

THE DISTANCE PLAN

#2

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Seven Conversations: An Introduction

Abby Cunnane
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DISTANCE MOVES CLOSER

In the three years since we started working on The Distance Plan a lot has shifted – both in the everyday conversations around climate change, and in the rapidly moving science that propels these conversations. There seems to be a growing awareness that climate change is no longer a distant problem for the future, but one which is already reshaping our culture. Recent analysis suggests that a ‘climate swerve’ – a shift in the way people are thinking about climate change – is taking place. In large part this is caused by the mass profile of climate-related disasters, ‘providing partial models for a devastating climate future.’¹

This swerve is also representative of a broader understanding that climate changes are *already*

1 Robert Jay Lifton, ‘The Climate Swerve’, *The New York Times Sunday Review*, 23 August 2014.

occurring, and of the urgency around altering our present actions so they will not jeopardise a recognisable future.

This publication is intended as a place to record those shifting conversations. The texts that follow span a range of subjects, but each includes someone involved in the arts: writers, curators, artists, teachers. Our hope is that by cataloguing our communities' changing concerns when it comes to talking about climate change we can play the role of witnesses, help to sustain the momentum which already exists towards combating this problem, and motivate each other to move the discussion forward. These conversations also further The Distance Plan's wider agenda of drawing critical voices from different disciplines into the space of art discourse.

SHAPED BY CONVERSATIONS

Conversations are where ideas and provocations are aired, anxieties and reassurances made public. Conversations have the potential to be open, discursive, candid, and – importantly for this issue – they can be conducted, recorded, edited and printed quickly. Conversations acknowledge that things remain provisional and contestable:

they are an appropriate format to address the always-evolving subject of climate change.

We are interested in the breadth and diversity of the discussion about climate change, as it's currently occurring across the world. As we write from here in Auckland, New Zealand, we are aware of how similar issues are being talked about globally, yet with different emphases. The conversations here are each inflected by different local conditions. In recognition of the common ground they share, The Distance Plan sets out to use the lateral spread of its community to link ideas that might otherwise remain isolated.

Another intention behind this publication's format is simply to take account of these conversations in the forms and places they occur. Climate change is discussed in many of the situations that we and our friends and colleagues are in: at lectures, staff meetings, openings, bars. This issue takes shape partly as a document of how we talk about the subject, with the acknowledgment that in New Zealand – unlike many of the other places represented here – there is still some way to go in cementing climate change as *the* concern for public discussion. The phrase 'going on record' indicates both assuredness, and a willingness to reveal

publicly one's position on an issue; this publication is such a record.

WHY ART?

This journal has also allowed each of its contributors to discuss with peers a question that we are still working to find an answer to: how should contemporary art practice engage with climate change? Our conjecture is that art is particularly well situated to be able to talk about complexities of the issue – as a matter of cultural and social urgency, as well as a scientific reality. When climate change is discussed in mainstream media, it is typically in an incomplete form and sensational in tone. It's the more complex and sustained narrative that art can provide which allows people to respond in a considered way, and collectively, moving beyond one-off emotional reactions.

Art's various contexts, at their best, also have the ability to offset uneven trends in attention, provide constancy and keep the issue in the space of public discussion. As the terminology around climate change evolves, art and humanities research initiatives are among those tracking and monitoring the shifts. In recent years 'global warming' has become

‘climate change’; ‘climate destabilisation’ is being reframed as ‘climate chaos’ (with related calls for ‘climate justice’), and the era of the Anthropocene and its philosophical implications are gradually being digested. As wider political and social trends currently prioritising mitigation begin to include plans for adaptation, artists are among those whose skills will be valuable.

Art also provides the means to confront and communicate these issues in a new way. This is vital as discussions around climate change are often criticised for being repetitive and didactic. The Distance Plan challenges artists – whose craft is communication – to put into use the language that they spend so much energy refining. The alternative seems counterproductive: why not bring one’s professional capacity to bear on a situation that has consequences on this scale? As artist Alex Monteith asserts in her conversation, ‘If you have a platform and you are given a voice there is a responsibility to consider how you should be using that in the service of the environment. It might be in the capacity of bearing witness, showing up, doing something physical, or actually putting your artwork somehow into the middle of the fray and risking it all getting

co-opted. I take that view now. And I go along on all of those levels' (see p.64).

The Distance Plan asks how contemporary art, in all its forms – gallery-based exhibition making, social practices in a broader field, writing and critical discourse – might practically and conceptually engage with climate change. In their conversation Isobel Cairns and Abby Cunnane discuss how psychology and use of language affect our ability to think about climate change, and how shifts in the climate change debate might be processed through the acts of reading and writing. Cunnane proposes that writing and visual art can 'make available ... a wider spectrum of possible actions for the individual' (see p.53).

Art's potential to expand the space of social and political possibility might be considered through the work of an artist such as Tino Sehgal, who employs both radical production methods and the final performance output to model different types of economic exchange and public interactivity, accepted reason and decision-making processes. In his work *This Progress* (2010, Guggenheim Museum, New York), visitors were met by a child who asked: 'What is progress?' Walking

the museum's spiral ramp, they met progressively older 'interpreters' who continued to discuss and complicate the idea of progress. Best known for these constructed situations, shaped by live encounters between people, Sehgal's work performs a widening of the spectrum of possible actions. Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has characterised his work as being 'deeply optimistic.... It believes in change, in the production of reality, and that engagement produces consequences.'² Sehgal's immaterial practice may also be read as anti-materialist; his critique of the efficiency or sustainability of making yet more 'stuff' evident in a conceptual approach that is object-free.

Analysis of the way social relationships and human well-being are affected by capitalism has long been the territory of social practice. As Scott Berzofsky states in his conversation with fellow artists and teachers Hugh Pocock and Katie Bachler, 'One thing that motivates us in the social practice class is preparing students to enter this economically precarious life' (see p.105).

2 As cited by Lauren Collins, 'The Question Artist: Tino Sehgal's provocative encounters', *The New Yorker*, 6 August 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/08/06/the-question-artist> (accessed 14 August 2014).

Climate change preparedness has a place in all contemporary educational frameworks; in the case of Maryland Institute College of Art where Berzofsky, Pocock and Bachler work, this means asking questions: What might making art in an unstable climate mean? How should young artists best be trained to deal with future circumstances? It is increasingly acknowledged that climate change is an issue of inequality, affecting impoverished communities and primary economies most harmfully. Institutions that reduce inequality, such as universally accessible education, are advocated for by many researchers working across disciplines. French economist and author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013) Thomas Piketty writes of the urgent need ‘to increase our educational capital and prevent the degradation of our natural capital’, undeniably a challenge, given ‘climate change cannot be eliminated at the stroke of a pen (or with a tax on capital).’³

WHERE WE ARE AND WHY IT MATTERS

As we write this New Zealand is weeks out from a general election. With the conservative

3 As cited by David Hodgkinson, ‘Thomas Piketty, climate change and discounting our future’, *The Conversation*, 12 August 2014, <http://theconversation.com/thomas-piketty-climate-change-and-discounting-our-future-30157> (accessed 20 August 2014).

National Party leading dramatically in the polls, it looks like three more years of lip-service toward climate problems and a continued delay in meaningful political action. This deferral is nothing new; Alister Barry and Abi King-Jones' recently released documentary film *Hot Air* (2014) catalogues how climate change denial has for decades been imported into New Zealand by the Business Roundtable and other conservative groups. This has been incrementally gaining momentum since National took office in 2008, with many existing publicly funded initiatives phased out, including the 'retirement' of the www.sustainability.govt.nz website (see p.124), amendments that weaken the Resource Management Act, a diminishment of the jurisdiction of the Environment Court, and a hollowing out of the Emissions Trading Scheme.⁴

In this election there has been a notable shift in framing and language employed by the New Zealand Green Party. Traditionally the active voice on this issue, the Green Party has in this campaign made considerably less visible use of the term climate change,

4 See Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand press release, 8 July 2012, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1207/S00095/widespread-concern-over-proposed-rma-changes.htm> (accessed 1 September 2014).

despite maintaining significant mitigation policies. In their conversation Sophie Jerram and Dugal McKinnon discuss how recent shifts in the political atmosphere have affected the profile of climate change discussion in New Zealand: 'The very phrase "climate change" in 2014 has come to be associated with an extreme state of affairs, a rather hysterical, unmanageable event that lurks ominously but is hard to identify specifically' (see p.122). Whether this is a consequence of perceived 'climate change fatigue', or compromise for another reason, it does highlight the difficulty of the sustained action this issue demands.

One consequence of the relative passivity on the part of political parties is that in the cultural arena, institutions in New Zealand have to spend more energy just bringing the issue into public discussion, and have less scope to develop conceptual thinking around it. Dissatisfaction with this local variant is expressed in a number of conversations in this issue. The sometimes problematic relationship between the art world and protest culture is discussed by Alex Monteith, Louise Menzies and Amy Howden-Chapman. Menzies comments, 'It's that tension between the symbolic and the practical that you come up against with art and political

action all the time. Like how effective is it to put a political message in a gallery? I think that's an important question. Sometimes it's effective – sometimes it isn't' (see p.73).

Māori hīkoi, a primary element in New Zealand's oppositional culture, is considered by Biddy Livesey and Dayle Takitimu, a discussion echoed in the photographs of Jos Wheeler.⁵ Takitimu states, 'I no longer have a romantic view of protest. It pisses me off, no end, that... when other people get to do stuff that is uplifting for them and their families my family has to go out and protest to save my tribe from being slaughtered by this government; we're under siege all the time – whether it be encroachment on our traditional territories, attacks on our indigenous lifestyles, [or] forced assimilation' (see p.90). Wheeler's photographs document the ongoing struggle that our tangata whenua have to make in order for their authority to be appropriately recognised in decisions about New Zealand's economic future.⁶

5 In this context, a hīkoi is a protest march, often over an extended period. The best known hīkoi was the 1975 Māori land march the length of the North Island, from Cape Reinga to Parliament in Wellington, organised by Dame Whina Cooper.

6 Tangata whenua: 'local people, hosts, indigenous people of the land – 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. The tangata whenua are the people who have authority in a particular place.' Māori Dictionary, <http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz> (accessed 2 September 2014).

INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

Through discussions around planning The Distance Plan sets out to address concerns for the future in the here and now, but also to consider those aspects of the future we still have some control over, in our cities, or on a more manageable scale, in our local arts institutions. In New Zealand, publicly funded and educational institutions are an essential place in which contemporary art is developed, viewed and critically discussed. For those in governance roles in such institutions there is a responsibility to be accountable to the existing legislation; for example, Auckland Council has recently launched a 'Low Carbon Auckland' policy which has aspirational targets for all its subsidiaries.⁷

An interesting parallel might be seen in artist Fiona Connor's project *A letter, office move, and book* (2009) at the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington, which initiated an energy assessment of the gallery considering categories such as air-conditioning, lighting and transport. In a letter introducing the project the artist

7 See Auckland Energy Resilience and Low Carbon Action Plan, Auckland Council website, <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/PLANS-POLICIESPROJECTS/PLANSSTRATEGIES/THEAUCKLANDPLAN/ENERGYRESILIENCELOWCARBONACTIONPLAN/Pages/home.aspx> (accessed 4 September 2014).

writes, 'Dear Adam Art Gallery... I hope to instigate permanent changes that make the gallery as energy efficient as possible, and move it towards an environmentally conscious operation.'⁸ Connor revisited the project five years later to evaluate the extent to which the recommendations had been implemented.

Many artists are financially sustained by institutions through teaching, as technicians, or are involved as students themselves. In these positions artists have relative agency within institutions, both as inheritors of the history of Institutional Critique in practice, and in more ordinary everyday ways. More recently, the will towards institutional change is evident in the New Institutionalism of the early 2000s, and in ongoing critical discussion around the institutional condition of the art world.⁹ The human constituency of the institution is increasingly acknowledged as its core and reason for being. Maria Lind, Director of the Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, a curator whose practice has focused on contemporary art and its institutional meth-

8 See *The Future is Unwritten* (2009), Adam Art Gallery website, <http://www.adamartgallery.org.nz/thefuture/connor/> (accessed 24 August 2014).

9 See, for example, *On Curating*, Eds. Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger (Zürich: Dorothee Richter), iss. 21, Dec 2013.

odologies, writes, 'Today, the immaterial and communication-based infrastructure is as important as the architectural one.'¹⁰ Certainly, it's easier to make change on the scale of individual institutions than at a governmental level, in the knowledge that a country is made up of multiple institutions.

The Diakron project is an attempt to establish a new institution, one which rather than simply reflecting on climate change, structurally embodies the discussion in its design. In the conversation between David Hilmer Rex and Aslak Aamot Kjærulff, two of Diakron's founding members, Hilmer Rex asserts, 'The way in which climate change has been dealt with in the arts is a good example of its inefficacy as an official narrative or discourse. [It has] been experienced as external to us and maybe for that reason has been dealt with on a representational, symbolic and thematic level within the arts, without substantially changing what an artistic practice could be when faced with a such complex distributed phenomenon as climate change' (see p.33). Martin Nowak, Harvard Professor of Biology and Mathemaics, identifies the impulse to privilege our present

10 Ibid., 'An interview with Maria Lind: We want to become an institution', p.32.

institutions over our future ones: ‘Even if you want to cooperate with the future, you may not do so because you are afraid of being exploited by the present.’¹¹ The Diakron project proposes that climate change must be built into all our institutional structures, this being the only way such institutions can simultaneously serve their present and future users.

With the majority of the world’s population now living in cities, contemporary urban planning is of unprecedented ecological and political significance. Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre’s typology of cities is widely rehearsed: ‘The earliest cities were political, organised around institutions of governance. The political city was eventually supplanted in the Middle Ages by the mercantile city, organised around the marketplace, and then by the industrial city, finally entering a critical zone on the way to a full absorption of the agrarian by the urban.’¹² We must now consider what shape the city should take in the age of the Anthropocene.

11 Martin Nowack, as cited by Peter Reuell, ‘Tomorrow isn’t such a long time: Research uncovers a path to future-conscious decisions’, *Harvard Gazette*, 26 June 2014.

12 Henri Lefebvre, as paraphrased by Martha Rosler, ‘Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism’, Part 1, *e-flux*, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-i> (accessed 4 September 2014).

Jym Clark and Joe Hoyt use their discussion of New Lynn, a small urban centre in Auckland, New Zealand to consider how the current and future city might evolve. Formerly a light industrial centre surrounded by suburban residences, New Lynn is becoming increasingly urbanised, and its connection with downtown Auckland improved. The discussion around New Lynn's development ultimately leads back to the question of political organisation on a local level. The economic concept known as 'path dependency' projects that once built, infrastructure is costly and politically difficult to change. This makes it urgent that we prioritise alternatives to motorways and suburban development, to avoid becoming locked into lifestyles based on carbon consumption.

Hoyt's practice as an artist is concerned with depicting sites in which civic infrastructure and the privately built environment reveal different ideologies. New Lynn is one such site, where the suburban dream is slowly being reshaped by a vision for urban sustainability; the redevelopment is a practical way of dealing in the present with the pressures facing the future city.

The relationship between infrastructure and natural environment in the New Lynn context has also been considered in local projects such as the Muddy Urbanism Studio which was part of the 5th Auckland Triennial in 2013. Bringing together artists, urban designers and architects, the Studio considered the Whau River running through New Lynn as a local case study for an expanded model of practice which responds to existing urban policy, infrastructure, architecture and zoning rules. For this project, Studio members Kathy Waghorn, Teddy Cruz and Esther Mercredy began with the idea that architects ‘can be designers not just of form but of political processes.’¹³ Integrated into existing planning structures and working for both conceptual and functional sustainability, the project subverted purely representational or symbolic logic.

A CHALLENGE OF SITE AND SCALE

International collaborations within the art world have the capacity to model the diversity of responses that tackling climate change requires. These responses need to be both global in their awareness, and alert to localised

¹³ See Muddy Urbanism Studio blog, <http://muddyurbanismstudio.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed 16 September 2014).

effects. In her ongoing project *A People's Archive of Sinking and Melting*, artist Amy Balkin invites people living in places threatened with disappearance because of climate change to contribute local items to an archive she maintains. Balkin has said, 'Although I'm interested in the potential for contributions to stand in for the recognition of the stakes by their contributors, the exposure of individual participants to the economic and political impacts of climate change varies greatly.'¹⁴ This project has particular relevance to the cultural and social impacts that will be increasingly felt in New Zealand. Positioned as we are in the Pacific region, the situation of affected countries such as Kirabati and Tuvalu will almost certainly lead to an influx of refugees into New Zealand.

A recent immigration case in New Zealand presented the first instance of 'climate refugee' status being granted here. Though climate change was just one of a range of factors, it was a significant one in the ruling. The decision paper states: 'Life became increasingly more difficult in Tuvalu due to the effects of climate change and overpopulation.

¹⁴ Amy Balkin, as cited by Dana Kopel, 'What Will Have Been: Interviews on A People's Archive of Sinking and Melting', *The Brooklyn Rail*, 5 June 2014.

The husband's home island of X became increasingly more vulnerable to inundation by sea-water as a result of sea-level rise.¹⁵ While the economic impact of further migration will arguably be within New Zealand's capacity to absorb, at least initially, the social impacts of the arrival of collectively traumatised communities is one that we can't fully anticipate.

One pre-emptive response to these major social upheavals is shoring up the political autonomy of publicly funded arts institutions in the public discussion around climate change, especially given the large amount of money still circulating to finance climate denial.¹⁶ French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour sees fragmentation of public discourse as central to the problem: 'There is no single institution able to cover, oversee, dominate, manage, handle, or simply trace ecological issues of large shape and scope. Many issues are too intractable and too enmeshed in contradictory interests. We have problems, but we don't have the publics

15 See court decision paper: Appellants AD (Tuvalu), NZIPT 501370, https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/IPT/Documents/Deportation/pdf/rem_20140604_501370.pdf (accessed 18 July 2014).

16 See Suzanne Goldberg, 'Conservative groups spend up to \$1bn a year to fight action on climate change', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2013.

that go with them.’¹⁷ Latour suggests that the collective effect of humans on the natural environment is now on a scale we previously considered only mythical beings capable of: ‘The sublime has evaporated as soon as we are no longer taken as those puny humans overpowered by “nature”, but, on the contrary, as a collective giant that... has become the main geological force shaping the Earth.’¹⁸

Speaking at ‘Projections and Preservations’, a roundtable discussion hosted by The Distance Plan last year, designer and artist Peggy Weil faced the audience of artists: ‘I think an interesting challenge is communicating the very large, the very small, the very slow and the very fast, because climate change is happening on each of those scales.’ Continuing to be active and present in conversations – of all scales – about the future is vital.

17 Bruno Latour, ‘Waiting for Gaia: Composing the common world through arts and politics’, a lecture at the French Institute, London, 21 November 2011.

18 Ibid.

Organising in the Anthropocene

Aslak Aamot Kjærulff
& David Hilmer Rex

David Hilmer Rex and Aslak Aamot Kjærulff are together with Bjarke Hvass Kure and Asger Behncke Jacobsen developing the organisation Diakron (founded in 2012). Diakron is a studio for transdisciplinary research, working-out of Copenhagen. Diakron sets out to explore open-ended organisational structures and action-oriented and aesthetic research methodologies, and to develop inter-organisational collaborations. The studio currently exists as a workspace for two collaborative research projects – Collective Learning Spaces and Organising in the Anthropocene – publishes an online journal, and is collaborating with two universities and an international research network to organise the upcoming conference Networked Urban Mobilities (November 2014).

The following conversation evolved from mutual interests. It represents at once a process of becoming familiar with each other's ideas, finding common ground for collaborations, and anticipating conditions and constraints for activities that are ongoing, or haven't yet begun.

Aslak Aamot Kjærulff

Thinking about climate change raises unfamiliar questions about things like the continuation of life as we know it. The perpetuation of modern development becomes a dubious question rather than a precondition for thought and action. So climate change could be seen as a kind of a climatological manifestation, or a

non-human response, to the ways humans have been rearranging the planet over generations. Climate change becomes one of several entities that start to emerge as large question marks. A social tendency that has been emerging alongside these question marks is the critique of a lot of the institutions that we take for granted today. But this critique hasn't been something that – at least in the mainstream practices of arts and sciences – has necessarily become integrated to what people do every day.

David Hilmer Rex

I think that a lot of people are equipped with critical tools to analyse problems around them. But perhaps there have been a lack of changes in the fundamental narratives around why we think, make, organise, produce, write, and so on, that incorporate large-scale environmental changes. A response to climate change is more something that has been added to a specific set of practices. We have reached a point where new values are about to be explored and experimented with on a wider spectrum. Visual arts have a strong tradition of experimenting with alternative ways of creating meaning, models of subjectivities and reflecting on values. So I tend to see visual art as an experimental laboratory for exploring new modes of engagement and sets of values.

AAK

So relating this to the values regarding environmental problems and climate change, I would say that these have been predominantly coming from representational, research based practices. Such as those of chemical scientists, physicists, astrobiologists, biologists, climatologists, geologists or atmospheric scientists – basically a lot of research traditions that deal with non-human entities, based on observation, measurement

and conceptualisation as their main modes of interaction. A lot of concepts and patterns of meaning are created. They narrate certain clarities about how different processes emerge and change. Maybe said in another way: the understanding of climate change has been based a lot on numbers and statistics and measurements and very little on an actual correlation to human practices. So a lot of what we know about climate change is based on discussions that have been very disembodied, and have been coined in very symbolic, numeric, and statistical languages. These languages have so far had difficulties establishing driving and generative narratives across disciplines and cultures.

DHR

The way in which climate change has been dealt with in the arts is a good example of its inefficacy as an official narrative or discourse. Climate change has largely been experienced as external to us, and maybe for that reason has been dealt with on a representational, symbolic and thematic level within the arts, without substantially changing what an artistic practice could be when faced with such a complex, distributed phenomenon as climate change. The actual way in which art contributes to climate change hasn't been dealt with. Here I'm not thinking of individual art practices, but the whole arts-industrial complex and its infrastructure: museums, art halls, and what goes along with that; the circulation of people, materials, works of art, and everything else that goes into producing and managing that system. All of that is virtually impossible to deal with as a single actor within the system. What is needed as I see it are explorations of the many ways in which aesthetic practices could contribute to collective attempts to tackle climate change. Even though our relationships to climate change might set out as very cognitive representational processes, they could develop into more complex

embedded artistic practices or efforts to create a more distributed awareness of climate change.

AAK

So it might be partly about seeing the liminality and the connections between, not just the creative side of an artistic practice but also the disruptive, regulating or redistributing side, in terms of resources and energy. It's that move beyond just criticising and trying to change social structures, towards trying to embody or practice that critique yourself. That is important, but also difficult, because it almost always carries ambivalences of being both creative and destructive with it. And at the same time, in the last few decades, understandings of the active role of human societies in ecological change have emerged. This opens up for what is coined the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene basically describes a geo-historical transition in the ecological condition of planet earth. From the Holocene – a period with relatively stable climates, surface temperatures and tectonic movements – to the Anthropocene where rapid changes in things like water, nitrate and phosphorus cycles, some of the basic components of life, are caused by activities of human beings. Human activities have become natural forces.

DH

Another thing that is historically significant is that subjectivity is written out of the process when we talk about sciences, while the subjective experience is often where artistic research sets out from. Within contemporary complexity thinking and transdisciplinarity, a lot of effort is put into inserting morally or ethically reflecting subjectivities. Meaning that the 'scientists' and the 'artists' along this axis are beginning to look more and more alike. Both are engaged in elucidating subjectivity as an inevitable factor in processes of global ecological change.

AAK

And these large-scale changes can only be discovered today because of our collective capacity to observe and render large-scale, complex processes sensible and comprehensible through digital technologies. These processes are at once able to be represented through networks of researchers and technology, and so enormous that they become hard to sense and understand as an individual. So we have the ability to render large-scale and complex agencies comprehensible, and respond to them in ways that we haven't been able to before. We can simultaneously imagine the climate changes that are coming towards us, the role that we play in their becoming, and their consequences. We are dealing with agencies that are a part of a world picture that we at once create collectively with technology and have a very hard time sensing on our own.

DH

For me this is an issue of starting to capture some of the questions that are emerging across institutions and disciplines that are responding to the complex problems associated with the Anthropocene. The way I conceptualise what Irit Rogoff has termed 'creative practices of knowledge' is that they draw on intuitive, engagement, a large catalogue of ideas, and concrete direct manifestations of methods. It is exploration and experimentation at the same time, and not confined to predictable ways of working. Meaning that the discoveries are by-products of the ongoing methodological experiments. They both render problems sensible and make an audience sensitive to its surroundings. It could be argued that there are steps to take towards the actual organisation of artistic practices around complex problems. Thinking about artistic practices in organisational settings has direct implications for connecting environmental discoveries to social practices. Artistic research develops by opening up to the unknown, unexplored and unconditioned, shaping

as well as being shaped in a process of co-evolution. That same quality, in an organisational setting, is important in developing more resilient modes of organising; it concerns a method for corresponding with a plurality of human and non-human interdependent processes.

AAK

The Anthropocene is the dividing line where we have to invent a whole new set of practices that work creatively with ecological changes. New values have to be invented for the rehabilitation of landscapes, the generation of commons or building resilient rather than escalating societal processes. This could also lead to new desires for employment and lifestyles that are not yet put into action. It could also be kind of a hiatus for existing artistic, scientific, political, economic or engineering practices to reconsider their values and desires, in order for them to continue to exist, but in new ways. So, now might be considered a period for designing new or recalibrating existing practices.

I think that's partly why we are collaborating on Diakron: we are both interested in doing that to our own ways of working. At the same time we want to create an organisation as a forum that doesn't have to lead anywhere in particular for us or for anybody else, but create this transitory space for experimentation and reconsidering practice. In this way things can be opened up in a kind of non-linear manner, where we try to connect people with different ideas.

DH

The practices that we are looking to explore can be seen as manifestations of new modes of employment, thinking and collaborating. Historically, qualities such as flexibility, creativity and improvisation have

been appropriated by mass-labour markets. It's therefore logical now to explore new paths for organising employment, research, and ways of drawing on artistic practice.

Many of the qualities that creative practices of knowledge have are also present in other disciplines, and individuals exploiting them could be described as having 'dynamic range'. One of the main challenges of any discipline right now is the lack of ability to engage the complex problems posed to us in the Anthropocene, and to do so in a manner which is at once collaborative and independent.

AAK

In talking of these many different approaches, I think it's important to say that none of them necessarily contain a solution to the problem, but as a whole they compose a set of reactions to a specific set of circumstances. Here I'm thinking of anthropologists working with new ways of representing agencies, from plants and animals to indigenous communities, or people trying to escape the lifestyles of urban western societies. 'Speculative realism' and 'object-oriented ontology' – people attempting to speculate once more about reality, independent of thought and of humanity more generally. Political economists, working with different ways of imagining the distribution of resources, beyond productivity-based lifestyles, liberal nation-state democracies and global capitalism. Creative practices of knowledge that condense ways of working, that conceptualise and engage problems leveraging artistic research methodologies. Peer-to-peer based imaginaries for new modes of distributed, decentralised and non-hierarchical modes of organising. Or collaborative projects of research-creation, where creative and interpretative disciplines work together to create theory that aims to avoid being

a part of a 'creative economy', but rather to experiment with interdisciplinary learning and growth.

We have been detecting or gathering different topics important to us that could be embedded as long-term interests of an organisation (see end of conversation). They do not have to be a part of every act but can operate as a core of collective intelligence of our organisation. Based on our common interests we've been developing research topics that we feel like we'll be working on for a number of years – sometimes together, sometimes apart, and through several projects, not as one big model. It is according to these research interests that our activities are given meaning within the organisation. We are interested in making projects that contribute to these topics, rather than creating successes according to primarily external validations, be those financial markets or whatever. So I guess that's the first step in our design of what an organisation is, and in the recalibration of what we do with our individual practices. Having research as a core component, and then activities as the expressive marks of that research, and no particular kind of end point or starting point, helps to generate imaginaries of what a creative research practice is, and what an organisation may potentially do.

DH

I think the question of new imaginaries could be a good point for finishing this conversation. Our research topics, each in their own way, aim to reengineer how we see ourselves and our position in the world. If the Anthropocene does ask people to consider their actions in a deep systemic and distributed manner, then what we're trying to do is to design

and engineer an organisation and a set of practices that can help people to think in that manner. The topics are an attempt to collect a set of common interests that over time accrue and attach new interests and desires. They are therefore never finished or exhausted, but are operational tools with which we navigate. Some of our main topics are:

- **Organising:** Coordinating events that make people assemble. Expressions of creativity and concerns through collective actions that generate and maintain social infrastructures for the distribution of and access to services, education, resources etc. We are interested in varied types of organisational imaginaries that represent distributed and plural sets of values.
- **Practices:** The cognitive, perceptive, intersubjective, imaginary and expressive characteristics of what people do every day and how they inscribe the larger social institutions they are a part of. We are interested in how people become aware and react to the politics they are a part of – the mess (shit), destruction, ordering and creation – that indirectly cascades into distant, indirect, unintended and generative processes.
- **Temporalities:** What are the conditions for imagining the ancient past and the distant future? Not by positioning events linearly in time, but (re-)positioning life forms, minerals, politics, practices in habitats. We are interested in the methods for invigorating and evoking futures and pasts and the values and concerns projected into them. Underlying this is a focus on the desires to extend (human) life beyond our own (inter-generational) mortality.

- **Technology:** Our interest in technology has to do with a perspective change from technology as solitary objects to an interest in social projects that compose these objects. This perspective focuses on imaginaries, and the relations needed to make technological infrastructures and objects possible. We are interested in exploring technologies as non-teleological experimental exercises that follow the many possible complex outcomes, rather than pre-given purposes.
- **Subjectivities/Agencies:** Made up of several modes of thinking (microbiology, systems biology, animism, speculative realism, quantum physics, science and technology studies, physics). Modes of thinking that in different ways incorporate multiple forms of agency, and follow their processes of becoming and unbecoming. We are interested in how the acknowledgement that a plurality of agencies challenges the ways we as humans conceptualise our own ways of being, acting and organising within philosophy, politics, agriculture, (digital) technologies, art etc.
- **The Anthropocene:** An interest in the interconnectedness in human life relating to landscapes, plants, animals, parasites, climate, bacteria, plate tectonics, atmospheres, water cycles viruses, minerals, metals, acids etc. Investigating the conditions of anthropogenic destabilisation of planetary ecologies that encroach on modernity/modernisation, and lead philosophy, sciences and arts into new (un)territories. The concept doesn't 'do' anything in itself, but points towards necessary changes in all spheres of socio-ecological processes.

Ages

You are
a surfer and a meteorologist
the sun shines into your bedroom this October morning touching
bare skin comfortable in the sea
and moles that give you board rash,
so I tell you that my mother read in the paper that people with moles age better.

I remember when the puddles in the netball court froze over
and I lived my dream of being an ice skater, on a very small scale.
We were taught that water expands when it freezes or increases in temperature.
I think of my drunk uncle at my cousin's wedding crying and saying
 'It's all about people'

I think about the Paekakariki surf club at the end of The Parade.
My cousin had a son last year and named him Noah Wark.
In the future
will we still be concerned about the extinction of Maui's dolphin?
The school of meteorology was built on the tallest hill in the city, like a periscope,
like they could see what was coming.

I wonder, do you have a well considered process for aging?
or only a small room in an earthquake prone building
an eye for the weather
and the next wave.

Isobel Cairns

A Strange and Hopeful Proximity*

Isobel Cairns
& Abby Cunnane

Isobel Cairn's poem *Ages* was the starting point for this conversation with Abby Cunnane, which took shape as an email exchange about language, writing and reading, and their relationship to change: making change, coping with, and thinking about change. Perversely – in the context of a publication and a project that deals often with great distance – Isobel was writing from her First Avenue flat in Kingsland, Auckland; Abby was often writing from her flat on Haslett St a few streets away. But writing seemed more appropriate. Isobel studied philosophy, psychology and creative writing at university, and currently works as a research assistant in public health at the University of Auckland. Abby is a curator who works at ST PAUL St Gallery, and writes both inside and outside of that role.

Abby Cunnane

I remember first hearing that poem aloud, and I'd been reading that day about our government's offer of residence to Tuvaluan people displaced by rising sea levels (this has since proved to be a highly selective process), and more about Kiribati Atoll in the Pacific, which is likely to be completely uninhabitable by the end of this century. I'd been reading a lot of numbers – apparently something like 630 million people world over live within nine metres of sea level;

in New Zealand about 65% of us live within 5km of the coast – and feeling depressed. Like the calculations, the ‘hard science’ on one hand, and the popular reproduction of this on the other hand, is still so hard to relate to people’s actual lives, and to the small and larger changes that are happening all the time. I’d been thinking about what it would feel like for your island to be sinking. And then your poem made me think about proximity – like this is actually happening here too – and collective vulnerability being something we all have to believe in in order to be able to change.

Isobel Cairns

Funnily enough, the poem didn’t start out being about climate change – it was just about a one night stand, and about being in physical places (other people’s rooms) that are entirely new and will most likely never be seen again. Anyway, not about climate change, until that’s kind of what it turned into. And then what came out of it was a lot of thinking about connection – exactly that connection you are talking about with the numbers, when big picture becomes small picture – yet how do we go about fitting the biggest picture stuff in with something so real and small as some of those moments feel.

I’d been thinking for a while about how strange it is that our generation, for all that we seem clued up about climate change, don’t really take account of it in our actions. By that I don’t necessarily mean mitigation, like thinking about our carbon footprint or being involved in politics, but simple adaptation – because if scientists are right, then in twenty years things will look a lot different. Where are we going to live? How are we going to get around, where will our food come from? Maybe young people aren’t that great at thinking about the future.

AC

After you read I remember there was conversation about how to use the word 'sex' in a poem, something like that, who could do it etc. Somehow this conversation has stayed in my mind as being about the precariousness of all relationships, like the words we use need to be negotiated all the time, they're never quite enough. Is that something you think about?

IC

Ah ha, no! That's actually not something I've really thought about. I do remember that conversation though, although I remember it much more as a sort of technical discussion – like when writers discuss whether you can put technology in your work, you know, having characters on cellphones and that kind of thing. How about you – do you mean words within a relationship need to be negotiated, or words to describe the relationship to people outside it?

AC

I think a lot about how language works – both within relationships, and describing them to the outside world. I guess a lot of that talking and thinking about the future happens inside of relationships, like you need to imagine things collectively, because it's hard to do on your own?

IC

I don't feel like I spend a lot of time thinking in relationships with others – I'm quite a solo person, and feel most myself when I'm alone – but if you're talking about the 'gaps between people', then yes, language is very important.

AC

There's this idea with written things that they offer a final or concrete take on something, and yet really, it seems to me that the whole deal with language is that it's elusive, and that every metaphor asks to be qualified by another. I think language is really important in the discussion around climate change. There's this phrase 'stranded assets' that gets used to talk about reserves of oil and coal which are still in their natural state, not yet mined and transformed into money – it makes me wild, but it's pretty suggestive right? I've also been on the National Party website recently, trying to figure out what they are committing to in terms of climate change and the environment more generally, and I found this whole new language there – 'bluegreen' policy, alongside of all the usual economic jargon: 'investing' in the environment, 'making use of its resources' etc. They keep referring to *our* oceans, *our* kauri, *our* waterways. Tell me, when you were working for the Green Party was there a lot of discussion around language, and how to establish the right tone? I feel like the relationship between tone and visual imagery is something contemporary political language exploits really effectively. Did working with politicians change the way you use and understand language?

IC

Oh, yeah, definitely! Maybe that's why I don't think of language so much when I'm writing, or in relationships – it's more like work to me. Language in that context is hugely important. It's part of something that gets called 'framing' – how do you talk about something, what is the problem, then what is your solution? It's been driving me crazy recently, because academics can be terrible at presenting their work to non-academics – and fair enough in some ways,

because one of the things that is so admirable about intellectual work is its dedication to ‘truth’, or if not that, ‘quality’ or ‘rigour’. But I miss that attention to clarity and simplicity I saw when I was working in Parliament, where there was much more attention paid to not just what was presented but how.

AC

Do you think there’s something particular to writers and other types of artists, in their ability to translate across discourses – academic to popular, political or strategic to something more practical, or more poetic or abstract? (I’m always kind of amazed that everyone expects to ‘get’ art, which they don’t expect from other professional or highly specialised discourses.) Maybe it has to do with the often really discursive processes involved in the research that writers and artists undertake. I just read something that filmmaker Briar March said after making her documentary on Takuu Atoll: ‘I see the act of filming like a ritual that creates some impact.... There was something very egalitarian about it... it wasn’t like the scientists were these expert witnesses sitting in an office somewhere. They were there in the community just like another character in the film. Everyone’s viewpoints were heard on the same level.’¹ Working with this kind of methodology, I think maybe artists and writers develop ways of talking about what they’re doing that are somehow unique, and a skill in looking at things from an oblique angle perhaps?

IC

I’d like to think that’s what writers and artists can do! Perhaps that’s almost the definition of good writing, at least, to me – when I think about pieces of writing

1 Briar March, talking about her film *There Once was an Island* (2010) in ‘Climate, Atoll and Change’ with Lyn Collie as part of the Now Future: Dialogues with Tomorrow series (Wellington, 2010).

or art that I really love, there's almost that ray of light, shining clarity or something, and it comes from looking at something in a new way – but maybe it's more that it makes a link that you hadn't seen before, and that can come from translating. I love when you get a flash of something political where you hadn't seen it before. I think though that when art, or anyone really, tries to be overly political it can backfire – people are turned off, look the other way, or the political questions get turned around and it becomes about whether art can be political or whether it's exclusionary, and it's not that those questions aren't very important, but you don't want to keep knocking into them all the time. I like it more when politics and art sidle up to each other subtly, it's more powerful that way.

AC

When we first met you were finishing a philosophy degree. I assume this informs your thinking around climate change somehow? Does it provide a kind of space to discuss this problem which often gets left to scientific or political or journalistic languages? Do you think it's possible to write directly about climate change, in a way that isn't somehow aesthetically unsatisfactory?

IC

There's a bunch of literature in philosophy on the separation between aesthetics and ethics, these two type of values; I don't think you can expect art to result in people changing their behaviour in any way. What would be more interesting – what I would like to see – is more of an exploration of what climate change will mean for us. How do we understand ourselves in a new, changing world? I can't really put into words what I mean by this, and I mentioned it earlier, but I think I'm talking about the difference between mitigation and adaptation. I find adaptation

more interesting, both politically and aesthetically, and I feel that it's the side that's been (more) overlooked.

When we had those depressing presentations about climate change when I was working for the Greens, what struck me most was how relatively easy it would be to build those predictions into our current plans. There's a motorway they're putting in on the Kapiti Coast north of Wellington, which is hideous in its own right, but it's going to be built through a flood plain and will likely be really vulnerable when the water table rises. To me that was more scandalous than the fact that they would still be building motorways when we're running out of oil, leaching carbon, etc. – that they're building something that won't even work in its own right, that isn't even a good example of what it's supposed to be.

AC

We were talking (outside of this conversation!) about how people psychologically deal with change, and what you were saying about evolution and innate biology seemed really relevant... Maybe can you touch on that here?

IC

People dealing with change is a whole big area of psychology. It's so hard to distinguish ability to change from wider structural stuff though, which is why I quit psychology. Basically, and this sounds too simple, people's adaptation will rest on their perception of the seriousness of the threat, and their ability to adapt to it – like whether they can afford to, whether they have the capacity to – but also their beliefs about how well they can adapt to it. Do they believe that their attempts to avoid disaster will be successful? So it's dangerous, in the case of climate change,

to tell people about how serious it's going to be without also telling them that they can do something to make it better.

And also, when it comes to climate change, there's a whole bunch of cognitive biases operating that are related to our biology and evolution. The idea is that our brains are operating a few thousand years behind this complex and crazy society that we've built (although I kind of hate the 'Paleolithic brain can't cope with modern world' discourse, because it is associated with so much gross stuff – evolutionary racism, sexism, paleo diets, CrossFit... provides too much of an ethical 'out', I think!). Anyway, there's a bunch of biases – brain shortcuts that make us more efficient, ways in which we see the world inaccurately – which make climate change seem like less of a threat than it is. Human brains are basically set up to pay more attention to things that are closer to us in time and space.

There's the availability heuristic for example²... That one states that we are geared to pay attention to things that we've actually experienced before, because they're more 'available': easy to bring to mind. These brain flaws mean that it's extra hard, cognitively, for us to deal with the idea of climate change, so at that very basic level, underneath all the politics and the capitalism and the terrible systems that we see, we're not set up biologically to deal with it. Maybe this is where writing can help? What do you think?

2 See Robert Gifford, 'The Dragons of Inaction: Psychological Barriers that Limit Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation', *American Psychologist* vol.66, no.4 (2011): 290-302. doi:10.1037/a0023566.

AC

Yep, I'm a believer – I don't think that writing (or visual art for that matter) can actually change things, but I think it can make available, to borrow your terminology, a wider spectrum of possible actions for the individual. And this can be really simple, through allowing us to visualise what might otherwise be impossibly abstracted from the everyday. To me it comes back to proximity, and writing can bring things close; that's been my experience as a reader anyway. There's this part in Nigel Clark's essay 'Acquiescence: Fluid Realities and Planned Retreat' which talks about Kiribati's recent establishment of a new marine reserve (it's massive, 410,500 square kilometres, and contains coral reef ecosystems unparalleled anywhere else on the planet), at the same moment as its people are facing the end of their home on the island.³ Reading about that gesture – which in transactional, cost-benefit terms makes no sense – makes you suddenly, abruptly aware of the fact that people and small actions are still really significant, that absurd acts of generosity happen. And if that's true then maybe the radical denial of self-interest can happen in other ways too.

So I think that reading is a political act – what you read, and how that infiltrates your thinking and conversation and whatever happens next for you, on a modest scale. There's that Kafka thing about reading being 'the axe to shatter the frozen sea within us', like it's what has the potential to break us. Maybe it's a structural particularity of reading, because it's something you generally do alone, that what you come across in that form can seem very intimate and specifically addressed to you. Something like that?

3 See Nigel Clark, 'Acquiescence: Fluid Realities and Planned Retreat', in Eds. Christina Barton, Natasha Conland and Wytson Curnow, *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*, iss. 4 (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2010), p.57.

Returning to writing, I don't think its political or action-generating significance is just that it has the capacity to impart information, or 'paint a picture', something like that. There's also the way that words work to bring disconnected things together. Like the meteorologist and your nephew Noah, and the puddles freezing and ice skating and climate change. All those things existed outside of the poem but they only make contact there. It's a version of your art and politics 'sidling up' I guess, but I also think it's the way brains make new connections: laterally rather than in terms of forward logic.

*This phrase is borrowed from Nigel Clark's essay 'Acquiescence: Fluid Realities and Planned Retreat', 2010. He uses it in the discussion of a possible relationship between a planet in volatile environmental flux, the economic logic driving global debates about the environment, and the idea of hospitality or generosity on the part of its human inhabitants.

Protest in Aotearoa

Louise Menzies,
Alex Monteith
& Amy Howden-Chapman

The following conversation took place between Alex Monteith, Louise Menzies and Amy Howden-Chapman in late August 2014 at Alex's house in Piha, west of Auckland. From the living room where they were sitting they could see Piha Beach, where the previous November around 2,000 protesters had gathered, including Alex and Louise. The protest at Piha was one of 35 across West Coast beaches that same day, organised by Greenpeace New Zealand in opposition to deep sea drilling by the Texan oil company Anadarko.

Three practicing artists, Alex, Louise and Amy discuss the intersection of activism and the arts, the changing nature of protest culture, and the shifting legal landscape around protest in Aotearoa New Zealand. Framing the opposition to oil drilling in Aotearoa alongside other regional environmental issues, the discussion touches on how localised protest might relate to a wider movement to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Amy Howden-Chapman

I was interested that there were artists involved in this local protest action against Anadarko's deep sea drilling that has consequences for climate change in general. I wasn't in the country at the time, could you fill me in?

Alex Monteith

The protest flotilla at Whaingaroa Raglan (where Anadarko was to begin drilling) sat within a larger Greenpeace protest campaign that happened in Piha, as well as other places along the coast. Their plan was to include many of New Zealand's main beaches in a rolling protest, and to be highly visible on the foreshores.

Louise Menzies

And West Coast beaches down the whole country were included. Bethells Beach, Karekare and then all the way to Raglan and Taranaki.

AM

Greenpeace is interesting to me because the campaigns they do are important, but I've tended to help by making an artwork beside or around where there's an ecological issue that Greenpeace is focused on. There's another organisation – Kiwis Against Seabed Mining (KASM) – and another whole set of protests that are happening against black sand mining for iron ore, but with Greenpeace they sometimes just need support so I end up doing photography. I shot the photograph that went into the *Herald* and the national papers for Greenpeace's distribution. And then I was shocked then to see it re-used in the opposite way, in support of right-wingers, supporting deep sea drilling, saying that the risks were overblown.

I think we need to support visible conversations about what's happening in the environment. And that's when it doesn't matter if it's Greenpeace or KASM or whoever. It's interesting to be there and just putting your support in. But Greenpeace – because they're global campaigners – they can't protest our seabed

mining because it's a local issue. That makes it more important that artists and communities are making visible actions of their own. Greenpeace decides as a global organisation what their campaigns are and deep sea drilling is a global campaign – so they care what's happening in the North Sea, what's happening in Antarctica.

LM

So for example the recent protests in the Arctic – with the Arctic 30.

AM

There was also the Lucy Lawless action occupying – jumping on one of the boats that was about to go service vessels prospecting for deep sea oil in Antarctica. Greenpeace is really good at what they do, they know how to mobilise people and be visible and capture a voice. It's really hard for smaller organisations to achieve the same profile, but black sand mining is the one that's come up next. Those two protests – deep sea drilling and black sand mining – both happened quite close together here.

LM

There was exchange between those groups, and mutual support. People were going along to both protests. The other thing about this particular day of the West Coast action that we're talking about, 25 November 2013 – it was supporting the former Green Party co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons and Greenpeace New Zealand Chief Executive Bunny McDiarmid, who were trying to have a protest dialogue on the sea with the Anadarko drilling vessel from aboard Greenpeace's boat the *VS Vega*.

AHC

Which is one of the boats that was in the flotilla for the 1973 anti-nuclear protests at Mururoa Atoll right?

LM

And the same boat that participated in the work that Local Time made about the 500 metre law earlier that year.¹

AM

So for the November protest at Raglan, Greenpeace was there with six protest vessels, to witness and wait for Anadarko, and ideally to block what was going on, but because of that 500 metre law that got brought in a few years earlier...

LM

... by the current government in direct support of companies undertaking prospecting, and drilling...

AM

It protects all prospecting and all their service vessels, so no protest at sea can impede their progression. Protestors can't go within 500 metres of a vessel that's doing the work of mining, once it's been approved at the resource consent end – they have this legal protection put in place.

LM

This new law makes it a really serious crime to take any type of direct action at sea. They changed the law so you could have kind of military intervention to get people out of the way, and then impound their boats.

1 Alex is one member of Local Time, a collective of artists, academics and writers based in Auckland / Tāmaki Makaurau. The group (other current members are Danny Butt, Jon Bywater and Natalie Robertson) share a concern for local and Pacific issues, often in non-urban sites, and move between individual and collective initiatives.

AM

Imagine what a personal risk it is to have a boat out there; and some of the protests that have been really important to us here in New Zealand lately have been done by people whose livelihood is fishing – and then that's lost. The Petrobras protest in 2012 was the one that caused this 500 metre law to come in. And then Anadarko's prospecting with the massive *Bob Douglas* – that's the name of the ship – this huge thing. It's so physically big it's really hard for smaller boats to be around or near the turbulent water that it makes. But protesters took the boats to the 500 metre limit – Greenpeace was taking photographs. Jeanette Fitzsimons actually took one of the major risks by going on the *VS Vega*, and within the 500 metre zone, and handing over a letter a child had written saying that they didn't want the mining to happen and the risks to New Zealand ecology. And I think because Fitzsimons was a former Parliamentarian... she's such a well-known public figure that she wasn't prosecuted. And so the *Vega* crew was uniquely able to do that – to be in breach of law and to deliver that letter.

LM

As well as delivering the letter, the *Vega* stayed within or near the 500 metre zone of the drilling ship for several weeks, intentionally sailing to get in the way of this vessel when it could.

AM

They managed to slightly impede progress for a period of time. The other useful thing about the *Vega* being there was it drew a lot of media attention, and got this 500 metre law – that had passed without much public debate at all and hardly any consultation – back in the public discussion.

AHC

Was the 2013 Local Time project for the Auckland Triennial about the 500 metre law? Was that work made around the time it passed?

AM

Just after – so we were reacting to it. The law was effective from 28 February 2014. If that law had been in place during the 1970s anti-nuclear protest, for example, that would have all been illegal.

LM

I also think about the amount of pride that New Zealanders take in some of the historical protest action that was carried out during the nuclear testing at Mururoa. That it's not possible under the conditions now to make a similar gesture about things happening in our own waters is disturbing.

AM

One thing that Local Time wanted to do was to respond to things that were current to do with local bodies of water. The legislation change had just occurred, between the Petrobras protest and the Auckland Triennial opening. It was going to affect every protest from that point forward; it would be an invisible legal problem. We thought it might be interesting to look at the law change itself as a reason to protest.

I went down and met Daniel Mears, who owns the *Vega*, along with two or three other people. He's been on a lot of important protests, including the early anti-nuclear protests and, he's a Greenpeace supporter on and off. But he's also the Auckland Harbourmaster. So he's in a normal role protecting the road rules of the harbour [laughter]. He was really supportive about the idea of doing something – he was about to undertake his own actions under the 500 metre law. So

we asked him if he might be willing to sail the *Vega* for the purposes of thinking through this legal issue. We knocked up all these flags with various ways of referring to the 500 metre law. We re-wrote protester Elvis Teddy's words, 'This is not a protest. I'm fishing', against Petrobras when they were prospecting in the East Cape region of New Zealand. Elvis Teddy was a Ngāti Porou fisherman who used a technicality in maritime law around fishing to just get in the way of the vessel and block it. It was really gutsy.

Then we flew those flags off our inflatable boats, including my boat *Mahi Kai*, plus sailed the *Vega* with some of her historic anti-nuclear flags, and we just sailed to various points in the Auckland Harbour.

AHC

I'm doing my own research at the moment about the New Zealand Nuclear Free movement, and I think it's interesting how there were so many artists involved. One of the questions I'm asking is why aren't more artists involved in a climate justice movement? And then just taking a step back and asking how artists might best be useful to these kinds of movements.

Greenpeace are very canny in how they produce images – which they've been doing all along – they were distributing images in the Nuclear Free movement. I'm considering if artists have a particular role, or have special skills that they are able to bring.

AM

I think lots of artists don't get involved in movements like that because they don't see art as the realm in which you should make a political statement – they're abstract artists – or others might take the view, well I'll attend in my capacity as a citizen rather than an artist. But I developed an ideology in response to the

historian Te Miringa Hohaia's comment. Te Miringa is from Taranaki, and he's had a lot to do with the development of Local Time's ethos and thinking. I was in conversation with him about a women's surf tour that was coming into the area of Taranaki, where his iwi are based. He said when he was meditating on sports people's profiles – anybody that had a profile and an audience because of that profile – they should use that in service of the protection of the environment. So I made that sideways leap that if you have a platform and you are given a voice that there is some responsibility to consider how you should be using that in the service of the environment. It might be in the capacity of bearing witness, showing up, doing something physical, or actually putting your artwork somehow into the middle of the fray and risking it all getting co-opted. I take that view now. And I go along on all of those levels.

AHC

So as a citizen as well as an artist.

AM

Either one of those – I'm actually not fussy because sometimes you're just needed as a participant or other times I've had the opportunity to use an artwork to help make something a little more visible. With the black sand mining, Dave Rastovich hand paddled himself from Taranaki to Auckland, and he was using his surfing profile to try and get some spotlight on an issue that's otherwise difficult to engage with for a lot of New Zealanders, because they don't know what's at stake with the iron sand.

AHC

What is at stake?

AM

The process is for a big ship to come in and suck about five metres depth of sand and process it on deck – so filter out the iron sand and dump back the tailings. It results in 100% death of the species and microorganisms. So that's a 100% kill rate, but on small things. Also in New Zealand we've signed over the largest amount of ocean territory anywhere in the world to surface mining – mineral mining in that way, and its effects are untested at this stage. But we've signed up for it.

AHC

It must have detrimental effects just up the food chain.

AM

That's the thing, because it gets right into the plankton, the very start of the food chain. Mining at the scale they're proposing... it's just totally unknown what the effects might be. The companies who want to do it have studied a range of things, but no one would know, if 10 or 15 ships came in, what the effects would be. Greenpeace isn't doing any actions around that one because of the global focus – it's really underexposed – it's a local subtlety.

LM

It's similar to the East Coast fracking proposals for me – another regional issue that an international organisation isn't focusing on, so again, it's hard to get enough visibility for the issue. But that's art's role, giving a voice to issues. I think what was interesting about the 500 metre Local Time action is that it did get written up in the paper. So the *Herald* newspaper covered the event, it wasn't just recorded within an art world context, even though that's the genesis of the activity.

AM

I was just thinking about the black sand mining because the way that was brought to public awareness was very manipulative and sneaky. They brought in the first legal case, which set precedent for it happening all over the country, in Patea, South Taranaki, a tiny place which doesn't have a large commercial lobby.

LM

Economically, it's a very depressed town.

AM

They broke in and pressured that area in order to get the legal platform that then just rolled it through all the other areas. And that was really cynical – I hate that stuff.

AHC

I know a lot of other similar cases of environmental injustice, for example in the Central Valley, near Los Angeles where I live, there is terrible air quality, which is contributed to by rubbish incinerators all through that Valley. The local community is largely low income and didn't have the resources or time to fight them being built there (which is partly why it was cited as a good place to build them), whereas you wouldn't stick a rubbish-burning facility in a rich neighborhood like Remuera – there would be too much opposition.

AM

Absolutely. Raglan, Whaingaroa Harbour – that area – the protesters just went absolutely berserk. They were really active against Anadarko and black sand mining because both would affect the key ecologies in that area. Also Raglan has strong fishing lobbies, which put a lot of weight behind a cause. It's funny when some of those lobbies – who aren't always ecologically-leaning in terms of species protection when it comes

to fishing – swing the other way in protection of the environment as they did in Raglan.

AHC

That's interesting, that role that organised labour plays. One of the things that I've been realising with my research into the Nuclear Free movement is that many of those involved came from really strong existing groups – the women's movement, the dockworkers' unions and other peace groups. They were around before or in parallel to the Nuclear Free movement and could be brought into the action quickly and be very effective because they had already established communication channels and memberships.

You two must know each other from being artists, and being involved in the arts community here which is quite small, and in many ways and constantly communicating with itself about random things all the time. I think it's a good group to mobilise – it can be mobilised for some things – like going to openings!

LM

One community can come in and be of support to other communities. I can think of a number of artists who are engaged in political work, and really do get out there and support issues whether they are environmental or otherwise, but perhaps it's just that the general social climate is not as attuned to protest as it was in the 70s and 80s in New Zealand? I think protest culture is different now.

AM

I also think it beggars belief that you could have 50,000 people on some of the hikoī, in recent times, protesting against mining or against asset sales – the Aotearoa is Not for Sale protests – and no movement at the government end. It used to be that a 50,000 strong movement did actually do something.

AHC

I agree that people are more likely to protest if they see it as an effective mechanism. I'm interested in the deep sea drilling issue and how people see it in relation to climate change. I know that Greenpeace are very concerned with direct action against climate change, so it ties into what they choose to support or put forward as their most important issues, but I don't know if deep sea drilling, for example, is something that's best just to think about as a local issue, or if it would be more productive to link those issues with a broader climate justice movement?

LM

So the question you're asking is how the deep sea oil campaign might relate to a broader climate campaign?

AHC

Yeah, was it talked about at the time of the protests as something that was related to climate change?

AM

I think the feeling is that the inherent risks of deep sea drilling – reaching into ever more unfathomable parts of the earth, taking more and more risks to extract oil from those places when everybody knows it's a finite resource – relates to climate change and fossil fuels. Either we back off and leave some of it there, or we keep extracting till it's all gone. And in New Zealand there have been many cases where people go until it runs out – for example whaling and sealing and even moss! I think the relationship is definitely on people's minds.

AHC

I've been thinking about the imagery and language that the Green Party has been using this election,

and I haven't heard them mention climate change at all, though they have been focusing on many things like offshore drilling, and also solutions to climate change, such as more sustainable cities and public transport – they're addressing those issues, but they very rarely make the relationship explicit.

LM

I think it's driving their policy, but they're just not saying it's the reason for each thing they're announcing.

AHC

I'm of the opinion – I'm interested in what you both think – it's important to keep that terminology in the public domain all the time. Talking about climate change as an issue so people can identify it as such and call to account parties that don't talk about it, at all, ever.

LM

There was basically no government response, or really much political response at all, to the new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report that came out last year. I think there were a couple of Green Party press releases, but that was it. I think the central government is really slow to deal with those issues in a responsible way, including just talking about them.

AHC

In the US at the moment it seems that the most direct action that is happening around climate change is protesting, one, about fracking and two, about the Keystone XL pipeline. Both concern oil, so an issue like offshore drilling could be perfectly aligned to those types of action but it doesn't seem to be. There's a significant difference in how the Keystone pipeline protest is being framed – as a symbol of stopping climate change in a very direct way – which is criticised

to some degree, with people saying even if you stopped Keystone, oil will still be conveyed, climate change will still be occurring. Though people debate the usefulness of Keystone as a metaphor, it's been a useful issue to build protest action around.

AM

It's interesting to consider climate change as a symptom (or that it's being caused by our consumption of fossil fuels), but I don't know if it's better to aim it at concepts like 'stop climate change', in that broad sense. It seems one level abstracted from our practice of values that are endlessly consumptive. We could be concentrating on the values that underwrite consumption – in that way we're addressing climate change as the thing that shows from that sickness. I think climate change is one of the many effects of our whole approach, excessive consumption.

LM

It does make me think about visibility again though, because I think there's quite different visibility available to local issues. The engagement that people can feel with something that's happening, or could happen near to them – a threat like deep sea drilling – I think people understand that there's a connection between that and larger climate change conditions. What's important, and I guess what you are asking, is how they operate together. I'd say it's obvious to most people that these issues are related, but it's how you get people thinking about that. I still think you can mobilise on the local level in a way that can be really helpful in a larger understanding of climate change, even if it's not talking about that directly. Thinking back to banners on the beach on the day of the protest though, there were definitely banners that related to wider climate issues, and to the protection of resources in general. I painted a bird on my banner,

out of the feeling that birds need representation too at these forums. I'm aware of how threatened those coastal birds are, their populations are so slim on these beaches as it is. I'm not sure how effective it was – going back to the currency of images in relation to protest, I think it's hard for a picture of a bird to necessarily do much to change anyone's opinion in a context like that – but how to provide adequate representation for other species has been on my mind.

AHC

Climate change, it encompasses the entire world, and the science considers complex issues. But a lot of the imagery is of melting ice – which of course is happening – but it's images of stuff happening else where, and I think placing those images in a local context is what gets people going. When the effects are recognised as being local. When Superstorm Sandy happened there was a sudden energy around doing something around climate change in New York. But I think it would be nice if we didn't have to wait for a crisis to happen here, or a series of crises, but if people can see what they find precious here – which in many senses is what the protest you were both involved in was doing. It was, one would hope, anchoring this debate into our landscape.

AM

Going back to the structure of the Greenpeace protest. It was all beaches. Getting communities out beach by beach does hint at that the ideology driving the protests: needing that variation from there and that variation from there, that those things are important. Because when you think of trying to set up the protests, is it better to have a centralised one big hit, or is it better to have staunchly local intonations?

Then you think about going on record somewhere,

or doing an action that might actually effect change, right up to direct action and trying to literally block something from happening – and still that’s something that’s been given a legal right to exist. And then you’re back trying to work on the legal end, which Greenpeace and KASM have both done. So how can the visual side complement those existing actions? The legal stuff is pretty unsexy. With the 500 meter work, we were trying to say this law change affects everything from this point on.

AHC

I do think you need a way to visualise those issues, and I do think that that’s what people were effective in doing in the nuclear free movement.

I have one last question. I know there was a lot of hīkoi around the offshore drilling stuff.

AM

The Aotearoa is Not for Sale hīkoi ?

LM

Those were a bit earlier. When the National Government first came to power and announced their economic agenda to begin mining there were huge protests. But they had their strategy all mapped out – they said they were going to mine on Great Barrier Island, which of course Auckland is not going to stand for because that’s where Auckland goes on holiday, so there was a huge protest. As big as for Aotearoa is Not for Sale – I don’t know the figures but by recent standards these were large protests. But it was just all part of National’s plan, because then they said, ‘Oh okay, we’ll just mine down in the South Island’. And everyone was like ‘Oh well okay’. Everyone thought ‘Oh, they’re being moderate now, they’re not going to mine these important natural resources that are close to

the biggest population area, that we feel connected to'. Mining just began again in the Denniston Plateau two weeks ago in Westland. My sister is part of a group called the Coal Action Network, which had been involved in a legal case to try and halt this work.

AHC

I know that Jeanette Fitzsimons is involved, I heard her say 'Keep coal in the hole'.

LM

I love that phrase. Coal Action Network becomes CAN. The group wanted to have this positive acronym. We can change it.

AHC

I feel like in the art world recently it's been really fashionable to make work about protest – which is I admit exactly what I'm doing right now by looking at the Nuclear Free movement. But there's a lot of reproduced banners – I feel like banners are really aestheticised – because they stand for something.

LM

I suppose it's that tension between the symbolic and the practical that you come up against with art and political action all the time. How effective is it to put a political message in a gallery? I think that's an important question. Sometimes it's effective – sometimes it isn't.

AM

I know that's a criticism of art trying to do something like that, because art's audience is comparatively small, as compared to the mass media, but I think of Te Miringa's call that if your platform has any voice, it's probably worth exercising it. That's the view that I've taken. I just see it as work that needs to be done,

but its efficiency is a question. The art world's efficiency might not be enormous compared to mass media outlets, but they can create a potent message. I think there's a question just about what art's role can be in relation to some of these extremely demoralising causes.

So with Petrobras and Anadarko, it feels like we have a victory because they've gone away, but in fact they've gone away because they haven't struck oil, and still our current laws undermine ecological protection.

New New Lynn

Jym Clark
& Joe Hoyt

Auckland is New Zealand's largest city, with 1.4 million people. Like many cities in the 'new world', Auckland is a place where the private vehicle is king. In New Zealand, public transport has long been a low priority, with the bus and train regarded as existing only for those who can't drive, or can't afford to own a car. But things are changing: public transport use is increasing in Auckland, and around the world. Between 2006 and 2013, total public transport commuting trips in Auckland grew by 27%, while car trips only grew 2%.¹

Alongside this shift the city's urban designers are calling for housing intensification in places served by the rail and to a lesser degree the bus network. This type of development, in contrast to the road driven sprawl, is part of how Auckland plans to create a quality compact city going forwards.

New Lynn, which is where the western suburbs converge to meet Auckland's isthmus, has recently been re-zoned as a special housing area, and combined with this there has been a push from Auckland Council to develop New Lynn as a regional hub, an area where mixed-use development, retail and dense housing can coexist. New Lynn has no direct

1 See table 3.3, 'Journey to Work Patterns in the Auckland Region, Analysis of Census Data for 2001-2013', Richard Paling Consultancy, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/nauib8dprhf2ex7/Richard-Paling-report-TransportPatterns-in-the-Auckland-Region.pdf>

motorway connection, but does have a railway line running through its centre.

Planning sustainable transport linked with housing is vital to reducing our carbon emissions – not just now but in decades to come. With that urgency in mind, Joe Hoyt and Jym Clark walk around the West Auckland town centre of New Lynn, approximately 40 minutes by bus or rail from the city centre, 20 minutes by car. The focus of their talk is a new transit hub and mixed-use development in central New Lynn, incorporating rail, bus, shops, parking and a large apartment building. As they talk, they wander through the development onto nearby streets.

Joe is an artist usually based in Los Angeles, but living for a time in the suburb of Titirangi, adjacent to New Lynn. Jym is an urban planner who has been living and working in Auckland for ten years. They talk about the intensification of New Lynn and how this kind of process can be analysed and absorbed from the varying perspectives of their own disciplines.

Joe Hoyt

This new building here, it really calls attention to itself. There's nothing nearly as tall as it for miles around.

Jym Clark

I know, you can see it from Avondale, and a bit further away. It's become a bit of a landmark.

JH

Do you think this apartment building has a symbolic value to people? To me coming here from the outside, it really seems to be advertising a hub or a centre.

JC

Yeah, I do – the Deputy Mayor of Auckland bought an apartment in there. And I think she did need somewhere to live, but it is a sign of a push for development of that kind. It does stand out so clearly now because the rest of the built landscape is so low, it has a real presence. And those yellow features make it stand out.

In terms of this central New Lynn area, it's a place where growth has been planned. The former Waitakere City pushed hard to get infrastructure investment here in New Lynn. Part of that was to get the rail line out of the way of traffic and down in a trench. Where we're standing now there used to be railway crossings.

JH

So without the trench, you would have had gridlock from the commuter trains blocking traffic. This is a pretty busy area. It is interesting, in a way the most important half of this new development is hidden underground and you can't even see it.

JC

Apparently this structure was meant to be just a large car park with retail sleeved around the bottom. But then some voices called for an apartment building to be put on top.

JH

So have the apartments been successful?

JC

Yeah, they're selling. There's quite a demand for more compact living spaces, especially with the aging population. There are people who want to downsize, and most housing is limited to three-bedroom, detached

dwellings in the suburbs. To have the option of a one or two bedroom apartment, with limited upkeep, is desirable.

JH

These retail shops, below the apartment building, don't look like they're doing so well. A lot of them are still empty – but all the stores in the mall across the road are occupied.

JC

Yeah, I wonder when this retail will start fully functioning. When the electric trains are operating on the line straight into central Auckland, and the frequency is up, more people will be passing by, that will make a difference.

JH

So the infrastructure serving this area is slowly getting ramped up...

JC

There used to be a bus interchange on this site, and it was a pretty grim-looking place. For two and a half years I caught the train out here to Henderson. They were building the trench. They built the walls into the ground, and then they dug it out, revealing the walls that they'd constructed underground. They had the railway line on top of the ground, and then put it into the trench. It's a clever technique. The guys who knew how to build the walls were from Egypt. It was such an expensive project that it had to be funded by both the local council and central government. The Labour Government of the time put money into this rail trench – maybe 120 million dollars?

But in terms of the retail development, that's also private investment. The Council owned the land, so I

think they leveraged for development to occur. There was a consortium set up that the Council was involved with, to make this Merchant Quarter a reality.

Why did you become interested in the New Lynn townscape, and centre? Just because it's close to where you are living at the moment in Titirangi?

JH

It is close and, with sustainability in mind, focusing on what is local to you is important. We come here to shop and also to catch the train in to Auckland central. But also it's an area in flux right now. That's creating interesting contrasts and disruptions, so you have a site where there are conflicting ideologies. Clearly this is still a car-dominated hierarchy that's thriving, but alongside you have an attempt by public and private groups to insert some urban sustainability. And they're doing it in a way that seems to coexist alongside the car-dominated one. That also interests me. Here you have a train line that's directly linking into a shopping mall, like a subway would. These are supposedly opposing interests. So I think this is an experiment that has relevance to a lot of other places, like Los Angeles even.

JC

I don't think New Lynn has any more potential to be a sustainable development than anywhere else on the railway line, but in saying that, everything you could want to buy you can get in New Lynn. And you can get the train to work, within a reasonable walking or cycling distance. With public transport there has to be a high level of convenience and accessibility to make it a viable choice.

JH

We are surrounded by a lot more desirable places

to live, that have coastline, trees and nicer houses. People who live in those neighborhoods could use New Lynn as a hub instead of going in to central Auckland. They don't have to live in the town proper for it to still function as a centre.

JC

They see that tall building, and they're like, 'That's what they want us to live in'. It can be a bit difficult for people who are scared of density. You go from very high density to a low density area and there's not a lot of a transition. They don't see dense development as an option, an option that in fact will be the new residential growth typology. There actually is a little bit of medium density development around here, just two minutes walk from the train here.

JH

I never realised those were there. They're really tucked away. Should we walk over?

JC

Yeah, so these are definitely medium density. I suppose this land was available because it's former industrial land from the Crown Lynn ceramic works. All that land was developed 15 or so years ago. So the industry leaving really freed the land up for development.

But the construction and design looks really terrible, it's just garages facing the street. As you say it's still a very car-orientated environment around here, as soon as you leave the central area.

JH

I guess that transition away from cars just takes a long time.

JC

These houses are relatively new, built I would say in

the early 2000s, but they've been plagued with issues, such as the leaky building syndrome. It's a phenomenon of poor building quality in which water gets inside the building frame and rots it from the inside out. It happened especially in the mid 90s after changes were made to relax the building code. It was a consequence of deregulation.

JH

I see a lot of buildings around in shrink-wrap.

JC

It's very expensive to fix, to the point that it's ruined people's lives. Apparently the total cost of the leaky building crisis is roughly equivalent to the cost of rebuilding Christchurch after the earthquakes there, around twelve billion dollars.

JH

Do you think the leaky building crisis has affected the way high density housing is judged?

JC

Yes, even though the leaky building crisis has affected many single-family dwellings, I would say it's been most associated with the two or three storey apartment or townhouse complexes.

JH

And maybe it also coincided with an increase of density?

JC

There was a lot of urban growth at that time, and through to the mid 2000s residential development reached a peak, just before the global financial crisis. It's definitely tainted people's perception of medium density housing. Any building that is covered in fibre

cement has a cheaper look, and eaves that are close to the edge of the building rather than wider. That sort of look is disappearing now. Developers will put things like eaves in to make new dwellings not look like those leaky buildings.

JH

This is a pretty large grouping of apartments, and right next door is a pretty big park, which also seems new. Those seem like native species that have been planted.

JC

When I caught the train out West for work, you would come across here and you could see lots of people spending time in this park.

JH

It wouldn't be too bad – to live in the apartment here, walk to the train, be close to the park. It seems like how you would have to plan these developments for them to be attractive to people. I mean, you can't just put buildings like that as stand-alone developments. There needs to be coordinated planning to make sure what's built around them fits with a certain lifestyle. I'm not sure that's happening here in New Lynn because a lot of the new construction continues to be these big box stores.

JC

So you were doing drawings along a new light rail line in Los Angeles – is that right? And what was the density like around those stations?

JH

It was pretty varied. A couple of stops are residential and have 'park and ride'. One of the stops is a big university, another is a transit hub downtown. There

are stops that are in industrial areas. But those are developing. They had to lay the tracks along a former freight line, so it takes a cross-section of the city, incorporating pretty much every kind of neighborhood.

JC

What was it about the rail line project that attracted you? Is it the type of project that you've done before?

JH

I've always drawn from life, and I like the idea of going to all these places through using the line. Many people never set foot on public transport so to physically go there and do drawings of these stations helps to bring transit to people's attention. So there's also an element of advocacy.

JC

Do you do a lot of your drawings in public spaces? What does it mean to draw in a public space?

JH

If you think about most public space that a pedestrian can access, it is designed for people to move through. Sometimes you stay longer for a coffee or to eat something, but that involves making a purchase. There are exceptions like parks, cultural spaces and museums. But much of the built environment is designed to be passed through or facilitate purchasing something. In many sprawling cities, there are very few spaces for people to congregate or engage outside of commercial activity. Doing a drawing is claiming a space for a different kind of purpose.

JC

Like a mall, which is a highly controlled environment. It's interesting that you're capturing a space that is quite utilitarian – you could see it as a utility, as an

element of infrastructure. It's infrastructure to move people to do other things. It's a catalyst for people getting to other activities.

JH

Yes, infrastructure is important to me also. But also the more conflicted spaces like the mall attract me as well. Take the Lynn Mall right here. It is a private space that has taken over the functions of a public space. The train was probably put underground to better accommodate its traffic, so it is a main beneficiary of the transit investments. And right now it really is the focus of the town's life, there are so many people in there at any time. But to me it's dangerous. The mall's use as a public space is compromised or subverted because the whole thing is designed with a commercial impetus.

Where we're living up the road, in Titirangi, they're building a major new art gallery, Te Uru, to go alongside the existing cultural hall, Lopdell House. That would be the kind of thing you'd hope to see alongside the train station, the kind of place that people in the community could use. Why not build it here if New Lynn is meant to be such a centre? The focus here seems to be only commercial.

JC

A redeveloped Lopdell House has been in the pipeline for twenty years, so longer than the recent changes in New Lynn. Titirangi has been home to a lot of artists, and there was community support for the new gallery to be in Titirangi despite it being a much smaller town which is hard to get to, even with a car.

JH

In a way I get it, living there. Titirangi also seems to be a better-off community; they must have had the

resources and connections to get something like that built in their neighborhood. It certainly is nice to have that kind of thing there. But I think for the artists and the institution, you'd probably get more exposure in New Lynn, and I think it's the kind of place that really needs a cultural and artistic centre. It used to be known for its ceramics, but now that's all gone. From what I understand, the tableware designs of Crown Lynn were a real cultural institution for people in New Zealand.

JC

The clay attracted the ceramic works here. If we walk down here, we'll find some of the old kilns. Roof tiles are still made here, by other companies, but the days of sourcing the clay from here have long since passed. The tiles are now made of cement. All this land we've been talking about was available for development because it's left over from the land used for the ceramics.

These are the Voices Voicing Dissent

Biddy Livesey,
Michelle Ngamoki,
Dayle Takitimu
& Jos Wheeler

This text draws on the words of Dayle Takitimu discussing images capturing the protests of her tribe, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, against drilling for deep sea oil in the Raukumara Basin, off the East Coast of Aotearoa New Zealand. The following photographs, including documentation of actions protesting the sale of state assets, were shown in Jos Wheeler's exhibition *Voicing Dissent* at Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland in July 2014.

Voicing denial

The protests documented in these photographs relate to two issues – drilling for deep sea oil; and the sale of state-owned assets. These issues are linked by the conservative Fifth National Government refusing to respond to public protest by stating that the ‘silent majority’ are in favour of these programmes, and that only the ‘noisy few’ are opposed.

‘Even though protest is a big part of voicing our opinions, it’s a heavy thing to be thought of as, you know, not very good people, or activists. There’s a whole lot of racism involved, and prejudice... It’s a heavy thing to take on.’

– Majic Paora

Voicing disruption

Protest is an important part of public life, using disruption – of traffic, of the sounds of the city, of the transmission of information – as a way to bring visibility to an issue and demand change. But protest also disrupts personal life – family, friendships, work.

‘I no longer have a romantic view of protest. It pisses me off, no end, that... when other people get to do stuff that is uplifting for them and their families my family has to go out and protest to save my tribe from being slaughtered by this government; we’re under siege all the time – whether it be encroachment on our traditional territories, attacks on our indigenous lifestyles, forced assimilation – it’s tiring but we have no choice but to stand up to it – defiance is the only option because surrender is not tenable...’

– Dayle Takitimu

Voicing desperation

Hīkoi are an act of desperation – when the representative democratic process has not worked, direct democracy is required. Pickets, demonstrations, occupations, hīkoi.

‘If you think about the seven thousand things you would rather do than march down Queen Street on a Saturday morning in the middle of winter.... It’s important for us to tell our kids to stand up for what’s right – I think that’s vitally important – but at the same time we shouldn’t always be facing decision-makers that are wrong all the time.’

– Dayle Takitimu

Voicing documentation

After the protest, the images remain.

‘When you look at some of these pictures of my Te Whānau-ā-Apanui people... you can see the fear. Intense fear, that [the oil drilling company] might actually come, and they might actually do what they were threatening to do. And the absolute fear... that our government wasn’t going to do anything to stop them – but they were actively encouraging them, and at the same time they were moving the Navy, armed Police and the Airforce in against us. It became apparent to us that we were scared after they left; we didn’t really recognise that emotion during the campaign against deep sea oil, it just became apparent to us that’s what it was when they announced they were leaving and the relief washed over us.’

– Dayle Takitimu

Voicing dissent

Other political currents run through these images, linking contemporary protest with a long history of activism in Aotearoa New Zealand, often catalysed by action by Māori groups against the settler government. In her book *Hīkoi – Forty Years of Māori Protest*, Aroha Harris notes that ‘Modern Māori activism, with its roots firmly planted in the history of contesting and negotiating the Treaty relationship between Māori and the Crown, has been a strong and consistent feature of Māori society in the second half of the twentieth century.’¹

1 Aroha Harris, *Hīkoi – Forty Years of Māori Protest* (Wellington: Huia Books, 2004), p.13.

Reading these images with an awareness of history means recognising the symbols of rangatiratanga and tino rangatiratanga evident in the black-red-and-white Tino Rangatiratanga flag, and the rejection of 'one government for all'; understanding the evocation of Papatūānuku, the earth/mother, as the victim of environmental destruction, and the fight to make space for Māori worldviews in a Western world; acknowledging the diversity of Māori identities through the presence of the flags and banners of individual tribes protesting local issues on a national stage, and the struggle to have Māori authority acknowledged by government; reaching back in time to see that Te Rārawa leader Whina Cooper setting out on the 1975 Land March to ensure that 'not one acre more' of Māori land would be sold to Pākehā is linked with the loss of 'New Zealanders' assets' through sale into private ownership.

In the context of these protests, drilling for deep sea oil is more than an activity of extracting energy, it is an attack on the self-determination of a people. Selling state assets is more than a transaction between government and industry, it is a continued erosion of the State's responsibility to care for this country.

Biddy Livesey

Ol' Kaupapa

why are we always on the kaupapa
always raising our fists, our voice
for the pani, for the rawakore
for our children
MANA MOKOPUNA!

our generations fight
our time to hold the hoe
paddle this waka
to another kaupapa
another fight, another downtrodden plight
every conversation, every nonchalant little thing
leads us back to kaupapa

we don't stand on soapboxes
no! we own the factory
or least the whenua it stands on
sometime long ago
we get up, we stand up
but when is the time to lie down?

Hiiiioiiii!!
When did 'we shall not be moved'
become Marching, marching to the bitter end
Like a ragtime audition for the battalion

Where is the living?
When we watch our children play
soak up every smile.
Then we saddle back up
Back on ol' kaupapa

How to protect those smiles?
How far to go?
I might go to prison,
but at least they're free and they know this was for them
I might be dead,
but at least they're free and they know this was for them.

They might take them from me. I'll never live again.

The thrill of battle gave us a few extra
Stories to mark our existence
In our neverending resistance
The real price?
What they really take?
The real kaupapa, the mother of all kaupapa, the fight worth fighting for,
the rumble in the ngahere
HOPE! h-o-p-e HOPE

Michelle Ngamoki

Voicing Dissent Five Images

Jos Wheeler











Teaching as a Way to Care for the Earth

Katie Bachler,
Scott Berzofsky
& Hugh Pocock

Katie Bachler, Scott Berzofsky, and Hugh Pocock are all artists and teachers living in Baltimore. Since 2006, Hugh has been teaching classes on climate change and sustainability at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). These have focused on urban farming, local food systems, water, waste, and energy. Katie and Scott are teaching a studio-based Social Practice class on principles of care and cooperation. This conversation took place at Hugh's home in Baltimore on Tuesday 23 September 2014.

Scott Berzofsky

What were some of the things that initially motivated you to bring these issues of climate change and sustainability into an art school context?

Hugh Pocock

Well, my background was teaching in the sculpture area and I was hired to teach New Genres, Performance and Video, focusing on new forms of art making in a three-dimensional, time-based manner. My own studio practice started to drift more and more to become concerned with and focused on ecological impact, and then climate change started to look me square in

the eyes, and as I became more aware of it, I began wondering where my point of engagement could best be. With climate change the frustration is around what can we possibly do, and how can it have an effect? So I started to see that where I had contact with the most people was in my city and my occupation. I had this opportunity to transform my job as an educator into something of a tool.

I also started to realise that the form of art making I was teaching was from another time, and while I really adored the language of art that I was inspired by, I questioned whether it was still transferable to a younger generation. I started to realise all of the slides I was showing, that were the inspirational slides in the canon of mid-1960s through 70s conceptual work which was the basis of so much, were all done on NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grants, through public funding, and that these artists were pre-market-driven art world, so the world had really changed since then. It made me want to be preparing students for what was to come rather than for a framework that seemed to have been eradicated.

Katie Bachler

Who were some of those inspirations, who were some of those artists you were talking about?

HP

They would have been people like Chris Burden and Paul McCarthy and then people like Joseph Beuys, David Ireland, people who came out of minimalism and Art Povera, and talking about content-driven work, not so much that was aesthetically-driven, but work that was primarily made from the position of a political post-Marxist critique of the art world, so it was intentionally attempting to be free of market forces.

KB

And it wasn't being funded by the market. It was being funded by grants.

SB

I think that one thing that motivates us in the social practice class that we teach at MICA is preparing younger artists to enter this economically precarious life, where there isn't really state support for the arts, and the market is extremely competitive. So what we're trying to cultivate are social skills of care, cooperation and mutual aid that can actually help us develop sustainable life practices as artists.

KB

Right, we are creating a safe space with our class to be able to talk about some of the issues that come up when thinking about social practice: working in a city that has a history of segregation and disinvestment and pollution. Creating a pocket of care within MICA. How does your Urban Farming class connect to the context of Baltimore city?

HP

Climate change is so hard to touch, and I noticed also that the despair level was really high if you started revealing the base line science to young students in their early 20s and exposing them to this proposed future that's very, very dire. It seems that the methods of doing something about it are out of our personal control and often removed from our space and location. So the inspiration I found was from urban farming, this idea of seeking anchors in the city, and this idea of the art then being really anchored and rooted where they lived. Being a migrant my whole life and a migrant to Baltimore, there was a certain decision that I wanted to become part of Baltimore. Also, Baltimore being a city where it's really hard to

actually get access and get in touch and get out of the car and walk around and have good reasons to do it. With urban farming and food production one can talk about all the different levels at once. You can talk about place, you can talk about economic disparity, you can talk about race, you can talk about food, you can talk about the built environment, and you can talk about homes – why do people live where they live? And then in an art language you can talk about context and responding to context with the work, so there's all these different dialogues.

In some ways for me urban farming is a really perfect vehicle to talk about contemporary art practice because it holds all these different issues inside of it. And the students get to do this great thing which is to hang out and grow food, and then they learn skills. It used to be that we'd teach steel sculpture and then say the derivative of this is that you get to learn how to weld, so maybe you can get a job as a welder. So I think that this is a truly post-industrial parallel: we're talking about a type of art practice and art language, but then students are also learning a way of producing food for themselves. So it's a really good vehicle for that, and then the energy and climate component really fit in really nicely with it.

SB

And then this past year you taught a class on water? What are some of the ways you've got students to care for and think critically about water?

HP

That one also comes more directly out of my own studio concerns; a lot of my own work has revolved around water. Water is this simultaneously sublime and functional material, which I've always felt was the perfect art material. So in an art school, how do we

talk about art and aesthetics, and also ecological functionality and urgency? How do we get those things mixed together, and water is a pretty good subject for this. It's presence in art is really, really old and from the beginning people have been making images of water and using water as different types of psychological, spiritual and political metaphor. And then there's all this information about the ecological crisis, and water is a really dominant language there. We can teach all of this at once, and you get to go on all these cool field trips.

KB

So these field trips in the world, again these multiple contexts for art, where do you go and why do you think it's important to go to these sites to learn about water and farms and such?

HP

Why is it important? One reason is I'm a little lazy and I think a real place does the teaching way better than I could. I think to go to a place and let it exist is way better than me trying to explain it. For me to try to explain what a coal fired electric plant is... best to go there.

SB

It's experiential.

HP

It's experiential. I dig it. I've always liked to go places with students, and I feel like sometimes that makes a lot of the impact. And then it is also, it's like, okay, this is real stuff. This is for real. What we're talking about here is: how do artists feel like what they're doing matters, and is connected to a real thing? So, going to a place and going to places with groups – and also, when it's about food and water – we went and harvested

pears. The act of taking a pear off the tree is a real thing. And then tomorrow we're going to press them and give the juice away. So the students, they get to see themselves as conduits, spreading some type of capital.

KB

And they're producing. Yesterday we started our class off by going to talk to plants at Hidden Harvest urban farm so they got a sense of wow, this is how my body feels in a garden. This is what I smell, and this is what I hear, and this is what health looks like. They picked vegetables, which we ended up using in our cooking, so there is this idea of them being producers, too. Your students are producing cider, and producing knowledge in that way versus consuming a Power-Point presentation about gardens and art. And I think that's a really important shift.

HP

Yeah, it's like we still need intellectual mediation, but it's still a problem. Especially for artists, there's this idea of the art practice being this tool of connectivity, either to community, to a social group – or maybe building a social group amongst themselves, or doing something that enables them to feel more connected to something. Something that I've found is true with making art is that it's a way to be more present, or more knowledgeable – it's a medium of that type of connectivity. And the field trip lets it happen. Some of it comes out of the idea of site-specificity. Probably there was some kind of plein air painting before site-specificity, this idea of being in a place and being a creative person in it – we're working through these different ways of doing that, and I think now, this idea of being personally engaged and being in an activist position is different than being an observer.

SB

It's modeling a kind of research-based practice. Can you give us a few more examples of places you've visited on field trips?

HP

Going to prison, to places that are examples of unsustainable worlds. A coal plant, to see them burning all the coal; pretty intense places. Domino Sugar, to see the big sugar factory.

The places we go to with the water class: we start at a spring, and we go to the city filtration plant. And then we end the class with wastewater treatment, at the sewage plant. So we follow water from its natural sources, to its mechanical processing and then through the city through all these different means that we use it for, including shitting and pissing in it, and then to where it gets processed. The water is used as a conveyance. And then there's another digester at the other end that separates all that out, and then returns some of the water to the bay, and then the solids are used for fertiliser, or burned. Yeah, crazy. So this idea of the art field trip as engagement with places as a type of metaphor: we can engage with things as both information and metaphorically. And somehow, students then transfer that to their own work in some form.

KB

Is there a way to structure time differently doing these site-specific socially engaged projects? It seems like year or even two year long class sessions would deepen this practice of sustainability...

SB

Didn't you do a trash project, where the class made a documentary and that was longer than...

HP

That was a year, and that was the Baltimore Food Ecology documentary.¹ We made a documentary on the ecology of food in Baltimore – that was awesome, that was a year and we got in there!

SB

So you managed to work with the same group of students...

HP

They signed on for a year.

SB

I remember when Michael Rakowitz taught a class called Super Pride Studio at MICA, he also structured it as a year-long course.

HP

It's harder to do, students' time is valuable. Time is valuable real estate. They need to feel it's interesting enough – and it's unknown, it's a gamble.

SB

So in this case, all the field trips and interviews the students were conducting were part of the process of producing a documentary film, that was the outcome.

HP

We went to a ton of places to learn how food flows through the city. And all the places from distribution to corner stores to school cafeterias, and talked to all the people engaged with that in one way or another. We got a tour from the manager of a supermarket, about how the food comes in the back and how they

¹ *BFED: Baltimore Food Ecology Documentary* (2010), produced by the Centre for a Liveable Future and MICA students, can be viewed on YouTube.

stock the shelves and what they are concerned with and what the shelves look like – and suddenly it's like entering the wrong way from the museum or the restaurant, coming in through the kitchen and everything looks different, that was great.

SB

Somehow the class creates a framework that allows you to do all these things and visit all these places and make connections between them.

KB

How can we as teachers cultivate artist-citizens who care about the future of the planet, artists who are concerned with the greater 'we'?

HP

I think that is the crux of some of what is going on, the idea of students wanting to turn their individual practice into a 'we' practice. These are the students that are attracted, they enter into these classes with some pre-existing tendency. So then how do we work with that tendency and expand it and challenge it and cultivate it and in some way enable it, and move into a new territory as well?

KB

And art school is this utopian place for dreaming, for experimenting. Maybe this can be a place to test ideas of hope and nurture a sense of urgency.

HP

I feel like it's all very experimental and it's somewhat unproven because it isn't like teaching a pre-existing vocation that is from a hegemonic system. It's teaching an experimental practice that is in some ways preparing them to have difficulty. It's similar to teaching 20th-century art, it's the same way of teaching

art, but the students come in with that sense of risk-taking already. I think then also about the classroom being this kind of conduit of larger information that has been masked by society and the media, so it's a place where you realise – oh, climate change is a lot worse than you thought it was. It also might not be as bad as some of the apocalyptic predictions. And in some ways that's worse, because the world isn't going to end in ten years, and it might not end at all, but what's worse is if we're still alive and actually going to have to deal with it, and that's harder information than fantastical enormous tidal waves or post-utopian drama struggles. That's a media-generated reality. Then there's the idea, oh, you're actually going to be living in this world. So what kind of decisions do you want to make as a creative person, about living in that world and how to make it a better place, as an artist and a person? Art school isn't necessarily about teaching people to be artists, it's about teaching them this other thing as well.

KB

I think this is an important point to think about: how do we make safe spaces to develop a sense of agency as people, and a sense of empathy and vulnerability – to be compassionate individuals in the world. It is about making safe spaces to be open, safe spaces to talk about this, because you are right, I can't process the apocalypse, no one can. It's like these little moments that incrementally add up.

HP

What's great about being in art school is this realisation that it is important. I remember when I was in undergraduate and we would talk about art in a certain way and everyone would get passionate and be like 'Wow this is important!' And then you would talk to someone who wasn't that into it and suddenly

it didn't seem that important. But the thing with this issue [of climate change] is that it's as important as people make it out to be. Art school is a place to say we're living with the results of a world that has not put a compassionate future first. So how do we give affirmation to large and small acts, how do we start to practise that?

The idea of social practice is reinvigorating lost practices that allow for that kind of affirmation of social cohesiveness, like cooking or the making of things or transferring knowledge or listening. It's almost like an art practice now to make pickles, which is kind of nuts, or know to cook, because we're so distanced from it. I remember when my kids were not yet born, going to a birthing class at a hospital. I was like, this is crazy, the oldest thing that this species has done and I have to go back to a refresher class; we're wanting to relearn our connectivity but it's so broken that the re-establishment is a type of art making.

SB

Through gardening and cooking I think many people find that connection to the natural world that we've become so separated from. Just planting a seed and watching it grow can be a revelation. I remember it was for me at age 25 or something, in a kind of embarrassing way because I never grew up gardening or really spending that much time in nature. Can you share some examples of projects that have come out of these classes?

HP

What I do at MICA has a very wide net, the course I made in 2006-07 was called Climate Change and Sustainability for Artists and Designers. So there's this space there for responses that are abstract and responses that are functional. And in some ways I

cast that wider net because all these kinds of students need to know about climate change and there weren't any courses in place to educate them. They needed to have deep information, a non-mediated perspective on what climate change is. They're going to get out of school and they'll be illustrators, graphic designers, ceramists, painters, photographers, performance artists. They'll all have a good general understanding of what climate change is, and what it looks like it's going to be. How it came about. That was my goal, it was kind of like an emergency.

A graphic design student made a poster teaching the impact of a hamburger, creating an information graphic of where that meat comes from, engaging with the skills of teaching food literacy. I think that's something that's really strong with graphic design. And then in fine arts, just an example of the opposite kind, I remember I had a student do a final piece which was not to make anything and just to help their friends with their projects. Then there was a student that did sort of a mix, and separated a couch and took apart all of the pieces, they took a couch that they found on the street, and then remade new objects from all of the pieces. With Urban Farming, I find that what students want to do is really very practical things to assist the farms. Students aren't really doing idea-driven work on the farms.

SB

They're doing more utilitarian design?

HP

Yeah, helping them do signage. Build a shed, help them do layouts for the gardens. Get images on their website, make logos, really functional things. I don't have students really doing more idea-driven work, I don't know why. I show students idea-driven work

and time, after time after time... I've given up, in a way now trying to get that to be the direction. I have it from time to time, a student made a really nice monument to a red beet where they cast a red beet, made it out of bronze.

KB

Right, once you leave the institution and enter a farm in the world, the urgency of the work changes. There are suddenly these real world needs to respond to, and artists are people, and art matters in a different way because audience and site shift radically.

HP

They respond to working in this context, and it is a longer term commitment.

SB

For some of these students it might be the first time they're working [making art] in the public sphere, outside of the more autonomous space of the studio or art school. Out in the world, sometimes the more ethical, pragmatic response is to do something useful.

KB

Do you stay in touch with your students after they graduate? What happens in the world?

HP

It's nice, I do stay in touch with some, and lots of different things happen and things change over time as well. Some students continue to be engaged with agriculture as well, and then also do some creative work with agriculture, gravitate to farms that have some art focus as well. I had a student who became a farm manager and ran a public ceramics teaching facility at the farm, in Michigan. Students go WOOF [Workers On Organic Farms] a lot. Some students stay

in Baltimore and become more deeply engaged with agriculture here. I've only had a few students who I know of continue with work around climate, and of course lots of people graduate and I don't know anything about what they do. I've had students go and work for architecture firms and do work around sustainable architecture and public planning. So there's a big wide variety.

I like to ask MICA students back in to talk about how do you take this information forward and how do you make sense of it? How do you create a meaningful life and also be an engaged artist at the same time? Which is that old recipe of: how do you be an artist? And now there's another layer of: how do you be an ecologically and socially responsible and engaged artist and survive?

I think that artists are going to be very good at inventing and adapting and learning how to be adaptive because we're progressive. We're always asking questions, we want to adapt to things before they actually occur. We're adapting to a food crisis while the kitchen is still pretty full. But we also need to become more politically demanding and maybe a bit more radical.

Dialogues with Tomorrow

Dugal McKinnon
& Sophie Jerram

Sophie Jerram and Dugal McKinnon are both based in Wellington, New Zealand, though this conversation was carried out across distance with Dugal visiting Austria. In 2010 they co-initiated Now Future: Dialogues with Tomorrow, a two-year programme of public discussions about art's interface with issues of sustainability and ecology. The first year's series is now released as a publication and accessible at www.nowfuture.org.nz. Sophie is an independent artist, curator and writer, interested in interdisciplinary practice, and art's examination of the relationship between business and the environment. Dugal is a composer and sound artist, a writer on sound art and contemporary music, and a lecturer at Te Kōkī New Zealand School of Music.

Sophie Jerram

The smell of a burning planet was already intense only four years ago. In *Dialogues with Tomorrow*, Dugal and I were motivated to reintroduce into the public realm an artistic and humanities view on climate change. We wanted to investigate, from phenomenological and ontological perspectives, what climate change meant, and how we might think and act differently as a result.

Dugal McKinnon

One of the things that we were particularly interested in was – is! – the affective dimension of art, the ways

in which aesthetic experiences can bypass the rational and irrational codings of individuals and cut to their psychological quick, hopefully thereby prompting active responses to climate change. Of course, we're not the only ones interested in such an approach. Brian Holmes' Affectivist Manifesto, for example, although we came upon it after the second Dialogues event, resonated strongly with both of us.¹

SJ

Though the science of climate change has been known to climate scientists for 50 or more years, the non-scientific world has only comparatively recently begun to understand this phenomenon and sense it as a permanent rather than faddish threat to our way of life, and potentially, to our existence as a species. What we felt was missing was the approach to climate change from an emotional and reflective position, to complement the rational and mechanical suggestions being posed. We hoped this might be achieved by bringing artists and scientists together, and inciting dialogue, rather than using the more commonly proffered scientific statistics.

DM

Or, returning to the idea of affect, asking scientists and artists to enter into dialogue seemed a good way to introduce affect, in a conscious and constructive manner, back into the climate change 'debate'. After all, affect remains the domain of the arts, even if often at the fringes of what mainstream culture understands as affective (i.e. stuff concerning the creation and expression of feelings), while scientists involved in climate research still struggle to be heard and most certainly have strong feelings about the reality they

1 See 'The Affectivist Manifesto' on Brian Holmes' blog, <http://brian-holmes.wordpress.com/2008/11/16/the-affectivist-manifesto/> (accessed 2 August 2014).

know to be around the corner. Hard data, it seems, doesn't scream loudly enough, so getting someone to do your screaming for you, might be a better way to go. (Here I imagine James Holden pairing up with Kusum Normoyle...)

SJ

Dugal and I met after a public event where he was talking about the sonic experience of Amy Howden-Chapman's *The Flood, My Chanting*, in October 2008.² We found common ground together and over a long series of conversations, and we began to proceed on a plan of public discourse, which became *Now Futures: Dialogues with Tomorrow*.

DM

And we've since continued our own dialogue, rather more sporadically than either of us would like, concerning further projects that would continue to deal with ecological issues via the arts and humanities. The hurdle to realising any further projects is, as ever, time and energy. Given the climatic context, though, really it should be the case that all one's time and energy goes into this.

SJ

What did we learn from *Dialogues*?

DM

We learnt a great deal I think. That scientists and artists often find common ground, but that they do speak very different languages and often struggle to understand the way the other side thinks. That there is value in trying to 'humanise' science and vice versa. That there is an appetite for addressing climate change,

² For more on this project see the One Day Sculpture website: www.onedaysculpture.org.nz

but trying to activate and organise this is a mammoth task. The emergence of social media activism, or whatever one might call an organisation like Avaaz, is heartening in this respect. That – and this is perhaps what is most significant for me – we needed to be more risk-friendly in running the project. I think that for some members of our audience, the idea of an arts-science dialogue around climate change seemed rather abstruse, while for others it was just another talk-fest. Using the arts dimension of the project for much greater affective impact was what inspired us both in the beginning and it was a thread in many of our initial conversations. The realities of running the project, at least in terms of the particular funding context we were working in, meant we backed off – without really being aware of it – those aspects which might well have been most impactful, and which might have created the affectively driven experience we wanted. Given the magnitude of the impact that climate change is having and will have, we should have taken on this magnitude as an exponential multiplier for the project.

SJ

What we didn't bargain on, after the second series in 2011, was the disappearance of climate change itself from the agenda. The very phrase 'climate change' has in 2014 come to be associated with an extreme state of affairs, a rather hysterical, unmanageable event that lurks ominously but is hard to identify specifically.

DM

Indeed. Though as extreme weather events become the norm, and the idea of climate change is replaced by that of climate disruption, I hope that this makes

the situation concrete enough for more people to understand the significance of the issue and just how perilous our situation is. It is hard to see the extent of something that's mostly over the horizon, even if what we can see is clearly linked to our present way of living. And as this way of living is so comfortable, why should we give it up? Who wants to believe that life is going to be extremely uncomfortable in the near-ish future? (Not forgetting that life is already not very comfortable for the global majority.) Maybe a few more climate bombs are needed to shake us out of our comfort? But can we, as artists, contribute to the shake-up? Certainly I felt we could when we started the Dialogues project, but in a culture with an appetite for aestheticised catastrophe it's increasingly difficult to see a way forward for the arts in this respect. The recently released film *Snowpiercer*, for example, should be understood for what it is – a cinematic metaphor for the awfulness of the world and its post-climate change future – but I imagine it is more likely to be enjoyed as another dark thrill.³

SJ

Instead (in New Zealand) we are faced with campaigns about cleaner rivers, public transport and lower waste. These are useful tactics but do not enquire about the principles behind our wider human approach. And such tactics are very easily overridden. For example, whilst working in 2006–08 for the New Zealand Sustainable Business Network I had been part of a process of populating the 'sustainability' space with digital case studies of businesses and individuals making changes to their practices which reduced carbon, aimed at zero waste and created local sustainable procurement strategies for

government.⁴ The government of the time championed the efforts of the household, business and public sectors through www.sustainability.govt.nz. These good intentions didn't last long. Most of the government initiatives were closed after a new government was elected in 2008. The [sustainability.govt.nz](http://www.sustainability.govt.nz) website was retired in March 2009. Gone was the idea of New Zealand becoming 'the model sustainable nation of the world' (Sustainable Business Network's vision in 2007).

In this island nation it still seems to be only 'good intention' that drives the political taste for sustainable behaviour. Sustainability, at least in New Zealand, is not regarded as the need for the correction of consumption patterns, but instead as a political view, or at worst, a metaphor for the financial sustaining of one's own organisation.

DM

Yes, though I do think all this is specific to the New Zealand context, which doesn't make it any less disheartening. But in Austria and Germany, where I'm temporarily based, the idea of tackling climate change at the level of public policy is very much in evidence. While it is hard to know how deep this goes, that fact the Vienna's web portal for public transport tells you how much CO₂ you've saved by using public transport is great to see. And as my wife recently observed, the same rural conservatives (in

4 The six programmes were:
1. Helping households towards sustainability.
2. Business partnerships for sustainability.
3. Eco-verification: demonstrating sustainability of goods and services.
4. Government to buy sustainable goods and services.
5. Public service takes lead in becoming carbon neutral.
6. Towards zero waste.

Only the business partnerships programme and zero waste still exist, each in a modified version.

the German-speaking part of the world) who were deeply anti-Green ten or so years ago are now installing solar panels and driving e-cars. I hope this means things are getting better, and that the lag one often observes in terms of New Zealand's sociopolitical relationship to the rest of the (progressive) world will start to shrink. Ideally, of course, we'd be leading rather than following, which to me always seems possible in theory, given that we're a country with a population the size of a largish city!

SJ

Yes, I'm keen to have a taste of living in a country that takes these things seriously from a macro-economic perspective. My family and I are going to Denmark shortly to investigate options for living there, where resource use and carbon effect are part of the consciousness of society. It does feel like New Zealand is seriously lagging behind in accounting for the invisible impacts of our lifestyles. I predict the artistic voice will continue to emerge, especially after this last election, as a more staunch and militant one in New Zealand. And as the news media landscape becomes homogenised, artists who are unafraid to give voice and perspective to alternative positions can only become more important. In the meantime, opportunities to directly impact and support the work of those already working for the public good are manifold. There are plenty of ways to keep the shift happening at home, without governmental assistance. Since the early Dialogues, I've found myself digging into my very local geographic community and asking how we can share resources, spaces and our time better. It doesn't feel like we're doing much for the wider picture but it feels important to be building sharing communities now.

Aslak Aamot Kjærulff is a PhD student working with action-oriented social sciences at Roskilde University, Denmark. He is interested in transdisciplinary approaches to ecological changes, and is engaged in enabling practice-based organisational transformations.

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Scott Berzofsky is an artist who lives in Baltimore.

Isobel Cairns studied philosophy, psychology and creative writing at university, and currently works as a research assistant in public health at the University of Auckland.

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Hugh Pocock is an artist and lecturer at Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore. He received a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and an MFA in New Genres at UCLA. He teaches sculpture, video and social practice, focusing on the impact of climate change and issues of sustainability. His own work draws on ideas around labour, industry, and organic materials, taking on water, air, salt, wood and earth as sites.

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