the volcanic black sands of the foreshore has been continuing unabated for 40 years. I conducted speculative fieldwork at this site; using lightweight handheld audiovisual recording equipment. I did not request access to the working parts of the mine site or engage in discourse with local communities in a conscious decision to give primacy to the landscape’s story. The Tasman Sea roars offshore from the site of extraction. Time feels vast here. This is a thin place.

The form of the experimental or artist’s film, as Bridget Crone suggests, situates the viewer in relation to the projected image, in a specific locational context. Where a narrative film offers to take the viewer elsewhere, an experimental film locates the viewer in relation to the material and its construction and opens up ways of seeing beyond facticity. (Crone, 2020) This is the triangulated affect that occurs in my practice; the first occurring as a relational action upon the embodied camera/operator in the field, the second that occurs in the studio when working in post-production with the materials, and the third, the psychic impact on an audience created through encountering its re-assemblage. In detailing this three-fold process, I am acknowledging and building on Bridget Crone’s turbidity of image-making, which offers recognition of “the double nature of fieldworking with a camera as an embodied experience and the representation (or measure) of that experience.” (Crone, 2024. P492)

In post-production, utilising the strategies of selection, appropriation and occlusion, I have overlaid images taken from a citizen website based in Beijing that tracks worker deaths and industries on construction sites across the country. Here I am linking the relations of extraction and the violence of global capital. The text on these images remains untranslated, partially obscuring the more naturalistic footage of the sand-mine works. (Figure 26) Also included in the overlays are screen recordings from a ship-tracker website, tracking the journeys of the iron-ore barges as they connect the sites in

Aotearoa with shipping ports in China. The most overtly enigmatic digital insertions into the naturalism of the documentary footage and photographs are images of pyrite (an ore known colloquially as Fool's Gold), discarded tyres, miners' dwellings and the sculpted prow of a *waka*; a memorial to the agreement made between local Māori and the Crown to exploit the site in the 1970's. The interval between a naturalistic representation of site and its complicated and non-linear historical narratives is created by these insertions and occlusions. The viewer approaches the material through its affect, created by the re-assemblage of high-resolution digital imagery, amplified by field recordings synthesised into an ambient soundscape, and through the immersive scale of projection. (Figure 27)



Figure 26 Screenshot from *An Age of Iron*. (B.Nunes 2019.)



Figure 27 Installation image: *Age of Iron* screening at RM gallery, Auckland. March 2020. (B. Nunes. 2019) Photograph Shelley Simpson

4: SF, soil networks and deep time. (*Clouded Vision* and *1000 Years Per Inch*)

The return in 2020 (just prior to the first lockdown) to the U.K., and specifically to the Midlands, has been a seismic shift in the context of my life and work. In a recent paper (Appendix 8) I articulate what has been at stake for my practice in these new relational entanglements. I have noted the questions that this familiar, yet completely new context poses for my practice in a recent paper, included as appendix 8. Here, I revisit my research questions, asking “should or could I continue to embed practices and protocols, learned by me in a very specific set of places and contexts, in my practice. Through a careful and respectful process, could I apply some of the learnings, methods, and processes to connect audiences here with these more-than-human stories?” (Nunes, R. 2025)

4.1. Chromatographs, or Soil Portraits.

To address this question, I turned again to the earth beneath my feet.

In describing the relational nature of our planet – Terrapolis, as she refers to it, Haaway insists upon its indeterminate nature and aligns it with the multi-species habitus of the soil: “not ‘post-human’ but ‘com-post’ ”. (Haraway, 2021)

This “com-post” and the fungal networks it contains resonate with my fieldwork in both the Global South and North³⁹. The works throughout the submission are all concerned with the earthly materials of landforms and the ground beneath our feet. (Figure 28, Figure 29). The concept of mycelial networks⁴⁰ gives structure to the reciprocal points of connection that the works span, across geographies, geologies, time and positionalities. Merlin Sheldrake describes how mycelium operates as ‘ecological connective tissue’ stitching the world into relation. (Sheldrake, 2023). Taking a mycelial position does not require an oppositional rooting on either side of the insider-outsider binary; rather it offers a reciprocal, relational flow between those states.

³⁹ Following postcolonial scholarship, the terms Global North and Global South are employed as relational rather than strictly geographical categories. Nevertheless, these terms risk obscuring the diversity of experiences within each designation and should be understood as contingent and contested.

⁴⁰ Much of my understanding of these networks has come from the writing of Anna Tsing and Merlin Sheldrake. (Tsing 2015, Sheldrake 2023)



Figure 28 *Fieldworking, Redhill, Nottingham*. (B. Nunes 2021).



Figure 29 *Soil, worm, roots*. (B. Nunes 2023).

To re-situate myself and to explore this new version of my insider-outsider positionality⁴¹, I began to investigate the properties of my local landscapes through chromatographs.⁴² Chromatographs are the scientific, or perhaps pseudo-scientific process of visual analysis of the biodynamic activity of soil through a process of “fixing” its image. As I have written, “In this way, the process has much in common with other processes of artmaking and of magic”. (Nunes, 2024) I refer to chromatographs as soil-portraits, as they can be considered to be a visual trace of the bio-dynamic state of the soil, captured through a light-sensitive chemical process similar in some ways to a photogram. The basis of these ‘soil portraits’ is apparently scientific; however, what they reveal about the

⁴¹ There is no space in this thesis to properly unpack the multiple connotations behind this over-simplified statement. However, I stand with Chandra Talpade Mohanty when she states that she is “For the Two-Thirds World, but with the privileges of the One-Third World”. (Mohanty, 2003.)

⁴² “Briefly, soils are placed in a solution of sodium hydroxide which is applied to circular filter paper that has been treated with silver nitrate. The soil mixture is poured into a petri dish and is drawn up through a wick inserted through the middle of the filter paper. The different elements in this soil mixture move through the paper at different rates through capillary action, resulting in distinctive patterns.” (Ford, Stewart et al. 2021)

life of the soil is abstract. The iris-like after-images cannot easily be decoded scientifically, nor can they only be “read” by scientists. They offer enigmatic readings to the viewer. (Figure 30.)



Figure 30 *Soil Portrait, From Roots of Oak*, (B. Nunes 2023).

Clouded Vision, the journal article included in this portfolio of works, draws together contexts of practice in the Global South and North through my proposition of protective partial visibility, or ‘clouded vision’. I have included this essay in the portfolio of submitted works as it forms a critical hinge between contexts. In the essay, I propose the notion of opacity in a lens-based artwork as a protective strategy for contested or negatively impacted ecologies. I identify three women practitioners who utilise degrees of non-representation to offer this protection. The occluded qualities of their work emerge through varying methods of optical and lensless capture, and in the essay, I align my emerging chromatography process with these intentions.

I initially incorporated the process into my creative response to the West Burton 2 coal-fired power plant as part of the DeCom C20 project⁴³. In this work, I considered the story of the coal. Coal is not a single chemical element: if we listen very closely⁴⁴ (Campt, 2017) it has regional dialects. Its genetic make-up is dependent on the plant matter that formed

⁴³ As part of my growing mycelial network I have made connections with Urban Wilderness, a C.I.C organisation in Stoke-on-Trent. In partnership with Keele University, Urban Wilderness commissioned artist responses to several decommissioned coal-fired plants as part of a range of participatory and community actions.

⁴⁴ Here I am referencing Tina Campt’s exhortation to us to listen to images. She says that this goes beyond the metaphorical: “if we do this intentionally, if we literally try to hear something that is not necessarily visualized in the image, then listening to images becomes a way of enacting the broader experience of how images register.” This aligns for me in many ways to Barclay’s listening camera.

it, and the specifics of the mud in which it had its deep-time burial. Each piece of coal, therefore, is chemically unique. Through processes of still-life and chromatography, I offered portraits of this fossil element, a folding of deep time into the present. (Figure 31, Figure 32)



Figure 31 *Coal*, 2023. B. Nunes



Figure 32 *Coal Portrait*, 2023. B. Nunes

Soil portraits also formed the central element of an installation as part of PLACE Collective group exhibition, installed at Timber Festival 2023. (Figure 33, Figure 34). Becoming an invited member of PLACE Collective has been part of my mycelial network; connecting out into this new geolocation. PLACE is a rhizomic network of artists across the U.K. for whom ecology and the climate crisis are central to their

practice.⁴⁵ The work was installed at the outset of the festival, and for the period of the event PLACE Collective artists including myself led guided walks across the site. The artworks served as catalysts for discussions about what could not be seen; the story unfolding beneath our feet.



Figure 33 *Soil Portrait: Silver Birch*, as part of *Resonance* at Timber Festival, July 2023. (B. Nunes 2023) Photograph B. Nunes.



Figure 34 *Audience, conversations, networks*. As part of *Resonance* at Timber Festival, July 2023. (B. Nunes 2023) Photograph B. Nunes.

⁴⁵ From The Place collective website: PLACE sits at the nexus of the four research themes at the UK's Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas, and uses art as part of interdisciplinary teams focusing on issues of rural cultures, ecology, conservation, nature/culture and human relations with the wider living world. It brings creative practice into research, use art as a bridge between academia and local communities, and offers multiple lenses through which to view and understand place.

4.2. SF, speculative fabulation and world-building.

It is useful here to return to my previously stated claim that the works move *beyond facticity* in relation to notions of speculative fabulation. Writer and curator Mark Nash, when discussing the ‘documentary turn’ of the first decade of the 21st century, stated that “the most interesting work these days occurs on the borderline between fiction, documentary, reality and fantasy.” (Nash, 2008) I propose that this borderline is only seen as such from a height, an optical God trick as described by Haraway. (1988). When taking a feminist posthuman position in relation to the notion of a borderline, that is, from the ground, located, situated, immersed, engaged in fieldworking, that line broadens out and becomes visible as what it is: a terrain. This terrain is that of speculative fabulation. I claim this version of Haraway’s SF as a concept that inflects all the works in the portfolio, but here it emerges as the primary conceptual framework in this submission. ‘Science fantasy’ operates in what I term a “future-now”, bending time, casting archetypes and often warning of the apocalyptic outcomes of human greed, hubris and an over-reliance on technology. Science fiction can also be co-opted into some sort of entangled redemption; Haraway’s cyborg, or the exuberant Afro-futurism of Ekow Eshun’s brilliant curatorial project *In the Black Fantastic*. These are not suggestions of Utopia; rather, they live in a compromised future-now, as Haraway tells us, SF worlds are “risky proposition(s) in relentless historical relational contingency.” (Haraway, 2021, p.11)

The *waka*⁴⁶prows that sail towards the horizon in *An Age of Iron* are a visual reference to the territory of SF; as a symbolic device, they suggest the moment of arrival of Māori on the shores of Aotearoa. They also suggest, in northern Māori tradition, the final journey of the deceased from the West Coast of Te Ika A Maui; upon death, each spirit travels along this coast until reaching the point of departure at te Rerenga-Wairua. (Roberts, M. 2013). This folding of time in on itself, a symbolic past-and-future, is a gesture that aligns with SF in its attempt to hold possible futures in the compromised present of the *future-now*.

To further examine the role of SF and the concept of speculative fabulation, I turn to the most recent visual work in this portfolio; *1000 Years Per Inch*.

Fieldworking	A situated, embodied practice of walking with a camera.
Selection	Not an extractive process, but an enigmatic one.
Occlusion	Working against the violence of total visibility
Appropriation	As an act of resistance or subversion
Re-assemblage	Layering, combining, re-framing

⁴⁶ (noun) canoe, vehicle, conveyance, spirit medium, medium (of an atua).

The body of work was made for a PLACE Collective group exhibition at the site of Grizedale Forest, in the Lake District of Northwest England, in April 2025. (Details about the exhibition can be found in the Google Drive folder for this output.) The form of the final output is a hand-made artist book or “broken manual”,⁴⁷ a fragmentary guide for future humans in the rebuilding of that essential earthly material, topsoil. This book was shown in exhibition along with a solargraph print of a fieldworking outcome (Figure 35). The form of speculative fabulation enables the folding together of possible pasts, presents, and futures through audio-visual fieldworking at Grizedale Forest, the appropriation and recontextualization of archival material available online, and enigmatic images created through a series of prompts given to a large-language model generative A.I.; Midjourney™. In this work, I draw together the three-fold creative praxis of fieldwork, post-production methods and encounter “as multispecies storytelling in the feminist mode” (Haraway, 2021)



Figure 35 *Ygdrassil* (B. Nunes 2024).

4.3. Fieldworking, post-producing, fabulating.

Archival searches yielded a resource from the Forestry Commission: a report on Grizedale Forest between 1936 and 1951, detailing the geological, topographical, vegetal and meteorological conditions of the site, along with the various historical and contemporary approaches to forestry there. This embodied knowledge of the site had emerged from annual visits by the State Forest Officer, J.S.R. Chard, from April 1936 to October 1951,

⁴⁷ I use this term to reference photographer Alec Soth. Soth’s photobook *Broken Manual* is a photobook comprising Soth’s photographs of Americans who have chosen to disappear. The book is styled on self-published zines and pamphlets and has a fragmentary quality. I use the term here to suggest a handbook that is partial, incomplete.

whose notes are poignant regarding the already problematic practice of monoculture in relation to species selection and planting. Key phrases from this report emerge in the work, emphasising the ancient geology underlying the topsoil and the variety and specificity of the soil make-up.

My own embodied fieldworking in this thin place (Figure 36, Figure 37) yields sketches, digital photographs and chromatographs from the soil at the roots of two trees at the site. These chromatographs are then introduced to a generative A.I. programme, with the request to reconstruct or at least reimagine healthy topsoil. A.I. is knowingly utilised as a hypothetical tool for possible ecological reparations, whilst also being implicated in the environmental polycrisis of our contemporary and future moments.⁴⁸ This parallels the complicated relationship that my larger body of work highlights, existing within the utilisation of optical and lens-based tools. Generative A.I. trains its large-language models on the collective (stolen) archive of human production. A partnership of creator organisations in the U.K. has recently released a report that offers a vocal critique of the current situation and calls for Government legislation to protect cultural capital and its creators. This report states that where creative work is treated as free raw material for A.I. systems this does not represent progress, but instead a form of cultural strip-mining. (Kidron, B. 2025)



Figure 36 *Fieldworking, Grizedale Forest.* (B. Nunes 2023).

⁴⁸ Models for determining the impact of generative A.I. on the environment are still being developed. However, it is already clear that the demands on energy, water and minerals are huge and exponentially growing. (Bashir, N et al, 2024.)

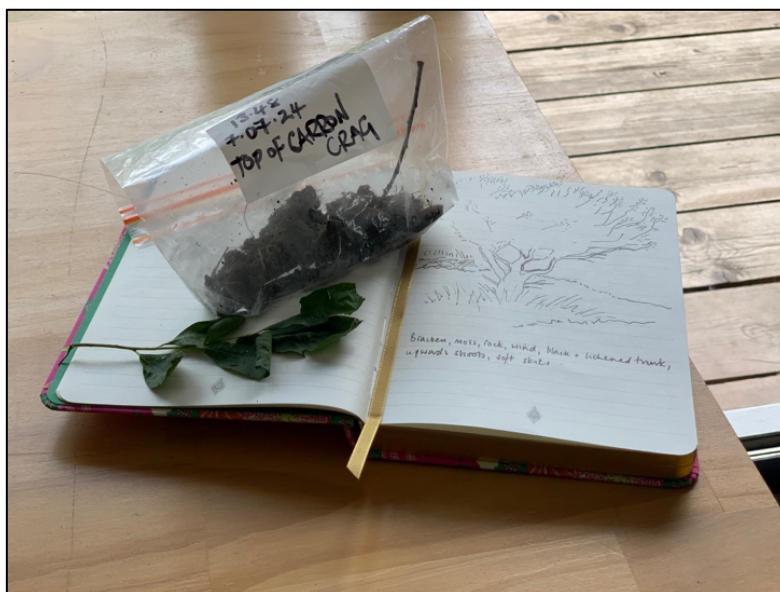


Figure 37 *Fieldnotes, Grizedale Forest*. (B. Nunes 2023).

Appropriated archival materials are employed to emphasise the deep geological time of the landscape and its minerality. Fieldworking is visible and woven into analogue, digital and synthetic outputs. Digital post-production methods are used to emphasise earthly elements and re-present them as enigmatic images. Synthetic large-learning model hallucinations⁴⁹ are generated as half-truth responses to prompts from a future-now where topsoil no longer exists. (Figure 38). It is important to acknowledge that working with generative A.I can be seen as a continuation of extractive practices even where the intention is to highlight the failings of the algorithms. In this work I begin to grapple anew with the implicated and slippery nature of photographic representation. Large Learning Models are facilitating the production of the ‘photoesque’. I suggest this term to express the synthetic simulacra of the world enabled through generative A.I, an ever-diminishing ouroboros of referent and reproduction. These photoesque images are produced at a huge environmental and cultural cost.

The book is hand-built and was designed to be held and experienced as a personal encounter by an individual viewer at the forest itself. This is a deep-time speculative fabulation, drawing on the worlding possibilities and warnings of SF, foregrounding both the deep history of a landscape and its possible future. This work makes a claim for the land as the central protagonist in all our stories.

⁴⁹ Hallucinations in the context of large-language models (LLMs) describe outcomes from prompts that appear logical but are, in fact nonsensical or factually incorrect. Hallucinations also connect us back to trance or dream-states, and thus to expressions of the unconscious. In this case, the unconscious of the Machine.

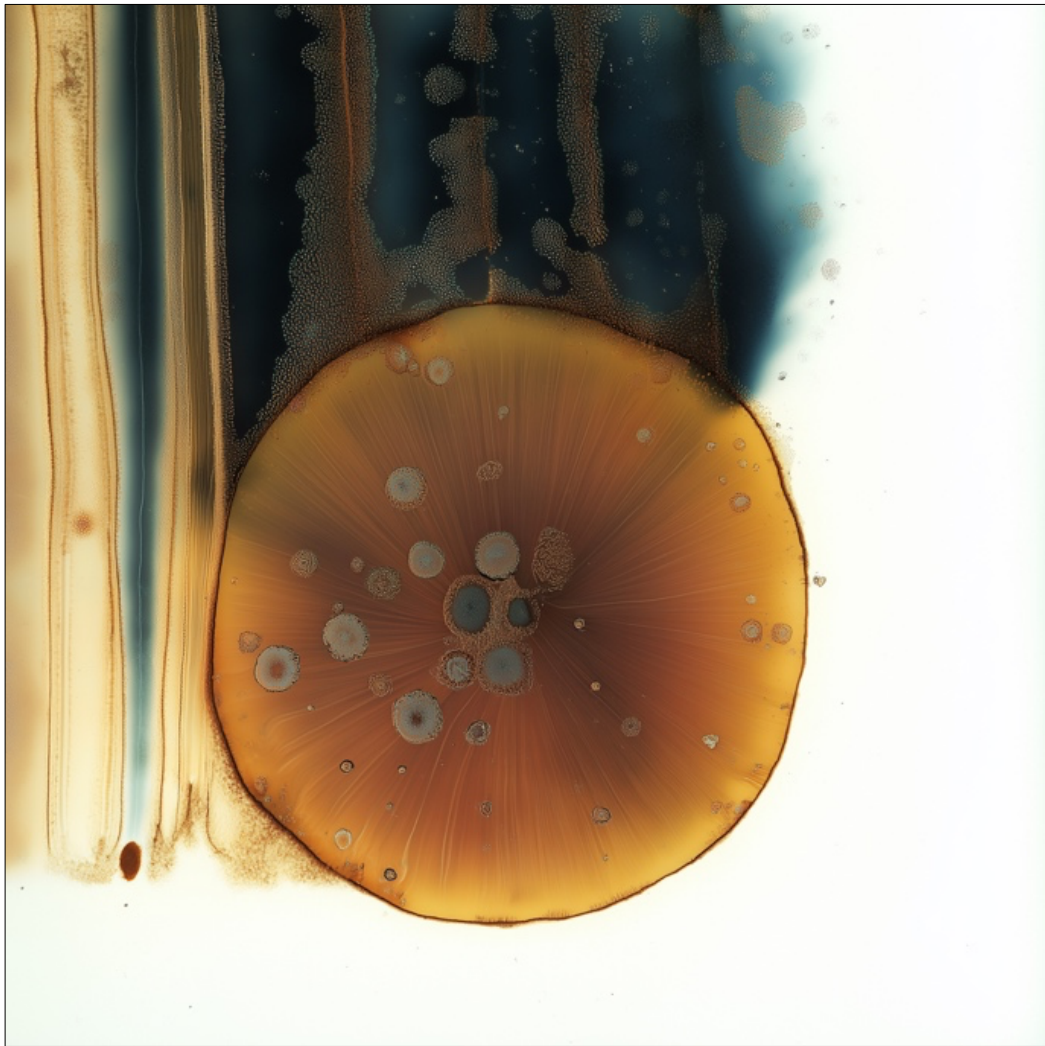


Figure 38 A.I *Hallucination of healthy topsoil #1.* (B. Nunes. 2024)

Conclusion.

Returning to the Research Questions

This thesis opened with two research questions born of an ethical and creative imperative that has propelled a decade of iterative practice. The first asked: how can a practitioner utilise lens-based practice to represent contested, colonised, and exhausted landscapes without reinscribing extractive practices upon them? The second asked: how can a lens-based practice reposition marginal landscapes as protagonists? These questions did not arrive as abstract propositions but as the direct consequence of fieldworking in thin places—sites in Aotearoa and England that carry within them the layered residue of colonisation, extraction, ecological trauma, and deep geological time. To answer them required not simply a change in subject matter, but a thoroughgoing revision of method, ethics, and the very conditions under which lens-based image-making takes place.

The thesis has demonstrated that both questions are, ultimately, inseparable. To reposition a marginal landscape as protagonist is, necessarily, to refuse the extractive gaze; and to work without reinscribing extractive practices is, necessarily, to reflect the entangled nature of planetary relations; situating landscape as an active participant rather than a passive subject. The portfolio of works traverses this double movement across five bodies of work: *Maunga*, *Tongariro Power*, *An Age of Iron*, *Clouded Vision*, and *1000 Years Per Inch*. In doing so, it traces not a linear argument but a mycelial one—rhizomic, reciprocal, and attentive to the conditions of each site and each encounter.

Findings and Critical Reflection

- i. The first substantive finding of this research concerns the **inadequacy of prevailing documentary conventions of landscape photography** as vehicles for the kind of relational, ethically entangled representation the research sought to advance. The analysis of dominant landscape photography in Aotearoa during the 1990s and 2000s demonstrated that even work motivated by critical or decolonising intent can, through its formal choices—the fixed-position large-format camera, infinite depth of field, the cool dispassionate aesthetic, the trope of the lone artist in the field—reproduce the anthropocentric, colonising gaze it nominally opposes. The landscape, rendered in high optical resolution, becomes a backdrop for the artist's interpretation. The survey of the 2022 exhibition *Tēnei Ao Tūroa* offered a productive case study of these tensions in practice, even among work with the most carefully considered critical intentions. The research is therefore not merely an addition to existing documentary landscape practice but a critique of its structuring assumptions.
- ii. A central methodological finding is **the development and theorisation of an integrated set of post-production strategies—selection, occlusion, appropriation,**

and re-assemblage—as ethically motivated disruptions of documentary realism.

Critically, these are not understood here as stylistic interventions but as relational-ethical ones. Drawing on Édouard Glissant’s concept of the right to opacity, the research has argued that post-production can function as a protective gesture: a deliberate withholding of total visibility that refuses to render the more-than-human Other fully legible to an acquisitive gaze. This is a significant conceptual contribution to the theorisation of post-production in lens-based practice. Where post-production is conventionally conceived as a tool for the resolution and polishing of the image, here it is reoriented as a site of ethical encounter and creative resistance.

- iii. The operation of these strategies was tested across a range of media and contexts. In *Tongariro Power*, the appropriation and slow-frame reworking of archival National Film Unit footage enabled a psychoanalytic and feminist reading of the original film’s extractive desire to penetrate the body of the landscape. The landscape could not be re-photographed directly without risk of repeating the colonising gaze; it had instead to be approached through the already-mediated layer of a prior representation, which could then be subverted from within. This was an important ethical and methodological realisation: that in some thin places, fieldworking with a camera may not be the appropriate first response, and that existing representations of those places can themselves be the material through which their stories are renegotiated.
- iv. In *Maunga*, the development of enigmatic images from speculative fieldworking in the volcanic field of Tāmaki Makaurau marked the emergence of the central visual method that runs through the portfolio. Working with photographic images of the site, the practice pushed toward what David Bate describes as the enigmatic image—an image that utilises optical conventions precisely to disrupt the conventional photographic signifier, producing opacity rather than transparency.
- v. This work also raised the ethical difficulty of working as tau iwi with landscapes of profound spiritual significance to Māori, even while using non-representational or fragmented modes. The critical reflection on the images resulting from *The Great Divide* demonstrates a process of recognition that formal innovation alone does not resolve the problem of positionality; that the conditions of production—who enters the site, with whose permission, in what spirit—must themselves be the subject of ethical scrutiny. This reflexive acknowledgement is, the research argues, itself a relational-ethical practice rather than a failure of method.
- vi. The third major finding **concerns the translation of an ethics of care developed in the postcolonial context of Aotearoa to the multi-marginal landscapes of England.** The return to the Midlands raised a question that the thesis has answered through practice: whether and how protocols and methods developed in a very

specific set of places and political conditions could be responsibly carried forward to new geographies. The work made in England—the chromatographs or soil portraits, the collaboration with PLACE Collective, the DeCom C20 project, and the photobook *1000 Years Per Inch*—demonstrates that the ethic of care need not be site-specific. Rather, like the mycelial networks that serve as a conceptual framework in Chapter 4, it can operate as ecological connective tissue, linking contexts across geographies while remaining attentive to the specificities of each. The adoption of Haraway’s ‘com-post’ framing and the chromatograph’s pseudo-scientific visual form represent a formal evolution of the practice in response to new terrains: the industrial Midlands, decommissioned coal plants, and the temperate deciduous forests of the Lake District are thin places with their own colonial and extractive histories, requiring methods that can listen to those specifics.

- vii. The use of generative artificial intelligence in *1000 Years Per Inch* introduces the most recent and perhaps the most unresolved strand of the research’s critical self-examination. The thesis takes the position that working with generative A.I.—prompting large language models to hallucinate images of healthy topsoil from chromatographs of degraded earth—is a knowing continuation of the ethically implicated relationship that runs throughout the practice with optical and lens-based technologies. Photographic apparatuses have always participated in extractive regimes; the generative A.I.’s training on the collective stolen archive of human creative production extends and intensifies this problematic. To frame A.I. hallucinations as speculative fabulations rather than representations of a real, while acknowledging the vast environmental cost of the technology, is to ‘stay with the trouble’ in Haraway’s sense: not to resolve the contradiction but to hold it productively within the work. This is both a finding and an open question that will require continued critical development.

The Practice-Based Contribution to Lens-Based Practice and Relational Ethics

The practice-based contribution of this research to lens-based practice is situated at the intersection of methodology, ethics, and aesthetics in ways that resist easy separation. The thesis advances a set of interconnected propositions that together constitute a new model for ethically entangled, more-than-human-centred image-making.

First and most significantly, it proposes and demonstrates partial opacity as an operative ethics of lens-based practice. Opacity, drawn from Glissant’s political philosophy and extended here to the more-than-human subject, is not presented as an aesthetic preference but as a structural condition of ethical relation. As John Drabinski

has clarified, the political force of opacity lies in its anticolonial resistance to modes of knowing that seek to absorb, possess, or render the Other fully legible. The thesis demonstrates how this philosophical proposition can be translated into concrete production and post-production methods: the enigmatic image, the occluded picture plane, the non-naturalising selection, the disruptive re-assemblage. These are not simply techniques but resistant strategies—ways of making that refuse the totalising visibility that Macarena Gómez-Barris identifies as the defining logic of the colonial extractive zone.

Second, the research makes a substantive contribution to the theorisation of fieldwork as a relational-ethical practice in lens-based contexts. The thesis develops fieldwork as a pre-productive ethical orientation rather than merely a method of data gathering. My methods draw on Polly Stanton's conception of fieldworking as always a process of 'making with', on Bridget Crone's account of speculative fieldworking as a terrain where the artist both enters into and is entered by the site, and on the kaupapa Māori protocols of respect, listening, and care developed through engagement with Ngāti Rangī. The practitioner's body, its situatedness, its permeability—what Astraea Neimanis describes as the porous posthuman feminist body—arrives at the site as a relational proposition. This framing displaces the figure of the lone artist-surveyor and repositions the fieldworker as a participant in a more-than-human encounter.

Third, the research advances the productive interval—drawn from Trinh T. Minh-Ha's critique of naturalism in documentary film—as a site of both ethical and aesthetic innovation in lens-based practice. The interval is the break in the flow of documentary sense-making that makes visible the partiality of the image's address, that refuses the seamlessness through which extractive representation conceals its own operations. Enacted in this practice through occlusion, fragmentation, sound manipulation, slow-frame processing, and non-linear re-assemblage, the interval produces what Jean-François Lyotard would describe as the *figur*'s eruption within the *discourse*: the emergence of an affective and non-semiotic register within the space of the image that blocks its easy assimilation into pre-existing representational regimes. The enigmatic image that results is the aesthetic form through which relational ethics is expressed in this practice.

Taken together, these three contributions constitute what the thesis has named, following Glissant, a clouded vision: an ocular ethics and aesthetic that refuses clarity, resolution, and totality in favour of affect, uncertainty, and relation. The clouded vision is not a deficit of sight but an ethical condition of it—a way of seeing that keeps the more-than-human protagonist resistant to possession, available for encounter, and capable of acting upon the viewer at the level of the unconscious and the affective. In this sense, the practice does not merely represent marginal landscapes; it produces the conditions under which they can be encountered as protagonists.

I emphasise the relationship between this practice and relational ethics, because it is here that the research departs most decisively from adjacent bodies of work in documentary and fine-art landscape photography. The relational ethics developed across the portfolio is not applied as a set of fixed protocols governing what may be represented and how. Rather, it is foundational for the practice from its earliest stages. The protocols of preparation and approach developed through engagement with Ngāti Rangī—arriving with a clear spirit and a good heart, setting intention through ritualised practices, remaining attentive to positionality in relation to indigenous and more-than-human perspectives—become the conditions of production, shaping which sites are entered, what is brought to them, and what can be legitimately received from them. This integration of an indigenous-inflected relational ethics into the production processes of a tau iwi lens-based practice represents a significant methodological contribution: a model for how non-indigenous practitioners might carry the obligations of decolonising thought into creative practice without appropriating indigenous methods or claiming an indigenous positionality. This model is further explored in Appendix 8.

Future Directions

The thesis ends at a threshold. Several of the most generative discoveries made during the research open onto territories that this submission can only signpost, territories that my practice has already begun to navigate with the same ethical care that has shaped the work so far.

The first of these concerns the relationship between the chromatograph as a practice-based method and the broader field of collaborative, participatory, and community-engaged art. The soil portrait workshops undertaken as part of PLACE Collective at Timber Festival 2023 indicate a significant direction: one in which the process of chromatography, the making-visible of the biodynamic life beneath our feet, becomes a vehicle not only for my own creative and ethical inquiry but for shared encounters between human communities and the more-than-human ecologies they inhabit. Future practice might develop the chromatograph workshop as a model for relational ecological pedagogy, extending the reach of the research beyond the gallery or the specialist art audience to broader publics with a direct stake in the landscapes being represented. The current participation in PLACE Collective, a rhizomic network of practitioners for whom ecology and climate crisis are central, offers an important community of practice within which these directions can be tested.

A second future direction concerns the development of the artist book as a form of speculative fabulation. *1000 Years Per Inch* demonstrates the hand-made, single-edition photobook—what the research has named, after Alec Soth, a ‘broken manual’—as a vehicle for the non-linear, deep-time narrative. The book is held, turned, and encountered as an intimate and individual object; it refuses the wall-mounted contemplative distance of the picturesque. Future iterations of this form will explore the

relationship between the artist book and other forms of ephemeral and situated publication as means of dissemination that resist the extractive impulse of the commodified art market. The billboard commission for 36S_174E at Te Tuhi in 2014 suggests that public siting of enigmatic images in the landscape they depict can produce powerful encounters, meeting local communities in more unmediated ways.

The use of generative A.I. in *1000 Years Per Inch* opens the most unresolved and perhaps the most urgent future direction. The thesis has acknowledged the ethical difficulty of working with technologies whose environmental cost is vast, whose training relies on cultural strip-mining, and whose outputs threaten to proliferate a ‘photoesque’—a synthetic simulacra that further distances image from referent. Future practice will need to develop a more sustained critical apparatus for working with these tools in ways that keep their implication in extractive systems visible within the work itself, rather than merely noting them in the critical writing. One possible direction is a closer engagement with the politics of prompt-making as a form of relational inquiry: attending not only to what the model produces but to what it cannot produce, where it hallucinates, where it defaults to dominant visual conventions, as a means of making visible the biases and omissions encoded in the collective archive on which it was trained. The landscape’s more-than-human agency might be articulated precisely through the generative model’s failures: the places where the technology breaks down.

A fourth direction concerns the question of how the ethical and methodological frameworks developed in this research will be shared with other practitioners working in analogous contexts. The appendix writings, the *Visual Politics* teaching materials, and the published essay *Clouded Vision* each represent preliminary attempts to translate practice-based knowledge into forms that can inform pedagogy and discourse. Appendix 8; *Current thinking and making*, contains the most recent writing, addressing the development of more sustained models for relational, ethically entangled lens-based practice that can be taught, debated, and adapted by others navigating the contested terrains of landscape representation through a lens of decolonisation.

The decade of practice gathered in this portfolio began with a question about what it means to represent a landscape without taking something from it. What it has produced in response is a set of methods, an ethical orientation, and a constellation of images that together demonstrate the possibility of a different kind of looking: partial, affective, relational, and alive to the more-than-human life that persists in even the most marginal and exhausted of thin places, and to which we are all connected. To make images in this way is not to solve the problem of the colonising gaze but to work steadily and honestly against it—staying with the trouble, tending the mycelial network, insisting on a vision productively clouded.

Portfolio of Works.

Maunga 2014-2017

Ohinerau, (Mt. Hobson) Seen from Great South Road

Tikikopuke (Mt. St. John) Seen from St. John Avenue.

Diptych, 2014

The great divide.

Tikikopuke, (Mt. St. John), seen from Ohinerau, (Mt. Hobson), across the divide of the Great South Road.

5x4 Pos/Neg Polaroid original, Ilford gold fibre archival print 503 x 400 mm

Maringi noa ngā roimata

Traditional waiata or lament.

2016. Archival matte print 230x380mm

36S_174E

2014. Te Tuhi Billboard commission

Ohinerau.

Exhibited at Te Tuhi in 2014, GrtSthRd Tangent group exhibition and publication as part of Auckland Festival of Photography 2014, DEMO in PAPERWORK group exhibition 2017

Tongariro Power 2015-2017

Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys

Video, 1.40 mins. looped. ©2015

Tunnellers

Video, 1.25 mins. looped. ©2015

Tongariro Power

Publication, ed. of 25. ©2015

An Age of Iron 2017-2020

Pyrite (B. Nunes. 2017) Digital collage. C-type print, dibond. 600x400mm

Taharoa (B. Nunes. 2017) Digital collage. C-type print, dibond. 600x600mm

Fools' Gold (B. Nunes. 2017) Digital collage. C-type print, dibond. 300x355mm

An Age of Iron. 7'58" HD Video Experimental film

Clouded vision: contemporary strategies of photographic representation as acts of planetary alliance.

Trace: Journal for Human-Animal Studies, published March 2025

1000 Years per Inch 2024-2025

1000 Years per Inch

Handmade artist book (Ed. Of 3)

Yggdrasil.

80x53cm solar-plate print on watercolour paper

Appendices:

Visual Politics Writings

- i. 15 Minutes of Fame PowerPoint. 2019
- ii. 15 Minutes of Fame Presentation Notes. 2019
- iii. Visual Politics and Documentary Practice Paper 2018
- iv. Visual Politics and Documentary PowerPoint 2018
- v. Photography and Social Justice Chapter. 2024

Tangent Ephemera.

- i. Exhibitions:
 - o Artweek Open Studio
 - o Artststion GRTSTHRD
 - o Newphotomedia Auckland Festival
 - o Platform I
 - o Platform II
- ii. Manifesto
- iii. Publications:
 - o Newphotomedia
 - o GRTSTHRD
 - o Tangent Vol 1.
 - o Pictures on Paper. (Short doc.)

This Air is a Material HD documentary film.

Mau Moko Testimonials

Agency and Co-Authorship

- i. Presentation
- ii. Paper

Screenworks journal essay

Eyecontact review

Decommissioning the 20th Century

- i. Documentation from Gainsborough exhibition x 2
- ii. Exhibition invitation
- iii. Images from project x4
- iv. Proofs from West Burton site

Current Making and Thinking

- i. *Pahekoheko* recorded presentation
- ii. *Pahekeheko* paper
- iii. *Pahekoheko* PowerPoint

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Mark Adams
Natalie Robertson
Chris Corson-Scott
projects brought together by Christina Barton.
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