

## Residuum

In his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) Henri Lefebvre analyses trends in mass culture, consumption, and urban space. He advocates a more inclusive Marxist critique of society, one that goes beyond an examination of economic determinants to take account of the pervasiveness of alienation in society. After examining changes in the way we live and work, Lefebvre reached the conclusion that everyday life was more important than work in determining experience and social transformation.<sup>1</sup>

He set out to interrogate those everyday things that eluded definition, which he described as “the residuum.”<sup>2</sup> This residuum incorporated aspects of everyday life that had remained overlooked because they had been considered trivial and outside the remit of philosophical enquiry. His concern with the everyday was a concern with “real life”: a life in which food, clothing, furniture, homes, neighbourhoods and environments all play a significant role in determining experience.<sup>3</sup>

The works of Allan McDonald, Dieneke Jansen and Layne Waerea represent aspects of our suburban environment that lie within this

1 McLeod, Mary, ‘Henri Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction,’ in Harris, S. & Berk, B. (eds.) *Architecture of the Everyday*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997. p. 7. Ibid, p. 7.

2 Ibid. p. 7.

3 The Situationists, in particular Constant Nieuwenhuis and Guy Debord, were directly influenced by Lefebvre’s *Critique* and lead the call for “revolutions in everyday life.” Trebitsch, Michael, Preface to Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique of Everyday Life* (trans. John Moore, London: Verso, xxvii-xxviii).

residuum. They draw attention to emarginated spaces within our local neighbourhoods and foreground mechanisms of surveillance and control that underpin representations of own, and other people’s houses.

In his photographs of suburban shopfronts, collectively titled *Drift*, Allan McDonald is interested in the impact of globalisation on neighbourhood economies. His intimate portraits record a diverse array of local shops that are fast becoming an endangered species.

Many of McDonald’s shop fronts bear the indexical traces of former occupancy. New tenants overlay these traces with their own particular imprints achieved on little if no



Allan McDonald, Otahuhu Great South Road 2008

budget. The wobbly, handwritten signs advertising a Christmas sale at PK Gift in Petone evoke a sense of quiet desperation. In Lower Hutt, High Street, a Polka dot typeface pronouncing ‘secret,’ sits ill at ease over a shop that is covered head to toe in newsprint. Did the secret fail to meet the expectations of the local community? Is it now under new ownership by another prepared to take a risk in difficult economic times?

The existence of the independent shopkeeper is threatened by the rise in popularity of Internet trad-

ing and shopping malls. The enjoyment taken in foraging for treasure amidst vertiginous piles of bric-a-brac in dust encrusted rooms may soon be a thing of the past, as more and more house lots and deceased estates are sold online. Auction websites provide a disembodied, electronic interface where you win or lose, discouraging bargaining practices that are embedded in bric-a-brac economies. Within the digital environment, objects are from broken homes. Paraded individually, they lose much of their spatial and material resonance. The interiors of second hand shops are unique spaces where objects of diverse provenance congregate. McDonald has described these objects as “destabilized signifiers of space and time.”

Corporate mega malls are another threat to local shopkeepers. Where local shops offer a diverse collection of vendors who serve the social and cultural requirements of their unique constituencies, shopping malls offer a predictable Australasian chain store experience, where matters of branding and corporate identity are paramount. Where suburban shop fronts have been designed at a scale sympathetic with the streetscape, gargantuan shopping malls colonise suburban blocks. Their external appearance is a byproduct of economic formulas devised to maximize leasable space. Their crude, off-white forms, and expansive car parks offer convenient shopping in spaces strategically designed to



Dieneke Jansen Reserve 01 2009

repress any references to the local. McDonald’s photographs both celebrate and commemorate a local typology, highlighting the unique and diverse contributions they make to our suburban landscapes.

Dieneke Jansen’s *Reserve* photographs record anonymous, ubiquitous spaces found in suburbs all over the country. They appeal to Jansen because they have no particular sense of ownership or purpose. She notes that these spaces “mark themselves with a vagueness that can be an irritant or a relief.” Like McDonald’s local shops, suburban reserves are also under threat. As suburban environments are becoming subject to ever-greater degrees of regulation, these awkward, hyphenated spaces provide room for pause. Reserves are troubling because they lack a particular programme. They are open to interpretation because they contravene the edict that public spaces must be apportioned and designed to serve the specific needs of local communities.

Jansen is troubled by the over-regulation of suburban environments that can lead to a verisimilitude in housing styles and bland, undifferentiated streetscapes. She has investigated initiatives by local government bodies to temper urban sprawl by establishing more medium density residential developments that incorporate what she describes as a “planned matrix of themed landscape parks” which will replace the ubiquitous reserve.

These parks will provide council-approved franchised playgrounds or sports fields, thereby prescribing what social behaviours are appropriate and inappropriate in such spaces, imposing more regulation on the public domain.

To make reserves obsolescent is to preclude the unprescribed: the errant, ambiguous spaces in our suburbs that allow for multiple but infrequent occupations. Reserves may act as expedient thoroughfares, host the occasional sports game, or entertain recalcitrant and sometimes violent behaviours. The sense of alienation and estrangement Jansen’s images convey, bring to mind the barren landscapes that recur in Michelangelo Antonioni’s films.<sup>4</sup>

In 1977 Charles and Ray Eames made *Powers of Ten*, a short film that takes the viewer on a trip to outer space and back again, arriving on earth at the scene of a picnic in the park. The film plays with scale, telescoping in from a cosmic perspective to focus upon the infinitesimal. The bright optimism of this film may be seen as a product of its age.<sup>5</sup> *Powers of Ten* celebrated technological developments that would provide people with access to new

4 In particular Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Il Grido* (1957) and *Blowup* (1966).

5 In 1977 there were a number of significant events that signaled a growing interest in space exploration. They included the first free flight test of the space shuttle Enterprise, NASA’s launch of Voyager 2 towards Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus & Neptune, the first space photograph of the earth and the moon together (taken by US Voyager), the Soviet space station Salyut 6 being launched into Earth’s orbit, and the premiere of George Lucas’s film *Star Wars*.

representations of the world.

Thirty years on, we are now more suspicious of technologies role in



Layne Waerea BA 31 sourced from LINZ Crown Copyright Reserved

society and how it is being used in a multitude of ways to impinge upon our personal freedoms. Layne Waerea’s work examines the social, cultural, and political implications of using popular computer programmes such as Google Earth, to access information about land use throughout New Zealand. Waerea is interested in the invasiveness of technological advances in our everyday lives: technological advances that are promoted as ‘educational tools,’ but serve to place the activities of individuals and communities under ever-greater degrees of unsolicited surveillance.

To make her animations, Waerea takes screen captures of Google Earth images. Zoom, offers an omniscient view of suburban sections from outer space, targeting one site within the terrestrial realm to inspect more closely. As the camera hones in on its focal point, visual acuity is replaced by obfuscation. We cannot (yet) gain clear access to our own and other people’s back yards but it is only a matter of time before this will happen.

Waerea’s animations evidence her interest in examining the legal and



ethical implications of the use of this new photographic imagery with respect to our desires for private land ownership. Who is entitled to access information about our place in the world, and how could this information be used against us? Residential development is highly regulated within New Zealand. Permits, licenses and consents are required for buildings to achieve codes of compliance. This begs the question: will local councils co-opt programmes such as Google Earth to secure evidence of any illegal additions or alterations to your property? What are landowner's rights with respect to the use of images of their property by local Authorities? Furthermore, who owns the airspace above the land? To what distance? Waerea is interested in the possibility that this space and valuable commodity, may be the subject of future legal claims.

Satellite technologies can be used to identify what areas of land have been approved by local authorities for development over others. In *Crop Circles*, a camera pinwheels around a location in Papakura, where two large areas are being groomed for transformation into what appear to be sports stadia. Waerea is interested in the politics of public and private space. Who determines what community projects are valued over and above others? There is a questioning of who controls the shaping of our physical landscape, and the political and economic motives behind this institutional decision-making.

Each artist in this exhibition provides a reading of the residuum by examining how suburban space is documented, archived and surveyed. All seek to draw together global and local concerns, commenting on social transformation by concentrating on everyday experiences.

**Dr Rachel Carly**

Department of Design & Visual Arts UNITEC

*Reserves explores concerns of the suburban terrain as a site that performs us. It explores photography's historical relationship with scientific discourses in formulating ideas about normalisation and the regulation of populations.*

*Specifically, it questions whether this relationship continues to be embedded in our experience of photography.*

Dieneke Jansen lectures in photography at Auckland University of Technology.

*Main streets disadvantaged by the success of the mall and the box retailer now use the design language of those places in an attempt to achieve the same influence over their customers compulsion to buy. The cleaning up of old neighborhoods and the intensification of branded retailing can lead to a neighborhood that is both everywhere and nowhere.*

*This project documents the small owner-operated shop.*

Allan McDonald lectures in photography in the Dept of Design and Visual Arts at Unitec.

*Consent hovers in a zone where our desire for this photographic information converge with a growing awareness of the use of potentially flawed evidence to regulate our lives. Paying lip service to a 'moment in time' these animations and this technology easily seduce; revealing our complicit role in the use of this photographic information for the purposes of our surveillance and social control.*

Layne Waerea lectures in commercial law at Auckland University of Technology.



## Pausing terrain

Allan McDonald   Layne Waerea   Dieneke Jansen

**RAMP GALLERY**



*Aerial Photograph: Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries (NZ) 255A-A2076*

RAMP Gallery

1st September – 6th October 2009