

# 20 18 Interstices

Under construction symposium

Presence



CREATIVE ARTS  
AND INDUSTRIES

**AUT** UNIVERSITY  
**ART+  
DESIGN**

Eduardo Chillida (1976). Peine del Viento (Comb of the Wind), San Sebastián  
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AND INDUSTRIES**

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*2018 Interstices Under Construction* is jointly organised by the School of Art and Design, Auckland University of Technology, and the School of Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland (Andrew Barrie, Andrew Douglas, Julia Gatley, Ross Jenner and Harold Marshall)

# Presence

*Interstices Symposium*

*Saturday 13 July 2018*

*Convened by Dr Julia Gatley, Dr Andrew Barrie,  
Dr Andrew Douglas, Dr Ross Jenner and  
Dr Susan Hedges*

Buildings, cities, landscapes, sculptures, paintings, and music, even, are already physically present and persisting in a present. Why theorise their presence, and what relevance could such a notion have for arts rooted in space?

The contemporary emphasis on the physical, material, performative and atmospheric – rather than on meaning – is a reaction against the overly discursive and semiotic strains of '80s post-modernism, when the identification and attribution of meaning became a core practice of architectural thought. Afterwards, materiality and its effects assumed what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht terms a “non-hermeneutic” presence (2004: 1-20), coinciding with the much vaunted ‘post-theory’ in architecture and its rejection of criticality. Today, we no longer believe that theory has been surpassed, nor, by the same token, that a complex of meanings can be kept separate from its mediality, that is, from material. Neither is pure manipulation of data, without aesthetic and bodily intention, able to produce architecture. The material and the immaterial are not easily divided.

While presence concerns communication, it concerns space even more—through its occupation (or dis-occupation) and activation. Gumbrecht reminds us that, what is ‘present’ to us (in the sense of the Latin *prae-esse*), is “in front of us, in reach of and tangible for our bodies” (17). He reminds us also of George Steiner’s remarks that the arts, “wonderfully rooted in substance, in the human body, in stone, in pigment, in the twanging of gut or the weight of wind on reeds”, begin, but do not end, in immanence. The task of the aesthetic is to “quicken into presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and ‘the other’” (Steiner, 1989: 227).

Absence of presence is not the same as presence of absence, in which traces, silences or voids powerfully embody (and make present) something not present. For example, the voids of Berlin: Daniel Libeskind, Peter Eisenman; or the voids of Eduardo Chillida, Jorge Oteiza and Tadao Ando; the silence of John Cage and the *mā* of Toru Takemitsu—they all involve experience and affect. By contrast, representation seems to be involved with the “age of the sign” and “conceptual deduction” (Gumbrecht, 2004: 57). However, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out in France, representation “is as old as the West”, and maybe there is “no humanity (and, perhaps, no animality) that does not include representation” (1993: 1). Nancy’s conception of presence does not refer to a permanent state, but to nascence: “Presence itself is birth, the coming that effaces itself and brings itself back” (5). Gumbrecht relates this wavering to the double movement of withdrawal and

unconcealment in Martin Heidegger, particularly in relation to his account of a Greek temple in terms of presence via the notions of “earth” and “world”. Here, “the sheer presence of the temple triggers the unconcealment of a number of things—in their thingness—that surround the temple” (Gumbrecht, 2004: 73). For Nancy the very act and pleasure of drawing, insofar as it is “the opening of form” (2013: 1), is also a nascence. What would it mean for a drawing, building, artwork or poem to perform or keep alive the performance of its birth? Perhaps the malleability of Alvaro Siza’s works (Molteni 2003) or Lemi Ponifasio’s irruptive choreography (Ponifasio, 2009) provide some hints to the potential of works’ in statu nascendi.

In addition, a human tendency to endow buildings and artworks with life includes practices involving the holy and tapu, such as sacrifice, rites of foundation and the address to a living ancestor (in whare and fale, for example). These frame, stage and enact the effect of “living presence” – exceeding an aesthetic stance of disinterested contemplation of art’s formal qualities (Eck, 2015: 172). “Studying what makes viewers deny the representational character of art”, argues van Eck, “will help understanding why art is such a universal feature of human life” (209). After all, “aesthetic experience” provides feelings of intensity unknown in specific everyday worlds; there is no aesthetic experience without presence effects emerging seemingly out of nowhere.

In all fields of art practice, what might be the status of presence in Virtual Reality and digital representation obsessed with verisimilitude? How can even purposeful design, particularly in an era of parametricism, retain an element of the status nascendi, as unprogrammed (or even unprogrammable) emergence? The “joy of averring oneself to be continually in the state of being born—a rejoicing of birth, a birth of rejoicing” (Nancy, 1993: back cover) requires an acceptance, even embrace, of the fact that existence “comes nude into the world”.

# Friday 13th July

Design Theatre, Conference Centre,  
The University of Auckland  
22 Symonds Street.

9:00 Registration

9:30 Symposium Welcome and Mihi

Elisapeta Heta and Rameka Alexander-Tu'inukuafe  
Ross Jenner and Harold Marshall

10:00 **Session A (ALR1)**

History's Presence

Chair: Susan Hedges

1. *Ex uno lapide; a making present of absence*  
Guillaume Dreyfuss, Konrad Buhagiar  
and Ephraim Joris

2. *Heritage & persistence: The case of the Kai-  
apoi fragment*  
Andrew Douglas and Nicola Short

Discussion

11:00 *Tea + Coffee*

11:30 **Ritual + Presence**

Chair: Julia Gatley

3. *Monumentality and 'light' in the Sydney  
Opera House*  
Kamila Soh

4. *Following an ethos of openness: Intertextual  
speculations on presence in a dialogue form*  
Chelle MacNaughtan and H  l  ne Frichot

Discussion

1:00 *Lunch*

**Session B (ALR5)**

Site + Presence

Chair: Ross Jenner

1. *Drawing canyon: Asymptotic presences in  
scale, material and sense.*  
Simon Twose and Jules Moloney

2. *In-time and in-place*  
Marian Macken and Fiona Harrisson

Discussion

*Tea + Coffee*

**Music + Machine + Performance**

Chair: Harold Marshall

3. *Notations: Drawing as idea and process  
between the intersection of music and architec-  
ture in relation to presence*  
Charlotte Greub

4. *Troubled bridges: absence and memory in the  
architectural machines of Eadweard Muybridge*  
Michael Chapman

Discussion

*Lunch*

**Session A (ALR1)**

2:00 **Landscape + Presence**

Andrew Barrie

6. *A reorientation towards aesthetics: Landscape architecture and the operationalisation of the sublime*

Shaun Rosier

7. *Aalto's foyers: Landscape presences*

John Roberts

8. *What landscape design aesthetics might offer to the question of the designer's relation to the real?*

Peter Connolly

Discussion

3:00 *Tea + Coffee*

**Design Theatre**

3:30 **Presence of Absence**

9. *Between presence and absence: Phenomenal interstitiality in Eisenman's Guardiola house*

Adrian Lo

10. *Making silence: some modes of emptiness*

Ross Jenner

**Session B (ALR5)**

**Absence + Vacancy + Urban**

Andrew Douglas

6. *Vacant Geelong*

Mirjana Lozanovska and Akari Nakai Kidd

7. *Presence—between walk and play and beyond*

Jan Smitheram

8. *Lines from the past: evoking the presence of un-built architecture in virtual reality*

Jules Moloney, Simon Twose, Anastasia Globa and Ross Jenner

Discussion

*Tea + Coffee*

7:00

*Dinner with Ross*  
*Interstices Symposium*  
*Open to symposium and colloquium attendees*  
*Venue: TBC*

# Saturday 14th July

9:30 Colloquium Welcome and Matariki

## Performance

Performed here by mezzo soprano Claire Scholes and dancer Cathy Livermore

Harold Marshall and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

## **Design Theatre**

Keynote: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

New dimensions of presence

## *Tea + Coffee*

### History / Culture / Theology

1. Presences across worlds

Anne Salmond

2. Place of presence and absence in Maori philosophising

Carl Mika

3. On Holy Ground: A church as a place of Presence

Merv Duffy

Round table

## *Lunch*

### Visual Arts / Media Studies / Artificial Intelligence

4. Spectrum to Spectre

Dane Mitchell

5. Architectures of virtual absence: Digital media and information environmentalism

Ethan R. Plaut

6. Artificial intelligence, intensity, and presence

Sam Ginn

Round table

### Composition / Music / Acoustics

7. Aesthetic immurement, the Schock of the new, and my mperfect body (of work)

David Chisholm

8. Matariki and more

Gillian Whitehead

9. The oblique imperative: the acoustical dimensions of presence

Harold Marshall

Round table

# Abstracts

# Ex uno lapide: a making present of absence

**Konrad Buhagiar, Guillaume Dreyfuss and Ephraim Joris**

This paper comments on a drawing protocol entitled the “Monolith Drawing”. In this protocol an architectural figure is extracted out of a single volume, synchronising analogue thinking with computational development. Working with a Lacanian interpretation that assumes there cannot be absence in an objective world—for absence can only exist through symbolic or representative means—we propose that it is through the representational means of the “Monolith Drawing” that we enable, as architects ourselves, with design presence where there is none.

This research explores and (re)deploys the notion of *ex uno lapide*, (“from a single stone”), in contemporary architectural production. We see this particular practice of making absence present evolving from a tradition linking geology with architectonic drawing, a practice that operates in conceptual space through means of contained sets of formal operations generating a particular kind of architecture.

Specifically, we consider the monolith drawing exemplified by a design for a museum extension adjacent to St John’s Co-Cathedral in Valletta by Architecture Project. The extension is intended to house a fifteenth century tapestry cycle by Peter Paul Rubens who sought to represent the event of transubstantiation. In response, the museum design acts as a closed vessel, a monumental reliquary, enabling a closed and controlled environment ensuring the conservation of the artwork. The reliquary is interpreted as a container of meaning, directing a reciprocal gaze towards the idea of meaningful absence. The monolith drawing in-

stalls two important principles: the idea of the mirror-construct, in which an object is depicted using parallel lines to project its mirror image and allow twofold vision, outwards (*res extensa*) and inwards (*res cogitans*); and, the idea of *ex uno lapide*—a strategy where architecture is carved out of a solid mass. This carving is guided by allowing the depicted object and its mirror image to intersect. Its transcriptions allow for a drawing with a history—a tracing of its own tracing.

# Troubled bridges: absence and memory in the architectural machines of Eadweard Muybridge

**Michael Chapman**

This paper explores architectural and theoretical ideas relating to presence and absence in the architectural machines created by Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge is most widely recognised for his 19th century experiments with animal locomotion, stop motion, and the creation and invention of elaborate spatial machines to record events instantaneously from multiple points of view. The notion of presence is obsessively central to these works. While the works produced by these machines are well known, the machines themselves (or their context) have been less widely explored. The paper will explore a systematic design research project to digitally recreate these machines in order to better understand the specific relationship between architecture and image, by interrogating motion, lines of view and simultaneity. It will use this as a gateway into a broader investigation of the spatiality of memory, and specifically in relationship to more recent investigations into neuroscience and architecture, that specifically theorise memory as a spatial activity. This relationship is significant in Muybridge's work, due to a number of pivotal events in his personal life, of which theorists in neuroaesthetics (Art Shimamura specifically) have recently begun to examine and diagnose. The most traumatic of these, is the stagecoach accident, in which he endured a major head injury, which necessitated a change in career into photography and dramatically transformed his personality and emotional stability.

This paper uses a combination of drawing, digital modelling, and critical theory to reposition the work of Muybridge in both photography and invention, in order to investigate more broadly

the relationship between image and memory, and the role of architecture and space in arresting and manipulating this. It was through the emergence of these elaborate and quasi-scientific spatial experiments in the nineteenth century that certain visual realities were first understood, but also that the relationship between image and perception could be tested and contested. The paper argues that architecture plays a role in unsettling the predominantly phenomenological theories in regard to architecture and memory, by placing an emphasis on reality and perception, in which the architectural machine is both witness and conductor of presence (both perceived and actual).

# What landscape design aesthetics might offer to the question of the designer's relation to the real?

**Peter Connolly**

It may be that the focus on presence is a 'poorly formulated question', to use Deleuze's oft-used phrase. The question of presence tends to promote a focus on, looking-for, thinking-about presence-of some-thing. There seems to be a fetish tendency in this question and an in-built ambiguity, which might also be found in 'object-oriented' thinking and in creative or design practices which tend to preoccupy themselves with objects. Such ambiguities are enigmatic fuel for discourse, of course.

This paper, will re-look at Deleuze's idea of reality as represented in his Cinema books, where he agrees with Bergson that perception does not occur in or mediated by the brain but occurs 'at the object'. For Deleuze it is an abstraction to identify and conceptually cut-off an object, 'itself' already relational, from the other relations of reality in spacetime. He draws upon Peirce to argue that perception at the object is not mediated but selectively, depending on the orientation of the perceiver, extended into relations. This extension of the object into relations constitutes a 'sign' and the function of a sign is, according to Tomaselli, to make sense of an encounter. Like Harman, Deleuze is also critical of how relations can disconnect us from the object through habit and received codes, however, his conception of the extension of the object into relations highlights that this making sense is not restricted to codes and habits and involves the relations to other perceptions 'at the object' of other objects. Harman's desire to paint abstractions as abstract seems to draw on very common sense notions of relations.

The perception and sense-making of this encounter – and the singularity of this encounter - are also only possible through the relation to past such encounters of the relations of objects, where the objects are extended into the relations. Deleuze wants to affirm both objects and relations but wants to conceptualise how to avoid codes and habitual relations which distance us from perception at the object, and in the process also avoiding abstracting objects out from the relations that they are always part of them.

Maybe the design of landscape, which tends not to be preoccupied with objects and where the encounter with what pre-exists the designer determines the trajectory of design investigation in ways and degrees that it tends not to in architectural objects, has something to offer this question? This paper will employ an example of the analysis of a landscape to attempt to communicate something of how the perception 'at the object' is extended into the relations of an encounter.

# Heritage & persistence: The case of the Kaiapoi fragment

**Andrew Douglas and Nicola Short**

This paper considers the Kaiapoi fragment—a portion of the now lost Kaiapoi Woollens Building (1913-1964)—itself an odd remnant that had remained fused to the more recently demolished Griffiths Building (corner of Wellesley Street West and Albert Street, Auckland). At stake in the fragment, we contend, are broader questions about the constitution of the present and future by cultural heritage. The fragment, in fact, provides one way of approaching what Gumbrecht (2004 & 2014) sees as an emerging, yet still undefined, post-historicist chronotope. As he argues, if a historicist chronotope is characterised by a “narrow present” in which passing historical time provides immediately cogent bearings for acting on, and organising, an impending future, our current present, shorn of organising metanarratives, posits a truncated future, one distanced from a present stalled and broadening inordinately (2014: 54-55).

In the most optimistic prognosis, the future of the Kaiapoi fragment (previously considered significant enough for incorporation in a new station proposed for the site of the Griffiths Building—Salmond Reed Architects, 2014) might be to address a travelling public, switching from the relative historical surety of street places to the subterranean “non-place” defining waiting and transit (Augé, 1995 & 2002). On the other hand, the Kaiapoi fragment, now vacated even from the site of the Griffiths Building’s demolition (and stored some place) may well enter into no fixed place-relation, for reported depictions of the new station forecast a bypass of any colonial presence in favour of representing the wairua of place and the “right atua, or gods” (Wilson, 2018)— something akin to what Mikhail

Bakhtin (originator of the notion of the chronotope) has termed an epic temporality sheathed in mythological reference (2000: 104-105).

The Kaiapoi fragment then, with little capacity to persist as a managed bearer of a scheduled public past, nor likely to enter into a public future framed according to modes of epic temporality, falls into an indeterminate historicity, yet one that may usefully elucidate the emerging and challenging chronotope Gumbrecht senses. Reading into the vexed ties between worth and preservation, the paper will test a further resonance with Bakhtin: that the Kaiapoi fragment calls up alternate ways of “keeping the past alive in the present” via intangibles adhering with and in its materiality, intangibles perhaps less readily apprehended in the management of heritage tangibility, yet readable within a dialogical relational ontology (Harrison & Rose. 2010: 265 & Harrison, 2013).

# Following an ethos of openness: Intertextual speculations on presence in a dialogue form

**Hélène Frichot and Chelle MacNaughtan**

By way of a dialogue form composed between a critical thinker (Frichot) and a creative practitioner (Macnaughtan), this paper will discuss the disruption of presence performed through the creative project works of Chelle Macnaughtan. The intertextual practices explored by Macnaughtan engage in an 'open work' principle that drives generative thinking and acts of making. The concept and method of 'open work' are defined in engagement with the philosophy of Umberto Eco, and further elaborated through the procedures of indeterminacy of composer John Cage. Where Cage's indeterminacy provides a transformative vehicle for engaging in the spatiality of sound and the act of listening, even when confronted with silence, Eco's discussion of the 'open work' challenges any stability of presence.

Drawing upon three creative projects within the oeuvre of Macnaughtan, a work's process of openness, as well as presence, will be investigated through intertextual notions of representation, authority and signature. The first of three projects to be discussed is a series of 27 prints titled 74'56" (Space in the Sound of Architecture). The project is a spatial listening diagram composed of indeterminate graphic notations that communicate an inconclusive, temporal journey of space and sound in architect Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, and by extension, his Chamber Works drawings. The second project, Les Trottoirs des Paris, is a collection of 48 photographs of dates marked into the surface of pavements by unknown municipal workers in Paris. The final project to be discussed is a text-based graphic score for four voices titled La Voix.

Common to all of these projects is their interconnectedness across chosen source material, which contributed to how one work led to the next. It will be shown that understanding work as always 'open', whether in its creation, meaning, interpretation or use, displaces presence across the variable locations of the author, reader, creative work, and situation. The dialogue form we propose likewise performs an ethos of openness in relation to the discussed concepts, approaches and projects.

# Lines from the past: Evoking the presence of un-built architecture in virtual reality

**Anastasia Globa, Ross Jenner, Jules Moloney and Simon Twose**

The presence of the past, as manifest through drawings of unbuilt architecture, provides a strand of architectural discourse that is typically reliant on an imaginative occupation of drawings by the viewer. Such paper architecture evokes a virtual presence that has been highly influential. This may be contrasted with the virtual occupation found within virtual reality (VR), where presence develops through representations of empirically tangible or real characteristics. Encompassing less tangible modes of presence, they trigger, as Kwan Min Lee argues, "a psychological state in which virtual objects are experienced as actual objects in either sensory or non-sensory ways" (2004:27). Despite this opening up of notions of presence from physical registers to psychological ones, VR within architecture tends towards versimilitude. In contrast, the approach explored here aims to read the technology of the virtual through a legacy of openness proper to architectural drawings.

An intersecting of VR technology with the critical practice of drawing is pursued in this paper via a case study of Giuseppe Terragni's entries to the 1934 Palazzo Littorio competition. The abstract spaces of the competition drawings are extended by way of technologies of immersive image, motion and spatialized sound. The use of VR here rejects versimilitude in favour of deferred and playful interaction, consistent with aspects of art historian Aby Warburg's thinking. Rather than through mechanistic computer modelling, presence is sought in this virtual Littorio project via evocative, drawing-like environments indicative of both the design and the historical milieu in which the project was con-

ceived. This evocation provides context for a discussion of the affordance of virtual and augmented reality relative to alternative modes of historical critique. In conclusion, the discussion draws on James J. Gibson's (1979) notions of affordance as a latency for action presented by artefacts, tools or environments. This latency, the paper argues, provides a framework for considering future modes of virtual presence for unbuilt architecture.

# Drawing notations as idea and process: An intersection of music and architecture in relation to presence

**Charlotte Greub**

Reaching deep into antiquity, as Alessandra Capanna has put it, “analogies, coincidences, affinities and bonds between architectural and musical compositions have been the object of research” (2009: 257). Consider for example the treatises of Vitruvius, Alberti, and Schelling (Xenakis, 1971). This overlap and translation between disciplines such as art, architecture and music finds contemporary expression, too, in the work of architects such as Daniel Libeskind, and composers/musicians like John Cage (Branden, 2016).

In Libeskind’s case, *Chamber works: Architectural meditations on themes from Heraclitus* (1983), is a drawing collection that explicitly addresses the field of music. The horizontal and the vertical series in these drawings form a continuum of graphic interventions that Kurt W. Forster (1983) defines as spatial music. As he sees it, they are spatialised scores or musical translations (box cover). Implicitly, *Chamber works* effects a critique of architecture as solely referencing built propositions because its clusters of lines float without reference to size, depth or material—in short, they are unbuildable. In its transdisciplinary appeal, *Chamber works* constitutes a precedence in which architectural drawings invoke an aural experience (presence).

In the case of Cage, the experimental notations for “*Fontana Mix*” (1958) consist of 10 sheets of paper and 12 transparencies whose dots, circles, and lines were designed to admit indeterminate performance. Cage’s compositional objective was to describe rules for the enactment of the composition but not the

performance itself. This meant eschewing the established rules of musical notation and performance at that time, but also, a translation of music into space and into spatial experience made uniquely present.

In this paper, firstly, I introduce the notational use of drawings found in Libeskind’s *Chamber Works*, and secondly, in Cage’s “*Fontana Mix*” in order to establish an intersection between music and architecture. Cage’s translation of the temporal nature of music into space, and Libeskind’s translation of space into time via notational scores, will be further explored in a theoretical positioning of presence.

# In-time and in-place

**Fiona Harrisson and Marian Macken**

The term 'analysis paralysis' suggests a disciplinary attitude to a preliminary phase of design as a form of procrastination before the real and propositional work of design. This paper offers an alternative position on the role of analysis—that the initial phase of encountering site is propositional. We suggest that this initial phase of design requires careful attention because it is at this moment that understandings of the world are made manifest. This paper presents parallel and collaborative teaching practices that expand approaches to encountering site through the lenses of performative drawing and temporality.

Through a series of courses, at RMIT University and the University of Auckland, students design a temporal framework for their observation and recording of phenomena. The act of drawing in the presence of that which is drawn requires students to be simultaneously in tune with the act of observing and the dynamic nature of the subject of their observation. Carefully looking is not passive; instead, it requires active receptivity to the world and involves a suspension of the known. Our capacity to see shifts as we spend extended periods in the presence of the phenomenon of our study. Rather than the drawn outcomes of this observation recording a past time, the notion of experiential time—and an expanded present—is embedded in the act of drawing. This process of observation and performative drawing that the students undertake alludes to Edmund Husserl's expression of a 'thickened present' (Kern, 1983, 83).

These ideas will be explored through an articulation of the teaching and learning frameworks

and a discussion of the student work. It also considers how this approach sits within the larger domain of spatial, temporal relationships and forms of drawing.

# Making silence: some modes of emptiness

**Ross Jenner**

*'La música  
inventa al silencio,  
la arquitectura  
inventa al espacio.*

Octavio Paz, Lectura de John Cage

In architecture, loss, mourning and memorialisation are only the most obvious manifestations of the presence of absence. Less conspicuous is the notion of space as interval and gap, cleared or excavated.

The creation of space by excavation contrasts with the modernist continuum made tectonically by addition: framing articulating and jointing. This distinction offers openings into the works examined here which involve clearing and hollowing solids – design by erasure – where voids are a call to emptiness. In shifts between material and non-material, they establish an endlessly intriguing rapport and interplay between mass and space, full and empty, present and absent, what is and what is not. They pose the question of how to make the void visible: how to voice the void?

This paper examines sculptures by two Basques, Jorge Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida, a building by Spaniard, Alejandro de la Sota, and works by the Portuguese brothers, Aires Mateus, to unravel ideas of space, that is, silence, as something cleared away

Like silence, void is a figure of potentiality. Galician poet, José Ángel Valente, once noted: to create is to generate a state of readiness, in which the first thing created is [...] an empty space. For all that the artist creates is perhaps

the space of creation. And in the space of creation there is nothing (so that something can be created in it). The creation of the nothing is the absolute principle of all creation.

Furthermore, as has scarcely been noticed, the conception of space as “clearing (räumen)” expounded by Martin Heidegger with accompanying prints by Chillida is exactly that of the excavation/dis-occupation that is central here. Heidegger’s extraordinary intuition, however, was quite without mention of affects. What might an atmosphere of the void mean? These works are concerned with, the experience of being in space. How to characterise creations of space whose key role is to make us step outside our bodies to apprehend space by making us aware that we are in it? Feelings of stillness and solitude are exceeded, bringing us closer to conditions such as puzzlement, awe and wonder. These works exceed any normative figure-ground Gestalt. Instead, the ground here is pre-ground, the empty void of the air, breath, no-thing, what precedes, prefigures and grants making: this is what is most bewildering.

# Vacant Geelong

**Akari Nakai Kidd and Mirjana Lozanovska**

'Vacant Geelong' explores vacated industrial architecture in Geelong, the sites of its current de-industrialisation and the neglected beauty of its industrial buildings. The major industries, which shaped and transformed it from empty field into urbanised centre, are leaving. Yet, the buildings do not leave. Vacated, they remain embodiments of past vibrancy and lost futures. Hence, the vacating of de-industrialised architecture is a presence of absence.

Specifically, the project asks how to develop a history of the present as a history of vanishing. Ideas related to ruins as infinite state (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012; Edensor 2005; Hersey 1988; Malpas 2012; Stead 2003) inform this approach, as does an opposing compression of the period between progressive industrialisation and economies of offshore production. Interest in it, however, calls upon creative practices to postpone the categorical assumption of industry as past.

Creative works here examine blankness through the layered palimpsest of the presence of absence and two perspectives: the Alcoa Manufacturing plant on Point Henry and the collective memory of past workers of the Ford Manufacturing Complex that persists in the present.

Geelong poses the question of an enduring visible-until-vanished background. Repetitive, revised, relentless visual photographic recording of the Alcoa Manufacturing plant became a labour in perceiving its unattainable presence on the horizon. Further, a technique of the experiential drawing of the journey towards created

intimacy before its actual demolition and true absence. In contrast, the persistent presence of the iconic architecture of the Ford manufacturing complex on the Melbourne Road was explored through the collective memory of workers'. Stories and a series of photographs by industrial photographer Wolfgang Sievers as the artefacts of ghostly presence, and explored how, as fragmentary slices of history they are either lost or inscribed into the architectural presence of Ford. Importantly, the project links vacancy to blankness – blankness not as nothingness but the minimal difference between absence and presence, between seeing and perceiving, or forgetting and documenting.

# Between presence and absence: Phenomenal interstitiality in Eisenman's Guardiola House

**Adrian Lo**

American architect and educator, Peter Eisenman, treats architecture as a form of text which can be read through traces of presence and absence generated in the design process. The notion of the trace has been much developed in existing scholarship—including, amongst others, Andrew Benjamin, Cynthia Davidson, and Stan Allen. However, Eisenman's Guardiola House, an un-built project dating from 1988, has been largely overlooked in analysis and interpretation, yet, it is here that the trace is developed particularly in terms of the interstitial. The paper proposes that a framework focused on the interstitial presents novel strategies in notation for recording and indexing instances of absence and presence.

The proposition made here is that the Guardiola House presents a critical shift in Eisenman's work. For the first time, he explicitly explored the trace as condition of the interstitial in three dimensions through the operation of imprinting. This not only brought about the merging of constituent geometries, but also provided a new way of blurring spaces (and even concepts) to constitute what might be termed a 'phenomenal' state of the interstitial, drawing upon the distinction Rowe and Slutzky made between "literal" and "phenomenal" transparencies. The Guardiola House reflects Eisenman's shift from the rule-bound transformations framed in Structuralism to the complex, interpretive, and unpredictable 'events' of Post-structuralism. What significance, then, in terms of theory, culture, and program, does this notion of the interstitial have for Eisenman's work—and for the practice of architectural design?

'Traces' in the Guardiola House, in both the published and archived design processes are analyzed and subsequently compared to reveal the presence of paradoxes and inconsistencies in the production of such traces. The interstitial in the Guardiola project, it is argued—as an idea and as a process—has operated throughout Eisenman's career, as one consistent idea with multiple manifestations, yet at each stage developing a more refined concept of this interstitiality.

# Drawing canyon: Asymptotic presences in scale, material and sense

**Jules Moloney and Simon Twose**

Architectural drawing involves asymptotic merging of multiple presences. The sense, permanent interruption, tension and intensity of mark making, merges with intensities in what the marks draw, be it architectural space or landscape: presences in drawing and its subject matter asymptotically tend towards each other. This paper reports on Canyon, a hybrid drawing project that intensifies drawing's capacity for asymptotic presences. Canyon attempts to develop an ever-emergent, nascent architecture from presences in drawing and landscape. The first stage of Canyon is exhibited at the Palazzo Bembo in the XVI Venice Biennale.

Canyon draws atmospheres from the dynamic undersea landscape of Kaikōura Canyon, Aotearoa, NZ. It uses a hybrid of hand sketches, soundscapes and virtual reality (VR) to distil architectural possibilities from the vast body of water of the canyon, recently jolted by huge forces in the 2016 Kaikōura earthquake. This landscape is known through instrumental descriptions: sonic scans, digital models and scientific data, yet less easy to record, is its powerful and ominous presence. The canyon has unimaginable mass and scale, with water kilometres deep and is figured by seismic jolts, turbid flows, pressures and intensities. Canyon imaginatively projects into this unseen landscape, crossing its ominous presence with evocative graphite sketches, soundscapes and the canyon-like boundlessness of virtual reality.

This work proposes hybrid drawing as an open medium figured by asymptotic presences. It resonates with Jean Luc Nancy's notion of drawing as the opening of form, indicating 'the

traced figure's "essential incompleteness, a non-closure or non-totalizing of form"' (Nancy 2013: 1). We extend the openness of gestural, analogue sketching to the digital and sensorial, and argue that VR, and sound, can be sketch-like: they too are figured by 'recalcitrant, "meaningless" smears and blotches' (Elkins 1995: 860). We argue these hybrid, 'non-semiotic' marks draw presences, from material, scale and sense in drawing and landscape: presences, in asymptotic relation, pointing to an architecture of nascence.

# Aalto's foyers: Landscape presences

**John Roberts**

Alvar Aalto and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe can be framed as Modernist figures, each defined against the other through concepts including space, function and landscape. While Demetri Porphyrios (1982) investigates Aalto's "heterotopic" plans against Mies's 'homotopic' grids, Mertins (2003) promotes Mies's universal functionality and infinite spatiality over Aalto's defined functions and bounded spaces. Weston (1995) distinguishes a critical chasm between Aalto and modernism through his abstract representation of landscape, while Constant (1990) reviews Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, central to modernist history, as a 'picturesque' landscape. Nancy's (2013) reflection that from a sketch "what was only design becomes drawing for the first time" (99), helps us see the creative birth-giving of Aalto's design processes. In Aalto's sketches and drawings, where contour lines and other marks delineate topography as landscape presence, Ray (2005) observes that "lines and scorings", indicate "human movement ... through foyers and out towards the landscape" (162). This study investigates the making and sensing of landscape presence in Aalto's foyer spaces, with their in-between spatiality, formal fluidity, irregular geometries and contoured forms.

Recent thinking on atmosphere and presence by Böhme (2017), by Leatherbarrow (2015), and by Gumbrecht (2012a) informs this investigation of Aalto's theatre and auditorium foyers. An Aalto foyer, (from 'focus', L. 'hearth'), may be more hearth than "empty space", to use Brook's (1972) theatrical term. The 'landscape theatre' of Aalto's foyers conveys both architectural presence and absence, both enriching and

questioning human presence. Aalto's embrace of landscape was part of his ideal of harmony for everyday people; Gumbrecht's interest in *Stimmung* for literature's "non-professional readers" suggests similar motives (2012b: 2). Through considering Aalto's in-between foyer spaces, thinking of landscape, and remembering Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, we begin to understand how presence may be created and experienced through architectural strategies interconnected with the natural world. And we begin to comprehend that the scope of architecture in this way may well be to put at stake, in Steiner's words, through "the sheer animal joy of understanding something infinitely deep" (2002: 11).

# A reorientation towards aesthetics: Landscape architecture and the operationalisation of the sublime

**Shaun Rosier**

Landscape Architecture is increasingly involved in the design of urban landscapes as part of remediation or a process of revealing natural and environmental systems. However, the discourse surrounding the role of design does not emphasise a key part of the discipline's practice, the realm of aesthetics. Since the early 2000's systems-based design has dominated. However, a re-orientation towards aesthetics within landscape design is necessary fully to engage with the pre-existing landscape. Sublime events exist as the most extreme or disturbing aesthetic experiences in landscapes, and yet remains mired in cliché, the abstract or the mystical. Using Deleuze, this paper re-approaches the sublime to attain to the concrete nature of its 'presence' in the landscape by emphasising relations over objects.

Comparing the writings of Corner (1999a, 1999b), Waldheim (1999) and others who have contributed to the dominance of systems-based-design, with those of Meyer (1994, 2008, 2015), Girot (1994), Claramunt and Mosbach (1999, 2002), who argue for an aesthetically oriented design practice, a re-orientation is argued. A critical analysis of historical and contemporary discourse on the sublime reaffirms its place in landscape architectural practice. The sublime enters this research as the hidden but forever present realm of affect, where the most extreme and confronting encounters become what is typically argued as sublime (Kleinherenbrink, 2015).

This is demonstrated through the comparison of designed post-use quarry landscapes, fieldwork, and design studies conducted at the

Horokiwi Quarry. The typical means of engaging with a complex site is compared against techniques that engage with the aesthetic dimensions of the landscape. To move beyond the limitations of systems-based-design, I argue that impactful and powerful urban places and spaces require a stronger engagement with aesthetics and on-the-ground experience, alongside contemporary design practice, via aesthetic, fieldwork, representation and design technique.

# Presence—between walk and play and beyond

**Jan Smitheram**

Play has held an attraction to theorists, because ordinary rules and social conventions are partly suspended, giving way to fun, joy, fantasy, redundancy, and quirkiness – providing a positive atmosphere (Gilloch 1996: 84). Play provides escape from the world, even while engaging with one's context (Mainemelis & Ronson 2006). However, play has not had a strong hold on the architectural imagination (Stevens 2007), where for the most part it is normatively situated as belonging to a particular time and space of one's youth. The challenge to this norm of play has more recently been made explicit through architectural interventions which forcefully make clear the positive dimensions of play. This paper takes a different approach and considers how taking a walk around and through buildings can remind us of the joy of interaction through playful movement. Moreover, while space in architectural discussions has been given to stilled contemplation (or a slow and engaged walk), this paper focuses on the shifting and changing rhythms between regulated movement and movement that is more transient and playful, which animates the aesthetic experience (Lester 2013).

The specific question at stake here is how our interactions with a building are crucial to understanding presence and absence. To explore this, I use a theoretical framework which brings Judith Butler into conversation with Sarah Ahmed to explore how aesthetic experience is both regulated and charged with affect. I begin by describing my experience of visiting SA-NAA's Louvre-Lens to examine the shifting relationship between architecture and presence, which is produced through my experience shift-

ing from playful engagements to a gentle sway as I encountered the artwork. My reflections on walking, at times playfully, through different spaces intersect with a tradition in spatial theory on the relationship between self and environment emergent with affective and performative potential (Wylie 2006). Observations arising from playing and walking at Louvre-Lens lead to reflection on how play dramatised the experience, interaction, and extension of architecture. This paper concludes with the proposition that in order to look at presence through the lens of play, there is a need to understand processes of transformation and regulation.

# Monumentality and 'light' in the Sydney Opera House

**Kamila Soh**

In his 1944 essay titled *Monumentality*, Louis Kahn writes, 'Monumentality in architecture may be defined as... a spiritual quality inherent in a structure which conveys the feeling of its eternity, that it cannot be added to or changed.' (Kahn, 1944: 455) This is not a spiritual quality that is to be separated from human life. On the contrary, Kahn indicates the spiritual within his buildings, 'light', is the tangible representation of fundamental human needs. A monument can, therefore, be understood as a means by which the constant demand for civic and lyrical expression is materialised.

Using Kahn's theory of 'light', the paper will explore the manifestation of light in the shells of the Sydney Opera House (1973). While much attention has been given to the play of sunlight across the tiles of the shells, this paper will focus more on a less explored aspect of light—the use of the shells' vast surfaces for the display of artistic projections. This can be identified as part of a key aspect of monumentality often overlooked in Giedion, Léger and Sert's 1943 manifesto, *Nine Points of Monumentality*, where it was envisioned that modern materials and new techniques would be employed to express the humane qualities found in older buildings. Projected displays across building surfaces would thus allow for the desired festivities that would serve to invigorate and unite the people. As proven in the Sydney Opera House, this did not only serve a civic purpose but also expressed the need for a poetic by unifying art, sculpture and architecture. An example is in the case of Sydney's Vivid Festival, where the Sydney Opera House becomes a centrepiece for this phenomenon. This paper will take these

reflections on monumentality and light to highlight the historical significance of this, beyond mere entertainment.

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## Biographies:

**Konrad Buhagiar** has a degree in Architecture and Civil Engineering from the University of Malta, and a post-graduate degree in Studio e Restauro dei Monumenti from the Università di Roma, "La Sapienza". He is a founding partner of Architecture Project (AP) and Senior Visiting Lecturer at the University of Malta. He has lectured in several countries abroad and is a member of the Board of Experts of the European Urban Space Prize. He is co-editor of *The Founding Myths of Architecture* (2016).

**Michael Chapman** is a Professor of Architecture at the University of Newcastle, where he teaches architectural design and theory. His research explores the relationship between the avant-garde and modern architecture, with an emphasis on Dada and Surrealism.

**Peter Connolly** is Programme Director and Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. He coordinates a multidisciplinary research group titled Ecologies Design Lab. Peter recently completed a doctorate titled 'An Affirmative Open Systems Landscape Design Assemblage'. He is continually developing landscape architectural forms of urbanism and styles of landscape architectural design research and gives particular and critical attention to recent landscape architectural and urbanist discourses.

**Andrew Douglas** is senior lecturer and curriculum leader in Spatial Design at Auckland University of Technology. He currently coordinates the Making Public Research Cluster, which investigates the role of urban events and place-making relative to emerging forms of civic life. He is Executive Editor of *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, and has co-edited a range of recent issues. He has pursued postgraduate studies at the University of Auckland and Goldsmiths, University of London, where he received his doctorate. His research ranges across fields associated with urban and Greek philosophy and history, aspects of poststructuralist thinking—particularly the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari—critical perspectives on socio-spatial practice, and gender and sexuality as these pertain to literature, cinema and the urban imaginary. His current research includes the role of affect in emerging forms of publicness and governance, historico-political urban contestation in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the technologisation of interiority.

**Guillaume Dreyfuss** is Director of Research at Architecture Project (AP). Guillaume is an art historian and obtained an MSc in Sustainable Heritage from UCL (University College London). He is co-editor of *A Printed Thing* (2012), and *The Founding Myths of Architecture* (2016), and is the author of various academic papers.

**Hélène Frichot** is Associate Professor and Docent in the School of Architecture, KTH, Stockholm, and the Director of Critical Studies in Architecture. Her research examines the transdisciplinary field between architecture and philosophy. In 2017 she was the recipient of a Riksbankens Jubileumsfond sabbatical grant, one outcome of which is a forthcoming book with Bloomsbury called *Creative Ecologies* (2018). She is co-editor of *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* (2017), *Deleuze and the City* (2016), and *Deleuze and Architecture* (2013).

**Anastasia Globa** is a research fellow at the IDeEA lab at Deakin University, Australia. Her current research includes algorithmic design, spatial modelling and responsive environments. She completed her doctorate at Victoria University of Wellington in 2015, after postgraduate studies in Germany and Russia.

**Charlott Greub** is an artist, architect and urban designer, educated at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany, who has received many fellowships and awards: among them the Cit. des Arts Paris, France and the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany. Her work has been exhibited at Gallery Aedes Berlin, the German Architecture Museum DAM, Frankfurt, and the Lehmbruck Museum Duisburg, Germany. Currently she is assistant professor for architecture at North Dakota State University in Fargo. Previously she taught architecture and art at the University of Utah, the Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany, and the Technical University Graz, Austria. She is licensed as an architect in Germany since 1993, and practiced internationally as an architect in New York City (USA), Maastricht (Netherlands), and Berlin (Germany). Since 2015 She is currently undertaking doctoral study at the Technical University in Aachen, Germany where she conducts research about the pavilion as a new genre between art and architecture.

**Fiona Harrisson** teaches in Landscape Architecture at RMIT University in Melbourne and has a background in horticulture, landscape architecture and urban culture. Her teaching and research explore modes of practice through a one-to-one scale. She is undertaking a practice-based PhD at RMIT, in which the making of a private garden is an intimate durational practice. Fiona was recently a guest editor for a special issue of *Landscape Review*: 'The Garden as Laboratory.' She also practices as a design consultant on public projects and private gardens.

**Ross Jenner** teaches at the University of Auckland. He has a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, has practised in the UK, Finland, Switzerland, and New Zealand, taught at various institutions in Australia and the US, was Commissioner for the NZ Section of the XIX Triennale di Milano, published in several books and journals, and is an editor of *Interstices*

**Ephraim Joris** is a Design Director at Architecture Project (AP) and a faculty member at KU Leuven and Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam. His research considers architectural phenomenology and the recasting of history as the experiential content of speculative architecture. He has contributed research and teaching at various institutions such as RMIT, Syracuse University, Westminster University and Brighton University. He has been a program director at UCA in Canterbury, and KU Leuven, and is a current member of The Mediated City Research Team at University College London. He is the author of various international publications and academic papers.

**Mirjana Lozanovska** is Associate Professor at Deakin University, Australia. Her work investigates the creative ways that architecture mediates human dignity and identity through multidisciplinary theories of space. She leads the collaborative work in the Vacant Geelong project. Recent publications include *Ethno-Architecture and the Politics of Migration* (ed.), Routledge 2016.

**Akari Nakai Kidd** is a Lecturer at Deakin. She received her architectural training from the Cooper Union in New York. Her research explores the in-betweens of architectural practice, specifically design, through the lens of affect theory. She currently teaches in architectural design, theory and design research. She has work published in major international journals.

**Adrian Lo** completed his PhD in Architecture at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, where he also did his Bachelors. His research focuses on the processes and issues relating to space making, particularly the condition of interstitiality and in-between spaces in architecture and urbanism, as found in the work of Peter Eisenman, Aires Mateus, and urbanscapes in Hong Kong and Kathmandu. Currently a Professional Teaching Fellow at the University of Auckland, he has practiced architecture in Hong Kong, and has held teaching positions in New Zealand and Nepal, teaching architectural and urban design, history-theory, and supervised final year theses.

**Marian Macken** teaches in design and media in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland. She trained in architecture, landscape architecture and visual art, receiving a PhD, by thesis and creative work, from the University of Sydney. Marian's research examines histories and theories of spatial representation; temporal aspects of architecture; and the book form as spatial practice. Her work has been acquired by various international public collection of artists' books, including those at Tate Britain, the Victoria and Albert Museum, UK, and Urawa Art Museum, Japan.

**Chelle Macnaughtan** is a creative practitioner concerned with transdisciplinary methodologies of indeterminacy from music into architecture, incorporating fine art, design and performance, as well as private architecture commissions and sessional teaching. She was the inaugural recipient of the Australian Institute of Architects Lysaght Research Scholarship (2005). In 2010 Chelle completed fieldwork in spatial listening as part of a Japan Foundation Fellowship in Kyoto. Her research is published in various edited books, journals and conference proceedings.

**Jules Moloney** is Professor of Architecture and Interdisciplinary Design at Deakin University, Australia. He has held position at the Victoria University of Wellington, the University of Melbourne and the University of Auckland. His academic career was preceded by a decade of architectural practice in the United Kingdom. The distinctive approach he brings to his research and teaching is based on expertise in digital technology and the importance of grounding computational design within the wider context of theory and practice.

**John Roberts** taught and lectured in Architectural Design, Site Studies and Communications in the BDes(Arch) program at the School of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Newcastle, NSW, from 2000-2017. He has also supervised MArch and co-supervised PhD and MPhil(Arch) post-graduate students. His teaching interests include design process, site studies, field learning, modernist history and theory, and hand drawing. John's research interests concern historical and theoretical relationships between architecture and landscape. His MPhil(Arch) thesis (2010) investigated prospect-refuge symbolism in Alvar Aalto's architecture. Current research interests include ruins; whiteness; and atmosphere, waves and clouds in modern and recent architecture. He is currently completing PhD studies at the University of Tasmania on landscape, spatiality, surface and form in Aalto's architecture.

**Shaun Rosier** is a Landscape Architect currently working towards a PhD entitled “Operationalising the Sublime: The Remediation of Horokiwi Quarry” at Victoria University of Wellington. Shaun has been developing aesthetic and design techniques that strive to work towards developing a stronger practice for engaging with the pre-existing landscape in terms of an aesthetic of affects.

**Nicola Short** is a heritage professional with over 25 years in museum and heritage management both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and overseas. She has held senior management roles in Local Government and museums in Auckland and Australia. She has recently begun teaching at Auckland University of Technology and the University of Auckland in the areas of heritage conservation, spatial theory and urban ecologies. Her post-graduate work is in the areas of critical heritage theory and practice with a particular interest in the policy and sustainable development of urban areas. Nicola has a Masters in Museum and Heritage Studies from University of Sydney and is currently exploring a PhD in critical heritage theory, social outcomes and sustainability.

**Jan Smitheram** is a senior lecturer in the School of Architecture at Victoria University of Wellington where she teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students. Extending work from her Ph.D. she looks at the relationship between performance, performativity and affect within the context of architecture. Her recent research looks at architectural practice through the lens of performativity and affect. Her work has been published in international anthologies, journals and conference proceedings.

**Kamila Soh** is currently enrolled in a Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Built Environment, at the University of New South Wales. Kamila's thesis focuses on architect Jørn Utzon's concept of wellbeing and its impact upon the urban role of the Sydney Opera House. Kamila has previously completed a Master of Architecture and Bachelor of Environmental Design at the University of Western Australia. Kamila is currently working as a tutor for the University of New South Wales and the University of Notre Dame and has previously worked in architecture and interior design.

**Simon Twose** is an architect and senior lecturer at the School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His work focuses on design research, looking particularly at crossings and transferences between architectural drawing and built space. Twose has published and exhibited widely, including invited contributions to five Venice Architecture Biennales.

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## Notes

# Notes

## Theme 3: Composition / Music / Acoustics

### *Matariki and more*

#### **Gillian Whitehead**

*(Ngāi Terangi),*

*DNZM, MNZM*

*Composer*

A prolific composer, Gillian Karawe Whitehead's continuous stream of works includes operas, orchestral works, choral pieces, vocal and instrumental chamber compositions, solo works, pieces involving taonga puoro and compositions including improvisation.

### *Aesthetic immurement: the Schlock of the new and my imperfect body (of work)*

#### **David Chisholm**

*Composer / Teacher / Creative Producer*

David Chisholm has an international practice defined through diverse and hybrid collaboration for which he has won six Green Room Awards, a French Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Award, a Highly Commended Paul Lowin Prize, a Mention at the 36th Bourges International Competition of Electro-acoustic Music and Electronic Art, a Special Mention in the X Media Forum, 31st International Film Festival in Moscow, the Medibank Private State and National Arts Awards and The National Young Achiever of the Year. David teaches Music Composition and Cultural Studies at Monash University and recently completed his PhD at Melbourne University. He is based between Santiago, Chile and Bendigo, Australia, where in 2013 he founded the Bendigo International Festival of Exploratory Music, of which he remains the Artistic Director and CEO.

*The oblique imperative:  
The acoustical dimensions  
of presence*

**Sir Harold Marshall,**  
*KNZM, FRSNZ*  
*Professor Emeritus (retired)*  
*University of Auckland*

Emeritus Professor Sir Harold Marshall co-founded Marshall Day Acoustics Ltd with Chris Day in 1981. He is recognised internationally for his contribution to concert hall design, in particular his seminal work with Mike Barron on acoustics, and more specifically on the importance of lateral reflections. Sir Harold has been design acoustician on many major concert hall projects, including the Guangzhou Opera House with architect Zaha Hadid, and the Philharmonie de Paris with French architect Jean Nouvel.

## Theme 2: Visual Arts / Media Studies / Artificial Intelligence

### *Spectrum to spectre*

#### **Dane Mitchell**

*Artist*

Dane Mitchell was recently selected to represent New Zealand at the 2019 International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, Italy. Since 2008 he has held 30 solo exhibitions and in the same period participated in more than 50 group exhibitions. Dane's practice is concerned with the physical properties of the intangible and visible manifestations of other dimensions. His work teases out the potential for objects and ideas to appear and disappear. His practice speculates on what is material and explores systems of knowledge or belief and people's experiences of them. In 2018 he is holding solo exhibitions at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne/Lyon; Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland; and Hopkinson Mossman, Wellington; as well as participating in the First Thailand Biennale, and a citywide project in Belgium, PLAY Kortrijk.

### *Architectures of virtual absence: Digital media and information environmentalism*

#### **Ethan R. Plaut,**

*PhD*

*University of Auckland*

Ethan Plaut is a Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Auckland. Before coming to New Zealand he held two different postdoctoral fellowships at Stanford University, in Computer Science from 2016-17, and in Writing and Rhetoric from 2014-16. Research interests include communication avoidance and silences as well as digital journalism and propaganda. Ethan is also a former journalist, including three years at an independent newspaper in Cambodia.

## *Artificial intelligence, intensity and presence*

**Sam Ginn**

*Stanford University*

Sam Ginn is an Artificial Intelligence researcher and student at Stanford University. He specialises in natural language processing and interactive language learning – the process of computers learning to understand language through live interaction with humans. In his research, he seeks to bridge the cutting-edge in AI research with the philosophical ground of continental philosophy. He is also the co-founder of a healthcare AI startup based in California.

# Theme 1: History / Culture / Theology

## *Presences across worlds*

### **Dame Anne Salmond**

*Distinguished Professor  
University of Auckland*

Anne Salmond is a Distinguished Professor in Maori Studies and Anthropology at the University of Auckland. In 2013 she won the Rutherford Medal, New Zealand's top scientific award, and became the New Zealander of the Year. In 2017 she hosted *Artefact*, a television series about the power of iconic objects, past and present. Dame Anne is also a Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Sciences in the US, Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy, and Foreign Member of the American Philosophical Society. She has a strong interest in Enlightenment natural history, Maori and Pacific philosophies relating to land and sea, and 'wicked' socio-ecological challenges, and reflects on these in her latest book, *Tears of Rangī: Experiments across Worlds* (Auckland University Press, 2017).

## *Place of presence and absence in Maori philosophising*

### **Carl T. H. Mika**

*(Tuhourangi and Ngati Whanaunga),  
PhD, MIS, LLB  
University of Waikato*

Carl Mika is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. After a PhD thesis in German Studies in 2013, Carl became increasingly fascinated by an indigenous theory of clarity/obscurity, and in 2017 won a Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia Award for his book, *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy* (Routledge, 2017). From a background in law, indigenous and Māori studies, and a knowledge base in Western philosophy (especially metaphysics, existentialism and phenomenology) his current research interests are in the representation of philosophy as a political act for indigenous peoples. He is co-editor of the journals *Knowledge Cultures* and *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, and an associate editor of *Online Journal of World Philosophies*.

Nga mihi nui ki a koutou.

*On holy ground: A church as a place  
of presence*

**Rev Dr Merv Duffy SM**

*Dip. Tchg BSc (Hons)*

*(Victoria University of Wellington)*

*STB (HB) STL STD*

*(Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome)*

*Good Shepherd College, Auckland*

The Rev Dr Merv Duffy is a Marist priest from Christchurch, ordained in 1985. While studying for priesthood, he completed a degree in Mathematics at Victoria University of Wellington and taught Mathematics, Computing and Religious Education at secondary level. For three years he was employed by the Qualifications Authority as the National Moderator for Religious Education. Subsequently, Merv spent four years in Rome studying for the license and then doctorate in systematic theology. He is currently the Acting Principal of, and a theology lecturer at, Good Shepherd College in Auckland.

# New dimensions of presence

## Keynote Address

### **Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht**

*Albert Guérard Professor in Literature,  
Emeritus (retired)  
Stanford University, CA*

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht is the Albert Guérard Professor in Literature in the Departments of Comparative Literature and of French and Italian (and by courtesy, he is affiliated with the Department of Iberian and Latin American Cultures, the Department of German Studies and the Program in Modern Thought and Literature).

As a scholar, Gumbrecht focuses on the histories of the national literatures in Romance language (especially French, Spanish and Brazilian), but also on German literature, while at the same time he teaches and writes about the Western philosophical tradition (almost exclusively on non-analytic philosophy) with an emphasis on French and German nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts. In addition, Gumbrecht tries to analyse and to understand forms of aesthetic experience in twenty-first-century everyday culture. Over the past 40 years, he has published more than 2000 texts, including books, translated into more than 20 languages. In Europe and in South America, Gumbrecht has a presence as a public intellectual, whereas in the academic world, he has been acknowledged with Honorary Doctorates (ten in all) from universities in Canada, Denmark, Germa-



ny, Hungary, Portugal, Russia and Georgia, with the most recent from Leuphana Universität Lüneburg (Germany) in July 2017. He has also held a large number of visiting professorships, at the Collège de France, University of Lisbon, University of Manchester and the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, among others. In the spring of 2017, he was a Martin Buber Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. A book project tentatively entitled *Prose of the World: Diderot, Goya, Lichtenberg, and Mozart and an End of Enlightenment* is in preparation for publication.

## Matariki (2008) for solo voice

*Matariki, people come together Matariki, provider of plentiful food Matariki, when water lies in pools Matariki, little eyes in the sky Look up to the sky, to the long sky the sweet smell of cooked kumara smoke drifts upward Matariki, people come together... Matariki rises a time to cry a time to laugh a time to lament a time to dance again Matariki, people come together... Matariki god shine here from within the night be abundant in growth be well, people hold fast to the peace emerging in the world Matariki, people come together...*

The text was written by the composer in te reo Māori for a double celebration; to mark Matariki, the Māori mid-winter festival on the one hand, and the birthday of mezzo-soprano Ana Good. Performed here by mezzo soprano Claire Scholes and dancer Cathy Livermore

# Presence: modalities, “stimmung” and intensity

*Interstices Colloquium*

*Saturday 14 July 2018*

*Convened by Professor Emeritus Sir Harold Marshall and Professor Emeritus Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht*

Coming from very different worlds and angles (Sir Harold Marshall: Auckland, Architecture, Acoustics; and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: Stanford, Comparative Literature, Philosophy), we met almost randomly, first “on the web” and later, less randomly, at Stanford, and became inspired by the idea of organising a colloquium about “Presence: Modalities, ‘Stimmung’ and Intensity” in New Zealand.

By “presence” we understand, above all, “tangibility” as an aspect of human existence that, counter to modern “rationality,” includes our bodies and, around the bodies, space as an emerging and unfolding dimension. There are two main reasons making us think that an intellectual focus on “presence” is timely, not to say necessary, today. From an academic (and not only “Humanities and Arts”) point of view, and due to the almost exclusive concentration on mind and consciousness in the modern philosophical tradition (“Hermeneutics”), there is a flagrant lack of viable distinctions, concepts and arguments that take into account our physical and spatial being. In addition, and from an existential angle, electronic technology and communication has pushed this exclusion and

even elimination of body/space to a new extreme – an extreme, however, that also explains our growing desire for phenomena and conditions of presence in our lives.

One might speculate that the emergence of the concept of “Aesthetics” (and the practices it entailed), since the late seventeenth / early eighteenth century, was an early reaction to the modern priority of mind and consciousness. If aesthetic experience and aesthetic practices is the one social field where (mind—based) “meaning” has always been mediated with body, space and tangibility, then we may understand its permanent value in relation to our desire for “presence.” The same is probably true for a number of theological concepts stemming mainly from the Christian (above all, Catholic and Anglican) tradition, such as “incarnation,” “liturgy” or “epiphany.”

In conceptualising this colloquium, we had no intention to narrow down the range of possible intuitions, thoughts and contributions, but from the outset we imagined a concentration on three topics and fields:

- In the first place, “Modalities” of presence, to draw attention to the historical and social variety of situations in which we can observe, analyse and understand occurrences of presence.
- Second, the German concept “Stimmung” (“atmosphere,” “mood,” etc.), which draws our attention to a multiplicity of (individually always certain) psychic states that are all triggered by the lightest forms of touch,

with which our material environment can impact our bodies (think of sound, music, weather, luminosity). The perhaps most compact and most beautiful description of “Stimmung” can be found in Toni Morrison’s novel, *Jazz*, as “It is like being touched from inside.”

- Finally, “Intensity” is a concept with a steep career in recent intellectual discourses, especially in the Humanities and Arts. Difficult to grasp and define, it seems to refer to existential moments in which our longing for presence (and perhaps even plenitude) come close to satisfaction – although such moments might be temporarily limited and also imply physical or psychic threats.

For the discussions of this colloquium, we imagined and invited two types of contributions (without, again, trying to limit the range of reactions and proposals): on the one hand, case studies, or historically and sociologically specific and specifying descriptions of situations where presence phenomena have articulated themselves in spite of the modern priority of “rationality” and “consciousness”; and on the other hand, more individual (and therefore perhaps stylistically precarious) descriptions of moments of “intensity” and (why not?) existential perfection.

We are delighted to have been able to assemble such a distinguished line-up of speakers for this event, spanning multiple disciplines and areas of thought. We have grouped them thematically, from “History / Culture / Theology,”

to “Visual Arts / Media Studies / Artificial Intelligence” and “Composition / Music / Acoustics,” with a roundtable discussion following each. We thank all the speakers sincerely for their time and valuable contributions.

Professor Emeritus Sir Harold Marshall and  
Professor Emeritus Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

July 2018

# 20 18 Interstices

Colloquium

Presence



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