expected compared with its liquid form."
Martin Chaplin, *Water Structure and its Science*.

34. George Sand, *Indiana*, trans. George Burnham Ives
(Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, Cassandra
Editions, 1978), 230–31, 324.

35. Chris Welsby, http://www.sfu.ca/~welsby/WaterNot.
htm, accessed December 28, 2009.

36. In describing in 1855 the regions of the Yarra (which are
going to experience severe salinity after the destruction
of the waterfall) John Butler Cooper writes: "Mr
Eddington says that, 'on Sundays in the summer time
the family of Bell went from Tivoli [their estate above the
river] in a double-handed paddle boat down the Yarra to
attend service at Melbourne in the John Knox Church,
Swanston Street. This mode of progression occupied a
long time, and the boat carried provision, in the way of
eatables for the Bell children who regarded the trip as
a picnic. Their drink was of the pure waters of the Yarra,
which they lifted in a horn tumbler." *The History of
Prahran from its Settlement to a City* (Melbourne:
Modern Printing Co. Pty Ltd, 1912, revised 1924). 53.

37. Letter reprinted in C.P. Billot, 280.

38. William Westgarth, *Personal Recollections of Early
Melbourne and Victoria* (Melbourne & Sydney:
George Robertson, 1888). 17.

39. The small waterfall was destroyed by divers and
dynamite, see newspaper wood engraving print, Julian
Rosi Ashton (1851–1942) "Improvements on the Yarra –
removing the Falls Reef" (1883), *Illustrated Australian
News*, October 3, 1883, held in State Library of Victoria,
accession number IAN03/10/83/161, available online,
www.slvvic.gov.au.

40. A 1993 study demonstrated not only extremely high
levels of toxicity but that "the salt wedge penetrates
to somewhere between Punt Road and Bridge Road,
a distance of approximately 15 kilometres upstream
of Hobson's Bay," Kerry P. Black, et al, *Nutrient and
Toxicant Outputs from the Yarra*, (Melbourne: Victorian
Institute of Marine Sciences & Melbourne Water
Corporation, Technical Report No. 20, 1993), 10–11.

41. Kristin Otto, *Yarra: A Diverting History of Melbourne's
Murky River* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2005), 68–69.

42. John Batman, *The Settlement at Port Phillip 1835*
(Melbourne: Queensberry Hill Press, 1983), 33–34.

43. Although the first contour survey of the Port Philip Bay
region was executed by the Acting Surveyor of the
Colony of New South Wales, Charles Grimes (1772–1858)
in 1805, 30 years before settlement, it was a general
survey of the whole bay area, rather than a detail of
the area that will become Melbourne. See *Port Philip*
[Cartographic material], lithographed at the
Department of Lands and Survey, by T. Slater, 14
February 1879; one map, mounted on cardboard,
51x45cm. Map Room, State Library of Victoria.

44. "The bane and bottomless deep for the Corporation's
narrow budget was Elizabeth-Street, where a little
'casual' called 'The Williams', of a mile's length, from
the hardly perceptible hollows of the present Royal
Park, played sad havoc at times with the unmade
street. It had scooped out a course throughout, almost
warranting the title of a gully, and at Townend's corner
we needed a good long plank by way of a bridge. At the
upper end of the street was a nest of deep channels
which damaged daily for years the springs and vehicles
of the citizens." Westgarth, 29–30. The creek is clearly
visible on a map entitled, *1838–1888, Melbourne Then
& Now: Together with the First Land Sale and Present
Value*, cartographer, M.L. Hutchinson, 1888. 1 sheet: ill.
(some col.), plans; 46 x 58 cm., folded to 23 x 15 cm.
The 1838 map was recreated from a model produced
for the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition of 1888.

45. Interview with urban designer, Nigel Smith,

anecdote from www.villagewell.org, accessed
December 20, 2009.

46. Westgarth notes, "Melbourne missed a great chance
in filling up with a street this troublesome, and, as a
street, unhealthy hollow. Dr Howitt used to tell me he
never could cure a patient, resident there, who had
become seriously unwell. A reservation of the natural
grass and gum trees between Queen and Swanston
Streets would have redeemed Melbourne up to the
first rank of urban scenic effect, and the riotous
Williams might, with entire usefulness, have subsided
into a succession of ornamental lakes and fish ponds."
Westgarth, 30.

47. Gilles Ivain, "Formulary for a New Urbanism," *Potlatch*,
1953, reprinted in *Situationist Anthology*, ed. and trans.,
Kenneth Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981). 1.

48. Kristen Otto, 90.

49. Ivain, 1 [Italics in the original].

50. Walter Benjamin, "Marseilles," (1929), trans. Rodney
Livingstone and others in *Walter Benjamin Selected
Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W.
Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge,
Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press
of Harvard University, 1999), 234.

51. Theodor Adorno noted: "He did not wish to read a word
more of Proust than what he needed to translate at
the moment, because otherwise he risked straying into
an addictive dependency which would hinder his own
production." Quoted in Peter Szondi, "Hope in the Past,"
in Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, ed.
Howard Eiland (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London,
England: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 234.

52. Walter Benjamin, "Image of Proust," *Illuminations*,
trans. Harry Zone (Great Britain: Fontana, 1992), 198.

53. Szondi, "Hope in the Past," 11–19.

54. Szondi, 12.

55. Szondi, 18.

56. Benjamin, "Image of Proust," 208.

57. Peter Osborne, "Small-scale Victories, Large-scale
Defeats: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time," in *Walter
Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*,
eds. Andrew Benjamin & Peter Osborne (London and
New York: Routledge, 1994).

58. Szondi, "Hope in the Past," 21.

59. Benjamin, "Moscow," *One-Way Street* (London and
New York: Verso, 1997), 177.

60. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zone
(Great Britain: Fontana, 1992), 248.

61. Osborne, 89.

62. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbaïah* (Jerusalem, Israel and
Toronto, Canada: Keter Publishing and Quadrangle,
the New York Times Book Company, 1974), 167.

63. Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust,"
Illuminations, 199.

64. Benjamin, "Image of Proust," 199–200.

65. Szondi, 19.

66. Walter Benjamin and Gretel Adorno, *Correspondence
1930–1940*, eds. Henri Lonitz and Christoph Gödde,
trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, UK and Malden,
Mass., USA: Polity Press, 2008), 21–22.

67. Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and its Phantom: A Reading
of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*," *New Literary History* 7
(Spring 1976): 525–548.

68. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S.
Roudiez (Hertfordshire: Haverster Wheatsheaf, 1991).

69. For an analysis of how exteriority and otherness
(strangers and enemies) have been dealt with in
Western thought, see, Richard Kearney, "Strangers
and Others: From Deconstruction to Hermeneutics,"
Critical Horizon 3, no.1 (2002): 7–36.

70. Scholem, 167.

71. Scholem, 167.

Fig. 1
Stella Brennan
Video still from
South Pacific 2007
Single channel video,
stereo sound
10 mins
Ultrasound images:
David Perry
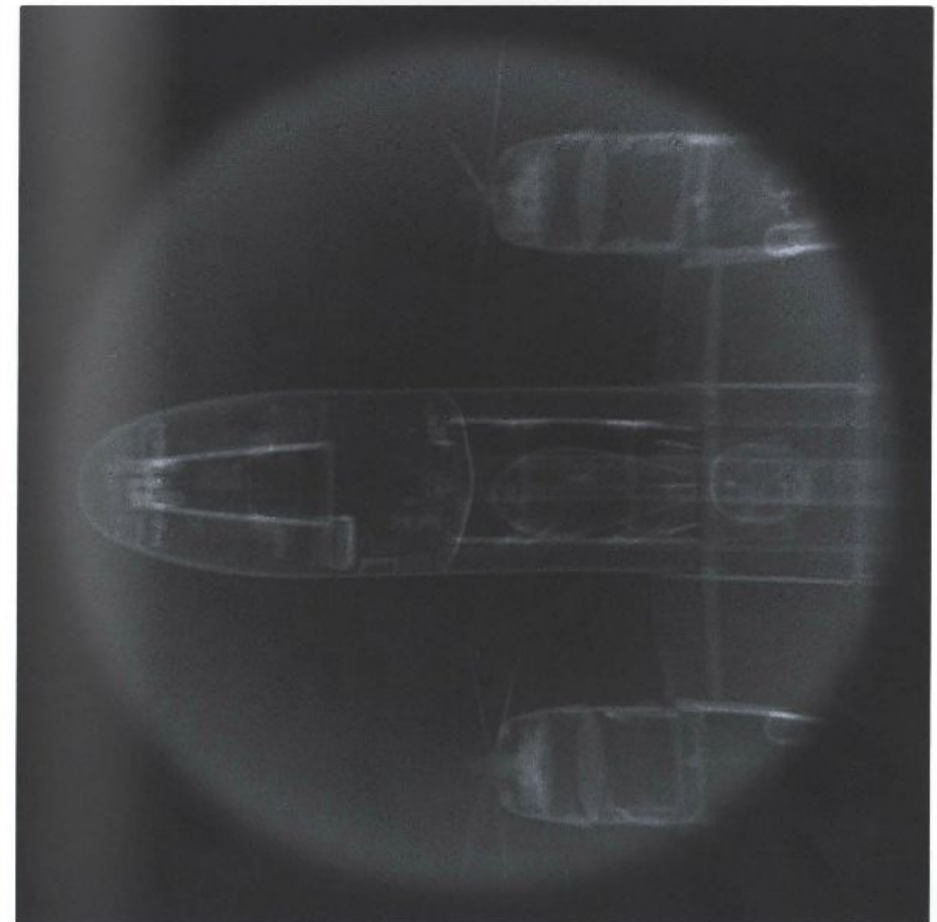
The Ordering of Worlds:
Two Recent Video Works
by Stella Brennan

Sean Cubitt

This essay is about two single-channel digital video artworks by Auckland artist Stella Brennan, South Pacific *(2007, 11 minutes), made with David Perry, and* The Middle Landscape *(2009, 10.30 minutes). In rather different ways these meditative works, which combine imagery, on-screen text and sound, speak to, from and of the necessary but historically tragic ordering of the world that every human and technical action produces. Art is charged with imagining and, perhaps, putting into practice orders other than those we inherit. For moving image media, the inherited order is inescapably linked with the heritage of classic American cinema, directly in the case of Brennan's* South Pacific *with Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1949 musical, and more loosely through cinema's fascination with landscape from the Hollywood Western to Tolkien's Middle Earth. Brennan's art reconsiders the order of the world, re-orienting it around a Pacific perspective, from which order no longer appears as static structure, but as a imagination of other futures.*

After a century of rectangular cinema, it is more than time enough to reconsider the shape of screens. The odd thing is that cameras produce circular images: it can be quite a technical struggle to produce a rectangular picture from the light falling through the lens. The problem is that the intensity of illumination falls off towards the edges, so pulling out a select, reasonably lit area must have seemed like a good idea. Besides, it made photographs look more like paintings: more legitimate. But now photography and cinema have celebrated their 150th and 100th birthdays respectively, why still rectangular?[1] Sadly, computers are the answer.

Initially designed as a TV screen in front of a typewriter, desktop computers have become amazingly sophisticated but they have also become more deeply standardised. One thing that is standard is the pixel array: the rows and columns of square dots on the screen. The numerical definition of each square is part and parcel of a computer's basic library of commands, the gravity field that inputs cannot but deal with. This arithmetic system, the raster display, has made us more rectangular than ever. Data projectors even come with automated keystone correction. You have to really want to get away from four-square pictures, and do some tricky adjustments to get another shape. The rectangle has become the default option, and few people bother to use any other.

Radar and ultrasound screens are some of the few that are oddly shaped. This is partly because they represent the path not taken in computer displays Ultrasound produces the delightful fan-shape familiar from intra-uterine perinatal scans, like polar projections in childhood atlases. For a brief period in the early days of arcade games, the radar style of display dominated the market for games screens: vector screens. Ivan Sutherland's first computer graphics programme used one, and Doug Engelbart's first mouse-driven point-and-click interface. These are the kind of screens used in oscilloscopes. Instead of scanning the screen in rigid order, vector screens' cathode ray guns travel to the point where the light is wanted and paint it electronically on the phosphors. A lovely technology relegated to expert systems. Systems, however, with their own fraught histories.

In 2007's *South Pacific* Stella Brennan and David Perry struggle with the curved or circular image in a rectangular frame (Fig. 1). In 2009's *The Middle Landscape* Brennan makes the contradiction of rectangle and circle integral to the work's themes. The geometry of the vector versus the arithmetic of the raster. Of course she is obliged to show the work on rectangular raster screens. It is a familiar conundrum: digital imaging is thickly populated with vector-generated artefacts, from 3D animations to the fonts Brennan uses, and they all have to be retro-engineered to fit the enumeration of pixels. There is an element of masquerade in digital imaging, a translation, as when Shakespeare calls someone plucked away by the fairies "translated". The elsewhere of digital imaging is the digital screen. We can only imagine the world lying microns below its ordered surface.

In a solid, molecules are locked into a structure. In a liquid, the molecules float free of one another. In a gas, the atoms composing the molecules separate and fly. In a plasma – as in a plasma screen – the electrons in those atoms divorce their nuclei and race madly about in the quantum foam. Liquidity is a gentle condition compared to the violence of hotter states of matter. Bonds still hold good. There is some formal familiarity between things. Liquid seems a fine term, for the ocean and the rain-drenched Taranaki landscape which dominate these two works. It catches the molecular relationship of the artists in the first, of the couple in the second, and the bond that holds the image together in the acreage of the black frame. Unities in contradiction are the dynamic of

Fig. 2
Stella Brennan
South Pacific 2007
Installation view
Liverpool Biennial, 2008

molecules in the liquid state, and of the formal properties of these works. Like electricity and water. An LCD screen – liquid crystal display – is made from materials that sit at the border between liquid and solid, molecules constantly restructured by the electric currents passing through them. The very word "current" says that there is a flowing in all things.

But everything that flows, flows downhill. This is the law of entropy. For good or ill, order has its job in the universe: to oppose and if it can, even for a while and locally, reverse the second law of thermodynamics. To hold on. To make it through. Not to dissolve. Not become gas, resist the lure to become plasma.

Every kind of order we build in the human universe seems to come out bad in the end. Order gets a bad name. Art gets a bad name when classicism rules, and order becomes not the shape of living organisms but some hierarchy. The *hieron*, the temple, and the high priests' secrets that it secretes discretely among its sectaries tell us to abandon Apollo, embrace Dionysius, But it is art's difficult work to make new kinds of order from the chaotic flux: the ocean, the war, time.

If the text that advances along the bottom of the screen in *South Pacific* (Fig. 2) were laid out on the page, you would say "a poem", perhaps a poem of the sea, and of its margins, like Charles Olson's *Maximus*. Olson was famous for his voice, even though much of *Maximus* is so clearly typewritten that it is hard to imagine how to read it. The silent voice of Brennan's text poses a similar

question: how could one (authorial) voice speak in the accents of all the personae inhabiting the words. We recognise, in the opening passage of *South Pacific*, the banality of the long-haul flight from Auckland to Los Angeles, or Auckland and anywhere except across the Tasman. The indefinite rumble of the engines, the foetal curl, the suspension of time in the steel bubble of pressurised air. The oval windows. We make a leap of imagination to hear, translated, the log of Gunther in the U-boat off Hastings, his fascination with the lights at a time when Europe had turned off its streetlamps and shuttered its windows. And we are amazed with him at how wonderful it is to live without trepidation.

The image of the passage on airline travel is a jet's eye view of waters far below through a moiré mask of scanning artefacts as the artists re-record from the in-flight nose-cam housed in a nacelle below the pilots. The image for the Hastings submarine is the patient rotation of a radar sweep. Separating them, ultrasound images of a drowned aircraft, a scale model of the plane which, we will read later, placed the Nagasaki bomb. There is a moment in the image flow when something – a nacelle? – turns into an organic form, which morphs to suggest the mushroom cloud forming over Japan or Bikini. "We are wet, transparent" say the words closing the Hastings passage, transparent to the cries of fish swimming round us, using sonar to communicate, find their shoals, and hunt. The epidermis that organises our water into form lets sounds pass through or echo back reflected. The microseconds between different echoes speak of distance, not substance. The changing reflections of mass and surface, and, swimming or floating, of water inside and outside the skin are pretty much of a kind.

Not so metals. The script evokes the ships' graveyard in the Solomon Islands and the dumping grounds of military stock off Vanuatu. Sixty years on, the wreckage of the Pacific War rusts slowly into the seafloor. Brennan wonders what the islanders would have made of this mass wastage. She uses the word cargo. In the 1940s, some years after the likely beginnings of the John Frum cult on Tanna, one of the least Westernised islands in the Micronesian archipelago of Vanuatu, 300,000 US troops were stationed there. An evolution of traditional beliefs, the John Frum rituals (and the similar Prince Philip Movement) earned the name "cargo cults" from missionaries and anthropologists amused at the idea that replica landing strips might attract more cargo from the distant folks who once brought so much stuff to their islands. Or bring it back from the local impresarios who made off with so much of it.

Or who, like the retreating army, threw it into the bay at Million Dollar Point. Brennan evokes a different irony: that the villagers' attempts to reforest the abandoned runways failed; that they remain as scars. Runways like the one on the island of Tinian in the Marianas, base of the Enola Gay and Bockscar, the plane which dropped the second atomic bomb, after Hiroshima, on Nagasaki.

Radar and sonar were critical innovations of World War Two's arsenal, especially for bombers, as was aerial photography, which developed rapidly in the Pacific theatre and was especially important for the A-bomb missions. Both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki flights were intended to be accompanied by photo-reconnaissance aircraft (though Bockscar's escort got lost). The radiant energy techniques of photography and radar – both working in the electromagnetic spectrum – differ from sonar, and later ultrasound, which are fundamentally physical effects in matter. One of sonar operators' first discoveries was the level of sound underwater in the sea. Most human inventions come, like flight, from trying to imitate natural processes. Sonar was an abstract idea which discovered that it had already been invented, by fish.

A kind of interference: a moiré pattern, like those Brennan uses to separate her footage taken from the nose-cam of a passenger jet from the ocean it records. Visual ambiguity is integral to scientific visualisations and optical instruments. They are images which require professional expertise to read. The migrant phenomenologist of media Vilém Flusser believed that photographs were the third stage of human communication.[2] First there were images. Then came words to explain the images. Now we have images to explain the words, images that therefore evoke, call for, demand, words to decipher them. But there is a gap here between the data carried in pictures and the images of things that emerge from them. It is like the difference between a *trompe l'oeil* still life and a Cézanne: both make us look at the way they are painted, but each works on the gap between picture and data in different ways. Another mesh lies over the arithmetic grid of the screen; another patterning contests the aggregate space of the clear, untreated image, revealing that it is after all also treated, also in its own way, if not an obfuscation, then a too-literal *trompe l'oeil*.

The soundtrack is shaped by electronic pings, like sonar beacon signals. They organise themselves around the reference to Musick Point, at the tip of Bucklands Beach in Auckland, where it points out into the Waitemata Harbour, whose waters, in te reo Māori, sparkle like obsidian. Musick, not as in the consort of musick, but named for a famous aviator, housed a radio station, operated at first by the Post Office, then by the Civil Aviation Authority, then by Telecom's maritime services. It is today a cellphone mast, and a heritage site, recalling the preparations for invasion, on the site of the Te Waiarohia pa (fortified settlement). That headland has a long history of managing the sea, of bringing it to order, since Kupe churned the waves on his departure from Aotearoa to dissuade pursuit. These harmonies across the many histories of the Hauraki gulf combine in layers of cloudy indefinition, the condition of all pictures, out of which the clarity of images is abstracted.

Ambiguity and ambivalence are responses to the over-definite determinations of the numerical screen. "A wide road, a vast possibility" is how

Brennan first dreams the openness of it all, teletyped across the interference where islands, clouds, storms, volcanic eruptions suggest themselves. There is nothing to deny: everything is possible. But what floats up is the Rodgers and Hammerstein movie, a movie, she recalls with the one word "khaki", set in wartime, a time when soldiers came, bringing with them equipment, music, airstrips and romance. The first sonic pings follow, and as the text admits to searching for "another place", the oceanic blue image fades to black, that impossible invisibility.

For "inscrutable, khaki-clad women", it is a table-top war, as they push the symbols to and fro across the grid of the map. They struggle to make sense of vastness and invisibility. The radio station at Musick Point, its portholes a memory of circular screens, is the centre of a cartographic enterprise to turn the Pacific into a net: a communication device for catching information on the fly. Like lines of longitude and latitude, their radio signals can't be seen, but are no less powerful organs of order for that. The design of the map tells them what is information, and leaves aside the rest. Noise is what is not information: as Mary Douglas said of dirt,[3] it is matter in the wrong place, matter that doesn't matter.

The static on the radios playing Hawaiian music, the indecipherable flickering of light in the ultrasound images before they give up their content, and in the areas where there appears to be no content, are matters all the same, the froth on a wave's crest that doesn't signify from five thousand metres but which the Polynesian navigators read – if read is the word to use of that understanding of the ways of wind and water. Extracted from the interference over shortwave, mainly solar in origin and so of a kind with the light and the radio, tunes pass from one island to the next through the medium of war, gifts to be passed on from islander musicians to their GI guests. Noise, interference, is the patina of space, as dirt is the patina of time. It is the evidence of distance, evidence systemically erased in the pursuit of the unambiguous which we call information.

The opening passage of *The Middle Landscape* (Figs. 3–5) recalls this cartographic order. Wallace Stevens wrote of the jar in Tennessee, "It made the slovenly wilderness / surround that hill". Brennan places a surveyor on the heights of Taranaki, or in the map room, "jamming his compass in the throat of the volcano". That distinctive circle in maps of the North Island of New Zealand preserves the wilderness of the peak, and defines it. It is at once an act of desecration and preservation, sacred and profane. We can never choose to make order under conditions of our own choosing. The sound is of the forest: the rustle of foliage and feathers. The second passage begins: it has the sound of water. The image fills the screen, but the words, which fade up and away in whole phrases, form a line along the lower left edge. After a while, the image seems to zoom out: darkness surrounds it, where in the previous sequence the smaller circle gave way to the full screen image. The shots are in low light: the camera strains for colour

in a near-perfect circle

Fig. 3
Stella Brennan
Video still from *The Middle Landscape* 2008
High definition video, stereo sound
10:30 mins

Fig. 4
Stella Brennan
Video still from *The Middle Landscape* 2008
High definition video, stereo sound
10:30 mins

and edges, interpolates them where it can, and artefacts begin to form a texture in the light, where quantum effects in the CCD chip begin to appear in the darker zones as indefinitely small pops of electricity discharge, to be read as colour information as the chip drains its freight of voltages into store.

Electricity: and water. Brett Graham and Rachel Rakena evoked the theme through a hydro plant's loss in *Aniwaniwa* in 2007. The animating spark in the waters, the dangerous confluence of two orders of flow: the Frankenstein legend, and the myth of genesis in one. But Brennan describes the hydro plant at the falls, almost as if it were Kipling's mill, that ground its corn and paid its tax ever since Roman times – a presence in the landscape that secures continuity. She is intrigued that the scale model of the plant at the nearby lodge is powered from the same place it pictures. History, as it were, seen through the wrong end of a telescope. You wonder whether taming the wild waterfall is trivial or cosmic. The mismatch of natural and human worlds is slight, but it will be greater. Strangely for an artist who has worked so much with video, it is television that marks the break between the two. On the motel TV they watch a wildlife show, rescreened literally through the colonoscope roughly attached to her camera, its optic fibres producing the insect-eye texture that characterises much of *The Middle Landscape*. The digital composite in the TV show, the text explains, evokes another spectacle, of the naturalist-presenter stupidly posing with wild creatures, with a brief gesture towards the Australian TV host's sudden demise from stingray poison. A sting in the tail. On those rare occasions when we try to love nature, it may not love us back.

As we move into a passage opening with the sounds of construction and lines on a ruined commune, it's hard not to recall James K. Baxter's Jerusalem.[4] Baxter dreamed of a double rainbow, Māori and Pākehā entwined to the regeneration of both. The commune's "failure" in its noble humility was nonetheless a successful utopia, if only in the bounds of a special generation, and the imaginations of another. Brennan's text recalls the joy of discovering that abandoned hives still house their honey bees, something Baxter too rejoiced in, in the second of the *Jerusalem Sonnets*:

The bees that have been hiving above the church porch
Are some of them killed by the rain –

I see their dark bodies on the step
As I go in – but later on I hear

Plenty of them singing with what seems a virile joy
In the apple tree whose reddish blossoms fall

At the centre of the paddock

Fig. 5
Stella Brennan
Video still from *The Middle Landscape* 2008
High definition video, stereo sound
10:30 mins

Such utopias stretch from the imagining of the South Pacific to the filmic moments that Brennan brings to heel around the image of an old communard hiking back down the mountain with his grandfather's chair tied to his back: *The Piano, Fitzcarraldo*, those moments of almost humdrum surrealism. Somehow it evokes the equally haunting imagery, also shot in Taranaki, of Vincent Ward's film *Vigil* (1984), rain-soaked, quiet. Brennan's images here are fluid, with the soft edges of dappled shadows, the kind that baffled Aristotle as he tried to understand how light which travelled in straight lines could cast shadows of such perfect circularity. Baxter's sonnet concludes with the image of a madman set on fire by the wind. The constant evocation of prayer, praying to and mediated by the elements of landscape, flora, fauna and weather, in Baxter seems not far from the altogether secular text Brennan opens and closes at the foot of her screen, as if a pagan ghost of Baxter theology haunted both the land and the bric-a-brac of tourism and passing settlements.

There comes a mention of windows as "eyes". The window frames have been recovered for the construction of a geodesic dome built around the spine of a growing tree. Today windows – the wind's eyes in their ancient etymology – are no longer shaped like orbs, but carved in the shape of safety deposit boxes. But disturbing their rigid geometry restores the prayerful aspect of the apertures that open onto the wind we hear on the soundtrack, and the open sky. The frames of doors retrieved from an abandoned cinema, like grandpa's chair, are also taonga, or treasures, rightfully and devoutly remade for present uses. As in a dream, a imperfectly circular vignette, its upper edge faded where its lower is

crisp, placed symmetrically mid-screen, pans through the sky of a classical geodesic dome. A wind is blowing. It makes me think of psychedelia, of album covers dusted with ash and Rizlas.

We have no real reason to our utopias. Whether in war, like the movie of *South Pacific*, or in the isolation of the Taranaki sheep stations, forests and falls, the dream of living well, of the good life, Aristotle's eudaemonism that spreads from the household through friendship to the polity, these lands of Cockaigne that were always at the further edges of the world have drawn the navigators Cook and Kupe as they drew the poets and dreamers from More to Butler. The curious destiny of the "Shakey Isles" has been to extract from older worlds the dream of a better and a newer one, and that for a thousand years since the first explorers found them.

The dream of fair weather, rich lands, kind harvests, bonny babies, of peace and plenty, has always had to subsist along with cut feet, wet hair, cold nights and hungry days. And the ordering of the world has always been a matter of conflict. Brennan speaks again and again of the rifts. Map and ocean will not fit. Nature and nurture are at odds. Frame and image do not match. Words and images have their disparate rhythms.

There is some structural resemblance between these works and the early *Cantos* of Ezra Pound; the personae, voices ventriloquised by the poet, the witnessing of history and myth in their moments of metamorphosis, the large blocks of story placed beside one another from which, by proximity, a sense arises that is not in any one tale but inhabits all of them, changed by their particularities. Like Pound's epic, they seek to contain history, but unlike Pound they have the wit to realise that history contains them. And unlike Pound, they are deeply implicated in the body of the artist, the colonoscope and ultrasound being medical imaging technologies which understand the terrains of Taranaki and the Pacific in the same terms as the bodies they more frequently image. Here too the scale, scaling of image and object opens dialogues: between projections, Mercator's or perspectival, micro- and macroscopic. Like the mutual and constant divergence of image, sound and text, these repurposed techniques of picturing produce a parallelogram of forces, create vectors, meanings which travel between them, and are not any one of them but formed of their interactions.

Ambiguous light, dirty light. Light thrown awry. It would be wrong to say this is dialectic: Brennan is an ironist, a dry, droll eye that has learned to shape her visions round the square, and when she floods the screen with picture, to make it clear that this, the rectangle full of colours, is a special effect, special because it is not the world of human perception with its fade-out into peripheral vision. She orders the strangeness of the worlds she dreams into essays, where the old French word "essayer", to try, attempt, assay, tends towards a future whose distance pulls as the past grounds. These little films are essays in that sense, tentatives towards an ordering of time that make of the dialogues between language, sound and

image homeopathic remedies for the rootless, directionless flux of the world and the passion we feel for it. A little order: like a seed set to crystalise a fluid. And yet, against the instinctive lure of order, she sets her ironic gaze on the failures of other orders, the nets set to catch a world in a frame or a grid.

These digital pictures are conducted into the light through imaging, a technology intrinsically pointed towards order through its histories of geometry and arithmetic. The float of words against the obdurate darkness of unilluminated pixels tells us about the layering that makes composite images, a technology stretching back into the history of theatre drops and flats, a baroque theatre of monarchical perspective, the whimsy of photographic backdrops and seaside cut-out stands. Between those layers lies the void: into it we drop, and from it we are born. These meditations on the Ocean of our story, and on the heartland of the Central North Island, open gorges under our feet, and stars above our heads. Cargo from faraway outposts and remote histories, weaving another textile, fabricating another form, prayers for a future we can't yet touch, but which Brennan teaches us to imagine.

1. See Gene Youngblood's classic *Expanded Cinema* (London: Studio Vista, 1970) for a historical account of vanguard disruptions of rectangular film, Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel's collection *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, (Karlsruhe: ZKM.; Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 2003) for the look forward, and Anne Friedberg's *The Virtual Window from Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge MA.:MIT Press, 2006) for an account of the rectangle in Western culture.
2. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Matthews, introduction by Hubertus Von Amelunxen (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).
3. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul,1966).
4. See John Newton, *The Double Rainbow: James K. Baxter, Ngāti Hau and the Jerusalem Commune* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009). I'm grateful to Zita Joyce who brought this to the attention of the *Re:Live* Media Art History conference in Melbourne in November 2009.