

# IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE ■ JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES



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JOURNAL OF CROSS\_CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES |  
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy  
and instructions for contributors:

<http://imagination.csj.ualberta.ca>

## Issue URL

<http://imagination.csj.ualberta.ca/?p=5231>

March 28, 2014

To link to this issue:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.periph.5-1>



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*Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies – Revue d'Études Interculturelles de l'Image*



PERCEIVED PERIPHERALITY AND PLACES IMAGES  
THE CITY, THE REGION, THE BORDER

2014 - IMAGINATIONS 5-1

PERCEIVED PERIPHERALITY AND PLACES IMAGES: THE CITY, THE REGION, THE BORDER

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# PERCEIVED PERIPHERALITY AND PLACES IMAGES THE CITY, THE REGION, THE BORDER

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# INTRODUCTION: PERCEIVED PERIPHERALITY AND PLACES IMAGES: THE CITY, THE REGION, THE BORDER

SUSAN INGRAM | YORK UNIVERSITY

*The most interesting things are happening at the margins.*

- Yuri Andrukhovych (Pomerantsev)

In their forward to *Cinema at the Periphery*, editors Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belén Vidal relate an anecdote about *Forgotten Silver*, a 1995 mockumentary produced by Peter Jackson and Costa Botes that cleverly inverts the history of the cinema, placing New Zealand at its centre:

*They detailed the discovery of a cache of rusty film cans in rural New Zealand, a find that was later identified by scholars as the films of pioneering ‘Kiwi’ filmmaker Colin McKenzie, who had died in 1937. With tongue firmly planted in cheek, Jackson and Botes lovingly parade experts such as film historian Leonard Maltin and movie mogul Harvey Weinstein before the camera to attest to how these cans of decaying nitrate reveal McKenzie to be the true Father of the Cinema. McKenzie’s many technical discoveries included the invention of celluloid film, sound recording, and the first color films made from local New*

*Zealand berries. McKenzie was not just a technological innovator but also a pioneering storyteller who originated the close-up, montage editing, and the genres of slapstick comedy and costume drama. Most significantly, he was a pioneering businessman who began the globalized film trade with breakthrough financing deals with the Soviet Union. (Bierman 56)*

Our special issue takes this fictional inversion as its starting point for an investigation of place imaginaries. In drawing attention to the way postcolonial rewritings of history remain mired in geopolitical power dynamics involving centrality and peripherality, the contributions here, like those in Iordanova, Martin-Jones and Vidal’s volume on cinematic peripheries, seek to demonstrate that “the revision and questioning of established canons has been the driving force behind some of the most innovative theory and practice”

(Jordanova, Martin-Jones, and Vidal 1), and not only in film history.

Jordanova, Martin-Jones and Vidal place themselves in the tradition of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's 1993 edited volume *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media* and 1994 monograph *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, which were formative in helping Film Studies make the postcolonial turn and open itself towards World Cinema, just as there was a similar push in the discipline of Comparative Literature towards World Literature (cf. Andrews, Damrosch). These scholarly moves can be understood as part of the hegemonic Anglo-American academy trying to accommodate larger globalizing trends in a manner it could live with politically. In a kind of "wish it and it will be so" click of ruby slippers, both absorb the world's cultural production into its fold by making it available in English translation or with English subtitles. That these processes of translation continue to be necessary to keep the originals alive in the new global world system is incontestable. Whether they also serve to flatten the "vibrant multitude of creative voices and forms of expression that originate and dwell beyond and outside the commonly celebrated cultural hubs" (3) is debatable and remains to be seen (cf. Braz).

Of interest to us in this issue is the question of what effects the technological changes in late modernity to the new global world system have had on place imaginaries. If a place like New Zealand continues to figure as very remote in the global cultural imaginary, why is this so? Has there or has there not

been any reconfiguring as the time-space compression of globalization and internet culture has interacted with real-time geographical realities? Are there historical precedents or mythologies that have managed to live on and exert a discernable influence? Unlike the *Cinema at the Periphery* volume, we don't try to bracket the centre out. Rather, we wonder in how far an overarching understanding of centrality has continued to persist in the face of technological time-space compression, and for this, we explore two key axes of centrality: Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and urbanity, on the other.

One can only read so many times about the growth of cities and the fact that an increasing percentage of the world's population inhabits them. Nevertheless, in the case of our contributors, cities matter and are what we all call, however uncomfortably or with tongue in cheek, home.[1] The idea for this issue took shape virtually, in the electronic inter-urban "cloud" that connects and allows for instantaneous contact between Auckland, Edmonton, Toronto, Paris, London, and Moscow. For each of these cities centrality and peripherality are questions of context, and the ethnic and cultural mixes in each have come to call Eurocentrism into question in interesting ways. Auckland and Edmonton are viewed unquestioningly as peripheral by those in Toronto and Paris but not by those in Rotorua and Vegreville. Within Canada Toronto is centrality writ large, but from within Toronto, one cannot but be aware of terrible feelings of peripherality vis-à-vis New York and London. Vienna and Moscow have tended to be considered

peripheral in comparison with Paris, even when they served as the capitals of powerful empires. Taken together, these cities confront us with the comparative relationality of the imaginaries with which they are commonly associated.

This relationality disrupts the routine way that cities are often metonymically articulated to nation states, but cities, we find, also work to restructure the experience of peripherality because they are anchored in hinterlands, less clearly demarcated but culturally equally significant regional spaces of identity. Regions interact with, support or counterbalance national imaginaries. Shifting geopolitical contexts (the fall of the Iron Curtain, American border protection after 9/11, the growing global significance of the Asia-Pacific, etc.) throw into relief the redrawing and resignifying of regional alignments. This special issue is interested in cultural representations that show how the nexus of the urban/regional and centrality/peripherality is negotiated in articulating spaces of identity across geopolitical borders, and thus draws our attention to the intricate interplay between the urban and the regional, how they can both work with and against the national, and to what degree they challenge or reinforce the longstanding histories of colonialism that have gone into the making of Eurocentrism.

Specifically, the contributions in this special issue explore the place imaginaries produced by the relationality of Europe and Oceania and take us from the far reaches of New Caledonia to contemporary London. The first three

articles are set in Oceania, the next two deal with cultural crossings between Oceania and Europe, while the final three take us to Europe and its branching across the Atlantic to the new world. We open with Raylene Ramsey's situating of the influential writer from New Caledonia, Déwé Görödé, among the shifting tides of postcolonial and feminist sentiment that helped the island be reconfigured as "less a distant appendage of France or Europe, or a far flung island in a vast Pacific ocean than an integral part of what the Tongan writer, Epeli Hau'ofa called 'Our Sea of Islands'". As Ramsey demonstrates, a powerful sense of place emerges as Görödé's "writing practices renegotiate the urban/regional or Noumea/Bush/*Tribu* nexus to counterbalance or contest national (French) imaginaries". Next, Deborah Walker-Morrison surveys Maori filmmaking to show how it articulates "the centrality of land and water to an evolving sense of individual and community identity" in (re-) constructing Aotearoa as *Tūrangawaewae*, or, as Walker-Morrison puts it, "*our Place to Stand*" (italics added). In the final contribution on cultural production in Oceania, Felicity Perry takes us from the region's periphery to the political centre of New Zealand, its capital Wellington, and offers us an incisive analysis of the city's very specific sense of fashion, which, as her title reveals and her article explains, involves black wool and vintage shoes.

In the second section, Ellen Carter and Angela Kölling offer us two case studies on cultural migrations between New Zealand and Europe. Carter's subject is the French novelist Caryl Férey's

sensationist novel *Utu*, in which, as she laconically sums up, “*Pakeha* (New Zealander of European origin) policeman Paul Osborne investigates a cannibalistic Māori separatist sect”. Carter’s interest is in cross-cultural reception between places of unequal cultural power relations, and her empirical study of French and New Zealand readers’ responses to the novel is instructive, conclusively demonstrating how “geographically and culturally-situated elements differently influence cultural insider and outsider readers, with the latter more likely to change their opinions than the former”. Kölling’s case study is of NZ@Frankfurt, that is, of New Zealand’s being featured as Guest of Honour at the 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair. Her interest, and entry-point, is translation and the personal engagement of translators that too often remains the invisible enabler of such an event. As in the case of Férey’s *Utu*, we see that the centrality of German-language readership influences the image of the periphery in the translations of “New Zealand literature” that appeared in Frankfurt and in how that anything-but-straightforward category was interpreted. She finds in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s work on “collaborations between transnational investment groups and local interest groups in the Indonesian rain forest... a valuable warning against assuming that such collaborations are based on common viewpoints or goals” and in Tsing’s concept of friction a useful alternative metaphor to illuminate the translators’ usual invisibility.

The final section of articles focuses on the European centre from the perspective

of its peripheries and explores the role that peripherality has played in a range of media. Susan Ingram’s subject is one of the monumental films made on the outskirts of Vienna in the early interwar period and how it helped a young Hungarian filmmaker make his way to Hollywood and shaped the thematics of the films he made there, the much loved *Casablanca* in particular. Elena Siemens then examines another cultural production whose space of performance contributed to resignifying a well-known text in terms of centrality: namely, a staging of *Dr Zhivago* in a Soviet-built suburban theatre in Moscow. Finally, just as the last contribution in the first section takes us to the capital of New Zealand and shows us how an imaginary of peripherality plays itself out in terms of fashion, in the final contribution to this section, Markus Reisenleitner takes us to the London of Guy Ritchie’s 2009 action thriller *Sherlock Holmes*, and in comparing its urban imaginary with that of Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, he demonstrates how “a persistent dichotomy of technology vs. occult knowledge... seems to be intimately connected to the persisting imaginary of London as a global city”.

The issue is supplemented by one of the features *Imaginations* encourages in its issues: namely, a spotlight on and interview with a guest artist. We were very happy that *Imaginations* suggested we feature the work of photographer Katrina Sark, as the sensitivity to the specificities of place that radiates from her perspectival, humanistically modernist images is very much in keeping with our thematics.

Taken together, the contributions take us on a journey that shows us how centrality can operate in the most peripheral of places, while at the same time centres are riven with peripheral divisions. We see that under the conditions of (increasingly late) modernity, both urban and regional culture has served as a contact zone and port(al) of entry characterized by cultural exchange, hybridity and cosmopolitanism, borders in a cultural and identitarian, rather than strictly geopolitical, sense that one is tempted to describe as geo-aesthetic.

Wrapping things up, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the forces and circumstances that turned this special volume from a possibility into a reality. The initial impetus was provided by a series of panels at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies conference held in Paris in July 2012, which brought together participants based in New Zealand and Canada, who related to Parisian centrality in very different ways. Our thanks to all those there whose incisive observations and animated discussions encouraged us to pursue our explorations of place images. Our thanks also to the editors of *Imaginations*, whose networked approach to cross-cultural media we were delighted to discover is very much in the same spirit as ours, and to managing editor Daniel Laforest in particular, for his guidance in bringing our work to your screen.

## Endnotes

[1] I would like to acknowledge Aleksandra Bida's influence on my thinking of cities as multi-scalar homes and congratulate her on the successful defence of her dissertation, "Mapping Home: Literary and Filmic Representations of Multi-Scalar Dwelling."

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# KANAK IMAGINARIES: A SENSE OF PLACE IN THE WORK OF DÉWÉ GÖRÖDÉ

RAYLENE RAMSAY, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

The study of the Kanak imaginary in the work of the first published Kanak (indigenous) New Caledonian writer shows this to be permeated by a sense of place. Rootedness in, and intense community with the land is not incompatible with the fluidity of ancestral criss-crossing of the Pacific or of constant border-crossing (pathways of exchange between groups) but nonetheless remains central. The ‘hinterland’ constituted by the places of the *tribu* (customary lands) sets up a challenge to the dominance of *Nouméa la blanche* and Déwé Görödé’s articulation of places of identity re-negotiate the urban/regional or Noumea/Bush/*Tribunexus* to counterbalance or contest national (French) imaginaries. Yet Görödé’s work presents both a return to a Kanak Place to Stand and a critical self in process (the latter situated in a ‘no man’s land’). The places in her work are ultimately ‘cognitively dissonant’: the marginal or hinter-land of Kanak imaginaries (the *tribu*), can hold (to) their own both outside and inside the city yet also open themselves up internally to multiplicity and critique.

L’étude de l’imaginaire Kanak dans l’œuvre de Déwé Görödé révèle la centralité de l’enracinement dans la terre. L’importance du lieu et de la communion intense avec la nature n’est pas incompatible avec les voyages des ancêtres qui traversaient le Pacifique dans tous les sens, ni avec les sentiers de la coutume et les échanges entre tribus, mais le lieu, qui donne son nom à la tribu, reste primordial. Les lieux de Görödé opposent la tribu (à la fois les pays coutumiers et les gens qui l’habitent) à Nouméa la Blanche afin de contester la domination de l’imaginaire national français et sa conception de la relation entre Nouméa, la brousse (des colons), et la tribu. Toutefois l’œuvre de Déwé Görödé articule un ‘Place to Stand’ (lieu d’origine et de résistance indigène) et aussi un être en procès, critique, qui se situe dans un ‘no man’s land’. Enfin, ses lieux d’écriture sont ‘cognitivement dissonants’ et multiples : ils constituent la marge et le « hinterland » qu’occupe la tribu, mais tout en s’ouvrant aussi à une occupation de la ville et à une critique interne.

The research question underlying the following article concerns first and foremost the imaginaries that construct the particular power and knowledge that attach to Kanak forms of post-coloniality. The centrality of place in these imaginaries from the margins of the French ‘country *sui generis*’ that is present-day New Caledonia, and their remarkable variance from European norms, makes their study of considerable pertinence to the topic of this issue (perceptions of peripherality).

In the most recent and political Oceanian imaginary, New Caledonia is less a distant appendage of France or Europe, or a far flung island in a vast Pacific ocean, than an integral part of what the Tongan writer Epeli Hau’ofa called “Our Sea of Islands”: a Pacific region populated 3000 years before our era by peoples speaking Austronesian languages who crisscrossed the Pacific in their voyaging canoes, marking their passage and interrelationships with their distinctive Lapita pottery. Oceania was then a sea of connected islands, of constant migration, of islands linked to each other rather than to Europe even after the arrival of the first sailing ships seeking the great southern continent that would balance Europe. (A visit to the Auckland Maritime Museum with its animated cartoon of the heroic pioneering voyage of Maori from Hawaiki-Oteiti to pristine Aotearoa-New Zealand provides evidence for the current centrality of this imaginary of ‘routes’, of legendary voyaging.) Many of the indigenous Pacific populations also identify with a further grouping, that of the world’s “First Nations” and in this case, most

particularly with their uprooting, their dispossession from their lands; that is, with roots rather than the differently powerful imaginary of routes or migrations to colonize new Pacific lands. (This imaginary of voyaging is less useful, even counter-productive, for the on-going processes of re-claiming taken lands.)

These South Sea islands discovered for Europe in the eighteenth century are, then, connected Oceanian (is)lands, peopled by *tangata whenua* or ‘people of the land’ as Māori, for example, designate themselves. They are also, since annexation in 1840 (in New Zealand) and in 1853 (in New Caledonia), English- and French-speaking regions of the world whose populations derive predominantly from nineteenth-century European colonisation of the Pacific and, as in New Caledonia, the penal and indentured labour that often accompanied European economic exploitation and colonial development.

The Kanak woman writer, Déwé Görödé, on whose work this paper focuses, was among the first Kanak to study at university level, completing a BA degree (*Licence-ès-Lettres*) in 1972 at the University of Montpellier in France. After her return to New Caledonia, Görödé became both an activist within the indigenous independence movement and the first published Kanak writer, exploring a sense of loss and exile from her own colonised culture but, paradoxically, also a strong sense of distinctive Kanak being. It is in landscapes, weather, geographical features, places of communion with nature and the creatures that dwell in it, with others, the ancestors, “être seul /

est/ être avec/u et *duée*/ceux que l'on ne voit pas/autour de nous/et qui sont partout" ("être seul", *Sharing as Custom Provides* 76), that her texts, like the unpublished texts of her father, Waia Görödé before her and of her paternal and maternal grandfathers, the pastors Philippe Görödé and Eleisha Nabaye, before them, constitute the basis of an authentic Melanesian person, of memory, feeling, and identity.

The description of the panels on "Imagining a Sense of Place: The City, the Region, The Border" in the Program of the Cultural Crossroads conference held in Paris in July 2012 opened up the topic of a 'sense of place' with the premise that, as is also noted in the Introduction to this special issue, "cities are routinely metonymically articulated to the nation state, and urban imaginaries mobilize notions of cultural cohesion derived from the national." Yet, under the conditions of (increasingly late) modernity, "urban culture as a contact zone and port(al) of entry has been characterized by cultural exchange, hybridity and cosmopolitanism, a border in a cultural and identitarian, rather than a geopolitical sense [...] Cities are anchored in a hinterland [...]. Regions interact with, support, or counterbalance national imaginaries" (ibid.).

Déwé Görödé, like her father and grandfathers, situates her writing resolutely in just such a hinterland, in a *parti-pris* of Kanak indigeneity, close to the land and to the *tribu* – that is, at once the place, the indigenous village/customary lands, and the people who inhabit the village/customary lands.

By definition, the *tribu* lies outside the French capital, Noumea, closely related to the traditional *chefferie* but also, since colonisation, including spaces reserved for the church, Protestant or Catholic. The *tribu* has largely counterbalanced the imaginary of *Noumea la blanche* in a mainstream imaginary that privileges the colonial town and adds a third term, the colonial Bush of rural white settlement, to overlay the space of the *tribu*.

However, Görödé's 2005 novel, *L'Epave*, her partially autobiographical *Graines de pin colonnaire* (2009), and more recently, *Tâdo, Tâdo, Wêê ! ou "No more baby"* (2012), also increasingly include scenes set in the French capital: the commercial centre and Kanak gathering space of the Place des Cocotiers in *L'Epave*; Rivière Salée, a Kanak residential suburb in *Graines de pin colonnaire*. The shanty towns that mark the gateway to the city and line the mangrove within it figure centrally in her poems and short stories. In Görödé's articulation of places of identity outside, on, and across the political, cultural and ethnic borders that have defined Kanak, her writing practices re-negotiate the urban/regional or Noumea/Bush/*Tribu* nexus to counterbalance or contest national (French) imaginaries.

In her discussion of Māori film titles such as *Mauri* and *Ngāti*, Deborah Walker-Morrison presents New Zealand Maori film as the construction of a *Tūrangawaewae*, a Place to Stand that centres on the traditional *taonga* (treasures) of land and water. In Görödé's text the geographical features of the land, mountains, rivers,

waterholes, coastline, stars, trees and plants are inextricably linked with, indeed the foundation of, the Kanak social world. The spring, like the rain water that enters the pores, is identified explicitly by Utê Mûrûnû with her grandmother. (“Je pense à la source qui nourrit les tarodières où à l’eau de pluie qui pénètre les pores” *Utê Mûrûnû* 19). In their turn, the *tertres*, or mounds of earth on which Kanak *cases* (thatched houses) have been built, the networks of taro terraces and yam gardens, mark the landscapes with Kanak social organisation, tracing out the pathways of matrimonial alliance and socio-political claims to land. Rows of masculine columnar pines and feminine coconut palms indicate the emplacement of a chiefly house left by the ancestors, customary pathways or landmarks for the failing memory, “voies coutumières... traces repères pour la mémoire qui défaille” (*Utê Mûrûnû* 11). Görödé is the name of a place, the geographical area that gives the extended Görödé family its identity. It is also a genealogy; toponym is patronym, much as Kanaké, the first ancestor of the Paicî foundation story from oral tradition, is the familiar landmark-mountain that Déwé can see from her garden. Despite their voyaging *waka* (which in *L’Epave* is figured as an abandoned wreck in the tribe’s canoe graveyard), these Kanak peoples too, imagine themselves predominantly as *tangata whenua*, as autochthonous, that is, etymologically, as people springing directly from, or rooted in the earth, not unlike the ancient Spartoi of the classical Greek myth of Oedipus.

*Racines*  
*racines s’étirant*  
*au quotidien*  
*au gré*  
*du temps qui passe*  
*du temps qu’il fait*  
*creusant*  
*la terre*  
*sous la pierre*  
*toujours plus loin*  
*pour nouer*  
*le lien*  
*le cordon*  
*ombilical*  
*rendu à*  
*la terre*  
*à même*  
*la terre*  
*telle la parure de chrysalide*  
*de cigale*  
*rendue à*  
*la terre*  
*à même*  
*la terre*  
*à la mue*  
*ou sur les racines*  
*pour naître au monde*  
*avant l’envol [...]*  
 (Görödé, *Sharing as Custom Provides* 54)

Most of Görödé’s short stories in the collections *Utê Mûrûnû: petite fleur de cocotier* (1994) and *L’Agenda* (1996), like her poems and novels, speak of this unique bond with the natural world as with the land.

*La Terre*  
*un lopin*  
*entre les sorghos*  
*près d'un gué*  
*sous in banian*  
*au bord de l'eau*  
*où naît une fougère*  
*sur un talus*  
*où me parlent*  
*une poule sultane*  
*une coccinelle*  
*un scarabée*  
*quand je m'endors*  
*en rêve*  
*sous un bout de ciel bleu*  
*ou un souffle d'alizé*  
  
*un rayon de soleil*  
*au bord de s paupière*  
*au seuil de son regard*  
*où brille une aile de cigale*  
*ou une perle de rosée*  
*sur une tige d'igname*  
*ou un cœur de taro*  
*où palpité mon être*  
*au rythme de la terre*  
*(Sharing 79)*

The daily occupations of her Kanak characters are working in the yam or vegetable gardens, fishing, gathering food in the mangrove or on the coral shelf, preparing and sharing and feasting on food to celebrate alliances, marriages, and deaths within the group, or learning or passing on these ancient skills. In "Il est déjà demain" (*L'Agenda*) the busy female narrator tends her gardens, feeds her family, seeing them safely to the ford to catch the bus for school on the other side, helps prepare food for the funeral feast



Fig. 1. Image of the places evoked in "La Terre".

for a young Kanak killed in an alcohol-fuelled road accident. In "J'use du temps" (*L'Agenda*), the young fisherman and independence militant systematically returns the smallest fish of his catch to the river to offer a libation. The natural world, alive with the *U*, ondines of the water, or with the spirits of the forest, encourages a sense of respect and thus of conservation. Work in the gardens aligns with the seasons, with the lunar calendar. Kanak occupation of the land is presented less as a settling or a development than a deeply entwined cohabitation. This is shared with the ancestors, with the gecko on the wall, with the spirits who reveal their presence in premonitory signs. The land is living, vibrant with signs and voices that Déwé Görödé identifies in the novella, *Utê Mûrûnû*, eponymous title of the collection that gives the stories its name, with the "vital energy" of the first *Utê Mûrûnû*. She is the wise old Oracle or "Pythonisse" whose voice is synonymous with the song of the *notou* bird, or the call of the turtle-dove and the gurgling of water ("le chant du notou ou la voix de la tourterelle, le bruissement de l'eau" 30) and who, aware of the wounds of the earth beneath her digging stick, invokes the earth mother, "our life and our death," and responds to the voices of the earth: « Je l'invoque, elle, l'autre femme, la terre, notre mère à tous,

qui était, qui est, et qui sera, avant et après nous. Oui, je l'appelle, elle, la terre, notre mère et notre tombe, notre vie et notre mort » (20).

In these very particular places, where place is name and identity, tribal or group memory, story, belonging, where being is being with the others, knowing is being in dialogue with “those people, there,” with the ancestors, nature can nonetheless be both nourishing “little mother” and dangerous or vengeful stepmother full of taboos and interdictions. A lack of the ritual gesture to the tree to be felled may be fatal, resulting in the imprisonment of a human spirit within the tree (as in the children’s bi-lingual story in French and Iaa language, *L’enfant Kaori / Wanakat Kaori*). The ancestor who sticks to the skin in *L’Epave* is at once the fin of the shark, the devouring ogre pursuing Tom, the protagonist, in his dream, and the old fisherman stretching out his hand to protect him from shipwreck.

The *tribu*, too, has more than one face, its inside and outside places. Young girls wandering alone in the bush, outside the boundaries of the customary village, or along the sea-shore, have often been considered as fair-game for gang-rape. Déwé Görödés’s novels contain a number of allusions to unspoken clandestine but accepted sexual liaisons that take place at night in the bush or on the beach, that is, outside of the socially controlled spaces of the *tribu* and customary matrimonial arrangements. As opposed to the socialized, the civilised, to customary law, the spaces of personal love trysts in the mountains represent wilderness territories of the savage or lawless. The

Utê Mûrûnû who represents the third of the five generations of women all named Utê Mûrûnû (little coconut flower) in Görödés’s novella of the same name, growing up in the *tribu* in the 1940s, crosses the mountain one night with a cousin and falls pregnant to this young man with whom she falls in love. Not long after, her customary brothers come to visit Utê Mûrûnû and her grandmother to announce that the maternal uncles have promised her in marriage to “those (relatives) on the other side” (“ceux de l’autre côté”) who still worship the ancient gods, while her younger sister has been promised to “the maternal relatives from up there” (“les utérins de la-haut” 7) of the new Protestant religion. Custom requires that Utê Mûrûnû remain silent about the fact that she is carrying the child of the cousin from “up-there” whom she is expected to renounce in favour of her sister. However, Utê Mûrûnû, the little coconut flower is also a *Kaavo*, a daughter of the chief, a warrior Princess or Antigone according to Déwé’s text, resisting oppressive social spaces. At the risk of finding herself in the wilderness, outside of the *tribu*, she must find a way, a steep path of her own, around the “rock” (“le rocher” 16) of custom.

The intense sense of place is multi-faceted; closely linked to time and weather. In fact, space can completely subsume time (and challenge French tenses) as in the extraordinary and powerful short story in *L’Agenda*, “J’use du temps” (I weather time), which plays on the polysemy of the French word “temps” (time and weather) turning common European understanding of time against itself. In

this text, a young man who leaves from the *Quai des Volontaires* to fight in the European war returns as a spirit in the 'formless uniform that scares children' to haunt the water-hole, the place where he once betrayed and lost the young girl he loved. Moving up and down past, present and future, this "I," recounts his story as he observes the lives of his descendants, and of the country.

In *Graines de pin colonnaire*, the allusions to weather, to covered skies, are constantly repeated, as the narrator convalesces in a Noumea suburb, recovering (like Déwé herself), from treatment for breast cancer in the hospitals of Sydney. This curious collection of fragmented but intertwined stories of the everyday lives of four women is haunted by the struggle with and understandings of illness and the voices of others, including the voices of the dead. Tany's story constantly addresses the sudden strong sense of a presence, a former 'folly of love,' a *lutin* or mischievous and impossible spirit, a rascal leprechaun, imp, given up for the greater good of the *tribu*, but who is also the guardian of the hill opposite. Time is space-time, circularity, but it also nurtures the person: the 'seeds of the columnar pine' fertilize the places of memory as the latter emerge to constitute the subject. This is the looking or 'walking backwards towards the future' of which New Zealand Māori speak, taking support, identity even, from the past in order to be in the present, in the familiar everyday of family dropping in, of shared take-aways from the toll-booth shop at the entrance to Noumea, of walks,

under cloudy skies, to the spectacular *Rivière Bleue* reserve.

Kanak social space outside and inside Noumea requires the constant, ritual, group sharing of the fruits of the earth and sea as of memories of persons lost (deaths) and celebration of persons gained (births, marriages) for the group. The short-story, "La Saison des pommes kanakes" (*Utê Mûrûnû* 69-78) begins with just such a colourful and mouth-watering display of a huge array of traditional dishes prepared by the women of the *tribu* for a betrothal feast. However, it ends with the fruit from the Kanak Apple tree, offered on this occasion by the very young promised bride to her young prospective brother-in-law, rotting on the ground some two decades later, as the former wastes away. She has become the victim of the sorcery of charlatans and the accusations of a jealous sister-in-law. Dabbling in black magic practices bruised and scraped ("écorchée") like the nickel mining lands from which she comes, this damaged sister-in-law, like the rotting Kanak apples, reflects both the destruction wrought by colonialism and mining and the problems latent within the Kanak world itself. In *L'Epave*, the marriage celebration in the *tribu* again consists of a huge array of dishes but these are now very explicitly a mixture of French and Kanak specialities and are accompanied by a vast array of French beverages, wines and liqueurs. The spaces of a Kanak culture are under attack from dispersal and disenfranchisement. The wandering ancestral spirits are unable to re-join their ancient house 'mounds' or *tertres* because of the settler's barbed-

wire and marauding cattle as in the well-known poem by the assassinated independence-leader:

*The homeland of our fathers is no longer  
in our hands  
A foreign flag flies over our land [...]   
The names that we bear  
Emerge from the raised mounds of our  
fathers' houses  
The blood that flows through our veins  
Wells from the breast of our maternal  
relation  
Who wander in search of the mounds on  
which their houses once stood  
Now trampled and profaned by the White  
Man's cattle [...]  
Where are our altars, where are our  
ancestors?  
Jean-Marie Tjibaou, 1996  
(Görödé, *Sharing* 277-78)*

The ancestral places presented as threatened by hybridization also dominated the unpublished earlier text of Déwé's father, Waia. Waia Görödé's writings demonstrate for the critic Dominique Jouve that the paths of conversion in Houailou were in fact those of the traditional alliance the new religion revived and reinforced on the one hand, and on the other, that writing is now also a means of expressing an individual self, its singular emotions and thoughts. The particular interest of Waia's autobiographical manuscript, "Mon école du silence," lies in the detail of the everyday lived experience of contact. Alongside the pain of the humiliations and aggressions of the colonial era, the internalizing of guilt for savagery and cannibalism, and the awareness of the de-structuring of his

society (the expropriation of land, the liberated convicts who "take our girls for nothing," that is, without customary contract or 'reciprocity' at the level of the group), Waia Görödé rejects the exclusion of the ancestors from Christian redemption and the Puritanism of the pastors. He recalls "our first parents, tall and handsome in their savagery like their gods of nature. They were not ashamed of their naked bodies. Their genital organs are just like any other organs" ("...nos premiers parents grands et beaux dans leur sauvagerie comme leurs dieux de la nature. Ils avaient point de la honte de leurs corps nus. Les organes génitaux sont comme les autres organes...") Waia Gorodé, quoted in Jouve, 117). Despite his work with Pastor Leenhardt in the Protestant Mission of Do-Néva, Jouve's reading of Waia Görödé finds no dualism in a text that integrates the deterritorialized Christian God and the gods of nature, the Kanak *bao*, less into a hierarchy, she claims, than simply into different spaces. Jouve presents Waia as attempting to displace the Western opposition between the sacred and the profane: Waia's old angel-gods of nature who are alive as visible or felt presence are, for her, immanent rather than transcendental: "the summits of mountains give life to invisible creatures that people this land of Kaledonia like the holy angels people the Heaven" (Waia Görödé in Jouve 117). For Jouve, Waia's dynamic interaction with the Christian notions of transcendence, the preference given to immanence, produce distinctively Kanak in-between spaces. Waia's text, she points out, can, for example, link 'school' ("école du silence"),

a Western institution, with (evangelical) light and with the name of a healing Paicî vine (traditional knowledge) (Jouve 112).

Déwé Görödé's militant texts that indirectly critique the hold of the Church on Melanesian society by introducing a Marxist framework of analysis are very different from her father's apology for the sin of cannibalism and yet Jouve's analysis of the structure of Waia's writing can be seen as pertinent to the work of both father and daughter. Waia, too, situates himself as an outsider in relation to France and academic French language. A "vieux tayo" (old 'native'), he describes himself as embarked on an irregular, "zig-zag", writing path. For her part, Déwé writes of "Living writing/ In a foreign land/Outside myself/Or as an outsider/In this language that is not mine." (*Sharing* 94-5). Writing in French nonetheless serves, in both cases, to recall the effaced connections to the past by reactivating lost links with the spirits, both *bao* and *apieru*, affirming the visibility of the "angel-gods" of nature, the invisible force between the living and the dead. Despite the cry against the degradation of nature, the "polluted waters of the land", shared by Déwé, the nostalgic call to the *dames U* or female spirits who no longer sing and laugh in the waterfalls, to remain himself, for Waia, is to protect the sacred in nature in the "Land of my ancestors. I must study their past, their culture, their cult of the adoration of the sun, of the moon, of the mountains, of rocks, of trees, of plants, and of animals as well as of minerals, etc. etc." (in Jouve 113). For Jouve, Waia Görödé's use of writing to

interrogate contradictory and incoherent or apparently incompatible thoughts and emotions is what makes his work 'literature' as well as historical document. The diversity of the knots in his linkages, in the net he casts, she claims, are not an addition or a synthesis but rather a syncretism of the kind Jean-Marie Tjibaou will adopt in 1975.

Déwé Görödé's work creates its own distinctive syncretism; one that also includes the observation of negative forces within the *tribu*, in particular, the suspicion of an age-old oppression of women and children. Metaphors of the natural world thus also figure the "sharp rocks" ("arêtes tranchantes" *Utê Mûrûnû* 16), the brambles on the "steep path" that are a challenge to *Utê Mûrûnû*'s agency and an inevitable consequence of her perilous refusal of the primacy of the *tribu* and a traditional arranged marriage.

I have investigated elsewhere what I call the 'cognitive dissonance' in Déwé's syncretic work (Ramsay 2010). This is the apparent contraction between writing an island where being has been "clear-felled" by the imposition of "the single way of thinking" ("une île/ un pays/ où les êtres étaient/ où les êtres étaient sans être/ où les êtres sont sans être [...] en coupe réglée de/ la pensée unique", *Sharing* 50) and the injunction to the new generation in "J'use du temps" to take the path of return, 'the long pathway of return to their Kanak land' ("le chemin du retour, le long chemin du pays" 70) and to discover what is beneath the ashes of the conch shells (« sous les cendres des conques ») as the title of her first collection of

militant poetry puts this loss that refuses to be definitive. This is the insistence that Kanak cultural roots and vision of the world exist and must not be lost to materialism, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the recognition that tradition is itself fatally altered by a century and a half of colonialism, the *tribu* flawed by destructive uses of sorcery and by gender inequality. This is the doubleness of writing “an island/a land/of water/rain-water/spring-water/sea-water” that is also “nickel-tinted/creek water/muddy water/of stagnant mangrove/where floundering around in the slime/or swimming through murky waters/like a fish in water/becomes an art” (“Writing” in *Sharing* 49). The pressures exerted by the encroaching global, capitalist economy (denounced in the early poem “Madame multinationale” in *Sous les cendres des conqués* 63-4) have been intensified and complexified by the involvement of Kanak, since the 1988 creation of the Northern Province in their own recent nickel mining initiatives, and even by the “common future” proposed by the recent landmark Matignon (1988) and Noumea Agreements (1998). New cyber or hyper-reality adds to this ‘cognitive dissonance.’ In her extensive work on a sense of global place, arguing that places have multiple and not single identities and are not enclosures with an evident inside and outside, Doreen Massey has asked whether calls for ‘return’ (to tradition or to singular and intelligible places) may not derive from a false nostalgia. However, *L’Epave* is a fierce attack on the power of older men over young women in customary extended families; the ancestral canoe here is a stone in the form of a prow in the tribe’s canoe-cemetery

on which very young girls, all called Helena (or Lena) are violated over several generations by a maternal uncle-ogre. These young women fall, mesmerized, under the ogre’s sexual power.

Görödé is not the only writer to courageously critique the power relations within contemporary Kanak society between old and young, men and women, that can lead to abuse and cruelty. The popular plays of the autodidact Kanak playwright, Pierre Gope, from the island of Maré indict such Kanak social ills as underestimation of rape as a crime or chiefly corruption in land or mining sales. Writing from France, Tai Waheo has dared to publish the story of an often lonely and battered childhood as the child of a customary adoption in his bilingual text, *Le petit coco vert*. However much these three writers find themselves in the liminal position of critic and conscience of their society, breaking customary silence, they are no less determinedly rooted in the Kanak world. The intensity and particularity of the sense of place in Görödé’s writing does not prevent her spaces from exhibiting changing faces nor from being in process. Whereas the voices of the warm, nurturing earth, “little mother,” speak especially to women, in a curious passage, reminiscent of Camus’ discussion of the absurd, the narrator also affirms that we create nature in our image but despite its sublime beauty, the natural world is indifferent to mankind. “The gods are in us” (*Utê Mûrûnû* 34). This ‘dissonance’ is compounded when the environment changes from the *tribu* to Noumea. The “urban culture as a contact zone and port(al) of entry...

characterized by cultural exchange, hybridity and cosmopolitanism” mentioned in the Introduction is very present in Gorodé’s work. In *L’Epave*, Eva’s garden, the subversive “paradise of women,” the property which she caretakes at the entrance to Noumea, constitutes a liminal space, what Eva herself calls a ‘no man’s land’ between *tribu* and town. Eva continues to fulfil all her obligations to reciprocity and the group while living independently. The town itself, like *la fête* it comes to embody, has many faces. The central square, the *Place des Cocotiers* is the space of a feverish Saturday morning *fête commerciale*, of buying and selling as of nightlife (*fête*) in the bars. It is also the terminus of the *fête* constituted by the joyful collective Kanak participation in the march for independence that also takes over, the central streets of Noumea. So, too, do new forms of protest, for example, *Kanéka* protest music of the politically militant 1980s, linked to the songs of Bob Marley or Black rap poetry. Like the shantytowns on its outskirts, the city represents a place of mixing and coming together but also of cultural amnesia, the traps of drugs, prostitution, and welfare dependency. The short story of the drug-addicted Kanak watched over by his brother who seeks in vain to take him back to his roots in the *tribu* (“Benjy mon frère”) and the biting recent poems “Ville tropicale” (Tropical Town), “Terrain vague” (Wasteland), and “Deperdition” (Ruin) attack the dereliction of Kanak in the affluent red, white and blue city. However, the city’s cyber spaces are also spreading their tentacles out into the *tribu*, into the *cyber-case*, decried, for

example, in the following poem “Dans les mailles du filet” (Netted):

*Petit garçon deviendra grand  
et surfera sur le net  
et d’aventure en aventure  
s’en ira de par le monde  
à la recherche du temps perdu  
et des civilisations disparues  
sur l’écran de l’ordinateur  
du cyber-café ou de la cyber-case [...] petit poisson deviendra grand  
se fera frire et sautera  
dans les mailles du filet  
(Görödé, Sharing 157)*

The critique of the web’s globalising takeover of traditional space is picked up again at length in the novel *Graines de pin colonnaire*, where one of the four female character’s reflections almost uniquely concern a description and implicit critique of the ‘inhumanity’ of the television programmes she nonetheless consumes. The two worlds in fact remain permeable to each other, open to takeover. In *L’Epave*, the ‘master’s’ spaces are appropriated literally by Eva (her garden) and subverted, for example, by the scandalous and daring sex games and inversions of sex roles. The largely non-white shanty-towns that constitute other in-between spaces linking Noumea and the *tribu*, look both ways like the Janus figure of the Renzo Piano designed *Centre Culturel Jean-Marie Tjibaou*, on a mangrove-covered headland at the entrance to Noumea, with its unfinished traditionally shaped *cases* looking both backwards toward tradition and forward to the future. Indeed, in the novels of New Caledonian writers of European origin, Claudine Jacques’

apocalyptic *L'homme-lezard*, *L'age du Perroquet-banane...* and *Noumea-Mangrove*, and Nicolas Kurtovitch's *Good Night Friend*, the infiltration of the white city or its shanty-town periphery by Kanak is depicted as a potential danger – invasion by the boucan (possession, black magic and revenge killings) or by violence against women. Is this a case of the old myth of the 'uncivilised' hinterland of Kanak culture coming to take over the civilised city? In *Foret, terre, tabac*, Kurtovitch nonetheless represents a clandestine native garden within the city limit as a haven of peace, of harmony with the natural world while Görödé presents the shantytown as a place of addiction and child-abuse and a fall from the grace of the *tribu*. Jacques, for her part, finds a form of redemption in the self-sacrifice of the individual, and the solidarity that can emerge in the shanty-town between Wallisian, Kanak and European. In all of these authors, spaces can have shifting values, and the liminal spaces, like the *tribu* or the town, are both negatively and positively coded.

To return then to our earlier contention that the representation in Görödé of the regional, the *tribu*, the Kanak 'outsider' in Noumea, seeks to critique, counterbalance, or infiltrate Noumea's national French imaginaries. Postcolonial theory, in particular hybridity theory, might seem to require a re-thinking of the translocations involved as the construction of mixed or in-between spaces and a new kind of location. Yet, Görödé's is a rather different kind of hybridity from the one Bhabha is proposing with his 'third' and subversive

space of difference created by the to-and fro between the cultures in contact, indeed by the very (ultimately subversive) mimicry of coloniser by colonised. Görödé's sense of a communal, non-urban, non-European, elemental space, of a Kanak space, is most deeply that of a Place to Stand among the elements, the natural world, infused with the spirits, of the ancestors. More particularly, this is a world of women, albeit resistant women. This place to stand is not, as Doreen Massey fears, an essentialist or single space but manifestly a product of a changing socio-political history – when *Utê Mûrûnû*'s parents leave the land to find work in Noumea, they move from a flea-bitten hotel to a damp cellar under the white owner's house, then to their own shed of corrugated iron and, finally, to a small apartment. The pre-Christian system of polygamy figured by the elderly polygamous husband, from whom the second *Utê Mûrûnû* fled, has disappeared from the life in the *tribu* in her granddaughter, *Utê Mûrûnû*'s time.

Finally, Görödé's places are constructed not only from landscapes and weather and the Kanak figures within them, but from a multiplicity of intertexts, including radical French literature (Rimbaud, Baudelaire); Francophone literatures of struggle, (Senghor, Césaire); Kanak writers (Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Pierre Gope), the texts of Kanak oral tradition, Pacific and feminist texts (Grace Mera Molisa), but also New Caledonian colonial writers (Baudoux and Mariotti), French anthropological writings on Kanak, and other contemporary non-Kanak New Caledonian writers (Jacques, Kurtovitch

or the writer of thrillers, Daenycks). These very disparate influences sit alongside one another. The sense of place that emerges from Görödé's literary creation is in texts that play with French language and its rules, de-territorialising, using and abusing genre, tone or verb-tense, wearing away linear time and creating a dissonant 'place of her own.' This is constructed from the hinterland, but also from both inside and outside her own culture as from the margins of both cultures in a "no-man's land" as Eva explains her simultaneous position of solidarity with the *tribu* and critical distance from it. Despite its *parti pris* of indigeneity and Kanak 'return,' this is itself constructed critically out of the two worlds, the multiple texts and languages Görödé inhabits and that (to recall Derrida) inhabit her. From the short story "Grandfather's House" ("La Case"), a detailed quasi-ethnographic description evoking the intense jubilation of the childhood memory of her Grandfather's place with its protective guardian spirits, on a bright sunny morning in Kanaky, to the attack on the Ogre-fisherman-father figure (using a variety of European intertexts, Dr Jekyll, Jack the Ripper, Bluebeard as points of comparison), and the quasi-anonymous fragments of women's diary-writing in *Graines de pin colonnaire*, linked by atmospheric notations, the strongly affective relationship to place negotiates both a self in process and a central and recognizable writing core. This subversive work on language as on the understanding of her own life, albeit a life inextricably bound up with others, is itself part of the search for a new Place to Stand where

the margin, the hinterland and Kanak imaginaries (the *tribu*) can hold their own both inside and outside the city.

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### Image Notes

Fig. 1 An image taken from *La Nuit ses Contes*, a DVD of images by D. Walker-Morrison and N. Morrison accompanying *Nights of Storytelling. A Cultural History of Kanaky/New Caledonia*, ed. R. Ramsay, Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2011.

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# A PLACE TO STAND: LAND AND WATER IN MAORI FILM

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New Zealand (NZ) Māori identity, as is the case for indigenous peoples the world over, is inextricably linked to a sense of place of origin, *Tūrangawaewae*, literally, “a place to stand one’s feet.” Place here is obviously first and foremost about land, but also includes the rivers, lakes and sea that have sustained Māori communities since their arrival in Aotearoa, almost a thousand years ago. Linking representations of land and water to a re-reading of Paul Gilroy’s twin metaphors of roots and routes, this paper reads issues of loss, conservation, regaining and/or transformation of such a sense of place as central to Māori fiction film.

L’identité Māori néo-zélandaise, à l’instar des autres peuples indigènes du monde, est inextricablement liée à un sens de l’origine géographique : *Tūrangawaewae*, littéralement “un endroit pour poser ses pieds.” Le lieu spécifique domine ici la conception du territoire, mais cela n’exclut pas pour autant les rivières, les lacs et l’océan qui ont permis la survie du peuple Māori depuis son arrivée à Aotearoa, il y a près de mille ans. En rapprochant les représentations de la terre et de l’eau de la double métaphore des « routes » et des « racines », cet article examine les questions de la perte, de la conservation, de la récupération et/ou de la transformation en lien avec le sentiment du lieu en tant qu’il occupe une place centrale dans le cinéma de fiction Māori.

As Māori we describe ourselves *astangata whenua*, “people of the land.” When we introduce ourselves in an official setting, we begin with the name of our *waka* or canoe, one of the fleets of vessels that carried our ancestors on routes across the Pacific from Hawaiki (Raiatea, French Polynesia) to Aotearoa, around 1100 AD, some seven hundred years before the arrival of the Pakeha.[1] We also give the name of our *iwi* (tribe(s)), *hapu* (sub-tribal grouping(s)) and details of our *whakapapa* (ancestry). But before naming people, we name our *maunga* and *awa* or *moana*, the mountain and river or lake that attach each *hapu* to a specific place, our geographical roots, our *tūrangawaewae* or “Place to Stand.”[2]

The history of colonisation in this country, as elsewhere, has been largely a story of uprooting and dispossession. The nation’s founding document, Te Tiriti ō Waitangi, signed in 1840 between representatives of the English Crown and *iwi*, while thought by Māori signatories to guarantee their peoples’ sovereign rights and possession of *taonga* or resources (including land and water), was ignored for 150 years marked by armed conflict (the Land Wars 1845-72) and ongoing despoliation and loss (see R. Walker 1990). Māori politics and arts, including literature and film, in this country, as elsewhere, have always been—inevitably—“about” this central loss of geographical, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual roots. But they are also, more importantly, about regaining our “place,” about routes of return and revival.

## Roots and Routes

This article proposes that representations of land and water in Māori cinema can be closely linked to the twin concepts of roots and routes proposed by Paul Gilroy (1993) in his groundbreaking study of transatlantic black identities and modernity. I use Gilroy’s transnational, diasporic metaphor of routes, in an indigenous Māori context, as connected to the element of water and signifying cultural return, conceptual mobility, spirituality and individual or collective change. Where Gilroy uses the chronotope of the sailing ship to discuss the initial traumatic displacement and subsequent journeys of discovery of blacks across the Atlantic, I use that of the *waka* or canoe (which can also translate as vehicle/car) to reference the historical voyages of Māori ancestors across the Pacific to Aotearoa and contemporary voyages within and around the land. Secondly, for indigenous peoples such as Maori, colonization occupies a (loosely) similar position to that of slavery for Blacks in Gilroy’s work and results in its own particular experiences of double consciousness (the generally painful, potentially empowering experience of living more than one racial and cultural identity). Thirdly, I read the metaphor of roots (which, in Gilroy, loosely signifies the distant original African homeland and its multiple traditions) as relating to the Māori relationship to the land we have inhabited for some 900 years, and to our resulting position as *tangata whenua*, people of the land, even or especially when this relationship has been and continues to be disrupted, via colonisation

and its postcolonial aftershocks. It is important to note that in the films I discuss (in Māori terms, as with other Pacific and indigenous peoples), paired elements such as land and water / roots and routes, appear to function somewhat differently to Western traditions, as complementary poles rather than as mutually exclusive opposites or Derridean binaries, with one term always already privileged over the other, both terms subsequently collapsing into one another. While the two can often be seen to merge, one element (land) or related set of terms and metaphors (roots, house, situated identity, life force) does not exclude, oppose, sit in a hierarchical relationship with, or collapse into the other (water, canoe, fluidity, voyage, transformation, renewal) (Walker-Morrison and Ramsay 237). Thus the discovery of new routes, new ways of being and doing, can lead to a re-discovery of roots, a reinvention of traditional identity and creation of a third space.

The following discussion outlines the interplay of these related concepts at work in a corpus of four fiction films, from the first Māori features of the 1980s (*Ngāti*, Barclay 1987; *Mauri*, Mita 1988) to the popular successes of the 1990s (*Once were Warriors*, Tamahori 1994) and following decade (*Whale Rider*, Caro 2002). My working definition of Māori cinema as cinema which tells Māori stories, written by Māori, using Māori actors, and/or directors, producers and crew, thus includes features directed and made by Pakeha and/or European (co-) producers, however problematic the involvement of these cultural outsiders may be considered in some quarters.

### **No Place to Stand in *Once were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori & Rewia Brown, 1994)**

I begin with the fiction feature which really put Māori filmmaking on the local and international map: the biggest grossing film in NZ film history until Jackson's *Lord of The Rings* trilogy (2001-2003): director Lee Tamahori and scriptwriter Rewia Brown's *Once Were Warriors*, (1994) after Alan Duff's 1990 novel of the same name. *Warriors* screened at Cannes, won awards at local and international festivals, was met with widespread critical applause and made \$NZ25 million at the international box office.[3]

The film opens with a seven second static shot of an idyllic rural landscape: pasture lands, framed by snow-topped mountains, reflected in a calm, blue lake. The soundtrack is of a different age, murmuring voices and haunting, flute-like instrumentals.[4] A spectator viewing the scene for the first time in 2013, post Jackson's Tolkien adaptations, might almost expect to meet the odd wizard or a hobbit or two... But no, as Tamahori's camera pulls back, the scene is revealed to be a contemporary one; however, this is no pastoral paradise but a billboard illusion planted beside a screaming motorway and neighbouring suburban slum (see fig. 1a and 1b). Through this opening "shot," Tamahori clearly establishes the cruel contrast between the tourist myth (reinvigorated by Air New Zealand's recent re-branding of Aotearoa as Middle Earth) and the ugly realities of urban life for working-class Māori. [5] Moreover, the billboard advertises a fictitious power company, ENZ Power,

whose name references the privatisations of state-owned assets, begun in the 1980s and recently renewed by the current new-right government. Such policies have generally not led to economic prosperity for Māori, as the film graphically demonstrates.

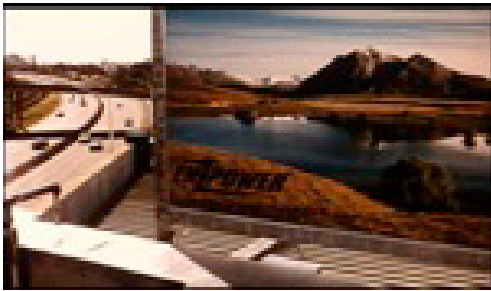


Fig. 1a A billboard illusion

Fig. 1b Urban living

The route to the Pakeha city has been no Yellow Brick Road. There is no land, no water, no place for urban Māori to stand in corporate NZ. During the ensuing expository prologue, a graffiti tagged on a wrecked car gives the name of the first modern Māori protest movement, *Ngā Tama Toa* (The Young Warriors), which lobbied aggressively from the early 1970s for the return of Māori lands and the recognition and revival of Māori language and cultural institutions. In this context, the almost schizophrenic, sociopathic rage that inhabits the film's male protagonist, Jake "The Muss" (Temuera Morrison), reads unambiguously, as springing from a dysfunctional urban

environment and concomitant loss of cultural values and identity.[6] Moreover, physical strength, the foundation of hegemonic Māori masculinity,[7] is no longer a valued commodity in the workplace under late capitalism, and Jake is unemployed. Unable to play the traditional masculine roles of protector and provider, cut off from his language, his culture, and his land, Jake has become "a slave to your fists, to the drink" as his battered but feisty wife, Beth (Rena Owen) retorts. Jake's moral impotence is further highlighted when his eldest son, Nig (Julian Arahanga), joins a gang and the second son, Boogie (Taungaroa Emile), is sent away to a remand home. In a pivotal scene, the family hires a car and goes on a day trip to visit Boogie, stopping on the way by a lake. In the distance, between land and water, Beth points out her family's *marae* (geographical locus of traditional community), her *tūrangawaewae*, bathed in a nostalgic, almost mythical haze. Mythical for the children, for whom the *marae* is an unvisited homeland, nostalgic for Beth. Not so for Jake: we learn that because he is of a lower, "slave" caste, Beth's family refused the marriage so the young couple eloped to the city and her children have never visited their mother's (and their) *whenua tuturu*. [8] Rigid adherence by older generations to certain traditional values (caste system) is thus a contributor to social dislocation.[9] The film downplays this element of Duff's novel; [10] in Rewia Brown's screenplay, it is economic marginalization, loss of cultural identity and separation from the land that pull the Heke family into a destructive, downward spiral of

double-consciousness, dysfunction and delinquency. “Embodying the (debated) statistics of ‘Māori socio-economic disparity’” (Chapple 2000), the family embarks on a path of destruction caused by poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence, sexual abuse and gang activity” (Martens 10).[11] Moreover, the film rewrites and amplifies Duff’s counterpoint theme of cultural renaissance, first and foremost in the character of Māori social worker Bennett (George Henare), whose “job” is to teach the audience—through Jake’s wayward teenage son—how masculine energy may be channeled into non-threatening forms of controlled, ritualized “violence” through traditional cultural practice, i.e. *taiaha* and *haka* (Māori martial arts and dance).

The character of Bennett, who navigates easily between both worlds, enables *Warriors* to begin the process of positive return to traditional, community-based roots, which will be taken up by Beth. But the film also demonstrates how tragically overdue is such a return for many Māori, since it is precipitated by Boogie’s incarceration and the suicide of daughter Grace (Mamaengaroa Kerr-Bell), victim of sexual abuse by a trusted family member and close friend of her father’s (Cliff Curtis). The family (minus Jake) returns to Beth’s *marae* for Grace’s *tangi* (funeral). Tamahori introduces the scene via a sound bridge of women’s voices uttering a *karanga* (ritual women’s chant, calling visitors onto a *marae*) over a medium close-up of Beth in her suburban state-house kitchen, as if calling her back to her people. In a slow dissolve, Beth’s

face and upper body are momentarily superimposed on a low angle medium close-up of the carved guardian standing atop the *wharenui* (meeting house), thus re-establishing the connection between Beth and her birthplace and announcing her future role as guardian of her *whānau* (family). Silhouetted against a clear blue sky, the brightness of the image contrasts poignantly with the funeral scenes that follow (see fig. 2) as the camera tracks down to the *wharenui*, cuts to the massed mourners arriving with the casket, watching over Grace’s body, performing a *haka* in her honor before her burial by the lakeside.



Fig. 2 Funeral scene

It is the return to this space, to her *tūrangawaewae*, that gives Beth the strength to leave her dysfunctional marriage and effect her own cultural rebirth, for herself and her children, declaring as the film ends: “Our people, once were warriors. They had *mana*, pride, People with spirit.” The film remains important in many senses, in articulating the devastating consequences of dispossession but also, in that “Beth’s pathway from victim to leadership reflects the passage of women taking leadership roles in the Māori renaissance of the 1980s” (Joyce 163).

Issues of central importance to the individual and community are always played out in relation to land and water as one's Place to Stand. The community is rooted in this very literal sense, but also a dimension of metaphorical fluidity is introduced through the element of water, closely linked to spirituality--the word *wairua*, "spirit" contains the word *wai*, "water." The central body of water may be a lake (*Warriors*) or river (e.g. *River Queen*, Vincent Ward, 2005) but because most films about Māori (whether directed by Māori or not) are set in coastal locations, water becomes most closely associated with the sea, as food / life source and as connection to ancestral and spiritual homelands.

### **Fluid Spaces in *Whale Rider*, (Niki Caro, after Witi Ihimaera, 2002)**

Apart from Jackson's blockbuster Tolkien adaptations, Niki Caro's screen interpretation of acclaimed Māori writer, Witi Ihimaera's (*The*) *Whale Rider* has been New Zealand cinema's most successful feature internationally since the turn of the millennium. Voted *People's Choice* at the *Toronto International Film Festival*, the film won 29 international awards and twelve year-old female lead, Keisha Castle-Hughes was nominated for an Oscar for *Best Actress* in 2002.

Set in the small, contemporary, Māori coastal community of Whangara (birthplace of Ihimaera and setting for the novel), the film tells how a young girl, Pai Apirana struggles to convince her Koro, grandfather and local chief (Rawiri Paratene, see fig. 3a and 3b), against centuries of patriarchal tradition, that

she is the new leader he is seeking for his people. Pai knows she has been chosen for this role because of the strong connection she has with the whales which are her *iwi's* guardians (the first ancestor, Paikea, from whom she is a direct descendant, having arrived in Aotearoa, riding on the back of a whale). The dramatic climax sees a score of whales strand themselves on the local beach, while the community struggle in vain to save them. When all appears lost, Pai rides the leader of the pod back out to sea and the others follow.

As a film about roots (the centuries of communal experience and tradition that bind the community to the land) and routes (those that first carried the ancestors across the Pacific and those that carry their descendents away from and back to the land), *Whale Rider* mobilises key tropes in Māori film and literature. Caro's film follows Ihimaera's novel in advocating for the possibility of cultural revival while rejecting unquestioning adherence to tradition: the patriarchal division of labour in the form of exclusive male leadership and rights over traditional knowledge. Crucially also, both refuse a Manicheistic attitude towards their characters, inviting empathy or *aroha* for both the character of Pai, as a young girl having to assert herself against the patriarchal authority of the man she most loves and admires; and also for her Koro, as a leader who believes he is doing his best for his community. In the film, if Pai's voiceover narration privileges her position, shot reverse shot sequences emphasise reciprocity and dialogue, and Caro's use of point of view camera is extended to all the main characters,

including Koro. Moreover, early scenes demonstrate a more endearing side to this stubborn patriarch: the old man's love for his granddaughter is revealed when we see him riding her home from school on the cross bar of his bicycle, laughing and joking with her, later responding to her curiosity about tribal history.[12]



Figs. 3a & 3b Rawiri Paratene, Pai's Koro (grandfather)

Following the novel, Caro's camera constructs an intergenerational bond which Koro's conscious mind, in its obsessive search for a male heir, refuses for most of the film.

The film also suggests that it is Koro's intransigence that has driven away his elder son, Porourangi (Cliff Curtis). Unwilling to take on the traditional mantle of leadership for which his father has destined him, uprooted also by the death in childbirth of his wife and first son (Pai's twin), Porourangi (named after the "original" paramount chief of the eponymous iwi, Ngāti Porou, to which Ngāti Konohi belong) has left Aotearoa for Europe, to pursue his

chosen profession as a sculptor. Indeed we learn that, like Māori artist Brett Graham who provided sculptures for the film and numerous others, the route to Europe has been a productive one, and Porourangi has established something of an international reputation for himself. Koro's scathing, traditionalist dismissal of his son's modernist inflected artwork as mere souvenirs serves to drive the two further apart. Moreover, the severing of Porourangi's connection to the land and the tribe's current lack of direction are given visual form in his half-finished *waka*, abandoned after the tragic circumstances surrounding Pai's birth. This plotline, an invention of the filmscript, enables Caro to set up the possibility of redemptive return: Pai's near-death experience prompting her father to complete the *waka* and (by extension) take up a key role in the community that is in tune with his own aspirations and talent.

Koro's younger son, Rawiri, is similarly seen to have been driven away by his father's single-minded obsession to find a male successor: as second son, his Māori martial arts talents remain unrecognized, and he has sunk into a lifestyle of drug and alcohol induced apathy. Thus, despite never having left the community, in a spiritual sense he has become cut off from his roots, through a combination of unemployment and filial disaffection. It is by becoming a mentor to Pai and by leading the community in their attempt to rescue the stranded whales that he will regain his place to stand.

As many commentators (e.g. Gauthier, Gonick, Message, Morris) have noted, the film is firmly rooted in its Māori community, with many scenes situated in the communal spaces of *marae*, *wharenuī* (meeting house) and *wharekai* (dining hall). In keeping with the exploration of the tensions between tradition (roots) and change (routes), both spaces are the setting for customary, community-based ways of being and doing (local school concerts, communal meals, Koro's revival of traditional martial arts and chiefly knowledge) and the questioning of tradition (Pai's refusal to sit at the back of the *marae atea* (open space in front of the *wharenuī*) because she is a girl [13]; her pursuit of forbidden knowledges and besting of Koro's favoured contender). It is significant that Pai's dramatic speech, which outlines her own and her community's collective past and her democratic vision for its future ("We can learn that if the knowledge is given to everyone, we can have lots of leaders and soon everyone will be strong. Not just the one being chosen"), will be delivered (in traditional dress) in the space of the *wharenuī* (Gonnick 314), thus revealing the latter's pivotal role as both traditional and transformational space.

Emphasising also the transformational role of water, the film stages the key test of the young boys Koro has chosen as contenders to succeed him at sea. Addressing the boys with a local proverb, Koro declares: "*He rei ngā niho, he parāoa ngā kauae*," which translates as "if you want to wield the whale's tooth, you must first have the jaw of a whale": leadership

requires great strength. Koro then tosses overboard the whale tooth pendant he wears as a symbol of his own leadership and connection to the ancestral Whale Rider, Paikea. After the boys' failure to retrieve the *taonga* (treasure), Koro sinks into depression, following which it will, of course, be Pai who retrieves the tooth of the whale and who will demonstrate that she possesses the jawbone required to wield it.

The central drama plays out on the shore, where land and water meet. The stranding of the whales, spiritual guardians of the *iwi*, can be read as the result of, and a visual metaphor for the grandfather's intransigence. The fluidity of tradition is restored as the grandfather comes finally to accept the legitimacy of his granddaughter Pai's future leadership. This concept is embodied, firstly, in Pai's riding of the lead whale, who heads back out to sea, taking her on a journey which doubles that of her ancestor, before subsequently rendering her back to her people.

Secondly, the metaphor of water as movement and change is embodied in the final scene (not present in the book), as the *iwi* paddle out on a glittering sea, on Porourangi's beautifully restored *waka* "manned" by both men and women, towards a fluid future that has renewed its connection to its past (see fig. 4). As *Cineaste* reviewer Paula Morris notes, the final scene "suggests the beginning of a journey as great as the Pacific voyages of old. The purpose this time isn't to find new land, but to create a new world in the place where they live" (18).



Fig. 4 Porourangi's *waka*

The concept of water as a source of physical and intellectual mobility, spiritual connection and renewal, indeed as a kind of third space, takes on deep resonance here. While the film ends on an open question mark as to what type of economic enterprises will enable the people to move forward, a positive reading of its narrative resolution would argue that Pai's role in the return of the artist Porourangi, in the rehabilitation of his younger brother, Rawiri, in the opening of Koro to the possibility of change, and in the mobilisation of the entire community catalyzes multiple routes for *iwi* to collectively navigate new routes between modernity and tradition. [14]

As well as the superb performance by its young female lead, the wild beauty of the film's coastal setting, its feel-good ending and astute visual story-telling (combining Māori ways of being with universal themes) made it a hit with audiences and critics, locally and internationally. Even sceptical Māori academic, Brendan Hokowhitu, had to admit that "indigenous people from around the world have embraced the film" (133). Still, echoing the reception of *Warriors*, the film provoked fierce debate. Veteran Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay (whose work and influence I will discuss

presently), angered that the film had been directed and scripted by a Pakeha, made by a largely Pakeha crew, and co-produced with an eye to targeting international commercial markets, dismissed *Whale Rider* as "indigenous film for beginners" (in Calder A2). In my view, the judgment is overly harsh, particularly given the endorsement of Caro's work by Ihimaera (also executive co-producer), and given the enthusiastic involvement of highly respected Māori actors and the local community. [15] Nonetheless, one cannot but share Barclay's (and others') disappointment that the film was not made with greater involvement by Māori filmmakers. Moreover, the influence of the German co-producer on the story line is evident in the invention of a pregnant German girlfriend for Porourangi, who appears suddenly on the beach in the final sequence, as the *waka* is launched. Although she thankfully has no speaking part, her character, clearly designed to enable the German target audience to insert themselves into an uplifting story about indigenous eco-friendliness and cultural revival, detracts somewhat from the local authenticity of the story. [16] Reliance on foreign, first-world capital can have problematic implications for the integrity of local and indigenous filmmaking. Nonetheless, in spite of these shortcomings, it remains my view that *Whale Rider* constructs an experience which is not only respectful and worthy of its Māori source text, its culture and community, it is also an empowering one. As Marnina Gonick (and others) have argued, "...in adapting and blending traditional ways of knowing, generic cinema conventions and oral cultural sources, the film engages in a politics

of re-imagination” (308), “effecting a decolonizing of the screen” (315). I would add that, through and beyond its feminist (re-) configuration of Māori agentic subjectivity, the film’s mobilisation of the tropes of land and water, roots and routes, suggest productive ways in which *iwi* can negotiate a third space between tradition and modernity.

### **The Roots of Māori Cinema: Merata Mita (1942-2010) and Barry Barclay (1944-2008)**

In the following sections, I want to suggest that *Warriors*, *Whale Rider* and other contemporary Māori films refer back, explicitly or implicitly to the roots of Māori cinema: the work of pioneer documentary filmmakers, teachers and cultural activists Merata Mita and Barry Barclay,[17] both one-time members of Ngā Tama Toa, who (co-) wrote and directed the first two Māori full-length fiction features. Shot more or less simultaneously, *Ngāti* (1987) and *Mauri* (1988) stand as major landmarks of the Māori cultural renaissance which began to gain momentum in the mid 1970s. Both films use similar geographical and temporal settings: small coastal communities in the post-war 1950s, the period which saw thousands of young Māori follow difficult routes, leaving their economically struggling rural birthplace to seek employment in the Pakeha towns. Both filmmakers use the medium of fiction film to document Māori realities, using Māori actors, settings, technicians, music and narrative methodologies, to “decolonize the screen” as Merata described it (Mita 49); inventing a philosophy of indigenous

filmmaking which Barclay would term “Fourth Cinema” [18] and which would “show the way” for indigenous filmmakers the world over.

The title, *Mauri*, meaning life force, emphasizes the spiritual connection to land and water and the importance of birth place and ancestral connection to land in the establishment of identity. *Tūrangwaewae*, one’s Place to Stand, is most often synonymous with one’s place of birth (or the birthplace of one’s *tipuna* or ancestors), one’s *whenua tūturu*, originary or true home. The film embodies this *kaupapa* (theme) from its opening scenes of traditional birthing practice, which demands that the umbilical cord and placenta be returned to the earth, tying the child to its roots in the Land.

This ceremony is instigated and performed by the film’s central character, *kuia* (grandmother or wise woman) Kara (Eva Rickard), who is bringing up her young granddaughter, Awatea (Rangimarie Delamare). Her family’s land has been lost through a miscarriage of Pakeha justice and deviously purchased by her now senile Pakeha neighbour, Semmons (Geoff Murphy). The multiple narrative threads coalesce around the return of her son, Rewi (Anzac Wallace), after an absence of twenty years. Rewi provides support but Kara’s attempts to persuade him to marry her beautiful niece, Ramiri (Susan Paul), are in vain. This is a troubled man with a dark secret. Not until the final act of the film is the mystery unveiled: he is an impostor and an escaped prisoner, Paki Hemapō, who stole the identity of Rewi

Rāpana, when the latter was killed in a car accident while attempting to return home. On her deathbed, Kara instructs the now fugitive Paki to return to the scene of his “crime,” where he disposed of Rewi’s body, and seek forgiveness.

The film stages the theme of colonial land theft and restitution through characterisation and plot, dialogues, casting and mise en scène. Played by fellow director Geoff Murphy, Mita’s long-time partner in life and art (also co-producer of *Mauri*), Semmons is a wildly and humorously exaggerated caricature, a point which has been lost on most Pakeha reviewers, even those who have been highly sympathetic to the film (Shepard 122). The construction of Semmons evokes Gilroy’s reading of Frederick Douglass’ inversion of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic: “[it] is the slave rather than the master who emerges from Douglass’s account possessed of ‘consciousness that exists for itself; while the master becomes representative of a ‘consciousness that is repressed within itself’” (60). While Semmons clearly embodies the crazed, repressed nature of white racism, greed and colonial land theft, the film attempts to circumvent over-generalizing of the character, firstly via humour, but more importantly, by making a point of not visiting the sins of the father(s) on the son. Au contraire, Steve Semmons (James Hayward), the opposite of his father in every way, is respectful of local Māori, falls in love with Ramiri, marries her and returns the land. Secondly, the casting of veteran activist Eva Rickard as Kara, fiercely nurturing mother figure of the community, already connects the

character with the “land question.” Merata underscores this in a long, fifty second, static shot-sequence of Awatea and Kara setting off for a *tangi*, during which Kara talks about her own imminent passing. The scene explicitly evokes Dame Whina Cooper’s historic *hiko*i or Land March of 1975. Attracting more than 60,000 supporters and 5,000 walkers, who walked the length of the North Island to the Parliament Buildings in Wellington, “in a powerful and innovative way, the land march embodied Māori protest over ongoing land alienation” (Royal). The *hiko*i raised awareness of the injustice of colonial misappropriation of Māori lands and ushered in an ongoing process of restitution. The most enduring archival image of this historical event shows *kuia* Whina in the same position as Merata shoots Kara / Rickard, from behind, walking along a country road, supporting herself with a walking stick, hand in hand with a young child.

Land and water are intimately related to the spiritual cycle of life and death. Being cut off from the land thus signifies spiritual impoverishment. We see this in the character of Paki, whom Merata describes as an allegory or parable about “the schizophrenic existence of so many Māori in Pakeha society” (Mita 49). His attempted return is compromised because he has stolen another’s identity: the price must be paid for his transgression, not so much of Pakeha law (attempted theft of money in a bank robbery gone wrong), but of Māori law: the theft of Rewi’s “Place.”[19]

The final sequence intercuts shots of Kara’s dying moments, her funeral

procession, her granddaughter running to a hilltop to wave her Nanny's spirit on its way, the expiation and surrender of the fugitive, Paki. It is no coincidence that Merata shot this latter scene at dawn, at the water's edge, place of spiritual cleansing. The protagonist is framed against a rock face: wrists crossed, eyes closed, chanting prayers, imploring the spirit of the dead man, the ancestors and living community he has wronged. As if in response, a sound bridge overlays the end of the first scene with the chanting of tribal leader, Hēmi (Sonny Waru), watching over the dying Kara with a group of loved ones. Intercutting continues until Paki completes his mission of rendering the dead man's possessions to the sea, upon which Kara expires and Awatea, who has been watching through a window, turns to run up the hill Kara has told her will be her route to the spirit world. When we cut back to Paki, the ensuing scene contains no dialogue, the soundtrack composed entirely of his sobbing and the gentle lapping of the cleansing sea around the rocks. As two Māori policemen arrive to take him into custody, the elder (Don Selwyn) approaches, takes his hands and the two *hongī* (press noses in the traditional Māori greeting), exchanging breath in a gesture of mutual recognition and respect. Unable to take Paki into custody himself, he leaves it to his younger colleague<sup>[20]</sup> to handcuff the prisoner's extended wrists. Cut to a medium close-up of Paki gazing skyward, holding his arms aloft until we hear the click of the cuffs like a prison door closing. This sound cues another abrupt cut, but not to a prison cell. Instead we

see a *kotuku* (heron) in majestic flight against a clear blue sky, as if the bird has been summoned by this final act of supplication. The cut takes us from imprisonment to freedom, suggesting forgiveness and redemption for the troubled male protagonist.

The *kotuku* is traditionally considered to accompany the spirit of the dead (especially in the case of a chief or other respected community member) on its journey north, to the tip of the island, to Te Reinga, the leaping off place, from where it makes the long journey across the Pacific, to the originary homelands of Hawaiki nui, Hawaiki roa, Hawaiki Pāmāmao (Hawaiki the great, the long, the far-distant) and the Spirit World, *Te Pō* (the Night). The scene then cuts back to Kara's *tangi*, the group of mourners solemnly crossing the paddocks, now filmed with an aerial camera, in a bird's eye / spirit-eye view. Meanwhile, the soundtrack is gradually filled with a soft lament, *Maringiringi noa nga roimata* / "Our tears flow unchecked," the words which Kara has previously recited to Paki and which are also the film's theme song. Aerial shots alternate with circular, close-framed, high angle shots of the young Awatea standing on the hilltop, tearfully gazing skywards towards us as she waves her grandmother's scarf in a final farewell (see fig. 5).

A masterful combination of mise en scène, montage and subjective camera align the spectator with both the *kotuku* and the departed *kuia*. Graeme Cowley's sweeping, circular, aerial cinematography takes the spectator on the spirit journey over land and sea; flying northwards but looking back, ensuring and reaffirming that the *mauri* of the community lives on, symbolically invested in the young girl whose name, Awatea, means dawn.



Fig. 5 Awatea upon the hilltop

We see Merata not simply drawing on the symbolism of the *kotuku* as spirit guide here, but imbuing it with multiple meanings which her subjective, winged camera, breathtaking land- and seascapes, and Hirini Melbourne's poignant, mounting musical score elevate to the level of what can only be described as the cinematic sublime (Freeland). Imprisonment and surrender become liberation, redemption; the pain of death, separation, tears of loss become spiritual journey, the route back to the originary homeland, while the *mauri* or life-force of the community, its rooted connection with the land, is renewed.

### Prophetic Places to Stand in Barry Barclay's *Ngāti*, 1987

Barry Barclay's first fiction feature, *Ngāti*, 1987, is "...widely credited as being the first fiction feature by a member of an Indigenous community" (Murray 1). *Ngāti* (tribe, people) is set in 1948, in post-war rural NZ, in a small (fictitious) coastal community similar to that of *Mauri*. The narrative's three interwoven plot strands enable the film to straddle several genres: romance, family melodrama, and what, in European terms, might be best described as neo-realist social drama. In the romance / melodrama plot line, a local born, Australian-raised doctor (Ross Girven) returns "home" for a holiday. The handsome but precocious young "Aussie" redneck is gently "re-educated" by the locals, before discovering that his biological mother was Māori, then falling in love with the local (Pakeha) schoolteacher (Judy MacIntosh). The family melodrama centres on the illness of Rōpata (Oliver Jones), a young Māori boy dying of leukemia, and the failed attempts of the sympathetic Pakeha doctor (father of the school teacher, played by Norman Fletcher) and Māori *tohunga* (healer) to cure him. The social drama plot thread turns on an impending threat to the tight-knit community when the Pakeha owners of the local freezing works (abattoir and meat processing plant) announce plans to close it down, effectively putting most of the town out of work.

As one would expect, Barclay's concept of indigenous Fourth Cinema is a deeply democratic "of the people, by the people, for the people" approach, driven by

values of collaboration, community and reciprocity. It supposes syncretic, hybrid approaches to life and work which take a lead from holistic, community-focussed indigenous values and economic practice. Sympathetic, well-educated Pakeha characters in *Ngāti* (the local doctor and his family) who are happily integrated within the Māori community reflect Barclay's desire that Pakeha also have their Place to Stand, within "...a bi-cultural New Zealand that is fundamentally Māori in spirit" (Murray 62). This inclusive approach is suggested from the film's opening: *Haere mai*, a traditional welcome song, plays over shots of an old bus, wending its way into the town, welcoming the viewer along with its newly returned son. Moreover, the "return" of Aussie doctor, Greg, his discovery of his Māori ancestry and integration within the community can be read as a call, by Barclay, for a generation of mixed blood, urban Māori New Zealanders to rediscover their roots.

Both Mita and Barclay's films share an underlying documentary aspiration that seeks to record--almost as direct-cinema--the lived experience of indigenous communities, the ebb and flow of life and death, whether in documentary or fiction film. Thus, in *Ngāti* as in *Mauri*, we are shown numerous scenes of (most often) communal activity (see fig. 6a and 6b): shearing, fleecing, stock-droving, fishing, gathering shellfish, eels, preparing food, singing, socialising, playing cards, eating, which serve no purpose in terms of driving the narrative, but are simply "about" the work of documenting community,[21] about "creating a visual

tapestry reflecting the physical details of Māori communal life" (Barclay Our Own Image 67).[22]



Figs. 6a & 6b Scenes of communal activity

Like Merata Mita and subsequent Māori filmmakers, Barclay's passionately-held belief in indigenous rights is inseparable from a deep commitment to inclusive cultural values, economic development and self-determination. This commitment, woven into every thread of their films, with more or less overt didacticism (and the term is not pejorative in the context of indigenous filmmaking and literature), is made particularly explicit within the social-realist drama plotline of *Ngāti*. As mentioned, the community is threatened with 'mass' unemployment by the impending closure of their local freezing works, which has become financially unviable, largely, we are told through the dialogues, because local Māori are imitating the big Pakeha farms and trucking their stock to a bigger plant further afield. As one stock drover explains: "I reckon our Māori

communities don't know what they're doing any more. Pakeha send their stock to the works, Māori send their stock to the works. Pakeha go fishing, bugger me days, they all go fishing." Another adds: "It's the bloody money. And to top it all off, the bloody farmers, Māori and Pakeha, they have confidence in that works down south." We then learn that there is already little work left for the local drovers, since farmers are increasingly using trucks to transport their stock to "that works down south." In other words, the community's work and well-being, its ability to sustain itself via the land, is threatened by loss of faith in its own structures, coupled with the ill-considered adoption of individualistic, capitalist Pakeha business practice. A *hui* (meeting) is organised at the local *marae* (see fig. 7), with a couple of company representatives, who feign sadness at having to close the works before reminding the people how much they owe the company for having provided them with employment. A radical response and solution is proposed by the recently returned daughter of war veteran community leader, Iwi (Wī Kuki Kaa). Standing to address both the Pakeha company men and her people, Sally (Connie Pewhairangi) retorts: "I too would like to thank the company for providing employment. But the thanks shouldn't be one-sided. The company did not build its processing business here because it fell in love with the people. It built here so it could make big profits for its shareholders and directors. The company has enjoyed the sweat and labour of our people. Kapua did not need the company... Let us run our own freezing works. Our own farms, our own

fisheries. Let us run them ourselves." The problem of dwindling stock numbers is solved by Sally's father, Iwi, who is the best stock manager in the region, greatly respected among both Māori and Pakeha, and who has just accepted the job of managing the biggest Pakeha-owned station, on his own terms. These are: total control over every aspect of the farm's management, including the power to decide to which freezing-works the stock will be sent. Supporting his daughter, "not because she is my daughter, but because what she says makes sense," Iwi declares: "...we will form an incorporation. We will buy the freezing works. We can and we will run it ourselves."



Fig. 7 Local *marae* (meeting)

*Ngāti* has been read as a nostalgic work, and in some ways perhaps it is. Not that this is a negative term for Māori, for whom it is common to say we "walk backwards into the future" i.e. with an eye on the past. More than a nostalgic work, however, *Ngāti* is also a prophetic one. Firstly, the character of Iwi displays an ability to find new routes, to bend the economic tools of modernity to the service of his community in ways which also nourish their roots: in this respect (as well as in its integration of Pakeha characters into the Māori world), the film constructs its rural community

as forward-looking third space. Secondly, *Ngāti* acts as a prescient socio-political document, made in the early years of an ongoing process of redress of historical colonial injustices, first and foremost among which is widescale theft of land and other resources. Since the film was made, this process has seen some of the resources that were misappropriated under colonialism returned to their original tribal “owners” (Māori prefer the term *kaitiaki*, which translates loosely as custodians). From 1990 – 2006, the Crown oversaw NZ\$900 million in financial settlements including the return of land and forestry, into the control of *iwi*. In 2007, according to financial sources, 12% of the country’s agricultural land was Māori owned. Commercial operations include farming, horticulture, viticulture, commercial forestry, gravel extraction and mining, property investments and the seafood industry. Since *Ngāti*, Māori have indeed formed many economically viable incorporations. Despite setbacks and inevitable disagreements, we have shown that we can “run things ourselves.”

Barclay’s view of cinema was a radical vision and one which is not shared by all Māori, whether filmmakers or industry stakeholders. The production values and aesthetics of Tamahori’s *Once were Warriors*, Caro’s German-coproduced *Whale Rider*, and the younger Taika Waititi’s playful, irreverent, and highly stylised popular comedies (*Eagle vs Shark* 2007, *Boy* 2010),<sup>[23]</sup> to name but a few examples, are a far cry from Barclay’s more unpolished, non-commercially focussed insider-asceticism. Similarly, in terms of economic models for Māori

society outside of the film industry—how Māori would manage the freezing works and farms and fishing rights once they gained collective ownership over them—Barclay was to become critical of the corporate models often adopted by *iwi* in order to manage their newly reacquired resources. There is still much healthy debate in Māoridom as to the ability of culturally foreign, capitalist business models and practices to deliver the best outcomes for Māori communities, whether in the so-called culture industries or elsewhere. But whatever one’s views, within the context of these ongoing debates, Barclay’s body of work as a whole, and *Ngāti* in particular, remains a powerful and positive encapsulation of Māori moves towards collective economic agency and responsibility.

Battles have been won, but the war is not over. In 2012, *iwi* attempts to purchase 16 large dairy farms (in receivership) were frustrated when the right-wing government allowed the lands to be sold to a Chinese business consortium. [24] In the same year, a Māori Council court action did not succeed in arresting plans by the same government to partially privatise state-owned hydroelectric companies which depend on the water from our rivers, recognised as *taonga* (Māori treasures or resources) under the Treaty of Waitangi. Māori are heavily involved in debates over land and water that are both current and ongoing. As historian Ranginui Walker states in the title of his 1990 alternative history of Aotearoa: *Kā whāwhai tonu mātou*, “We are still fighting.”

For sheer reasons of space, I am aware that I have not done anything like full justice to the films and concepts I have outlined here. This overview has nonetheless attempted to demonstrate the centrality of place (land and water) to Māori narrative filmmaking. More importantly, it has argued for the importance of Māori cinema in articulating the centrality of Land and Water to an evolving sense of individual and community identity, i.e. in (re-) constructing Aotearoa as our Place to Stand. My hope is that this paper might encourage readers to take a closer look.

### Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the two anonymous referees whose astute comments and generous suggestions pushed me to broaden and strengthen my discussion. *Na reira, ngā mihi nui ki ā raua.*

### Endnotes

[1] Māori is the indigenous term (adjective and noun) pertaining to ourselves, the indigenous people of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Pakeha is the Māori term originally describing White settlers, now used more generally for Europeans.

[2] My *iwi* affiliations, on my father's side, are to the Rākai Pāka and Ngāti Pahuwera *hapu* of Ngāti Kāhungunu. Moumoukai is our *maunga*, Te Nuhaka is our *awa*, Te Manutai is our *marae*.

[3] *Once were Warriors* was notably well received in France. See Walker-Morrison 2011.

[4] The flute is the traditional *kouauau*, and the voices therefore demand to be read as those of the ancestors of the land, calling softly in a mournful, haunting lament.

[5] Tamahori has been criticised for subsequently reconstructing South Auckland's suburban geography with the alleged consequence of deforming or misrepresenting the social deprivation of his protagonists: "The dubbing or splicing of the physical environment in *Once were warriors* indicates a more serious deformation: the social criticism implied by the impoverished condition of this local culture is cloaked" (Turner 133). My subsequent discussion presents a counter-argument.

[6] This causal link between unemployment and/or cultural dispossession and dysfunctional behaviours is central to *Mauri* (Mita, 1988) and forms a backdrop to *Whale Rider* (Caro 2002) and *Boy* (Waititi, 2010).

[7] Taika Waititi's recent films are a comic, gently critical exploration of contemporary Māori masculinity. His adult male protagonists are endearingly failed warriors who struggle to find their place to stand in the contemporary Pakeha (*Eagle vs Shark*, 2007) or Māori (*Boy*, 2010) world. In both films, Waititi comically restages contemporary masculine warrior training rituals (*Eagle*) or fantasy war games (*Boy*). In both films, scenes visualising this struggle take place in a beach setting, in the liminal space between land and water.

[8] Beth uses the term "*taku whenua tuturu*," my original or true land, of

similar meaning to *tūrangawaewae* and which she glosses for her children as “my piece of dirt.”

[9] This has been a major theme of Alan Duff’s (otherwise powerful) writings, highly contestable and heavily criticized by Māori intellectuals as based more on personal opinion / grievance than statistical realities or sociological and historical research. See for example, R. Walker 1993 and Taylor.

[10] For a reading of the shifts between novel and film, see Renes.

[11] On its release, the film came in for much criticism, on the grounds that its glossy, “Hollywood” inspired aesthetics and uncompromising representations of domestic and gang violence served to (re-)produce non-historically contextualised, demonising stereotypes of Māori for local and international audiences (e.g. Pihama; Turner). Indeed, some academics still take the view that in popular films such as *Warriors* and *Whale Rider*, “colonialism is dehistoricised and depoliticised.” See for example, Wilson. Nonetheless, other academic commentators came to recognise that “as an allegory, the film ceases to express the pathos and rage of the isolated individual and becomes the pretext for the revelation of colonised space, both historical and actual” (Simmons 339). Critical reception of *Warriors* thus shifted to include a more nuanced awareness of the ways in which the film inscribes the plight of its protagonists within a critique of colonialism, as “the dystopic outcome of white settlement in New Zealand” (Joyce

246). For a reasonably comprehensive review, see Martens.

[12] Brendan Hokowhitu’s reading of Caro’s construction of Koro (and Maori masculinity) as simply “despotic” (128) and “abhorrently patriarchal” (129), problematically overlooks these scenes. Moreover, the suggestion, in the same article, that key aspects of traditional Maori patriarchy fore-grounded by the film (most notably, male succession) are a colonial invention is not substantiated, either within the article or by historical evidence. To claim that contemporary Māori / indigenous identities have been inflected by the colonial experience is self-evident. To investigate specific ways in which this hybridization can be demonstrated, as Hokowhitu does (by looking at the influence of British-style private boys’ schools on Māori masculinity) is important and merits further research. It does not follow however, that Māori patriarchy is therefore a colonial invention. See Hokowhitu.

[13] The question of women’s rights to sit alongside men, to stand and speak within the open space of the *marae atea* was an issue of keen national debate around the time the film was made. Ngāti Porou were in fact one of the most liberal tribes in this respect, although their women still had to fight hard for the right to speak there (while, across the country, Māori women could and did speak within the *wharenui*). See Bidois.

[14] Critics of the film (e.g. Hokowhitu, notes 11 and 14), driven largely, it would appear, by its perceived hijacking by

non-indigenous interests, also read Caro's failure to frame the story within a meta-narrative of colonial oppression as precluding a positive reading of its narrative resolution. Hester Joyce (*Out from Nowhere*) similarly argues that "The tragedy of *Whale Rider* is that the young woman seer, Pai, is saved and saves her tribe in a flight into fantasy that erases their past, rendering her people's deliverance hopeless" (248). The fact that such dystopian readings clearly do not reflect the film's reception by Māori and indigenous popular audiences (who were uplifted by the film's symbolic ending) is not taken into consideration.

[15] For further discussion, see Walker 2006.

[16] I would not go as far as Hokowhitu, for whom, "Menacingly, the hybrid child symbolizes the tribe's sealed destiny of becoming an indigenous component of global culture-like her father's creations in the visual arts. By blurring national and cultural boundaries, the infant's genealogical lines symbolize postindustrial, transnational agendas" (132). Worrying hints at miscegenation aside, Hokowhitu's equating of openness to the contemporary world with selling out to postindustrial, globalized capital effectively condemns Māori and other indigenous people to economic and cultural stagnation.

[17] Episode five in Barclay's landmark *Tangata Whenua* TV documentary series (1974) is entitled "A Place to Stand."

[18] Barclay 1990 and 2003. See also Stuart Murray's excellent monograph (2008).

[19] A similar theme of difficult return is explored in *The Strength of Water* 2009. Directed by Armagan Ballantyne after an original script by Māori playwright Briar Grace-Smith, the film was co-produced by Pandora Films, the same independent German company involved in *Whale Rider*, and the rural coastal setting and child protagonists invited many comparisons between the two films. There were no German characters this time, however. Presumably the German target audience were presumed less keen to insert themselves into this much darker narrative of damaged, mourning people and brooding landscapes. For a psychoanalytical reading, see Wild. The catalyst for the film's central drama (the accidental death of a ten year old girl and her twin brother's attempts to deal with his grief) is the arrival of a stranger, whose name, Tai, also means tide. Seeking refuge in his grandfather's abandoned house overlooking a wind-swept beach, Tai, like Paki, is a fugitive, a loner seeking and fearing connection, struggling to find his place in both the Pakeha world and the Māori world of his ancestors. As in *Mauri*, water symbolises passage, mourning, the connection to the spirit world, as evidenced by the cliff-top from where characters watch the swirling tide and talk about death, dying and other forms of leaving. Water is also the rain that threatens or falls almost constantly during the film, especially after Melody's tragic death: the life-giving force of water also has a darker strength. The film's theme

song, *Tihore mai te rangi*, (“Clear up, sky”: <http://folksong.org.nz/tihore/>) thus implores the rain to stop, lest life perish, and calls on the warming, life-giving force of the sun.

[20] Temuera Morrison in an early role, plays the unlikeable, upstart young cop.

[21] Gauthier argues that scenes of community life in *Whale Rider* are inspired by Barclay and Mita’s indigenous approach (70).

[22] Barclay’s intention to intercut shots of unscripted documentary scenes of the local people (many of whom played themselves in the film) into the fiction was sadly foiled by logistic and continuity problems.

[23] Merata Mita was co-producer on this film.

[24] After almost two years of legal battles and public debate, the purchase was settled on November 30, 2012. See Adams.

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### Image Notes

Figs. 1a, 1b, 2 *Once were Warriors*, dir. Lee Tamahori & scr. Rewia Brown, Communicado, 1994. (DVD: Magna Pacific 2009)

Figs. 3a, 3b, 4 *Whale Rider*, dir. Niki Caro, after Witi Ihimaera, South Pacific Pictures, 2002. (DVD: Buena Vista Home Video)

Figs. 5 *Mauri*, Merata Mita, Awatea Films, 1988. (DVD: Screenline 2010)

Figs. 6a, 6b, 7 *Ngāti*, Barry Barclay, Pacific Films, 1987. (DVD: Screenline 2009)

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# BLACK WOOL AND VINTAGE SHOES: THE WELLINGTON LOOK

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“He told me I didn’t look like I was from Wellington,” a friend, from a small town almost two hours away, confided to me over a cocktail in a downtown bar. This article asks, what is the Wellington look that this statement describes? How does it produce and reflect Wellington’s reputation as the locus of arts and politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand? It examines how the inhabitants of Wellington weave the fabric of the city together through their dress, analyzing how Wellington-based media, boutiques, designers, and locals together create a style that is distinctively ‘Wellington.’

“Il m’a dit que je n’avais pas l’air de venir de Wellington.” C’est ce qu’une amie venant d’une petite ville à deux heures de Wellington m’a confié il y a quelques années alors que nous partagions des cocktails dans un bar local. Cet article s’interroge: de quel aspect de Wellington est-il question dans une telle affirmation? En quoi exprime-t-il une idée de Wellington comme centre artistique et politique de Aotearoa/Nouvelle-Zélande? On y examine en particulier comment les habitants de Wellington définissent leur identité urbaine à travers leur style vestimentaire, à travers l’analyse des façons dont les boutiques et fabricants de Wellington créent un style qui se voudrait idiosyncrasie.



Deborah Sweeney, “Lost Love”,  
Autumn/Winter 2013

*I love this city, the hills, the harbour, the wind that blasts through it. I love the life and pulse and activity, and the warm decrepitude... there's always an edge here that one must walk which is sharp and precarious, requiring vigilance.*

Patricia Grace, *Cousins* (1992)

“Too much black!” the massage therapist summarized. Lying naked while the therapist gave her damning opinion of Wellington as a city drained of colourful dress, I felt sheepish as I went to pay, fully dressed in black. Of course I was. I’m a Wellingtonian. I was born in Wellington city, but left when I was a babe. I returned at the turn of the millennium, sixteen years old and alone, to find my birthplace filled with inhabitants that appeared as though they had stepped off a fictional 1960s space station with their silver and black garb and asymmetrical haircuts. Having spent my life in both Sydney (Australia) and in the provincial New Zealand town of Hastings, it struck me that Wellingtonians dressed like no group I had seen. What are the cultural matrices—the “very special circumstances” as Christopher Breward (11) terms the emotional, economic and aesthetic factors that produce London’s fashion—that shape the dress practices of Wellingtonians? This article explores the “special circumstances” of the Wellington look through an examination of my personal experiences of having “live[d] the city” (Donald 8), the “arts of existence” (Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 10) of young Wellingtonians as they (per)form their identities in and through the ‘ethics’ of the city, and the work of three Wellington-based fashion

designers. I take inspiration from Susan Ingram and Katrina Sark’s book *Berliner Chic* and their assertion, following the work of Ulrich Lehmann, that the distinctiveness of place *matters* (17, my emphasis). Through Lehmann, Ingram and Sark remind readers that Paris is not Berlin is not Prague (17). Or, to locate this phrase within the trajectories of both colonization and my childhood, Wellington is not Sydney is not Hastings is not London.

### **Wellington: The “Best Little Capital”**

This article concentrates its analysis on the inhabitants of the Wellington city centre. While I attempt to capture Wellington’s cultural specificity, it is important to note that the city is always in flux, and, as such, “hovers beyond the possibility of simple representation, but is never yet reducible to a series of simulacra” (Wolfreys 7). Traces between institutions, climate, boutiques, designers, and the populace of the city can be made.

Like many cities in the West, Wellington has been gentrified. Refurbished pristine heritage buildings housing Non-Government Organisations border one end of the central business district, while glass and steel buildings bearing the names of multinational corporations reflect the sky at the other end of the city centre, pushing into the Parliament buildings in a fitting tribute to the work that successive neoliberal governments have done to accommodate these corporations. The workers’ cottages have been removed and the substandard housing and rumoured drug dens of the central city have long

been replaced by fast-food joints, fine-dining establishments, and elegant bars. The contemporary inhabitants of the city are overwhelmingly middle class, and predominantly white. They work in and frequent the offices, government buildings, art galleries, boutiques, cafes, and schools of the city.

The capital of New Zealand, Wellington is known for its wind and for its beehive-shaped Parliament. It is a small city, with a population of 205,000 (“Facts and Figures”). The city centre can be traversed by a brisk walker in just over half an hour. Wellington’s climate is ‘mild’ if the ferocious wind that often whips through the city is ignored. Temperatures rarely rise above 25 degrees Celsius, or below zero degrees. Wellington is the site of New Zealand’s national museum and archives, as well as the site of national governance. It is not a city that populates fashion discourse. Indeed there are t-shirts available in the traditionally working-class central suburb of Newtown making light of this point, inserting the suburb comically into the familiar fashion city roll: “London, Paris, Milan, New York, Newtown.” While Wellington is not institutionally established on the fashion calendar, holding its first fashion week in 2012, it is a city of style. This can be seen not only in the dress of Wellingtonians, but in the city’s distinctive architecture and the proliferation of art galleries, libraries, and museums that showcase visual culture.

The predominant colour palette of Wellington dress is dark; black fills the cafes and offices of the city. Black is a colour that can at once mark the wearer as

an insider and an outsider. Crossing class and gender lines, black allows the wearer to traverse multiple sites and multiple subject positions, many seemingly contradictory. It is the colour of New Zealand’s national sports teams (giving the All Blacks rugby team its name, for instance) and it is the colour associated with intellectuals, anarchists, Māoritanga, artists, office workers (who are frequently referred to as ‘suits’), bikers, and punk, goth, emo, and metal subcultures. This manifold and expanding relationship between black and multiple identities is particularly useful in Wellington whereby a significant portion of the inhabitants are public servants who must enact the policies of successive governments and are contractually obliged to remain seemingly politically neutral. Black allows such workers to fit into both their ‘neutral’ work identities and their less-neutral post-work lives. Black signals both categorical and ontological identity, including, at times, New Zealand’s national identity.

Utilizing the connotations of the colour black, Wellington produces itself as sophisticated, intellectual and creative. An example of this production can be seen in the national television campaign and website developed by Positively Wellington Tourism (funded by Wellington businesses with support from Wellington City Council). The website terms Wellington the “capital of cool,” linking “cool” with the cultural elements of Wellington, telling browsers that the city is “home to Parliament, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa, a thriving film industry, and heaps of other cool stuff” (*WellingtonNZ.com*). The

website's television advert, with its moody violin-based electronic soundtrack and dissolving shot transitions narrates a weekend away for two, presenting Wellington as an edgy city laced with sex, coffee, art and jazz.

This emphasis on Wellington as “cool” is also evident in discourse about the city by its inhabitants. The city makes much of the fact that Wellingtonian film director Peter Jackson is based there and consequently Hollywood stars often migrate from the centre of ‘global’ film production to the periphery, populating Wellington as they take part in Jackson's films.[1] Unlike the New Zealand government, Wellingtonians are welcoming of these actors but do not gush over them. There is a sense of pride in “staying cool” and treating celebrities like everyone else. A myth oft repeated in the halls of the hospitality industry is typical of this attitude. The story tells of how an exclusive and hard-to-find bar turned away Liv Tyler when she was filming the *Lord of the Rings* because she did not have the correct identification to prove that she was of the legal drinking age (18 years old). Such behaviour belies a desire to not buy into the hype associated with Hollywood's commercialism. This is exhibited by Peter Jackson himself, who regularly dresses-down for red carpet events, thumbing his nose at Hollywood glamour.

Wellingtonians position the city as privileging “arts and culture” rather than the commercial. Although the multinational chains Starbucks and Blockbuster make appearances here, Wellingtonians prefer to get coffee from

a boutique fair-trade roaster and their DVDs from an independent retailer. Resting on its theatres, cafes, libraries, bars, and large design and music academic institutions, Wellington sets itself apart from both Auckland, the other major city in the North Island, and against the small provincial towns of New Zealand which are based primarily around agriculture, viticulture, or forestry. The commercial Auckland, the agricultural provinces, and Hollywood, are the Others against which Wellington constructs its identity.

This construction of Wellington as the “cultured” city in comparison to the commercial and provincial Other was apparent in the discourse of students at the city's namesake high school, its only non-uniformed and co-educational secondary school. I interviewed five focus groups of students, each made up of a pre-existing friendship group.[2] Three of the focus groups were single-sex (two female, one male), and two of the groups were mixed-sex. The participants, 24 in total, were students from year 10 to year 13 (aged 14 to 17), with varying class, racial, and sexual identities. I met with each group three times, except for Group Two, whom I met with four times as, due to their long enthusiastic responses and debates, they took longer to discuss each topic than the other groups. The focus group discussions were designed to facilitate talk about identity: how the students see themselves, think others see them, and the techniques (with particular attention to dress practices) they enact to shape their own and others' views of themselves. Focus groups demonstrate what cultural theorists Deborah Epstein and Richard

Johnson (100-1) term the “situatedness” of identity production, that is, its constant production through practice and discourse, which is influenced by the spatial-temporal location of the subject and whom she is interacting with. Focus groups, then, allowed me an opportunity to engage with the identity production of young Wellingtonians at close range.

The students situated Auckland as the home of commerce, oppositional to Wellington’s position as the home of art and government. Students spoke of visiting Auckland and small provincial towns and feeling “out of place,” too different from the inhabitants in their age group. The students understood Wellington to be a place of heterogeneity where difference is valued. Their visions of Auckland and of New Zealand’s provinces position these “other” places as sites of homogeneity where inhabitants are required to dress in a manner that reflects the commercialised trends available on high street since difference is not welcomed. The students have a sense of pride based on dressing outside of trends and relate this to being from Wellington, a city they formulate as fostering diversity. Yet, many Wellingtonians do shop at high street stores and thus arguably wear trend-based items. The students demonstrate, then, the familiar notion that “[w]hat is disowned, feared, and denied in the self is projected onto another being or group. The other is then stigmatized and warred against” (Caputi 14). The uptake of styles offered by chain stores is not included in dominant discourse on Wellington as such behaviour must be misrecognised

in order for Wellington’s identity position as ‘nurturing difference’ to be securely produced.

The contradictions that pervade the city mean that Wellington needs to constantly reassure itself of its cosmopolitan status. While most of its inhabitants may foster a nonchalant attitude to stars, many Wellington-based producers make it known when Hollywood’s stars like their product. Much is made, for instance, of Liv Tyler’s love for the products of boutique facialist and skincare guru Margaret Hema (“Press”), and the boutique clothing stores and cafes that Miranda Kerr and Orlando Bloom frequent (“Orlando Bloom Winter Shopping in Welly”). Several restaurants also have photos on their walls of *Lord of the Rings* stars enjoying the food at the establishment. Further, when Wellington was named the “coolest little capital in the world” by *Lonely Planet* in late 2010, the accolade was splashed across multiple city newspapers as front-page news (Stewart; “Lonely Planet Acclaim”; “Travel Guide Extols”). It seems that this little city is reliant on big voices to affirm its image as a worldly city.

This centre-directed perspective fosters what I term a “culture of critique” in Wellington, whereby Wellingtonians judge restaurants, politicians, cafes, art, transport and fashion in line with an imagined (wealthy, Western) city standard. This critique helps Wellingtonians justify their city as the best in New Zealand, indeed, as the “best little capital” (“Lonely Planet Acclaim”). This critique is influenced by several

factors: that the national Parliament sits in Wellington; that Wellington has the highest proportion of inhabitants with a post-secondary school qualification of any city in New Zealand (33% of Wellington's inhabitants have a Bachelors degree) ("Facts and Figures"); and that the city has more cafes and restaurants per capita than New York City (Restaurant Association of New Zealand). These factors help to produce Wellingtonians as discerning foodies and politicians. They know their macchiato from their mochaccino, their roti from their naan; they know bills from Acts, and elected members of parliament from members on a party list seat. This culture of critique is reflected in and produced by the multiple free-to-access Wellington-based blogs and newspapers that provide information on proposed government and council policy changes and review Wellington's cafes, bars, restaurants, theatre, and art. It is also reflected in the fierce debates found throughout the city regarding the best cafes, and, importantly, the best coffee beans. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage website, *New Zealand History Online* asserts that one bad coffee will mean that a Wellingtonian will not return to that cafe, such is the value placed on good espresso in the city ("Wellington Cafe Culture"). This care regarding politics and what is imbibed, where, is one afforded by being middle class and educated. It also demonstrates the importance placed on the care of the self (Foucault 1988): on what one does, where one goes, one's relationship to politics and the law, and what one puts into one's body. Thus critique is related to the construction of the identity of the

person performing the critique, as well as to the 'ethics' (Foucault 1985) attached to place. To be a 'true' Wellingtonian is to be critical.

Wellington's well-cultivated reputation as the cultural capital draws people to the intellectual, artistic and culinary city, ensuring that its reputation is cemented by its inhabitants. Indeed, it was this discursive reputation that enticed me back to the city that birthed me. My alienation from the provincial culture of Hastings, a conservative town at the centre of New Zealand's fruit and wine industries, led me to move alone to Wellington when I was sixteen. The prestigious tertiary institutions in the city focused on design, art, and politics also act as drawing cards for people intent on practising critique. These institutions interpellate students into the dual subject positions of critical thinker and producer commonly occupied by the Wellingtonian, and ensure that there is a large amount of non-commercial student-produced art, fashion and music in Wellington, helping the city to be the "capital of cool."

### **Wellington Dress**

This emphasis on critique, on politics, design, and art produces a dominant dress culture unlike that found in the provinces, or in Auckland or Christchurch. People wearing a mix of vintage and new, designer with high-street clothes in a dark palette fill the city's streets, cafes and offices. In line with the production of Wellington as 'not commercial,' the Wellington 'look' is not predominantly trend-driven. City dwellers often allude to fashionable styles rather than embrace

them in a homogenous manner. Many of the designers that are worn in Wellington are conceptual rather than trend-based, producing clothes that nurture the cerebral rather than simply mimic catwalk looks from Europe. Appearing somewhat original is important in Wellington. This is achieved predominantly through the mixing of second hand or vintage items with high-end or high-street items to create a look unique to the wearer. In part, this mix of old and new, designer and chain store, could be attributed to the small size of Wellington. Combining these elements lessens the chance that a person might be in the same place with someone who is dressed in the same outfit. In addition, the high use of public transport in Wellington—higher than any city in New Zealand (“Facts and Stats”)—means that inhabitants are often in close proximity with each other with time to evaluate each other’s style. This further drives the culture of differentiation.

This culture of differentiation is demonstrated by the young Wellingtonians I met with at the city’s main high school. The students overwhelmingly view being unique as positive. For most of the students, the more differentiated they can be from others, the better. The members of Group One, for example, describe how when they were younger very few of their peers dyed their hair, so when they dyed their hair, they “felt really cool!” This ‘coolness’ is based on being different from their peers. Group One laments how it is much harder to stand out today because most of their friends use hair dye. In Group Four, student Lance reports how he is

“safe” in Wellington if he wears the sports jersey associated with a rugby team in a province more than 300km away rather than the jersey for the Wellington team. This recourse to safety is reliant on this student’s desire to be different from others. Many of the students assert that they “don’t like blending in.” Student Neve, in Group Three, states that subjects want to be seen as individuals because “you want to be interesting and different than everyone else, you know?” To be different, then, is to be “interesting” and “cool,” and consequently to be a valuable subject. Or, in the words of Group One, to be different is to “win at life.” Thus, the very act of living is entwined with being different for the students.

Indeed, the students associate appearing differently from others with authentic identity, with living ‘true’ to the self. The students position identity as based on experiences, background, and emotions. They believe that no one has the same identity as anyone else and position dress as both reflecting and producing identity. For the students, then, because “*everyone* is completely different,” everyone will look different when they are dressing as themselves. Because of this, the students associate appearing “too similar” to others with inauthenticity. This fuels the young Wellingtonians’ desire to look different from others.

The students also link inauthenticity with the commercial, a notion that is also present in the discourse of older Wellingtonians. ‘Real’ coffee and food are not procured from Starbucks or McDonalds. The students conceive

of commercial culture as promoting homogeneity, and thus inauthenticity. The participants' negative view of the mainstream is a result of the high value they place on uniqueness. This view is present in the students' conception of mainstream media texts, which they criticize for not featuring a broad spectrum of appearances as desirable and presenting a homogenous ideal that most men and women will not achieve. They argue that in the process of trying to achieve this ideal, subjects become similar and thus their selves and their self-expressions become less authentic. The students position themselves as critical of the ideals of commercial culture. They view those that accept these ideals without question as 'duped' by the media, and as belonging in commercial Auckland rather than intellectual 'diverse' Wellington.

The students use many strategies to ensure that they look different from others. These techniques include the conscious embodiment of an unusual style—in black-oriented Wellington, the wearing of as much colour as possible, or dressing more formally than other young adults, for instance; shopping at opportunity shops (thrift stores) or online auction sites where the clothes are second-hand; confronting friends who appear to 'copy' their style; constructing their own clothes and altering bought items; lying to others about where clothing items were purchased to prevent inquisitors from buying those items; buying clothing from shops outside of New Zealand or online from overseas-based websites; and attempting to avoid

shops frequented by young adults. Troubling the students' notion that difference occurs simply by "being yourself," these techniques illustrate that difference must be worked at to be achieved and maintained. These practices of "being yourself" involve choice and restriction; they are 'techniques of the self' (Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 10), which form and showcase the way the young person thinks of herself and her position in relation to the ethics of the city. The use of colour by the students is particularly pertinent in its resistance to the culture of dress of older Wellingtonians. This foregrounds resistance to norms as a technique of the self. In this way the students can be 'different' from the city's visual mode, and position themselves 'outside' of the adult-city. Yet through this colourful resistance the students continue to uphold the prevailing ethics of the city that construct Wellington as a site of creativity and anti-commercialism.

Due to their ability to produce difference, 'vintage' clothes are a large part of the Wellington look. Wearing vintage, that is, items made in an era other than the one they are worn in, is an easy way for an individual to appear individual. Given that vintage clothing is usually sold separately from the identical pieces manufactured at the same time, it is unlikely that the same two vintage items of clothing will be easy to purchase in Wellington. Vintage stores line one of the most popular shopping streets in the city, selling good quality wear sourced from New Zealand and overseas, usually at high

prices. These shops are so popular they have spawned shops along the same street that appear to sell vintage clothing, but on closer inspection sell clothes that only appear to be from the era they emulate, alluding in a hyperreal fashion to the style of the time. These ‘retro’ shops do not sell one-offs, however, and are thus not as well positioned to provide the buyer with a unique look.

As well as vintage shops, more accessible opportunity (thrift) shops line the edges of the city. These sell second-hand clothes and shoes, which have been donated by city-dwellers rather than curated with an eye for fashion by store buyers. Shopping at these stores allows the buyer to hunt for items that will help them to create unique outfits. Often these items will need some customisation. This operates in line with the mythological New Zealand trait of ‘ingenuity’ and the DIY (‘Do It Yourself’) culture fostered through early colonial settlement. DIY occurs both in the act of finding the clothes themselves amongst the out-of-shape, faded, poorly made and poorly cared for fast fashion of trends gone by, and in altering the clothes so they fit.

Arguably the propensity for vintage and second-hand clothing in Wellington is also related to the desire by some residents to not support sweatshop labour and poor environmental practices. The notion of ‘fair trade’ and of producers being paid a just price for their goods and labour is frequently referred to throughout the city. There are large adverts in the city’s free newspapers touting the fair trade status of goods; there are signs in a high proportion of the city’s cafes advising

the fair trade coffee within; and there is a popular shop that sells only fairly traded products. The popularity of fairly traded goods is related to the amount of discourse about the labour of majority-world workers that is available in the city, creating an environment where, for the liberal intellectual classes of Wellington’s CBD, to willingly not buy fair trade coffee (at least) is a moral crime. The penchant for second-hand clothes could also be related to environmental concerns as well as concern for the well being of the manufacturers of products. Wellington city fostered the highest percentage of urban support in New Zealand for the environmentalist Green Party in the 2011 election, with 27.7% of voters giving their ballot to the party, compared with 22.8% of voters in Auckland central and 16.3% in Christchurch (Ng). Buying clothing second-hand works to reduce the amount of clothing produced and thus the amount of environmental damage clothing production incurs, as well as ensuring that the companies profiting from the sweated labour production are not receiving—however small—money from the shopper’s wallet.

It is black, as well as vintage, that dominates Wellington’s fashion landscape. This dominance troubles the students’ strong assertions about difference and authenticity in the city. The connection of black with so many identity groups, outlined in the first section of this article, may help to explain why black does not seem to be subject to the scrutiny of uniqueness that other colours are held to. While in Wellington it may be important that (outside of wearing a uniform) a

person is not dressed in the same colours as someone close by, the wearing of black by many people in the same vicinity is acceptable as it can link multiple wearers to varied identity positions. Further driving this acceptability is the notion that black is universally flattering and stylish, suitable for everyone and for most situations. Black can be seen as—to use the words of Georg Simmel on fashion—“a social obedience, which at the same time is a form of individual differentiation” (297).

Further, black is the colour associated with New Zealand fashion. This connection was heralded by Maggie Alderson, fashion writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who declared at Sydney Fashion Week in 1998 that New Zealand is “the new Belgium” and Zambesi, known for its dark palette, is “New Zealand’s answer to Dries van Noten” (Regnault 204). Continuing the comparison between Australian and New Zealand fashion, Marcus von Ackermann, fashion director for *Vogue Paris* stated, “New Zealanders have a darker outlook, less show-offy, more intellectual” (204). Ackermann’s assertion is oft repeated in the New Zealand media and by local designers. The association between New Zealand and darkness was cemented when Karen Walker, Zambesi, NomD, and World – dubbed the ‘New Zealand Four’ – showed for the first time at London Fashion Week in 1999. Karen Walker asserts of New Zealand film, paintings, fashion, and song writing, “there’s a heavy, ominous, slightly restrained kind of feel. And I think that comes from our culture and our landscape and just the personality of the country.

There’s a heaviness to it” (Regnault 207). Certainly, dress donned by Wellingtonians is often dark and intellectual, or, as *The Times’* (London) fashion critic Lisa Armstrong terms New Zealand fashion, more Jean-Paul Sartre than Paris Hilton (12).

As Ackermann perceived, much of New Zealand fashion is not about cash-flashing, in-your-face flaunting of bodily or monetary assets. Standing out from the crowd is not something that is encouraged in New Zealand culture. This has an historical anchor in Aotearoa New Zealand, related both to the settlement goal of the New Zealand Company (the private organizer of English settlement of New Zealand) to create a country with an egalitarian ethos, one that was not divided by class; and to Māori culture’s emphasis on the communal rather than the individual. Indeed, there is an Antipodean habit of cutting successful people down, known as ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome.’ A ‘tall poppy’ is a “privileged or distinguished person” (“Tall Poppy”). The Roman tyrant Tarquin reputedly struck off the heads of poppies as a graphic demonstration of the way in which the “important” men of a captured city should be treated (*ibid.*). Tall Poppy Syndrome refers to a tendency to discredit or disparage people who have become rich, famous, or socially prominent, that is, those that stand out from the crowd. Black is a colour that lessens the ‘peacock effect,’ hiding tall poppies. As New Zealand designer James Dobson states, black “never overpowers” (Regnault 210). Due to black’s seeming universality, it is a ‘safe’ choice, allowing the wearer to be similar yet different to others in the milieu.

The relationship between black and New Zealand extends beyond the colonising New Zealand Company's drive for egalitarianism. Black also lies at the foundation of Western clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand. The first European settlers here were Christian missionaries, who wore black clerical dress (de Pont 10). Later, when the main wave of settler migration to New Zealand from England occurred during the 1860s, black was *de rigueur* throughout England and its colonies, reflecting Queen Victoria's mourning dress (11). Many Māori adapted Victorian dress in black. Additionally, for settlers, black's ability to hide dirt made it a useful colour to wear when working the land. It is no surprise that the uniform of the national rugby team in 1884 was fabricated in black (Palenski 110), institutionalising the connection of New Zealand and the colour.

Today, the dark palette of New Zealand fashion is mirrored in the bars and cafes of Wellington rather than muddy fields. Dark wood tables with deep black leather booths and dim lighting create the dens where Wellingtonians while away their time over copious 'long blacks' (double-espresso in a tulip cup with hot water added). If camouflage reflects the environment in which it is worn, then dark fabrics are the cloak of the Wellingtonian in her natural habitat. The dark palette is also cognisant with the oft-grey skies above the city, the deep green thick belt of trees that borders the CBD (known as the 'town belt'), and the chilling wind that continually accompanies the city. This is not a city

of hot sun, chilled cocktails, and bright colours that make tanned skin pop.

The prevalence of this 'camouflage' dress is propelled by the lack of international or big-box fast fashion retailers in Wellington. Many of the shops that dress Wellington are small boutiques offering small runs of locally made or designed clothes, or consignment shops selling the good, discarded clothes of Wellingtonians. There are no large international retailers in Wellington such as Topshop, H&M, or Zara. Further, there are no major global fashion labels available. There is no Louis Vuitton, no Gucci, no Versace, no Chanel or Christian Dior, for instance. The lack of international chain-stores or global designer clothing available to purchase may contribute to the muted colour palette of many city-dwellers who are likely to buy New Zealand (if not Wellington) designed clothing, which often utilizes dark fabrics and corresponds with the mild to dark weather. It may also go some way to explain why many Wellingtonians do not appear to wear trend-based dress—there is simply not the same amount available for purchase in Wellington as in Auckland and other major cities.

A final striking aspect of Wellington style is the lack of high heels worn in the city. This may be because many Wellingtonians use their feet as a main mode of transport—it is difficult to walk far or fast in high heels. Further, Wellington is filled with hills and the angle of high-heeled feet makes it difficult to walk up or downhill. Very few Wellingtonians change from heels into flats as they walk, bus, or train home, choosing instead to



Fig. 1a Alexandra Owen, LBD Capsule Collection



Fig. 1b Alexandra Owen, Autumn/Winter 2011

wear shoes that they can travel and work in comfortably. In addition, a significant portion of the workforce are university-educated women who are likely to have encountered discourse associating heels with patriarchal repression of women. It could be argued that the lack of heel is a sign of Wellington's liberal and intellectual culture that privileges women's participation in the public sphere and downplays the commercialism that the high heel is often associated with.

### Dressing Wellington

The work of Wellington-based fashion designers Alexandra Owen, Deborah Sweeney, and Laurie Foon corresponds well with the ethos of Wellington. These designers create clothes that produce and reflect the city's dress culture, eschewing trends and fast fashion, concentrating on quality fabrics and construction.

Alexandra Owen designs immaculately cut and tailored, sophisticated pieces for women (see figures 1a and 1b). Owen's collections are predominantly monochromatic, although muted greys, mustards, maroons, and blues make appearances amidst the black and white. While born in Auckland, Owen was raised in Wellington and continues to live in the city. She completed her fashion design qualification at Massey University's Wellington School of Design. Earlier, Owen attended the same high school as the students featured in this article. Like the students, Owen positions herself outside of fads. Owen's website states that "[t]he house maintains a quiet disposition, rejecting hype and trends,





Fig. 3a Starfish Autumn/Winter 2013

allowing the work to resonate” (“Bio”). The site also emphasizes Owen as auteur, asserting that her collections “softly fuse together artistic vision and wearability” (*ibid.*). Owen’s pieces are often seen on high-profile arts patrons at gallery and theatre openings, and on the lawyers and policy writers of the city. Angela Crane, writing for *HerMagazine*, which focuses on women in business, states, “[i]n an industry that thrives on shock, change and disposability, Owen has made her name doing the opposite: taking her time, largely ignoring trends... She is essentially an anti-hipster; she’s not interested in distressed denim or seasonal prints but in sumptuous fabrics and heavenly shapes” (“Alexandra Owen”). Owen’s and Crane’s discursive stress on quality design, and ‘timeless’ rather than trend-based style, resonates with the spirit of Wellington as independent and art oriented.

Like Alexandra Owen, Deborah Sweeney gained her fashion diploma from the Wellington School of Design. After completing her diploma, Sweeney worked for Jill Stuart New York, Topshop and H&M. Perhaps because of this experience, Sweeney’s collections are the most colourful of the labels mentioned. Sweeney’s designs emulate vintage clothing, capitalising on Wellingtonians’ penchant for second-hand clothes. Her style is more youthful than Owen’s, yet Sweeney’s clothes still exude a level of gloominess befitting Wellington’s oft-grey skies. Sweeney’s recent collection, entitled ‘Lost Love’ (A/W 2013, see Figure 2b), is filled with loose-fitting garments, in high quality silks and cottons in black, grey, dusty yellow and orange. Showy

bodycon is not in Sweeney's design vocabulary. Sweeney's designs have been described as "intelligent, edgy and wearable" ("Deborah Sweeney"), and "dark as well as playful" (Williams). The design aesthetic of Sweeney adds some pop to Wellington's darkness, but does not send it into a fizz, which ensures that her clothes still represent Wellington, albeit a city sprinkled with sugar.

Working hard to ensure her materials are environmentally friendly and ethically produced, Starfish designer Laurie Foon encapsulates the culture of critique of Wellington. Foon's designs are produced in Wellington from fairly traded fabric, and use natural dyes and organic material. Foon's shop also stocks fairly traded 'ethical' international labels. Foon caters to the many Wellingtonians who are concerned with how and where their clothes are produced and the conditions within which the clothes are made in. Indeed, Starfish's tagline is "style with an ethical heart". Foon asserts that her company's mission is "to prove we can look great while having a minimal impact on our environment" (Blithe). Foon adds that "[f]ast or throwaway fashion is possibly the biggest problem we have and it's escalating" (*ibid.*). Like Owen and Sweeney, Foon also places emphasis on her materials rather than trends. Foon is termed an "idealist and a socialist" by New Zealand fashion journalist Stacy Gregg in her book *Undressed* (103). Indeed, Foon increased her Wellington profile fighting against the (now completed) city 'bypass' motorway, raising funds and awareness of the motorway's impact on the historical artists' and



Fig. 3b Starfish Autumn/Winter 2013

workers' quarter in the inner city. Foon had people who lived and worked on the proposed motorway route model her fashion range in posters which detailed how the motorway would affect them and the city (106). Foon has also been involved in other charitable projects such as Project Crimson, a trust that works to revive the native pohutukawa and rata trees, and has worked to provide support for those affected by the devastating Christchurch earthquake of 2011.

Foon's heart-filled passion for people and the environment does not result in her clothes being sweet and light. Catering to her Wellington clientele, Foon's initial desire to "get Wellingtonians out of their black clothes" has not been particularly successful (107). Foon admits that Wellingtonians like "hints of colour but never too much" (107). Indeed, walking into Foon's shop Starfish recently, the palette remains overwhelmingly dark, evoking Wellington taste on the recycled timber racks (see figures 3a and 3b).

### **Zippered Up: Parting Words**

The shock of Wellington style when I arrived back in the city at the close of the 1990s will leave its impress on my mind forever. An outsider wanting to embrace and be embraced by the city, I started my new life by buying new clothes. I hoped that a black wet-look vest and white knee-length skirt with converse sneakers would not scream my provincial origins to my peers. Wellington was my Greenwich Village of the 1910s, drawing me in and showering me in a deluge of philosophy, music, fashion, literature and food. In many ways, Wellington is similar to other

small cities in the colonised West. Yet, it is my city, the city where my dreams were cemented, where difference is valued, dark is the palette, and wearing the past or fair trade is the way forward. It is a city that wears its brain on its (black) sleeves.

### **Endnotes**

Thank you to Assoc. Professor Susan Ingram and Assoc. Professor Markus Reisenleitner for co-ordinating and editing this special edition of *Imaginations* and for inviting me to participate in their panel "Imagining a Sense of Place: The City, the Region, the Border" at Crossroads 2012. Special thanks to the students that participated in my research, to Susan Ingram for her encouragement and insight, and to my anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

[1] Emerging with a film that, although filmed at the edge of the world, continues Hollywood's cultural dominance.

[2] I defined 'friendship group' as friends that spend time with each other outside of the spatial-temporal confines of the school day, as well as at school.

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### Image Notes

Fig. 1a Owen, Alexandra. Little Black Dress Capsule Collection. <http://alexandraowen.com/lbd-capsule-collection/>. Web. January 8, 2013

Fig. 1b Owen, Alexandra. Autumn-Winter 2011. <http://alexandraowen.com/autumn-winter-2011/>. Web. January 8, 2013.

Fig. 2a Sweeney, Deborah. Photo: Michael Ng, “Deborah Sweeney 1” for Air New Zealand Fashion Week. [www.nzfashionweek.com](http://www.nzfashionweek.com). Web. April 2, 2014.

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Fig. 3a Foon, Laurie. Starfish. Autumn/Winter 2013. <http://www.starfish.co.nz/autumn-winter-2013/>. Web, February 10, 2013.

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**Felicity Perry** is author of a doctoral thesis examining the relationship between dress, identity and the media. It explored how students at an urban non-uniformed secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand use dress—and dress-related discourses—to both construct and express their identity. Perry’s continuing research is based on an interest in the relationship between media and the workings of everyday life, examining the ways in which gender, sexuality, race, class, and appearance intersect in social interactions. Perry is currently living in Tel Aviv, enjoying the opportunities for dress analysis available in this diverse city.

**Felicity Perry** est auteure d’une thèse de doctorat sur la relation entre l’habillement, l’identité, et les médias. Elle y a examiné comment les étudiants d’une école sans uniforme obligatoire en Aotearoa/Nouvelle Zélande utilisent l’habillement et les discours qui s’y attachent afin d’exprimer leur identité. Ses recherches s’enracinent dans un intérêt pour la relation entre les médias et les mécanismes de la vie quotidienne, notamment les façons dont les sexes, la sexualité, la race, les classes sociales et les apparences s’entremêlent dans les interactions sociales. Elle habite actuellement à Tel-Aviv, et y reste à l’affut des multiples occasions d’analyse de l’habillement social qui parsèment cette ville.

# IMAGINING PLACE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF HOW CULTURAL OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS RECEIVE FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF PLACE IN CARYL FÉREY'S *UTU*

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I provide empirical evidence from a longitudinal cross-cultural reader reception survey showing that cultural outsider (French) and insider (New Zealand) readers are differently influenced by the geographically and culturally-situated elements in *Utu* (French 2004, English translation 2011), a crime novel set in contemporary New Zealand by French writer Caryl Férey. After reading the novel, both cultural outsider and insider readers changed their opinions towards the image portrayed by Férey, even when his cultural claims were incorrect. Furthermore, for French readers, this influence extended beyond *Utu*'s final page to opinions about New Zealand and its inhabitants.

Cet article veut offrir la preuve empirique que les lecteurs provenant respectivement d'une culture extérieure (France), et intérieure (Nouvelle-Zélande), sont influencés différemment par les éléments géographiquement et culturellement situés dans *Utu* (France 2004; traduction anglaise 2011), un roman policier de l'auteur français Caryl Férey se déroulant dans la Nouvelle-Zélande d'aujourd'hui. L'étude s'appuie sur une enquête longitudinale interculturelle de la réception au sein du lectorat. Après lecture du roman, les lecteurs culturellement externes et internes ont chacun changé leur opinion quant à l'image véhiculée par Férey, même lorsque ses représentations culturelles s'avèrent incorrectes. Qui plus est, aux yeux des lecteurs français, cette influence s'étend au-delà du roman lui-même, et semble se porter sur la Nouvelle-Zélande elle-même, avec ses habitants.

French crime writer Caryl Férey (b. 1967) spent only five months in New Zealand before publishing a novel set there: *Utu* (2004, English translation 2011), in which *Pakeha* (New Zealander of European origin) policeman Paul Osborne investigates a cannibalistic Māori separatist sect. He discovers that his half-Māori childhood sweetheart has joined the separatists but that the real criminals are corrupt *Pakeha* politicians and businessmen who are dynamiting an ancient Māori village site to make way for a multimillion dollar beach resort and who try to throw Osborne off their scent by framing him for the rape and murder of a high-profile, mixed-race model.

My study applies social science approaches to humanities data in order to identify differences between the reception of this culture-specific text by cultural insiders (New Zealanders) and cultural outsiders (French readers). I am not interested in whether readers give the ‘correct’ answer to cultural questions (if such a thing exists) but how and why the opinions they hold are, or are not, influenced by their reading of this novel. *Utu* is useful for cross-cultural reader reception because it embodies extremes: (1) Férey spent only months in New Zealand before publishing *Utu*; (2) France and New Zealand—united by rugby but separated by nuclear testing—have few contemporary or historical touch points in common thus their distance, psychological and geographical, makes difference easier to identify and then explain; (3) Māori have a distinct and distinctive culture with a globally recognised iconography; and

(4) *Utu* was translated by an Englishman for an American publishing house. While it can be dangerous to extrapolate from extremes—risking Manichean generalisations that deny an issue’s fine structure—they do help to make difference visible.

Cross-cultural empirical reception studies loom largest in film and television studies (for example, Barker and Mathijs; Crofts). Equivalent textual studies are less common, perhaps due to “the anti-empirical climate of the Anglo-American literary academy at large” (Richardson 11). However, there are exceptions, such as Carroll et al.’s study of nineteenth-century British novels, which surveys “faculty in English departments world-wide” (3) but does not report results by respondent location. Childress and Friedkin’s empirical sociological study (55), while not cross-cultural, examines longitudinal changes in readers’ attitudes to a novel before and after a book-club meeting to test the influence of the discussion process on reception. Halász, Short and Varga compare responses from German, British and Hungarian school students to three short texts but do not explore their respondents’ cultural insider/outsider positions relative to these texts. Thus my paper reports the first empirical, longitudinal, cross-cultural investigation of the influence of a novel on its readers’ opinions.

## 1. Method

I started with four hypotheses about the relationship between a reader's geographical and cultural background and their response to *Utu*, or how the place of reading influences the reading of place:

Hypothesis 1. That cultural-outsider (French) readers are more influenced than cultural-insider (New Zealander) readers by *Utu*'s geographically- and culturally-situated elements, such as political, anthropological, historical, and social depictions;

Hypothesis 2. That cultural outsider (French) readers are more influenced by depictions of certain aspects of New Zealand and/or Māori culture than by other aspects;

Hypothesis 3. That the perceived source of the geographically- and culturally-situated information influences readers' reception; and

Hypothesis 4. That French readers change their attitudes to New Zealand and New Zealanders based on their reading of a novel set in that country.

To test these hypotheses, I developed two sets of dependent variables: (1) twenty-seven statements about New Zealand and Māori culture (see Table 1), which I used with both the French and New Zealand participants; and (2) eight attitude statements about New Zealand and New Zealanders (see Table 2), which I used only with French participants. I asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a seven-point Likert-type rating scale

from 1 = 'completely disagree' to 7 = 'completely agree.'

All twenty-seven statements in Table 1 appear in *Utu*, but this does not mean that this information is necessarily accurate (for a discussion of *Utu*'s cultural errors, see Carter and Walker-Morrison). Nineteen statements are made by the narratorial voice, one by a protagonist, Osborne, and seven by an antagonist, Melrose. These last seven are inflammatory; I included them to test my third hypothesis about whether reader response is affected by the information's perceived source.

Table 1: Twenty-seven statements about New Zealand and Māori culture used as dependent variables with both French and New Zealand participants

Statement and page in French (2008) and English (2011) editions of <i>Utu</i> by Caryl Férey	
S1	There are squirrels in New Zealand (French 191; English 160)
S2	Each Māori gang has its own distinguishing facial tattoo pattern (360; 299)
S3	South Auckland streets are very dangerous at night (318; 264)
S4	<i>Kohanga reo</i> are Māori language secondary schools (49; 43)
S5	Any Māori can make a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal (53; 47)
S6	Māori are worse off economically than <i>Pakeha</i> (54; 47)
S7	Nineteenth-century Māori were cannibals (160; 133)
S8	Unemployment is higher for Māori than <i>Pakeha</i> (54; 47)
S9	In the 1980s, a Labour government attacked the welfare state (72; 62)
S10	Possums are a national plague in New Zealand (112; 95)
S11	The British tricked Māori by intentionally mistranslating the Treaty of Waitangi from English into Māori (149; 125)
S12	When they signed the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori thought they were only renting land to the British (149; 125)
S13	Māori lands were confiscated to give to <i>Pakeha</i> settlers (149; 125)
S14	Māori committed more atrocities during the nineteenth-century Land Wars than did the British (159; 133)
S15	Māori exterminated then ate all the Moriori (159; 133)
S16	Māori are warriors, incapable of integrating into contemporary <i>Pakeha</i> society (159; 133)
S17	Some nineteenth-century Māori tribes allied themselves with the British in order to wipe out neighbouring tribes (160; 133)
S18	Māori prefer to get drunk rather than work (160; 134)
S19	Generally speaking, Māori children are malnourished (160; 134)
S20	Some Māori are still cannibals today (94; 80)
S21	In remote parts of New Zealand, people still travel on horseback today (243; 202)
S22	Only a blood link can make someone Māori (282; 235)
S23	Māori are proportionally over-represented in prisons (54; 48)
S24	A Māori's facial tattoo indicates the wearer's merit (363; 301)
S25	Māori worship multiple gods (396; 329)
S26	Nineteenth century Māori sold shrunken heads to sailors (421; 348)
S27	Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand

Table 2: Eight attitudinal statements about New Zealand and New Zealanders used as dependent variables only with French participants

Attitudinal statement	
A1	J'ai l'intention de visiter la NZ au cours des trois prochaines années.
A2	En NZ, les visiteurs se sentent en sécurité.
A3	Les néo-zélandais sont amicaux.
A4	En NZ, je pourrais être victime d'un crime.
A5	On m'a dit que la NZ est un pays dangereux.
A6	Les néo-zélandais sont dignes de confiance.
A7	Je conseillerais aux amis de faire attention à la criminalité en NZ.
A8	Les néo-zélandais sont sympathiques.

Of the eight attitudinal statements (see Table 2), I adapted five (A1, A2, A4, A5, A7) from George's (812) South African study of visitor perception of crime-safety and attitudes to risk, and two (A6, A8) from a study investigating changing attitudes and country image (Auruskeviciene et al. 55). I added A3 because 'friendliness' is an attribute often mentioned by overseas visitors to New Zealand but it barely features in Férey's novel.

Since I was interested in if and how participants' opinions were changed by reading *Utu*, I used a repeated measures design. I gave pre-reading questionnaires and numbered copies of *Utu* in French to 119 students enrolled in English courses at Université Paris-Sorbonne, as well as pre-reading questionnaires and numbered copies of *Utu*'s English translation to 114 students enrolled in French or Māori Studies courses at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. As well as demographic information,

these pre-reading surveys asked for participants' opinions about twenty-seven statements (see Table 1) on contemporary New Zealand and/or Māori culture and society. Participants were invited to read the novel then complete an on-line post-reading questionnaire that asked for their opinions about the same twenty-seven statements, presented in a random order. They also had to report their novel's number so I could match pre- and post-reading responses. I received twenty-six (21.8%) post-reading responses from French and twenty-four (21.1%) from New Zealand participants.[1]

My research design is quasi-experimental (Black 69-70), using pre- and post-test observations but with a non-equivalent control group, i.e. New Zealand participants. Given the key constraint to my study--that participants had to read a crime fiction novel in their own time before responding to an online post-reading questionnaire--I could not rely on experimental rigour controlling

for some variables. Nonetheless, my repeated measures design helps control for between-readers differences in textual reception (Halász, Short and Varga 195). Using the survey research method allowed me to quantify how respondents felt about issues to do with New Zealand and Māori culture, and how this knowledge and opinions were (or were not) influenced by the participant's reading of *Utu*.

## 2. Results and Discussion[2]

### **Hypothesis One: That cultural outsider (French) readers are more influenced than cultural insider (New Zealander) readers by *Utu*'s geographically- and culturally-situated elements**

My null hypothesis –  $H_01$  – is that cultural outsider and insider readers were similarly influenced by *Utu*'s geographically- and culturally-situated elements, such as political, anthropological, historical, and social depictions. I tested this in two ways: by looking at the degree of correlation between pre- and post-reading responses for each cohort, then by comparing pre- and post-reading responses at the individual reader level.

#### *Degree of correlation between pre- and post-reading responses*

My research design involved non-independent observations since I measured participant responses to the same questions on two different occasions. However, the degree of correlation between these pre- and post-reading responses differed between the two cohorts; while a paired sample t-test

showed that the pre- and post-reading responses to only two (S3, S20) of the twenty-seven questions were statistically significantly positively correlated for French readers, this was true of sixteen questions asked of New Zealanders. This provides evidence to reject  $H_01$  since it shows that New Zealanders were more likely than French readers to give similar pre- and post-reading responses, indicating that reading *Utu* had not changed their opinions.

#### *Change in pre- and post-reading responses*

I ran Wilcoxon signed ranks test for related samples to compare responses before and after reading *Utu* for French and New Zealand respondents. Table 3 shows the number of statements for which the pre- and post-reading results showed a statistically significant difference for each cohort, as well as whether this difference was a change towards the opinion depicted by Férey in *Utu*. Given that the pre- and post-reading opinions of French respondents was statistically significantly different for twenty statements – compared to only seven for New Zealand respondents – this provides further support to reject  $H_01$  and accept  $H1$ , that cultural outsider (French) readers were more influenced than cultural insider (New Zealand) readers by *Utu*'s geographically- and culturally-situated content.

Yet even New Zealanders were not left entirely unmoved by reading *Utu*. Their opinions about three statements changed from 'disagree' to 'don't know,' a change in the appropriate direction in two cases: S5 properly recognises that "any

Table 3: Summary of results from Wilcoxon signed ranks tests on pre- and post-reading responses to twenty-seven statements by French and New Zealand readers

	French	New Zealand
Statistically significant difference and mean moved from 'disagree' to 'agree'	7	3
Statistically significant difference but mean did not cross scale's mid-point	13	4 ( $p < 0.05$ ) 2 ( $0.05 < p < 0.1$ )
No statistically significant difference	7	18

Māori person may submit a claim to the Waitangi tribunal” (“Making a Claim”) and S7 reflects current thought about nineteenth-century Māori cannibalism (at least pre-1815, Barber 242), although scholars disagree over the reasons, from meeting spiritual (Barber 280) to physical needs (Salmond 142). However, New Zealanders were wrong to change from ‘disagree’ to ‘don’t know’ for S4 since *kohanga reo* are Māori language preschools, not secondary schools. Férey has his half-Māori heroine, Hana Witkaire, attend one throughout high school as a way of showing her embracing her Māori heritage; his depiction was sufficiently forceful to overcome New Zealanders’ prior knowledge.

Table 3 also shows that Férey’s influence is not monolithic: French (and New Zealand) readers changed their opinions about some elements but not others, leading to my next hypothesis, examining which aspects are more persuasive.

### **Hypothesis Two: That cultural outsider (French) readers are differently influenced by certain aspects of New Zealand and/or Māori culture**

From the results in Table 3, I can immediately reject my null hypothesis:  $H_0$  – that cultural outsider readers are similarly influenced by all the different aspects of New Zealand and/or Māori culture portrayed by Férey in *Utu*. The more interesting question is whether there are commonalities between the cultural aspects of *Utu* that are (not) persuasive, because this might shed light on which cultural elements are (not) influential. To investigate this I looked at French responses and compared the seven statements grouped in Table 3’s top row – statistically significant difference and a change from ‘disagree’ to ‘agree’: S3, S4, S7, S15, S17, S23, and S16 – with the seven in the table’s bottom row – no statistically significant difference: S1, S14, S18, S19, S20, S21, and S27 – to try to identify factors that could account for these differences.

I classified each statement by whether it deals with a contemporary or historical issue; with a specifically Māori or generally New Zealand topic; whether Férey mentions it once or several times; as well as whether it is voiced by the narrator, by a protagonist or by an antagonist. However, none of these groupings fully and completely accounts for the changes in French responses. I found only one feature that partially correlates with French responses: for all seven of the statements for which their responses showed no statistically significant difference before and after reading, New Zealand respondents also showed no statistically significant difference in their opinions, suggesting an absence, rather than source, of influence. Therefore, although I accept H2, I am unable to extrapolate from my results to predict the type of cultural information that will or will not influence cultural outsider readers' opinions.

Although I cannot claim an overall schema for what type of information is culturally persuasive, it is informative to look at the seven statements that swayed French readers. While for three of them – S4, S15, and S17 – it was unlikely that French participants would possess relevant prior knowledge before reading *Utu*, for the remaining four – S3, S7, S23, and S26 – they could have 'guessed' that they should agree by either drawing analogies with France or from general knowledge. First, S3, in which Férey depicts South Auckland as the *banlieue*, a concept familiar to French people, meaning the low socio-economic, high crime area on a city's outskirts,

but one French participant rejected before reading *Utu*, perhaps believing New Zealand too quiet a country or Auckland too small a city to have such areas. The second, S7, treats nineteenth-century Māori cannibalism, depicted by Jules Verne in *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant* (1868), which Férey claims as a formative childhood text (Angelier). The third, S23, is about Māori in prison. Given that indigenous peoples are over-represented in many countries' prison populations, French participants could have guessed the answer by association. That they did not may signal a French exception due to republican ideals of equality, which forbid the collecting and/or reporting of statistics based on racial or ethnic origin (Schnapper 133). Finally, S26, shrunken heads. The New Zealand Government is making a concerted effort to have all *kōiwi tangata* (ancestral remains) held by museums outside New Zealand returned to Māori care (Hole 5). In January 2012, the French government held a ceremony at Quai Branly, the ethnographic museum in Paris, to return twenty such heads (Mortaigne), which was reported in French newspapers and on television.

### **Hypothesis Three: That the perceived source of the geographically- and culturally-situated information influences reception**

Despite the mixed outcome of H2, I wanted to further explore one factor by testing a third null hypothesis:  $H_03$  – that readers are equally influenced by geographically- and culturally-situated information regardless of perceived source. In this I was aided by Férey's

creation of an antagonist called Melrose, whom Férey intends the reader to detest. Even before we meet Melrose, he is described as an extremely right-wing, racist, multi-millionaire businessman who writes self-published history books about New Zealand that have become bestsellers (French 59-60; English 51-52). A lengthy anti-Māori, neoliberal diatribe by Melrose (159-60; 133-34) is the source of seven of my twenty-seven statements. Looking at pre- and post-reading responses to these seven ‘Melrose’ statements shows that French participants changed their opinion from disagree (pre-reading) to agree (post-reading) for three of them (S7, S15, S17), disagreed less strongly with one of them (S16), and did not change their opinion for another three (S14, S18, S19). Therefore, I could not reject  $H_03$  but instead looked within these seven statements to develop two null sub-hypotheses ( $H_03a-b$ ) for two subgroups of information:

$H_03a$  Readers are equally influenced by historical or contemporary information conveyed via Melrose.

Looking at data for the first null hypothesis— $H_03a$ —shows that French readers were less willing to change their opinions about contemporary society—about whether Māori today are drunkards (S18), warriors (S16) or poor parents (S19)—than about historical issues such as nineteenth century cannibalism (S7) or exterminating nineteenth-century enemies (S15, S17). Therefore I rejected the null hypothesis  $H_03a$  and accepted hypothesis  $H3a$  “that readers are more influenced by historical than contemporary information conveyed

via Melrose.” Turning to the second null hypothesis –  $H_03b$  – shows that French participants were more willing to change their opinion about statements treating ‘facts’ (S7, S15, S17) rather than ‘attitudes’ (S14, S16, S18, S19), thus I rejected the null hypothesis for  $H_03b$  and accepted hypothesis  $H3b$  “that readers are more influenced by facts than attitudes conveyed via Melrose.”

Given Férey’s left-wing politics, he might be dismayed that his readers accepted anything from Melrose. However, I have three possible explanations for why French readers are susceptible to factual and historical information despite the perceived source. Firstly, by the time readers came across these statements Férey seems to have convinced them of his expertise in all matters Māori and New Zealand, meaning that information presented as ‘facts’—even from Melrose—seemed credible. Secondly, it may be due to increasing memory externalisation. Search engines provide access to a universal archive so why should these student participants memorise dates of the Kings and Queens of France, or details of the Land Wars, when the answer is only a search away and mental effort can instead be directed towards following the latest celebrity gossip? This is perhaps especially true for ‘facts’ that readers feel they will never be required to regurgitate, such as those offered during leisure reading of crime fiction. Finally, in establishing Melrose, Férey may have done himself a disservice by labouring the point that Melrose self-published his bestselling history books, since the world has moved on to publishing phenomena such as *Fifty*

*Shades of Grey* (James), which began as a self-published e-book before being picked up by Random House (Knox 54). While this might be anathema for established authors, popular fiction readers now seem not to regard ‘self-publishing’ as automatically equating to ‘lower quality’ (Fay). Thus (student) readers today may equate ‘(fictional) author of history books’ with ‘credible source of historical facts.’

#### **Hypothesis Four: That French readers change their attitudes to New Zealand and New Zealanders based on their reading of a novel set in that country**

Having looked at the micro-effects—how readers reacted to the world portrayed within Férey’s novel—I turn now to the macro-picture: did *Utu* influence French readers’ attitudes towards New Zealand and New Zealanders in general? Both before and after reading *Utu* I asked French participants to respond to eight attitudinal statements (see Table 2) that explore their general attitudes to the country and its citizens rather than about the specific issues raised in *Utu* about geography, politics, anthropology, history or society. My null hypothesis –  $H_04$  – is “that French readers’ attitudes to New Zealand and New Zealanders are unaffected by reading *Utu*.” I found a statistically significant change in mean response to A2, A4 and A7 (at the 0.05 level) as well as A3 and A8 (0.1 level) so I rejected  $H_04$  and accepted  $H4$ : “that French readers change their attitudes to New Zealand and New Zealanders based on their reading of a novel set in that country.” However, in all five cases the mean responses moved in the opposite direction to that which might be

desired by Tourism New Zealand: after reading *Utu*, French participants thought New Zealand less safe to visit (A2), that visitors would be more likely to be victims of crime (A4, A7), and that New Zealanders are less friendly and likeable (A3, A8).<sup>[3]</sup>

I did not find a statistically significant change for A1: “I will visit New Zealand within the next three years,” with participants disagreeing slightly both before and after reading. Just as Bayard argues that it is unnecessary to experience places first-hand in order to write about them, readers can also be content with literary, rather than physical, voyaging. To Bayard’s physical and psychological inconveniences of travel (13), one can add the high cost in time and money a trip to New Zealand involves, making it unimaginable for most university students.

### **3. Conclusion**

I have provided empirical evidence that a novel’s geographically and culturally-situated elements differently influence cultural insider and outsider readers, with the latter more likely to change their opinions than the former. Moreover, for every statement that showed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-reading means, readers’ opinions moved towards the image portrayed by Férey in *Utu*, not only for outsider French readers but also for New Zealanders, even when Férey’s cultural claim was incorrect.

Furthermore, for cultural outsiders this influence extends beyond *Utu*’s final page to opinions about the country depicted. At first sight, readers’ negative attitudes

to Férey's dark depictions might seem bad news for New Zealand given that tourism represents 8.5% of its GDP (Statistics New Zealand 9). However, there are two reasons why *Utu* may in fact be beneficial. First, New Zealand markets itself to thrill seekers through international advertising campaigns with images of adventurous activities such as bungy-jumping and white-water rafting set amid its rugged landscape; such potential tourists are unlikely to be deterred by (fictional) cannibalism. Second, most of Férey's French readers never intended travelling beyond the novel's covers but nonetheless closed it with a new perspective on the country and its people. Perversely, it matters not that this perspective is negative; the simple fact of having read a novel about little-known New Zealand boosts the country's intangible reputation within the French imaginary. To support this claim, I turn to Berger, Sorensen and Rasmussen, who show that "Whereas a negative review [in the *New York Times*] decreased purchase likelihood of a book that was already well known, it increased purchase likelihood for a previously unknown book" (824). By analogy, *Utu*'s negative 'review' of previously unknown New Zealand helps the country's name recognition; any publicity is good publicity.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Emeritus Professor Ian Carter for enrolling study participants at the University of Auckland as well as two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. This research was supported financially by the University

of Auckland Faculty of Arts Doctoral Research Fund. Approval for this study was given by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (2011/417).

### Endnotes

[1] I refer to the 'French' and 'New Zealand' cohorts in this article although both contain members who were neither born in nor citizens of those countries. I received too few post-reading questionnaires to find statistically significant differences between sub-groups within each cohort, for example between the nineteen New Zealand-born versus five non-New Zealand born post-reading respondents comprising the 'New Zealand' cohort.

I aimed to enrol 120 in each group, a number arrived at from a priori sample sizes (G\*Power v.3.1.3, Faul et al.) calculated from the results of a pilot study and allowing for predicted response rates, (Scott et al. 6; Kaplowitz, Hadlock and Levine; Baruch and Holtom; Nair and Adams 295; Sax, Gilmartin and Bryant 417; Deutskens et al. 29), the establishment of a gift/obligation relationship (Smart 389), the requirement to read a long, violent noir novel and my repeated measures design (Gardner 107-09) as well as two logistical issues: funding and the number of enrolled students.

[2] Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results showed that pre- and post-reading responses to the twenty-seven statements for both French and New Zealand participants and to the eight attitudinal statements for the French participants were not normally distributed. Therefore

I used non-parametric statistical tests throughout this analysis (Black 550–551). Unless otherwise stated, statistically significant difference is at the 0.05 level.

[3] A3 and A8, as well as having a lower statistical significance, are problematic because the results may have been influenced by my actions as a researcher. Participants completed the pre-reading survey immediately after I had spoken to them and had given them a free copy of the novel, perhaps leading them to believe that I, and by extension, other New Zealanders are friendly and likeable, and moving the pre-reading mean to a more positive value. However, after having read a violent novel—and the effect of meeting me having worn off—participants reported lower scores, perhaps representing a truer opinion.

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# NZ@FRANKFURT: IMAGINING NEW ZEALAND'S GUEST OF HONOUR PRESENTATION AT THE 2012 FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

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With over 7,000 exhibitors from over 100 countries and circa 300,000 visitors each year the Frankfurt Book Fair is a playground for political, economic, and cultural imaginings, including many domestic and foreign places. The Book Fair is often conceived of and studied as a site of intercultural politics and commerce but has not yet fully been explored as a site of translation and translator's agency. This essay offers critical reflections upon metaphors for the translator, arguing that a shift of the base metaphor in comparative literature studies of translation from conflict to friction could redirect interdisciplinary translation studies. I propose that the friction metaphor leads toward an appropriate balance between complex detail and ordering reduction of data that allows us to describe the intensity and the challenges of translation without recreating the old-established realities we already know.

Comptant plus de 7,000 exposants, une centaine de pays participants, et au-delà de 300,000 visiteurs chaque année, la Foire du Livre de Francfort est un vivier pour les imaginaires politique, économique, et culturels, et met ainsi en représentation plusieurs lieux locaux et étrangers. La Foire du Livre est fréquemment conçue et envisagée comme un site de commerce international et de tractations politiques, mais elle n'a pas été étudiée en tant que site propre à la traduction et à l'agentivité du rôle de traducteur. Cet article offre une réflexion critique sur la métaphore pour le traducteur, en arguant qu'un déplacement, dans les études en littérature comparée de la traduction, de la conception basique de la métaphore du conflit à la friction peut engager les études interdisciplinaires de la traduction dans une voie inexplorée. Je propose que la métaphore frictionnelle pointe vers un équilibre entre les détails complexes et une réduction des données qui permet de décrire l'intensité et les défis de la traduction sans retomber dans les poncifs ou paraphraser les connaissances acquises.



Fig. 1

The reflections on metaphors for the translator I want to offer in this essay are based on my observations of encounters between a number of agents, including myself, involved in the networking for New Zealand's Guest of Honor presentation at the 2012 Frankfurt Book Fair. My involvement in what I call the NZ@Frankfurt network was work-related and connected to the following institutions: the University of Auckland (UoA), the Goethe-Institut Wellington, the New Zealand Society for Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI), the New Zealand Centre for Literary Translation (NZCLT), the New Zealand Literary Translators (NZLitT) initiative and the New Zealand German Business Association Inc. (NZGBA).

Initially, I was motivated by a desire to gain experience in literary translation and supplement my income but also to contribute in some way to this unique cooperation between my native country and my host country. My first contact with the NZ@Frankfurt network was through the New Zealand Literary

Translators initiative, which was set up shortly after the official announcement mid-2011 that New Zealand had accepted the offer to be the Guest of Honour in Frankfurt. The members of this initiative are highly qualified translators who are also first-generation immigrants to New Zealand. They understand their role as ambassadorial and aim to promote and support translations of New Zealand literature overseas. I gladly followed their invitation to become a member and was soon able to absorb the world of literary translation in the context of real-life commercial pressure and competition, as opposed to the rather privileged and abstract point of view that I had so far been accustomed to as a scholar of Comparative Literature. At the same time I applied for membership with the NZSTI. Here, I found interesting opportunities to discuss my ideas and questions about the socio-political context of translation with translators who mainly worked in a non-literary environment, such as medical, legal, or technical translation.

In June 2012 the NZSTI held its annual conference in Wellington and included in its programme a Frankfurt Book Fair roundtable, which brought together representatives of the NZCLT, the Goethe-Institut, the New Zealand publishing industry, the NZLitT and me. The event memorably reflected the gist of the conference's title "Translating and Interpreting: Celebrating Strength in Diversity" as the panel members addressed and discussed in detail the different expectations each had as participant in the NZ@Frankfurt network and how it so far had shaped the cooperative processes they were involved in.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3 (Müller)

Fig. 4 (<http://medienarchiv.buchmesse.de/detail.html?assetId=34549&lang=en>)

Shortly after the conference a review of the Guest of Honour press conference held on 17 June 2012 in Germany appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). It stirred up a controversy about how much or how little New Zealand's presentation actually focused on books. The main points of dispute were that Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Hobbit* (Fig. 2), which was also the theme for the 2012 Cosplay (short for costume play), was largely diverting attention towards New Zealand as location for fantasy films and outdoor recreation; that the rich narrative tradition of the Maori was mainly presented in the form of carvings (Fig. 3), dance (Fig. 4), textile art and graphic art, and tattoos rather than books; and that a large number of the books that would be presented in translation at the Fair were either reprints of the usual suspects, i.e. Janet Frame, Frank Sargeson, Alan Duff, Witi Ihimaera, or travel and cook books (Platthaus). Unfortunately, a professional translation (in English) was never made available to the New Zealand public, and thus many of the responses neglected the extent to which the author had attributed the deplorable state of the New Zealand book at the Fair to a great shift within the German book industry towards "transmedia storytelling" and a lack of courage to support the import of fresh New Zealand literary works. It was obvious that the Frankfurt Book Fair network both in New Zealand and in Germany was marked by cooperation that was not necessarily built on a common point of view or shared goals. Every group represented in this network

imagined New Zealand@Frankfurt in a very different way.

During this time, I also worked as part-time tutor for the German and the English Departments at the University of Auckland and became involved in activities that were designed to raise interest amongst students and staff for the Book Fair. In response to the *FAZ* article, I had wanted to create a roundtable with representatives of both departments and experienced my own share of difficulties translating from one culture to another. Following the suggestion of a more experienced colleague, I chose the title “The Frankfurt Book Fair – Eine verpasste Chance/A Missed Chance?” for the event and sent out invitations. The responses were unenthusiastic, and I should have known better. In a German context, it is quite common to use a negative question like this to provoke contradiction. Especially as the book fair was yet to take place, I expected my guests to happily disagree. But the feedback I received clearly showed that such a set-up did not translate well into the New Zealand context. One letter of refusal pointed out that I might not be up to date with recent developments being undertaken to promote the Fair in New Zealand and that only if I was willing to change the character of the foreseen roundtable and set a positive, forward-looking framework would they consider participating. Another respondent explained that she had found the title disheartening but thought that the informed and robust debate I was proposing would be very healthy. The roundtable never eventuated. I instead created and chaired a roundtable

with members of the New Zealand Society of Authors (formerly PEN New Zealand), which allowed me to see that independent authors and literary translators shared a number of experiences in their efforts to gain ground within the NZ@Frankfurt network. Overall, my impression from this observational period was that cooperation among different agents in the NZ@Frankfurt network was fraught and the whole formed a highly complex system of interaction that involved multiple points of view and diverse goals and strategies that kept developing and evolving.

I soon discovered that scholarship had already addressed the complexity of the Frankfurt Book Fair but mainly in terms of its historical development and its economic and promotional relevance for different sections of the literary industry. Detailed studies on the task of the translator in the context of the world’s largest platform for literary and cultural exchange are still lacking, despite the fact that the Fair established the “Weltempfang” (World Reception) Centre for Politics, Literature and Translation in 2003. Geographic presence at the Fair has thus not yet been translated into a presence within the larger book fair, academic or public conscious.

Available historical and monoperspective studies of the Frankfurt Book Fair substantiate the fact that the annual event is a reference point of major relevance for the entire system translation, meaning its function as a platform for cultural diplomacy, literary discussion and economic development. The Guest of Honour phenomenon at the Book

Fair lends itself to a transdisciplinary approach, drawing on economic, cultural, political and psychological elements to answer the question: How do translators position themselves in the Frankfurt Book Fair network? In the following I will address some of the methodological challenges and offer reflections on how these can be met.

### **A Highly Complex System of Interaction**

Each year in October, the Frankfurt Book Fair produces a variety of commercial, cultural and national topics in association with an ever-evolving global literary book market. With over 7,000 exhibitors from over 100 countries and circa 300,000 visitors each year, it is considered the world's largest book fair. Heir to a 500-year-old tradition, the Frankfurt Book Fair today has almost nothing in common with its original character, especially with regard to its function. Consequently, the opinions of experts and observers about its significance and meaning for the book industry diverge greatly.

Periodisations are difficult to establish due to developmental overlaps, gaps in available sources, and altering foci. However, major recent studies (Füssel in 1999, Niemeier in 2001, and Weidhaas et al. in 2007) seem able to agree on several caesuras in the developments of the Fair since its reestablishment after WWII. The Fairs are generally set themed in close relation to the economic and cultural forces in Germany dominant during the given periods: the internationalisation in the 1950s, with

1953 marking the year in which foreign exhibitors outnumbered the domestic ones for the first time; the politicisation in the 1960s, in particular, the peak years 1966 and 1969 of the left intellectual and student protest movement; the growing commercialisation in the 1970s, indicated by the introduction of "Schwerpunktthemen" (focus topics) that did not have a strong lobby but helped to embed the Fair within a larger network of international initiatives and debates,[1] which was then replaced in 1984 by the "Schwerpunktländer" (focus countries); lastly, the increasing significance of electronic media from the 1990s onwards; the connecting of emotion and information and growing event culture inaugurated by veteran art fair organizer Lorenzo Rudolf, who ran the Fair from 2000-2003 ("Buchmesse"). One might say that one function dominates a certain chapter in the history of the Fair because certain social, political, commercial and technological developments draw attention to it, but in its entirety the Fair is multifunctional.

The establishment of focus countries in the 1980s is a particularly good example of how intricately interwoven cultural and economic functions are in the context of the Fair. On the one hand, the focus countries grew out of the idea to support themes that otherwise did not have a strong lobby in the system of the Fair (Thielmann 130). On the other hand, the focus countries organise and finance a great number of events, which is of substantial economic benefit to the Fair. [2] Another indicator is the fact that the guest nations themselves often seize the

opportunity to accentuate other economic branches within their program. In 1988, for example, Italy presented a vibrant tourism industry and Japan, guestland in 1990, foregrounded their strong high-tech industry. Platthaus's critique regarding a lack of focus on New Zealand books thus cannot entirely be reduced to the book industry's recent trend away from printed paper.

Having the guestlands largely design and organise their presentations themselves was intended to ensure that enough cultural translation occurred in advance to avoid a repetition of the debacle that transpired during the presentation of India in 1986, which was then still in the hands of the Fair itself:

*Although the tone of initial reports in the media was generally neutral and innocuous, it soon became clear that the coverage was primarily dependent on clichés relating to classical India, instead of addressing the complexities of the present. Unfamiliar philosophies, complex plotlines, a bewildering delineation of characters, and even the unfamiliar pronunciation of the Indian authors reading their works in English were all perceived as being too foreign for public consumption. The audience remained either puzzled or indifferent. (Weidhaas et al 204)*

On the other hand, Iceland's focus on fables in their 2011 "Fabulous Iceland" presentation was hugely successful. Whether and the extent to which a shift of responsibility from the receiving culture to the guest country resolves matters of

cliché and unfamiliarity or puzzlement and indifference merits case-by-case studies.

In connection with the financial cost of presenting as Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, Niemeier points out that guest nations display a need to out-do each other, which has led to ever-increasing sums spent and a growing Eurocentrism in the selection of the guests owing to their better financial standing (Niemeier 53-4). In other words, economic interests have pushed aside the original idea of drawing attention to marginal topics. Instead, as recent studies of the Fair's incentive measures and development of funds for translations indicate, translator initiatives take on the task of lobbying for economically less fortunate literatures (cf. Bachleitner and Wolf 2010).

The attention national PR and cultural translation have received in academic and public forums point to the political significance of the Fair. This is often addressed in heated debates, which occur in Fair-external settings. The Platthaus review and ensuing reactions in New Zealand are just one of many ways in which this can occur. Weidhaas et al. describe another example from the 1980s. Under the Schwerpunkt "Black Africa," apartheid became a hotly debated issue, openly addressing the diachronic role of Germany as host country and colonial power. South African writer James Matthews expressed his confusion openly at a public session titled "The Function of Modern African Literature?" in the Conference Hall of the Römer:

*I ask myself what the devil I'm doing here. I am only half-literate, and yet I have been given a room at a super-luxury hotel. I push a button and food is brought to me. Should I be won over? This country, like all other European countries, has exploited my country. And where is the compensation? This is the first time I have even been allowed to leave my country. For twenty years I was refused a passport. How come I have one now? Is your country so powerful that it can exploit us and still negotiate a passport for us at the same time? (as quoted in Weidhaas et al. 197)*

His words found a receptive audience and led to further processing through the German public (Weidhaas et al 204-207).

While serving as a major reference point for topical debates of global politics and ideologies, the Fair itself subscribes to neutrality and freedom of thought and expression: “The founding members [of the Fair] were inspired by the idea of an international literature without national censorship, the free development of opinion as the foundation of democracy” (Schulz 2458-2488).

<sup>[3]</sup> Historical analysis shows, however, that the Frankfurt Book Fair network is too complex to yield to clear-cut boundaries. As the Fair often necessarily responds to the socio-political climate at a given time, the neutrality principle has been challenged with different outcomes on several occasions.

In 1950, a stall run by a neo-Nazi publisher was removed by other stall owners, who consequently demanded that such publishers be excluded in

advance. This demand was refused under reference to the neutrality principle. The exclusion of anti-religious literature, on the other hand, which was a condition for the booking of the Paulskirche in 1949, had been, after much heated debate, accepted. Other significant examples of indirect censorship include China's boycott of the Fair in 1957 in response to Taiwan's participation; the exclusion of Iran from the 1989 Fair in response to Ayatollah Khomeini's call for a fatwa against British writer Salman Rushdie following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*; the closure of the Fair to visitors, including experts, at the height of the protests in 1968 on the Sunday afternoon that the Peace Prize was awarded in the Paulskirche; and the seizing of the GDR state publishing company's showcased “Braunbuch über Kriegs- und Naziverbrechen in der Bundesrepublik” (Brown Book of War- and Nazi-Crimes in the Federal Republic) by the Frankfurt district judge's office followed by massive protests by other exhibitors (cf. Niemeier 45-46). Another incident worth mentioning occurred in 1967, when the GDR as well as the Soviet Union threatened to boycott the Frankfurt Book fair when the organisers refused to use the statename “GDR” for the books published in the East German country.<sup>[4]</sup>

The permeability of the system, meaning that certain functions can be transferred from actors who solely work within the Frankfurt Book Fair network and others who may only be temporarily attached to the wider Frankfurt Book Fair network (newspapers, exhibitions before and after the Fair, externally organised

roundtables), makes it difficult to determine the positioning of the translator by looking at his/her function. A better way to approach this topic is through an interdisciplinary focus on interaction.

### **Chaos and Order**

The Fair's multifunctionality and permeability have already pushed research towards elements that are not solely profit focused, such as culture and politics. The contributions to the Suhrkamp anthology *50 Jahre Frankfurter Buchmesse* (1999) reflect the growing interest in analyses that critically assess the field of tensions between cultural and commercial interests. Stephan Füssel, the volume's editor, emphasises the Fair's significance as a connection point between the history of the German republic after WWII and a scaled book industry:

*Due to the fact that one does not only trade economic goods at the Fairs, but also heatedly debates their contents, the history of the Frankfurt Book Fair can be traced as a mirror image of the history of the Federal Republic and also of the European and worldwide book markets. [5] (8)*

The selected essays in the anthology emphasise historico-political aspects of the Fair and also to a large extent reinforce the aforementioned periodisation of the Fair. For example, Füssel and Fischer focus on the early internationalisation of the Fair after WWII. Scheideler and Schneider describe politically motivated countermovements in the German public in the 1960s. Sabri examines

the bestseller marketing of the 1970s. Thielmann, Rütten and Fischer look at the consequences of the introduction of focus topics for the Fair and the shift towards nationalism and economic outsourcing through the introduction of focus countries. Götz considers the shift towards electronic media against the background of the 1984 focus topic "Orwell 2000." Next to a detailed historical representation, the anthology delivers a valuable impression of the Fair as a complex system of communication and interaction, which promotes further shifts in methodology.[6]

The shift in study towards the sociological embeddedness of the Frankfurt Book Fair and its diverse actors can be traced to the far-reaching influence of the foundational works of the cultural turn in the 1970s, such as Hayden White, Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. In translation studies, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* in particular facilitated the growth of socio-cultural translation studies. Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem and Gideon Toury's descriptive methodology set the course for researchers to engage in mapping the micro (individual instances of translation) and macro (the socio-politics surrounding a translation) levels of literary and practical translation. This has helped to discern the cognitive, social and cultural constraints under which translators operate counter to the reducing of translators to the status of transcoders and translation machines that had historically forced them into invisibility (Venuti 1995).

While the surge of new methodologies and perspectives on translation has widened the scope of translation studies, the new avenues in translation research have also led to new challenges. Attention to the specificity of translation runs the risk of producing data that is chaotic and lacking in explanatory force. The visual representation Şehnaz Tahir-Gurçağlar developed of the network model to map the network composed of publishers, translators, authors, editors, readers, and government and literary institutions illustrates the shortcomings:

CHAOS BEFORE ORDER: NETWORK MAPS AND RESEARCH DESIGN IN DTS 735

A Network Map for Translated Popular Literature in Turkey in the 1940s based on Alim Kızıltan as Gateway

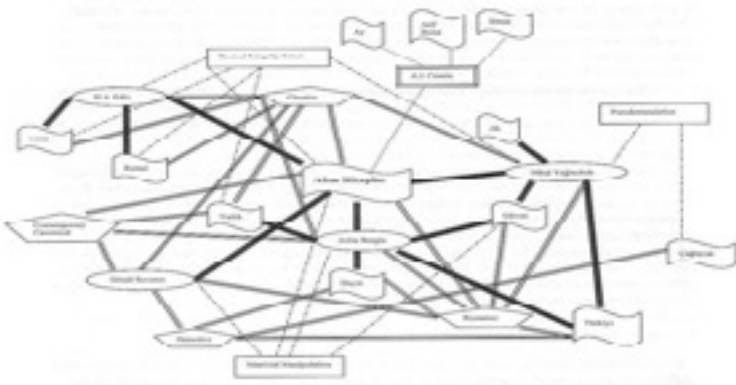


Fig. 5

Acknowledging that the visual representation is problematic in a number of ways, Tahir-Gurçağlar foremost criticises the model's failure to fully exhibit the available data: "the more elements one adds to the map, the more complex it becomes and the lines become impossible to trace on a two-dimensional plane. Since the goal is to be as comprehensive as possible with the inventory of elements, visualization is nearly impossible and the map becomes conceptual" (736).

The multifariousness of the object of study makes conceptual models that help structure it all the more attractive. But the problem here is that the structuredness of the model may distort the unstructuredness of the object. A case in point is the ATCS (Acquired Capabilities for Translation Systems) by Thomson-Wohlgemuth and Thomson. It lays out the relationship between five core abilities (professionalism; organisation; consistency; refinement; innovation) and related behaviours (commitment, discipline; communication, teamwork; service; self-reflection; embracing change) compared to the five gears of a car.

Acquiring capabilities in translation 117

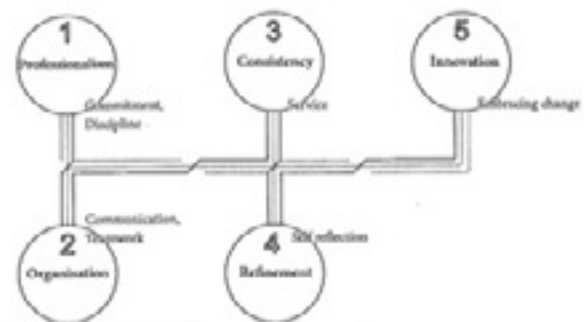


Figure 1. The ACTS model

Fig. 6

The 5-gear-model suggests a neat hierarchical sequence of processes, and the language the authors employ to describe the model reinforce the sense of order, of straightforward cause and effect: "Used together, these should enable an organisation to create an effective, disciplined process so as to meet the requirements of its customers, minimising internal costs and in the hope that everyone in the organisation

can take pride in their work (see Figure 1 above)” (257). Of course, there are other ways to represent collected data, but visual representations as in the two figures above illustrate the challenge in descriptive translation studies very clearly: how does one position and direct one’s study? From comprehensive detail or data chaos to order (Tahir-Gurçağlar) or within order (Thomson-Wohlgemuth and Thomson)?

This is a challenge common to studies that face complex socio-cultural data. Reviewing the status quo of studies available on the Frankfurt Book Fair, Niemeier assumes that it is the deterrent effect of data complexity that explains the lack of interdisciplinary studies in the field (xi). Her own study offers an insightful overview of the historical development of the Fair and investigates how actors of the “System Book” position themselves at the Fair. She links the complexity of the Fair to necessary adjustments of scientific approaches:

*The course of the fair is shaped by economic, cultural, political and psychological interests. The fair turns into an instrument for the production of collective experience. This inevitably influences scientific approaches to the book fair, because, if one considers all aspects of it seriously, one has to study it differently. We are dealing with a complex system and a personal experience, thus the non-rational components also belong within our focus. All the more important it is to draw on as many perspectives as possible to help better understand the emotional, not purely profit-oriented relationship between branch and book fair. (Niemeier xi-xii)<sup>[7]</sup>*

Consequently, her study makes use of historical studies, analyses current coverage in the trade journals, periodicals and public media, and draws on conversations with exhibitors, visitors and representatives of the *Ausstellungs- und Messe AG (AuM, subsidiary of the Association of German Publishers and Booksellers)*, statistics released by the Frankfurt Book Fair, and her own experience, observations and targeted interviews (xii).

Like Tahir-Gurçağlar and Thomson-Wohlgemuth and Thomson, Niemeier uses figures to represent parts of her methodology and findings. Three figures represent the relationship between main agents/participants at the Fair: one represents the “System Book,” which includes agents, publishers, authors, buyers, readers, reviewers, libraries, distributors and book sellers (58), another situates the Fair within the “System Book” (59), and a third illustrates the network of interactions between the different groups participating in the Fair, which includes the exhibitors/publishers, book sellers, authors, the public, politicians, media, the organisers/AuM and other service providers (food, accommodation, banking, security, medical, transport, etc.) (88). Niemeier’s figures share the same shortcomings as the others, namely the reduction of detail and complexity; however, the directionality in her study is different. The figures appear at the beginning of the respective chapters “System Book” (58 and 59 of 57-85) and “Internal Structure” (88 of 86-112). Niemeier thus moves from a simplified representation to elaborate detail and

complexity. Simplification of data is the point of departure not the goal, and neither is complexity. While this approach is preferable to the other two studies, ideally, an interdisciplinary study of the translator's positioning in the NZ@ Frankfurt network would include both directions from a simplified approach to complex details to a meaningful ordering or reduction of data. But how?

### **Friction - An Invisible Gap Made Visible**

Niemeier's study stands out from the larger sum of monoperspectival approaches to the Frankfurt Book Fair, but it still shares one of the most common blind spots: the translator. Given the early internationalisation, the focus on foreign countries, and the fact that the Fair is often heralded as a site that offers a plethora of opportunity to strengthen international ties through "cultural diplomacy"; and given that the job of the translator is often described as that of a bridge maker, a mediator between cultures, and a tourist guide, it is quite surprising how little mention there is of this group of participants in connection with this annual event. Even the scholarly essays coming from Translation Studies, such as the contributions by Hofer and Messner and Fischer, Pölzer, Seidler and Havranek to the 2010 anthology *Streifzüge im Translatorischen Feld: Zur Soziologie der literarischen Übersetzung im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Exploring the Translation Field: The Sociology of Literary Translation in German-Speaking Countries) are incomplete in so far as that they mention the Fair predominantly in connection with its function as the creator of incentive measures and development

funds and less in connection with how translators interact with other actors in the Frankfurt Book Fair network. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the Fair only relatively recently, in 2003, added the *Übersetzerzentrum* to its programme, a centre for translators, which aims to facilitate contact with agents and colleagues and wants to bring more attention to the translator as envoys of cultural and linguistic diversity. Although it seems more likely that the preconception of the translator as invisible has been and still is an unfortunate starting ground for a shift of (self-)positioning.

Invisibility is just one of the many metaphors that have shaped the way in which we understand translation. These metaphors aid in training successive generations of translators and theorists, and often also determine what facets of translation are deemed to be important and therefore merit study. As such they play a central role in the modelling of methodologies in translation studies, which needs to be critically examined.

Scholars in disciplines as diverse as medicine, business, advertising and music, have recognised the importance of metaphors to their research. This is due to the unique role metaphors play in connecting the literal and the abstract and, as many scholars argue, in directing thought as well as action. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who have greatly contributed to establishing the cognitive importance of metaphors, point out that metaphors are a means of structuring our perception. They can

highlight or make comprehensible and often reduce particular aspects of any given experience (87). The metaphor and the aspect it describes build a strong sense unit. So strong, Lakoff and Johnson argue, that they can become “guides for future action” and even “self-fulfilling prophecies” (112).[8] At the same time, metaphors are partial and imperfect, as Mike Hanne reminds us in “Metaphors for the Translator”: “it is rare to find a single phrase being treated as exhausting the metaphorical potential of a person, object or phenomenon” (211). Thus metaphors are permeable entities that allow for development and redirection of thought and perception. The large number of metaphors traded in translation studies is evidence of this.

An attempt to discuss here the manifold metaphors in circulation in translation research can only be as partial and imperfect as any metaphor. Many metaphors for translation, however, share that they reflect the overarching “secondary” quality of translation as a form of communication that “provides access to something, some message, that already exists” (House 3). As such, translation entails intuitive associations with falsity and treason. From a politically engaged perspective – be it in relation to (post-)colonial power struggles or current international affairs, or simply within the field of translation itself – invisibility quickly becomes a matter of complicity, challenging translators to position themselves on the scale of conflicting ideas. Do you follow source-focused or target-focused approaches (Pym; Venuti)? Have you explored your social context

(Even-Zohar; Hermans 1985, 1994; Toury) in order to determine whether you are complicit in the construction or dislocation of empires (Spivak; Salama-Carr; Milton and Bandia)? Summarising the gist of major contributions to the discipline, Myriam Salama-Carr writes: “The notion of ‘conflict’ is part and parcel of contemporary discourse on translation and interpreting” (1).

The import and growing acceptance of the conflict metaphor can also be linked to globalisation and its perceived creation of a world that is “increasingly polarized” (Salama-Carr 1) and “conflict-ridden” (Baker 1). Focusing on the role translations and translators play in conflict situations such as warfare, racial persecution, etc. gives Translation Studies the opportunity to attach itself to a larger public platform (Apter). The extreme context lends the reality and intensity of the challenges of translation immediate relevance. But, like any other metaphor that comes to dominate a scientific discipline, the conflict metaphor threatens to limit the range of theory development and study. A focus on translation in connection with global conflicts leads to a displacement and distancing of issues that are too mundane to merit much interest or attention under less extreme circumstances. It is another form of ‘othering’ the translator and discounting the everyday life challenges of literary translation.

Further at stake is the notion that conflict supports the perceived incompatibility that results from the theoretical dichotomies in translation: “source/target,” “domestication/ foreignisation,”

“coloniser/ colonised,” “individual/ system.” Oxford Dictionaries defines conflict amongst others as “a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one”; “a prolonged armed struggle”; “a state of mind in which a person experiences a clash of opposing feelings or needs”; “a serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests.” The conflict metaphor moreover reinforces the sense that the main task of translators is to perform only secondary communicative acts; they serve to mediate a preexisting disagreement or situate themselves in relation to preexisting dichotomies. What is needed is a metaphor that denotes a shift from perceived complicity (neutrality) and incompatibility (theoretical dichotomies) of translation and translators toward specific instances of contact between translators and other actors.

To meet this need and to overcome the problems inherent in the confining conflict metaphor, I suggest that it be replaced with ‘friction.’ Scholars in other disciplines have proposed and illustrated that a focus on friction produces better results because it challenges the bias that successful intercultural cooperation is the consequence of smooth interaction. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues that friction forces the scholar “to become embroiled in specific situations” (1) and thus lays bare the transformational processes that turn universal aspirations into local currency: “Speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency” (6). Her study

of collaborations between transnational investment groups and local interest groups in the Indonesian rain forest is a valuable warning against assuming that such collaborations are based on common viewpoints or goals, or that they will necessarily result in reciprocal benefits.

The notion of cultural contact inherent in the friction metaphor has been picked up by Shenkar et al., who analyse the organisational and research ramifications of the ‘cultural distance’ metaphor in international management (IM). They propose friction as substitute metaphor for ‘distance’ to counter a research environment “where ‘messy’ cultural encounters and their potential for disagreement antagonism, and conflict are never dealt with; where social and political overtones are squelched; and where sensitivities relating to hierarchical positioning and power differentials across partisan interest are habitually overlooked” (909). The friction metaphor, in their view, can help to redirect research in their field leading to studies which anticipate and aim to understand the dialectical and developmental nature of cultural interaction and provides better answers to the challenges of international management.

Looking at collaborations between international conservationist groups and indigenous communities, Jim Igoe similarly comes to the conclusion that a close study of types of frictions that arise in different situations is essential to predict the likelihood of certain outcomes. The outcomes can be predicted in relation to patterns, which, with the

help of such study can be attributed to certain variables.

For instance, alliances between conservationists and indigenous communities are more likely where indigenous peoples have legal authority over natural resources; where they have been allowed to live inside protected areas; where indigenous leaders have good accountability to their constituency; and where indigenous peoples initiated the relationship with conservationists rather than vice versa. In situations where the conditions are the opposite antagonisms are more likely to prevail. (386)

These three examples show that the friction metaphor has improved studies by providing at least three important vectors that allow for a balance between complex detail and meaningful reduction of data: 1) the shift from abstract to concrete; 2) the premise of dialectical, possibly uneven and developmental nature of interaction; 3) the filtering of complex data into patterns with relative explanatory force.

Of course, this suggested symbiotic existence between the friction metaphor, theory and method remains to be tested for Translation Studies, and not just in the context of the Frankfurt Book Fair. Like all metaphors, it has limits that will necessarily be revealed. My hope is that friction will make a modest contribution toward tapping the rich veins of innovative metaphors that signify a willingness to imagine and explore transformed conceptualisations of Translation Studies.

## Endnotes

[1] In 1978, for example, the topic was “Kind und Buch” (Child and Book), which was shortly after the UNESCO had declared 1979 to be the International Year of the Child. The Fair successfully positioned itself as the send-off for a worldwide initiative and debates about how different societies treated children (Thielmann 139f.).

[2] In 1999 up to 40% of the events were organised by the guestland (Niemeier 106).

[3] „Die Gründungsmitglieder [der Messe] beseelte der Gedanke einer Internationalität der Literatur ohne nationale Zensur, Freiheit der Meinungsbildung als Grundlage der Demokratie.“ Compare also “Eine Zensur findet nicht statt.” (1980) and “Zensur findet nicht statt.” (2009). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

[4] This is documented in detail by Seyer (175-180).

[5] „Da bei diesen Messen ja nicht nur mit kaufmännischen Waren gehandelt, sondern auch über die Inhalte vehement diskutiert wird, kann die Geschichte der Frankfurter Messe als ein Spiegelbild der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik und auch des europäischen und weltweiten Buchmarktes nachgezeichnet werden.“

[6] Moreover, that the last four of the ten essays explore the Fair’s focus topic/focus country aspect can be seen as indicator for the growing importance of the Fair’s event character.

[7] „Wirtschaftliche, kulturelle, politische und psychologische Interessen prägen den Messeverlauf, sie wird zum Instrument für die Erzeugung kollektiver Erfahrungen. Dies beeinflusst die wissenschaftliche Betrachtung der Buchmesse unweigerlich, denn nimmt man all dieses ernst, muß man die Messe anders untersuchen. Wir haben es mit einem komplexen System und einer persönlichen Erfahrung zu tun, also gehören auch die nichtrationalen Komponenten in den Blick. Umso wichtiger ist es, möglichst viele Perspektiven heranzuziehen, die helfen, das emotionale, nicht nur absatzorientierte Verhältnis zwischen Branche und Buchmesse besser zu verstehen.“

[8] In this connection Hofer and Messner (2010) point out that the status of the translator as invisible is continually reinforced because translators have to a large extent internalised the desire that translations should not be recognisable as such (43).

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## Image Notes

Fig 1 <http://derstandard.at/1348286004455/Ein-Elchtest-fuer-die-Gutenberggalaxis>

Fig 2 <http://www.thebigidea.co.nz/news/industry-news/2012/oct/122641-hobbits-take-over-at-frankfurt>

Fig 3 <http://www.cafedigital.de/2012/10/13/frankfurter-buchmesse-2012-%E2%80%93-der-tag-der-kiwis/>

Fig. 4 <http://medienarchiv.buchmesse.de/detail.html?assetId=34549&lang=en>

Fig. 5 From Tahir-Gürçağlar

Fig. 6 From Thomson-Wohlgemuth, Gabriele and Ian Thomson

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# FILMSTADT IN THE VORSTADT: LOCATIONALITY IN THE FILMMAKING PRACTICE OF MIHÁLY/ MICHAEL KERTÉSZ/ CURTIZ

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The article examines the largest and most monumental of the silent film epics produced in the Austrian republic: *Sodom und Gomorrha* (1922). In seeking out the film's shooting location, an abandoned site of clay pits and hilly grasslands at the southern edge of Vienna, the article explores what the site's history and current incarnation as part of a *Kurpark* reveal about the filmmaker's urban imaginary and the role of technology in modernizing it, and it establishes parallels between the early work he did under the name Michael Kertész and the later success of his cult classic *Casablanca*.

Cet article examine le plus monumental film muet produit dans la république d'Autriche: *Sodom und Gomorrha* (1922). Avec l'exploration du site de tournage du film, une enclave de grès et de friches à la frontière sud de Vienne, on examine comment l'histoire passée du site et son incarnation actuelle comme Kurpark révèlent l'imaginaire urbain du cinéaste et le rôle de la technologie dans sa participation à la modernité. On établit en outre certain parallèles entre les premiers films qu'il a réalisés sous le nom de Michael Kertész et le succès plus tardif de son film-culte *Casablanca*.

In Vienna in the aftermath of World War I, amidst an economic crisis that resulted in hyperinflation, mass unemployment, and political radicalization, silent film epics were produced of monumental scale with themes taken from history, the Old Testament and classical antiquity. One of the largest and most monumental of these films, and the most expensive film ever produced in Austria, was the 1922 *Sodom und Gomorrha* directed by Michael Kertész, as he was then called.[1] The film juxtaposes a contemporary story of seduction, sin and redemption with a biblical tale that could be mobilized for designing, constructing and spectacularly destroying lavish, art deco-inspired sets of gigantic proportion.

The film is spectacular in many regards, and not simply for its production values or the brilliant restorative work that the Filmarchiv Austria did to make 98 minutes of the original three hour long production available in 2002 (Nord). [2] As will be shown here, *Sodom und Gomorrha* not only substantiates claims like Loacker and Steiner's about film's suitability for creating and preserving images but also shows that even early film was able to interact with and affect the places it created and preserved images of.[3] *Sodom und Gomorrha* is an unsung touchstone in cinematic history that allows one to open up new perspectives on, and relations between, classics like *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Fritz Lang) and *Casablanca* (1942, dir. Michael Curtiz) if one is willing to make a small detour through the outskirts of Vienna to its main filming location, which is the path this article takes. In

resituating *Sodom und Gomorrha* in the place where it was made, this contribution taps into and reveals the film's emancipatory potential for a film historiography that is expanding to take in copies of long-lost films that have been resurfacing out of the archives of Eastern Europe.

It also adds to the scholarship on Curtiz, whose under-appreciation is underscored in the few biographical studies of him there are (cf. Portuges, Robertson) and by the title of the 2012 documentary, *Michael Curtiz: The Greatest Director You Never Heard Of*. When Curtiz's films receive attention, it is usually on account of their thematics, such as the nostalgia in *Casablanca* that interested Homi Bhabha and Umberto Eco, among others. Both Film Studies and Austrian Studies tend to be dismissive of Curtiz's accomplishments, and allusions and references to his work are often overlooked. To cite a recent example, in an article on Billy Wilder's Austrian connections, Robert Dassanovsky attributes the "true name of the helpless Belgian wife searching for her missing husband in Wilder's truncated Sherlock Holmes tribute," namely, Ilse von Hofmannsthal, to "the equally untrustworthy femme fatale (Marlene Dietrich) in *A Foreign Affair* (1948)" because that character "insists on the recognition of her nobility (the von in her name) in the very same manner" (Dassanovsky 5). Rather than referring to Erika von Schluetow, whom Wilder, like everyone else, would associate with Berlin, something at odds with the allusion to Vienna in the last name to

“Austria’s most anti-Prussian Viennese author (Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 1874–1929)” (6), a stronger case for a Viennese/Central European connection could be made by not ignoring but rather positing that Wilder was alluding to the heroine in Curtiz’s 1942 *Casablanca*, Ilsa Lund, and then referencing Curtiz’s career as I do here. In revealing Kertész/ Curtiz’s minoritarian proclivity for peripheral locations and the potentiality of technology, this article draws attention to hitherto underappreciated aspects that demonstrate the consistency and coherence of the filmmaker’s progressive oeuvre.

### ***Sodom und Gomorrha***

One of *Sodom und Gomorrha*’s many remarkable qualities is the complexity of its plot structure. It may begin conventionally enough with the archetypical story of a beautiful young girl (Miss Mary Conway, Figure 1), whose mother pressures her into renouncing the well-known sculptor she is in love with (Harry Lighton, Figure 2) in order to marry an evil capitalist (Mr. Harbers, Figure 3), who is old enough to be her father and has just caused the London Stock Exchange to crash to his benefit.

Two plot twists are then introduced. First, there is a flashback to the biblical city of Sodom, which is depicted as a parallel to contemporary hedonistic Vienna. This link is made explicit with the same actress who plays Mary playing Lot’s wife (both parts are played by Kertész’s then wife, Lucy Doraine) as well as in the intertitles that precede the shift to Sodom. When Mary catches sight of them building



Fig. 1 Mary Conway



Fig. 2 Harry Lighton



Fig. 3 Mr Harbers

her “Blutgerüst,” she throws herself at the priest, who replies: “You, daughter of Sodom! Even in your last moments you’re thinking only of your sinful body and not of freeing your soul?!” “Suffering world, you new Sodom and Gomorrah” “You are ripe for destruction!” “In your palaces orgies are held just as they were in Lot’s city...!” („Du Tochter Sodoms! Auch in Deinen letzten Augenblicken denkst Du nur an Deinen sündhaften Körper und nicht an die Befreiung Deiner Seele?!“ „Wehe Dir, elende Welt, Du neues Sodom und Gomorrha! Du bist reif, um vernichtet zu werden.“ „In Deinen Palästen feiert das Laster Orgien wie einstmals in der Stadt des Lot...!“).

In the second plot twist, just as Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt, we discover that a good part of Mary’s adventures before the flashback to Sodom has been a dream. She is shown waking up in terror and smiling when she recognizes that she is not in the jail cell she was taken to for inciting Mr Harber’s son Eduard to stab his father, but rather the bedroom of the palatial villa where her wild engagement party took place, at which Harry threatened to shoot himself and Mary then, in what turns out to have been a dream sequence, went about seducing both Eduard and his priest-guardian. When we return to Mary at the end of the film, she looks at a clock and declares that in the past half hour she has experienced a terrible tragedy (“In einer halben Stunden durchlebte ich eine fürchterliche Tragödie”), forcing the viewer to think back over the course of the film to determine the point at which the apparent reality of the filmic narrative had actually become a dream.

Also noteworthy is the film’s situating of Mary as a dreamer-protagonist, something that warrants a comparison with *Metropolis* (1927, dir. Fritz Lang). Andreas Huyssen has suggested that “it is precisely the doubling of Maria, the use of religious symbolism, the embodiment of technology in a woman-robot and Freder’s complex relationship to women and machines, sexuality and technology, which give us a key to [*Metropolis*]’ social and ideological imaginary” (66). *Sodom und Gomorrha* also features a doubling of the female protagonist, religious symbolism and a father-son rivalry; however, it is not about the son’s complex relationship to women, machines, sexuality and technology, but rather the woman’s complex relationship to men, technology, urbanity, and history. It is not a case of a female heart mediating in a Tower of Babel conflict between a clearly class-based male head and hands, but rather of a female soul trying to make her way through depraved surroundings and mediate between the waking dream of her phantasmagorical consumer-based existence and what her dream teaches her about her heart. There are not two Marys in *Sodom und Gomorrha* the way there are two Marias in *Metropolis*: one innocent, pristine and bucolic, the other a vampish machine that wreaks havoc and destruction on a city. Rather both Mary and Lot’s wife Sarah are vampish, lascivious temptresses, but their lasciviousness is not destructive, only self-destructive. Sodom is destroyed not by one woman’s desires but rather by the general mores of the place. In other words, it is not a fear of woman per se, but a woman’s fears that are the central

concern in Kertész's film, something with political implications. As Huyssen has shown, the fear of woman in *Metropolis* is also a fear of the masses:

*The fear of the masses in this age of declining liberalism is always also a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass. ... Male fears of an engulfing femininity are here projected onto the metropolitan masses, who did indeed represent a threat to the rational bourgeois order. The haunting specter of a loss of power combines with fear of losing one's fortified and stable ego boundaries, which represent the sine qua non of male psychology in that bourgeois order. (52-53)*

What then of female fears? By equating Mary and Lot's wife, *Sodom und Gomorrha* shows how women have been barred from accessing technologically driven progress. The only resource Mary has to mobilize is depicted as precisely the same as in the biblical tales: namely, her decidedly low-tech womanly charms. Kertész's film encourages one to conclude that the female lot in life, if one may be permitted to put it like that, has not improved over the millennia. Rather, it is up to women to learn from the bad dream that has historically been their reality and wake up and follow their hearts.

It is here that the film implicitly makes a neat leap. After all, if women are to learn from their dreams, then where better for them to turn than the dream factory of cinema? In staging an intricate example of pedagogy, Kertész can be seen to be

raising awareness of the potential of the new technology to motivate emancipatory dreams, something that is mirrored in his own production practice. Kertész obviously did not feel the need to depict either the unruly masses or technology as a threat the way the much more bourgeois Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou did. As Huyssen reminds us:

*The expressionist view emphasizes technology's oppressive and destructive potential and is clearly rooted in the experiences of the mechanized battlefields of World War I. During the 1920s and especially during the stabilization phase of the Weimar Republic this expressionist view was slowly replaced by the technology cult of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and its unbridled confidence in technical progress and social engineering. Both these views inform [*Metropolis*]. (67)*

Kertész, who had been born in Budapest in 1886 and would die in Los Angeles in 1962, seems to have sided more solidly with the latter view. His filmmaking practice shows him to have been aware of the powerful good that his medium of choice could do. His monumental films employed literally thousands at a time when unemployment in Vienna was rampant, as films like the Greta Garbo vehicle *Die freudlose Gasse/ Joyless Street* made a point of depicting by ostensibly setting the misère in Vienna (though the film was actually made in Berlin).

## Sodom und Gomorrha's Location

The site Kertész chose for the most spectacular sequences in his film also reflects the attention he paid to film's, and technology's, emancipatory potential. While previous films made for Sascha Films were shot either in the Prater or a studio in Sievering (Loacker 31), *Sodom und Gomorrha* required an uninhabited area with hills and ponds, upon which huge sets could be built and destroyed without inconveniencing surrounding dwellings. A suitable location was found in what has come to be called the "Filmstadt" [Figure 4] in honour of the films made there in the 1920s. The Filmstadt is part of the Kurpark Oberlaa [Figure 5 and 6], which is located on the Laaerberg in Favoriten, Vienna's tenth district and one of the most proletarian parts of its *Vorstadt* (the title of the standard work on the subject *Die Anarchie der Vorstadt: Das andere Wien um 1900* by Wolfgang Maderthaner and Lutz Musner has been translated into English as *Unruly Masses. The Other Side of Fin-de-Siecle Vienna*). [4] This other/outer part of Vienna has tended to be neglected, especially in Anglophone scholarship, as it is hard to square with, and can only detract from or call into question what has become known as the myth of "Vienna 1900," which is firmly located along the central Ringstrasse that Franz Joseph had built in the mid-nineteenth century around the city's first district to replace the city's premodern military defensive glacis, which is where Kertész's film starts. However, there is only an establishing shot of the centre, after which Kertész takes us to the



Fig. 4 Filmstadt



Fig. 5 Kurpark Oberlaa, #20 Filmstadt

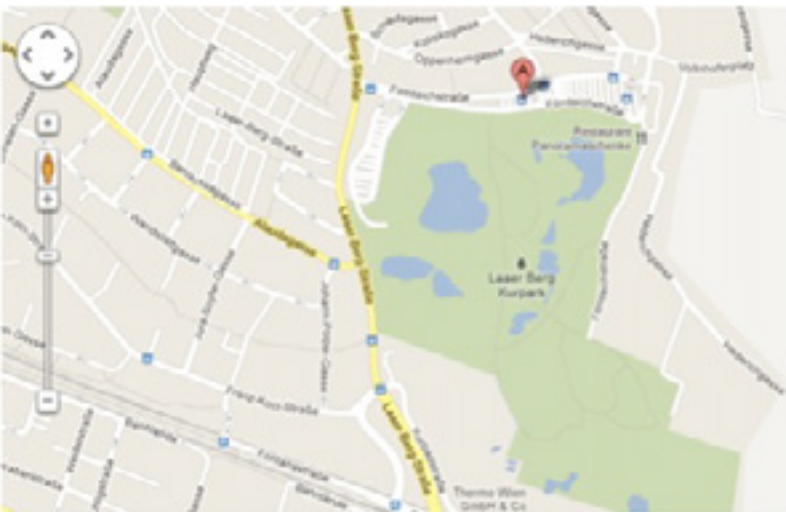


Fig. 6 Filmpark, Google maps  
Kertész's filming of *Sodom und Gomor*

city's monumental outskirts, which he transforms first into a pleasure garden and then into a city of literally biblical proportions.

Kertész's filming of *Sodom und Gomorrha* had a transformative effect on the Laaerberg. First, as Loacker details, infrastructure had to be provided: "paths were established, barracks for the carpenters and set builders had to be built as well as dressing rooms for the actors; even a separate telephone network was installed on the wide fields. For water provision and to create a further artificial lake, a thousand-meter long water pipe was laid into the dry area of the Laaerberg" (31). The site became popular for academic outings led by professors of art history and archeology, who took classes there to show them characteristic elements of the antique styles. The 64m tall temple of Astarte could be seen from a great distance and was very popular. Filming took almost a year, ending on 14 June 1922 (38), which lent the initial infrastructure a

more permanent quality, particularly when it was followed by further lengthy shoots, such as an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's *Der junge Medardus* (1923), *Die Sklavenkönigin/ Moon over Israel* (1925), and the outside scenes of *Salamambo* (Pierre Marodon, 1924).

This initial infrastructure encouraged neighbouring areas to be developed after the filming was over. The films were thus part of a larger movement that soon saw the development of humane housing and recreation areas for the rapidly expanding proletarian population in Vienna's *Vorstadt*. As Maderthaner and Musner detail, Favoriten



Fig. 7 Artificial pond on the Laaerberg, 1910

*was established in 1874 from the increasingly proletarianized parts of the third, fourth and fifth districts. Through the operation of land prices, an 'economy based on division of labor' had led 'under profit pressures' to 'a functional specialization of the urban space' as well as a 'marked social segregation of the population.' The steady expansion of development took place according to a strict pattern in which housing and industrial plots intermingled. On the edge of the Wienerberg and Laaerberg hills there thus grew up what was for Viennese standards a uniquely homogeneous and dynamically expanding quarter. Medium-sized plants in metalworking and machine-building in particular were built here, as well as the innovative and capital-intensive electrical industry, without breaking the prescribed block-grid system. (41)*

A direct product of industry, the area, “which mushroomed in open country in the wake of the railroad construction” (41), became “a virtual refuge for numerous families who had no other resources but their children, could not manage to exist in other parts of the city given the significantly higher rents and provision costs, and were pressed into the low-rent tenth district” (Lichtenberger, cited in Maderthaner and Musner 42, Figure 7).

According to former inhabitants interviewed by Robert Wegs, prior to WWII Favoriten comprised three distinct social and cultural areas:

*The eastern part of the district, overlooked by the Ankerbrotfabrik (which became the largest bread factory in the world in the 1920s), was described by most of those I interviewed as the poorest part of Favoriten in the pre-WWI period. Known as Kreta to most local inhabitants, it housed many of the unskilled workers employed by the Ankerbrotfabrik, the nearby South Railway Station (Südbahnhof), and the cable factory, Felten und Guilleaume. [26]... With few parks in the area, the children were forced to play in the narrow, dirty, and often dangerous streets. A 1912 report by Favoriten's city advisor complained about the rubbish and dust from the cable factory and rat-infested trash storage areas, which forced residents to keep their windows closed. (Wegs 25-26)*



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Because of the terrible housing shortage and the inadequacy of the existing housing on the city's periphery, "the Social-Democrat-controlled city council launched a major building program in the interwar period. They reduced rents to such levels that private investors were driven out of the market. ... But the SDAP was interested in more than merely providing housing for the poor. In their drive to create 'new people,' socialist leaders hoped to mould a new worker consciousness through a multitude of cooperative projects in the new housing projects, such as common kitchens, day-care centres, kindergartens, and numerous evening events" (Wegs 38). That is, the area around where Kertész was filming his monumental films was soon being

scouted out by city planners and architects such as Adolf Loos, who was responsible for encouraging the building of humane row houses which were equipped with gardens in the back so that vegetables could be passed conveniently into the new Frankfurt kitchens [Figures 8, 9].

Perhaps it was Kertész's status as an immigrant in Vienna that gave him greater insight into, and empathy with, the plight of the masses there and the role that industry, including the cultural industries, could play in improving their working and living conditions, and which, as history has established, were indeed reasonably effective.[5] Favoriten has remained predominantly ethnic and working class, but according to recent headlines, "Ausländermäßig funktioniert's!" (foreigner-wise, it works, Gučanin and Puktalović). Also noteworthy is the fact that, unlike Lang, Curtiz went to Hollywood on his own volition, in 1926, at the behest of Warner Bros, a move very much in keeping with an awareness of technology's ability to provide better life chances.

### **Curtiz's New World Film and its Location**

If we turn now to what has become Kertész's best-known work, the 1942 *Casablanca*, we find a pattern similar to the one in his earlier monumental film. Once again we have the story of a woman under great external pressure to play the temptress and use her feminine charms for the benefit of others. Again her loyalties and desires are divided, and it is left up to her to decide what the right thing to do is so that she doesn't regret it: "Maybe

not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life.”[6] And again access to technology proves not oppressive or destructive but rather enabling, indeed pivotal at the film’s climax, as the bulky plane provides the means of escape out of a doomed city.

The city in *Casablanca* is as interesting as the female lead in its parallels to *Sodom und Gomorrha*. Also a peripheral location, on the edge of the main theatres of WWII, it resembles Vienna/ Sodom in that it is depicted as under the control of a sinful, evil force, and it also features a metonymic den of iniquity. Consideration of Kertész’s earlier film thus implicitly situates Nazi-occupied Casablanca in a continuum that stretches back to include the worship of false idols in antiquity and the robber-baron capital crisis in the early twentieth century. If Alan K. Rode’s assessment is correct that “Inexplicably, no other director remotely possessing [Curtiz’s] credentials has been accorded less historical respect,”[7] the same claim can also be made of *Sodom und Gomorrha*, especially if one keeps in mind that *Metropolis*’s way of vilifying “active and destructive female sexuality” by pairing it with “the destructive potential of technology... is in no way unique to Lang’s film. Apart from... literary examples..., it can be found in numerous 19th-century allegorical representations of technology and industry as woman” (Huysen 77). Rather than the usual eruptions of nature into the heart of the metropolis in the form of wild animals or storms that then need to be tamed in order to restore bourgeois order, which one finds in, for example, *King Kong*,

Kertész’s films offer an emancipatory reversal: insertions of the technological into the wild nature on the metropolis’s periphery that open up lines of flight for those excluded from or trapped in the lower orders of oppressive hierarchies. That such a depiction is implicitly anti-national is underscored by Catherine Portuges, who describes *Casablanca* as “[t]he most international of productions, a film about anti-fascism, directed by a Hungarian, with a cast... most of whom speak accented English,” and the one who mostly notably does not, Humphrey Bogart’s Rick, when asked his nationality, responds “I’m a drunkard” (Portuges 166).

What I would like to underscore here in concluding is the potential that Kertész saw in outskirts and peripheries when one had access to adequate technological means to transform them. That is what he discovered upon arriving in both Vienna and Hollywood: that to approach the centre, one had to look to the edges, of cities as well as of regions and continents; that was where one could find the paths to the greatest success, at least that is where, as I hope to have established with this contribution, the paths to his greatest successes were located.

## Endnotes

[1] He was born Mihály Kaminer in Budapest in 1888 and worked there in theater and film as Mihály Kertész before fleeing in 1919 for Vienna (Portuges 161).

[2] The original version was 3,945 metres long, representing a running time of about 178 minutes (Wostry 163). The film was therefore generally shown in two parts: Part I: Die Sünde (“The Sin”) and Part II: Die Strafe (“The Punishment”). For details about what made the restoration of the film one of the most difficult cases in Austrian film history despite there being more material for it than for any other Austrian silent film (copies were found in archives in Moscow, Berlin, Prague, Bologna and Milan), see Wostry. “Although the whole film is not recovered, all four sequences have now been restored. The restored version has a running time of 98 minutes” (cf. the English Wikipedia entry).

[3] As Armin Loacker and Ines Steiner have shown, in these films the medium was really the message (11). In early monumental films, audiences encountered the founders of religion like Buddha, Moses and Jesus; historical heroes like Hannibal, Belsazar, Caesar, Mark Anthony, Nero, Spartacus, Alexander, Columbus, Danton, and Napoleon; legendary femmes fortes like Cleopatra, Judith, Esther, Kriemhild, Joan of Arc, Maria Stuart, Anne Boleyn; and femmes fatales like Salome, Delilah, the Queen of Saba, Lucrezia Borgia, and Mme. Dubarry (11). In contrast to film critics such as Kracauer, who dismissed early monumental film as problematic,

escapist, aesthetically questionable and “unfilmic” (12), the work in Loacker and Steiner’s *Imaginierte Antike* (Imagined Antiquity) shows that early film became not simply “the image repository of modernity” but rather “the primary medium in which this modernity preserved images of everything that had been” because it was suited to create “all possible, real and imaginary images in collective memory” (11).

[4]. I have left Vorstadt untranslated in order to highlight the specificity of the “before the city” aspect of the Viennese situation, which in the original German is in the singular. One could translate Vorstadt as “outer district,” but then the singularity of the original space would go lost. By the same token, it would be culturally misleading to call Favoriten a suburb.

[5] Portuges comments on “Curtiz’s multiple—and conflicted—identities as a Hungarian Jew, European intellectual, and Hollywood icon” and relates a wonderful anecdote about his “otherness as a foreigner” which has “Curtiz and Lagosi speaking Hungarian in a café in Los Angeles in the 1930s; their loud conversation purportedly prompted Billy Wilder to admonish them: ‘Enough Hungarian, boys! You’re in America, so you should talk in German’” (164).

[6] As Catherine Portuges points out, “A number of Curtiz’s films, such as *Mildred Pierce* (1945)... later an iconic text of feminist film theory—portray intelligent, resourceful and ambitious women, clever survivors who may be allowed to love more than one man at a time” (165).

[7] Something he details in his biography: “Curtiz directed more acclaimed movies in different styles and genres than any other film director. He directed over 170 feature films; a staggering output that outstrips the legendary John Ford and exceeds the combined careers of George Cukor, Victor Fleming and Howard Hawks. Nominated five times by the Motion Picture Academy as Best Director and winning for *Casablanca*, Curtiz helmed rousing adventures, westerns, musicals, spectacles, drama, comedies, horror, war, crime, mystery and film noir. His career shaped the earliest days of silent cinema in Europe as he acted, produced and directed scores of films in Budapest, Vienna and France before coming to Warner Brothers in 1926.”

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### Image Notes

Clip 1 Sodom und Gomorrha (Images @1922 Sascha-Film).

Clip 2 Sodom und Gomorrha (Images @1922 Sascha-Film).

Fig 1 "Mary Conway," Sodom und Gomorrha (Images @1922 Sascha-Film).

Fig 2 "Harry Lighton," Sodom und Gomorrha (Images @1922 Sascha-Film).

Fig 3 "Mr. Harbers," Sodom und Gomorrha (Images @1922 Sascha-Film).

Fig 4 "Filmstadt" (Photo: S. Ingram)

Fig 5 "Kurpark Oberlaa" (Photo: S. Ingram)

Fig 6 "Filmpark" Web. July 10, 2013 <<http://maps.google.com>>

Fig 7 "Artificial pond on the Laaerberg, 1910" (*Favoriten Album 1880-1930*. Eds. Helfried Seemann and Christian Lunzer. Vienna: REMAprint, 1992. n.p.).

Fig 8 "Laaerberg backyard" (Photo: S. Ingram)

Fig 9 "View out window" (Photo: S. Ingram)

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# HIGH- RISE ZHIVAGO

ELENA SIEMENS | UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

This paper discusses the Taganka Theatre's production of Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, staged in a remote Moscow suburb. Performed in a Soviet-built palace of culture, the show radically reinterprets *Zhivago*, transforming it from an intensely personal to a collective narrative. Drawing on a chapter from my book *Theatre in Passing: A Moscow Photo-Diary* (Intellect 2011), the paper refers to Marvin Carlson, who argues that theatre buildings and their locations greatly impact the overall meaning of a show. Citing evidence provided by cultural theorists, architectural critics, as well as authors and artists, I expand on my earlier discussion of suburbs – a fertile subject attracting a wealth of contradictory opinions. I illustrate my discussion with images of high-rises inspired by the avant-garde photographer Alexander Rodchenko, and pictures of soup cans and cases of Coca-Cola – my tribute to Andy Warhol, who, like Rodchenko, rejected the old in favour of the new. I conclude with a nostalgic shot of a single-family dwelling, reminiscent of the spaces depicted in Pasternak.

Cet article examine la production par le Théâtre Taganka de *Docteur Zhivago* de Boris Pasternak dans une maison de la culture en banlieue de Moscou. Marvin Carlson a proposé que les espaces performatifs jouent un rôle à part entière dans le sens global d'un spectacle. Suite à Carlson, je propose à mon tour qu'en étant montée dans une banlieue de Moscou, la production Taganka réinterprète radicalement *Docteur Zhivago*, le faisant passer d'un récit individualisé à un récit collectif. L'article interroge des représentations fragmentaires du Moscou historique, des banlieues construites sous les Soviétiques, en plus de points de vue sur l'habitabilité suburbaine empruntés à des théoriciens culturels, des architectes, et des auteurs. Le tout est illustré et appuyé par des photos de bâtiment suburbains inspirés de Alexander Rodchenko, ainsi que des photos de conserves Campbell et de caisses de Coca-Cola rendant hommage au travail de Andy Warhol. L'article se conclut avec l'image nostalgique d'une ancienne maison familiale, proche de l'esprit original de Boris Pasternak.

Riding the metro to the Meridian Culture Palace, I tried to keep an open mind. The show was staged by the Taganka's veteran director Yuri Lyubimov, who had produced many of this theatre's legendary Soviet-era productions. The journey was long, even by Moscow standards, and to make things worse I had nothing to read, making the trip even more tedious. The Meridian, which I found right next to the station, was exactly the kind of structure I imagined it to be: a giant concrete shoebox decorated with sculptural depictions of spacecrafts and cosmonauts. Directly in front of it was a large parking lot, where I photographed a girl walking a cat on a leash. A mass of residential high-rises was visible in the distance, and beyond that were more high-rises and a forest.

The show began with dancing and choir singing. The enormous stage was lit by blinding spotlights. This was not a promising start. *Doctor Zhivago* was prohibited in the Soviet Union, and people read it in smuggled copies. Most Russians were familiar only with the novel's selection of poems published during Khrushchev's thaw. "Winter Night," describing the clandestine meeting of Lara and Strelnikov, has a haunting refrain: "The Candle on the table burned, the candle burned" (Pasternak 488). This poem was made into a song which everyone sang at informal gatherings. I had hoped the show would be inspired by it as well. After the intermission, things remained the same – more group dancing, more choir singing. And more spotlights. I gathered my things and left, blaming director Yury Lyubimov, but



also myself for thinking that he could overcome the environment. No one could. When staged at a place like the Meridian, *Zhivago* inevitably acquires a completely different set of characteristics and becomes something other than *Zhivago*. Later on, I learned that Lyubimov's choice of the Meridian was not entirely deliberate; it had resulted at least in part from a fierce internal conflict at the Taganka Theatre and a territorial war that followed it.

Theatre buildings and their locations, Marvin Carlson argues in *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, "generate social and cultural meaning of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre experience" (2). Most researchers, Carlson laments, address "primarily (and often exclusively)" the written text, while leaving the space of performance virtually ignored (2). To counteract this approach, Carlson refers to Roland Barthes' essay "The Eiffel Tower," among other sources,



which identifies the meaning of various constituent parts, or zones, of Paris. Extending Barthes, Carlson points out that Parisian theatres “reflect these connotative divisions,” and that the Montmartre zone, for instance, which is associated with “pleasure,” contains mostly cabarets and music halls (1989: 12).

Similar “connotative divisions” can also be found in Moscow, as exemplified by the contrast between the Meridian Culture Palace and the historical Taganka Theatre. Taganka’s original building was constructed in 1911 and initially housed the Volcano Cinema, one of Moscow’s first movie houses. This old-fashioned building is representative of the cozy, pastel-coloured low-rises that populated Moscow before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Today the theatre is painted dark-red, and its façade is decorated with various Constructivist-inspired details. The theatre’s striking emblem, also displayed on the façade, is reminiscent of

Kazemir Malevich’s iconic painting *Black Square* (1913), recognized as a turning point in the history of art. Malevich received a less enthusiastic response in his native Russia during the age of Socialist Realism.

In the Soviet period, the Taganka staged prohibited material, such as Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, that gathered large crowds and antagonized the officials in charge of the Soviet arts. Its rebellious repertoire corresponded to the theatre’s location on Taganskaya Square, the former site of the infamous Taganskaya prison, founded in 1804. Following the prison’s demolition in 1958, the Soviet-built Taganskaya metro station became the square’s most prominent landmark. The Taganka Theatre’s imposing new building, adjacent to the theatre’s old stage, opened in 1980. With its arrival, the square has become a prominent theatrical destination – a transformation similar to that of Bastille Square in Paris. Once a site of the legendary Bastille prison, this square is now home to the enormous Opera Bastille.

The Taganka Theatre’s historical building is representative of the old Moscow described in Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. Riding to a Christmas gathering in the chapter “Christmas Party at the Sventitsky’s,” young Yury Zhivago admires the “ice-bound trees of the squares and streets” and the “lights shining through the frosted windows” (81). On Kamergersky Lane, he notices “that a candle had melted a patch in the icy crust on one of the windows” (81). He whispers to himself the beginning of his

yet unwritten poem “Winter Night” (81). Kamergersky Lane, with its old houses predating the 1917 Revolution, plays a key role in the novel. Both Yury Zhivago and Lara live here at different times, and it is here that both of them will die. In his room on Kamergersky, Zhivago feverishly writes his essays and poetry, addressing his beloved city. He acknowledges how “empty and dilapidated” Moscow has become following the “trials of the first few years of the revolution” (436). “But even in this condition,” he insists, “it is still a large modern city and cities are the only source of inspiration for a truly modern, contemporary art” (436).

In contrast to the Taganka Theatre, the Meridian Culture Palace is located near the remote Kaluzhskaya metro station – a residential suburb far removed from the historical centre of Moscow and populated by a mass of uniform high-rises, representative of the “new rationalist” architecture that originated in the 1960s. Inspired by the 1920s motto “the form is determined by the function,” the “new rationalism,” Andrei Ikonnikov writes in *Russian*

*Architecture of the Soviet Period*, subordinated form to “building technology” (327). He points out that the homogeneous architecture of the 1960s divided buildings into “functional types”; considerations of style came second and “depended on the purpose of the structure” (328). A characteristic example of these functional buildings, Ikonnikov continues, is a large cinema defined by the “austerely natural forms of exposed, undecorated constructions” with an

“emphatically straightforward” interior devoid of any superfluous decorations (285-86).

The “palaces of culture,” also built according to a standard design, exhibited similar characteristics. These multifunctional entertainment structures staged concerts and theatrical productions, as well as offering space for political gatherings. The Soviet architecture of the 1970s, Ikonnikov argues, still “failed to take on a more personal touch,” and the collectivism of the 1960s continued to rule (328). The homogeneity of Soviet-built suburbs received a humorous treatment in Eldar Ryazanov’s hit film *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath* (1975). The film includes an animated prologue, in which Soviet authorities veto any architectural innovations, and insisting instead on populating Moscow and the rest of the Soviet Union with uniform high-rises. The suburban Cheremushki neighbourhood, located one metro stop away from the Meridian, serves as the film’s Moscow location.

“Just a few minutes from my timeworn house, and I am surrounded by the derricks of a building estate without a past,” Henri Lefebvre writes in his well-known essay “Notes on the New Town” (148). According to Lefebvre, in the “old town” each house “has its own particular face,” and streets are “spontaneous and transitory” (148). The street, he explains, “is not simply there so that people can get from A to B, nor does it lay traps for them with lighting effects and displays of objects” (148-49). Conversely, the “new town,” with its uniform high-rises,

or the “machines for living in,” terrifies Lefebvre (149). He acknowledges that the new “blocks of flats look well planned and properly built,” as well as offering various modern conveniences (149). But can these blocks of flats, Lefebvre asks, “mediate between man and nature, between one man and another”? (150). “Streets and highways,” he warns, “are becoming more necessary, but their incessant, unchanging, ever-repeated traffic is turning them into wastelands” (151).

Sharing some of Lefebvre’s concerns, Douglas Coupland, the author of the seminal *Generations X*, writes in his book *City of Glass* dedicated to his hometown of Vancouver:

*A few years ago, I went to see a Hollywood thriller which was partly filmed in front of my father’s office building in North Vancouver. In the movie, North Vancouver was “Boulder, Colorado,” and throughout the movie Vancouver doubled as Seattle, Denver, New Orleans and a few other cities, none of them Vancouver. (6)*

Vancouver, Coupland continues, “can neatly morph into just about any other North American city save for those in the American Southwest, and possibly Miami” (7). This statement also applies to Edmonton, the capital of neighbouring Alberta, where I took my photographs for this paper. Edmonton’s downtown skyline, representative of a typical midsize western city, can “neatly morph” into a variety of towns in the American Northwest. Moreover, Edmonton’s residential high-rises, located downtown



and around the University of Alberta campus, resemble Moscow’s suburban apartment buildings. I also photographed rows of soup cans and cases of Coca-Cola at Edmonton’s chain grocery stores. With their repetitive geometrical patterns, those grocery displays reveal the same monotony to which Lefebvre objected in his discussion of the new town.

But the new and the uniform can also be celebrated and even revered, as demonstrated in Andy Warhol’s art – an inspiration behind my photographs of Edmonton’s supermarkets. “My ideal city,” Warhol declares, “would be completely new. *No antiques*. All the buildings would be new. Old buildings are unnatural spaces. Buildings should be built to last for a short time” (157).

Warhol urges city planners to construct new buildings “every fourteen years” (157). He explains: “The building and the tearing down would keep people busy, and the water wouldn’t be rusty from old pipes” (157). Warhol has also favoured “the good, plain American lunchroom

or even the good, plain American lunch counter” over fancy restaurants (159). He even hoped to start a chain of diners called *Andymats*. He states: “Everybody’s sense of beauty is different from everybody else’s” (71).

According to Warhol, “the most beautiful thing” in any city from Tokyo to Florence is a McDonald’s (71). Since the 1970s, when *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* first appeared in print, Moscow has acquired numerous McDonald’s restaurants, as well as western-style supermarkets offering Coca-Cola and Campbell’s Soup. Along with Peking, renamed Beijing, contemporary Moscow can now be added to Warhol’s list of “beautiful” cities. Discussing Coca-Cola’s contribution to America’s democracy, Warhol writes:

*What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drink Coke and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. (100-01)*

Like Warhol, the renowned early Russian avant-garde photographer Alexander Rodchenko advocates the advantages of living and creating art in a modern city. He denounces painting as old-fashioned and irrelevant: “Every modern cultured man must wage war against art, as against opium” (1988: 253). Instead, he champions photography, a truly revolutionary medium, and insists



on capturing such manifestations of modernity as “multistory buildings, specially erected factories, plants, etc., two- to-three-story-high windows, trams, automobiles, light and space advertisements, ocean liners, airplanes” (2005: 209). According to Rodchenko, the modern city has shifted “the customary psychology of visual perception,” and he urges his fellow photographers to take pictures from unexpected perspectives, corresponding to the changed environment (2005: 209).

Rodchenko’s photographs of Moscow’s high-rises from his *Balconies* series (1925) employ many of the unusual perspectives he advocates. Captured from a high-floor window, sometimes from the roof, or, alternatively, from the ground looking up, his striking shots reflect the exciting geometry of the modern city. The traditional centered point of view derived from painting, Rodchenko argues, fails to account for this, just as it fails to adequately record “the street with its rushing automobiles and scurrying pedestrians,” as seen from

a high-rise balcony, or a tram window (2005: 209). In “What the Eye Does Not See,” his associate Ossip Brik writes that in Rodchenko’s photographs “the familiar object (the house) suddenly turned into a never-before-seen structure, a fire escape became a monstrous object, balconies were transformed into a tower of exotic architecture” (90). Echoing Rodchenko, Brik insists that film and photography capture things “from unexpected viewpoints and in unusual configurations, and we must exploit this possibility” (90).

While serving as a fascinating subject of photography, Moscow’s uniform high-rises provide an incongruous setting for a production of Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. In his essay “On the Prose of the Poet Pasternak,” Roman Jakobson writes: “To belong to a compact collective group and to hold firmly to a particular direction are both repugnant to Pasternak, who is a passionate destroyer of customary affinities” (317). Narrating the story of the Bolshevik Revolution, *Zhivago* remains a private document – possibly the book’s greatest fault in the eyes of the Soviet state, and the reason for its prohibition in the Soviet Union. The poem “Explanation,” included at the end of the novel, describes Yury Zhivago’s “passion to break away” as his strongest “pull” (Pasternak 476). Further evidence of this “passion to break away” is found throughout the novel. Some of his associates at the Hospital of the Holy Cross in Moscow regard Zhivago as “dangerous”; other people, “who had gone further in their politics,” consider him “not Red enough”; in short, “he didn’t please anyone” (169). His view of the



revolution is equally nonconformist: “You might say that everyone has been through two revolutions – his own personal revolution as well as the general one” (136).

Performed at the Soviet-built Meridian, the intensely personal *Zhivago* was inevitably transformed into a collective narrative. With its persistent use of choir singing and group dancing, Lyubimov’s show, subtitled “a musical parable,” also contributed to this transformation. The music composed by Alfred Schnittke, Birgit Beumers writes in *Yury*

*Lyubimov at the Taganka Theatre*, “did not provide any solo musical scores, but offered choral music to accompany some of Pasternak’s poems” (268). “Some metaphors from the novel,” Beumers points out, “were transformed into theatrical images for the production”; among these was a candle, which in one scene “was carried in on a spade” (268). She adds that the show “was commissioned by a Western producer for the Vienna Festival,” and originally

premiered in Vienna in 1993 (266). According to Beumers's largely favourable account, the Taganka's production did not "aim at a rendering of the events of the novel"; instead, it raised a more general question: "But who are we, and where do we come from?" (274).

While appealing to the Western spectator, the show demonstrated less sensitivity to the domestic audience. "Mise-en-scene does not have to be faithful to a dramatic text," Patrice Pavis argues in his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (26). He asks: "If producing a faithful mise-en-scene means repeating, or believing one can repeat, by theatrical means what the text has already said, what would be the point of mise-en-scene?" (27). In Pavis' opinion, "the undeniable relationship between text and performance" must take the form of a "transfer or a confrontation of the fictional universe structured by the text and the fictional universe produced by the stage" (28). This is a convincing argument, particularly when applied to the adaptations of well-known works of literature, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, both staged victoriously at the Taganka Theatre. With Pasternak's novel, which many Russians were only discovering when the show first premiered in the early 1990s, the theatre's defamiliarized approach produced a less satisfying result. Sometimes, a more "faithful" mise-en-scene is the better route to take: to be able to read, you first must learn the alphabet.

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### Image Notes

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# IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC: SITUATING NOSTALGIA FOR TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND THE OCCULT IN GUY RITCHIE'S SHERLOCK HOLMES

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Guy Ritchie's recent blockbuster success with a revisionist Sherlock Holmes is the latest in a series of popular films and fiction to have reinvigorated a nostalgic imaginary of London's past that places the former capital of the Empire at the crossroads of a persistent Manichean battle between empiricist-driven technological progress and traditions of occult knowledge supposedly submerged in the 17th century yet continuing to trickle into the heart of the Empire from its colonies. By tracing some of these historical layers sedimented into 21st-century popular imaginaries of London's past, this paper explores the mechanisms of popular culture's production of nostalgia that mediate public memories and histories and suture them to the imaginary urban geographies that constitute the space of the global city through its metonymic sites and its materialized histories.

Le succès récent du blockbuster de Guy Ritchie revisitant la figure de Sherlock Holmes s'inscrit dans une lignée récente de films et de récits populaires qui ont revivifié un imaginaire nostalgique du passé londonien dans lequel le centre de l'ancien empire britannique se trouve au croisement d'un conflit manichéen entre un progrès scientifico-technologique et les traditions d'un savoir occulte supposément enfouis dans les siècles précédents mais qui continue à s'insinuer au cœur de l'empire à partir de ses colonies. En retraçant certaines de ces couches historiques dans les créations contemporaines du Londres impérial, cet article explore les mécanismes de production de la nostalgie dans la culture populaire en tant qu'ils font le pont entre la mémoire publique et la mémoire historique en rattachant celles-ci à un imaginaire de la géographie urbaine qui pour sa part pointe vers la ville globale d'aujourd'hui.

In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century competition between global cities to establish themselves as central, London has emerged as a clear front-runner. London has been cementing its position, asserted since the opening up of its stock market in 1986, not only by economic and political decisions but also through a slew of representational practices, most recently through the global media spectacle of the opening of the 2012 Olympic games (Reisenleitner 2014). The very contemporary imaginary of London's centrality to a global system of urban nodes has routinely been buttressed by a particular vision of empire, an almost desperate attempt to create (or re-create) the collections and constellations of collective memories that would otherwise be rapidly obliterated in the constant need to assert global-city status through "nowness," creative destruction and innovation. Mediated memory of empire has been mobilized to provide an imagined historical context for the single-minded "branding" campaigns of ad agencies, global media spectacles and similar vehicles powered by the engine of global market fundamentalism, a hegemonic practice that imposes stability and homogeneity on a space (the urban) that, as Steve Pile reminds us, "... cannot be thought of as having one geography and one history" (Pile, Brook, and Mooney vii).

In this article, I explore some of the historical layers sedimented into 21<sup>st</sup>-century popular imaginaries of London's past. I am specifically interested in a persistent dichotomy of technology vs. occult knowledge that seems to be intimately connected to the persisting

imaginary of London as a global city. I argue that this imaginary has become the basis of a nostalgia for the British Empire, one that mediates public memories and histories and sutures them to the imaginary urban geographies that constitute the space of the global city through its metonymic sites and its materialized histories. I will explore how cinematic techniques, specifically the possibilities of computer-generated images, negotiate the visual memories of London as a centre of empire in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009). Placing the movie in its genre context and exploring the layered histories that inform the film's take on the urban detective can reveal the constitutive elements that challenge and inform the imaginary of London's centrality in contemporary Hollywood-mediated popular culture.

### **Policing the Imperial Centre**

The emergence of popular culture produced for a mass audience coincides with the emergence of the modern city during the nineteenth century. European and North American popular culture developed in constant dialogue with the profoundly unsettling experiences of modernity, imperialism, and globalization. The upheavals that accompanied urbanization resulted in new ways of seeing the city as opaque and potentially dangerous; an alleged illegibility of the city and the urban masses translated into popular fiction as crime and threat associated with the city streets and translated into the architectural forms of gated communities, ubiquitous surveillance,

defensible architecture, and all the other accoutrements of a city of fear that Mike Davis so masterfully conjures up in *City of Quartz* (Davis 1990). “Modern” ways of seeing the city, and acting upon the city, arose with the nineteenth-century city of industrialism and its immiserated working class and resulted in the city being seen as a “problem” (similar to the emergence of the “environment” as a problem in the later twentieth century). The necessity of rendering this problematic city—the site of crime and illness (often expressed through body metaphors)—administrable is predicated on the visibility of the city as an object. While urban planners and reformers were busy re-imagining the city as a cleansed, controlled and sanitized machine for living (Corbusier), working, traffic flow, and commerce, the fear of the irruption of the uncanny into city spaces that defy planning and description has continued to speak to the presence of an elusive other—often a colonial other—in the Western metropolis. Popular genres like detective fiction and film noir have created topographies of modern urbanity in which monstrous spaces, characterized equally by the danger and lure they pose for the metropolis, threaten an assumed movement towards a well-ordered urban rationality, establishing (at least Western) urbanity as a structure metaphorically and literally built on the (post-)imperialist paranoia about the presence/return of the alien and asserting a desire to establish control over fundamentally unstable spaces—precisely the kind of control that also resulted in the disciplining narratives of urban surveillance, statistics and reform. Eugène

Sue’s histories in the *Mysteries of Paris* are as responsible for Baron Haussmann’s reimagining (and redrawing) of Paris as John Fante (*Ask the Dust; Dreams from Bunker Hill*) was for Los Angeles’s “Bunker Hill Renewal Project”—even Los Angeles was, in Orson Welles’s words, “[i]n the beginning [...] simply a ‘bright, guilty place’ without a murderous shadow or mean street in sight” (Davis 2001, 33). Anthony Vidler draws our attention to the historical roots of sensitivities that have become commonplaces in contemporary popular culture:

*The contemporary sensibility that sees the uncanny erupt in empty parking lots around abandoned or run-down shopping malls, in the screened trompe d’oeil of simulated space, in, that is, the wasted margins and surface appearances of post-industrial culture, this sensibility has its roots and draws its commonplaces from a long but essentially modern tradition. Its apparently benign and utterly ordinary loci, its domestic and slightly tawdry settings, its ready exploitation of an already jaded public, all mark it out clearly as the heir to a feeling of unease first identified in the late eighteenth century. (Vidler 3)*

This feeling of unease and threat that accompanied the emergence of the modern city, and its symbolic resolution through the re-establishment and imposition of a rational order, is epitomized by the emergence of the figure of the urban detective, arguably the most important figure in the history of urban perception. Like the flâneur—detached, interested, fascinated, trying to make sense of the city but with what Simmel

described as a blasé attitude (14)—the detective has become a privileged site of Western urban perception, the solitary (often staunchly middle-class) male figure entitled to move through the metropolitan maze of illegible, violent and dangerous crowds to decipher what needs deciphering in order to tame, appropriate and control. Tony Bennett, drawing on Benjamin, reminds us that “the development of a position of imaginative spectatorial dominance afforded by detective fiction was accompanied by, and corresponded to, the development of new mechanisms of surveillance which—precisely through their bureaucratic reduction of individuality to a set of knowable traces—rendered the city legible to the gaze of power” (215). The urban detective’s way of acting on the city is informed by the superior insight afforded by the rationality that distinguishes him from the urban crowd while also legitimating his exerting violence on the city and its less desirable elements. The urban detective has come to stand for the urban planner and the bulldozer conflated into one, ultimately containing the unruly cityscape (and the unruly crowd moving through it) by exerting some form of visual/semiotic control. Detective fiction has come to function as a

*fantasy of a spectatorial subjectivity capable of establishing epistemological and aesthetic control over an environment commonly perceived to be threatening and opaque. By reducing the city to a legible model or emblem of itself, and by demonstrating his control over its production, such a subjectivity assumes a paternalistic or heroic role in relation to an urban literary audience. (214)*

Detective fiction as “representational forms of solutions to the problems of social control in a dynamic capitalist urban milieu” (Frisby 58) draws attention to the fact that the meaning of a city is produced as a site of social negotiations (which are not private but collective, situated practices), “an imaginary space created and animated as much by the urban representations to be found in novels, films and images as by any actual urban places” (Donald x).

Sherlock Holmes, together with Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin, is the archetypal detective of the Western metropolis, on mission after mission to uphold the city’s rational order, moving through the metropolitan maze of illegible, violent, dangerous and exotic crowds, rationally deciphering what is illegible in order to establish a “rational” form of order and control, often violently and through superior physical prowess. Holmes has recently been resurrected in a variety of fiction, film and TV adaptations that highlight London’s presence on the global media stage. Guy Ritchie’s 2009 and 2011 blockbuster successes (*Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes, a Game of Shadows*) with a revisionist Sherlock Holmes as a down & dirty Iron Man-like action hero in what set out to become, according to producer Joel Silver, “an 1891 Bond film” (a sentiment that highlights the connection of the two major popular culture heroes to the violence of empire), are major contributions to a series of popular movies and fiction to have reinvigorated a nostalgic imaginary of London’s past.

The plot of *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) revolves around the eponymous detective, played by a somewhat seedy but super-fit Robert Downey Jr, and his stalwart sidekick Watson, played by Jude Law, who prevent the megalomaniac sorcerer and magician Lord Blackwood (Mark Strong) from blowing up Parliament and reclaiming and recolonizing America for the British Empire. They are joined by the feisty Irene Adler (Rachel McAdams), remembered by Holmes fans from Arthur Conan Doyle's first short story, the 1891 "A Scandal in Bohemia," as the only woman able to outsmart Holmes. Together they pursue the evil mastermind in a ride that involves numerous action- and fight scenes in paradigmatic London locations such as Baker Street, the Embankment, the shipyards of the East End's docklands, the sewers, and, in the climactic finale, on a Tower Bridge under construction—a half-finished symbol of the Empire's technological prowess that connects the proletarian outskirts of the river's southern bank to the metropolitan centre but also literally controls the flow of ship traffic (by raising the bridge) from and to its colonies around the world.

Guy Ritchie's knowing update of the Baker Street sleuth inserts itself into the generic conventions of more than one and a half centuries of detective stories. Robert Downey's character might be more physical than previous versions (enjoying, not unlike the film's director and lead, the occasional drunken brawl in an Irish pub)—something Ritchie has justified including in his film by pointing to the original stories, in which Holmes is often depicted boxing, sprinting, and

disguising himself on chases. However, the lineage is very clear. Packaged into Downey's character are not only Doyle's and Sax Rohmer's detectives but also Poe's "Man of the Crowd" and Baudelaire's flâneur—he is a dandy, a ragpicker, and a sloppy Bohemian. Ritchie's protagonist knows his city—the London of 1891—so well that there is literally no pulling the wool over his eyes: when taken blindfolded to the Temple of the Four Orders, an occult-dabbling secret society headed by a prominent Lord, he "was admittedly lost for a moment between Charing Cross and Holborn, but was saved by the breadshop on Saffron Hill, the only baker to use a certain French glaze on their loaves, a Brittany sage. After that carriage fork left and right ..."

Local knowledge and easy movement through every social layer of the city—including its underground, the sewers—make it possible for him to keep at bay the forces that threaten the metropole's rational social order. Following generic conventions, the material city is presented as a semiotic reservoir to be deciphered. Clues are spread throughout the urban landscape, and solving this puzzle through powers of intellect is the detective's forte, but he is also in perfect command of all the other institutions of modernity, particularly those of movement:

*The deep anxiety of an expanding society: the fear that development might liberate centrifugal energies and thus make effective social control impossible. This problem emerges fully in the metropolis, where anonymity—that is, impunity—potentially reigns and which is rapidly becoming a tangled and inaccessible*

*hiding place. We have seen detective fiction's answer to the first problem: the guilty party can never hide in the crowd. His tracks betray him as an individual, and therefore a vulnerable, being. But detective fiction also offers reassurance on the second point. All Holmes's investigations are accompanied and supported by the new and perfect mechanisms of transportation and communication. Carriages, trains, letters, telegrams, in Conan Doyle's world, are all crucial and always live up to expectations. They are the tacit and indispensable support of the arrest. Society expands and becomes more complicated: but it also creates a framework of control, a network of relationships, that holds it more firmly together than ever before. (Frisby 58)*

In the detective genre, command and control of modern technology are equated with mastery of the urban. This is how crimes are solved, and order re-established.

### **Hermetic Historicities**

The resolution of threats to the urban more often than not involves exorcizing (violently and physically) the threat of a colonial "other." However, while a Chinese villain does make an appearance in a fight scene—a clear reference to Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu—the threat posed by evil mastermind Lord Blackwood and his esoteric cult do not fit neatly into the pattern of threats to the colonial centre described above. With his vaguely foreign looks and sounds and references to old Egyptian and Cabalistic teachings, Blackwood might be read as an orientalized representative of a colonial outside threatening the imperial

centre, but this would disregard his being positioned very clearly within an English tradition of occultism. The figure of Lord Blackwood is recognizably modeled after the influential and controversial English occultist and magician Aleister Crowley (1875–1947),



Fig. 1 Aleister Crowley



Fig. 2 Lord Blackwell

who was involved in a number of early twentieth-century hermetic and esoteric groups not too dissimilar from Ritchie's fictional "Temple of the Four Orders" (see Pasi). While some of this occult practice is presented as being of oriental origin, it is all really a quite silly mixture of elements from the Christian, Jewish and Egyptian traditions, in other words: a merry gumbo of "Western Civilization"'s past that has, mysteriously, left its obscure traces in the material shape of the city. Holmes manages to make sense of this past, and prevent catastrophe, by mapping this "ancient" knowledge—manifested in London's urban morphology.

Uncovering some past secret is, of course, nothing unusual for detective fiction. What is, however, surprising in these twenty-first century recuperations of the historical is that in addition to predictably hearkening back to the modernist strands of the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century that gave rise to a genre linking technological rationality and empire, current manifestations of the historical in popular culture seem to throw into relief what is perceived as an almost Manichean struggle between empiricist-driven technological progress and traditions of occult knowledge supposedly submerged in the seventeenth century.

What obviously springs to mind in this otherwise mind-boggling denouement of an ancient conspiracy manifesting itself in the heart of empire is Dan Brown's mega-hyped *Da Vinci Code* and the previously written (2000), although only recently filmed (2008) *Angels and Demons*. Like Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes, the *Da*

*Vinci Code*'s symbologist professor-detective Robert Langdon deciphers historical symbols to reveal ancient mysteries passed on through medieval and Renaissance channels of conspiracies and physically preserved in the cities' material environments, breathlessly connecting dots on the maps of Paris, Rome and London in order to uncover Gnostic traditions preserved in secret societies. For Dan Brown, the historical city also provides the crucial clue for unraveling the ancient mystery. Much like Sherlock Holmes's deductions or Dupin's ratiocinations, the instruments of the professor's intellectual toolbox reveal "correct" interpretations of those clues that ultimately lead to modernist rational closure—in Brown's case, a deep structure of an alternative narrative of Christianity, and thus European civilization, that does away with the contingency and multifacetedness of history's relics and assigns, literally, the right "place" to historical manifestations. Dan Brown's story similarly follows the well-established generic metaphor of the city as a historically layered enigma whose underlying deep structure—the historical narrative that manifests itself in highly visible material symbol carriers—needs to be deciphered by the expert. The plot of *The Da Vinci Code* is structured as a treasure hunt, with clues hidden in well-known art works and tourist sites. The structure hidden behind all the superficially confusing manifestations of history is conveniently provided by the heavy hand of the Catholic Church—the most persistent, organized and powerful Euro-global institution in the history of the West and arguably the originary

motor for the establishment of global domination and empire, represented in Brown's novel by its more recent hardliner manifestation, the Opus Dei (established in 1928), and its equally monolithic "other," the secret society that preserved the hidden knowledge of the "sacred female."

The metonymic London locations that Dan Brown chooses for resolving the contradictions between science and religion, such as Westminster Abbey, provide closure in ways vaguely similar to Dame Francis Yates' historical trajectory of Elizabethan and seventeenth-century London's role as a funnel for articulations of empiricism and occult knowledge culminating in both open and submerged agendas of the Royal Society (Yates 1964, 1972, 1979). According to Yates, the Renaissance marriage of magic and science, which was based on Cabalistic and Hermetic teachings imported from Italy, epitomized by the magician Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and which thrived during the formation of the British imperialist tradition during Queen Elizabeth's I. reign, was submerged by the institutions of modern science, yet continued to inform knowledge production in the imperial centre. Condensing this tradition into the role of Isaac Newton, Brown efficiently mobilizes the reverberations of new-age inspired historical narratives that pick up on hypotheses of occult, supposedly ancient knowledge's lineages having been preserved by secret societies. The persistence of history ultimately guarantees meaning and reveals its overdetermined and wildly psychoanalytic

origin: the tomb of Mary Magdalene beneath the Louvre. Brown's narrative thus operates much like a tourist map: once properly unfolded (and only a select few have access to this particular gift), everything falls into place. The detective unfolds the bizarre traces of history in the material urban environment into a linear (albeit implausible and preposterous) narrative.

*Sherlock Holmes* in Guy Ritchie's interpretation is very much part of the same tradition, but takes as its focus the struggle against and submersion of ancient occult knowledge during the Industrial Revolution. The occult knowledge that threatens the metropole here is presented as already having been part of the Rule Britannia lineage, and consequently the evil master plan is not an overthrow of the British Empire through some foreign (previously often vaguely oriental) enemy (as would have been mandated by generic tradition), but rather the re-creation of an authoritarian-imperial tradition that includes the United States, precisely by mobilizing the submerged occult. "It looks like he was attempting to combine occult practice with scientific formula," states Holmes when he finally figures out Blackwood's intentions, but "there was never any magic, only conjuring tricks." Ultimately, it is technological rationality that has the last say. The occult only consists of recycling earlier scientific knowledge, such as an "ancient Egyptian recipe" for untraceable poisons. In the final climactic fight sequence, Blackwood is not killed by Holmes but by the half-finished Tower Bridge itself: technological symbol of

the city's connection to the global traffic rationalization of empire.

What Guy Ritchie is picking up on here is the well-known Victorian penchant for the occult and the paranormal—after all, Arthur Conan Doyle was a well-known spiritualist. In an exclusively Blu-ray special feature Guy Ritchie takes us through the movie like a budding film professor, explaining that “the intersection of this particular time of science and superstition... is what this era is about.” While this commentary seems to be stating the obvious, the filmic recuperation of this history also involves reclaiming the East End and other places in London through representations of the occult, a way to layer and deepen the histories of many sites in London. Indeed, Ritchie's attention to sites is meticulous, with a heavy emphasis on the “authenticity” of the recreation of 1891 London. This creation of historical authenticity necessitated shooting at non-London sites such as the docklands of Manchester, not yet gentrified into a Canary-Wharf like corporate Yuppie-Town, and numerous digital effects—in other words, a cinematographic toolkit better suited to (re-)create urban history than the irrevocably altered material city. It is the role of the digital in filmmaking that reclaims certain histories that I would like to turn my attention to next.

### **Role of the Visual-Digital**

The visual design of *Sherlock Holmes* is meant to painstakingly recreate the London of 1891, clearly along visual lines of representation that take their cues from Sidney Edward Paget's

illustrations of Conan Doyle's stories for the *Strand* magazine. Ritchie is therefore bypassing a long tradition of cinematic versions of Sherlock Holmes that have created very different, cross-referenced imaginaries of turn-of-the-century London. The Sherlock Holmes film coming closest to Guy Ritchie's urban imaginary is a Steven Spielberg production of 1985, *Young Sherlock Holmes*, which also features an esoteric underground cult supposedly originating in Egypt, and notable mostly for its computer-generated effects, including the first fully computer-generated character: a knight in a stained glass window, created by Lucasfilm's John Lasseter, of *Toy Story* (1995) fame.

Digital technologies in film-making have clearly come a long way since 1985, giving filmmakers the means to generate images and sounds of the past that are infinitely malleable and able to eschew the archival and material traces of the moment of film-making, while at the same time making it possible to create pasts remembered through a lineage of images. Films such as *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004, d. Kerry Conran) and *King Kong* (2005, d. Peter Jackson) were shot entirely against blue/green screen on sound stages in an attempt to visually recreate pasts through their mediations by cinematic images (see Reisenleitner 2012). Guy Ritchie's film, however, while obviously using compositing techniques and digital special effects technology liberally for his streetscapes, fight scenes, explosions, etc., very deliberately includes “real places,” location shots which were digitally

enhanced but still meant to produce a form of “authenticity” supposedly denied to the purely digital. While the recreation of the Docklands was actually filmed in Manchester and Liverpool, Ritchie seems eager precisely not to eschew the material traces of the urban histories of the imperial centre into which his narrative inserts itself. The material remnants, the ruins of an empire driven by mechanization and an industrialist rationality, make their way into shots of a huge shipyard and a mechanized slaughterhouse in the Docklands; the centre of British rule—Parliament—is metonymically presented by Manchester Town Hall; and the occultist heritage is present in a shot of Covent Garden’s Freemason’s Hall. The scenes most reliant on CGI are the panoramic views from Tower Bridge under construction during the final showdown, when the visual referents shift from recreating historically accurate contexts of still existing places through CGI to a visuality more reminiscent of Gustave Doré’s and Paget’s illustrations.

### Conclusion

Andrew Ross reminds us that it is not only space but also time that has become fluid in techno-simulation (132). It seems to me that the centrality of digital production methods in Ritchie’s film is predicated precisely on this aspect of the fluidity of time, its nexus to the materiality of the physical, specifically urban environment, and a desire to render the memory images of the potentialities of the past, whose material traces have been erased by natural and man-made disasters. Like the computer-generated fractal

weather maps and other CG-generated special effects through which movies like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004, d. Roland Emmerich) have envisioned the weather, a system as unimaginably complex as the past, and with similar effects on material environments, digitally modified images re-constitute historicities that have, precisely because they have become disconnected from materiality, transcended experiential thresholds. Digital simulation, because it is infinitely malleable, visualizes an approach to the past in which “chronological topographies replace constructed geographical space, where immaterial electronic broadcast missions decompose and eradicate a sense of place” and allow us to come to terms with the disconcerting consequences of what Abbas (personal communication) describes as the “urban double-take,” the sensation that when you look again, the complexity of the system has already changed your perception, so the only thing you can see is the pre-conceived cliché—nostalgia—as the only, albeit alternate, chronology possible. Digital cinematography seems to manage to capture the oneiric quality necessary to imagine (urban) pasts in their global connectivity and multi-layered temporal synchronicity, the *mise-en-scène* of past possibilities for the future.

The Tower Bridge sequence captures the oneiric quality of the Empire through what was one of its most prominent structures. It becomes Ritchie’s symbol of a London at the heart of a British-ruled world of technological progress from which the esoteric is (repeatedly) purged. But it is also a fragile, half-finished

structure, and clearly a nostalgic, visually mediated memory of an empire that never was. The surviving material city that Ritchie takes great effort to include in his film does not seem to allow for the compositing out of powerful challenges to the (Western) forces of rationality in the same way, and we are left expecting the unavoidable sequel, which hit cinemas during a holiday that is surely one of Western Civilization's most powerful reminders of its pagan past: Christmas (2011).

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### Image Notes

Fig. 1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aleister\\_Crowley,\\_wickedest\\_man\\_in\\_the\\_world.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aleister_Crowley,_wickedest_man_in_the_world.jpg)

Fig. 2 Screenshot from *Sherlock Holmes* Clips 1 & 2 From *Sherlock Holmes*

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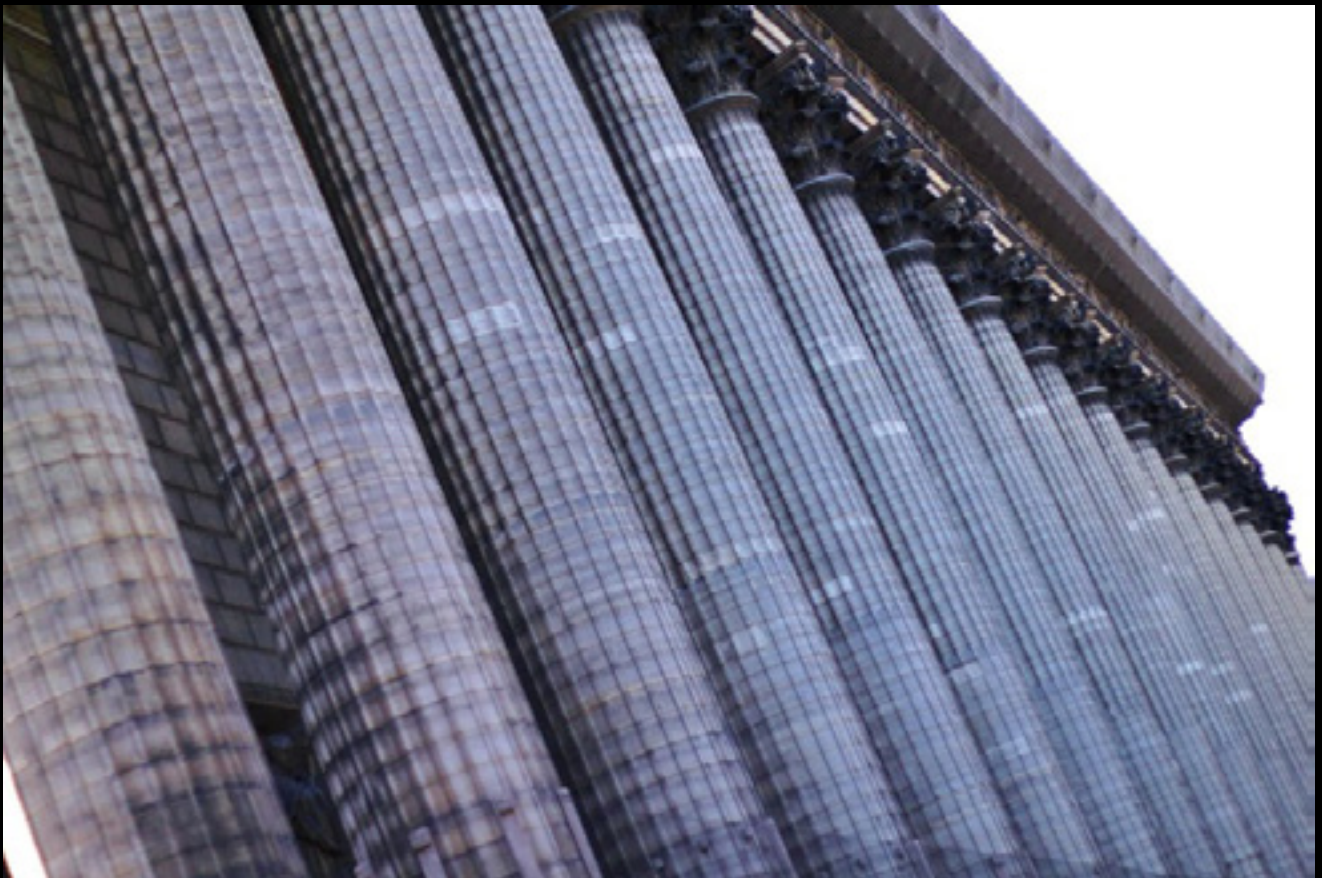


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# LES ESPACES URBAINS, LA VIE QUOTIDIENNE, ET L'OEIL DE L'HISTOIRE

ENTREVUE AVEC KATRINA SARK

**Katrina Sark** est candidate au doctorat au *Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* de l'Université McGill. Elle se spécialise en analyse culturelle et en études urbaines. Katrina est la co-auteure de *Berliner Chic: A Locational History of Berlin Fashion* (avec Susan Ingram), et a participé au travail de recherche pour le livre *Wiener Chic*. Ses photos ont paru dans *Inquire: Journal of Comparative Literature* (2010), *Berliner Chic* (2011), *World Film Locations: Berlin* (2012), ainsi que sur son blog: <http://suitesculturelles.wordpress.com/>. Elle habite à Montréal.

**Martin Parrot** est documentariste, étudiant au doctorat en *Humanities* à York University, et blogueur/critique culturel pour [monlimoilou.com](http://monlimoilou.com).

J'ai interviewé Katrina Sark, artiste et chercheure en études culturelles, à l'*Arts Café* à Montréal, le 28 novembre 2012. Nous avons discuté de Montréal et de sa psychogéographie, de la photographie, des lieux familiers, de l'exil et de la vie quotidienne.

**MP:** Tu es à la fois photographe et chercheure. Y a-t-il des chevauchements entre tes œuvres d'un côté, et tes travaux de l'autre? Est-ce que tes travaux influencent ta posture, ton approche?



**KS:** Pour tout dire, ceci est nouveau pour moi. D'habitude je suis celle qui se trouve à ta place, celle qui interview des designers, des réalisateurs et des auteurs afin de documenter et d'analyser la production culturelle de la mode, du cinéma, de la photographie, de l'art, de l'architecture, etc. En tant qu'universitaire, ce sont les casse-têtes avec lesquels je travaille; je les analyse, je cartographie leurs continuités et discontinuités, les tendances, etc. Je les questionne en lien avec la culture d'une ville. Dans mes recherches, ce sont particulièrement les cultures de Berlin et de Vienne qui m'intéressent. C'est un peu un travail de détective, un peu un travail analytique, mais c'est aussi un travail interprétatif très amusant. Être une artiste –être en quelque

sorte de l'autre côté— est nouveau pour moi.

**MP:** Tu compares la culture visuelle à un casse-tête. Sachant que des gens verront ta photographie, cette idée (celle du casse-tête) a-t-elle une influence sur ta pratique photographique? Travailles-tu en fonction d'un certain public?

**KS:** J'approche les choses différemment avec une caméra en main. En photo, je tente de capturer un paysage, un lieu, un élément culturel, etc. ; je produis une image, et non un texte ou un casse-tête. L'acte d'interprétation est une image. Cela dit, que ce soit en tant que photographe, ou en tant que chercheuse, je suis toujours en quête d'une certaine compréhension de ce qu'est un trait de culture spécifique. C'est en ce sens que mes deux activités sont liées, malgré leurs titres qui diffèrent. Comme tu peux le voir, je négocie sans cesse entre ces deux pans de mon travail.

**MP:** Travaillant ainsi avec des images, tu ne communique pas comme une universitaire. Et le public n'est pas le même. Est-ce que je me trompe? Tu as deux blogues, *Suites Culturelles* et *Les Carabinières*. Dans les deux cas, tu présentes des extraits de ton travail académique ainsi que des essais photographiques sur les espaces urbains de Montréal, auxquels s'ajoutent quelques expérimentations visuelles. Qui visite ces sites web? Comment réagissent-ils à ton travail?

**KS:** Je pense avoir deux publics distincts pour ces blogues. *Les Carabinières* est avant tout un hobby. Je l'ai lancé lorsque j'ai eu ma première caméra. Initialement, c'était une façon pour moi de produire

une photo par jour, et d'ainsi créer une archive d'images sur lesquelles je pourrais travailler ultérieurement. C'est en parallèle à cette expérimentation que j'ai commencé à lire sur la théorie en photographie. J'ajoutais des citations de ces livres aux photos quotidiennes publiées sur mon blogue. Mon père a toujours fait de la photo, et il parlait souvent de la composition de l'image, mais je n'ai jamais pris de cours de photographie. Cette première année m'a servi de cours. Le défi fut d'appliquer les théories, d'expérimenter avec elles à partir de mes photos quotidiennes.

Suite à ce projet de 365 jours, j'ai décidé de faire une nouvelle série de photographies quotidiennes étalée sur un an. Cette fois-ci j'ai opté pour des citations de livres variés, pas seulement de théorie photo. J'ai fini par ajouter des citations sur le bonheur et la pleine conscience à mes photographies. Je tentais de concrétiser ces idées, d'en faire des pratiques quotidiennes. C'est par la photo que j'y suis parvenu. J'imagine que c'est une autre façon d'archiver des moments, et de découvrir le monde.

**MP:** C'est cette pratique qui nous mène au thème de la vie quotidienne. Je l'ai mentionné plus tôt lorsque tu es arrivée: il y a des motifs récurrents dans ta photographie, des tropismes qui articulent l'image de façons bien particulières. Je crois que la vie quotidienne est vraiment ce qui organise les éléments formels de tes images, la composition. Tu l'as d'ailleurs dit toi-même: les images ordinaires et quotidiennes sont le matériau à partir duquel tu as beaucoup travaillé. Cependant, je ne limiterais pas cela à ton

blogue *Les Carabinières*; je le vois aussi dans tes photos plus récentes, et ici je pense surtout à tes essais sur Montréal dans ton autre blogue, *Suites Culturelles*. Des thèmes s'y répètent: l'anticipation de la répétition de mouvements et de gestes quotidiens, des espaces où se croisent des éléments familiers et anonymes, des gros plans sur ce qui semble habituel et ordinaire, des frontières, des grilles et des réseaux, l'architecture vieillissante, etc.

**KS:** Oui, je pense. Mais ces thèmes apparaissent d'eux-mêmes, non? Ce sont les paramètres par lesquels j'ai produit les séries; le but était de prendre une photo par jour et non de chercher le spectaculaire, ou l'extraordinaire. L'association entre une citation et une image ne fonctionnait pas toujours, mais la possibilité était là, même avec une limite de 24 heures pour trouver chaque image. Ce qui pour toi regardant mes photos paraît immanent était pour moi tout à fait inconscient.

**MP:** De ta perspective, en tant que photographe, quelle est la relation entre l'essai photo intitulé *Borders and Everyday Life in Montréal* et les expérimentations quotidiennes? Cet essai, et en particulier la façon de le produire, a-t-il été influencé par tes séries expérimentales? Approches-tu toujours la photographie de la même façon?

**KS:** Il y a trois essais photographiques dans *Suites Culturelles*. Chacun d'eux m'a pris quelques semaines à créer. Sans la limite de 24 heures, je peux faire plus de recherche, et prendre plus de photos! *Borders and Everyday Life in Montréal* est l'essai le plus récent, et le

premier commandé par un journal où je dois travailler avec un thème précis. L'essai précédent était *Montréal's Ruins of Modernity*. J'ai toujours été fascinée par les ruines et les bâtiments en décomposition. L'expression « Ruines de la Modernité » est tirée d'une entrevue que j'ai faite avec une designer viennoise dont cette expression est la griffe. J'admire beaucoup ses créations, et j'ai toujours associé cette idée de ruines à Montréal.

**MP:** Pourquoi Montréal? Comment la ville est-elle liée aux ruines, et à la modernité?

**KS:** Il me semble qu'à Montréal, surtout depuis l'Expo 67, on trouve un désir effréné de construire, construire, construire... par-dessus tout ce qui est 'vieux', et ce particulièrement dans un style moderniste. Le temps a passé; il en reste les signes du rêve d'une ville moderne qui reste à faire. Des balises architecturales tiennent toujours, comme si elles avaient résisté, mais elles semblent sur le point d'être dépassées, détruites. Le stade olympique est un bon exemple. Il semble tout à la fois gelé dans le temps et hors du temps. On trouve plusieurs exemples de tels bâtiments à Montréal. On ne voit pas cela dans le reste du Canada. Vancouver est neuve et polie; comme dans la plupart des villes en processus de gentrification, les constructions de briques et les entrepôts des vieux quartiers sont transformés en condos, boutiques et restaurants. On observe cela aussi à Montréal, mais surtout dans le bas du boulevard Saint-Laurent.

**MP:** Comment cette sensation d'un bâtiment gelé dans le temps peut-elle

être liée à l'environnement immédiat de ce lieu? Ici je pense surtout en termes de frontières spatiales et temporelles qui opèrent à travers divers quartiers de la ville.

**KS:** Ça dépend vraiment du site, mais au centre-ville, où la gentrification va de pair avec toute nouvelle construction, Montréal est similaire à d'autres grandes villes: la nouveauté se doit de tout imprégner. C'est ainsi qu'on détruit les ruines de la modernité. Ce sont la distance du centre-ville et la situation financière de la ville qui détermineront si la gentrification a lieu, et à quel rythme. Mais Montréal semble être dans une bulle, la gentrification y est plus lente qu'ailleurs. Économiquement, ce que cela signifie est simple : la gentrification n'a pas commencé de pleins pieds; la vieille architecture n'est pas protégée, elle est simplement laissée de côté, pour le moment...

**MP:** Dirais-tu que les vieux bâtiments sont des restes urbains?

**KS:** Oui, et c'est pourquoi le paradoxe est si intéressant: certains de ces lieux sont toujours fonctionnels. Ceci dit, ils sont ambigus: ils ont une relation en strates désorganisées au temps et à l'espace. Dans une perspective moderniste, ils sont démodés et devraient être mis à jour. J'aime ce paradoxe temporel.

**MP:** En regardant certaines de tes photos dans l'essai, je me demandais quels liens à la quotidienneté ont tes portraits des berges du fleuve Saint-Laurent, du vieux port, et des parcs urbains? En quoi sont-ils liés aux frontières, et au paradoxe temporel que tu as souligné?

**KS:** En méditant sur le thème *Borders and Everyday Life*, j'ai trouvé difficile de faire le portrait des frontières d'une ville comme Montréal. J'ai demandé à plusieurs amis de différents quartiers, et leurs suggestions ont confirmé mes impressions: le boulevard Saint-Laurent, le fleuve Saint-Laurent, etc. Par comparaison, dans une ville comme Berlin les traces de divisions sont beaucoup plus visibles. À Berlin, on peut voir les frontières entre quartiers, entre districts, entre communautés culturelles, et même entre périodes historiques. À Montréal, les divisions sont moins visibles; elles sont plus linguistiques et conceptuelles. C'est sans surprise que le boulevard Saint-Laurent est une frontière importante à Montréal. Historiquement, c'était une limite entre l'est et l'ouest, entre les francophones et les anglophones. Même si cette division ne s'opère plus de façon aussi tranchée, les gens se la remémorent ainsi. J'ai tenté de capturer cette idée, mais je ne pense pas y être parvenu. Je ne sais pas comment je pourrais faire! Quoiqu'il en soit, la photo montre une double frontière, celle au coin de la rue Laurier et du boulevard Saint-Laurent, qui est orientée est-ouest, mais aussi la limite entre le quartier du Plateau Mont-Royal et celui du Mile-End.

L'eau est aussi importante. Montréal est une île, et elle a des frontières naturelles évidentes. On trouve aussi des chemins de fer en grand nombre! Dans le Mile-End et dans Parc-Extension, ces derniers forment de véritables frontières souvent inconfortables. Dans le Mile-End, par exemple, il y a un gros viaduc. Les gens étaient habitués à prendre des raccourcis

par les rails afin de se déplacer du boulevard Saint-Laurent à la rue Saint-Denis au lieu de faire un détour par la rue Saint-Urbain, vers l'ouest, pour ensuite revenir l'est. Il y a maintenant un garde de sécurité qui empêche les piétons de passer et qui distribue des contraventions. Le chemin de fer est pourtant beaucoup plus sécuritaire que le viaduc sur lequel les automobilistes conduisent à toute allure. J'ai donc commencé à penser à d'autres frontières, divisions, barrières, clôtures, etc. entre les quartiers et entre divers autres espaces urbains. J'ai aussi pris des photos de l'avenue Hutchinson, qui est la limite entre Outremont et le Mile-End. En flânant à pied, j'ai pris soin de ne pas dédoubler mes photos de projets antérieurs (*Montréal's Ruins of Modernity* et *Tracing the Remains of Montréal's Expo 67*). Mes premiers projets mettaient l'accent sur des éléments formels et sur les styles architecturaux de la ville. *Borders and Everyday Life in Montréal* capture plutôt les frontières spatiales – grandes et petites – de Montréal.

**MP:** Où ces projets t'ont-ils menée? Sur quoi travailles-tu maintenant?

**KS:** Le prochain essai photo sera en lien avec *A Room of One's Own*.

**MP:** Le livre de Virginia Woolf?

**KS:** Oui, je l'ai relu récemment. J'ai été surprise de son actualité. J'ai donc décidé de prendre des photos des salons et bureaux de mes collègues qui servent à la rédaction de leurs thèses doctorales. L'emphase, étant donné le sujet de *A Room of One's Own*, sera sur mes collègues femmes. Ces espaces de travail sont très

utilisés, et pourtant ils sont pris pour acquis. Je voulais mettre cela en lumière. Tu sais, il y a souvent beaucoup d'effort et de créativité dans l'arrangement de tels espaces. Je trouve cela inspirant. Je veux capturer comment un texte ou un projet est produit, dans quel espace, et par qui. Je veux représenter les conditions physiques dans lesquelles s'exprime la créativité.

**MP:** Encore des archives du quotidien et du familier en gestes et événements. Y a-t-il une différence entre des archives d'images et de textes?

**KS:** Oui. On ne peut pas avoir autant de contrôle sur les images. L'image est toujours faite d'éléments inconscients saisis par la caméra. Ces éléments vous surprennent, que ce soit des significations multiples et apparemment contradictoires, ou des éléments qui apparaissent en latence, ceux que vous ne voyiez pas au moment de la prise de photo. Parfois ces éléments ne sont pas désirés, parfois ils vous permettent de signifier plus fortement ce que vous vouliez. Il est donc plus difficile de contrôler une image qu'un texte. Avec l'écriture et la langue, on peut contrôler le menu détail de toute signification. Je veux préserver la puissance imprévue de l'image. Je n'utilise donc pas *Photoshop*; je ne retravaille aucune image. Cette approche me limite un peu, mais je la préfère. Reprenant l'exemple du boulevard Saint-Laurent, j'aurais pu retravailler ma photo afin de signifier ce que je voyais, en d'autres mots ce que tout le monde connaît de l'endroit, mais j'ai préféré laisser la photo s'exprimer.

**MP:** Tu as photographié Berlin, Toronto, Vancouver et Vienne. Qu'est-ce qui est

spécifique à Montréal? Comment le paysage urbain réagit-il à ton travail? Est-ce différent?

**KS:** Les frontières de Montréal sont souvent intangibles. J'ai mentionné Hutchinson. Cette rue ressemble à toutes les autres, et pourtant c'est une limite. J'ai fait la rue à vélo du sud au nord, et je suis dans l'incapacité de dire où commencent et où se terminent le Mile-End et Outremont. C'est très intéressant! À Berlin, par exemple, les marques de divisions sont évidentes. Bien sûr, les deux villes n'ont pas la même histoire.

**MP:** Marcher ou traverser la ville à vélo à la recherche de marqueurs frontaliers a-t-il affecté comment tu prends des photos, ou comment tu conçois ton travail?

**KS:** J'aime que des photos puissent être des échecs ou des succès. J'aime le fait que, prenant ma caméra, je ne suis jamais certaine de réussir à capturer ce que je désire. J'aime les surprises, elles sont comme des moments d'épiphanies. Les détails voilés au moment de la capture d'une image, ceux qu'on ne voit que plus tard, sont ceux qui enseignent à voir le monde avec plus d'empathie. Ceci dit, ces moments ne peuvent pas être planifiés. Certains approchent leurs images avec des concepts en tête; ils les modifient en post-production afin qu'elle s'intègre dans leurs projets. Une telle approche ne m'intéresse pas, car je ne cherche qu'à capturer des moments réels. J'aime forcer mon regard à se poser sur les choses autrement, surtout les sites célèbres, comme le moulin *Five Roses* à Montréal. Dans de tels cas, j'utilise une lentille 35mm, ce qui me force à mettre

l'emphase sur les petits détails au lieu de voir l'architecture à plus grande échelle. Mon premier projet photo était avec une lentille 50mm, ce qui est encore plus limitant! C'est ainsi que j'ai appris à communiquer une idée, ou une image, par ses fragments. Si tu connais Montréal, tu n'as pas à voir le moulin *Five Roses* en entier pour le reconnaître; l'imagination le complète aisément. Une telle approche permet de créer de la nouveauté avec le déjà connu.

**MP:** Lorsque tu mentionnes Saint-Laurent et Hutchinson, ou lorsque tu parles de l'attente, de la capture de l'intangible, etc., il me semble que tu cherches à cerner quelque chose de bien spécifique: l'expérience d'une situation. As-tu des attentes en ce qui a trait à la réaction des gens à tes images? Pour qui ces documents sont-ils produits?

**KS:** Honnêtement, je ne sais pas. Jusqu'ici, lorsque je regarde les impressions des gens, je pense avoir réussi à communiquer par image. Par exemple, j'ai pris des photos du toit de l'*EMP Museum* de Seattle conçu par Frank Gehry. Le toit reflète la lumière du soleil de façon bien particulière. Certaines personnes se sont senties interpellées par cette photo, ils ont reconnu l'endroit. Leurs sourires témoignent d'une certaine reconnaissance, ce qui signifie aussi: « Je comprends ta langue, et ce que tu veux dire. » J'adore cela. Pour moi, c'est un peu comme de la poésie.

**MP:** Bien dit. Merci beaucoup pour l'entrevue, et pour m'avoir fait visiter Montréal à nouveau pour la première fois...

**KS:** Avec plaisir!

Pour les photo-essais de Katrina Sark, rendez-vous à: <http://suitesculturelles.wordpress.com/photography/photo-essays/>

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# URBAN SPACES, EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE EYE OF HISTORY

## AN INTERVIEW WITH KATRINA SARK

Katrina Sark is a PhD candidate in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at McGill University, specializing in cultural analysis and urban cultures. She has co-authored *Berliner Chic: A Locational History of Berlin Fashion* (with Susan Ingram) and assisted with the research for the upcoming *Wiener Chic*. Her photographs have been printed in *Inquire: Journal of Comparative Literature* (2010), *Berliner Chic* (2011), *World Film Locations: Berlin* (2012), and can be seen on her blog: <http://suitesculturelles.wordpress.com/>. She lives in Montreal.

Martin Parrot is a documentary filmmaker, a PhD student in Humanities at York University, and blogger/cultural critique at [monlimoilou.com](http://monlimoilou.com).

I interviewed scholar-artist Katrina Sark at the Arts Café in Montréal on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012. We talked of Montréal and its psychogeography, of photography, familiar spaces, life in exile and everyday life.

Martin Parrot: As an artist as well as a scholar, if there are any, how do you see the relations between your work as a cultural analyst and your work as a photographer? More specifically, is the work you do on one side informing the way you produce material on the other?

Katrina Sark: Actually, this is new to me; it is usually the opposite. Normally, I am the one in your chair, I am the one interviewing designers, filmmakers, authors, looking at cultural production in fashion, film, photography, art, architecture, etc. As a scholar, these are puzzles I work with; I analyze them carefully, mapping out continuities, discontinuities and trends, and relate these to the culture of a city, especially, in my case: Berlin or Vienna. It is a little bit of detective work, a little bit of analytical work, but also, always, fun interpretative work. Being on the other side of that, being called an artist, is new to me.

MP: You speak of visual culture as a puzzle. Knowing that people will see your photography, is this idea (the puzzle) operative in your work as a photographer? Do you work expecting the gaze of an audience?

KS: With a camera in hand, I always approach things differently. When I take a photograph, I try to capture a landscape or cityscape, building, aspect of culture, etc., visually; I produce an image instead of a text or puzzle. My interpretative act is a particular image. That said: I am in both cases (as a photographer as well as a cultural analyst) pursuing a certain understanding of culture. In that sense, my two activities are related, but the labels

are different. As you can see, I am still negotiating the relationship between these two sides of my work.

MP: Working with images this way, you are not communicating as you are as a scholar, and not, one could argue, to the same audiences. You have two blogs, *Suites Culturelles* and *Les Carabinières* where we can see snippets of your academic work, but also photo essays on Montréal cityscapes and various experimentations. Who is looking at these? How do they respond to your work?

KS: I think I have two distinct audiences for these blogs. *Les Carabinières* is a photo blog that is a fun hobby to do. I started it when I first got my camera. It was initially a way for me to do a photograph a day and build an archive of images to work from later on. In parallel to this experimentation, I started reading theories of photography and added short quotes from these books to the photos I posted every day. My dad had always been into photography, and he often talked about things like image composition, but I have never taken a photography course. That first year acted as one. The challenge was to apply theories, experimenting with them through images drawn from the material of my everyday life.

Following the 365-day project, I decided to do another yearly photography series. However, instead of working with quotes from theories of photography, I associated my pictures with other readings I was doing. I ended up working with quotes on happiness and mindfulness, trying to make these concepts into a daily

practice: not merely thinking about these things, but really practicing happiness. In my case, it was through photography. Another way to archive moments and ways I relate to the world.

MP: This leads us to everyday life. I mentioned this earlier when you came in: there are recurring patterns in your photography, “tropes” if you will, articulating what appears in the image. These I see as expressing everyday life. As you said yourself, the daily and the ordinary are the challenging material you had to make images from in your yearly series of photographs. It seems to me, however, that they also organize formal elements in some of your most recent photo essays on Montréal in *Suites Culturelles*—the expectation of repetition in movements and gestures, overlapping spaces of the familiar and anonymous, close-ups on the apparently usual, borders and grids, common place architecture, etc.

KS: Yes, I think so, but it is there by default, no? It is the parameter through which I did the series; the goal was to take a picture a day of what was happening daily, not to look for the extraordinary or the spectacular. It did not always work; I did not always succeed, for example, in associating an image of my daily life with a notion of happiness. The possibility, however, was always there, even when working in a limited 24-hour period for each image. It is interesting to me that what you see as being immanent to these series to me is a subconscious thing.

MP: From your perspective, as the photographer, what is the relation

between the daily series and the photo essay entitled *Borders and Everyday Life in Montréal*? Was the latter informed by material from the initial series? Do you approach photography in the same way?

KS: There are three photo essays featured in *Suites Culturelles*, each of them took me a few weeks to put together. Without the 24-hour limit, I can take more time for research, so to speak, and take more pictures! *Borders and Everyday Life in Montréal* is the most recent one, and it's the first one I did that was commissioned for this journal and forced me to work with a particular theme. The previous one was *Montréal's Ruins of Modernity*. I have always been fascinated by ruins and broken buildings, and the Montréal cityscape offers lots of these. The expression «ruins of modernity» comes from an interview I did with a Viennese designer whose fashion label «Ruins of Modernity» I really admire, and which happens to be an idea I always associated with Montréal.

MP: Why Montréal? How is it related to ruins and to modernity?

KS: It seems to me that for a while in Montréal, especially since Expo 67, there was a craze to build-build-build on top of what was there before, always in a modernist style. Now, that time has passed and we are left with marks of the dreams of a modern city that are still standing, yet seem short-lived, in some cases on the verge of destruction. The Olympic Stadium is a great example. It seems frozen in time, and yet, affected by it, displaced. There are many other buildings like this, often older ones too. You do not

see this in the rest of Canada. Vancouver is brand new and polished. As in most cities that undergo gentrification, the old inner-city neighbourhoods with brick buildings and factories are now turned into condos and trendy boutiques and restaurants. You can see this happening in Montreal on lower Saint-Laurent Boulevard.

MP: How is this feeling of a building being frozen in time related to its immediate environment, especially thinking in terms of spatial and temporal borders operating in and through various neighbourhoods?

KS: It really depends on the site, but in the city core, where gentrification is always happening with the building of new spaces, Montréal is generally very similar to other big cities: newness ought to pervade everywhere. When this happens, ruins are taken over. Depending on where you are in the city, or how far you are from the city core, and, of course, on the financial situation of the city, gentrification happens, or is about to happen. Montréal is still in a bubble, gentrification is not happening at the same rate as in other cities... Economically, what it means is simple: gentrification has yet to happen; these buildings are not protected or preserved, they are simply left out, at least for now.

MP: Would you say they are remains of the city?

KS: Yes, and it is why it is such an interesting paradox: some of them are still functional, yet they are ambiguous—they have a multi-layered and disorganized relation to space and time. From a

modernist perspective, they are outmoded and have yet to be updated. I like this temporal paradox.

MP: Looking at other photographs in the essay, how are pictures of the shores of the Saint-Lawrence River, of the Old Port, and of city parks related to everyday life, borders and the temporal paradox you highlighted?

KS: When thinking about the theme *Borders and Everyday Life*, I found it challenging to portray the borders in a city like Montréal. I asked friends who live in different neighbourhoods for suggestions and interestingly their answers all overlapped and confirmed my own: Boulevard Saint Laurent, Saint Lawrence River, etc. By comparison, in a city like Berlin, it is much easier to locate the traces of divisions: the borders are still there, and much more visible. In Berlin you can see the borders between districts, neighbourhoods, ethnic communities, even historical periods, etc., while I feel like in Montréal the divisions were less visible and more conceptual and linguistic. Not surprisingly, Boulevard Saint-Laurent comes to mind as an important border in Montréal. Historically, it used to be the border between East and West, Francophones and Anglophones. Even if this is no longer operative, so to speak, everyone still remembers it that way. So when I tried to capture the legacy of that street, I do not think I did it justice. Even now, I do not know how I would do it! Nevertheless, I took a picture of a double border, I believe, the corner of Laurier and Saint-Laurent, which is the border between two

neighbourhoods: the Mile-End and the Plateau Mont-Royal.

Water is also important. Montréal is an island, and it has natural water borders. There are also railways, lots of them! In the Mile-End and Parc-Extension they create very real and uncomfortable borders. In the Mile-End, for example, there is a huge overpass. People used to take quick shortcuts through the railway to go from Saint-Denis to Saint-Laurent instead of having to go all the way to Saint-Urbain, and then come back eastward. A security guard now prevents people from crossing the railway; he sits there all day and gives tickets to trespassers. The railway, however, is much safer to cross than that crazy overpass where cars are always speeding. So I started thinking about other borders, barriers, divisions, fences, etc. between neighbourhoods and various city spaces. I also took pictures of Avenue Hutchinson, which is supposed to be the border between Outremont and the Mile-End. Walking around, I was careful that my photographs did not overlap too much with other projects I did before (i.e. Montréal's *Ruins of Modernity* and *Tracing the Remains of Montréal's Expo 67*). If I previously focused on style and formal architectural elements, with *Borders and Everyday Life* in Montréal my focal point was spatial borders – smaller ones as well as bigger ones – in the city.

MP: Where is your work taking you now? You worked with borders in Montréal, with ruins of modernity, and with the Expo 67; what is next for you?

KS: The next photo essay project will be A Room of One's Own.

MP: As in Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own?

KS: Yes, I recently re-read this essay and was surprised at how relevant it still is today. So I decided to take photographs of my colleagues' living rooms and working rooms, especially those spaces used for writing dissertations. I will focus on my female colleagues, so that it goes with Woolf's essay. These are spaces we spend much of our days in, and take for granted. I want to bring this to light. You know, there is often very real creativity in the ways these spaces are set up. I find this inspiring. To capture how a certain text or project is produced, in what space, by whom, to capture the physical conditions in which creativity is at work.

MP: We are going back to the archive you mentioned earlier, to recording daily, familiar objects, events, and activities. Do you see differences between archived images and archived texts?

KS: Yes. You do not have as much control over archived images. The camera always picks up unconscious elements in the image, things you were not necessarily looking for, things that surprise you. Sometimes you either have multiple meanings in an image, or you have details appearing on the foreground that you did not see while taking the picture. Sometimes they are unwanted, sometimes they emphasize what you were trying to accomplish with the image. The latter moments are amazing. In general, it is harder to control an image than a text. With language, you can work at and

control the minutiae of meaning; you can create clear nuances, etc., but I want to preserve the power of images, and so I do not use Photoshop or re-work images once they are taken. This approach to images sets up limitations as in the example of Boulevard Saint-Laurent, trying to capture the concept of a border that is no longer there. Living in Montréal, you know that this used to be a symbolic border, but there is nothing left of it. It's extremely challenging to produce an image to say exactly how this feels.

MP: You took pictures of Berlin, Toronto, Vancouver and Vienna. What is specific about Montréal? How is the cityscape here reacting to your work? Is it different?

KS: In comparison to Berlin, Montréal's borders are often are intangible. I mentioned Hutchinson. Well, this avenue looks like any other, and yet, it is a border. I cycled Hutchinson from South to North, and honestly you cannot tell that the Mile-End ends there, or that Outremont begins. That, in itself, is interesting. Whereas in a place like Berlin, you really have a sense of the city having been torn; after twenty years, there are still very clear markers of division. Of course, Berlin and Montréal do not have the same history; it depends on what went on in the city.

MP: Walking around or cycling in pursuit of markers of division in Montréal, has it affected how you take pictures, or how you see your work?

KS: I like the fact that pictures can be failures and successes. I like that you cannot take the camera to the street knowing that you will succeed in capturing this or that. I like surprises in

the images; they are like moments of epiphany. These unseen details upon the capture of an image, the ones you see later on, they teach you how to look at things with more empathy, they train you. This being said, you cannot plan such moments. Some people approach images with concepts in mind, and so modify them in the post-production to suit their projects. This does not interest me as I am doing photography based on capturing real moments and essays. I like forcing my gaze to look at things differently, especially for famous buildings, like the Five Roses Flour Mill, which is such an iconic Montreal sight. In such cases I use a 35mm lens because it forces me to look for details instead of relying on the usual cityscape we are used to. My first photo project was done with a 50mm lens, which is even more limiting. It trained me to think about how you can communicate, or suggest, the idea of a whole image through fragments. If you know Montréal, you do not need to see the whole flour mill to recognize it; your mind can complete the picture, and in so doing, create something known that is also new.

MP: When you mentioned Saint-Laurent and Hutchinson, or the flour mill, or talked about waiting for something to happen, for the intangible to be captured, it seems to me that you are trying to capture something very specific, almost the experience of a situation. How do you expect people to react to these images? For whom are these documents produced?

KS: Well, honestly, I do not know. However, given the feedback I got from

earlier work, I feel like moments of recognition from the audience means I have been successful in some ways. For example, I took pictures of the roof of Frank Gehry's EMP Museum in Seattle, especially as it reflects sunlight in very specific ways. Some people related to this picture—they knew the place and felt an instant connection with it through the photograph. When you can almost see a smile on someone's face, you know that there is a moment of recognition. It also means «I understand your language, and what you are trying to say.» I love this. I see it as similar to poetry.

MP: Nicely said. Thank you very much for this interview, and for making me revisit Montréal again for the first time.

KS: You're welcome!

For Katrina Sark's photo essays, please visit: <http://suitesculturelles.wordpress.com/photography/photo-essays/>

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