

The Fairy Falls

Fairy Falls

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Cushla Donaldson



David John Hall

**Born to lose, live to
win: an anatomy of
bogan**

Born to lose, live to win: an anatomy of bogan¹

David John Hall

Is bogan an insult?

It says something that, for many years, I never thought so.

Of course, this doesn't mean it isn't an insult. A lot of cruel and derogatory language is buoyed along by people's ignorance of the sting in a word's tail. A speaker can lack the sense of history or systemic prejudice that is implicated in a word – but ignorance is not the same as innocence. Ignorance might make a slur understandable, perhaps even forgivable, but it doesn't absolve the speaker entirely. It doesn't make hurtful words un hurtful.

Perhaps bogan involves post-intentional prejudice.² This is a plausible accusation and the etymology of bogan would seem to support it. In 2012, bogan entered the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) as a “depreciative term for unfashionable, uncouth, or unsophisticated person, esp. of low social status”. Earlier, the [Cassell's Dictionary of Slang](#) defined bogan as “(1) an uncouth person. (2) one who is mindlessly conventional. (3) a social misfit, a ‘nerd’.” Such definitions situate bogan unambiguously in the realm of the pejorative. More troubling still, the association of “low social status” raises the spectre of classism, the most misunderstood dimension of identity politics, rudely in the news again.³

But... really? A “nerd”? “Mindlessly conventional”? This doesn't resonate with me at all. Nor is this the first time that the word “bogan” has seemed to refer to something other than what I thought it did. When I lived in Melbourne circa 1999–2000, I noticed that bogan was used rather differently there, to refer to what in New Zealand we called “boy racers”: young men in souped up Honda Civics with ultraviolet underbody lights and gabba-spouting subwoofers. To my mind, the Australians had bogan confused. This was reinforced in 2013 by the “Boganland” scandal, where an Australian politician complained in a leaked email that: “Bogans have... inherited the earth and the world is full of them demanding their right, in an odd way, to be heard. [...] It is no longer satisfactory that they will just buy (and wear) Ugg boots, watch [Big Brother](#), choke on a diet of grease, dye their bright purple [sic], tatoo [sic] and rejoice in their ignorance.”⁴ Obviously, this politician's usage aligns neatly with the dictionary definitions, his curdled contempt conveying his own sense of superior status. This is intentional prejudice, classism even. But again, I find myself mystified by the usage. The bogan I know wouldn't be caught dead in Ugg boots. Boots to be sure, but leather boots with steel-caps, not fucking [Ugg](#) boots.

So who is the bogan of my intuitions?

My heartfelt answer is: I know one when I see one. To say anything more is to indulge in caricature. Because even classic motifs, such as the mullet, are neither sufficient nor necessary. There are fully-fledged bogans who don't have a mullet; likewise, there are folks with mullets who are decidedly not bogans, most notably those middle-class

¹ The title is the motto on the late Lemmy Kilmister's ace of spades tattoo. I dedicate this essay to his ineffable spirit and also to Malo John Rootham Hall who was born the week it was written.

² I'm riffing here on Imani Perry's notion of post-intentional racism from [More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States](#) (2011), New York: New York University Press.

³ By “in the news” I principally refer to the torrent of oversimplistic and essentialising commentary about “the white working class” that has surrounded the election of US President Donald J. Trump. For a taste of richer earlier analysis, see Beverley Skeggs (2000), [Class, Self, Culture](#). London: Routledge; or Linda McDowell (2006) “Reconfigurations of gender and class relations: Class differences, class condescension and the changing place of class relations.” [Antipode](#) 38: 825–850.

⁴ Matt Smith, Jason Tin, 'Palmer United Party Queensland leader Alex Douglas blasts bogans in emails', [CourierMail](#).

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poseurs who thought that acquiring a mullet would make them one. To bastardise Heidegger, they are as Dasein to being, standing in relation to boganness, not as Bogan-in-itself.⁵

There is no ur-bogan, no essential core, to single out. This point was well made in New Zealand Parliament by former ACT MP Deborah Coddington, who in 2003 poignantly asked the House: “How do we define a bogan?”⁶ She grasped rhetorically for candidate traits – “Is it someone who wears a mudflap hairstyle, a mullettee in black jeans?” – but her deeper point, quite correct, was that the bogan is too indeterminate, too essentially contestible, to be a sound target for legislation. “Are we going to ban people wearing stonewashed black denims?” she asked. And what else? A well-worn Iron Maiden T-shirt, a Paterson Riley-style skull ring, black wraparound shades? These could be worn – as they often are by fashionistas today – to signal what is known as “a touch of bogan”, but conviction on these grounds would land many wealthy Aucklanders’ sons and daughters in jail.⁷ Still, if enough of these elements are in place, along with certain traits of character and upbringing, then by weight of evidence a bogan is born. Yet if the cultural content is ambiguous, the presence of culture is not. Bogan is not just evaluative but also descriptive, not just a generalised put-down but a name for something in the world. It has a look, an attitude, a habitus, a way of life, a reality that is wholly lacking from the dictionary definitions. I don’t see the bogan as a negative concept in the sense that the Australian politician used it: an offal pit to be filled with everything one despises about one’s less well-off compatriots. No: I have in mind a positive definition, based upon a culture that is constructed and asserted by bogans themselves, that is grounded in their sincere interests and values, that involves their agency.⁸ This is where I cannot agree that bogan is an insult – or at least not only an insult. This is where I stand my ground.

⁵ Dasein is a German word that means “being there” or “presence”. Martin Heidegger used it to refer to the experience of being which is peculiar to humans, because only for humans is the very question of being a question. Typically Dasein is contrasted with being-in-itself, which has no reflexive relation to its own beingness: it just is (and even this overstates it).

⁶ Deborah Coddington (2013), ‘Land Transport (Street and Illegal Drag Racing) Amendment Bill — Second Reading’ Hansard, Session 1; Volume 607; Week 20; House of Representatives, 1st April 2003.

⁷ This hypothetical law might also catch out Upper Harbour MP and current Deputy Prime Minister Paula Bennett whose leopard-skin print campaign car is a naked appeal to her electorate’s positive self-identification as “Westies”, a species of bogan that is endemic to West Auckland. Her slogan: “Proud to be a Westie.”

⁸ Recall Bennett’s “Proud to be a Westie” slogan (see fn.7). Calculated to be sure, but she wouldn’t use it – and nor would she win her electorate seat – if the slogan didn’t have resonance among her local community.

⁹ The methodological echoes here are to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s assertion that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language.” Philosophical Investigations section 43.

One worry is that I’m harbouring a romanticised conception of the bogan. But it isn’t only me who conceives of the bogan in this way. I didn’t conjure up this conception by myself; I did not will my bogan into existence in some fit of proletariophilia. I learned how to use the concept in a certain time and place – in rural North Canterbury in the 1980s and 1990s – where bogans were far from uncommon. This was not only my bogan, but the bogan of a linguistic community that I happened to belong to.⁹

The boundaries of this community are difficult to discern, especially from the inside. But I suspect that geography is a factor. This would explain why I felt that sense of rupture, of disalignment, when I first heard “bogan” spoken in Australia. We in Aotearoa New Zealand simply seem to use bogan differently, a sociological fact that the lexicographers have failed to detect.

This linguistic community also seems to have generational boundaries. An unscientific analysis of several hundred Aucklanders in 2011 found that those “under the age of 30 are more likely to consider being a bogan a good thing compared to those over 30.”¹⁰

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Professor of Linguistics Miriam Meyerhoff said that younger respondents associated the bogan with “individualism and identity, being ‘who you are’, while older Kiwis (if they know the word at all) are more likely to see it as something negative.” Younger Aucklanders were also more likely to recognise that women could be bogans too, a point that seems self-evident to me.

It isn’t merely that I hold a romanticised conception of the bogan, then. I would go further by saying that the bogan is, or can be, a romantic conception. For some of us, the bogan is a kind of hero, a model of humble but attainable virtue which is built on local materials and contrary to certain contemporary ills, none more so than the vice of condescension.

This seems to me a far preferable state of affairs to one where the word “bogan” is outlawed as impolite or irreformably classist. In his book, *The Bogan Delusion*, David Nichols describes the bogan as “just a coy mask for demonising the disadvantaged” [emphasis added].¹¹ Similarly, Chris Gibson describes bogan as “merely the latest linguistic/cultural device to maintain middle-class hegemony, keeping the working-classes at bay as apprehensive other” [emphasis added].¹² Admittedly, these writers both operate in the Australian context where bogan is clearly used as a catch-all expression of contempt for the working class, for all that’s uncouth in the eyes of the beholder. I also don’t doubt that the word has been used the same way in New Zealand also. But I still want to dispute that “just”, that “merely”. Is the bogan just a demonic aspersion? Is it merely an oppressive device wielded by the bourgeoisie? Is that all the bogan is nowadays; all that it could ever be?

For a start, this defies the spirit of bogans themselves, who are no strangers to salty language and tactically delivered offence. It also frustrates the well-worn strategy of the underdog to embrace the contempt of others, precisely because it shows them up to be the pretentious and morally bankrupt shits that they are. Finally, the classification of bogan as irredeemably politically incorrect only reifies the term as pejorative; it undoes all the good work that’s been done to reclaim, to re-valence, the word. In his article, Gibson proposes that the deep meaning of bogan is “an absence of cultivated aesthetics or tastes”¹³ – but by doing so he only takes the bastards at their word. He posits boganness as a cruelty imposed upon the working class, a deprecation that is mean-spirited but broadly correct, and that can be thwarted only by an enlightened class of Marxian cultural theorists who unveil these ideological strategems – “Behold!” – in the paywalled recesses of scholarly journals.

My sense is precisely the opposite to Gibson’s, that the bogan is a paragon of cultivated taste with a highly refined aesthetic sensibility. Granted, these aesthetics and tastes do not correspond with the New Zealand majority, but that only buttresses my point. It takes effort, intention and specialist knowledge to be a bogan – to hold forth intelligibly on when Metallica jumped the shark, to resuscitate an old scrapheap into a burnout-worthy vehicle, to create a serviceable bong with nothing more than standard kitchen implements. This cultural richness is precisely what sustains the oeuvre of New

¹⁰ University of Auckland, “Bogans are on the increase – and that’s not a bad thing”, Press Release 17th May 2011: <http://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/news/news-2011/2011/05/17/Bogans-are-on-the-increase-and-thats-not-a-bad-thing.html>

¹¹ David Nichols, ‘The Story of My Book: David Nichols on The Bogan Delusion,’ *Readings*, June 2, 2011, <http://www.readings.com.au/news/the-story-of-my-book-david-nichols-on-the-bogan-delusion>

¹² Gibson, Chris. (2013). “Welcome to Bogan-ville: reframing class and place through humour.” *Journal of Australian Studies*, 37 (1), 62-75.

¹³ Ibid

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Zealander Dr Dave Snell, a self-confessed bogan and self-described boganologist who published a doctoral thesis, then a book, and most recently a television series on the topic.¹⁴

Where I grew up in North Canterbury, the bogan was anything but “mindlessly conventional”. On the contrary, it was one of very few options to defy the conventional rugby-fixated rural culture that dominated. In a pre-internet era, it required effort and dedication to run against that current. I know because I did it myself, via a tape copy of Slayer’s *Reign in Blood*, lent to me when I was about thirteen years old, under conditions of secrecy by a classmate. Listened to furtively in the dead of night through headphones, this album opened a portal that could never be closed, a portal which all true bogans also pass through.

This allegiance to heavy metal – so primary to the New Zealand bogan yet so conspicuously absent from the Australian – is of the utmost importance. It is an artform that has long revelled in baiting, provoking, antagonising and offending those who would see themselves as superior: conservatives, figures of authority, and mainstream society. Nor is it any coincidence that the genre has its roots in the working class, crystallising in industrial Birmingham when four grafters – Ozzy, Tony, Geezer and Bill – relaunched themselves as Black Sabbath in 1969. Then, as now, heavy metal was a chance to bite back, to take control of dynamics that ostracised them, even if it invited new lines of loathing.

A feature of moral panics is the singling out of “folk devils” who create social mischief.¹⁵ The moral majority initiates these panics to cultivate its collective identity, to create an Other by which to oppose itself and therefore define itself. As Horace Romano Harré and his co-authors describe in their classic study of hooliganism, *The Rules of Disorder*, this process induces in the moral majority “a comforting sense of order and social propriety”.¹⁶ Yet heavy metal pre-empts this process; it avoids passively becoming the victim of a witch hunt by actively embracing the witch, by playing up the folk devil, whether through occultism, militarism, drug use, or drag. It sets the terms by which it is persecuted – or as Machine Head once put it: “I’ll be the thing that you despise, ‘cause I’m the path to your demise, and I will be there standing tall – tall!”¹⁷

As anyone who’s spent time inside a mosh pit knows, the semblance of chaos is orchestrated by an unspoken etiquette, a physical grammar, a set of rules. It isn’t unregulated aggression but a consensual suspension of ordinary public conduct, mediated by camaraderie and tolerance (to a point). What looks like an absence of order – or taste – from the outside is anything but. There is a relational logic that holds together the practices of heavy metal, as well as their position within wider society. Harré’s aloof conclusions on hooliganism retain their usefulness:

We have come to see [what is happening] through the eyes of the people who take part in it. They see their social life as a struggle for personal dignity in a general social framework that daily denies them this dignity. Far from valuing disorder, they

¹⁴ Dave Snell (2012), *The Everyday Bogans: Identity and Community amongst Heavy Metal Fans*, a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Waikato; *ibid.* (2013) *Bogan: An Insider’s Guide to Metal, Mullets and Mayhem*. Auckland: Penguin; and *Bogans* (2015), NZ on Air/TVNZ.

¹⁵ Stanley Cohen (2011 [1972]), *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, London & New York: Routledge.

¹⁶ Rom Harré, Peter Marsh, Elizabeth Rosser (2005 [1978]), *The Rules of Disorder*, London & New York: Routledge: 9.

¹⁷ Machine Head (1997), “Ten Tonne Hammer” from the album *The More Things Change...* Roadrunner Records.

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are engaged in the genesis of significance for their lives and an order in their actions that is their own. The struggle begins when they see many of the things that seem routine to the rest of us as ways of devaluing them. The official forms of order can seem anomic to those who are systematically treated as non-persons, since, as they pursue their lives, they have no stake in the society for whose maintenance that order exists. If they are to have any significance, their lives must be self-constructed and made significant with the use of homemade material.¹⁸

This sense of agency, of homemade-ness, is easily overlooked by well-meaning academics who want to save bogans from themselves. It is also overlooked by politicians who misdiagnose the phenomenon and its causes. But they would do well to recall that these cultures are organic and intentful responses to social and economic circumstances, which is what policy makers really ought to be focusing their attention on. Bogans haven't "inherited the earth" as the Australian politician feared; indeed, these days we see something potentially far worse. We see hostile patterns emerging among people who are denied dignity by our political and economic arrangements, patterns that are taking xenophobic, authoritarian and illiberal forms. It is Rob Halford's extraordinary howl in "Breaking the Law" – "You don't know what it's like!"¹⁹ – manifested not as music, let alone petty crime, but as England's urban riots of 2011, or the vote for Brexit in 2016. These events weren't driven by working class people – far from it²⁰ – but their despair is an important part of the story, part of this moment's sovereign energy. It empowers politicians to police these mobs on the one hand – the hooligans, chavs, bogans, and white working class – while on the other hand inducing their votes. In New Zealand the idea of "Waitakere man" creates this kind of split-brain thinking: half repulsion, half electoral avarice.²¹ But to devise political strategy on such myths is, at best, to sail by only the sails, without an eye on the weather, nor the sea, nor even the rocks ahead.

And in spite of all this, I imagine that, somewhere, on some remote westward-facing peninsula, pointed like a fang into mercurial seas, there's a vintage Ford Escort parked up, occupied by a couple who don't need me to defend them. Their windows are ajar to dissipate the purple haze within. A guitar riff churns away for what feels like eternity, wriggling into their cerebellums, pulsing through cart-wheeling shifts of consciousness that transform their vantage of the brilliant sunset that is erupting over the ocean's end: sometimes an external reality, sometimes a film projected on their windscreen, sometimes all a construction of their minds. The sun wobbles, droops and splays as it nears the horizon line and then, in a blink, it disappears – and in the perennial satisfaction of this moment, as well as countless others, they prove that there are many ways to be well in this world.

¹⁸ Rom Harré, Peter Marsh, Elizabeth Rosser (2005 [1978]), *The Rules of Disorder*, London & New York: Routledge: 2.

¹⁹ From the album by Judas Priest (1980), *British Steel*, Columbia Records.

²⁰ Political figureheads like Nigel Farage and Donald Trump are not working class by any stretch, nor their billionaire backers, nor their many middle- and upper-class supporters who gambled stability for hate.

²¹ The term was coined by Chris Trotter to refer to Labour's lost working class voter. His argument is that the Labour Party, too tied up in identity politics, cannot plausibly claim to be "proud to be a Westie" and everything this entails. See "Outrageous Choices", *Bowalley Road*, 20th March 2010: <http://bowalleyroad.blogspot.co.nz/2010/03/wrong-choice.html>



Heidi Brickell

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive Pronouns

One person	two people	three or more
(t)aku, (t)āku (t)ku my/mine	(t)ō/(t)ā tāua our two's	(t)ō/(t)ā tātou all of ours
	(t)ō/(t)ā māna our two's (but not the person addressed)	(t)ō/(t)ā mātou ours (3+), but not yours
(t)ō, (t)āu, (t)ōu your/yours	(t)ō/(t)ā kōrua you two's ⁽²⁾	(t)ō/(t)ā kōtou you guys ⁽³⁾
(t)ana, (t)āna, (t)ōna his/hers/theirs (singular)	(t)ō/(t)ā rāua those two's/ theirs	(t)ō/(t)ā rātou Those guys'/ theirs

If the object belonging is singular use the 't' to begin the words,
if it's plural, drop it.

Possessive Pronouns

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Possessive Pronouns that aren't

The kōruru atop the pou of my whare-tīpuna is Tamatea-Pōkai-Whenua. He is known by a few names. Another is Tamatea-Pōkai-Moana. Pōkai usually means to fold, roll up, or spindle. If you couple pōkai with land features, it means to travel or circumnavigate. I imagine the words referring to a transcendence of usual time and space; as though to cover geographical expanses so vast can only be achieved by a mathematical feat so advanced it's virtually supernatural. It folds the dimensions to traverse them.

Spirals, dovetailing curves and interlaced parts of bodies emerge and give away the limelight via evenly distributed tropes of dark and light that protrude and recede in turn. Precluding gravitation toward a singular ground as dominant schema is a proclivity that permeates the design of an enormous wave of knowledge and intuition that swells behind me. A sensibility that rides on tension, inversion and oscillation either underpins or is generated by these āhuahanga. It must be both.

And within the constellation of my tipuna's names, all brimming with rupture and seams, my focus dances from the fabric of the universe to the skin of the human that occupies their place within in it. Another name of his is Tamatea-Ure-Haea. Visualise the act of laceration against the multiple 'why's—the social fabric and interwoven values—playing off one another. This is the story of how he acquired that name.

Ka mōhio a Tamatea, nā te tehenga o te ure o tōna hoa a Rawenga i nui ake te rekareka me te nui o te auē o tā rāua wahine i tōna hoa. Na, ka tae ki a ia, kore rawa tā rāua wahine e rekareka, e nui hoki te auē...¹

Which means something like:

Tamatea knew that his friend Rawenga's cock elicited greater pleasure and 'auē' for tā rāua woman than his. Come Tamatea's turn to please, he sensed the dissatisfaction of tā rāua lady; her auē unconvincing.

And so, mystified, Tamatea devised a plan to discover what was so special about his friend's tahito...

One day, he suggested that they swim, removing his own maro in the hope that his friend would follow suit. Afterwards, they brushed sand over their dicks, for either privacy or sun protection... Tamatea feigned sleep and his friend, again, followed his example...

...Kua ngongoro te ihu o Rawenga, kua mōhio a Tamatea, kua moe tōna hoa. Hukea mai e Tamatea ngā kirikiri i ahuahutia e tōna hoa ki runga ki a ia hei huna i tōna ure. Te horonga o ngā kirikiri, takoto kau te tahito o Rawenga.

¹
Hikawera Wiremu Mahupuku. c.1880.
"Tamatea-Ure-Haea." In Lee Smith 'Ngā
Pūmuri o te Reo Māori.' In Te Kura Reo o
Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Aho o Māui 2013. p.
68-69 Te Aho a Māui. Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi
Incorporated.

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Mātakitaki kau ana tōna hoa takatāpui ki te taonga o tōna hoa e takato[SIC] ana. Kei te tau whakararo e pūkai ana ngā kiri amoko o tōna tahito. Ka mōhio a Tamtea[SIC], he mea hahae ki te matā waiapu te ure o tōna hoa. Whakaarahia ana e ia, hoki ana rāua.²

...Once Rawenga began to snore, Tamatea brushed the concealing sand away, to discover lacerations made with a matā waiapu. Now he knew his friend's secret. He dusted some sand back to where it had been, briskly roused his friend from sleep and they left.

Tōna taenga atu ki te whare ka itaia te matā waiapu. Haenga o tōna ure ki te matā waiapu. Ko tōna ingoa tēnei – Tamatea-ure-haea.³

Once alone in the whare, my ancestor took to his own dick with the mata waiapū.

Ko Tamatea-tehe-kapunga tōna ingoa hoki.⁴

The words are vital, though mediated through dictionaries and workshops that excavate the bones of paradigms engineered out of common representation and casual interpretation. Journeying back and forward between mouths and ears, dendrites and axons, and eyes and buttons, they bring alternative realities alive and I want to bring them alive in ō tātou mouth, in ō tātou hinengaro.

I hesitate because horopaki is everything to delicate interpretation of terms. My horopaki doesn't put me in idiomatic affinity with this combined word-come-name, Tamatea-Tehe-Kapunga and by using it, and being so bold as to try to translate it for the unknowing with less horopaki still than me, I transport it into another horopaki, changing it, like a single wave does incrementally a rock form. But I think it means something like 'Tamatea with his hands full of glans' or 'Tamatea who scooped up the glans with two cupped hands'. Or, to me, it means 'Tamatea with his biological equivalent of the clit in his hands'.

Another embedded detail winks at me: tā raua wahine. A possessive pronoun included without announcing itself that tells so much about the norms of the day. And I envy the tā raua wahine motivating this narrative, for her easy legitimacy and the sense of singularity she must have had in her influence on āna tāne.

The names I know of for my tipuna are:

Tamatea-Pōkai-Whenua
Tamatea-Pōkai-Moana
Tamatea-Ure-Haea

Tamatea-Tehe-Kapunga.

²
Hikawera Wiremu Mahupuku. c.1880.
"Tamatea-Ure-Haea." In Lee Smith 'Ngā Pūmuri o te Reo Māori.' In Te Kura Reo o Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Aho o Māui 2013. p. 68-69 Te Aho a Māui. Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated.

³
Ibid

⁴
Ibid

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He kuputaka:

āhua – (noun) shape, appearance, character

hanga – (noun + verb) build, also a suffix that operates similarly to ‘tanga’ –almost an equivalent of the Pākehā ‘ness’ (tōku Māoritanga – my Māoriness), but perhaps with simultaneous reference to the constitution of something, in its conflation with the word hanga

ure - penis

tahito- an old word for ure

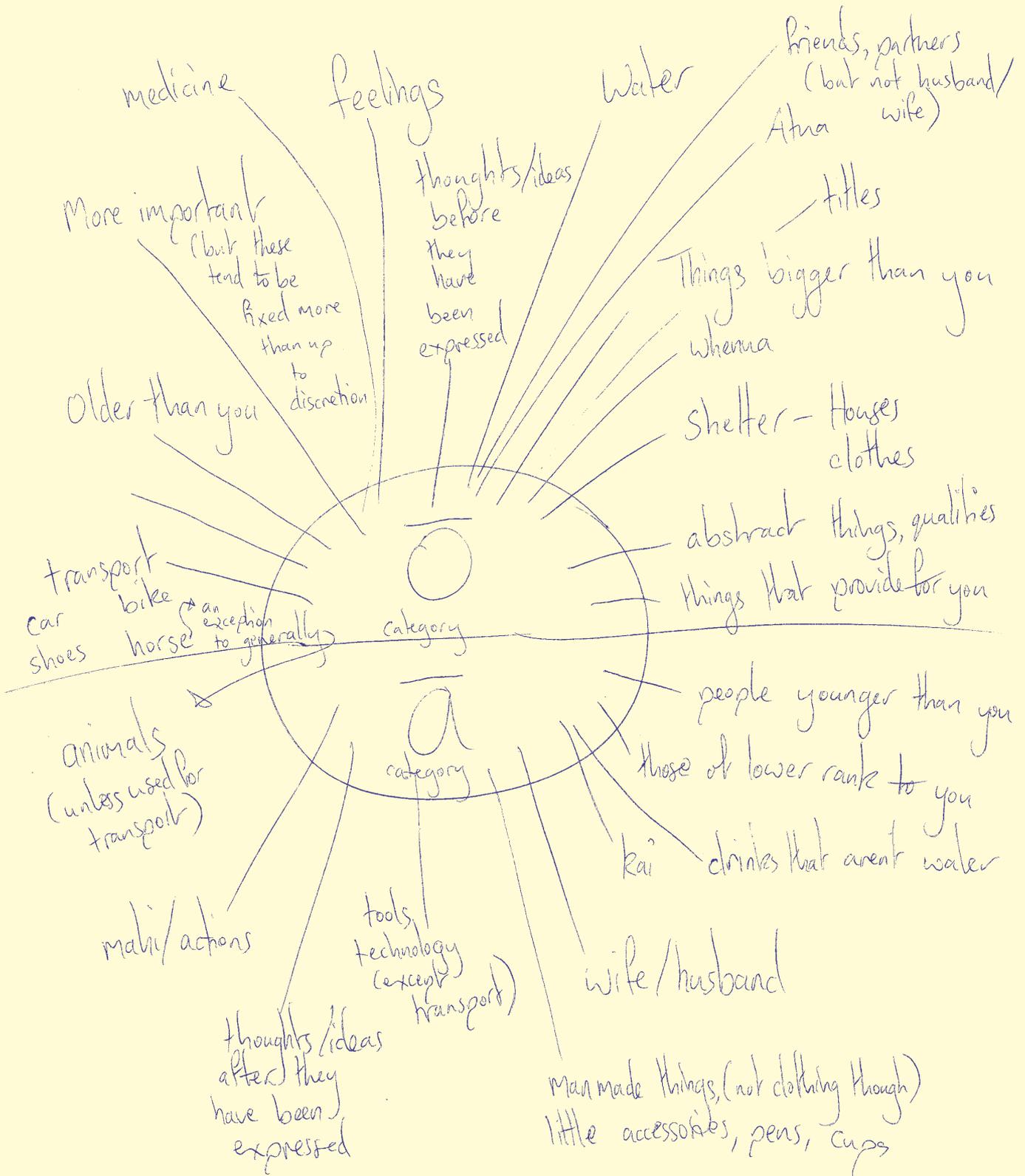
maro – a type of loincloth

matā waiapu – a carving implement

horopaki – (verb) to surround, (noun) context.

tehe – glans (of a penis)

kapunga – (verb) to scoop up with both hands together, (noun) palm (of the hand), (noun) handful.



'a' with no macron - ~~is~~ neutral category. Often indicates familiarity, some relational possessives can lose their category in this instance to indicate familiarity - 'taku kua



Ioana Gordon Smith

Beyond this thing

Beyond this thing

Ioana Gordon Smith

Perhaps the first thing you see in [The Fairy Falls](#) is a lie. Suspended in the air are bunches of soft sculpture grapes. They're oversized, covered in shiny material¹ and look like they would be amazing to hug. They're also white. They don't index any real grapes that can be found in the world, but a projected view of grapes seen primarily in their future value as white wine. Doubling the presence of a 'lie' is the grid ceiling from which the grapes are hung. Infamous as a modernist motif that refers only to itself, art historian Rosalind Krauss called the grid "anti-natural" and "unreal". "It is", she continues, "what art looks like when it turns it[s] back on nature".²

Notions of honesty or falsehoods, and the role of aesthetics in producing these realities have occupied artist Cushla Donaldson throughout her practice. In her solo exhibition [The Fairy Falls](#), Donaldson suggests that rationalism and financialisation are false states that come undone when we recognise that which sits outside of their networks. Discussing this exhibition with my friends, the idea that there are things that are of inherent value beyond their reasonable knowability or tradability has seemed obvious. [Of course](#) nature has value that shouldn't be commercialised. [Of course](#) there are things in this world that we could never fully know. And yet, the creeping world of financialisation renders this casual certainty at risk. Campbell Jones writes:

... financialisation involves a change in interpretive criteria, in which all manner of activities come to be interpreted and understood in terms of finance. This is a process in which not merely the world that we sense is subjected to financial criteria, but in which the ability to sense the world follows a financial logic. Here the concepts, techniques and metaphors of finance stand not only as objects in the world but as ways in which the world is experienced and interpreted. In what can be called the financialisation of the senses, one comes to relate to the world in terms of investment, risk, speculation, hedging and profit.³

Herein lies the central falsehoods of financialisation; first, that all things hold the potential of tradability, and second (and perhaps more pervasively), that things are known only through their tradable value. Using this logic, all things and phenomena are subjected to a (acted out or not) process of arbitrage, where any point of differentialisation becomes a possible cause for trade with the aim of seizing value. The result is where we no longer care about the essence of a thing, but rather how its difference (real or not) might be leveraged. Hence, we might see green grapes only as white wine, and white wine only as a beverage that may or may not be more profitable than another. In the world of financialisation, things become untethered from their 'thingness' or 'objecthood' and are instead projections of financial speculation.

Working in opposition to the logic of financialisation is a belief that all things have an innate value beyond what we can perceive, know, or make use of. In the making of this exhibition, Cushla and I particularly discussed the writings of Māori academic Carl Mika, who draws upon the writings of early German romantic poet Novalis to reimagine Māori terminology with what Mika calls "the dignity of the unknown".⁴ Mika analyses Novalis' idea of the 'Asbsolute' as something that lurks in the backdrop of all things; it both permeates and pre-exists all phenomena. It presents a paradox in the sense that

¹ Cushla Donaldson notes that cheap satin is a classic working class, aspirational material in that it provides maximum flash at minimum expense.

² Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October*, 9, 1979, p. 50. A grid is also faintly visible in Donaldson's paintings. Rather than projecting a grid onto the surface as a guide, Donaldson drafts directly on to the canvas.

³ Campbell Jones, 'Finance, university, revolt', *The University Beside Itself*, 1, 2014, p. 46.

⁴ Carl Mika, 'Novalis' Poetic Uncertainty: A Bildung with the Absolute', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 48:6, 2016, p. 628.

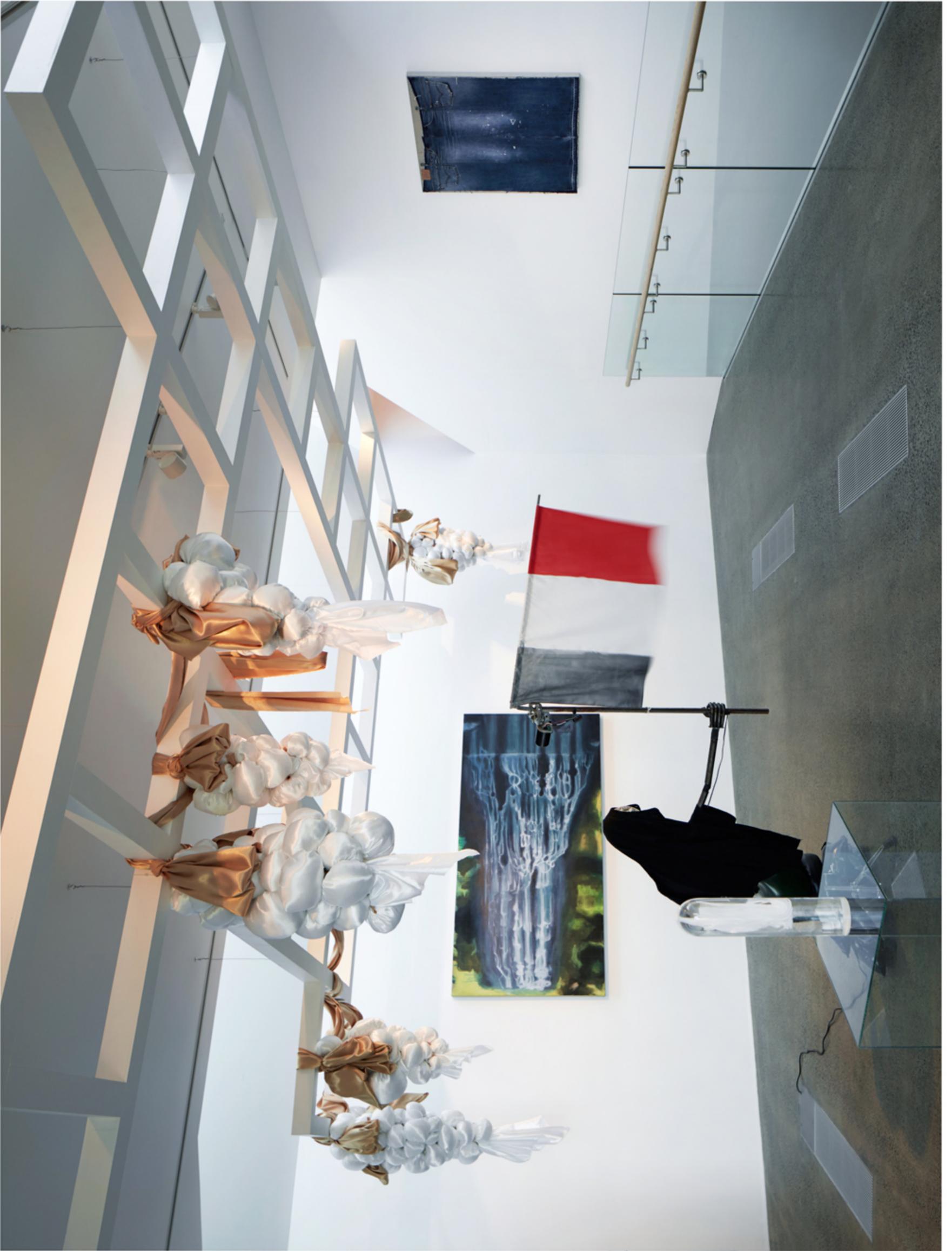
Beyond this thing

Ioana Gordon Smith

though we may encounter things, which are imbued with the Absolute, the Absolute itself is “self-agentic” and defies knowability. This renders our language and the signs used to know and refer to things as useful only to a point; able to denote things, but never fully capture them. Between language and the ‘thing’ is a gap. Herein might lie mystery. Herein might lie what has previously been called ‘the sublime’.

The ontology of things and our relationship — both tangible and cognitive — to what is around us may seem like a solely philosophical enquiry. There is a level of indulgence and privilege in asking how it is we come to know something — or accept the limits of knowledge. But in [The Fairy Falls](#), the political potency of how objects and aesthetics are accounted for is always in the foreground. If the way that things and phenomena are accounted for in different worlds – the financial and the romantic – is the battle that Donaldson points us to, then the nature of artworks becomes highly loaded, as objects that inevitably double as something that points to something else while still retaining its own objecthood and status as an artwork to be encountered. [The Fairy Falls](#) knows this tension. Amongst these works that embody the lie that is a “financialisation of the senses” is a strong element of the representational. Painting, sculpture, film are all used to convey certain realities that exist beyond the purely rational and financially-considered: a moment of collective euphoria during a Black Sabbath concert; an assemblage of clothing kept from past relationships; a famous actor (Cliff Curtis) enacting an indigenous connection to the land by going barefoot to a black-tie event; a bride. These networked instances transcend the ‘feel good’, and instead indicate a firm, and perhaps defiant, commitment to various cultural values.

Yet there is also a jolting materiality at play. Draped fabric, ephemeral swirls caught in resin, reflective aluminium, the golden tones of a projection. There is an oscillation, then, where art can both take us away and keep us locked into place. While art might be used by Donaldson as a signifier for moments of the sublime that lie beyond the gallery walls, the status of art as a sign — as a thing — is a truth that never becomes a lie. The moment of moving from a representational reading to a material encounter is like the act of trying to hold the two images in an ambiguous pattern simultaneously. You try to catch it, glancing quickly, left to right, right to left. Impossible. In seeing any one thing, you’re ever conscious of another thing unseen — unseeable — occupying the same space.



The Fairy Falls

Mark Amery
Rob Berggren
Colleen Brennan
Heidi Brickell
Steven Brookbank
David Brown
Jon Bywater
Andrew Clifford
Joyce Coleman
Kristine Crabb/ Miss Crabb
Phil Dadson
Phill Dryson
Jackie Early
Michael Fullerton
Matthew Galloway
Anna Gardner
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Ayesha Green
Florian Habicht
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Melinda Hatherley
Ary Jansen
Anish Kapoor
Alex Laurie
Tim Lewton
Adam Luxton
Hugh Harawera Lynn
James Mathews
Marx's 'Capital' study group, Auckland Critical Theory Circle, University of Auckland
Gilbert May
Benjamin Morley
Stephan Neville
The Ngaruawahia Historical Society
No Pride in Prisons
Vivian Ryan
Michael Vincent Sperring
Tamaki Housing Group
Sir James Wallace
Gemma Walsh
Andrew Wilson
Erica Wilson
May Wilson

Acknowledgements

The Fairy Falls

Image credits

1. The Bride and her Complex Strategies, 2017, oil on canvas, 550 x 400 mm
2. Who dreams? (Exposing the dream-worker, the enforcer of the metapsychological and the tinker of ego, just.), 2010, denim worn whilst working as a studio technician for Anish Kapoor on canvas, 1150 x 850 mm
3. The Great Ngaruawahia Music Festival, 2017, film still, HD projection, 29min. Still features Hugh Lynn, founder and previous head of Eden securities.
4. The Fairy Falls, 2017, installation view
5. London G20 protest outside the Bank of England 1st April 2009, C-type print, 2009

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