

TERRA_DATA AND OTHER 'LINES OF FLIGHT'

Ana Terry



Figure 1: Ana Terry, detail in *terra_data* (2007), plastic bird painted with stripes that camouflaged its form against a landscape.

In this practice report I discuss my recent work and provide samples from the series of projects my practice has developed into during my master of fine arts candidacy so far. These include curatorial projects, a site-specific project in Oamaru and, most recently, works exhibited at the Hocken Gallery in Dunedin.

As part of negotiating my practice as a series of projects I have loosely adopted geological and archaeological approaches as a set of tools. My methodologies have included mining for and stratifying material, and processes of repetition, collecting, archiving and distilling. Studio experimentation and outcomes have provided visual analogies and metaphors grounded in these processes, in some cases quite literally.

Writing this report has provided a plateau – a necessary hiatus, a space between things – to reflect on tracings and proposed mappings. Here, and in drawing on other disciplines through my studio practice I refer to key ideas suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*¹ and also by Simon O'Sullivan's book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*.² O'Sullivan experiments with the Deleuzian notion of de-territorialisation and demonstrates how to construct an active engagement between an arts practice and Deleuze and Guattari's suggested methodologies. De-territorialisation is a philosophical concept that challenges the boundaries of any given territory through resistance to the status quo. Deleuze and Guattari use geomorphic metaphors in describing these processes and this is akin to my own adoption of geological and archaeological analogies in my practice.

In my practice as a series of projects a constant tension exists between the whole being the sum of its parts and the parts reflecting the sum of the whole. I am negotiating between parts and whole, between one project and the others while trying to resist a totalising narrative. There are chasms and fractures but these are full of potential.

A tension also exists between my defining and therefore confining ideas to the point of exhaustion, or allowing processes to spill over and change course. A resistance to the latter is grounded in a fear of a lack of critical engagement. But I am also questioning this assumption and it seems to me that the process between outcomes actually requires perhaps a greater vigilance in its awareness of referrals, connecting threads and disjunctures. It is harder to talk about process than about outcomes as process is by its very nature amorphous. To quote Gregory Bateson – an anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, and cyberneticist – from his writing *Steps to an Ecological Mind* (1972):

We are better at nouns than verbs, better at referencing visual artefacts than organization with active parts, temporal components, or differential change...While a persistent desire for unifying theories parses the world into unities and universals, an alternative practice identifies its differentials and switches. It proceeds, not by recursive stories, but by jokes, involutions, and reversals – the special points of translation or exit between stories and logics.³

Applied to an arts practice, Bateson's ideas begin to extend boundaries, both conceptually and practically, with a specific emphasis on process. However, "jokes, involutions and reversals" will only exist in relation to a boundary or way station. Considering my own negotiation of processes, I borrow the Deleuzian notion of a plateau that provides multiple places to stand and edges that are provisional.

Deleuze suggests the necessity to find a consolidated base to work out from and against. He writes: "You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems..." In other words you need a territory to return to, a root from which to produce a rhizome, a point to move out from, and something to resist. Deleuze actually provides an instructive proposition where he continues: "This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantage point on it, find potential movements and de-territorialisation, possible lines of flight, experience them...have a small plot of land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight".⁴

In this lyrical analogy Deleuze moves from "a plot of land" to the idea of inter-strata. This seems to be a move from our earthly ties into something more akin to an altitudinal holding pattern calculated and monitored through a process of trigonometry that requires fixed geographical points while one's position between these points can shift. A holding pattern is defined by repetitive loops and returnings, strategies to which I will return later in this report.

With my project entitled *terra_data* the territory or strata I set out from was literally a selection of landscapes in the collection of the Hocken Library in Dunedin, New Zealand. These paintings are housed in an atmospherically controlled environment suggestive of a stratification in their arrangement within concertina racks which form what is known as 'the stack' (Figure 2). To me they needed excavating and reorganising; they needed to come into contact with other territories.

Confronted by the archive as both space and as an object in space my first impressions were of its vanishing point. Contrary to the ambient stillness of 'the stack,' the alignment of the archive suggested a potential temporality and velocity: a "dromoscopic" experience perhaps?

Paul Virilio discusses his invented term "dromoscopy" in an essay entitled "Dromoscopy, or the Ecstasy of Enomities" (1978)⁵. His focus is on the motorist's consumption of a territory through a series of vanishing points created by the parallel borders of a highway. Virilio explores the violence inherent in the crashing of data against the windscreen as one vanishing point is superseded by the next. His oculocentric experience of consumption of the landscape at speed is always through a screen and creates what he calls, "an accident of the body, a de-corporation".⁶ It is specifically through his idea of such a vanishing point that I became interested in the possibility of an embodied way of seeing or, as media theorist Laura Marks describes it, in "haptic visibility".⁷

Contrary to my former installation and site-specific projects I retreated to the edges of the gallery space for *terra_data*. I focused it as a wall work towards which the viewer would be orientated. This entailed a shift in strategy, away from my previous projects in which the audience's immersion in an installation was paramount. I needed to

resist the projects which preceded *terra_data*. To quote Deleuze, I had to find “something to turn against [my] own system” In *terra_data* a retraction of material to the edges of the room tested the notion of immersion as simulated through the visual. In my previous projects, the viewer had often been challenged in a very physical way by the arrangement of the works; now I wanted to see what the effects could be if the works were to be contained within the edges of the wall. This was contrary to the projects mentioned below as can also be seen in a sample image from one of my previous projects (Figure 3).

In *Marginal Errors*, over 2000 books were cut down and then formed into a floor to be walked over. Selected works in *PLOT* such as the *Bound* series were landscapes made of sculpted books protruding from their frames at eye level. And, in *Wall Stories* (2007), the viewer needed to negotiate quy ropes which stretched between the walls and floor. But, returning to *terra_data*: I had to deal with the institutional matrix that contextualises the collection in the Hocken Library. One of my concerns with this project was its potential to slip into the well-worn groove of landscape painting critique. Equally fashionable has become critiques of the archive, of the institution, of “representational totality” and of “institutional integrity” as discussed by Hal Foster in his article “An Archival Impulse” (2004). It is by now a given that the archive or museum as a coherent system has been unmasked.⁸ While I am not denying that this is a register of *terra_data*, it is not my primary concern. In line with Hal Foster’s “archival impulse” towards generating something beyond – but still in relation to – the boundaries of the Hocken Archive, ‘the stack’ remained a point of departure, a plateau to lift off from.

In terms of “lifting off” and coming into “contact with other territories”, it is worth noting the current ongoing construction of a meta-data for the Hocken Library’s collection that coincided with my *terra_data* project. This massive undertaking includes the digitalising of some two million photographs and over thirteen and a half thousand paintings. ‘The Digital Collection’ was launched in August 2008 on the University of Otago website. Images, including the landscape paintings I have used, are now in the processes of being disseminated through the web, crossing over and colliding with other data territories.

In *terra_data*, my strategy was firstly to wedge apart both the archival origins of the landscape and its ‘composition’ through a process of de-territorialisation, by literally infiltrating the collection with ‘outsider’ landscapes, gleaned from second hand dealers and from Trade-Me sellers.

I integrated mass-produced images such as a faded (anonymous) print of the Matterhorn with accentuated lofty snow-covered peaks and replete with a picturesque chalet, and intermingled this with a modest rendering of Lake Manapouri at dusk by painter Nicholas Chevalier. This strategy of sampling as based on composition, content and colour rather than on authorship diffused traditional archival paradigms and leant towards an abstraction of the material. The material’s reordering began to undermine origins and discrete boundaries. A process of collecting and re-aligning the contours of information suggested a distillation of sedimentary stuff – namely of *data* as proliferated within our mass media world.

Here, I would like to discuss what the word ‘data’ means. ‘Data’ and ‘information’ are terms often used interchangeably. I suggest there is a fundamental difference between these terms. ‘Data’ can only become ‘information’ once it is organised or codified in some form. Up until that point it is open-ended, fluid and full of potential. In my current practice I am exploring the edges between data and information, investigating possibilities between process (forming and reforming) and object (outcomes or artefacts resulting from this process). Data inherently lends itself to digital environments. Mitchell Whitelaw, in his paper entitled “Art Against Information: Case Studies in Data Practice”, argues that data artists typically resist or defer information and seek out data’s potential for the autonomy of process and for the generation, rather than the finalisation, of outcomes. He discusses the work of Lisa Jevbratt who describes her data images as “abstract realism” and “objects for interpretation, not interpretations”.⁹ This involves a type of trans-coding between data-substance and sensory material. An uncovering of data and its potential operations beneath the information is abstracted in my Figure 5. The on-line site “Informe Imager” allows the user to create “crawlers” (software robots, which could be thought of as automated Web browsers) that gather data from the Web, providing methods for visualising both the collected data and its trajectory.

Taking information and de-coding it to find data is familiar territory to me. I both collect and excavate material. This impulse developed during my formative years living in the Middle East. In between my father’s tours of duty as an

observer for the United Nations on the Golan Heights and Gaza Strip, weekends were spent with the family visiting archaeological sites and going coin hunting in both Israel and Syria. Looking for patterns and recognising forms such as the curve of a coin's edge; finding pottery shards and fragments of oxidised glass surfacing from the arid terrain, became firmly embedded as part of my memory.

In this process of memory formation, I learnt that there is a fine line between something being embedded in and being camouflaged by geological strata. Indiscernible in its entirety, an artefactual fragment once prised from its earthly archive becomes recognisable as a sample of life generated through a process of geomorphic change.

On the Golan Heights and Gaza Strip, I also learnt the difference between a clean coin and one encrusted with dirt. The muted reliefs of dirt-encrusted coins are redolent with mystery and hidden data; their contours shrouded from direct viewing, enticing us to excavate their potentials, just as the archaeological act excavates them from the soil. The excavation process is time-consuming while the mapping of pieces of pottery shards together provides edges of possibility in their (mis-)alignment. Working with such kinds of delayering and types of puzzle pieces has constituted a parallel development during the making of *terra_data* (see Figure 6). Exploring the process of distilling information into data and shrouding information in the very material that generates its own camouflage became important to my practice in ways which had already been hinted at in my earlier projects.

Processes of cross-sectioning, cutting, scraping back, patterning, and accumulating material repeatedly appear in my projects. One of my concerns with the repetition of these processes of making is a re-articulation of the 'same' in different guises. My curation of an exhibition entitled *wee hiccup* as hosted by the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in late 2006 and my subsequent writing about this show published in *Scope (Art)* 2007, as well as discussions with other artists working with repetition have assisted in my enquiry into the issue of repetition.

I have discovered that registers beyond simple reiteration can develop through repetition. Deleuze discusses the possibility of *difference through repetition* using an evolutionary model. In *Difference and Repetition* he likens "dynamic repetition" to genetic action.¹⁰ According to Deleuze nothing can recur exactly, as everything entails an evolution of continuous becoming that breaks with the habitual. He suggests that there are two forms of repetition: repetition of difference (of that which cannot be represented but only repeated or reactivated) and the repetition of the same (i.e. through representation and resemblance).

Deleuze refers to the secret operation of repetition, demonstrating that the power of repetition is the same as in revolution. Using the paradox of festivals he says that they repeat an unrepeatable event: "They do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first to the nth' power". He thus suggests that events echo forward with gaining variance and strength.¹¹

Following Deleuze's lead, I have used repetition in *terra_data* to generate a sense of motion and temporality. This articulation also suggests the experience of multiple viewpoints, of a shattered mirror reflection of a given terrain as experienced at the high speed of dromoscopic engagement with the landscape. Cutting the landscapes into strips reveals differences. No two are the same. Singularly, each 'still' presents only a moment in time. However, arranged as a series, the structures of cinematography are connoted, suggesting a continuous reel of film. A sequential time-frame is implied. A sense of variation in space and time is generated through repetition. This kind of perception is filmic in the sense of montage, where material or data is juxtaposed against and after another.

Here, it is worth noting that landscape and travel and filmic experiences have a long conjoined history. In Lynne Kirby's book *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (1997), she points to links generated between the panorama and the railroad, and between later photography and cinema, these appearing most clearly in discourses around the "panoramic perception" made possible by train travel. The speed, velocity, and diminishing intervals between geographic points resulted in what became commonly referred to in the mid-19th century as "the annihilation of space and time".¹²

In *terra_data*, the vertical strips repeated form fence lines or suggest the metronomic strobing of telegraph poles as they mark the kilometres one travels by train or car. The final installation of the project thus references the panorama as well as early optical devices such as the zootrope. This latter device relies on vertical slits and the blank

spaces between them to generate a repeated flicker of information that creates a sense of movement. In *terra_data* the alternating of visual material territories generates this kind of 'flicker'. However, like Max Ernst's collage (figure 7), the viewer is inside the apparatus rather than outside of it; physically experiencing the movement, not only looking at it.

Although confined to a wall, a de-territorialisation of the material causes visual information to move in *terra_data* between folds of stratified hanging valleys, lake shores, and skyline ridges. This collection began to suggest something between data and information. I discovered during my play with the material that a strobic beat of information toys with our focusing between foreground and background, nearness and distance. This is generated by colour and detail variations on each strip in relation to the next and engages an embodied looking as we become aware of the mechanics of perception.

An embodied way of looking is what Deleuze describes we experience as "smooth space".¹³ Smooth space is haptic and localised. It envelops one in a force of sensation. The space cannot be distanced and objectively observed because our sensation of the space is paramount. Smooth space continuously involves a shifting of our orientation with regard to landmarks as linkages and multiple directions operate 'step by step' as strobes that prevent us from seeing only one discrete object or outcome. Engaged in a fluidity of experience between one step and the next involves the 'being-in-the-world' of the phenomenologist.¹⁴

In *terra_data* the processing of pleated surfaces of colour and texture provides endless curvy folds which twist, turn and extend territories: fold over fold, a mapping one on another and one into the other. This project is aligned to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas as proposed in *A Thousand Plateaus* and also to Deleuze's writing in *The Fold*.¹⁵

Thinking about these sources has been inspirational for *terra_data* as against my earlier projects. As O'Sullivan proposes, Deleuze and Guattari offer tools for expanding not only the notion of how an arts practice can operate but also of how we might live in the world: between what is inside and outside and along our own edges. I near conclusion of this report with a final quote from Deleuze:

An art practice is a fluid, dynamic system always in connection with a number of different regimes and registers and always in contact with an outside...What an art practice 'is' then is defined by its outermost edge, its boundary line or simply its line flight, understood as its furthest point from within its territory...Indeed the artist...is this line of flight, or more accurately operates on this line and at this edge.¹⁶

The projects included so far in my master of fine arts practice aim at questioning how I can work and thus, how I can be in the world. With *terra_data*, this aim has stepped into new territory for me: the de-territorialisation which Deleuze and Guattari suggest as a strategy towards achieving "smooth space" and experiencing a "haptic visuality" through strobic repetition.

Ana Terry is a multi-disciplinary artist. She responds to found materials and often to a given location from which to draw out ideas and metaphoric associations. She was awarded the William Hodges Fellowship with collaborator Don Hunter in 2008-09. She has been lecturing in project drawing and digital media since 2000 at both the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic School of Art. Currently she is based in Vanuatu as a volunteer working with the Wan Smolbag Theatre as a visual communications and design advisor while completing her Master of Fine Arts.

- 1 Gillies Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- 2 Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).
- 3 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) 27.
- 4 Gillies Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 161.
- 5 Paul Virilio (1978), translated by Edward R. O'Neill, "Dromoscopy, or the Ecstasy of Enormities", last accessed 1/10/07, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wide_angle/v020/20.3virilio.html.

- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensory Theory and Multi-Sensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 18.
- 8 Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October*, 110, Fall 2004: 5.
- 9 Mitchell Whitelaw, *Art Against Information: Case Studies in Data Practice*, last accessed 1/10/08, http://journal.fibreiculture.org/issue11/issue11_whitelaw.html
- 10 See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/deleuze.htm#SH4c> last accessed on 4 October 2008.
- 11 Gilles Deleuze, cited in Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). 134.
- 12 Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). 48.
- 13 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 70. Accessed in "Repetition and the Scientific Model in Art" by Ellen K Levy, Spring, 1996, *Art Journal*. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_n1_v55/ai_18299598 last accessed on 24 October 2008.
- 14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). In this essay, Merleau-Ponty develops an alternative to the representationalist's view of perception by extending Heidegger's notion of human reality as 'being-in-the-world'. He does this by proposing an embodied way of seeing.
- 15 Deleuze, Gilles, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, translated by Tom Conley, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 16 Simon O'Sullivan, 32.



Figure 2: 'The Stack', Hocken Pictorial Collections, Dunedin, 2007.



Figure 3: Ana Terry, *Marginal Errors* (floor detail of installation), 3.0 x 4.0 metres, 2002.

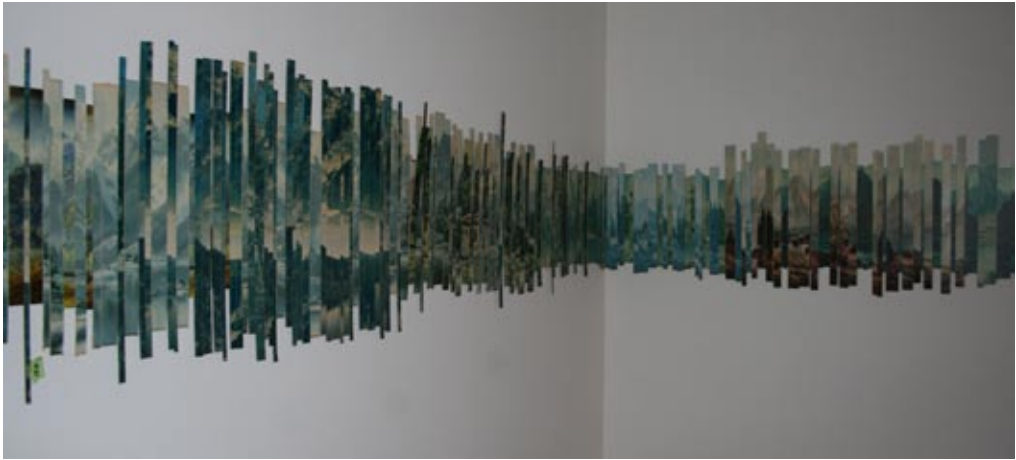


Figure 4: *terra_data*, detail of a 28-metre wall work installed at the Hocken Collections Gallery, Dunedin, December 2007 – March 2008.

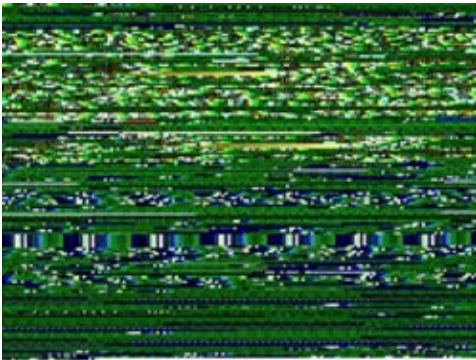


Figure 5: Ana Terry, image created on Saturday, 3 November, 2007, 21:17:10, with the "Informe Imager" (<http://infome.net>).

This image is an abstraction of an internet crawler's journey through 300 websites that have the word 'edges' embedded in each website's html tags and http headers. The image was generated by Crawler: ID2401.

Figures 1-6 courtesy of the author.



Figure 6: Ana Terry, work in progress, 'exploding' pieces from a 2000 piece jig-saw titled "German Country Cottage" 2006 – 2007.

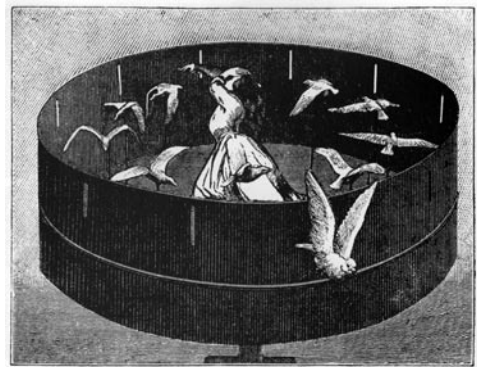


Figure 7: Max Ernst, *A Little Girl Taking the Veil*, collage, 1930 (image in the public domain).